

THE AUSTRALIAN

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## RURAL CHURCHES





THE AUSTRALIAN



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# Editorial

## Tough Churches

DON SMITH

**R**ural churches are a familiar sight for country travellers. For well over 100 years leadership has flowed into our life from these centres of inspiration. Some of our greatest leaders and household names of earlier years came from rural churches. \* An analysis of our churches nationwide reveals that 47% have memberships under 50, with a further 29% between 50 and 100, a combined total of 76%. A number of these churches are based in rural areas. Similar patterns exist with other denominations, both here and in the USA. \* Population statistics reveal many rural areas in decline. The average age



of farmers is also increasing. Through all this there are virile rural churches. In this issue we carry some interesting reports of rural churches. By coincidence a report from Berri, SA, in this issue reports on closure and new links with the local Uniting Church. A handful of our rural churches have opted for this approach in recent years. Some have linked with larger country centres or moved from full to part-time ministry. \* What is important is that smaller churches don't think small. Both Lyle Schaller and Martin Robinson, who are experienced consultants, speak of churches owning a vision and feeling positive about their purpose. Schaller describes the small church as tough. The dynamics of these churches are quite different from the larger church. Martin Robinson in his book *Celebrating the Small Church* notes the importance of making disciples, having a sense of call, fulfilling a mission, recognising a need for change and clearing away obstacles. This issue is dedicated to rural churches. We affirm their importance and recognise the "tough" churches in each state. There is also a plea for a commitment on the part of the rural church to claim its part in the wider church and avoid an isolationist stance. And for each state there is a need for strategic thinking about how the rural church can be affirmed and best supported. Martin Robinson declares that the journey of the small church is not in dashing to and fro, but in developing a fellowship where each is known and accepted. He says the healthy small church is anchored in the praise of God. That is cause for celebration! \*



## Rural Churches

**Life and ministry in rural churches.**

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## Small Churches 19

*Pam Weston raises some questions concerning our response to small churches.*

## Update

Dear Readers,

This issue has a focus on rural churches. Our cover photo of the Caveside, Tas, church building has been supplied by John Harrison, the minister of the church. Caveside must have one of the most picturesque settings of any of our Australian rural congregations. The scenery combines a background of the Western Tiers, sometimes covered in snow, and a lush rural countryside devoted to dairying and agriculture. Records show that Stephen Cheek, one of our pioneer evangelists, visited the area in October 1877 and preached a sermon on "Ruth". The former Mole Creek church assisted in the commencement of the work and aided working bees which constructed the original chapel in 1910. This building continues as part of the present complex. The Caveside church has an active program, an attendance of 26 at the morning service and noted three baptisms in the last report to Vic-Tas Conference.

We are appreciative of donations from churches and readers which are arriving almost daily at the office. Thankyou. This

help will bring progressive benefits to all readers as we continue to develop and strengthen the paper.

Our forthcoming issues will focus on church planting, evangelism and archaeology. The year will conclude with two Christmas issues. Planning for 1998 is under way. Your ideas about themes for next year are invited. They should be submitted immediately. Even if there is not room in 1998, they may well be possibilities for 1999.

In our last Update column we invited drawings illustrating a Christmas theme, Biblical or Australian, from primary-school-aged children. Contributions should come on A4 paper using the vertical dimension of the paper and done in one colour—black, dark blue or dark red. Names and addresses should be included on the reverse side of the drawing. Entries must reach the office by 7 November. Any publication of drawings will be assessed on suitability for reproduction and the quality of the work.

*Len Smith*



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## Bringing our Churches Together

### A new era for our churches in New South Wales

Bruce Armstrong will commence a new ministry in New South Wales on 20 October 1997.

Bruce will head the work of all our Conference Ministries and act to maximise the networking among the churches.

Bruce brings considerable energy and wisdom to the role of Ministry Coordinator that can only be gained through long years of successful ministry.

A service of Commissioning will be held at the Northside church on Tuesday evening 21 October 1997, beginning at 7.30pm.

A full building is expected for what will be the happiest celebration of our churches for many years.

Bruce constantly refers to the Conference as a "living network of churches" and is optimistic that God has given us abundant blessing in each other.

The old attitude of absolute autonomy has led us to more than our fair share of helpless autopsies.

Ahead of us is an awakening to the riches that God has provided for us in each other for the sake of the world that he loves.

An age of vitality and accountability will come as we realise that the gospel is proved not by argument but by mutuality and community.

Bruce is a familiar figure around NSW although he leaves a minis-



**Bruce Armstrong, NSW  
Ministry Coordinator**

try of eighteen years in Toowoomba, Qld, to commence this ministry.



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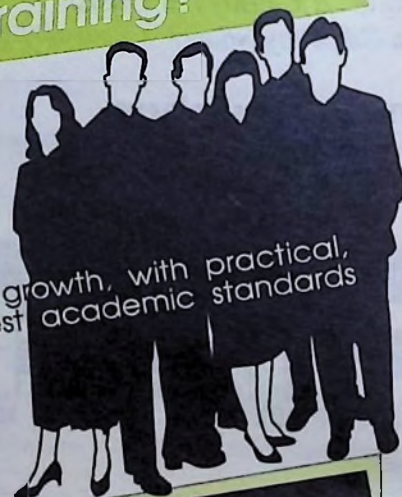
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## Bright New Era

Encouraging move for country church



*Celebrating the move into new premises over morning tea*

The Bright, Vic, church celebrated their move from the local RSL hall, which had been used for services for over twenty years, into a historic building, formerly used as a Presbyterian church, restaurant and gallery, on 31 May. The grounds have been imaginatively landscaped.

Members had worked hard making the building suitable for worship and welcomed the many visitors who attended over the weekend. Various gifts to equip the building were acknowledged: the lectern and communion table from the former North Balwyn church; the piano from the family of Georgina Withers; and the carpet from the owner of the building.

Ron Beach, elder, presided over the dedication service. Greetings were brought by the Rev. Ian Cayzer, Uniting Church, on behalf of the churches in Bright, and Councillor Fran Bentley on behalf of the Alpine Shire. Marge Beach, secretary, spoke about the history of the church, and Bernard Purse, elder, explained the history of the building and the events leading to occupation of it, and gave the address. Lynette Leach, Conference Executive Officer, spoke on behalf of Vic-Tas Conference and led the dedicatory prayer.

Steve Mackie, the first full-time minister, was a visitor and participated in the Sunday service. After the service, the Catholic Church hosted morning tea.

## Steady Growth for Country Church

Loxton takes risks and reaches out to the community



*Outside the renovated warehouse, now used as a community base by the Loxton, SA, church*

In August 1985, the Loxton Church of Christ, SA, moved from its old premises to a renovated warehouse and was renamed the "Living Waters Christian Community". The aim was to provide a contemporary profile in the community.

Since then we have seen steady growth.

The ministry to the unchurched has seen the establishment of the "Pub With No Beer" (7.00 pm – 12.00 midnight, Saturdays) for the youth of the town; "Saturday Arvo Club" (2.00 pm – 4.00 pm, Saturdays) for the unchurched children of the town and "Oasis" (a Friday morning "drop-in" for the women of the town). The complex pro-

vides a warm atmosphere that is welcoming and non-threatening to the outsider. Recently, we saw four unchurched adults and their families make commitments to Christ and become part of the church family. Most of the unchurched children are at Sunday School on Sunday mornings. Although this is an exciting move of God in a country town, it also comes with the cost of lovingly accepting people who don't fit our "traditional mould" of Sunday Christians.

We look forward to what God has in store for us and are trusting the Lord to raise up more workers as the harvest is indeed very great.

—Pastor Sonny Pillay

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### Pontius' Puddle





## Women's Ministries Retreat

### Being "Dinky Di" for Christ

The 1997 Women's Ministries, WA, Annual Retreat, 19-21 September, was held in perfect Spring conditions amid the bush setting of Serpentine campsite.

The theme "Dinky-Di for Christ" was evident right from the time application forms were available and was followed through in the name tags we wore, the ice-breaker game "Kangaroo", a fun-filled evening of giggle spots, boot scooting and a very appropriate craft elective.

The speaker, Sylvia Hancock, drew on her own life and many years of chaplaincy work to show how important it was to be 'dinky di' with ourselves before we could grow and be helpful to others in their needs.

