

to be one.

Stories of a
Radiant Church





Image: After a service at Kingsford Church of Christ.

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Stories in this magazine have been edited for print. Read our original stories at ccnswact.org.au/news

Front Cover Image: Friends gather at Epping Church of Christ.

Father, Son and Spirit,

You hold all of creation in your tender love. We acknowledge that you hold the life and energy of our connectedness as churches, communities and people. As our stories are told in these pages, we honour you as the source of our own love, life and hope.

We long to be deeply held by your gaze, that we might be captured again by the fierceness of your love. And yet we recognise that there are many ways in which we are resistant to you.

We ask your forgiveness and seek your mercy.

We humble ourselves before you again and cry out, “give us ears to hear and eyes to see your presence and activity among us. Soften our hearts to your desire to heal our wounds so that we might deepen our trust in you. By your spirit, help us to again relinquish our ways of self-sufficiency. Rather, lead us to know the deep joy and freedom of living in dependence on you.”

As your people, may our lives and words bear witness to your goodness and faithfulness so that others might be drawn to you.

For the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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Our Churches



Unity

We celebrate and embrace the diversity of Christ's people, united by His love at our centre.

We nurture unique and authentic communities that uphold Jesus as Lord, bear witness to His love and seek unity with the wider Body of Christ.





From Displacement To Discipleship: Generations Of Faith At Wagga Wagga Christian Church

When three Christian refugee families from Burma (now known as Myanmar) arrived in Wagga Wagga in 2011 with little English and few local connections, they began gathering as a house church.

Fourteen years later, Wagga Wagga Christian Church (WWCC) has become a thriving community for more than 100 Burmese Christians in the area, many of whom fled military oppression in Burma and spent years in Malaysian refugee camps before being resettled in regional New South Wales.

“Our mission and vision was to have an active, strong faith and to pass that faith to the next generation,” said Pastor Joe Redamwang.

Over the years, family after family arrived in Wagga Wagga with similar stories of displacement, faith and perseverance. What began as a handful of families praying together in a rented hall grew into a multi-generational congregation open to all, where denominational differences mattered less than the desire to follow Christ together.

Many of these families carried a churches of Christ heritage from their home churches in Burma. When the church officially affiliated with the churches of Christ network in 2024, it represented both a continuation of that legacy and a partnership for their future.

When asked why they chose to join the network, Pastor Joe responded, “To help encourage each other for the Lord.”

Elder Sar Aung Shatut’s personal connection with churches of Christ reaches back through generations.

“My grandfather and grandmother were the first to accept Jesus Christ,” Sar said. “Then my parents followed, so my whole family comes from a church of Christ background.”

Although many members came from Burmese backgrounds, the congregation did not want to be limited to one ethnic or denominational identity.

“We named the church Wagga Wagga Christian Church so that everyone can come and join us to worship,” Sar explained.

God’s Faithfulness

The early years were marked by significant challenges, especially as families tried to find work with limited English.

“When we first started looking for jobs, there weren’t many Burmese people in Wagga Wagga,” remembered elder Kangram Dakham. “As soon as we asked the job interviewer something, they could tell our English wasn’t good, and some people didn’t want to talk with us.”

Rather than give in to discouragement, the church community turned to prayer.

“Every Saturday we fasted and prayed, and we still do it today. We always keep our focus on Jesus, always talking with God, and through that we believe we can face anything,” Kangram said.

Today, the employment situation looks very different.

“Now when they need workers, they don’t even hold interviews, they just call us,” Pastor Joe shared with gratitude. “That’s God’s blessing. Without it, we wouldn’t have had a chance.”

Future Generations

As the community became more established, its focus turned strongly toward the children and young people growing up between two cultures.

“One day our next generation will lead the church,” Pastor Joe said.



Top: Worship at Wagga Wagga Christian Church.
Bottom: Pastor Joe (left) with his church family.

Today, with around 80 children in their Sunday school program, children's ministry has become central to the life of the church. Their children are growing up as second-generation Australians, fluent in English and attending Australian schools, while their parents are seeking to keep them rooted in biblical faith and connected to their heritage.

"If they did not attend church, when we grew old, the church would be gone," elder Sar said.

"We did not know much about this country or have much experience, but we shared our faith and what we knew about the Bible with our children every day and every Sunday."

With a growing number of children in the congregation, WWCC leaders reached out to the churches of Christ Network Resource Team last year, seeking to strengthen their children's ministry team with practical teaching skills, English-language curriculum and Safe Church practices.

For Mary Nanghee, who has been teaching Sunday school for the past two years, the training from experienced children's educators and ministers, Avril Mundy and Meikle Bennett, brought new confidence and clarity.

She said, "When we teach with English now, the children understand more, the more they catch on."

"Even though we do not have enough education and there is a language barrier, but we try and pray for them. We are like a bridge, joining with God and the next generation."

Through this training connection, Mary and other leaders recently joined our network's SYNC discipleship kids camp and are developing connections and relationships in our network that will continue to support them in their vision for the next generation.



Images above: Sunday School teaching.
Image opposite: Worship at Wagga Wagga Christian Church.

"We are like a bridge, joining with God and the next generation."

—Sunday School teacher, Mary Nanghee



10 Years Of Platform Nine: Making People *Feel At Home*

Last October, the ballroom at Club Central Hurstville was filled with supporters, volunteers and community leaders for the annual Kingsway Community Care Gala Dinner. But this was not just another annual fundraising dinner.

The night marked ten years of Platform Nine, Kingsway Community Care's temporary and crisis accommodation service, a ministry born from compassion and sustained by faith.

"Platform Nine began with one rough sleeper, a pastor and a publican," Brook Stewart, Kingsway Care General Manager, recalled. "Out of that encounter, came an act of compassion. The publican later offered us a motel for \$1 a year, and that's where it all started."

Brook Stewart has led Kingsway Community Care since 2017, while also pastoring SeeChange Community Church in the Sutherland Shire since 2006.

Over a decade, Platform Nine became a lifeline for more than 2,200 people experiencing homelessness across the Sutherland Shire and St George region, offering not only a bed for the night but safety, dignity and hope for the future.

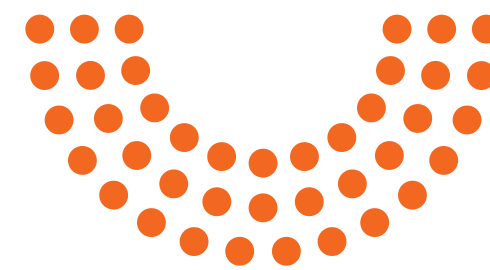
The name itself carries biblical significance, drawn from Matthew Chapter 9, where Jesus looked at the crowds and had compassion on them. "Ten years later, that same compassion still drives everything we do," Brook said.

What started with a few motel rooms has evolved into a comprehensive support network. Today, Platform Nine operates five properties, providing emergency accommodation alongside wrap-around services, including casework and weekly workshops on financial planning, self-care, job readiness, personal development, and pathways to permanent housing.

In 2024–25, Platform Nine supported 287 people, including women, men, and children. Over 2,000 casework sessions were delivered. Since 2021, in partnership with the Big Sister Foundation, the organisation has provided weekly workshops to more than 512 individuals.



Attendees at the gala dinner.



"People often arrive at Platform Nine in crisis, many because of family and domestic violence or financial hardship," Brook explained.

"Homelessness shows no partiality; right now, we are supporting both an 80-year-old and an 18-year-old person. It affects men, women, and children alike."

The diversity of those seeking help reflects Australia's escalating housing crisis. Rising rents, cost-of-living pressures and limited social housing availability have created a perfect storm, pushing people from all walks of life into homelessness.

"The need has grown dramatically," Brook noted. "Rising rents, the cost of living, and limited social housing mean more people are coming to us than ever before and with more complex needs. All our beds across every site are full most nights, and we often need more beds than we can provide."

