

# InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement



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## Past Issues

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[www.klesis.com.au/intersections.html](http://www.klesis.com.au/intersections.html)

## Editorial

Welcome to the May 2013 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue has a loose theme focusing on restoring biblical faith. This is a distinctive plea amongst non-denominational Churches of Christ. In our *Feature*, Benny Tabalujan explores the principle of biblical restoration throughout history and reviews some of the challenges to its implementation. Continuing with this theme, Nathan Holyoak in our *Food for Thought* contemplates what a biblical view of God looks like.

Our *Interview* features Nick La Spina, an Australian youth minister working in New Zealand. Nick provides biblical insights into the practical issues facing Christian youth in a post-modern world and considers how the church might respond. In our *Letters* section, Robert Reagan, an American missionary based in Thailand, writes about his compelling experiences with Angkor of Faith and the street kids of Siem Reap in Cambodia.

Back in Australia, in our *ChurchScope*, the spotlight shifts to the Eastside congregation in Sydney. Eastside's evangelist, Peter Mandalidis, reports on the pioneering work of the late Ron Wallace and changing evangelistic methods over the years. Finally, our *News* provides an update on the Barnabas Mission held over the Easter weekend in Darwin and a summary of two Melbourne teens' mission participation in Angkor of Faith 7 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

We're also excited to announce our updated website ([www.klesis.com.au](http://www.klesis.com.au)). Do check it out. There are free publications like past copies of *InterSections* and free tracts available for download. The website is still being updated and we'll keep you informed regarding progress. Meanwhile, it also has details regarding the upcoming Church Leadership Forum in Brisbane on 24-27 July 2013.

We hope this issue simultaneously reignites and restores your soul.

*Editorial Team*

## ChurchScope: Eastside Church of Christ, Sydney, NSW

According to Ron Wallace's journal, the Eastside church began at Bondi Junction on Sunday, 13 October 1974. Ron had previously been involved in establishing a congregation in the northern beaches area of Warringah. He left this work in the very capable hands of his friend and classmate from the Sunset School of Preaching, Don Klingenberg.

Initially, the church at Eastside consisted of Ron and Edna Wallace, their three children (Sue, Mark and Julie) and two newly baptised believers, Camile Rez and Hazel Yealland. The church began meeting in the Clarrie Martin Clubrooms which they rented from Waverley Council.

Ron was financially supported by the Glenwood Church of Christ in the US and its elders until 1987. Then the Eastside church took over his support. Due to Ron's

*Continued page 2*

evangelistic efforts, the church grew steadily. A feature of its growth was Ron's encouragement to new converts to reach out to their friends and family with the gospel.

Ron was an expert when it came to doorknocking. He coupled his door-to-door Electrolux sales work with requests for Bible studies. Ron continued to develop his abilities in reaching out and Bible study through his attendance at Ivan Stewart's School of Practical Evangelism. Throughout Ron's work as an evangelist he used the Ivan Stewart program, *Open Bible Study*. He also taught those who obeyed the gospel to use the same method.

Today, the Eastside Church of Christ continues to meet in Bondi Junction. It has since moved to a new rented building which the Council erected: The Mill Hill Centre located in Spring Street. Being an inner city church, many of those baptised often move away to other areas, worshipping with other congregations.

Nowadays, the church uses *FriendSpeak* as its main way of reaching out locally. There are many people from overseas as well as students at the University of New South Wales who wish to improve their conversational English. *FriendSpeak* enables them to improve their English and at the same time learn about God and his love for them. They do this by reading and studying extracts from the Gospel

of Luke. Unlike the doorknocking approach, this method relies on friendship which is developed through attending regular reading sessions and additional social activities. Since the commencement of *FriendSpeak*, one person has been baptised and many others have visited the church and been exposed to New Testament Christianity.

The Eastside church has a history of liberal giving and this has continued since the time of supporting Ron Wallace. The church has an outward focus and has supported works in Africa and India. The church also supports students attending

MSOBS (Macquarie School of Biblical Studies). Members of the congregation have also been involved in assisting other Australian congregations in outreach activities in Queensland. In addition, the church encourages its members to support activities such as church camps and picnics.

