

THE AUSTRALIAN

Christian

NATIONAL JOURNAL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AUSTRALIA

Vol. 100 No. 21, 29 November 1997

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"For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be
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And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace."

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Isaiah 9:6 NIV



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Editorial

A Time of Trial

DON SMITH

For most of us the next few weeks will include end-of-year work pressures, Christmas parties, special shopping, planning for guests and of course the enjoyable end-of-year church activities. * Our personal lives at Christmas run parallel with global, national and state political concerns. We are always more aware at this season of the plight of the disadvantaged. There has seldom been a time without testing and dark issues confronting society. * Since a recent conversation with Jeff Weston of our Overseas Mission Board, I have found myself reflecting on the Hueili church deep in inland



rural China, established by our mission efforts in the 1920s. This church has now lived through over 70 years of turmoil. How do these believers celebrate Christmas in an alien and sometimes hostile environment? * In Isaiah 8:22 we find a picture of distress and darkness. While this is a picture of Israel's situation at the time, with the eastern, western and northern provinces under Assyrian domination, it is symptomatic of every age. And then Isaiah breaks forth into a great message of hope, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light ... on them has light shined". * For Israel there was a real question—had God abandoned them? Or perhaps an even darker question still. I invite you to make a reading of Isaiah 9:1-7 as part of your preparation through this time of Advent. You will discover within the passage the triumphant expression of hope appearing on our cover. This great statement has been received by the church as a promise of the coming Messiah. It is a message of hope. Hope is fundamental to our personal existence and continuance as a church, as a nation and, indeed, a world community. * There is a similar expression of hope in Revelation 11:15, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever". Here is a profound new view of history, enlarging hope and confidence through all the difficult times experienced this century and indeed in any era. For Christians this hope is fundamental to our view of the world, and life and death. *



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The Orizaba Wreck

The Australian Christian welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters up to 175 words stand the best chance of publication. All letters may be edited. We reserve the right to omit letters altogether.

The Bible Code

To the Editor

With reluctance I enter the Drosnin debate, but I feel that my knowledge of Hebrew, both Biblical and modern, enables me to indicate how Drosnin "pulls the wool" over the eyes of those who are not familiar with that language.

First, note Drosnin's duplicity with regard to dates.

Each of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value. The first nine represent the units, 1-9; the next nine represent the tens, 10-90; and the remaining four stand for the hundreds, 100-400 (500-900 are indicated by the symbol for 400 together with another one or two of these four symbols). Further, a mark over a

letter indicates that its numerical value is multiplied by 1000. On page seventeen, line nine, Drosnin places squares around five letters. Reading from the left these letters have the numerical values 2 (or 2000), 300, 400, 50 and 6 respectively, giving a total of 2756. The first letter may also be the preposition "in", giving the interpretation "In 756". There is no symbol for 5000, yet, to suit his own purposes Drosnin, with no explanation, renders these five symbols as "In 5756/1995-96". Drosnin repeats this subterfuge on page 56; but a careful examination of the "squared" letters in line four on page 55 shows that the first letter is different from the first "squared" letter on page seventeen, and it does represent 5000. Again, on page nineteen the "circled" letters do not give any indication of the year 1991; the middle letter gives the day and the bottom three spell out the month while the top three spell out "fire on".

Second, note Drosnin's misuse of the plain meaning of the text.

The "squared" letters in line eleven on page sixteen come from Deut 4:42, as Drosnin claims. The word which Drosnin translates as "assassin" can indeed mean that in Modern Hebrew, but it can also mean "killer" or "murderer". However, although the word "assassin" appears in the NIV, it is never as a translation of the word used here. If we read on in the same line we find that the assassin "assassinates his neighbour unintentionally"—which makes nonsense of the plain text! Moses established the cities of refuge in the promised land, to which this verse refers, specifically for those who killed their neighbour accidentally, unintentionally, without malice aforethought.

There is a group at Harvard who make their own awards at the time

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A Christmas Gift that lasts all year

Letters to the Editor

when winners of the Nobel Prizes are announced. These are called Ignobel Prizes and are awarded for research that is outstandingly frivolous, trivial or useless. They recently included Drosnin in their list of laureates for his research that produced *The Bible Code*.

—Gordon R. Clark
(Bayswater, Vic)

Harcourt's Services

To the Editor,
I felt I had to make a correction to information passed on to you as Editor regarding a service at

the Harcourt, Vic, church ("AC" 18.10.97), stating that it was "the church's first ever evening service".

During the 1950s I conducted a monthly film service on Sunday evenings at Harcourt for several years and these were well attended.

It was good to see the names of Rice and Pellas still associated with the church. It brings back many happy memories of fellowship.

—Geoff Barnett
(Baxter, Vic)

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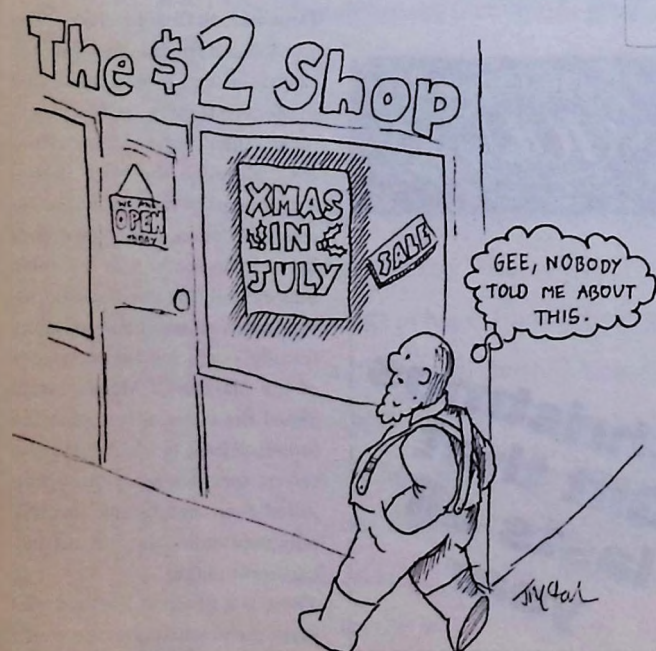
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Update

Dear Readers,

This issue is the first of our two special Christmas issues. We hope you will enjoy the approach to Christmas. We are crowded with news and special features. Don't let that deter you from sending material, but at times some patience is required. We welcome the cartoon below from Tim McFarlin of Mitcham, Vic, who has prepared some Christmas cartoons for us. Tim has done some great illustrations for a forthcoming publication by the National Literature Department. At 14 years of age he is making an early start in this field. Following our request, we received a number of drawings from children, but after some careful consideration by a consultant none quite came up to a standard for effective reproduction. Thanks for your contributions.

We thank Glen Wegner for his regular contribution which he concludes after two years. His material on hospital chaplaincy and pastoral care has been appreciated. A new young writer from Perth with a different theme will commence in our first issue for 1998.

Orders for 1998 Calendars published by our National Literature Department continue to arrive. If you want further copies at \$6.50 to arrive before Christmas please write to PO Box 101,

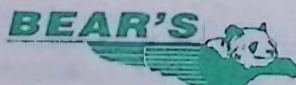
Essendon North Vic 3041 as soon as possible.

As noted in our last issue, we shall be losing the help of a volunteer office assistant who has worked with us one day a week. Some basic skills with computing would be useful. Please be in contact if you know of someone who could assist in this way. We have received a legacy of \$1543 from the estate of Alice Kentish of Adelaide. Her thought for our work is much appreciated. An obituary also appears in this issue.

Having spent the greater part of my working life in the church development area, I can recommend *Net Results*, a US-based monthly bulletin on church vitality and leadership. Herb Miller of the Disciples is the Editor. The September issue carries 32 pages of outstanding material on staffing churches, models, teams and changing sources of supply. Also featured are strategies for denominations and new models for regional/state development and services. Copies are available from our Australian Board of Church Development and Education, phone (03) 9326 8900. *Net Results* would make a great gift for your minister at \$A33.00.

Sam Smith

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Eighteen-Year Ministry Concludes

Toowoomba says farewell to Bruce and Iris Armstrong

It has taken eighteen years in Toowoomba, Qld, for Bruce Armstrong to realise that Sydney is where the action is and that he and Iris should return to the cut and thrust of the big smoke. Toowoomba Church of Christ's Senior Minister has accepted an appointment as NSW State Ministry Coordinator.

A farewell, from which everyone is still recovering, consisting of a dinner and a concert (Steven Spielberg move over) was organised as a small tribute to the many years of fellowship and friendship. The dinner saw 160 people enjoy a meal with Bruce and Iris, followed by four speakers representing Churches of Christ in Toowoomba and Queensland, the ministry team and elders and the membership. Numbers swelled to approximately 400 and all sat spell-bound for the entire evening.



Bruce Armstrong

Bruce concluded his ministry on Sunday 12 October 1997 by speaking at both Sunday services, with attendance well over 400 for both the services. At the conclusion of Bruce's final message a standing ovation highlighted what has been a fruitful and rewarding ministry.