Despite the overwhelming demand, Platform Nine has maintained its commitment to dignified and comprehensive care. Through casework, programs, and practical support, lives have begun to turn around.

"Most guests move into safe, stable homes and rediscover hope again," Brook said. "We've seen people find work, reunite with family, and find stable housing. Spiritually, we see guests being prayed for, with many connecting or reconnecting with their faith."

Just as Jesus showed care to the crowds, today the Body of Christ continues that work. The church community has been integral to Platform Nine's success. "The Church has always been the heart of this work," he said.

"Our church and other churches provide clothes, food, furniture, volunteers, prayer, meals, and so much support. It's the Church being the hands and feet of Jesus, faith made visible in action. The Church has been awesome. God's people really stand tall given the right opportunity."

As Kingsway Community Care looks to the future at this significant 10-year milestone, the organisation is exploring new initiatives, including a Host Family Program, a volunteer Buddy Program and potential crisis accommodation for men re-entering the community.



Top: Brook Stewart, General Manager, Kingsway Community Care, speaking at the 2025 Gala Dinner. Bottom: Messages of Hope written by attendees to guests of Platform Nine.

A Shop With Purpose: Missions Op Shop Asquith



On a busy stretch along the Pacific Highway, it would be easy to walk past a humble op shop in Asquith without realising what is happening inside. Racks of second-hand clothes, shelves of donated goods and a steady flow of customers tell part of the story. Behind it all is a team driven by a shared heartbeat for mission.

At Missions Op Shop Asquith, every purchase carries a purpose. Each dollar spent in the shop is directed towards global mission work, supporting Christian leaders and communities beyond Australia, while also helping meet local needs.

Run entirely by volunteers from Asquith Church of Christ and the local community, the op shop has grown into much more than a place to buy and sell second-hand goods. It is shaped by people who give their time freely, showing up week after week to serve, connect and care.

"Not one of our staff is paid, all being volunteers... it's very rewarding and feels like working in a big family," said Steph Daniels, who has been serving voluntarily at Missions Op Shop Asquith for more than a decade.

When the church took over the shop in 2012, it was a simple step of faith. At the time, it had raised more than \$800,000 for Bibles for Missions. Over the years, it has grown into a thriving ministry, now contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars towards global mission work while also assisting local families in need.

"All of our volunteers have real joy in being able to help others get good value for their money," said Senior Pastor Andrew Maxwell, who has led the church since 2010.

"Knowing that the money raised goes into gospel-centred mission work gives everything we do a deeper purpose," he said.

A Local Mission

Today, under the leadership of Vincylam, that same heartbeat continues to shape the shop's presence in the community.

"There's a lot of regulars that come in and they have a long-term relationship with some of the staff that we have," Vincylam said.

As people enter the store and ask where the money goes or what the shop supports, volunteers find natural opportunities to share about faith, offer encouragement and build meaningful connections. People often walk in carrying more than donations. Some come with grief, hardship or significant life changes. In those moments, the counter becomes a place of care.

"You get to chat to those who have lost family, a partner or dear friends," Steph said. "We are able to comfort them and offer support."

Vincylam has seen that care expressed in practical ways.

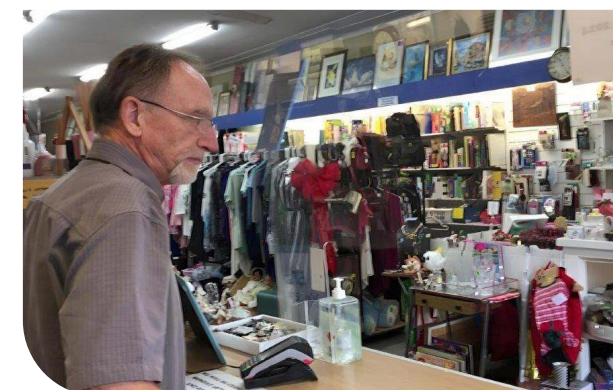
"There was a lady who lost something very special that belonged to her late mother," she said. "We helped her find a replacement and one of the volunteers became close with her and supported her through her grief. That's a really nice relationship that came out of the shop."

The shop has also become a place where people grow and find belonging.

"There was a high school student who started helping at the op shop to get some experience," Vincylam said. "Now he's finished school, looking for work and he comes to church as well. He loves the volunteers. That's been really encouraging to see."

What sets Missions Op Shop Asquith apart is not just that it is volunteer run, but the purpose that drives it. Every item donated, every conversation shared and every sale made becomes part of something larger.

"It is a great atmosphere knowing that the Lord is running the whole shop," Steph said.



Senior Pastor Andrew visiting the shop. Image opposite page: Missions Op Shop Asquith manager Vincylam.



One of the shop's passionate volunteers, Steph Daniels.

Stories That Connect: Reaching People Through Testimony

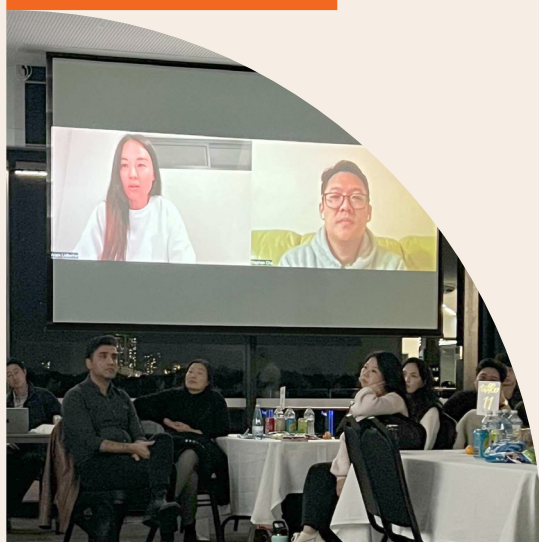


When the team at The Chapel Sydney decided to host a conference, they deliberately moved away from traditional church formats to reach people who might never attend a Sunday service.

Senior Pastor Stephen Cha said, “If you want to reach new people, you have to do new things. This is the first conference that we had that wasn’t preaching, it wasn’t a church service, and it wasn’t at church. It was all about story.”

In practice, this meant the conference focused entirely on personal testimonies rather than preaching; making it easier for church members to invite friends. Instead of asking someone to attend a church service, they could simply invite them to come and listen to someone’s personal story.

“For years we’ve been doing traditional conferences, but we were finding that people wouldn’t necessarily come to hear a sermon or a message, but they *did* want to hear a story of a life changed,” James Jang, Associate Pastor, explained.



The main speaker of the night was a Korean missionary now serving in Singapore’s villages. His own story of redemption from struggles with drugs and alcohol was a powerful testimony of the night. “This guest speaker has had a pretty crazy story,” James Jang said. “God really changed his life, and he’s given his life completely to the work of the mission field.”

The evening was not just about listening – it encouraged engagement. Between the stories shared, the organisers facilitated discussion times that encouraged attendees to reflect on their own experiences.

“We asked questions like, ‘What’s been the happiest moment of your life?’ and ‘What’s been the hardest thing in your life so far?’” James explained. “We really had people just open up.”

This approach drew an unexpectedly diverse crowd, creating an environment where people felt safe to explore questions they might never have considered before.

Ray, one of the attendees, found the evening particularly impactful. “My overall experience was it was very eye opening, just to see the way that God could touch so many people in completely different walks of life,” he said. “It felt like there was no pressure to do anything or believe anything.”

The impact of the evening was not about altar calls or instant decisions. Pastor James said, “It wasn’t so much about being able to say, ‘Oh, my friend gave their life to God’, but it was about ‘My friend started thinking about faith and thinking about things that they’ve never really mulled on before.’”

As The Chapel Sydney team reflected on the new approach, they felt the conference format met a need in this cultural moment. As Pastor Stephen noted,

“Evangelism is really important but, with our generation, it has to happen through relationship.”