To encourage unity, weekend retreats have been held regularly as well as annual cricket matches. Picnics have also been held in conjunction with the Gosford church.

Eastside has also organised two singing workshops led by Keith Lancaster and another one is scheduled to be held in Sydney in February, 2014. Like many other congregations, the Eastside church has developed a web site. Do browse our website if you wish to learn more about us. ■



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### InterSections

*InterSections* is a quarterly journal designed to inform, inspire and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s). Advertisements in *InterSections* are broadly consistent with the ethos and goals of the journal; however, they do not necessarily constitute endorsement by the journal. *InterSections* is published by Klesis Institute, the ministry division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

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# Food for Thought

## Restoring a Biblical Understanding of God



Who is God and what's he like? It's one of life's oldest questions, one which mankind has debated and fought over for millennia. It's also one of the most important. How we answer this question will influence all our thoughts on religion and doctrine. For example, many Jews in Jesus' time misunderstood the nature of the promised messiah. This prevented them from recognising him when he was among them (Luke 7:31-34). What preconceptions might we have that prevent us from seeing the true God?

We can only know God by what he has revealed to us in Scripture and there is no better revelation of God than in the Christ of the Bible. Jesus claimed that to see him was to see the Father (John 14:9). Yet even the God revealed in the Bible can be difficult to grasp, often seeming contradictory. Nevertheless, it is only by engaging and wrestling with these paradoxes that we can come to a more complete picture of God. Let's explore some of them.

### **Sovereignty and free will**

One fundamental aspect of God's nature is his sovereignty. It's what makes him God rather than a pretender. He created the universe and everything in it (Genesis 1:1) and therefore rules over it as Lord (Psalm 103:19). Despite this, he has given us – his creation – the freedom either to follow him or reject him (Deuteronomy 30:19). God desires our trust and obedience but he doesn't force us. Sadly, this means that much that happens in the world is against God's will, but this takes nothing away from his sovereignty.

God is in control of the bigger picture; he asks us to trust him (Job 38-41). We don't fully understand how God works in the world but he assures us that, despite the chaos caused by evil, he is working to achieve good (Romans 8:28). Ultimately, he will be victorious (John 16:33). Meanwhile, our free will is a gracious gift, given at great cost. God's heart aches when we refuse to follow him (Matthew 23:37). So free will is a gift to be used with great care.

### **Love and justice**

God's love is one of his most defining personal characteristics. God *is* love, and anyone who loves knows God (1 John 4:7-8). But what is love? In the following verses, John says God demonstrated his love by sending his son as a sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9-10). This is not a soppy, sentimental love. It's a love that acts, that protects, that costs. It's a love that does not ignore harsh realities but graciously works to redeem them.

Here we see God's love and justice working together. God is holy and cannot be associated with sin (Isaiah 59:2). His justice demands that a penalty (death) must be paid for sin; yet his love desires relationship and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). In Christ's loving sacrifice both demands are met. We can take comfort knowing that we have a loving God. We can also feel secure knowing that he will see justice is done. Justice without love is cruel and love without justice is hollow.

### **In God's presence**

What is it like to be in God's presence? Isaiah tells us that God's throne room is full of smoke, angelic beings and thunderous praise – a scene which filled him with woe

(Isaiah 6:1-5). On the other hand, we have the intimate picture of a God who promises to wipe away our tears (Revelation 21:4). We also see the tender touch of Jesus healing lepers (Matthew 8:3) and delighting with children (Luke 18:15-16).

The presence of God is fearful for those who oppose him (Hebrews 10:31). But it brings peace for those who follow him and put their trust in him (Romans 15:13; Matthew 11:28-30). Although Isaiah was terrified, God was quick to reassure him and offer forgiveness (Isaiah 6:6-7). He offers the same to us through Jesus, who leads us as the good shepherd (John 10:11).