Celebration Books

Bookshop outreach and ministry opens in central Melbourne



Celebration Books—outreach and ministry in the CBD

Celebration Books, an outreach and visionary ministry of the Swanston St, Melbourne, church, was opened on 31 October as a Christian bookshop. It is situated on the ground floor of Melbourne Campus Apartments, 339 Swanston Street, which is next door to the church, in the heart of Melbourne. The church is praying that this venture will be a ministry to the city, to the many residents in the apartments in the building and to students in the nearby universities. The shop has an area for

quiet reading and for tea and coffee. Current Sunday church attendances exceed 700.

Alan Baker, minister of the church, said at the opening, "I believe the Lord will bless this new venture of outreach as a Christian witness to all who enter Celebration Books."

Ian Pugsley manages the shop with a team of volunteers. He said "By opening 12.00 noon to 8.00 pm we hope to be convenient for students and residents of the city, as well as those who work here." It is open Monday to Friday.

Full-Time Minister

We are a growing congregation of around 250 English-speaking Asians, with a children's ministry of 100.

We are looking for an experienced, born-again, evangelical minister with:

- formal theological training
- strong vision for growth and outreach
- ability to lead a strong lay ministry support team
- spiritual gifts in teaching.

Please forward your application to:
The Pastoral Search Committee
PO Box 29
Glen Waverley Vic 3150.

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Initial enquiries can be directed to tel/fax (03) 9803 5409 or e-mail <jyklm@netspace.net.au> or <khmc@skynet.net.au>.



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Wik Legislation

Letter from our National President to the Prime Minister

The following letter to the Prime Minister from Robert Leane AM, the National President of Churches of Christ, has been forwarded to us by Bob Smith, our National Coordinator.

Dear Mr Howard,

I am writing on behalf of Churches of Christ in Australia, a body representing congregations of Christians affiliated with Churches of Christ. We seek your direct involvement in the reconciliation process so that a true spirit of hope and relationship can be built between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

1997 has been a very difficult and emotionally draining year for

many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Events of the year have included the "Stolen Generations" Inquiry and subsequent release of the report "Bringing Them Home"; the Wik decision on native title and the attempts by non-indigenous Australians to seek ways to lessen the impact of that decision. Each of these situations has brought considerable pain and suffering to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We want to stand with our indigenous brothers and sisters, to strongly urge you and your government to resist any change to native title legislation and/or the Racial Discrimination Act which

would in any way diminish the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to a fair and just settlement and legitimate claims.

We would ask you to work towards ensuring the indigenous people and their direct personal and spiritual involvement with their land be recognised and provided for through negotiated joint terms.

As part of the broader reconciliation process we would also urge you, as the leader of the Australian government, to offer on behalf of the Australian people, a full and public apology to indigenous Australians for the past injustices which they have experienced.



We recognise that the issues surrounding native title and land rights, self-determination and cultural identity are complex for both ordinary Australians to grasp and Governments to deal with. We seek your assistance and strong leadership in this process and offer you our prayerful support and goodwill.

Yours sincerely,
Robert Leane
President

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1800 023 270

Rupert Taylor has been acting as insurance advisor to the Churches of Christ in NSW for over forty-five years and has been instrumental in raising well over \$1,000,000 in commissions that have gone into the Lord's work.

Your insurance transactions can be of assistance to the Churches of Christ Provident Fund-No. 1 Fund. Accordingly we invite all ministers, church and conference officers as well as church members *who are not committed to other worthy causes* to seek professional advice on their insurance transactions from Rupert Taylor. By doing so you may save on premiums, you will keep your insurance premiums in Australia and you will assist the work of the Churches of Christ Provident Fund-No. 1 Fund.

Jim Ashley
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Life of Service Recognised

Vi Watts' contribution to the community recognised

A certificate of appreciation was presented to Mrs Vi Watts in Dareton, NSW, on 19 October 1997.

The tribute was arranged by the Federal Aborigines Board together with the Vic-Tas Indigenous Ministries Unit.

The award was in recognition of fifty years' service to the Aboriginal community in and around Dareton and for her involvement in attempts to secure land and provide other facilities for Aboriginal people, as well as for her Christian witness throughout the Sunraysia district.



Judith Williams (left) from Robinvale, State elder on the Uniting Church Aboriginal Congress, presents the award to Vi Watts

Gateway Baptist Church Pastor — Youth Full-Time

Gateway Baptist is a larger church with a heart for renewal, located in the south-eastern suburbs of Brisbane, about 20 minutes from the GPO.

We are looking for someone to join a growing pastoral team, and whose main area of ministry will be to lead and develop the ministry among youth and young adults. This is a position with great challenge, and will involve giving direction to the ministry area, and building into the lives of leaders and young people, with the purpose of seeing growth.

The qualities that we would be looking for in this person are: a growing heart for God, a passion for ministry among young people, vision, the ability to disciple and mentor people, good communication skills, and the capacity to oversee and organise a growing youth ministry.

As well, the person would need to have a high degree of personal motivation, and the ability to work in a team ministry situation. Ability to commence early in 1998 preferable.

Applications and/or inquiries (treated with strict confidence) to:
Tim Hanna
Senior Pastor
Gateway Baptist Church
PO Box 2033
Mansfield Qld 4179
Phone (07) 3849 8833.
Fax (07) 3849 5496.

Applications should be received by 31 December 1997.

Up From the Ranks

Girls' Brigade leader commissioned

Megan Portlock has been a Girls' Brigade member since cadet days. She progressed through her company at Hawthorn Church of Christ, SA. She has undertaken all of the leadership courses available to her. In 1996, Megan was awarded the Queen's Award, the highest International Award that can be attained in Brigade.

At a Church Parade recently, Megan received her Commission as a Girls' Brigade leader from the Deputy State Commissioner of Girls' Brigade, Yvonne Lanyon. Megan is currently leading the cadet unit with 22nd Adelaide (Unley Park Baptist). Her quiet efficiency, careful planning and creative ideas are appreciated by her co-workers.

By contrast, Yvonne Lanyon became involved in Girls' Brigade at a mature age, being the Company Captain at Henley Beach Church of Christ for eight years. She was



Newly-commissioned leader Megan Portlock, left, with Deputy State Commissioner Yvonne Lanyon

a Divisional Commissioner for three years and is currently serving as Deputy State Commissioner.

With her family, Yvonne worships at the Marion Church of Christ. She works full-time in the office there, yet still finds time to carry out her many responsibilities in Girls' Brigade.

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Revelation of the Seven Churches

Interesting survey data from the seven larger churches

The Title sounds like a Bible commentary but it actually reflects a revealing mini-study of seven larger Churches of Christ which were represented at an informal Senior Ministers' group which meets annually. The churches comprised Blackburn (Vic), Doncaster (Vic), Marion (SA), Pendle Hill (NSW), Toowoomba (Qld), Telopea (NSW) and Wollongong (NSW). We compared the National Church Life Survey results of the seven churches from various states with the Australian average. Some of the findings were as follows:

Spectators

There is a common perception that a larger church attracts "spectators" and this appears to be well founded. This sample indicated that their worshippers were less inclined to be involved in community activities and slightly less likely to be involved in mission activities than the Australian average.

They were less likely to have worshippers participating in decision making (significantly different) and were more inclined to report a higher percentage of worshippers who had "no role". The problem may not be the type of person who is attracted to larger churches. It may reflect understaffing, as volunteers need more encouragement and intentional recruiting in larger congregations.

This sample reported a slightly higher tendency to attend church weekly than the Australian average (surprise!) and the reported involvement in small-group programs was the same as the Australian average (however, it takes more organisation in a larger

church to recruit small-group members). Perhaps the form of involvement more favoured in these larger churches was in worship and study/sharing groups.

New Worshippers

With one exception, these churches were far more likely to be attracting new worshippers. They were slightly more inclined to be willing to invite new people. The sample also indicated a higher percentage of new converts in their congregations. This may be confirmation of contemporary overseas studies which suggest that larger churches and new churches are the most effective means of outreach.

Age Groupings

Most of these churches reported a significantly higher worshipping population of under 30s. Associated with the younger age grouping, these churches were more likely to report a higher male involvement than most Australian churches (less widows!).

Worship

As larger churches have more resources for worship you would have expected this sample to have reported a higher degree of approval of worship, but this was not generally the case. This may reflect the higher expectations of their young adult populations. As a contrast, this group of churches consistently identified contemporary worship as one of the four most favoured aspects of their congregational life.

Leadership

This aspect was the most interesting, as the common stereotype is that larger churches are led by "autocrats"! Instead, most of the churches perceived their minister to be "inspirational" and an "encourager" of the development of

gifts. Only two of the seven reported a perception that their minister was one who "took charge". The congregations reported a far higher commitment to the overall vision of the church than normal and were far more likely to report commitment to, and acknowledgment of, new directions. These churches were perceived by their constituencies to be going places! Often churches "on the move" can report high conflict levels, but the overall average of conflict levels was no different to the national church average.

Theological

The differences in Biblical conservatism seemed more related to state influences. All but two of the churches reported significantly lower rates of Biblical literalism than normal (another surprise!). Six of the seven churches had much lower rates of involvement in "tongue speaking" than the reported average of Australian churches.