The positive response has encouraged the team to continue exploring similar formats. It’s made them wonder if the most powerful way to share faith is not through answers, but through honest, human stories that invite people to lean in.



The Chapel Sydney testimony night meeting.



Churches Gather To Confront Domestic Violence On The Central Coast



Jeff Nagle and Karen Gould speaking at Contend Conference.



Panellists sharing insights during Contend Conference.

Faced with rising domestic violence cases across the Central Coast, churches in the area gathered last October to discuss domestic and family violence.

Held at Coast Community Church in Killarney Vale, the conference brought together around 90 pastors, parents, educators and community workers for a day of prayer, listening and honest dialogue, united in their commitment to confront domestic and family violence, and build safer, more resilient communities.

Unlike other conferences, Contend Conference sought to help the Church respond to issues facing the Central Coast through prayer, action and shared purpose, rather than programs.

“Rather than a mission statement, we have a statement of calling,” Jeff Nagle, minister at Coast Community Church at Tumby Umbi explained. “We don’t get to make up our own mission. We say yes and participate in what God is already doing.”

That sense of calling has been articulated as “contending” for the renewal of the Central Coast, a vision that reaches beyond one church and invites the wider body of Christ into God’s work of reconciliation.

“In subsequent years, we’re going to be looking at what parts of society on the Central Coast are in need of renewal,” Jeff said. “Where do we see evidence of brokenness, decay, fragmentation and that the Church can be a minister of reconciliation in those spaces?”

This year, the conference focused on domestic and family violence, combining teaching with a panel of local practitioners who explored its underlying drivers, how it manifests, and the ways the Church has been both a source of help and, at times, harm.

Kristen Crossfield, who chairs both Coast Community Care and Common Grace chaired the panel. Panellists included Carolyn Cousins, a counsellor with specialist expertise in domestic and family violence and contributor to Creating Safe Spaces training, Danielle Habib, a highly regarded practitioner with CatholicCare Broken Bay, and Natasha Kelley, who works with Peninsula Lighthouse, a Christ-centred ministry on the Central Coast supporting survivors of domestic violence, including men.

“The panel helped us understand the drivers of violence, how it presents, where the Church has been both helpful and harmful,” Jeff said.

For a significant portion of the day, Common Grace and Cottage Counselling facilitated Active Bystander Training, which grounded the conversation in personal awareness and responsibility.

“The overwhelming advice was not to rush into creating new church programs but to begin by paying attention to your own biases and assumptions,” he said. “Recognising that I can foster eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to respond, and have some safe ways of being attentive and intervening in reasonable ways.”

Looking ahead, Jeff says that the work is far from finished. Emergency accommodation and housing insecurity remain major gaps on the Central Coast and no single church has the answers.

“We ourselves don’t have good solutions,” he said. “The Central Coast as a whole is just grossly under-resourced in that regard.”

Yet for Jeff, Contend Conference represents something vital taking root: a church willing to listen, to learn, and to take responsibility.

“I think it’s really important that the Church is seen to be informing itself,” he said. “That the body of Christ is taking a stand against violence in a really grassroots kind of a way.”

At its heart, the conference challenged the long-held belief that violence is a private matter and silence is faithful.

“That has not served people well,” Jeff said. “It’s not served women well; it’s not served kids and families well.”

Instead, Contend Conference called the Church to name the real enemy and to stand together against it. “Violence is the enemy,” he said.

“We need men and women to lock arms in standing up against violence.”



Our People



Restoration

We join Christ in His ever-expanding mission towards the restoration of all things.

Empowered by the Spirit and anchored in Scripture, we are sent to welcome all peoples into the family of God, bringing healing to a broken world.



Image: Pastor Joshua and Yoonah Choi after a service at Heartbeat Church, Merrylands.



Walking Together: Chaplains Refresh For 2026

For chaplains, ministry is often the work of holding the journey of others in places marked by grief, loss, and unanswered questions. Day after day, they walk alongside people in the hardest moments of their life, offering the presence of Christ.

The annual Chaplains Retreat is a rare and intentional pause for chaplains to step back, reflect, connect with other chaplains, and recalibrate with those who share an understanding of this unique ministry context.

Held at the beginning of the year, the retreat leads the chaplains to set direction and refocus for the year ahead.

Chaplain Jeni Callaghan said, “The retreat closes the door on last year and sets a new rhythm for the year ahead.”

That sense of renewal is especially important considering the emotionally demanding settings that chaplains work in – including residential aged care, retirement living, hospitals, defence forces, schools, and prisons. Chaplain Carolyn Schache, who serves in aged care, said stepping away together makes a tangible difference.

“We’re quite geographically spread out,” Carolyn said. “Coming together helps us better understand each other and the gifts each person brings.”

Carolyn described the retreat as more than rest. It is a chance to be renewed in ministry.

“For me, going swimming really symbolised refreshment,” she shared. “The freshness of the water captured what was happening internally.”

That renewal, she said, helps her continue walking with people through loss, grief, and frailty.

“You come back with a renewed perspective. That’s really important when your ministry context involves sadness and grief so much of the time.”

Alongside renewal, the retreat also strengthens professional practice. Senior Chaplain Peter Carblis led sessions focused on professional standards, boundaries, and personal integrity in ministry. These conversations created space for careful reflection that is difficult to prioritise during the year.

Chaplain Andy Chung, serving in prison and aged care chaplaincy, said that space is vital.

“It’s a very special time,” Andy said. “We step back from frontline work, look after ourselves and each other, and receive resourcing for our ministry. It’s a gift to have that time.”

Without it, Andy believes chaplaincy could easily become isolating.

“With the retreat, it’s a reminder that we’re doing this together. We’re part of a team. We support each other, encourage each other and remind each other why we’re here.”

The retreat also provides a meaningful entry point for newer chaplains. Glenn Baigent, who recently commenced his role, valued the opportunity to learn from others’ lived experience.

“The empathy that comes from other chaplains who are journeying in the same space is really important,” he said. “Hearing about their experiences, trials and challenges was very helpful.”

One reflection particularly stayed with him.

“We talked a lot about reaching the person, not just the circumstances around them,” he said. “It’s easy to get distracted by everything surrounding a resident, but our role is to reach the person themselves.”

Please continue to pray for our chaplains who faithfully serve and companion people in communities across NSW and ACT.



Images above: Moments of joy at the retreat.

‘Solutionary’ Living: John And Deb Kim’s Journey Into Social Enterprise With Kingdom Purpose



John Kim at the Recan depot.

In 2017, standing among the slums of Talisay in the Philippines, Deb and John Kim (‘Shepherds’ at Heartbeat Church) were confronted by piles of waste, the stench of decay and the human cost of rubbish left unmanaged.

In this moment they were compelled by a problem that would later lead them to launch Recan, an environment-tech business and social enterprise in Brisbane.

“We witnessed first-hand how the waste problem affected and destroyed people’s dignity, their way of life,” John said.

“From generational poverty to health issues, crimes, addictions – you name it – everything was connected to this issue. Then we wondered, could we help change that – not just through ministry, but by creating something more sustainable?”

John, a former corporate executive, and Deb, a social entrepreneur, began to sense that God was planting a deeper vision in them. They wanted to create a model that could respond to waste while also opening doors for people often pushed to the margins.

“Entrepreneurs are called to create solutions for problems that are close to our hearts. We call it a ‘solutionary’ way of living,” Deb explained.

After a year travelling as a family and studying how different countries approached waste management, the Kims returned to Australia as Queensland’s ten-cent container deposit scheme had just launched, creating an unexpected opportunity.

“We didn’t think that our venture would begin in Australia, but like many divine stories, unexpected places become our testing grounds for faith and obedience,” Deb said.

In 2019, Recan began in Brisbane. The business now operates a recycling refund depot and is developing an all-in-one software platform for container pickup depots, combining booking, pickup coordination and refund processing into one system.

Today, the depot employs 16 people, many of whom have faced significant barriers to employment.