This involved recognising our past experiences, allowing Christ to heal us of negative ones and moving on to grow and serve others.

The missionary spot focused on Helen Norling and seven ladies from the Aboriginal church at Hedland.

A communion offering of \$564 was given to the Hedland church.

A drama-to-music presentation by Kelmscott young people made the communion service memorable.

Worship times were led by Warwick and Albany ladies. A book-stall was organised by Rivervale. It was encouraging to have a wide range of ages represented.

### Here and There

#### Beware of Traditional Hymns!

"Joyful, joyful, we adore thee", one of the better-known traditional hymns, was especially included in a well-attended worship service by one of our larger Victorian churches. In the best tradition of innovative methodology, the hymn was reproduced on an overhead as a contribution to the worship and music seminar being conducted by the church. All went well until a group of worshippers who really enjoy singing traditional hymns came to the line "Giver of immortal gladness" with the letter "t" omitted.

[We can sympathise! —Ed.]

#### Clergy-Only Communion

A UK Report on Eucharistic Presidency from the Theological group of bishops of the Church of England concludes that while circumstances in the church had greatly changed and "there is no difference in the value or worth of persons before God", the suggestion that lay people might preside at the holy communion cannot be accepted. (Church Scene)

## Queensland Leaders

### Three leaders recall early years in Toowoomba



David Lowe, (left) Beverley Grenfell and Selwyn Dickfos all attended the Margaret St, Toowoomba, church in the 1950s and 1960s. They recently attended the Camp Cal reunion and talked about their current roles with the Queensland Conference.

David, a music store proprietor, is chairman of the Department of Ministry (Kenmore Christian College), Beverley, a consultant with the Queensland Health, Commu-

nity Health Services in Toowoomba, is President of Churches of Christ Care and Selwyn, a sales representative, is a member of the Department of Church Development and Education.

Together they are grateful for the influence and encouragement received in earlier days as they serve in their local churches and the wider work of the Conference.

### Mitcham Church of Christ

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## Cowaramup WA

A peek into the life of a rural church



Children demonstrating the "I am the Light of the World" theme at a recent service

Cowaramup church is located in Western Australia's south west, some 270 km from Perth. The area is a centre for dairying, vineyards, sheep and cattle. In July, Trevor Streeton of the Maylands, WA, church organised a four day visit for seniors, which included an evening with the church. Tour group members and local people shared in a program

of items and testimonies. In the last year the church has faced some major challenges, which included the Gracetown cliff tragedy and the resignation of their minister. The church reports it is blessed with lively worship, an intercessory prayer group and a Sunday school. Recent efforts include a calf sale, a care ministry and recycled clothing outlet.

## Correction

In the advertisement of 4 October, "A Case of Curiosities" Len Woodley, speaker at the Christian Librarians' Network dinner, is a

commentator on religious books for ABC radio; and a consultant to publishers and booksellers, not an ABC radio consultant.

## Weaving the Mission

First National Consultation



Bob Smith, National Coordinator, discussing National Literature Department books with representative Geoff Alves

The first ever National Consultation of Churches of Christ in Australia was held at Mulgrave, Vic, on 12-13 September. The theme of the Consultation was "Weaving the Mission", an acknowledgment that Mission in Australian Churches of Christ has many and varied threads which create a rich tapestry for the Kingdom.

Over 50 people representing National and State Agencies and National Networks met together to share strategies, dream dreams and extend the networks that are now so essential to our national synergy. They were further stimulated by the vision-casting of our four key note speakers, representing differing but significant frontiers of mission. Graham Long, Alan Hirsch, Allan Meyer and Chek Chia all spoke of what was in their hearts on the theme, "Listen to What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches".

The Consultation also provided the opportunity for the national agencies to report on their stew-

ardship during the past year and to share their plans for the next. The Federal Aborigines Board's response to "Bringing Them Home"—the report into the stolen children—was an important part of this gathering, as was the Consultation's recommendation to National Council to stand with FAB in urging our churches to express our sorrow and repentance for this injustice in appropriate ways and to work actively for reconciliation.

As special interest and national networks reported to the larger group the extent and variety of our national mission became even clearer. It ranged from caring for 4000 aged persons in our aged care facilities to caring for sailors aboard HMAS Adelaide on its rescue mission in the Southern Ocean. From an Internet web site to ministries to street kids, it's all part of the tapestry that is Churches of Christ in Australia.

—Bob Smith,  
National Coordinator



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## A Matter of Perspective

Counting your blessings!

I have just spent a week at a women's convention in a remote village in Papua New Guinea. It is two hours by boat and a two-hour walk from my home at Chungribu, which is itself 40 minutes by air from the nearest township.

The ten-minute walk to the bathroom (a creek shared with the other 180 women at the convention, and the host village people) made me appreciate my own little bathroom complete with cold running water, bucket shower, and a curtain across the doorway. Primitive is definitely a matter of comparison! My bucket toilet complete with seat and only 100 metres from my door is also appreciated after a week of squatting over an 200 mm square hole in a rickety floor built over a pit.

My kitchen seems like a miracle of modern convenience, despite the fact that the fridge runs on



*Fay Christensen, providing perspective*

kero and its freezer section is not working properly, the cupboards have no doors, and only cold water comes out of the tap. I have a fluorescent light in my kitchen, but since it comes from 12 v solar power, there are no appliances. But it sure beats having to sit on the floor to cook over an open fire, using firewood that had to be chopped and carried home from the bush on my back! It beats working in the dark if the kerosene supply for the hurricane lamp runs out, when the nearest store selling kero is two hours walk away!

My 50 mm thick foam rubber mattress may not be quite like your inner-spring bed, but it sure beats a mat on the floor and no pillow. How many times a day do you thank God—as you turn on the hot water tap, flush your toilet, switch on a light, sit in a comfortable chair with cushions, sleep on a bed with a mattress—for the comfort that is a daily part of your life?

—Fay Christensen

### Here and There

#### Fears for Human Rights Activist

Fear is held for the safety of Father Miguel Concha Malo, a well-known and respected human rights defender working in Mexico, who received a death threat early last month. Amnesty International is concerned for his safety. The Mexican Government, despite continually pledging to protect human rights defenders, has still not made this purported commitment a reality. Candle Day, 24 October, is being observed to remind all about the special needs of many around the world facing danger and harassment. For further information contact 1800 808 157 or <<http://www.amnesty.org.au>>.

## Trans-Tasman Teamwork

New Zealander in Australia for evangelism projects

Richard Black is a New Zealander in Australia to study and participate in church development, mission, revitalisation and evangelism projects. He has an internship to work with Alan Hirsch of the Victorian-Tasmanian Division of Mission and Revitalisation. Richard and Jennifer have recently moved into the Coburg manse and will give some assistance to the church's ministry. They believe their work in Australia is an expression of partnership between the two national churches.

Richard's stay in Australia has the endorsement of the New Zealand Association of Churches of Christ. He plans to return to New Zealand at the end of his two-year term and use benefits of the experience within New Zealand churches. Richard previously worked in a church-planting situation with Grace Community Church in Christchurch, NZ. He holds a BA in Classics from the University of Canterbury and will complete BD studies through the Bible College of New Zealand this year. Richard first made contact with Australian Churches of Christ through his



*Richard Black*

visit in company with a team of ministers to Victorian and New South Wales churches in November 1995, and attended the Spring Conference at Wollongong. His wife Jennifer has a degree in Speech and Language Therapy and a BA degree in English Literature. Richard and Jennifer have been married for two years. Jennifer is currently looking for employment.

## Think

The question "Where are we going?" is crucial to the life and future of each church. The small church is no exception. Leaders and laity will need to work together in order to dream possibilities and realities of where God might take them.

—Martin Robinson.  
*Celebrating the Small Church*

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## Berri Closure

SA country church to close



*Berri, SA, soon to hold their last service*

The Berri Church of Christ, located in South Australia's Riverland, will hold its final service on 2 November 1997.

The church building erected in 1917 has been sold to the Sisters of St Joseph, with a view to the extension of St Catherine's Nursing Home.

It is expected that past members will participate and learn of the new proposals, which include the formation of a combined congregation with the Berri Uniting Church. A three-acre property on the Sturt Highway has been purchased, with a new worship and community centre proposed.