Social Issues

Do larger churches have an interest in social welfare needs? Another surprise! Five of the seven nominated "community care and social justice" as one of the four most highly valued aspects of their church life and in this area were well ahead of the national average.

It should be recognised that the sample may not accurately represent larger churches in Australia, but it at least challenged some of the stereotypes and generalisations that are made about churches with more than 300 at worship each Sunday.

A full copy of the report can be obtained by sending a self-addressed envelope to the Wollongong Church of Christ, O'Briens

Road, Figtree, NSW 2525 or by visiting our Web Site, <www.magna.com.au/~wgongcoc>.

—Ted Keating

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WA Women's Ministries

Conference forms part of WA's centenary celebrations



Ladies from Dianella church at the Women's Ministries breakfast

One hundred and eighty women and two men met on 1 November for a Women's Ministries breakfast as a part of the Centenary Celebrations of Western Australian Conference.

The event was held at the Carinya Park function Centre, with Shirley Burton as MC. Living Link Melba Wallam and wives of new ministers were especially welcomed.

One encouragement was the large number of women who indicated that this was the first Women's Ministries Conference they had attended. Lynette Armstrong, State Secretary, brought greet-

ings from Marj Dredge, CWF World President, Lorraine Hensby, Australian Representative for World CWF, NSW and Vic-Tas Conferences, and the National Executive.

Coralie Wise, Outreach Coordinator reported on achievements and financial support for Overseas and Aboriginal Mission.

Other features included a Celebration of Pioneers led by Vera Patterson, an address by Graham Agnew of Marion Church of Christ, SA, and the announcement of the new committee for 1998, with Marian Hall as President.

Preparing for Retirement

Seminar on financial planning for "younger seniors"

The NSW Seniors' Ministry Team organised a Financial Planning Seminar in October for "younger seniors". The seminar entitled "Pre-Retirement Financial Planning and Growth in Retirement" was held at Boronia Grove Function Centre, Epping, and included dinner.

The presentation was coordinated by Dr Merv Fiedler from the North Turramurra church, who was, until his retirement, the Chief Economist for the AMP Society and is now an Adjunct Pro-

fessor at the University of Technology, Sydney and an investment adviser and financial planner. Other presenters were Bob Nixon, a Financial Manager from Melbourne, and Jack McCartney, from Bankers' Trust.

The seminar was of a high standard and was well received by those who attended. It is proposed to hold similar future seminars and to encourage younger seniors to use these as bridge-building opportunities to their non-church friends.

Viktor Frankl

Renowned psychologist, author and concentration camp prisoner dies

Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist who survived four Nazi camps, including Auschwitz, died on 2 September 1997. Born in 1905, by 1941 he had attracted an international reputation as a neurologist. He was offered a visa to America, but chose to stay on with his Jewish patients in Vienna.

While in prison, his parents died in the camps, as did his first wife. His most famous book was *Man's Search for Meaning*, which sold over two million copies in 26 languages. The book described the experiences of imprisonment and Frankl's new thinking which grew from his insights about life during imprisonment. His oft-repeated theme was to find hope amid despair and beauty amid desolation. His message had essential spiritual themes which made their impact upon many readers, including the writer, who heard him deliver a moving and unforgettable address some twenty years ago. While Frankl did not claim to be religious, his message reflected the very core of the teachings of Jesus about self, hope and purpose.

—Don Smith

Help Make the News!



"By including 'The Australian Christian' in your will, you can help make the news for years to come. A bequest will help ensure that your newspaper continues to provide news and information to our future readers."

—Lindsay Mott, Treasurer

A bequest to The Australian Christian can be made through your solicitor or contact us for the appropriate wording.

Churchill Fellowships

Grant available for overseas study

The Churchill Trust is currently inviting application for three months' overseas travel, with fares, fees and living allowance, to the value of approximately \$14,500.

Grants are available to young Australians 18 years and over from all

walks of life. Applicants should be able to propose an overseas study project that will enhance their usefulness to Australian society. No prescribed qualifications are required.

Details are available from the Trust on (02) 6247 8333.

Pre-Schooler Ministry

Family Life Seminar at Wollongong

"A MOPS program can be one of the best investments that a church can make in the lives of young mothers and children, as well as in the outreach of the Church", said Ted Keating of the Wollongong Church of Christ, NSW, at the opening of the Family Life Seminar held at Wollongong in early November. He was introducing Carol Kuykendall, Vice President of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International of Denver, Colorado (pictured above). Carol was the keynote speaker at the conference. She proved to be a great source of encouragement to the leaders of already established groups (Ballarat, Vic, Canberra, ACT, Nambour, Toowoomba, Qld, Campbelltown and Wollongong, NSW) and an inspiration to those considering establishing groups. Although MOPS is a non-denominational organisation, most groups in Australia are currently found in Churches of Christ, stemming from a visit of a group



of senior ministers of Churches of Christ to the MOPS headquarters in 1996.

Carol Kuykendall proved to be an outstanding speaker and audio and video tapes of her addresses are available by calling David Morton on (02)4226 5022.

The Australian churches are deeply grateful to MOPS International for sending Carol to Australia. Inquiries about MOPS can be directed to Robyn Robertson, (03) 5344 8490, Julie Prattis, National Coordinator (02) 62917898, or by e-mail to <wgongc@magna.com.au>. Details of the Wollongong MOPS Program can be obtained by visiting the web site <www.magna.com.au/~wgongc>.

On Being Alive

Christian magazine to enter newsagent distribution

After 23 years of publishing, *On Being* is closing and will reappear as a new magazine in February 1998. The magazine will go to subscribers, bookshops and hundreds of newsagents throughout Australia. The name for the new magazine is *On Being Alive*.

The magazine will give personal stories of ordinary and high-profile Australian Christians. The first issue will carry a feature on Peter Garrett. Other items will include editorial comment, news, humour, letters and reviews. Social issues from a contemporary and socially relevant Christian perspective will continue to be examined.

Steve Baxter, editor of the paper, says that the magazine's entry into the newsagent market is an attempt to show Jesus as a realistic alternative at a time when there is thirst for spirituality in Australia. The magazine will strive to show that following Jesus is not old-fashioned and boring. Call 1800 334 054 for a free sam-



ple copy or call Angus Giles (03) 9819 4755 to discuss the initiative.

Here and There

Russian Orthodox Remain in World Council of Churches

The Russian Orthodox Church's Council of Bishops recently resolved to continue membership with the World Council of Churches based in Geneva. There has been heavy pressure to shift to an observer status. The Russian Orthodox Church is the largest of the World Council's 330 member churches. Its loss or downgrading of association with the Council would have been a severe blow to the World Council, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 1998. However the Church has criticised the World Council because of "ecumenical liturgies", new trends in theology and practices of Western Protestantism, such as the ordination of women ministers, the use of inclusive language for biblical translations and reconsideration of New Testament moral norms regulating relations between the sexes. (*Christian Century*)

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Christmas

Advent

JOY PARRY

Christmas is a special time we prepare for, and though it is often on our minds during the year, the four weeks prior to Christmas, Advent, is the special time of preparation. *

The word "Advent" means "the coming" and this is the special time Christians set aside to prepare for the coming of God into the world in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the first Ad-

Christmas has come too fast, I'm not ready.

vent, when God would send a Saviour to redeem his people from sin and darkness. *

Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and concludes on Christmas Eve. So those four weeks can be a very special time. How often do you hear people say, "Christmas has come too fast, I'm not ready." Advent reminds us that for anything to be understood and appreciated fully, there must be preparation. The following are some suggestions which could be used with your family as you prepare for the coming of Christ: *

- First, make a commitment for the whole family to spend some time each day during Advent in some activity designed to help prepare for Christmas. *
- As a first activity, make an Advent calendar, with each day suggesting something special to be done or thought about. *
- Choose a theme for each week of Advent, e.g. hope, peace, promises, love, joy, anticipation, thanksgiving. Advent is a great time to read

some Scripture together regularly on the themes you have chosen. *

- You could think of the people involved in the birth of Jesus, thinking what preparations they had to make to be ready for the event, and how that preparation enabled them to accept it, e.g. Mary, Joseph, the innkeeper, the wise men, the shepherds and the angels. Ask each member of the family to think how they would have felt in place of each of these characters. *
- Make banners or posters depicting some of the themes of Advent, or illustrating some of the events highlighted in the readings. *
- Think about sharing God's love by offering hospitality to someone you have been thinking about, or haven't seen for some time. *
- Christmas traditionally is a time for extended families to be together, but you may know a family with no relatives near them who could be invited to share with your family. *
- Obtain information from your church about the Christmas Bowl offering. Think about what it would be like to be a refugee—after all, Jesus and his family were refugees. Perhaps you could agree to do without something in order to give to the Christmas Bowl. *
- Amnesty International has lists of prisoners of conscience to whom they send cards at Christmas—contact Amnesty and become involved as a family in sending these cards. *
- Visit your local library for books explaining some of our Christmas customs (these are usually in the children's section). *
- Make some Christmas biscuits in shapes representing Christ-



mas themes; star, lamb, tree, angel. *

- Think about the decorations you add to your Christmas tree—perhaps you could make some which remind you of the real meaning of Christmas. *
- Make an Advent wreath. These are made of evergreen branches, reminding us of the eternal nature of God's love. Five candles are inserted in the wreath, with one being lit each Sunday reminding us of God's promise of the Light of the World to come, with the fifth candle being lit on Christmas morning to remind us that that light has come. *

These are a few suggestions. No doubt your family can add more. Preparing for Christmas is always a busy time, but set aside time to prepare for the real meaning of Christmas, so that we can find our way through the maze of advertising, the crowded shops, the sound of cash registers accompanied by Christmas songs ("Silent Night" in crowded shopping centres!), to be ready to hear God's voice to the world on Christmas morning in the cry of a baby. *

Joy Parry is a member of the church at Mitcham, Vic.