“Most of our staff lived through difficulties, with no formal qualifications,” John explained. “Some carry a history of criminal activity and were never given a chance at full-time work, while others have struggled with severe addictions, domestic violence, and other challenges.”

For the Kims, the depot has become more than a workplace.

“You name a social problem, it’s here,” Deb said. “Once you become part of the team, we are not just your bosses. We become friends, family, and stewards that offer something more than a paycheck – a picture of eternity.”



John and Deb at the Recan depot.

“We don’t push an agenda because we are believers who own a company,” John said.

“I will do my best to provide a setting where we equip you as a worker, grow you as a person, empower you as a citizen. That means, if you’re going through a hard time, we battle through together.”

Deb concluded, “We were called to steward this planet, why not do it with the people who are at the centre of God’s heart, who are labelled as the lost, the last and the least? So here we are – one bottle at a time, one life at a time.”



Recan team members having lunch together.



Image: Catching Up at Collective Gathering 2025

Women Of Faith: The Lasting Impact Of Women In Our Network

Julia Gilchrist, our network's Historical Archivist, uncovers, sorts and digitally scans the countless boxes of artefacts and archives of churches of Christ in NSW & ACT. While the work can be slow, Julia is passionate about the soul-stirring stories hidden in dusty boxes that she uncovers and preserves for future generations.

"I was always fascinated by stories," Julia said. "As a child I would ask my parents for 'a long time ago' stories. I loved the idea that people lived in different times and cultures, and that what happened in history shaped their lives."

Her academic path deepened that interest. During her undergraduate studies, Julia completed a Bachelor of Writing and Contemporary Cultures (Honours, Social Inquiry), at UTS, which included a thesis on women in publishing in the years between 1500-1900.

"I did a series of profiles on women from that period," she said. "That's really where my academic foundation for historical research began."

Over time, Julia's interest in 'how history shapes us' has grown into a career. Doing this work, she is particularly captured by the stories of women.

"The women were the first witnesses to the risen Christ," Julia explained. "Without them going to the disciples and telling what they had seen, we would not have the gospel accounts in the way we do."

That moment reflects a pattern that appears repeatedly throughout church history. Women stepping forward, sometimes quietly and sometimes boldly, to serve their communities and advance the work of the Kingdom. Across the network, that legacy stretches back to the earliest days of our movement in Australia.



Rosa Tonkin, an Australian missionary in China who rescued vulnerable girls at risk of exploitation. She adopted six as her own children, giving them a new future.





Ellen Elizabeth Ashwood – one of the inspiring women of the Ashwood family.



Mary Thompson, the first missionary sent by churches of Christ, who served in India for four decades.



May Ashwood, church benefactor who established Ashwood Aged Ladies' Home at Pendle Hill in memory of her mother, Ellen.

In the mid nineteenth century, when churches of Christ was first taking shape in Sydney, gatherings often happened in homes rather than church buildings. One of those homes belonged to Isabella and Albert Griffin, who helped establish the church in the city around 1850.

Hosting a house church was no small task. It meant preparing the home, welcoming people from different backgrounds and creating space for worship and fellowship, often in small and crowded rooms. Yet women like Isabella opened their homes repeatedly, creating places where communities could gather, pray and grow together.

That same spirit continued as the church expanded. When congregations moved from the city to suburbs like Newtown, other women stepped forward to host gatherings, ensuring the life of the church continued even before dedicated buildings existed.

Women also responded to the practical needs around them. Christian women's groups organised fundraising efforts, supported mission work and developed ministries that cared for families and children. Long before modern healthcare systems existed, they also raised funds to support hospital care for mothers and babies.

Their efforts helped establish initiatives such as mother and baby centres and early childhood programs. Often these ministries began by women simply recognising a need and deciding to respond.

“They would look at their community and ask, what is needed here?” Julia said. “And then they would work together to make it happen.”

Through these efforts, women developed leadership skills, organisational experience, and a confidence that shaped the life of the church and its wider mission.

Some women felt called to go even further. Julia recounts the story of a remarkable young woman, Mary Thompson, who stepped forward with courage to enter the international mission field when she was thirty years old.

Australian churches were first embarking on overseas mission work in the late nineteenth century. When no one (neither men nor women) responded to the call to go to India as a missionary in 1891, Mary Thompson volunteered.

Supported by women's groups across Australia, Mary served there for four decades, becoming the first missionary sent by churches of Christ in Australia. Christian women sustained her ministry through letters, fundraising and prayer.

Another intrepid woman from the churches of Christ archive who inspires Julia is Rosa Lavinia Tonkin, who served in China during a time of deep social hardship. She rescued orphaned girls at risk of exploitation and welcomed them into her home. Though single, Rosa adopted six children, giving them a future. One of those girls later became a doctor.

“She stayed in China, she cared for these children, and she became a mother to them,” Julia said.

Lastly, Julia talks about three women in one family: Grandma Ann Morris, Ellen Elizabeth Ashwood, and May Ashwood. Grandma Morris worked alongside Isabella Griffin and Martha Clapham supporting the growth of the network, particularly leading into the inaugural NSW Sisters' Conference in 1894/95. Ann's mentorship included her daughter, Ellen Elizabeth, who served on the NSW Sisters' Conference executive and financed Ashwood Hospital in India.

Ann's granddaughter and heiress, May, was deeply involved in furthering the Ashwoods' initiatives, financing and establishing Ashwood Aged Ladies' Home in Pendle Hill in memory of her mother.

“Discovering these three women in the one family was a massive surprise,” Julia said.

“I love that they were so purposeful. Our women didn't leave the future to chance. They had a succession plan, identifying other women and girls as suitable co-heirs and giving them mentorship, close support, and the care needed so they could be successful in their own right.”

For Julia, these stories are more than historical records. They reveal a pattern of faith lived out in ordinary and extraordinary ways – women responding to the needs around them, often without formal recognition, yet leaving a lasting impact on the life of the church and the communities it served.

“If you forget your history, you can lose your sense of direction,” she said. “History helps us understand who we are and why we do what we do.”

These stories remind us that the Church has always been built through people who are willing to take the next faithful step, trusting that even small acts of service can become part of a much larger story.

Julia will soon be releasing a book on the history of women in our network. Stay tuned to explore more inspiring stories of our heritage of faithful and faith-filled pioneers.



Our Network



Life

We cultivate the vibrant life of Christ in our communities.

We develop relational, multi-generational pathways for discipleship, inviting God to form us in Christ's likeness, readying us for service alongside others.



Image: Worship led by Saegil Church during Collective Gathering 2025.



A Radiant Church At Collective Gathering 2025

Joy and laughter filled the Tops Conference Centre in Stanwell Tops as more than 250 friends in ministry from churches of Christ across NSW and the ACT gathered for Collective Gathering 2025.

Through shared worship, powerful teaching and conversation across generations and cultures, Collective Gathering offered a vivid reminder that the joy of Christ is most clearly seen in how we gather and walk alongside one another.

Reflecting on his experience as a first-time attendee, Associate Professor Peter Laughlin at the Australian College of Ministries (ACOM) said he found joy in the people around him. “It’s people that bring joy to me,” he said. “Just seeing some of my friends, spending time together with people and conversations is probably where the biggest joy is.”

That sense of connection was echoed by Tamara Clark from Forster Tuncurry Church of Christ, who said relationships sat at the heart of the gathering.

“I believe that the Church needs more joy as well,” she said. “Joy is in connection – shared values, common interests and the roles and struggles we carry together.”

This year’s theme, A Radiant Church, was shaped by 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NIV).

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

The gathering opened with a time of communion, heartfelt worship and an address from Executive Leader (Interim) Anne Simpson. Anne shared a powerful passage from Revelation 21, calling the Church to not give up longing for the Bridegroom, Jesus. This set the scene for the following sessions from keynote speakers Michel and Claudia Hendricks from Life Model Works.