## Creative Crew Members

Charters Towers encouraged by visit from *Doulos* crew members



*Doulos crew members creatively presenting the gospel*

Eight crew members of the ship *Doulos* arrived in Charters Tow-

ers, Qld, recently to spend ten days landlocked. They were a small part of the 320-member crew comprised of 29 different nationalities who sail around the world as a part of Operation Mobilisation. During their stay they worked with the combined Baptist and Church of Christ congregations, conducting services and showing something of what God is doing in the world.

They also worked with a number of schools and presented the gospel using drama, mime, dance and even the translation of a testimony that brought to the students the message of God's care for them in a fresh and relevant way.

An international food night was one of the highlights. A number of unchurched people attended an excellent night of eating and fellowship. The team were a great encouragement to our church and our ministry in the schools and wider community.

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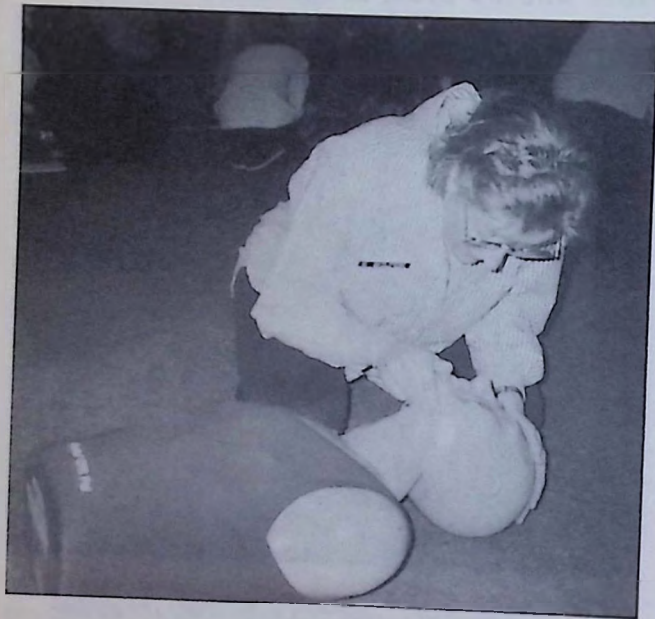
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Telephone (03) 9842 8433 to arrange a visit or further information.



## No Camp for Dummies

**Girls' Brigade Camp for Leaders**



*Mrs Anita Barnes (Noarlunga Centre Church of Christ) participating in a first-aid workshop. Anita is Captain of 14th Adelaide Girls' Brigade*

Girls' Brigade held their annual Training and Fellowship Weekend at Victor Harbor, South Australia, recently. Leaders from both country and metropolitan areas attended.

Of great encouragement to the organisers was the attendance of fourteen ladies new to Girls' Brigade.

It was a time of sharing ideas, business sessions, worship and workshops on behaviour management and first-aid.

Many a concern was shared and resolved over a "cuppa" between sessions.

At this relaxed and informative weekend away from the usual responsibilities of home, leaders had time to focus on the opportunity we have as leaders, on a weekly basis, to share the love of God with the girls in our care.

## Serving in Nepal

**Ballarat church family moves to mission work in Nepal**



*Glenn, Terri, Felicity, Anna and Zoe Creelman, serving God in Nepal*

Glenn, Terri, Felicity, Anna and Zoe lived in Invermay, just near Ballarat, Victoria. Although busy

and happy in their church and work lives, in recent years Glenn and Terri have both sensed God was broadening their horizons and prompting them to consider overseas ministry. This came partly through difficult times that caused them to question what they were doing with their lives.

Trained as a metallurgist, Glenn worked for a number of years as a mechanical engineer. Terri is a teacher with Early Childhood Education and ESL (English as a Second Language) training.

The Creelmans now plan to use their skills as a means of ministering to the people of Nepal working with Interserve. The Ballarat Family Church of Christ, Vic, is the family's home church and they are pleased to have their strong, prayerful encouragement. Information about contact with the family or support can be obtained from Interserve, PO Box 320, Box Hill Vic 3128.

### Considering Missionary Service?

We have the following exciting opportunities available to begin in 1998.

#### Primary Teacher/Literacy Worker

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## Harcourt's Special Events

### Special events for youth of three churches

Jacinta Rice was baptised at Harcourt, Vic, church on 14 September. After the service Horrie Rice, church secretary and her grandfather, presented her with a Bible and baptism certificate. Roy Armitage, the minister, also presented her with a bottle of water taken from the baptistery.

The day also marked the church's first ever evening service. The Castlemaine Church of Christ supplied the musicians, lighting and song leader. Harcourt provided the venue, the choir, the soloist and the reader (all from the youth club) and Adam Swift, the preacher. The Bible text was read by Tamika Rice and Jacinta gave a beautiful solo of "Jesus

lover of my soul"—very fitting for her feelings of the day. Over 60 people came from Castlemaine, Bendigo and Harcourt. Luke Pellas, Harcourt, gave his testimony, explaining how the youth group had helped him to come to faith and the changes he had experienced in his life. Harcourt church provided a BBQ tea.

The following Sunday Bendigo church ran a special youth service which the Harcourt youth attended. Two weeks later Castlemaine church had a special service when the youth from all three churches will come together. It is hoped that this will become a regular event between the churches.



*At Harcourt's first evening service*

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# Albania: A Country in Crisis!

**Mission Without Borders (MWB) brings aid to the desperately needy**

"Yesterday on 2 March of this year, the Albanian Government in an extraordinary session decided to put the law of state of emergency in the whole of Albania." With this announcement, we learned of the crisis that had developed in Albania.

Along with the fall of communism in Albania and the freedoms that came to the people, pyramid schemes became wildly popular as a means of getting rich quickly. People invested all the money they had saved into these schemes which eventually collapsed causing economic ruin for thousands.

In their frustration and anger, the people rioted and rebelled, causing great damage to buildings and public facilities as well as hundreds of people being injured and many others killed. The situation became like a volcano waiting to explode. And explode it did into bloody civil war.

The very activities that hold a society together were destroyed. People who once had little money and savings lost everything and joined the poor who had nothing anyway. Gangs of criminals and adolescents, armed with all sorts of weapons, plundered almost everything they could find: warehouses, offices, shops, hotels, mission centres, and many other buildings. Thousands of Albanians, in a desperate attempt to flee the nightmare around them, have been using anything even vaguely resembling a boat in the hopes that it will get them across the Adriatic sea. Hundreds of children and parents drowned in their desperate attempt to escape.

People left everything they owned in their desperate attempt to flee. Yet one of the most frightening

sights of all was watching the military detachments and police abandon their posts and prisons intent on fleeing for their own safety.

In the face of this horrible situation, MWB just could not wait any longer. We had to take some action even if it meant high risk. It did not take long to come to the logical conclusion that children should be the first to receive help. For this reason the orphanage at Durres was chosen. There, living in miserable conditions, were about 50 children from birth to three years of age.

Food and support had been next to impossible to get. Children were hungry and frightened, and orphanage staff simply did not know how they were going to get through that terrible time.

The director of the home, Aleksander Koci, and his staff received all kinds of promises for help from foreign organisations, yet very little aid was given. The orphanage is extremely small and run-down, with no place at all for the children to play. Mr Koci humbly said that he felt what they had was better than nothing, and went on to say, in a saddened voice, "Most missions have left Albania. We are very happy and grateful to MWB Albania for this help to our orphanage and for the continuation of their work in Durres."

MWB Albania's emergency action took place in complete secrecy. No one knew what was going to take place with the exception of MWB Albania staff. Small trucks had to be rented for transportation. Fatos, an MWB Albania employee explained, "It was very hard to convince the truck drivers to carry out this operation ... They were all very scared."



*MWB—delivering food to the desperately needy*

By the time the trucks were loaded and the drivers rounded up, a lot of time had passed. Curfew was drawing close, and all the drivers balked at delivering the goods after curfew.

But the Lord was with the MWB workers, for a senior truck driver came forward and offered his services. Despite the danger, he felt deeply for the children in the orphanage. Everyone involved in this secret action of assistance truly felt the hand of God that night. Despite travelling after curfew, despite gunfire and rioting, all went smoothly and successfully for all involved, and the parcels of goods were delivered to an orphanage in great need.