Christmas

The Best Gifts are Fragile

WENDY PARISH

The older I get, the more I know that God's ways are not the ways of our first choice. I wonder how almighty God could have placed his plan for the world in the vulnerable situation into which Jesus was born. If you had been around at that time, would the sight of this little baby have suggested the presence of some great plan for the world? *

What makes a gift valuable?

On my fridge is a note from a little girl who drew a picture because it was all that she could give me. Her mother came to our Crisis Centre suffering from the results of chemotherapy. This

We all see a rush of humanity that ignores the lovely in favour of some "thing" that sparkles.

poor young woman was not only dying from cancer, but had just left a husband who had belted her poor dying body on a regular basis. It was my privilege to care for her and her three girls as part of the ministry of our church. To cuddle these children who I knew would soon lose their mum was on every occasion a moment of prayer. The little gift, made on scrap paper, is one of my most precious possessions. *

It's funny how the thing which is most precious to me is easily discarded by someone else. Love has to be the most easily overlooked thing in the world. If we open our eyes we will all see a rush of humanity that ignores the lovely in favour of some "thing" that sparkles. Christmas is the perfect time to look. Maybe we should worry less this year

Love has to be the most easily overlooked thing in the world.

about what we should give everyone and concentrate on how we will give thanks for all that we have and receive. I expect our forgetfulness to be thankful is directly related to our capacity to really live. Here is an idea: I suggest we give nothing at all this year except that which we can give by way of thanks to someone. All of our giving could be an expression of vitality coming from a gratitude for life. *

Do we underestimate the value of what we give?

I once delivered a food hamper at Christmas time to a woman whose name I had been given by a mutual friend. There was nothing remarkable about the hamper I delivered and there was nothing to my mind too remarkable about the visit. In due course that young mother gave her life over to Jesus and now she works in full-time Christian ministry. I failed to recognise the preciousness of my own gift. This woman had been so badly treated through her life that a gift of a food parcel given in love changed her life. She told me some time later that she felt she had been cared for and listened to. I thought it was nothing. *

This story is not so unusual. Many people are suffering much more than they show publicly. Most of us have the resources to give one of those fragile gifts that offer God's grace. To ask, "How are you?" and actually want to know could be enough. To smile or to use words that encourage when judgment could easily be offered could well be the kind of fragility in which almighty God pre-



fers to wrap his gifts. To share Christmas lunch with someone who has been a little on the outer. To give roughly the cost of your Christmas lunch to someone in need. All of these fragile things would be a blessing to the world. *

Does everyone eat on Christmas day?

For years now Christmas has been the mad season for us in Churches of Christ Community Care. We recognise this as the season for over spending, for over eating and especially for over drinking. It is as if the country tries to fill the place that is only filled by fragile love with food and drink. We have also come to see that many adults drink with the money that could have and should have fed their children. It is not uncommon for us to meet hungry children. Some of us in the church are so removed from this that we find it hard to believe. I ask the readers to pray for the "care" ministries of our churches around this country. *

Wendy Parish is the Assistant Director of Churches of Christ Community Care in NSW. She is also the Coordinator of the Crisis Centre at Pendle Hill.

Christmas

Mango Christmas

LINDA JODNER

Do you know any new mango recipes? There's mango jam, mango chutney, mango chicken, mango butter, mango mousse ... I've tried all them and I've still got a fridge full of ripe mangoes; four boxes of green ones under the house that the scrub turkeys are trying to get at; a compost bin full of over-ripe ones that I didn't get frozen in time; and the dehydrator is running 24 hours a day. We're disappearing under a mountain of orange pulp! *

The Christmas season is similar in ways to the mango season ... once it's over, it seems we can't get rid of the evidence quickly enough.

All the kids have mango rashes. My lips have swollen up and I've got to make three Christmas puddings; two Christmas cakes; a whole bunch of itty-bitty meringues with little silver things on top; while the power keeps going off! * It's 34° every day. The humidity is over 90%, but inside my lounge room it's a winter wonderland! No, it's no cooler than anywhere else in our house; it just looks as if it should be. *

A Blue Spruce dressed to the nines, holly and nuts, Santa snow (yuk) and tinsel overload. Fairy lights; cellophane "stained glass windows"; lanterns made out of old Christmas cards; paper chains and a whole pile of presents with holes poked in the wrapping. *

Our household routine is turned upside down. "We have to dress up as angels

Mum." Expanding waistlines, diminishing bank balances. Oh why do we do it? Because, we wouldn't have it any other way! Or would we? *

The humbug in me reminds me that we were never told to remember Christ's birth as we were to remember his death, and that Christmas is really a heathen festival that was Christianised to appease the masses. Yet, a good portion of the gospels is taken up describing the facts surrounding Jesus' birth. If it wasn't an important event to remember, why did God go into so much detail and then not tell us when to celebrate this wonderful thing? *

The day after Christmas, the cleansing process begins in our homes and in the shops. Everything is marked down for clearance. "Quickly, get rid of those tacky ornaments, I'm sick of the sight of them." The Blue Spruce goes back into its coffin for another eleven months. We start our diets and make appointments to see our bank managers. *

The Christmas season is similar in ways to the mango season ... once it's over, it seems we can't get rid of the evidence quickly enough. *

I know, even we Christians are guilty of over commercialism, gluttony and spending beyond our limits, but we at least have a little bit of Christmas that stays with us for the whole year. That little bit? Christ, of course! *

The urge to cleanse away the Christmas paraphernalia is strange. I guess it's tied up with the feeling of a new start that the New Year gives us. We want to start out (at least) with everything all neat and tidy. *

So, we have to be careful during this period not to cleanse Jesus' miraculous birth out of our thoughts, just because Christmas is over. *



I can't properly enjoy mangoes when they all come at once, but there's nothing nicer to offer a Southern visitor in the middle of a tropical winter, than a bowl of plain old mango and ice cream! *

Why don't we try bringing Christmas out of our cupboards for our families to enjoy throughout the year? Like the mango in the freezer. *

Celebrating Christmas in the middle of the year with a big family get together, a slap up feed and presents is a real treat. (Our church in Cairns had Christmas in August once—it was a hoot!) Enjoying the story of Jesus' birth, discovering what the prophets said, reading the Christmas classics, singing carols, centring our family's thoughts back on the true meaning of Christmas. Hey, there's nowhere that it says we have to do this in December! *

I think that if we could just get away from all the Christmas hype at the end of the year when it's hot and humid and smelling of mangoes, we would experience a flavour and texture of Christmas that we've never experienced before. *

Linda Jodner is a member of Centenary Lakers Christian Community, Cairns, Qld. A mother of four, she works in children's ministry and runs an out of school hours care program.

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Christmas

Reaching Out in Love

JEFF WESTON

Christmas is a good time for a focus on Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCOA), as the appeal is well known in our churches. Sometimes when we give to an overseas aid appeal we wonder how much good our financial support will do. Will it reach the people who have the real need, or will it be swallowed up in administration fees and levies of all sorts? If it does reach the needy, will it be used wisely? Are we doing the best thing, or are we just making people more dependant upon overseas aid? *

"Without the loving care and example of the staff, I would be walking in darkness and anger today."

Recently I met a person that has confirmed to me the value of wisely distributed overseas aid. The keynote speaker at this year's Conference and Annual Meeting of the Churches of Christ in Western India was Rev Philip Bawdekar. Philip is a wonderful evangelist who has now completed forty years of fruitful ministry for the Lord. He is the head of an evangelistic association called "Anointing Ministries for Christ". Philip was an orphan, aged five, when first brought to the Baramati Mission Boys Home, a project supported by COCOA. His extended family was unable to care for him on his mother's death. *

Philip told me: "Without the loving care and example of the staff, I would be walking in darkness and anger today". At the Conference many were challenged and encouraged by his enthusi-



Orphans like some of these girls at Shrigonda Girls Home in India are given love and hope through the work of COCOA.

astic preaching. Philip tells how the staff loved him and treated him as a son, not a number! They encouraged his academic efforts, and supported him through secondary school. He feels that he is part of a family and is proud to have been raised at Baramati Mission Boys Home. *

This is just one example of how gifts to Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCOA) have assisted in giving a chance at life to people who would have no chance. Our gifts can make a difference. Not just with young orphaned children in India but all around the world. Recently I have been in Papua New Guinea, currently COCOA is providing drought relief funds to those hardest hit by the worst drought on record in that country. For many years COCOA have provided funds for medical assistance to isolated people, espe-

cially air evacuations for the desperately ill and isolated in PNG and India. In Thailand, COCOA provides funds to feed and house refugees from Burma. In Vanuatu COCOA has a wonderful record of providing funds for the education of young people, so that they will have the opportunity to reach their full potential and assist their country in its development. This year in the Philippines COCOA provided clean water facilities, including a water pipeline to needy villagers, to a school for the deaf. In Zimbabwe a number of small businesses have been supported in their development, so that people can move from dependence to independence. At Bulawayo COCOA is helping to develop a children's village that will care for the victims of HIV/AIDS deaths. *

This aid is given through recognised Church Conferences or agencies, with the minimum of administration costs. These agencies must be prepared to make themselves fully accountable and responsible. All have an excellent track record of managing such funds and providing aid where it will do the most good. An important factor in COCOA's approach is to give aid in such a way that the recipient gets the maximum benefit while maintaining personal dignity. COCOA also aims to assist those who are needy to move from dependency to independence by supporting projects that use and develop local resources where possible. *

Through COCOA Australian Churches of Christ are able to support, encourage and express in practical ways the love of Christ to those who need a helping hand. Remember: "When someone somewhere cares, someone somewhere else survives". *

Jeff Weston is Executive Director of Churches of Christ's Overseas Mission Board.