Across their sessions, Michel and Claudia introduced the concept of ‘whole-brained’ discipleship, drawing on insights from neuroscience and spiritual formation to explore how understanding our brains can help shape healthy discipleship. Their teaching blended practical demonstrations with thoughtful biblical reflection, opening meaningful space for participants to consider what joyful and emotionally mature formation could look like in their own contexts.

On both mornings, team members of the Australian College of Ministries and Global Mission Partners offered creative theological reflections on “Beholding God’s Face” and “Bearing God’s Glory”.



Amanda Stewart leading worship at Collective Gathering 2025.

As a first-time attendee, Leah Odongo from Global Mission Partners was deeply moved by the intergenerational nature of Collective. She said the mix of children, youth, parents and older adults created a picture of hope for where the church is heading.

“Seeing every generation together gave me a real sense that God is doing something new,” she said. “It felt like a quiet kind of revival that you don’t always see but you can sense in the room.”





Images above: Moments of joy at Collective Gathering 2025.

Thursday night's Network Celebration Dinner was a highlight, as Stephen Cha, Intercultural Engagement Leader with the Network Resource Team, hosted an evening filled with food, laughter and worship. The night also created the opportunity to farewell Head of Network Enterprises Matt Young, honour outgoing Conference President Emily Drough and welcome incoming Conference President, Mike McGarrity, and newly-elected Conference Executive members.

Children and families were an important part of Collective Gathering. Collective Kids welcomed its largest group yet with more than 30 children joining the two-day program led by Mel Oxman from NewDay Church. "We had such a good time with the kids," Mel said, sharing how well they connected with support from NewDay volunteers and interns from The Tops.

Erin Treloar, Children & Youth Pastor at Liberty Church of Christ said that having her children with her at Collective made the gathering especially meaningful. "We really loved being able to come and have our kids be part of the kids program where they get to connect with kids from other churches and build new friendships," she said.

In a time of 'Harvest and Celebration' on Friday, leaders from across the network shared prayerful reflections on what they had heard for our network of churches. The theme of light was clear, as many spoke of what they hoped to carry back into their ministries.

As the final session ended on Friday, there was a sense that the days of worship, learning and fellowship were an illuminating reminder of who we are: a radiant church, beholding the face of Christ, and shining his joy wherever we are planted.



**For God, who said,
"Let light shine out of
darkness," *made his
light shine in our hearts
to give us the light of the
knowledge of God's glory
displayed in the face of
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God and not from us.***

—2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NIV)

Regional Gatherings 2025: Collective Voices Shape Network Vision

Over 2025, the Network Resource Team (NRT) visited churches both regionally and online to engage leaders with a proposed 'Working' Vision statement on behalf of Conference Executive.



Anne Simpson, then Executive Leader (Interim), facilitating one of the gatherings.

This engagement initiative brought the network together through eight regional gatherings across NSW and the ACT, supported by 23 online meetings. Gatherings covered Sydney, the Hunter, Northern and Western NSW, the South Coast and the ACT, and 66 churches participated. 154 members gathered in person at regional events, while online meetings drew 95 leaders, elders and church members.

At the South Coast regional meeting, Stephen Cathcart, pastor of Southern Church, reflected on what this process means for our network.

"I think we're in a moment, probably another one of these generational moments, where we have an opportunity to bring forward what makes churches of Christ, *churches of Christ*," he said.

"We now are in this moment of decision where it takes courage to call out and to bring to the surface who we really are, that we are a flourishing network of people who are in the priesthood of all believers, who have this DNA within us to be missional and to be involved in mission and see people coming into the Kingdom."

Stephen also highlighted the unique nature of this process. "One aspect I am grateful for in this is the fact that we actually have a "working" vision, and that we have the opportunity to participate in that vision. What other movement of churches would allow you to actually speak into vision making?" he said.

The Working Vision is part of a larger Future Vision and Realignment Project approved by Conference Executive in October 2024 and announced at the 2024 Annual Meeting of Conference and Collective Gathering 2024.

Former Conference President Emily Drough said, "While Conference Executive are responsible for stewarding across the whole network, which includes both our churches and entities, they particularly wanted to hear how our churches resonated with the direction Conference Executive were taking. They wanted to know if there was a sense of resonance with the mission of each local church."

Anne Simpson, Head of Network Relationships, and Executive Leader (interim) at the time, led and facilitated these gatherings with NRT leaders on behalf of Conference Executive. Reflecting on what the consultation process revealed about the network's identity, she said, "Our churches, by participating in these regional conversations and opportunities and engagements, are playing an active participation in the future shape of our network."

"We're in this together. We want to shape the future together."

Across the regional gathering feedback, four key themes emerged from churches: the call to mature discipleship, the centrality of the local church in mission, a desire to see increased resourcing for mission, and the focus on community-impact.

Anne reflected, "There was overwhelming support for - yes, we want to be a flourishing network! We want to be about disciple-making. We want to be about local context. We want to be about community impact. We want to be resourced for this work."

The compiled feedback and recommendations will assist Conference Executive in future planning around governance, organisational development and resourcing as the network moves forward in pursuing its mission of disciple-making and community impact.



Top: Conversation at the Regional Gathering at Living Grace Church, Tweed Heads.
Bottom: Stephen Cathcart and other Illawarra leaders at NewDay Church, Wollongong.

Reflecting On The International Churches Of Christ Conference 2025 In Kenya – With Dr. Mark Riessen



Every four years, representatives from across the globe converge at the International Churches of Christ conference known as Global Christian Connection.

2025 marked 20 years of the event, with 350 leaders and delegates gathering in rural Kenya for the August conference. It was an historic moment, marking the first time the gathering had been hosted by an African nation.

Dr. Mark Riessen from South Australia attended on behalf of Churches of Christ in Australia and Global Mission Partners. As he joined this cohort of leaders, he was struck by their desire for unity in the global Church.

The gathering centred around the theme: Pamoja, a Swahili word meaning “coming together in unity.”

“For some of these leaders, this was actually the first time they had come together for a conference like this,” Mark said, noting that the previous meeting had been cancelled due to COVID.

Alongside keynote speakers from the United States and African churches, the formal sessions focused on unity, evangelism, church planting, community empowerment, and sharing testimonies from across the global Church.

Yet some of the most meaningful moments took place outside these sessions, as leaders gathered to share stories of what God was doing in their communities.

Pastor Paulino Malou, founder of Christian Mercy International South Sudan, reflected on how these conversations encouraged him.

“We share the experience of love and unity by listening to all the nations’ presentations and getting to know their achievements and blessings that God has done for us and challenges that need prayers and God’s provision in their home countries,” he said.

“Personally, it means that we are one in the Spirit of God and we are the body of Christ. We are the family, we are in one faith, we are in friendship with Jesus Christ and we are in fellowship with him.”

South Sudan Joins The National Conference

One of the most powerful moments of the conference came when seven delegates from South Sudan, supported by Global Mission Partners, were introduced. Their leader, Paulino Bol, was invited to address the gathering.

South Sudan is the newest national conference of Churches of Christ in the world. This formal connection point opens doors for churches to not only be connected and supported in their local region, but welcomed into a global family of churches who support each other in many ways.

South Sudan remains one of the world’s poorest nations and continues to carry the scars of conflict. Paulino’s father was executed during the war.



Dr. Mark Riessen, centre, with fellow attendees.

The churches he leads now minister to refugees from North Sudan, people often associated with the violence that devastated their country. To serve them well, they have even learned Arabic.

“In order to be hospitable people, we need to learn the language of those who have been our aggressors. This is what Christ calls us to do,” he said.

Churches of Christ in South Sudan has its foundation built on hospitality, forgiveness and reconciliation. This is all underpinned by a deep sense of unity – the same value shared across churches of Christ worldwide.

The Value Of Pamoja

Anne Simpson, our state Executive Leader (Interim) is also chair of the National Council of Churches of Christ in Australia, which represents around 300 churches nationwide. She believes Australia's continued connection with the international Churches of Christ family is an essential part of continuing our movement's legacy.