### **Wisdom**

God is the source of all wisdom (Proverbs 2:10). But what is this wisdom? What does it look like? Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is not the wisdom of the world. What we consider wise, God often considers foolish (1 Corinthians 1:20-31). Wisdom and humility seem to go hand in hand. God's wisdom is not shown in self-indulgent pondering or grandiose power statements. Instead it has been shown in Christ, a suffering servant submitting to a shameful death on the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18-24). God's wisdom is also revealed in the church, a seemingly weak collection of flawed human beings (Ephesians 3:8-12). These are the glories of God's wisdom. This realisation ought to radically alter how we perceive true wisdom.

### **God of paradoxes**

It should not surprise us that God defies easy characterisation. His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). The aspects of God's nature we have looked at show that he is not quite what we might expect; he's not a heavenly version of an earthly king. He's a God to whom everything is owed, yet he freely gives of himself. He commands the heavens, yet delights in the flowers of the field and the lives of the lowliest of his children. He demands righteousness, yet he bought it for each of us with his own son.

We also cannot help being awed. God is beyond what we can imagine. We follow not a simple block of wood but a multi-faceted, living, active being. He truly is God. The only appropriate response is worship – worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23) which involves our whole being (Romans 12:1-2).

This realisation ought to shake us out of any complacency we might have. What does it mean to follow a God like this? How must we change to conform to his likeness?

When all is said and done, we all want to know God better. But the limitations of our understanding can leave us disappointed. However, it will not always be so. One day we'll know God fully, intimately. 'Now we see as through a glass darkly, then we shall see face to face.' (1 Corinthians 13:12) ■

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and is part of The Point Church in Brisbane.  
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# Letter from Thailand

by Robert Reagan 



Angkor of Faith. The name itself is a play on words. Angkor Wat is the name of the ancient temple in Siem Reap, Cambodia. It sounds a lot like the English word 'anchor'. A good friend of mine once explained to me that the best way to keep your boat safe during a hurricane is to take it out into the middle of the ocean and throw down a deep anchor. The boat will certainly get tossed around in the storm but it won't get smashed against the docks and other boats in the marina.

In the same way, spiritual anchors can help us when life's storms come our way. Each time we have a mountaintop spiritual experience, it can act as an anchor for our lives. One anchor can keep us from drifting too far. Two anchors can hold us in place even better. And three...well, you get the picture.

Since 2007, Angkor of Faith (AOF) has been creating anchor experiences in the lives of hundreds of youth and youth workers throughout Asia and, more recently, Australia and New Zealand. No other event has consistently brought together so many youths from Churches of Christ in this region. Lifelong friendships have been formed. Youth groups have been strengthened. Working and serving together has a way of uniting us as one – whether we're from Cambodia, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Australia or New Zealand.

AOF is a weeklong program of ministering to the street kids of Siem Reap. Everyday during AOF we cook lunch for

about 150-200 kids. We cook dishes characteristic of one of the countries represented at AOF. Then we play games and teach the kids about God. We even have a hygiene day when we wash lice out of every child's hair and teach them about cleanliness. The youth who attend AOF bond together as they lead and serve the street kids. AOF helps our youth understand that it is truly better to give than to receive.

How did AOF begin? The story goes back to 2006 when Edwin Choy and Dave Hogan (two evangelists from Moulmein Church of Christ in Singapore) asked a group of us to go with them to Cambodia. We went just to see what the Lord might do if we built more relationships there. God led us to meet Nathan and Cheryl Wheeler in Phnom Penh. Then I had a brainstorm idea to ask Nathan if I could bring some Thais to Cambodia to do a joint retreat with some Cambodian Christians. Nathan liked the idea.

When we travelled to see the ancient temples in Siem Reap, it wasn't the temples that mesmerised me; it was the street kids and how well they spoke English! I had a blast talking with them. Then, later that year, at the Asian Mission Forum in Siem Reap, I took a lot of friends down to the market area to meet some of these street kids. I think we stayed there several hours talking and laughing with these kids.

Then we had the idea of making an outreach to these street kids a part of the joint Cambodian-Thai retreat. When other youth workers found out about our plans, everyone wanted to be involved in this exciting new event. Before we knew it

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## Church Leadership Forum

**24 - 27 July 2013, Brisbane**

The 2013 Klesis Forum will bring together interested Christians to reflect upon, learn about, pray for and share experiences on church leadership with two back-to-back workshops.