Christmas

Two Grimy Hands in Friendship Joined

JIM LOWDEN

The "Two grimy hands..." title comes from Henry Lawson's poem *Fire at Ross's Farm*. The poem's theme is Australian to the core. It records that Squatter Black is being forced off his large pastoral lease by the selectors, much as the ranchers were squeezed out by the smallholders in the USA. However, whereas Australians resorted to petty tyranny against each other with little or no personal danger, outrages in the wild west areas in the United States sometimes resulted in injury or death. The Australian has al-

The hopelessness soon evaporated as "The beaten flames gave way".

ways had a sense of fair play ... a sense of mateship perhaps. *

The outback Australia of yore provided little chance for socialisation beyond the district, so it is not surprising that the squatter's son, "Young Robert Black was seen to ride/ With the pretty Jenny Ross," the selector's daughter "Beneath the Southern Cross". While they indulged in their innocence of youth, their parents, Squatter Black and the stubborn Scot, Sandy Ross, who both epitomise the immovable, trade insult and misdeed against each other with no remorse. *

Summer came and the once lush pastures became tinder dry. Then the scourge of all rural dwellers struck: "The bush-fires started in the north/ And travelled south for weeks." * Finally, "The sun had set on Christmas

Eve" and "Young Robert Black came riding home/ As only natives ride." * It was Robert Black who "gave the first alarm:/ The fire is past the granite spur,/ And close to Ross's farm./ Now father send the men at once,/ They won't be wanted here;/ Poor Ross's wheat is all he has/ To pull him through the year". *

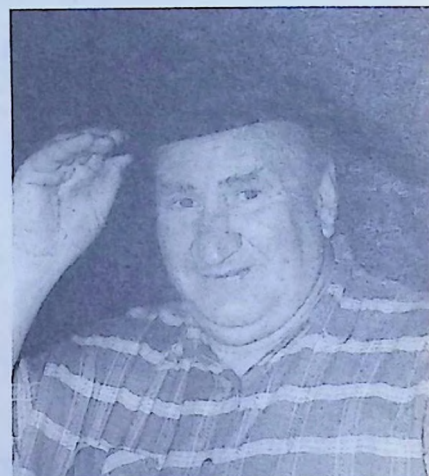
Squatter Black was resolute in his retort: "Then let it burn, ... /I'd like to see it done—/ I'd bless the fire if it would clear/ Selectors from the run." He added, "Go if you will,/ You shall not take the men—/ Go out and join your precious friends,/ But don't come here again". *

Robert replied defiantly, "I won't come back", as "He sharply turned his horse's head/ And galloped towards the fire". There he joined Sandy Ross and they toiled desperately to save the "ripened wheat" from the dreaded flames. But like every firefighter's worst dream, "Then came a cruel gust of wind" and the fire jumped the track "And lit the fence of brush", which bounded Ross's crop. *

Ross's desperation and cry of hopelessness rang out, "The crop must burn!/ We cannot save it now". Suddenly "The sound of horse's feet" heralded the arrival "The squatter with a dozen men/ ... racing through the smoke". *

"Down on the ground the stockmen jumped/ And bared each brawny arm;/ They tore green branches from the trees/ And fought for Ross's farm". The hopelessness soon evaporated as "The beaten flames gave way". *

Peace had been restored on earth at Ross's farm, and it was now the time for goodwill towards all men, so "Two



grimy hands of friendship joined—And it was Christmas Day". *

One could imagine the two former enemies having a hard-earned cuppa together. (The ladies appeared on the scene, as they still invariably do at bushfires, with the billy of tea and sandwiches.) After which it was time to make sure the fire had been totally blacked out and there was no further threat. The job must be done well, especially on Christmas Day. *

Who in their wildest imagination would have dreamt that Squatter Black would help save Sandy Ross's crop, let alone shake his hand, but then such is the unpredictability of God's guiding hand ... and the miracle of Christmas. *

Lawson's poem carries a timeless message for the feast of Christmas. It is indeed a time for peace on earth and may we all pray that all the combatants around the world cease their struggles and that they too will join their "grimy" hands in lasting friendship and have a peaceful and safe Christmas. *

Jim Lowden lives in Kilmore, Vic, and has a long-standing interest in Australian history.

Media Matters

A Genius Visits

VINEY LONGTHORP

The Rembrandt exhibition is now in its last couple of weeks in Melbourne. It then opens at the National Gallery, Canberra, on 17 December and ends there on 15 February 1998. Don't miss it. It is guaranteed to open many windows on to the wondrous world of light for those with eyes to see. *

The exhibition consists of twenty authenticated paintings

No artist ever more deftly realised the poignant yet mystical human content of the Bible.

by the master, 50 prints and drawings, together with 41 key paintings by his most important pupils. Something like 10% of Rembrandt's prodigious output has come to our shores. For a time this makes Australia the "Rembrandt capital" of the world. *

These works have been brought together from both public and private collections from cities as disparate as Berlin, Helsinki, London, Amsterdam and Florence. *

What is so special about Rembrandt? It has been said that, "the supreme works of dramatic, literary, musical, graphic and plastic art do more than merely please our senses and aesthetic sensibilities; they tell us about the nature of reality". Above all, they comment on the soul and the spirit of humankind. Rembrandt takes his place in this regard with a handful of

artists such as Mozart, Goya, J.S. Bach, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky. *

The externals of his story may be briefly told. Born in 1606 in the city of Leyden, he was the son of a miller. The young Rembrandt's gifts were in evidence early. In his early twenties he moved to Amsterdam to become a leading, fashionable portrait painter. His rise to fame coincided with the full flowering of the Dutch Republic, a time described by the historian Simon Schama as "an embarrassment of riches". It is not without interest that among the wealthy burghers and merchants painted by Rembrandt (for very large fees), would be some who were directly responsible for drawing the attention of Europe to the Terra Australis Nondum Cognita—which later became us. *

As with Shakespeare, Rembrandt was a "stay at home" artist who did not need to travel to exotic locations to gain inspiration. He exemplified the saying: "Man finds his meaning at home, not by flying all over the heavens." At first he accumulated great wealth, but in his later life he had much sadness and frustration. The death of his wife Saskia devastated him and only one of their many children survived him. His style fell out of public favour and in the decade or so before his death, in 1669, he was bankrupt, living in near poverty. *

Rembrandt's fully emerged artistic style expressed his genius. Early on he was influenced by the Dutch followers of the Italian painter, Caravaggio, whose technique required the fall of a beam of light from a single direction to emphasise contrasts of form. Rembrandt developed this trait to produce his own fa-

mous technique named chiaroscuro, whereby light plays on immense shadows to suggest character and action. It could also powerfully suggest the element of mystery. But great technical facility is no substitute for those with nothing to say. In his case this technique facilitated the expression of a wondrous human vision. *

Many of his subjects were from the Bible. No artist ever more deftly realised the poignant yet mystical human content of the Bible. In his many etchings of scenes of the crucifixion the drama is never merely theatrical, but felt as truth, and this feeling is marvellously captured in his remarkably fast lines. His religious works are the more convincing because he never painted for the church. As such, he was free from traditional iconography and could express freely his own experiences of the ways of God. *

The process of aging fascinated him. In his many self-portraits he depicted, "warts and all", the battered vessel of hard-won spirituality, beyond pity. *

For many of his contemporaries, Rembrandt grew to be too serious. Some of his bourgeois subjects were offended by his representation of them because he was forever expressing the spiritual within the mundane and offering intimations of the Divine. Herein lies the paradox of Rembrandt's work: his luminous humanity transcended time and place. Though he was the quintessence of "Dutchness" he was also the fountainhead of universal artistic genius. *

A further aspect of his work that made him so special was that he said the last word on existing skills and methods in painting. True genius is not obsessed



with innovation and radical revolutionary trends. That is the "heresy of romanticism" so prevalent today. He was not responsible for starting anything, but he perfected everything. He was no iconoclast. Rembrandt took the best that was and made of it the highest spiritual expression. *

Typical of his genius is the etching, *The Beggars*. He would be familiar with such people because Europe was just emerging from the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. In this etching, picturesque detail has disappeared in the interests of a simple human interpretation. All surface accessories of attire have been eliminated to lend powerful emphasis to the humble mien of the characters. Rembrandt also defined their individuality and dignity as well as their poor physical condition. *

It is said that the people who commissioned *The Night Watch* complained that, "Rembrandt has gone too far." But he would not desert his vision. Much later, the English poet William Wordsworth wrote:

*While with an eye made quiet by
the power*

*Of harmony, and the deep power
of joy,*

*We see into the life of things. **
That was Rembrandt van Rijn. That is what this exhibition is all about. *

Classifieds

ENGAGEMENTS

SANSOM-THOMAS Bob and Margaret Sansom of Narre Warren North together with Malcolm and Beverley Thomas of Bervick take great pleasure in announcing the engagement of Lisa and Paul.