"In our DNA, in our history, there's always been something of collegiality," she said. "We aren't held together by hierarchy, we're held together by the Lordship of Christ."

Historically, Churches of Christ in Australia have worked nationally to support global mission and to raise up leaders for ministry. Today, that continues through our local partnerships such as Global Mission Partners and the Australian College of Ministries (ACOM).

"All of those things are about taking the gospel outward into our communities," Anne said.

"That's what's achievable when you have unity, to be able to do that together."

Anne believes that unity at state, national, and international levels requires maturity and intention, including being in community at events like Global Christian Connection.

"The work of unity is the work of being able to hold difference and diversity while finding the common path or language that allows us to still be together under the Lordship of Jesus," she said.

"Unity is the miraculous," Anne said. "When Jesus prays for unity in John's Gospel, he prays for it because it requires the miraculous."

Reflecting on his time at this conference, Dr. Mark Riessen offered an important perspective on our Australian context. Conversations at home often focus on declining attendance, limited resources and the challenge of reaching people with the gospel.

In Kenya, Mark encountered a different reality.

"What I found in Africa is that evangelism and church planting is genuinely flourishing," he said. "The main resource they have is prayer."

As the global churches of Christ continue to connect across cultures and contexts, the invitation is the same: To pursue a unity that reflects the heart of Christ.



Pastor Paulino Malou representing Churches of Christ in the capital, Juba.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that *all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.* May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

—John 17:20-21 (NIV)

Group photo on the beach at Drastic Camp.



Drastic Camp: Limitless

Tribal team chants and worship music filled The Tops Conference Centre during the 2025 Spring school holidays, as 139 young people and 54 leaders from across the network gathered for Drastic Camp.

Drastic is our network's annual youth camp for students in Years 7 to 12. The 2025 program, themed "Limitless!", invited young people to explore the limitless love of God through worship, teaching, activities, small groups and time together in community.

For Pete Sargent from Connect Church Engadine, who directed the camp alongside Brianna Sargent and Tina Phillips, the theme spoke to the fears and barriers many young people carry.

"We worship God and sometimes we live with these walls and these barriers up," Pete said. "Yet introducing them to this theme of limitlessness shows that God himself is limitless."

Throughout the week, campers wrote reflections on a testimony wall, with silver notes gradually filling the space. For Pete, the wall became a visible reminder of how God was meeting young people during camp.

For Logan, a camp leader from Tribe Youth Engadine, serving at Drastic was deeply personal.

"I serve because I know what a life without God was like," she said. "Now having found Him and the complete and utter joy that I have with Him is so unreal that I just can't wait to share that with everyone around me."



SYNC Camp: On Expedition With Jesus

More than 110 children and 50 volunteer leaders gathered at The Tops Conference Centre during the Spring school holidays last September for SYNC Camp, a five-day camp for children in Years 3 to 7 exploring what it means to be "On Expedition With Jesus."

"Expedition" invited children to see faith as an ongoing journey with God as both guide and companion. Through the program, leaders helped campers connect the adventure of camp with the deeper invitation to trust God, follow His direction, and grow in faith.

Camp Director Jess Love described the week as a joyful celebration of what God was already doing among campers and leaders.



"Young people are meeting Jesus, campers are enjoying themselves and we're just celebrating everything that God's already done this week," Jess said.

For Ramsar Kong Lang, who came to camp for the first time with Wagga Wagga Christian Church as a camp intern, the week helped him think more deeply about trusting God.

"I love the activities, the high ropes, the carts, and what we learn about God," Ramsar said. "In life, you're going to make many decisions, but you've got to trust God and have faith in Him to choose for you."



Images above: Having fun and making friends at SYNC camp.

Upcoming camps



SYNC and Drastic Camps are held each year, as well as Uprising (our youth discipleship camp). Details for upcoming camps and other network events are available on our events page at ccnswact.org.au/events

Selah: Young Adults Make Room To Rest In God



Today, young adults live in a world that rarely slows down. Study, work, church life and constant digital connection can leave little room to pause and reflect. Amid full calendars and competing expectations, rest can feel counter-intuitive.

This is why the team behind the recent network Young Adults Retreat was passionate about providing a counter-cultural message.

The retreat in January was shaped by the conviction that for many young adults, even faith can quietly become about doing rather than being.

Spiritual identity can tend to be shaped by performance rather than presence with God, and serving, leading and showing up can begin to define a sense of worth. The message shared with our network's next generation was clear in the sessions and conversations across the weekend – your value does not come from what you do for God, but from who you are as His child.

“Sometimes our value and our worth sit on what we do in our local church,” said retreat director Pete Sargent. “We love what we do, but that’s not where God values us. God values us as His children.”

Gathering at The Tops from 16-18 January for a retreat themed ‘Selah’, which centred on Psalm 46:10 (NIV), “*Be still and know that I am God,*” more than 70 young adults stepped into a shared space of rest, reflection and renewed identity.

“The whole theme of Selah was to pause and just wait and sit with God,” said Pete. “We really felt like this year was about creating room for Jesus to move.”

“It’s been encouraging to see the need and the heart for Jesus within our young adults, not just in Sydney but across the movement,” Pete said. This hunger was clear by the distance young adults travelled to be there, with five driving 12 hours from Broken Hill, two flying from Lismore, and one from Canberra.

When heavy rain interrupted plans for worship and a walk at the beach, unplanned quiet time opened space for deeper conversation, reflection and connection.

Hudson from Broken Hill Church of Christ recalled, “For about the first 45 minutes, the quiet time was brilliant, really peaceful. There was kind of this light mist around and then the heavens opened and it was torrential downpour. I got drenched, but it was a good experience.”

Alongside worship and teaching from Abi Skelly, Andy Chung, Jono Prince, and Mitch Salmon from Global Mission Partners, the retreat also focused on building healthy rhythms for life. A Saturday morning session explored practical ways to begin the day with Jesus, helping young adults think about sustainable habits once they returned home.

“I’ve seen a lot of our young adults and emerging leaders get burnt out because they just go and go and go,” Pete said. “You can’t sustain that long term. There has to be a healthy process in place.”

In another workshop, participants took part in a guided quiet labyrinth walk, pausing and breathing before entering a space of rest and then retracing their steps. The practice was designed to help them slow down, focus on God and create space to listen.

For Alicia, it became more than just a walk. As she moved through the path, she found herself becoming more aware of God’s presence and what He might be saying to her heart.

“I was a little self-conscious, thinking people were watching me walk,” she said. “But I paused and realised it didn’t really matter. I needed to do this for God and not worry about what other people were thinking.”

An unexpected highlight of the weekend was a baptism in the Grevillea pool on Saturday night for Georgia Cross, former Tops intern and current Program Leader and Designer at The Tops. During worship, she asked if she could take this step to mark a significant step in her faith journey.

By the end of the weekend, Selah had become more than a theme. It became a commitment to return to daily life and local church with a renewed understanding of rest, identity and trust in God.



Image left: Georgia being baptised.
Top: One of the powerful worship sessions.
Bottom: Moments of joy at the Young Adults Retreat.

Read more



Creating spaces for young adults to connect, worship and learn has been a particular focus in the network recently. In addition to the Young Adults Retreat, a powerful worship night for young adults was held for the first time at Restore Church Castle Hill.

Network Resources Spotlight



Watch the podcast

youtube.com/
watch?v=pqVVCo-AZvo



**Collective Conversations
Podcast: “From Hero to Host”**

Did you catch this conversation between Jeff Nagle from Coast Community Church, Naomi Giles (formerly from Nations Heart), and Kym Dixon and Josh Gibbon on the Network Resource Team?

They discuss becoming a leader who is the host of a community, rather than its hero, unpacking what we’ve learnt in the last year from exploring Open Space Technology with Michael Wood as a network.