Meanwhile the plan to bring emergency aid to the people of Durres continued to proceed. Sixty tons of food and medicines in the form of 5000 food parcels

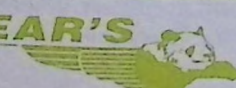
and 500 medical parcels were brought in on three large trucks from Holland and taken to a safe warehouse in the harbour area of Durres. Here the food and medical parcels were stored until, under the strict protection of multinational forces stationed in Durres, the aid was distributed. While poor people appear at the distribution point to collect a food parcel you can read on their faces the suffering and the sadness, but also the sparkles of joy and hope as they come out of the crowd holding a food parcel in their hand.

Please pray that help will be generously given.

Further information on how you can bring hope to the people of Albania may be obtained through Mission Without Borders, PO Box 265 Bankstown, NSW 2200, or by phoning on (02) 9793 8100.

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## Does God Play Sport?

**Special family breakfast at Greensborough, Vic**

"Who said this, 'I have a dream'?" Paul Cameron, Senior Minister at Doncaster Community Church, and chaplain to the Richmond Tigers AFL Football Club, asked while speaking at a family breakfast held at the Regional Church of Christ, Greensborough, Vic, recently. The theme of the breakfast was "Does God play sport?" The breakfast was advertised in the community, and attracted several interested locals. "All of us have had our dreams," Paul said. In his famous speech, civil rights leader, Martin Luther King spoke of his dream of racial equality. Paul dreamt as a boy of becoming a cricketer and playing at the MCG. Paul also had career

success. In the Wales (now Westpac) bank, he was the youngest person to become manager. Once reached, these career goals were replaced by a dream of reaching out to people with the Gospel.

As a chaplain, Paul works to "keep the rumour of God alive" in the community. Paul sees football chaplaincy as a privileged position, as it involves ministering to people who have achieved their dreams in professional sport.

A chaplain is a comforter, a listener and an encourager, Paul is referred to as "the Rev" by the footballers in the club, and is very much a part of the team. "We are all whole human beings, and foot-



Used with permission, Sports Monthly

*"The Rev", on the bench at a game*

ballers are too," Paul remarked. AFL footballers are made heroes and idolised by many. They seem to be "superhuman", yet they have the same needs as all of us. Paul helps footballers work through their feelings, and the emotions that come with the highs and lows of their careers.

Footballers also have a spiritual component to their lives. Players have often come to Paul for prayer

and counselling, and had visited churches during difficult times in their lives.

So, does God play sport? According to Paul Cameron, the answer is "Yes". God made us to work, but he also made us to play. In Genesis, the Sabbath day, is time we use to unwind, and prepare ourselves to face life's demands. God created the idea of a time for leisure.

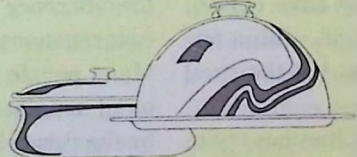
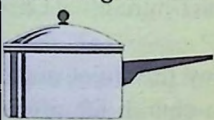
The relaxed approach to presenting the Gospel that Churches of Christ people have, is ideal for chaplaincy. Though the world is different now from Gospel times, its message has not changed. The church needs new and creative ways to share the gospel. In this sense, chaplaincy is ideal.

If God can go to the football, then God can come to school, and work. As Christians we take God with us wherever we go. How much we allow him to shine through to others, depends on how much we allow God to touch ourselves. What are we prepared to do to "keep the rumour of God alive" in our own community?

—Scott McPhee

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# Rural Church

## Trends in Rural Churches

GRAHAM LAWRIE

**W**ho cares about rural Australia? With its vast electorates, scattered population and a feeling their votes don't count, rural Australia is on the defensive. Economic rationalism seems to be what is behind many businesses and government departments leaving rural areas. Banks are closing, machinery parts are being consolidated in Sydney warehouses and government services are relocating to major centres. \*

*Sometimes the church is the only institution left that defines a given community.*

At the same time as anger is being directed at both government and business for their desertion, revolutionary amounts of information and technology are becoming available. Last harvest I called at a remote farmhouse where I was amazed to see the computer's colour printer spewing out mosaics of harvested paddocks, detailing grain yield for every square metre. The information for the mosaics was fed to the computer from a monitor fitted to the harvesting machinery and guided by GPS (Global Positioning System). Access to the Internet and electronic banking is beginning to replace services once supplied face to face. The church is important in this context. At a recent Uniting Church rural conference Rev. Dean Eland is quoted as saying, "With the withdrawal of services, people are looking for what makes community. The church has a role in developing a spirit of community in that setting." \*

Sometimes the church is the only institution left that defines a given com-

munity. In this setting more emphasis could be given to the inclusive nature of the church, with more openness and less sharply-defined boundaries, as some have suggested. \*

Sometimes the church reacts to all the change by a grim hanging-on to hymns and rituals of the past. While some preserve the traditions, others write the church off as being irrelevant to our modern world. It is not unusual for conflicting thinking to exist side by side in the one congregation. \*

A major frustration is the inability to meet the expectations of youth. Small rural churches cannot deliver what regional and urban churches offer. It is the youth who seem most discontented with the style of church life which suits the rest of the congregation. "Nobody goes who is my age!" is a familiar cry. With unmet felt needs, an alarming number of youth are dropping out of the church scene altogether. \*

Rural churches, by and large, are getting smaller and many have closed. Churches of Christ in SA, with a few notable exceptions, has left the rural scene. \*

Anglican and Uniting Churches try to serve vast areas. This is a costly business. Many of the churches are asset rich, but cash poor. Some well-meaning church officials campaign to close down outlying churches. The hope is, that it will force members to travel to regional centres. It seems economic rationalism is driving even the church. When churches do close, many people feel angry and grieve over their loss. Some cease to be part of the church, bringing little gain and much pain. \*

I am watching with interest the experiments of Anglican and Uniting churches with Ministry Areas and Cluster Ministries. \*



Ordained, trained and paid ministers are spread over wide areas with oversight over many small churches. Uniting church congregations are encouraged to exercise a degree of independence, elect a ministry team and appoint a leader. This team is responsible for worship services, including communion, preaching and sometimes baptisms, funerals and even marriages, where a licence is issued. In some instances we could play a game of "spot the difference" with Churches of Christ congregations! \*

Many people enjoy the quiet uncluttered approach to church life offered by the rural church. Its primary focus is on the single gathering for the week, to worship and teach Sunday School. Through the week the church disperses to become the wider community. This natural, acceptable integration into the community gives enormous potential to be both salt and light. \*

As the church begins again to grasp its role as a mission outpost, the rural church will rise again as one of the richest sources of Christian leadership within the Australian church. \*

After thirty years ministry in SA Churches of Christ, Graham Lawrie is currently assisting in the Wakefield Parish of the Uniting Church in the mid-north of SA.



# Rural Church

## A Rural Church Family

KERRY PARRY

A young girl sat at the church piano, carefully playing a melody in hesitant strokes of the keys. She finished the tune and a middle-aged man said, "Play another one, that was great!" She smiled, basking in the words of encouragement and started another song. It was 10.50 on a Sunday morning earlier this year, my eight-year-old daughter Kathleen, who is eagerly learning piano, wanted to "play in church" and I suggested she could play a few songs prior to the service. I smiled, this was one of the re-

*It is not uncommon to see our children dressed up to act out a Bible reading or giving an item on their recorders.*

wards of being part of a small rural church. As Graeme Smith sat listening to Kathleen play, he continued to encourage her to "play another song"—her confidence boosted, Kathleen immersed herself in glorifying God in her simple, yet just as important, worship through music. I remembered our experiences in the larger Grovedale Baptist Church, Geelong, Vic, some years earlier, the church musicians were accomplished artists and I don't think I ever saw a child participate in any way in a service. \*

Here at Pyramid Hill Church of Christ, it is not uncommon to see our children dressed up to act out a Bible reading or giving an item on their recorders. Our church family really is that—a family—which the *Oxford Dictionary* defines as being a group of related peo-

ples having common features. \*

A visit to the doctor's surgery sees our Sunday School Superintendent, Estelle Farrar, sitting at the receptionist's desk. At the local P-10 College, another Sunday School teacher, June Smith, greets you at the office where she is secretary. Buying groceries at the store,

you often "come across" someone from church. The lady at the checkout greets my children by name and asks them how they are. For the six years we lived in Grovedale we never met our next door neighbours. In Pyramid Hill, Vic, the "bush telegraph" had passed on the message that we had bought a house in town almost before we had decided to buy it! The sense of family radiates from the church into the community. \* It really made me appreciate being part of a smaller church family when a minister of one of our larger South Australian churches told me that if one of his congregation is away for three Sundays in a row, he doesn't recognise them when they return! At Pyramid Hill, if you miss a Sunday service, it is almost assured that you will hear from the church family "checking" to see if you are OK. \*