DEATHS

DAVIES, Edna Maud (nee Franks) Passed away in the Port Pirie Hospital on Sunday 9 November. Mum and grandma, we will miss the times with you on the farm (and the morning cups of tea in bed!). Lovingly remembered by Les, Alison, Ben and Greg.

EARL, Harry Frederick, on Friday 7 November. "Pop". Reunited with his beloved Lal. Father to Judith (dec), Ray and Lyn, Keith and Aruna, David (dec), Margaret and Mike, Neil and Sue. Grandfather to Karen, Wendy and Adrian, Steven and Debbie, Colin, Owen, Johtie, Travis, Scott, Rebekah, Joshua, Nathan, Rachel and Aaron. Great-grandfather to Aidan, Tara and Ashley. A gentle and loving man who lived for his family and his Lord. John 8:12.

MILNE, Eda Elizabeth, on 17 November at Wahroonga Village, Glen Waverley. Dearly loved mother of Shirley (Wallis). Mother-in-law of Jack (dec). Loved "Nanna" of Ross and Vicki Wallis, Kerry and Graeme Cooke, Ian and Judith Wallis. Loved "great Nan" of Julie, Craig, Christine, Peter and Michael Wallis, Erin and Cheryl Cooke, Robert and Olivia Wallis. Together with her Lord and her loved ones. Rev 21:3-4

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HOLIDAYS

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Pastoral Care Partners

GLEN WEGNER

With increasing frequency I find myself being introduced to someone's partner, and not their spouse. * I suspect that in the near future the church will have to consider its attitude towards a major change in opinion that an increasing number of young Australians have towards traditional marriage. *

Occasionally I meet people

The question emerging is: what constitutes marriage?

whom I assume are married, only to discover they have been partners for some years. I have provided pastoral care to senior people, who came together as partners in middle years, and lived faithfully with each other until death ended their relationship. Only when organising the funeral did I discover they were partners. *

People born since 1970 are quite open about this style of relationship and will, for example, comment on how they and their partner have just purchased a block of land. It's clear their intention is to live as husband and wife without seeking either civil or religious recognition of their relationship. * I'm sure this trend will continue. How should the church respond to it? *

About twenty years ago the church was unsure about how to respond to those who were divorced and sought remarriage. Some churches are still struggling with this issue. Something similar is likely to occur in a few years, when



churches may find couples in their fellowship who are not formally married. Will such couples be seen as "living in sin"? *

The question emerging is: what constitutes marriage? What's the difference between a family unit where the couple have been formally wed, and those who are partners? Will we even be aware of a difference? *

I believe there is value in formalising a relationship through marriage. I see marriage as more than just a piece of paper. *

However, reality requires some rethinking. What constitutes a marriage in the eyes of God? Were Adam and Eve actually married? I'm not aware of the first partners formalising their relationship, sending off documents to the government statist and having their names recorded in a church register. * Perhaps Genesis 2:24 provides us with ground to argue that when a man and woman cleave together as one, that constitutes marriage. *

I'm not proposing an answer, but rather raising an issue. However, I'm sure this will become a significant pastoral and policy issue our churches will soon have to address. (Readers may like to write to the editor expressing their opinions on this issue). *

Missiles, Chameleons and the Light of the World

MIKE COPE

This spring several churches in Abilene were buzzing with concern over a controversial television program. "What is Highland going to do about Ellen?" a woman asked my wife. Without meaning to insult her question, Diane immediately replied, "Not watch it." Since we have church activities on Wednesday evening, that was a fairly safe response! *

The world is going to act like the world. Our job isn't to constantly scold it or to try to hide from it.

Ellen DeGeneres had just recently come out of the closet. Then, Ellen Morgan, her television character, did the same. As a result, e-mails, faxes and petitions were flying around Abilene churches. "If you want to help save this country, write me," pleaded one concerned Christian in the newspaper. *

The torrid concern and activity led me (again) to these three observations about many Christians and the world. *

First, Christians tend to become passionate about issues that cost them nothing. A church in Canada has asked its members not to vacation in Florida because of the way Cuban immigrants have been treated. The members are being asked—as a statement of social justice—to travel to Cuba instead. *

Now there's a bold moral stand! What does this cost them? Nothing! Church members can still take their nice vacation and will probably

get more for the same amount of money in the process. That seems easier to me than asking them to make a social statement by caring for the homeless and poor around them. That's a bit more costly. *

Likewise, taking a strong moral stand against that episode of "Ellen" in a conservative southern city didn't require a lot of moral fortitude on anyone's part. At least it wasn't as costly as, say, getting close to people who are tortured by their sexual identities, by listening to them and by loving them. *

Now that would be courageous! Is the church up to the task? It's much easier and less costly to sit back and condemn. *

Second, Christians tend to become passionate about issues that tempt them least.

I wonder where the moral outrage would be if Ellen had come out as a racist or a liar or a gossip or a person filled with bitterness or lust or greed. Or imagine a prime-time television character finally admitting her lack of concern for the poor. Surely the church would then protest and picket! *

Have you noticed that those who will take the time to get to know someone who struggles with their sexual identity tend to quickly get off the crusade bandwagon? While holding to



their biblical convictions about sexual ethics (sexual relations in a marriage between a husband and wife or celibacy), they no longer demonise "the gays". Instead, their first impulse is to hurt with those who can't figure out who they are and with those who teeter-totter on the brink of suicide. *

Third, Christians tend to become passionate about preserving their own purity by policing the world.

Growing up, I heard constant emphasis on how women ought to dress so men wouldn't lust. *

Have you ever noticed this isn't a huge concern to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? He just tells his followers, male and female, to control their lust. The way to deal with lust isn't to scold the world for the way it dresses, but to deal with our own thought processes. What should we do with a woman who is scantily clad? Invite her to church! (Men, it helps my case if you don't "amen" at this point!) *

Christians need to realise that the hope for the world isn't how "Christian" the government is, how wise the Supreme Court is, how daring the Legislature is or how moral Hollywood is. Rather, our hope is in the kingdom of God that has broken into this world through the ministry

of Jesus Christ! The world is going to act like the world. Our job isn't to constantly scold it or to try to hide from it, but to live redeemed lives right in the midst of it. *

Paul knew that the church would always find it easier to attack the morality of the world than to deal with its own sins. But his perspective is clear: "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside" (1 Corinthians 5:12f). *

So what can our churches do in response to this Ellen episode—and other episodes that will undoubtedly follow on other shows this fall? Just continue to be the church. Ellen DeGeneres isn't the enemy! (My guess is that calling her Ellen DeGenerate, as one popular fundamentalist minister did, doesn't really inch her any closer to Christianity.) *

The challenge constantly before the church is to be "in the world, but not of the world." We are not the scud missiles of the world, sent to wage a culture war, launching deadly verbal missiles. Nor are we chameleons of the world, free to take on every value and behaviour that's around us. Rather, we are the light of the world. God's counterculture living out the values of the kingdom in the midst of darkness. It is our task to pray for the people of our world, live holy lives among them and gently point them to the Father who has delivered us in Jesus Christ. *

Mike Cope is co-editor of "Wineskins", a journal of the a cappella Churches of Christ in the USA.

This first appeared in *Wineskins*. Used with permission.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

RONALD GRAHAM

With their emphasis on the desired unity of the church, with whom do the three Stone-Campbell groups cooperate? In general, at the ministerial level Disciple pastors will be disproportionately joined with Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, and Lutherans. Nondenominational Christian Church pastors will belong to an Evangelical association. A cappella Churches of Christ pastors will go it alone. *

Valuing the liberty of the local congregation to order its own life, who speaks for them?