### **Spiritual Deepening:**

10:00am Wed, 24 July – 5:00 pm Thur, 25 July 2013.  
Led by Dr Earl Lavender, Lipscomb University.

### **Equipping for Change & Conflict:**

10:00am Fri, 26 July – 4:00pm Sat, 27 July 2013.  
Led by Dr Steve Joiner, Lipscomb University.

**Venue** - Holland Park Church of Christ, Brisbane.

**Program Fees** - inclusive of GST.

**Register by:** Friday 12 July 2013.

Program - Fees	Regular	Early bird
<i>Spiritual Deepening</i>	\$33	\$22
<i>Equipping for Change &amp; Conflict</i>	\$33	\$22
<i>Attending both programs</i>	\$55	\$33

**For registration form, see [www.klesis.com.au](http://www.klesis.com.au) or contact Alan Rowley**

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## News Barnabas Mission: Darwin

During the 2013 March Easter break the Darwin church (currently 5 members and 2 children) was blessed with the presence of several Christians from interstate. The idea of this mission originated 9 months earlier when the Coffs Coast Church of Christ offered to visit another 'small and young' church for the purpose of encouragement. Soon interest developed and ultimately four congregations were represented at this gathering: Marvin & Jenny Ancell and Heather Cox from Coffs Coast church (NSW), Roy & Nancy Courtney from Hawkesbury church (NSW), Len & Jan Bestmann from Morayfield church (QLD) and John Gibbins from the Gosford church (NSW).

The mission became a mini-lectureship which ran from 30 March – 1 April (Fri-Sun). It was characterised by great lessons, singing, eating together, playing games, sightseeing and a bit of puppetry for the children, which the adults also enjoyed. The theme of Barnabas Mission was 'Christian living and church growth' and the lessons were really encouraging to the Darwin church and to all who attended.

There was an emphasis on Christian basics and the centrality of Jesus Christ in church planting and growth. The primary encouragement was for Darwin church members not to



lose heart, but to avail themselves for God's work and try all avenues of outreach. In a sense, the church in Darwin felt validated by this visit and more secure in the knowledge that other congregations, particularly the church in Coffs Harbour, are available to help and support the work in Darwin in whatever way possible. Looking into the future, constant communication and cooperation will be fostered with the Coffs Harbour church.

Barnabas Mission 2 looks like a strong possibility next year! ■

*Bopelo Boitshwarelo, Darwin church. bopelo@gmail.com*

## Angkor of Faith 7, Cambodia

Joy Tabalujan and I (from Belmore Road church in Melbourne) participated in AOF7 in March. This year AOF taught over 100 children from the streets of Siem Reap about God and the creation story, with more and more children coming each day. On our hygiene day we had up to 200 children present. They were taught to brush their teeth, care for wounds, wash their hands and brush their hair.

On our last day with the kids, we took them around Siem Reap and taught them how to bless others like they had been blessed that week. It was amazing to see all the kids so happily involved and being so generous with smiles on their faces. They gave food and drinks, helped clean up rubbish and sang songs about God to passers-by. It was great to see all the kids bow their heads and put their hands together to pray on the last day. It showed us that they were learning and taking it all in.

We were blessed with donations of clothes, books, toys and bags to give out at different places. We broke into groups and spent time at orphanages, a children's hospital, a school, a village and a dumpsite where families live. We gave donations at these different places and spent time encouraging the people around us.

Our prayer is that God continues to bless the people of Cambodia and the church in that area. We also pray that the people we ministered to can remember that there's always someone who loves them and that they continue to seek God and live for him in their communities. ■

*Emma Payne, Belmore Road Church of Christ. emmielou96@gmail.com*



## Feature *The Restoration Idea*

*InterSections* is committed to helping restore New Testament faith and practice today. But you may well ask: is 'restoration' itself a biblical concept? More than that, is it a desirable goal? I answer yes to both questions. Let me explain why.

In response to the first question, I note that restoration is a recurring theme of the Bible – in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In the book of Judges, the cycle of oppression by Israel's neighbours followed by deliverance by God's champions can be viewed as a cycle of drifting and restoration. During the divided monarchy, Josiah was one of the better kings: he removed idols, repaired the temple and restored proper worship to God (II Chronicles 34-35). After the Babylonian exile, a remnant of Jews returned to Palestine and rebuilt the temple – this too can be viewed as a restoration of sorts.