When my husband Paul and I were first married (back in 1984) and moved into our first home in Stawell, Vic, we experienced this same sense of rural community. As youth leaders at the Stawell Church of Christ, we happened to mention to our group that our back fence needed painting. "We'll help!" was the catch-cry. So the next Saturday morning, we suggested those wanting to par-



ticipate should wear some old clothes and bring their own paint brush. The group went one step further and decided to supply their own paint! \*

Our fence was transformed into a colourful mural of varying degrees of artistic ability. The next Saturday morning, Paul and I set to work repainting the fence a more "respectable" brown—we were pleasantly surprised when a number of group members arrived (uninvited) to help repaint the fence! \*

A unique event which I had never encountered before, is the outdoor farm services held by Pyramid Hill church. Informally we gather together for a bring and share meal followed by choruses (with our organist David Broad playing his piano accordion), readings and a special message for all who have come willingly to share in this non-threatening worship time. \*

*Compton's Interactive Bible Commentary* states that, "Jesus showed a preference for small towns and rural areas." Being cared for as part of the Pyramid Hill Church family, I can understand why! \*

Kerry Parry is a member of the Pyramid Hill, Vic, church. The photo of Kerry and her family was taken when Kathleen was a bit younger.



# Rural Church

## Success in the West

GREG MURPHY

**W**hen I first announced my call to Roma, Qld, the reaction of many friends, family and ministry colleagues was one of amazement. "Why would a young, intelligent and capable minister leave a plush church for a ministry in the middle of nowhere?" People believed such ministries were for those low in talent or long in the tooth. However, several people conceded that a short stint in the country might be good to consolidate before getting back into "real ministry". Such attitudes are not lost on people in rural churches. In response to my question about the lack of a con-

*Our response is conditioned by our horizons.*

stitutional voting process for ministry re-appointment, a local church leader said, "We never have to ... They always leave!" \*

It is not only churches that have a problem with continuity of staff in rural areas. In fact, in comparison with some organisations, churches are doing well. Much of the population of Roma is transient. One group has employed four different coordinators in three years. Another position has changed hands three times in four years. I wonder why? \*

The only hitchhiker I've ever picked up turned out to be a consultant employed by a city council to investigate a decade of economic downturn. As he described to me what he considered the key contributing factors, I experienced a strong sense of déjà vu. It dawned on me that his description of the city bore striking similarities to how a colleague

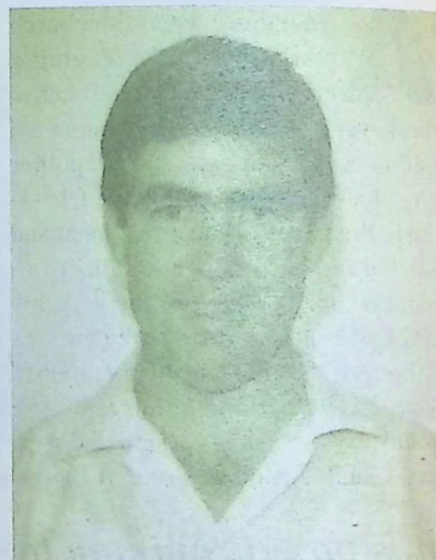
in ministry in the same town had recently described the local church. \*

Since then I have developed a conviction that a church reflects the prevailing dynamic of the surrounding community. People develop overarching attitudes to life in response to the forces at work in their neighbourhood. Christians are no exception. While we all worship the same God and read the same Scriptures, our response to both is conditioned by our horizons. If my conviction is true, then the dynamic currently driving many rural churches is probably one of survival. \*

Stricken by drought and falling cattle and grain prices, many rural communities are fighting for their very existence. When the Queensland Government recently floated the idea of putting a maximum security prison in a rural area, nineteen shire and town councils chasing potential economic benefits expressed interest. Many have employed tourism and economic advisers to promote new development opportunities. \*

However, it is not just the recent circumstances which contribute to the dynamic of survival. It is the whole way of life on the land. Being at the mercy of weather patterns, world markets and the whims of governments is not conducive to the development of what psychologists call an "internal locus of control". People who by nature believe they can mould their world, rather than let their world mould them, have their work cut out for them in the bush. \*

In contrast, many metropolitan areas are thriving with new housing developments, shopping centres and schools appearing regularly. Cultural diversity abounds and populations figures continue to spiral. The prevailing dynamic is often one of growth. Every time I



return to the coast on holidays I find some technological advance which will take years, if ever, to reach the country areas. (Last time it was card operated petrol pumps.) Growing up in growing areas facilitates the development of a growth mind set. \*

There is a saying, that you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. I believe it goes the other way as well. You can take the minister out of the city, but it is difficult to remove the city from the minister. Many candidates for ministry come from more coastal areas. Ministry in a rural area is for these people, in various ways, a cross-cultural experience. \*

This doesn't mean it is not possible for such ministries to be successful, but success may have to alter its definition. Success in the city may mean exponential growth in a short ministry term. In rural ministry it may mean keeping the witness alive and well over many years without significant growth. It may mean faithfully planting seed every year in the hope that one of these seasons there just may be a bumper crop. \*



# Rural Church

## Ministry in Rural Churches

JOHN TOCKNELL

**M**inistry in the rural church gives opportunity for a minister who is called of the Lord to be happily working in an area that can at times be isolated. The minister does not necessarily need to be a farmer as long as one has an interest in things that are going on in the farming scene. \*

Because of isolation from sister churches, there is a dependence on each other that is distinctive. That bond is cemented because of the involvement with members, families and friends. Visiting may involve a 180 km round

*The talking may be done in the cab of the tractor or header as it continues to make its laps*

trip, with a lot of the travel on gravel roads. It may involve the picking up of a much-needed part for the running of the family farm and taking it on the trip. Often there is a meal prepared, fellowship around the table, then a look around to see how the crops are going. \*

This visiting is curtailed during the busy time as people are just too involved to take time off. If it is essential to visit, then the talking may be done in the cab of the tractor or header as it continues to make its laps. \*

Then there is the flexibility at the manse. Members call in and have fellowship, a cuppa or meal as they wait for a tyre or vehicle to be repaired in town. There are no set hours, but having an open house enables us to enter into many hours of blessing. \*

In a farming community there is the continual sharing of ideas and talking over various plans about farming business. There is the need to buy a rain gauge to know what you got and be able to share this with others and find out what they got! The minister needs to have a vital interest in the farming scene. \*

Involvement in the local community is also important through sports meetings, school sports, clearing sales, Anzac services and so forth. \*

Often it is convenient to have an afternoon worship service, fellowship tea and then the evening service. It's not easy to return to another service in the evening if you live 90 km out of town. I was impressed when a young couple with two small boys travelled 150 km from their second farm to a Friday night Bible study, then another 87 km to their home after the Bible study and have their tea. \*

Because people are well known in a rural community, it is often hard for an unbeliever to turn up at a church service because of the peer pressure. In the large city scene you could almost go unnoticed. \*

There are unique opportunities given if you are the only resident minister. These include RE in schools, Anzac Parades and people in general needing help. \*

Radio ministry is an avenue that is often affordable. This can be a rewarding avenue because of the coverage over a large area. It is also personal if you live in the area. The message of the Gospel is so relevant because the farming community is so dependent on the Lord for the seasons. \*

There is involvement with ministry to other churches in the area. Perhaps a small fellowship is without a minister



or another is waiting for a minister to come. It may mean a round trip of 300 km, but there is a special bond between God's people so this can be a time of encouragement. Each fifth Sunday the churches in the WA wheat belt meet to share at an agreed location to enjoy fellowship in the Sunday services, often with a special speaker. \*

Rural church members have an opportunity to show the reality of their commitment to Jesus Christ. Because they are known, people can see the change the Lord makes to their lives. This is also shown when someone strays from their commitment. It is necessary for things to be quickly put right before the Lord in any situation, but particularly in a small town where everyone knows what is going on. The townspeople have a standard they expect of Christians. \* For us it has been a tremendous blessing to have been able to spend 22 years with rural people learning from them and sharing the joys of the Lord. \*

John Tocknell is now retired. He is chaplain at Peel Lodge, Mandurah, WA, and in membership with the Rockingham church. From 1968-1973 he and his wife June were missionaries in the Canary Islands.