Valuing the liberty of the local congregation to order its own life, as they all do, who speaks for them? *The Disciple* can be said to be the "official" periodical of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The *Christian Standard* comes near to that for the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, although it is published by a privately-owned company and its Sunday School material is nondenominational in character and is used by a variety of congregations, including some Disciples. *Wineskins*, begun in 1992, is the voice of one segment within the a cappella Churches of Christ. * Alexander Campbell's iconoclastic *Christian Baptist* was succeeded by his *Millennial*

Harbinger (1830-1866). Between 1835 and 1849 he often wrote in favour of some form of extra-congregational churchly life. Such organisation, he held, while not mandated by Scripture, was needed as an expedient in three areas: the distribution of the Bible, the church's evangelistic mission at home and abroad, and the improvement of the Christian ministry. (He had come to believe that what was not forbidden by the New Testament might be permitted.) *

By 1845 Campbell was calling for meetings of messengers (i.e. voting representatives) at church conferences at the national, state and district levels. However it was not until 1969 that the Disciples established a delegate General Assembly. Their 1997 biannual at Denver brought together 8,411 registered members. Any may attend but only delegates may vote on resolutions. The Assembly has no power to encroach on the property rights of congregations. Financial support is voluntary. Final authority is in the hands of a broadly representative body and that authority is persuasive, not formal and never coercive. (No congregation or minister has been written out or off because of disagreeing with the Assembly.) Cooperation is expressed in covenantal language under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Church is defined in three "manifestations": local, regional, national. *

Who speaks for the churches? Folk dissatisfied with the new theology, the meaning of participation in the Federal Council of Churches and overseas mission strategy organised a succession

of congresses in protest against the International Convention of Disciples of Christ, 1919-1926. Concluding that they had unjustly been rendered voiceless, in 1927 the first North American Christian Convention was held. *

It was not meant to be schismatic but to begin with was an attempt to bring Christians together on common grounds of a shared heritage. In 1950 it became an annual event. Today upwards of 40,000 will register, with 20,000 attending. A notable feature of every convention is the number of "independent" missionary societies and Bible Colleges telling their story. * The Convention, which conducts no business and is held only for inspiration, fellowship, and education, powerfully binds together the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. *

(Leadership at a Disciples Assembly is interracial and international, by clergy and laity, women and men. At the North American Convention I attended, leadership was given almost exclusively by white, male, ministers of their churches.) *

Who speaks for the churches? The a cappella Churches of Christ have no national organisations and do not meet in national conferences. Nearest the latter are the annual lectureships given at their universities, especially Abilene Christian, Texas, and Pepperdine, California. *

Three important shifts have taken place among the Disciples in the last forty years. *

One relates to polity. For a century their extra-congregational life was expressed by societies



of individuals. Now all their cooperative work is accountable to the General Board and the General Assembly. *

A second has to do with restoration understood as the reproduction of the Campbellian "pattern" of the primitive church, which is now viewed as an obstacle to unity. *

The third has to do with their self-designation as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They do not style themselves as "undenominational" nor do they claim to be the Church universal. They affirm that the Church is more than the local congregation and more than the sum total of local congregations and they also recognise the historic churches as partners in the mission of the Church universal. *

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Comment The Orizaba Wreck

JOHN CROSBY

Could this be the spot? Shutting off the motor and putting up our blue and white dive flag, I yelled out to the other boat of divers, "The sunken *Orizaba* must be here below". This was going to be a shot in the dark because we had no maps, no instruments, just my memory and my dive buddy's experience with the coastline of Rockingham, WA. Three kilometres out to sea we had anchored on the Five Fathom Bank, a limestone coral reef that protrudes up from the 90 metre sea bed. The

Orizaba, a 5000 tonne, 140 metre passenger liner struck the Bank in 1905, the captain apparently disorientated in the haze of bush fires, mistook Rockingham for the Port of Fremantle. Fortunately no lives were lost. *

I had read in a dive guide book that if you head out under the Garden Island Causeway and as you enter the open sea, line up behind you the tallest chimney on the coast (193 m) with the southern tip of Garden Island, this line will take you over the wreck. *



Photo compliments of Malibu Dive Shop

Checking our dive gear and giving the OK, we rolled over the boat and began our long descent. Buff Bream encircled us as we descended. The visibility was excellent—10 metres—the marine life was incredible: red emperors, sweet lips and queen snapper were everywhere. Occasionally we find rays, jewfish and port jackson sharks. Upon reaching the bottom, I checked my content and depth gauge and tightened my weight belt. One time I caught my finger in the weight belt. As I looked at my finger, green blood flowed. Colours change deceptively at these depths. *

Suddenly the rock I was standing on seemed strange, very dark and covered with seaweed. Then it hit me, this was no rock but the deck of the *Orizaba*. A bewildering feeling came over me as I motioned to my buddy. I can imagine the elation when archaeologists uncover a big dig. Finding neutral buoyancy, we cruised a metre above the wreck working out the mass of twisted iron work, the bottom plates seemed intact. In the shadows we saw the eerie sight of the propellers frozen on the seascape, I paused and gazed. I often pray underwater, thanking God for his magnificent creation, in the quietness away from the busyness of ministry. *

I thought about the men who built and sailed this ship. I wondered if the captain had died a

The visibility was excellent—10 metres—the marine life was incredible

broken man, turning to alcohol to relieve his guilt. Gazing at the wreck it is obvious to me that humanity is only a fleeting moment in time and earthly treasures will pass away. God however is eternal and lasting, without God life is meaningless. As a minister of the Gospel I see its immortal value. *

What a great dive, as I logged it in my dive manual. By the way the other divers missed the *Orizaba* completely they swam off in a different direction. I now have my sights set on another wreck, the *Carlisle Castle*, she went aground on Coventry Reef in 1899, strewing her remains across the reef. All lives were lost. These wrecks are gazetted. *

John Crosby, Pastor of Warnbro Church of Christ, WA, dives with his buddy Clive Hebbard, an elder at Warnbro.

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MARRIAGES

•Margaret Klass and Glenn Hurse, Amanda Holt and Tim Straughair, **Dalby, Qld** •Rachel Warren and Leslie Milhinch, Gwyneth Monger and Chris Lane, **Northam, WA**

DEATHS

•Dot Wood-Burgess, **Montrose, Vic** •Robert (Bob) Butler, **Fremantle, WA** •Howard Bentley, **Goolwa, SA** •Marion Welsh, **Bordertown, SA** •Harry Earl, **Tootgarook, Vic** •Alice Pedersen, **Warragul, Vic**

OBITUARIES

Obituaries are limited to 100 words

BROWN, Andrew Arnott

(19.9.97) Andrew was born 9 March 1920 in Glasgow, Scotland, arriving in Australia with his parents in 1923. They settled in Hampton, Vic. He was a fine sportsman playing cricket as a left-hand spin bowler for "Hawthorn East Melbourne". He also won many trophies at Bowls. Andrew did voluntary work for many years and was a Life Member for Child and Family Care, Glen Waverley. He is survived by his wife Hilda, son Glenn, daughter Jeanette and four grand daughters. Andrew served a record 32 years as Secretary of Oakleigh church. Safe in God's eternal kingdom. —DRM

DAVIES, Edna Maud

(9.11.97) Edna was born at "Hillthorpe" in the district of Napperby, the southern Flinders Ranges, SA, on 13 March 1914. Generosity was a family hallmark—the stranger was never turned away, even during the depression. She was an active member of the Napperby Congregational Church, but became a baptised member of the Port Pirie Church of Christ following her marriage to Thomas Davies in 1937, in which fellowship

they raised six children. In the later years she joined the "Rainbow Helpers" at Port Pirie Hospital, an activity which epitomised her life spent helping others—she worked to bring the Kingdom of God on earth.

—LD

EARL, Harry

The family and friends of Harry Earl met on 12 November to give thanks for his faith and his life of 78 years. Harry, from the Box Hill, Vic, church, met Lal Pettigrove, of the Ivanhoe, Vic, church, at a Christian Endeavour camp. Later they married and began 55 years of Christian life and service together in the Ivanhoe and Tootgarook, Vic, churches. Harry served variously as youth leader, tennis coach, Sunday School teacher, church secretary, deacon and elder. He was honoured by the Tootgarook church as elder emeritus. The Earls had six children, thirteen grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

—GRS

KENTISH, Alice Evelyn

(10.9.97) born 22.5.12 to Eliza (nee Thomas) and Edgar Kentish, Alice was baptised October 1921. She taught in the Kindergarten Department of the state Education system. She was active in the Dulwich, SA, church, where she was organist and

Sunday School teacher. Also active in Christian Endeavour and was on the Board at the Glen Osmond Rest Home. For many years Alice managed the SA Correspondence Sunday School; writing lessons and preparing practical work. She oversaw the cooking at SA Youth Camps at Gawler and Longwood. Alice lived most of her life in Toorak Gardens, before entering Glenrose Court Hostel and Nursing Home.

—T. Lawrie

LAWRIE, Harold Edward

(5.11.97) Twin brothers Harold and Don born to Tom and Alice Lawrie. Accepted Christ under John Turner's ministry. Encouraged to preach and lead worship from an early age. Married Veta Ford 1937 and took over Kilmarnock farm at Pinery, SA. Moved to Adelaide 1949, working in the furniture business until retirement at 70. Veta died 1972. Five years later Harold married Iris Francis. Her ill health saw them move into Roselin Court Hostel where Harold remained until his death at 92. Was president of Northern District Conference. Over many years preached at city and country churches. Board member and elder, Hampstead Gardens for 40 years.