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Similarly, in the New Testament, restoration is also a theme. Paul sought to restore the Galatian churches who had been influenced by legalistic Judaizing teachers (Galatians 1:6-9). At an individual level, we're called to restore a fellow Christian who stumbles into sin (Galatians 6:1). Indeed, the entire drama of redemption as it plays out in the OT and NT is one overarching story of God restoring mankind into fellowship with him.

In response to the second question, I note that throughout 2,000 years of church history God-seeking individuals have initiated various restoration attempts. Probably the most famous is the Reformation sparked by the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther (1483-1546), who circulated his '95 theses' in 1517, questioning the practices of the Roman Catholic church of his day. In addition to Luther there were other reformers like John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, Martin Bucer in Strasbourg and Thomas Cranmer in England.

But there were others before and after Luther and his contemporaries. Before Luther there was Jan Hus (1372-1415), the Czech who led a reform movement in Prague. There was also the Waldensians, a radical group which started in France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century who challenged medieval papal authority and concepts such as purgatory on the basis that these teachings were not found in the New Testament. In England, John Wycliffe (1329-1384) rejected the clericalism of the medieval Roman Catholic church and translated the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) into English – so that common people could read God's message for themselves.

As the Reformation swept Europe, the more radical Anabaptists sought to restore believer's baptism and congregational church government. Across the channel, English Puritans sought to reform the Church of England by abolishing various ceremonies associated with Roman Catholicism. Several of these Puritans and later separatists became part of the 'pilgrim fathers' who migrated to America in order to avoid religious persecution. In America itself, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the Second Great Awakening among whom were religious leaders like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone and Walter Scott who called for a restoration of the New Testament church.

In highlighting these individuals, I'm not asserting that they're perfect models for us today. Or that the beliefs and behaviours they and their followers had were all biblically grounded. The truth was that they, like everyone else, had flaws. Moreover, they didn't agree on everything concerning Scripture. For example, Luther's followers like Melancthon were open to re-establishing some Roman Catholic worship practices whereas stricter Reformers like Calvin and Zwingli argued that what's not prescribed in Scripture should be forbidden. The 'regulative principle' of these Reformers purified worship practices and led to

them rejecting incense, musical instruments, icons, statues and other worship paraphernalia common at the time.

What remains notable is the courage and commitment these individuals demonstrated when they called for people to go back to the Bible. They sought to restore biblical practices as they understood it – even though they were often persecuted as heretics.

What then are some challenges for us today as we strive to go back to the Bible today? One challenge is discerning between a universal principle applicable to all and a particular practice applicable to a specific community back then. For example, does the exhortation to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' (Romans 16:16) mean that Christians must kiss one another when we meet? Or is the emphasis on the 'greet' – which means that we're free to greet one another with a hello, handshake, hug or whatever is appropriate in our day? (In my view, the latter meaning is preferable.)

Similarly, restoring New Testament practices doesn't mean doing absolutely everything which the first century Christians did. Some things which they did were simply wrong. For example, following Judaizing teachers (as in the Galatian churches) is one case. Being factious, immoral and disorderly (as in the church at Corinth) is another. Yet, with these negative examples there are positive teachings. It's the principles and practices which the teachings point to which we should restore and emulate.

Meanwhile, our focus on the New Testament doesn't mean that the Old Testament is not relevant for us today. Far from it. The OT is a part of God's revelation to man.

Its stories constitute a casebook which teaches us how God deals with man (Romans 15:4). The dramatic story which began in Eden continues through to the promise to Abraham, the exodus and the covenant with Israel. The highs and lows of the drama demonstrate God's abiding holiness and grace as well as his faithfulness to and love for humans. In fact, it's because of God's love that the promised messiah – Jesus of Nazareth – entered human history to save the world (John 3:16).