# Rural Church

## Opportunities in Rural Churches

ROGER FOLETTA

**O**ur small rural churches have a key role to play. Despite their unique difficulties there are great opportunities. One of the main difficulties is isolation, something that is often expressed as a problem by people living on the land. Since a sense of community is so important to everyone, we need to find ways to minimise the effect of isolation. One way is to work with other local churches. To this end we combined with the local Unit-

*If there has been trouble in a church, the mud sticks.*

ing Church last Easter in practising and presenting in each of our churches, a contemporary Easter gospel musical drama. We also have a combined Youth Group with them. \*

Another problem is that if local people start getting serious about attending our group, the local grapevine lets the whole town know about it. People usually have to be pretty serious about coming along before they will actually make the effort. This makes it harder than in a city church and can slow the growth of the church unless you can find a way to overcome it. We decided that we need to have plenty of outside church activities that people could come to before committing themselves to the church. \*

Lack of speakers and capable workers also presents difficulties. In larger areas there is a variety to call on. In our situation there is often a lack of people in certain gift areas so people are often

called on to work in areas that are outside their expertise. So we need to train and use our own people more. The establishment of a Ministry Centre of the NSW Theological College has provided opportunity for some local people to develop themselves in areas that they would not normally have had opportunity to do. At Maclean we have a person training full-time and others that do occasional courses. \*

Reputation is very important. If there has been trouble in a church, the mud sticks. It takes a long while to overcome because it is very difficult to get an influx of people that will change the nature of a church. It is important anywhere, but especially in a country church. \*

Despite the difficulties, though, I believe the small rural church has a key role to play in our country. Since there is widespread hopelessness on the land, the rural church can bring God's love, Christ's compassion and hope which can transcend economic and famine related depression. If the Church can't provide hope and optimism in this situation, who can? \*

But there is another key role for the church "in the bush". Unlike the city with all its social attractions, night life and entertainment is very quiet here. Yet people need to mix and stretch themselves socially. \*

The Church has a great opportunity to be the place where people can meet others, mix and have fun together. Families need activities and they need something that will help give them cohesion and direction. This can be a great opportunity to reach people. \*



Many of our activities involve whole families. They are run on the philosophy that the church is like the extended family. One Sunday each month is set aside for this type of activity. We have run well-attended, successful car observation rallies with bonfire and BBQ that families as well as singles can attend. We sometimes meet beside a river, lake or the beach for water-skiing, volleyball or other similar activities. On these days we dispense with the normal service and have a small outreach type service as part of the day, explaining some aspect of the Christian faith. This month we are holding a tent/caravan camp weekend on a farm with some dialogue evangelism. \*

We are conveying the message to the community that the church can have fun and yet be serious and committed. We also want them to feel that family is important. We offer home studies as people become interested in a deeper faith. The *Jesus* video and Christianity Explained are ideal tools for us. \*

In all our planning and praying we hope not to remain a small rural church. \*

Roger Foletta is part-time minister of the Maclean and Lennox Head churches in NSW.



# Comment Small Churches

PAM WESTON

**W**hen I was in Bible College preparing for missionary service, we were told that we might find ourselves in isolated situations where the church would be either nonexistent or very weak. \*

While still in my twenties, I found myself in exactly such a situation. At times, my co-worker and I were the only Christians in a remote village of Papua New Guinea. More often,

*Do strong churches ever commission their members to go out as self-supporting missionaries to smaller, sometimes less-attractive places?*

we were part of a little group whose faith was weak and whose way of life was strange and uncomfortable. Mostly, we were the givers, not the receivers;

the builders, not the beneficiaries. By the goodness of God, not only did we survive, we also served and matured. \*

Now that I am back in Australia, living in a small country town, I see parallels to my overseas mission experience which lead me to a sad conclusion: when people transfer from large city churches to country towns where churches are usually small and often weak, we often lose fine people with great potential. \*

Let me tell you what I often see when people are transferred to my town, usually against their will. \*

**I see resentment.** They come with minds already made up that the place, the people and the job are to be endured until the next round of transfers. \*

**I hear criticism.** They become part of the small local church, but their common refrain is how much better it was back home. From the few weak but willing musicians and the sparse congregation, they expect the polished programs and uplifting singing they have been used to. \*

**I observe escape.** From the very beginning they can hardly wait to go away for the weekend, to the home church if it is within travelling distance, or to the

nearest city where there is usually a large church. \*

**I perceive retreat.** They seem to find their only friends and relaxation among non-Christians. Instead of engaging in friendship evangelism, they lower their standards to the point that they become one of the non-Christian crowd. \*

Does this sound cynical? It is not meant to be. It happens time and time again. The local Christians are disappointed that they have lost someone who could have helped build up the fellowship. They have a feeling of guilt that they have in some way failed the newcomer. \*

Large churches, small churches—that's not the point. It is futile to say one is better than the other. Both have strengths, both have weaknesses. \*

My concern is this: what can be done to support Christians, young and old, who move away from large, strong churches and are forced by circumstances to attend small, weak churches? \*

I have no answer, only a few suggestions. \*

Attitude seems to be the key. I suggest that pastoral counsel could help people accept transfers (even involuntary ones) as within the will of God, and therefore to be used by him. \*

If people go to country towns and small churches for the purpose of helping, it can give them perseverance when the going is hard. Do strong churches ever commission their members to go out as self-supporting missionaries to smaller, sometimes less attractive places? \*

Coupled with a positive attitude and a sense of purpose, it is most important for people who find themselves in relatively isolated situations to be diligent about nurturing themselves: to build up their relationships with God through regular Bible study, personal prayer, listening to teaching tapes or videos and reading good books. \*

Strong prayer and moral support from the sending church is also important. The home church could keep regular contact with their "sent-one" by letter, phone, audio cassette or video. Prayer support should be specific and regular. \*

Visits from members of the home church can help and encourage both the "missionary" and the small church. \*

Unexpected blessings can arise through befriending local Christians for the purpose of building one another up. This might not be easy at first, because some country people do regard city people with suspicion and distrust. They may appear less sophisticated. They, too, have faults. On the other hand, many country folk are hospitality personified, with knowledge and skills which would greatly enrich newcomers. \*

From time to time it helps to go back home for a reviver, but it should always be remembered that the source of one's faith is Christ, not the home church. \*

Is it possible that we can make the best of transfers—both for the strengthening of small churches and for the spiritual growth of those who are transferred? Above all, can we avoid this distressing loss of people who don't seem to be able to cope when separated from strong home churches? \*

Pam Weston is a member at Charlers Towers Church of Christ, Qld.

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## Classified

### BIRTHS

**HONE** Belinda Clare born 12 June, 1997 to Rod and Janine. **HONE** Mitchell Thomas Andrew born 19 August 1997 to Gary and Janette. A sister and a cousin for Stephanie.

**HUGHES (Morris)** Mark and Brenda proudly announce the arrival of Kimberly Jade on 23 September 1997 at 11.15 pm (6 lb 5 oz). Praise to God for our beautiful daughter.

### HOLIDAYS

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invites applications for the position of

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1998

Burleigh Heads is situated in the centre of the City of Gold Coast, a major tourist destination with great potential for outreach ministry throughout the year. Membership approximately 140. The person we require will need to fulfil the following criteria:

- Experience in Churches of Christ ministry
- Age 35-50
- Marital status—married
- Bible college graduate (conservative evangelical).

This person will need to:

- Join in ministry with our eldership team
- Take pastoral care of the congregation
- Be strong in preaching, teaching and evangelism.

The Pastor will be backed by a strong oversight, able to assist in many aspects of ministry.

All applications will be treated as strictly confidential.

Please send your applications to:

Mrs Merryl Tree  
Secretary, Board of Officers  
43 Palm Beach Ave  
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Phone (07) 5534 2675.