Curious about Open Space Technology?
Read our story: ccnswact.org.au/every-voice-invited

**Small Group Guide:
A Companion Resource To
Taste And See**

The Belly & Bones cohort created this guide to help groups make sacred space for honest conversation and reflection as they journey through the creative journal, *Taste And See*.

Included in the guide are 7 sessions exploring themes from *Taste And See*: Ache, Story, Wonder, Hope, and Courage. Scripture, prayer, and creative practice interweave through each session, offering a rich mix of material and prompts for group discussion and personal reflection.

The guide not only offers ideas to study, but is a living invitation to pause, to notice, to create, to heal, and to grow.



**Download or
order today**

[ccnswact.org.au/
belly-bones-journal-purchase](https://ccnswact.org.au/belly-bones-journal-purchase)



Rosanne and Ian Berry from Dubbo Community Church welcomed Esther to the NSW Central West.



Queen Esther On Tour

Esther: Queen Of Courage

As part of the Belly & Bones cohort, Amy Morrison created this stunning piece of art titled “Esther, Queen of Courage”. Amy is a generous and discerning, kingdom-focused watercolour artist from Gumbaynggirr Country in Coffs Harbour.

Since the artwork was created, a large print of Amy’s Esther has been “on Tour” around the network with many of our churches getting to see her close up and hear more about the Belly & Bones project.

Find out more about Belly & Bones, meet the women behind the project and explore other creative pieces born out of their time together – visit ccnswact.org.au/belly-and-bones

Order prints

Order prints by emailing Amy at am.watercolours@gmail.com



**Watch the process of
making ‘Esther, Queen
of Courage’.**



Our Partners



Image: Conversation at Collective Gathering.



Forming Leaders For The Harvest: The Kenmore Institute For Church Planting

Across Australia, churches are asking a familiar question in a changing world: How do we faithfully live out the way of Jesus in our communities today? The newly launched Kenmore Institute for Church Planting at Australian College of Ministries (ACOM) is addressing that need by equipping leaders and helping local churches take root in their communities.

Led by Steve Gray, an experienced pastor and missional leader, the Institute is focused on church planting and renewal.

A decade ago, Steve and his wife stepped into Burleigh Heads Church of Christ on the Gold Coast, and led them in a process of renewal and church planting.

“We essentially took on a church that needed a new life,” Steve said. “Over time, it came back to life. It’s now full of new people, new families and new energy.”

Steve now brings this passion for renewal to Kenmore Institute. Rather than offering quick solutions, the Kenmore Institute is focused on forming leaders who can discern what God is doing in their context and respond with faithfulness.



“There’s no secret formula for church planting,” Steve said. “It’s about being ready for what God wants to do and learning to move at His pace.”

For ACOM Principal and CEO Neale Meredith, the Institute also carries a significant legacy. The name Kenmore honours Kenmore Christian College, which was established in Queensland in 1964 before later becoming part of ACOM’s story.

“The Kenmore part of the name recognises and honours the legacy of the Kenmore Christian College,” Neale said. “To create something that the movement of churches in Queensland for Churches of Christ identified with.”

As part of ACOM, the Institute brings together theological training and real-world practice.

“As I met with leaders of our movement across the country, it became very clear that church planting was high on everyone’s agenda,” Neale said.

In response, ACOM began developing church planting pathways beyond a single subject or short course, creating diploma, bachelor and master’s awards that Neale described as the first of their kind in Australia.

From traditional church plants to new church expressions, the goal remains the same: building Jesus-centred communities in local contexts.

“The heartbeat is not just to plant churches,” Steve said. “It’s to see people transformed by Jesus.”

At its core, the Institute meets a growing need for leaders formed for ministry today. Its focus is shaped around three priorities: exposure and permission, community and cohorts, and patterns and practices.

“We want to give students exposure to all of that and help them find what suits them,” Steve said. “We don’t just want to teach, we want to form people in the context of real ministry. Church planting is incredibly hard but it’s also incredibly beautiful.”

“If we can see leaders developed who are deeply formed, who understand their communities, and who can lead in a sustainable way, that can shape the Church for decades,” Steve said.

The Kenmore Institute exists to see that kind of leadership take root, so that more communities might encounter Jesus in lasting ways.

If this article sparks your curiosity and you’d like to know more, feel free to reach out to **Steve Gray** at sgray@acom.edu.au



Read more

Learn more about ACOM’s journey to announcing this global first.



The Australian College of Ministries

The Australian College of Ministries develops healthy, effective leaders who can positively impact their own corner of the world. The team at ACOM emphasises a missional focus, flexible learning, deep spiritual formation based on the life, teachings and values of Jesus Christ, work-based learning, and academic excellence.



A Camp That Gives Kids The Best Week Of Their Lives

—By Nikki Sealey

For over 20 years, The Tops has partnered with Southern Cross Kids Camps (SCKC) to host camps for at-risk primary-aged children in vulnerable living situations.

Many have experienced cyclical abuse, neglect and a host of other challenging issues. Many live in foster care, moving from home to home, lacking the stability and care needed to feel safe and secure. The camps are designed to interrupt these patterns, bringing respite in the form of fun and laughter back into their lives and help them develop the tools they need to build confidence, value, self-esteem and trust.

The Tops has played a significant role in this vital work, partnering with Kingsford Church of Christ (January camp) and Kingsway Church (April camp) and community groups to host two camps a year.

Children are selected through support agencies in the local community, and the camp is provided at a minimal fee, with the majority covered by The Tops.



One week at a camp might not seem like much, but to a child who's at-risk, it can be a circuit-breaker; a turning point for their life.

That's why a number of sponsors and providers supply goods and services at little to no cost, from food to transport, allowing The Tops to go all in to help the kids have a week they'll never forget.

In April, 22 campers arrived at Stanwell Tops for camp and had the time of their lives. From Archery and outdoor games in bright sunshine to indoor fun, there was a lot to lift their spirits and remind them of what it's like to enjoy life to the full.

The Tops staff love being involved and are released from their regular work roles to join the SCKC team to bring the best experience they can to the kids.

Georgia Culey, Camp coordinator at The Tops said, "One of the highlights of this camp is the Birthday Party. We love to celebrate the campers and part of that is giving them a birthday party with the works! We have party games, like "Pass the Parcel" and "Musical Chairs", buggy rides, an inflatable obstacle course and we also did air spray tattoos. This is an amazing time for these campers to be able to feel celebrated and just have some fun."

Just when you think it couldn't get any better, birthday presents donated from sponsors and providers were gifted to every child. And as the sun set, the campers came out of their cabins and were greeted with picnic blankets, fairy lights, upbeat tunes, and a Mexican food truck (Amigos), generously donated for the evening. Loud shouts of joy could be heard echoing across the site, and the energy and excitement were impossible to ignore.

The day wrapped up with a decorated birthday cake made by the camp's "Nana" and finished with the Have-a-Go show, a wonderful opportunity for campers to showcase their talents and be celebrated for who they are.

Ultimately, the hope is that every child that attends the camp, leaves feeling like they have been seen, heard and valued; small steps perhaps, but significant for living a life that isn't defined by the hardship that they have faced at a young age. This is transformative work.

Fresh Hope Communities is grateful to be able to partner with the SCKC team, the churches and all the sponsors, donors and providers to make this possible for these incredible kids.

For more stories like this one, head to freshhope.org.au/news-stories

Visit sckc.org.au to find out more about Southern Cross Kids Camps and how you can become a supporter.

Read more



Enjoyed this story?
Read another story about this project where camp leaders share more about what makes these camps so life-changing.

Fresh Hope Communities

Fresh Hope Communities (FHC) exists to create spaces that cultivate belonging and places that feel like home.

FHC is the welfare arm and Public Benevolent Institution entity of churches of Christ in NSW and ACT. For almost 90 years, FHC has been providing quality support and lifestyle choices across retirement, residential and respite settings, as well as conference and outdoor adventure experiences for school and community groups, and more recently, affordable housing.