In this way, the OT sets the stage for the coming of Jesus as God incarnate in whom and through whom we find salvation. With the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God has ushered in a new era in his dealings with man. This is the era when Christ builds his church (Matthew 16:18), when disciples are commissioned to preach the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:18-20) and when the Holy Spirit is given to and empowers everyone who is baptised into Christ (Acts 2:38). This era will close at Christ's second coming when the kingdom in its fullness is revealed and he delivers the kingdom to the Father (I Corinthians 15:24). And it is precisely the gospel of this kingdom which we share with everyone, so that those who heed the call can be restored into fellowship with God. ■

*Benny Tabalujan is editor of InterSections. He and his family are part of the Belmore Road Church of Christ in suburban Melbourne.  
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## *Letter from Thailand - Ronald Reagan*

70 people had signed up for AOF1. No one really knew what to expect at the first AOF in 2007. Before our eyes, God did amazing things in our midst. It was definitely more than what we could have asked or imagined!

AOF1 was so powerful in everyone's lives that it seemed only natural to do it again the next year. Each year God brings new challenges and victories. And each year many youths have their first anchor experience and others simply add to their list of anchors.

After AOF4 in 2010, the coordination of AOF was passed to a younger generation. A team of young people from Singapore and Malaysia organised AOF5 and AOF6. This younger team brought many fresh ideas and energy. And this year AOF7 was organised by an excellent group of young people from the Philippines. The accompanying photos on pages 4 & 5 (taken by Joy Tabalujan from Australia) show some of the things we did during that wonderful week in March 2013.

God has taken my original idea for a Cambodian-Thai retreat and outreach to the street kids and turned it into an annual life-changing event in the lives of the youth here in Asia and elsewhere. To God be the glory. ■

*Robert Reagan and his wife Jan are longtime missionaries with the Payap Church of Christ in Chiang Mai, Thailand.  
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## *Interview - Nick La Spina*

Finally, many churches don't allow young Christians to develop and use their gifts. They might have the chance to pass out the Lord's Supper or lead a closing prayer sometimes, but that's about it. When given the opportunities (with guidance and mentoring), young people can really help churches grow, both spiritually and numerically.

One thing we really admire about the Otumoetai congregation is that the elders and the leadership have been very intentional about 'handing over the family farm'. While this has been a difficult thing for them to do, they understand that if they don't, they will lose their young people and Otumoetai will be another church that simply ages and dies out. The shepherds are very much still overseeing the congregation, but they have left much of the planning and creative side of how things are done day-to-day to young people that they see are proving themselves through their character and actions. We believe that many other churches would be wise to do the same.

### ***What are some of the ways young people can be a blessing to churches?***

Youth bring passion, energy and excitement to what they do. This complements many of the older members who can have the wisdom and experience but lack the energy. When working together, these two things can really complement each other. Young people also bring fresh ideas and perspectives and this can often prevent churches from becoming stale.

### ***How do you think marriage has helped or influenced your ministry with youth?***

One way is that it is helpful to have someone bounce ideas off or talk to about things when you've had a bad day. My

wife, being the amazing cook that she is, has also been able to cook up some amazing dinners for different youths whom we've had over throughout the last few years.

I also know that Bex supports me in what I do. Even though she has her commitments and she's now a stay-at-home mum, I know that she believes in me and wants me to do well in what I do. She's also passionate about seeing young people come to God and live for him. I would find it much harder without her!

### ***What challenges do fulltime church workers face?***

Raising financial support is a huge challenge. It's not fun to ask people for money all the time. But these things also keep us relying on God, and he *always* provides! Having said that, the majority of full time workers (including us) work below what we should be earning. While we trust God to provide, it would really help those in ministry if churches provided more support to their workers. I'm blessed because about 80-85% of my support comes from this region (NZ or Australia) and we don't rely that much from overseas (especially US) sources.

Ministry can also turn into a 24/7 job. Many church workers burn themselves out because of this. It's a real challenge to set clear boundaries and stick to them. When there's a day off, we often have to turn off the phone or let the answering machine answer. In order to be more effective it's important to take that time out and recharge.