## Coffee Break In the Wilderness?

CAROL PRESTON



If you are between jobs, between homes, between stages of life, if you've lost something or someone important to you and haven't yet found how to move on or how to replace the loss, then you are right in the middle of transition—the place I want to focus on this week. \*

In discussing transitions, we've talked about endings and saying goodbye, but that means we

*Like the Israelites, we need to pitch our tents in this desert for a while.*

must face this middle ground between what was and what is to come. You can't go back, can't see forward. Something has ended, nothing new has yet emerged. It's often hard to see what God is doing. Many of us find waiting unbearable, and not knowing excruciating. However, it can also be a very powerful, productive time. Psychologically we'd call it the potency of disorder. Because there is room for something new, our potential is heightened. We are on the growing edge. Because our identity is often loosened from what we once did or had, we can reassess our identity. We have space to reflect on new meanings for our future. \* What we often do of course is panic. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, we just want to go back. Even if we've left behind something negative we can prefer it to something new

and think, "It would be better to live as slaves in Egypt". If what we've left or lost has been good we have an even greater pull to go back. The temptation here is to fill the empty space with anything we can, often random activity, or something that resembles what we had. In the mid-life transition we see men and women approaching 50 and "redoing" life from the 30s; dressing, acting, relating like they did earlier (or wished they had earlier), sometimes with disastrous results. But we can respond with this "repeating the past" approach to many transitions. \* We need to wait, gather information, take time to get clear perceptions, new vision. We need to find a place of stillness, seek support from others to help us make the best decisions for the future. Like the Israelites, we need to pitch our tents in this desert for a while. We need to pray for discernment and be listening for what God is saying and doing. He is at work, preparing something new, so it's important to be ready to cross over when the right time comes. To not pay attention in this time might leave us in the wilderness for much longer than is necessary. \* We'll talk about new beginnings next month. \*



# In Praise of Saint Hugh

VINEY LONGTHORP

In the extensive hagiography of the church there have been several Saint Hughs. There was Saint Hugh of Grenoble who reformed an order of monks in the middle ages; it was a Saint Hugh who rebuilt Lincoln Cathedral in the thirteenth century. However the Saint Hugh I have in mind is alive and well. You can view his serious visage every Saturday morning on page two of *The Australian* newspaper. They don't call him a saint of course, that's my prerogative and for the following reasons. Hugh Mackay is one of Australia's

*Hugh Mackay lets in a lot of light on those concerns which he addresses.*

most respected and "on the ball" social commentators. In his weekly column he brings his trained mind to bear on a wide range of issues and problems that do daily beset us. His tone is unfailingly decent, courteous, gentle, and he is immensely well-informed. \* This should not surprise us when we learn that he was raised in a strict Baptist house-

hold. However, he later "walked away" from the church because he found that its fundamentalism "did nothing for me". But one feels that he is still on the side of the angels. \*

Some sampling of Saint Hugh: "Leadership is the art of encouraging us to bring out the best in ourselves; unlocking our potential to do the decent thing; defining a goal we can recognise as worthy of us. True leadership never involves pandering to ignorance, prejudice or self-interest, even though that might bring short-term popularity." \* "There are strong reasons emotionally why the gambling industry in Australia is booming and always does boom at times of economic and social uncertainty. We can make all the moral claims we like about the evils of gambling and casinos, but gambling is likely to remain popular as long as morale stays low. Similarly with the dramatic increase in expenditure on computers, Internet access and mobile phones. People are using information and permanent telephonic contact as a way of assuring themselves, and insulating themselves from their insecurity. [It's a case of] keep talking, keep listening, keep immersing yourself in information as a way of dulling the pain of what is actually going on." \* "Until we decide what we be-

lieve in, as a society, the world will continue to baffle us." \*

On serving others: "People who establish drop-in centres for homeless kids or other lonely or disadvantaged people, people who record book-readings for the blind, people who regularly visit the sick in hospitals and nursing homes, people who devote years of their lives to running Scout or Guide groups or training local sporting teams ... such people express the ideals of community service because, one way or another, they are all responding to the needs of strangers." "And apathy is, in its own way, another form of vandalism." \* Our Saint Hugh is highly sceptical of information technology. "It will be easy for us to be seduced by the idea that increasingly sophisticated communications technology will actually enhance our relationships with each other. In fact the very opposite is true. Communication technology is inherently paradoxical, it facilitates the transfer of data while actually keeping us apart from each other. Relationships via technology are illusory." "In fact, information can get in the way of wisdom unless we leave ourselves sufficient time and energy to reflect on it, make sense of it, and integrate it into our lives." \* Then there are people: "Perhaps our maturity as a society might be most tellingly measured by the extent to which we



Photo Anglican Media Melbourne

allow hermits, eccentrics, and bores to be themselves—unspooked by the call for universal 'niceness'." \*

More about people: "Many unintelligent people are renowned for their kindness, their faithfulness or their willingness to serve the needs of others. Intelligence is as poor a predictor of life's outcomes—in the individual case—as height, weight or ethnicity." "The truth about each of us remains mysterious; the real story of our lives is contained in an impenetrable sub-text." \*

Once in a Scripture exam a student was asked to define a saint. Remembering the way the sun illuminated the stained-glass windows of his church, he wrote: "A saint is a person the sun shines through." One has to admit that Hugh Mackay lets in a lot of light on those concerns which he addresses. You must judge for yourself the source of that light \*

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## BAPTISMS

•Angela Frederiksen, Ann St, Brisbane, Qld •Lynette Smith, Boronia, Vic •Kate Driscoll, Isaac Arnison, Theo Visser, John Skipper, Wodonga, Vic •Julia Stirrup, Neil Labinsky, Riverlands, Qld •Brad Deadman, Emma Juleff, Naida Knox, Richard Nesbitt, Raylene Williams, Lower Blue Mountains, NSW

## MARRIAGES

•Wendy Taylor and Cliff Wearne, Ann St, Brisbane, Qld •Danielle Delmar and Scott Campbell, Springvale, Vic •Kara Baxter and Ben Potter, Belconnen, ACT

## DEATHS

•Ken Turpin, Knoxfield, Vic •Vera Kickbush, Riverlands, Qld •Henry

Ernest (Harry) Waldron, Springvale, Vic

## OBITUARIES

Obituaries are limited to 100 words  
**BUTLER, Charlotte Elenora (Lottie)** (26.9.97) Mrs Butler, 93, had been a member of the Horsham Church of Christ since 1922. Married to Horatio (dec), mother of Arthur, Len, Eric, Kelcey (Corp), Don and Graham (dec); grandmother of 16, great-grandmother of 25, great-great-grandmother of one. Mrs Butler was secretary of the CWF for many years and a tireless worker for the church, rarely missing a service (sometimes floods prevented the family from attending). She played the organ at Haven church. Her interests included croquet and gardening. A faithful servant of the Lord.

—Julie Trinnick

## NSW

**GILGANDRA** Churches combined for a weekend with Kerry Medway & team from Aussies Alive. Well attended meetings ... Dinner held to celebrate 40 years CWCI & 25 years KYB in Gilgandra ... Half-yearly meeting held 16 September ... Church appreciates visiting speakers. Many travel long distances ... David & Sandra Mudford's daughter born recently.

**ORANGE** (John Shuttleworth) Church recently purchased new piano-keyboard, resealed car park & installed new sign ... Christmas carols to be held at local hotel in the beer garden as part of community outreach ... Three new baptisms & two new families attending regularly ... Youth group members took service recently, youth work extended to involve some smaller groups in the community.

**LOWER BLUE MOUNTAINS** (Stephen Templeton) 22 new members since beginning of year ... 3 new cell congregations & 5 baptisms ... Vision of second staff member being presented to church to focus on youth, while being pastor to pm service ... Church focus on spiritual growth, resulting in pm service becoming a congregation in its own right, instead of overlap from am service.

## QLD

**WYNNUM** (Charles Cole) At AGM two new deacons appointed ... Proceeds

### David Johnson

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from successful Spring Fair mainly to missionary work ... Kids' Club under leadership of Alan & Dale Gray, successful. Most children from non church homes. All presented with Bibles ... Local Ministers' Fraternal enthusiastically involved in combined outreach to Bayside community ... Church supports chaplaincy in schools.