—T. Lawrie

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NSW

HILLSIDE FELLOWSHIP, BATHURST (Glen Cumbers) "Race Weekend" 18 October very successful. Family breakfast held, guest speaker Gary Coleman, chaplain Mt Panorama Races ... Keith Farmer speaker 19 October ... Minister & wife attended MOPS seminar, Wollongong, with MOPS ministry planned for 1998 ... Fundraising dinner held for Rhema Christian radio station ... Celebration Sunday 16 November with Brian Bruce, Wollongong, speaker ... Training for Life Development program completed with 12 participating ... Hillside now on Internet thanks to Greg Donald.

QLD

DALBY (Tony Ochse) AGM saw change in Board structure implemented, with elders, executive & ministry team replacing Board of Deacons & Elders. Executive & ministry team meet bi-monthly on alternate months & congregational meetings also to be held ... Dr Sid & Nell Bickerton have retired to Buderim. They are greatly missed ... Men's ministry enjoyed worthwhile fishing trip.

SA

SALISBURY EAST (Morrie Munyard) Morrie Munyard commenced new ministry with church 2 November. **GOOLWA** (Chris Ambrose) Church regrets death of Howard Bentley & gives praise for his faith ... CWF held an-

nual sewing day ... Sunday Forum held on "Gifts of the Spirit" ... Monster garage sale raised over \$220 ... Temple day offering in excess of \$7000. 3 baptisms were held same day ... Youth service held Friday evening to be quarterly fixture.

BORDERTOWN (Darryn Hickling) Recent guest speakers Ken Blake, Max Wright, Anne Stewart, Rod Reid & Kingsley Congdon ... Lobethal Harmony Choir visited 6-7 September ... Bible Club celebration 21 September, Steve Blacket guest speaker ... 27 October Church saddened by sudden & untimely death of Marion Welsh in car accident.

VIC

CHADSTONE (Malcolm and Yvonne Lowe) Lindsay Dewberry guest speaker ... 4 members attended worship seminar at Balwyn led by Dennis & Noeline Prince ... Club 147 visited Rialto ... David Birrell rode in Round the Bay Bike Ride ... New fence erected at rear of church ... Playgroups doing well & numbers growing ... Jon Lowe received Duke of Edinburgh award ... Wendy Ross back after 2 months in Tasmania with Fusion.

PYRAMID HILL Church looking forward to Bill & Pauline Sharrock coming to minister in December ... Visit of Sandro Schietroma from Port Fairy much enjoyed by young people, Sandro also involved on Sunday.

BALWYN (Rob Culhane) Church joined with Baptists at local community fes-

tival ... Don Russell inducted as fourth elder ... Heath Wells retired as treasurer after 22 years' service, also concurrently serving as secretary for 15 years ... Cafe Mo's, Sunday night outreach commenced ... Annual photograph taken ... Dolly, Francis & Lesley Seow & Ross & Sam Collins welcomed into membership ... Mrs Rose Rusden celebrated 100th birthday 18 September.

MONTROSE (Harvey Clark) 120th Anniversary great success, overflow crowd enjoyed wonderful program Saturday evening & special morning tea & Sunday service ... Members working hard on talent schemes after preaching of parable. Increase to be given to others ... Large new sign erected to make church more visible to those passing ... Pennants distributed at Baptist & Churches of Christ Tennis Association church service.

BURWOOD-MOUNT WAVERLEY (Peter Wing Tang) AGM 2 November. Betty Knights, Jean Grayden re-elected deacons ... Sunbeamers Play Group popular, numbers increasing ... Men's breakfast successful. Norman Lowe guest speaker ... Barry Jenkins, Jack Edwards, Peter Holliday guest speakers ... Garage sale great success, record amount achieved ... Working bee & BBQ happy occasion ... Jean Grayden retired & Marj Birkett elected President of CWF ... Great church camp at Anglesea ... Peter Cass, Norman Lowe welcomed into membership.

SURREY HILLS (Jonathan Moore, Julie Adam) Project day raised \$2,210 for Prison Ministries ... Fete successful ... Alan & Chris Niven's studies appreciated ... Gwenda Medley farewelled to new home Upper Beaconsfield ... At AGM Ed Salisbury thanked for years of encouraging, inspiring & dedicated service. Nell Haines congratulated younger members on shouldering church responsibilities ... Congregation sent letter to Premier expressing misgivings about changes to Work Cover & office of Auditor General.

WARRAGUL (Les Medley) Les Medley's ministry to conclude January 1998 ... Church saddened at death of longest-serving member Alice Pederson, who at age 95 years went to be with her Lord ... St Paul's Grammar School bell ringers & the Bendigo Chime Ringers shared recent worship service ... Combined home groups held celebration lunch ... Church annual meeting held.

TOOTGAROOK (M. Giezendanner) God has blessed us this year under Mal's ministry. Church family has grown, though 6 members died during the year, the last being Harry Earl. Church mourns loss of valued members ... All auxiliaries active, including new craft class ... Paul Cameron guest speaker at anniversary service ... Other special speakers Richard Whaley, Prison Fellowship, G. Dajscher, Leprosy Mission ... Annual business meeting well attended.

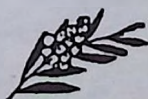
WA

FREMANTLE (J. Caporn, R. Fairman) 105th Anniversary celebrated 9 November. Many former members & guests joined local members in hall for tea & service. Features were a guest soloist, reminiscences of the church's girls' basketball teams of bygone days & a testimony by a present member of the heritage she had in home & church ... 17 persons attended church camp ... Sympathy expressed to Betty (Taylor) Butler & family on death of Bob, aged 82 ... Choir of Bicton UC presented Christmas Cantata.

NORTHAM (Jason Hemsley) New pastor, Jason Hemsley & wife Margaret welcomed in February. Jason and Margaret have five children, so playgroup and Sunday School grew too ... New program for primary children commenced during church time: Kid's Way—His Way. Children are having a wonderful time and learning lots ... First Alpha course begun with up to twenty people attending. So far three people have come to the Lord.

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Exploring the Day Twelfth Night

JANET THOMPSON

I have almost finished my Christmas cards. By the time you read this they should be in the tender hands of Australia Post and on their way to all the corners of the world that contain my friends. *

Choosing the cards, writing in them and addressing the envelopes has taken some time, but it has been interesting. *

As I select each card, I pause and think about the person who will be receiving it. I go back over the times and experiences we have shared and explore this person's significance in my life. *

While I am addressing the envelope, I can see the house—if I have never visited the place, my mind always constructs a picture for me—and I reflect on what might be happening at the moment. All of this helps to shape what I write in the card, so each message is individual and special, even if it is only a few words. *

When I write, "Thinking of you!" I mean it. *

It seems reasonable to assume that similar thoughts lie behind each Christmas card in my letterbox. *

I hang the cards on ribbons—all around the lounge room. By the time Christmas arrives the room is aglow with colour. It looks wonderful! *

And it feels even better than it looks. The messages, and the thought that has gone into bringing them to me radiate an incredible warmth, which penetrates every corner of the house. *



I stand in the doorway and let myself feel the loving touch of friendship. No bells or tinsel can equal these decorations. *

The 5 January—Twelfth Night—is the traditional day for taking down the tree. It's fun to pack the lights and trinkets away, ready for next time. But I am reluctant to take down the cards. *

I make excuses ... the room will look too bare if I remove everything at once ... maybe tomorrow ... Sometimes it is the end of January before I give in. *

Then I discover—again—one of the lingering touches of Christmas. I can spend a tranquil summer afternoon re-reading all the messages, visiting my friends again, and renewing my delight in that gift which is too often taken for granted—a caring friend. *

The Last Word

When you set out on your spiritual quest, take your body too.

—Jean H. Vandergrift
The Disciple

Christmas: when people get emotional over their family ties—especially if they have to wear them.

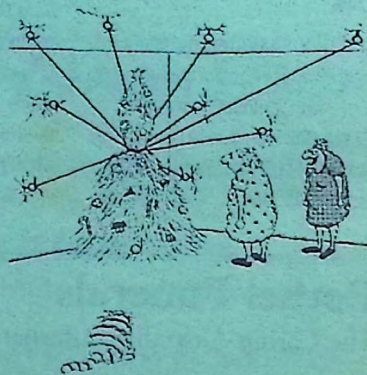
Have you seen the new aluminium Christmas trees? You really can't tell them from the real plastic ones.

The school party was assembled at Circular Quay for a day trip on the Harbour.

"Harris," said the headmaster, "we must all be very careful on the ferry. If one of the boys falls overboard—what do you do?" "I shout 'Boy overboard!', sir." "Good. And what do you do if a teacher falls overboard?" "Er—which one, sir?"

"Do you write with your right hand or left hand?" "Well, I usually write with a pen."

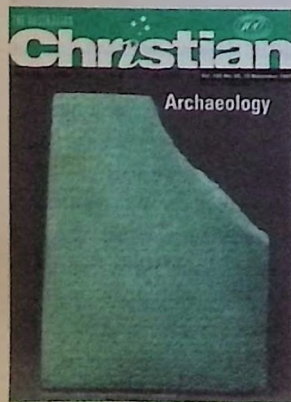
What happened when the glow-worm got trampled on? He was de-lighted.



"No chance of the cat knocking the tree over this year."

From *Dangerously Close to Home* by John McPherson (Zondervan 1997).

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