For anybody considering full time ministry, the most important thing is to ensure that you're spending consistent time in the Word and in prayer. You cannot pour out to others if you're not being filled yourself! ■

*Nick La Spina and his wife Rebecca (Bex) are part of the Otumoetai Church of Christ in Tauranga, New Zealand.  
Interviewed by Nathan Holyoak. nick\_la\_spina@yahoo.com.au*

# Interview

Nick La Spina

**Nick, you are originally from Brisbane. How did you come to study at the South Pacific Bible College in New Zealand?**

This is a long story but, in a nutshell, I desired to learn more about God and his Word, but the doors that I was trying to go through kept closing. After really seeking God and what he wanted for me, I met Evan Lawrie (a graduate of SPBC from Gosford) and Gill Raine (who was working for SPBC at the time, and is now my mother-in-law). They shared with me about the college and what it had to offer. After months of prayer and considering it, I decided to apply and give it a go.

**Can you describe what your role as a youth minister involves?**

My main roles are preparing and teaching classes and small groups, planning and running activities, Bible studies, the occasional youth camp or mission trip and equipping others to do the same. However, my role at the Otumoetai church is not limited to youth. I also preach up to 12 times per year and this year my teammate, Andrew, and I will be heavily involved in leading the church through a period of studying God's Word to re-evaluate where we need to be heading as a church and focusing our energy and resources in this region.

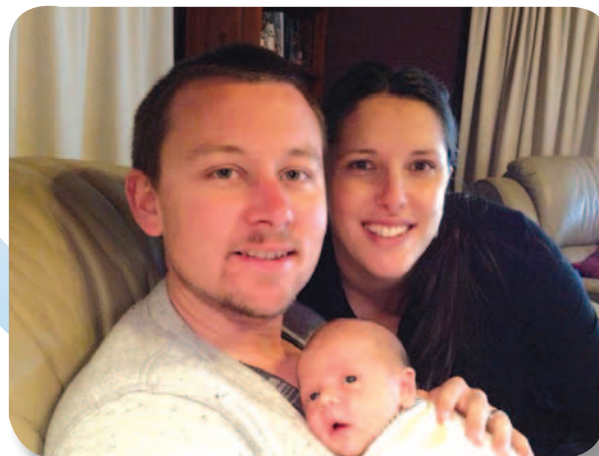
**What are some of the main challenges you see facing youth in the church today?**

There are many challenges that face teens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the major struggles I believe youth face is our postmodern culture. The message that we hear in the world is that whatever we believe as an individual and whatever is right for any one person is 'truth' for them.

However, Jesus tells us that he is 'the way, the truth and the life, and no one can come to the Father except through him' (John 14:6). It's hard for youths to stand up and say that Jesus is the only truth. So Christian teenagers (and adults) are facing more and more ridicule for standing up for what they believe in. An example of this right now is the gay marriage debate, which is prevalent in western society at the moment.

Many young people come from broken homes. Their parents have split up or they have been abused or neglected in some way, or they simply haven't received the love and affirmation that all people desperately need. As a result, many youths turn to drugs, alcohol and other destructive behaviours to try to fill this need. Sadly, this is a real problem for many in the church also.

Another challenge facing today's youth is the influence of the media, whether it be TV, movies, music, internet or social media. In these areas, sinful things are often portrayed as normal and acceptable. It has also enabled other things, such as pornography, to become more readily available. The more we fill our minds with the ways of the world the more we think sinful behaviour is okay. Teenagers' brains have not developed completely yet so when they see and hear



immorality portrayed through the media as acceptable it is shaping the way they think and therefore live out their lives.

Finally, another major challenge facing the church is keeping teens engaged. Now more than ever we need to invest in our young!

**Any suggestions on how churches might help youth meet these challenges?**

There's no easy answer to this question, but here are a few observations that we have seen.

Firstly, churches need to provide an environment where teens are loved and accepted for who they are and where the older ones can teach and equip the young about life because many aren't receiving that at home.

Secondly, churches need to provide opportunities for young people to live out their faith and serve others, whether it's through mission trips, reaching into their local community, camps and retreats or all of the above. Once I brought a number of youths to clean the garden of a lady in the community who had cancer. One of the girls said to me, 'Imagine if we all did this more often – how many people would want to know Jesus?' This young lady learned more that day than in a year of classes.

*Continued page 7*

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