**ANN ST BRISBANE** (W.J. Flett) 114th Anniversary of church held 21 September, Rod Warwick, State Conference President guest speaker morning service, youth group instrumental section contributed both services ... Angela Frederiksen baptised ... Many former members in attendance ... Noel Abrahams recovered well from recent eye surgery ... Social Issues magazine *The Big Issue* being distributed from church premises to assist outreach ... Wendy Taylor & Cliff Wearne married 27 September.

## TAS

**HOBART CITY** (Clinton Wardle, Andrew Tonkin) Kidzone, program for primary aged children held twice in school holidays ... "Cabaret 'n All That Jazz" organised. An excellent fund raising program & entertaining night for 70+ attenders ... Breakfast plus afternoon youth program organised for AFL Grand Final Day ... Clinton Wardle leading "Emmaus Walk" sessions in Victoria ... MOSAIC a valuable learning tool for those women able to attend workshop.

**LAUNCESTON** (C. Spaulding, W. Kerrison, T. Gray) 32 present at Ladies Prayer breakfast, 13 September. Coral Heier elected president ... John Batchler inducted Tom Gray into Pastoral Care ministry 5 October. Family lunch followed, after which members inspected newly acquired property in Canning St ... Church with help of Op. Shop outfitted & settled Bosnian family in Launceston ... Speaker at 7.00 pm Walter Pimpong, Ghana.

**NUBEENA** Recent speakers have been Geoff Morffew & Paul Williams from

## Annual Meeting Christian Fellowship Association

Members are advised that the  
**62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting**

of the  
Christian Fellowship Association  
has been scheduled  
for

**Thursday 20 November 1997  
at 7.00 pm**

in the  
Board Room  
at  
77 Capel St, West Melbourne

Your attendance is welcomed to receive the reports  
and deal with the general business of the  
Association.

We look forward to seeing you there.  
Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided.

Please register your attendance/apology with Kerry  
by 18 November 1997 on (03) 9567 1177.



# Church News

**Howrah** ... Church held successful fair & raised approx \$2000 ... Baby dedication & two rededications on 28 September ... Church farewelled Stan & Muriel Ryles who have assisted for 5 months ... FEBC Christian Radio representative shared with church 8 October ... Keith Moulton to be inducted as interim minister on 12 October.

## VIC

**KNOXFIELD** (Malcolm Gray, Elaine McLeod, Jason McCheyne) Recent men's breakfast featured Cyril Minns as guest speaker, accompanied by Tan ... Members have been involved in program examining life of church. Most important areas found to be worship format & structure, youth ministry and outreach ... Youth travelling to Sydney for weekend Impact Leadership Conference.

**SURREY HILLS** (Jonathan Moore, Julie Adam) Marjorie & Jack Young, DeArne & Michael Schmidt welcomed into membership ... New born babies: Rebecca to Judith & Andrew Bruce, Lily to Sue & Colin Hughes ... Charles Bayer's course "Building a Biblical Faith" attended by 40, including Uniting Church members. Liberating insights ... Recent celebrations: church anniversary, young women's week-end camp (husbands baby sitting), all-age progressive dinner ... Forward planning group enthusiastic ... Part-time church administrator Gwen Vivian appointed.

**WODONGA** (David Oldfield) Much rejoicing with 4 baptisms & 2 new families ... Recent visiting speakers, Steve Mackie, Wodonga High School chaplain, David Skeet, YWAM, Bob Cole, Bible League, Dr Nickolai Porublev, Executive Director Research & Cult Awareness from Slavic Gospel Association, & Sandy Baldry, APCM ... Working bee planned for Cheshunt Camp 1 November.

**BORONIA** (Keith Milne, Bruce Moore, Simon Risson) Keith Milne announced

retirement from ministry ... PSA with Gordon Stirling repeating his "Mission & Message of Churches of Christ" in the new century ... "Hillstop" coffee & craft shop, a service & outreach venture commenced ... Good Companions teddy bear's picnic raised \$300 for Emmaus Guest Home ... Combined churches evening service at Baptist Church, speaker Tim Costello ... We focus on Evangelism during October.

**ESSENDON** (K. Stolthard) Successful fellowship dinner 19 September realised \$560 ... Thanksgiving service for life of Vincent Collins 11 September ... Son born to Bronwyn & Craig Woodburgess ... Working bee held prior to concreting in front of church ... "Young at Heart" group progressing well.

**SPRINGVALE** (John Carmichael) Church celebrated 56th anniversary with a luncheon ... Greg Taylor wel-

comed into membership ... Ladies provided afternoon tea as a wedding celebration for a young couple ... New family attracted through "student focus" at Springvale Secondary College ... 1996-1997 mission target of \$7,000 exceeded by \$765. Donation of \$925 given for mission work among Madurese people (an unreached Muslim group) in Indonesia ... Ministry to elderly in local hostels continues.

## COCOA brings HOPE



*To the isolated people of Orissa State in INDIA, COCOA brings HOPE via medical treatment.*

*Dr Iris Paul and her assistants travel for many days to reach these people. She brings much-needed medical treatment and supplies. Without our support many of these people would die.*

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Help spread HOPE though a gift to COCOA.**

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Signature .....

Post to: Churches of Christ Overseas Aid  
180a Gray St, ADELAIDE SA 5000.



# When the Stars Began to Fall

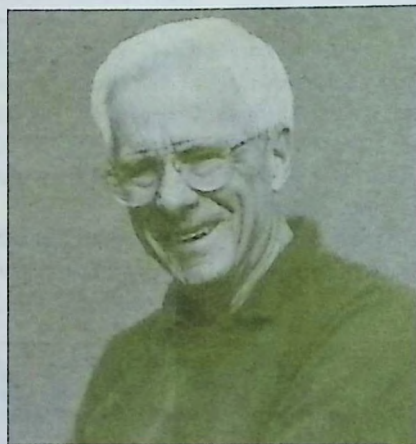
GORDON STIRLING

**W**hen I was in Canberra, a gentleman turned up at Channel 7 studios announcing that Christ would return that night. He had seen the signs. The Channel 7 people asked me if I would interview him. I asked him many questions which he answered vaguely. He said that every one in the world would see Christ at one time. I asked him how this could be as the world was round. He said, "On TV of course." I asked him about the people who were not watching TV. He said that the Lord might have some sort of flying saucer travelling at the speed of light. I asked the TV people when the interview would be played. They said, "We will wait and see if anything unusual happens." \*

People have always been interested in "the signs of the times". It was so in America 130 years ago. Alexander Campbell was on an evangelistic tour with David Burnet in the Virginia hill country. On 12 November 1833 they were in Richmond. Taking whatever hospitality they could get, they were occupying the same bed. \*

In the middle of the night they heard a strident voice shouting, "Come and see the heavens falling!" They rose and saw the streets thronged with alarmed crowds afraid that the world was coming to an end. The heavens were bright with showers of meteorites. And was that not a sign of the end of the world? \*

Burnet, who himself dabbled on the side

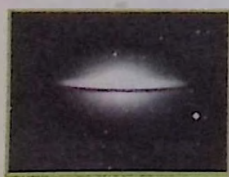


with interpretations of prophecy, was inclined to be caught up in the panic and bewilderment. It seemed that the only calm one that night was Alexander Campbell, who walked about trying to comfort people by explaining to them the causes of this natural but unusual phenomenon. \*

The world did not end and D.S. Burnet continued in Richmond with considerable success. Perhaps the star fall made people more willing to come to terms with God! There is a record of a public meeting that Burnet held in the Richmond court house when he preached on New Testament Christianity for two hours. His hearers wanted more and returned each day for several days for five hours at a time. The building was so packed "that not even all the women could get seats". \*

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## The Last Word

I bind unto myself  
today,  
The power of God to  
hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, his  
might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to  
my need.

Celtic prayer

*Bad English is when two people  
are duck hunting and the hunter  
on the left is following a duck  
(with his shotgun) from left to  
right and he yells, "Duck!"*

—Jack Rodgers

*The earth is like a spaceship  
that didn't come with an operating  
manual.*

—R. Buckmaster Fuller

*What a preacher! His sermons  
were like water to a drowning  
man.*

**Son:** Dad, "I'm afraid the car's  
got water in the carburettor."

**Dad:** "Where's the car?"

**Son:** "In the lake."

**Customer:** "Have you got a  
cod's head for the cat?"

**Fishmonger:** "Why, are you  
doing a transplant?"

*My children really brighten up  
the house. They never turn off  
the lights!*

## Pontius' Puddle