A camper practices archery at The Tops.
Image opposite page: Beach day on camp.

From Prison To Kingdom Harvest: **Pastor Thaung Myint's Story**



Pastor Thaung Myint.

In the Christian faith, we are reminded that the story of the cross and resurrection is not distant history. It continues to unfold in lives transformed by grace. For Nai Thaung Myint, one of our partners in Thailand, that transformation began in prison.

Pastor Thaung did not grow up in the Christian faith and, in his younger years, made decisions that resulted in a nineteen-year imprisonment for drug smuggling in another country.

Prison was marked by suffering, isolation and regret. Yet it was there that God began to work in his heart. "I had heard the Gospel before, but I couldn't understand or accept it; in fact, I even opposed it," he said.

Through Bible courses, visits from prison missionaries, Scripture, and prayer, his heart slowly began to change. He later described it as a "revelation of the heart" that made him aware of his deep need for God and led him to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

While still incarcerated, he was baptised by a fellow believer and became involved in weekly worship gatherings within the prison.

He was mentored by visiting missionaries and sustained by the prayers of believers around the world. "Throughout my nineteen-year incarceration, I was sustained by the intercession of hundreds of brothers and sisters from across the globe."

"It was through the transformative power of prayer that I was empowered to conduct a prison ministry from within my cell."

Repeated transfers between prisons and buildings became unexpected opportunities. Prison authorities moved him five times because of the positive impact he was having on fellow inmates.

As he shared the Gospel, some prisoners came to faith and others experienced significant behavioural change through his pastoral care and encouragement.

"I was able to shine the light of Christ in the darkness," he explained, as he gathered fellow inmates for prayer and Sunday worship in each new prison building.

After his release, he pursued theological training at a Bible school in a refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border. Conditions were difficult, with language barriers, limited resources and the challenge of studying alongside much younger classmates.

Despite the challenges, those four years shaped his character and calling. "Four years of Bible school taught me to see everything positively, to accept, to be patient, to understand, to love, to hope, to trust, to be humble, to be persistent, and to be dedicated," he reflected.

Today, he serves as a missionary leading the Samut Songkhram Evangelism Center in Thailand. When he and his wife first arrived, they knew no one. They began visiting migrant workers in plantations, workshops and factories, building relationships patiently and faithfully.

Over time, the gospel was shared with thousands, hundreds responded in faith, and dozens were baptised. Weekly worship services were established, and children from migrant families began receiving educational support.

Today, the ministry also provides English, music and computer classes for Burmese migrant workers, creating opportunities for people to build practical skills while encountering the hope of Jesus Christ.

Looking back, he compared his life before Christ to a life lived in darkness.

"A life in the light is a life that I live by knowing and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ and putting Him first in my life," Thaung said.

Since 2018, Global Mission Partners has walked alongside Samut Songkhram Evangelism Center, helping establish the mission base and sustain ongoing work. Even when other family support ceased, Global Mission Partners and local partners helped keep the evangelistic centre open. He described this support as "a lifeline in the growth of our evangelistic ministry."

The Samut Songkhram Evangelism Center is part of Global Mission Partners' International Church Partnership program, giving Australian churches the opportunity to support and strengthen this growing ministry as it expands its outreach among Burmese migrant communities in Thailand.

Read more stories from Global Mission Partners at gmp.org.au/news-updates

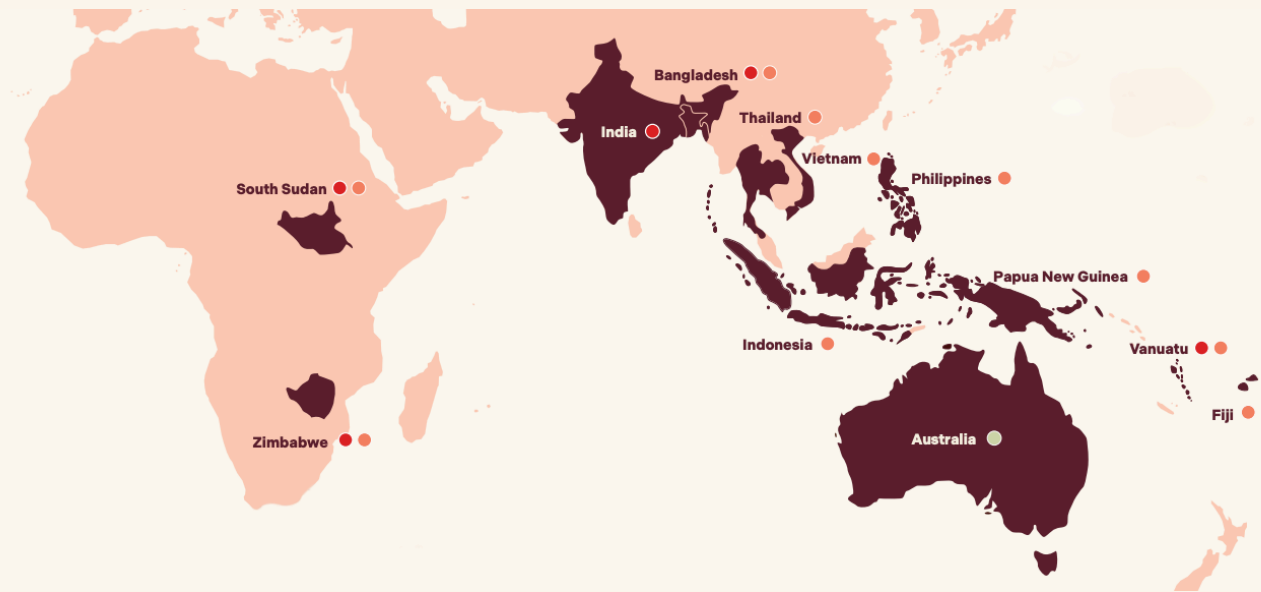
Read more

Read more about the
Samut Songkhram
Evangelism Center in Thailand.



GMP's Partners Around the World

- Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCO)A Projects
- International Church Partnership (ICP) Projects
- Indigenous Ministries Australia (IMA) Projects



Global Mission Partners

Global Mission Partners is the Christian mission and aid arm of the Australian Churches of Christ. For 130 years they've put love and faith into action through high-impact, long-lasting, local-led partnerships.

The team at Global Mission Partners longs to see a world where every Christian is active in God's mission, offering hope, love, and restoration throughout the world to people who need it the most.

They're also strong believers that their mission must work alongside what God is already doing in local communities, and in partnership with the local people. This is why they partner with people on the ground and resource them to be the change they want to see in their communities.

Whether partnering with local churches, working with Indigenous leaders, or providing critical relief and development projects to help break the cycle of poverty, they're 100% committed to helping people find their voice and change their lives.

Want to know more?

Discover more about Global Mission Partners and how you can support the work they do - both here in Australia, and across the world. Visit them online at gmp.org.au



Global Mission Partners' Nick Wight (right), Indigenous Partnerships National Manager, stands with Indigenous leaders at the first combined Indigenous Partnerships and Baptist Mission Australia Emerging Leaders Gathering in late 2025.

Share Your Story

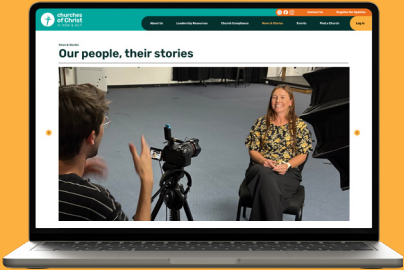
How are you seeing God at work?

We love sharing stories of the diverse and vibrant life of our network! If your church has a testimony to share, we'd love to hear from you, with a short description, at communications@ccnswact.org.au.

This could include:

- Inspiring stories of transformation and discipleship in people's lives
- Exciting developments in community and ministry
- A significant milestone to celebrate

While we can't share every story of God at work, every contribution we receive is welcome and valued.



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