



NAIDOC
highlights need
for change **P7**

**Seeing creation's
wonders through
microscope **P19****



Celebrating 25 years of service

Kirralee Nicolle

AN ANGLICAN-LINKED social service provider says it is helping more people than ever before as it celebrates 25 years.

Anglicare Victoria said in its 25th year it was continuing to advocate for reform, and for improved circumstances for vulnerable children and families.

It comes after Anglicare Victoria worked alongside government during COVID-19 lockdowns, to offer housing, food and other practical needs for people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage.

Story – P9



Brighton Grammar's Christian Neeson delivers donations to Anglicare Victoria's Chris de Paiva to support emergency relief during lockdowns.

Picture: supplied

Lambeth views mixed

Cost, sexuality issues deter some bishops from summit

Jenan Taylor

AT LEAST EIGHT AUSTRALIAN Anglican bishops declined to attend the midyear Lambeth Conference in the United Kingdom.

Bishops from Sydney, Tasmania, Bathurst, Armidale and North West Australia dioceses, variously cited costs and views on human sexuality among the reasons they were not going to the conference.

More than 650 bishops from across the world were gathering for the start of the Lambeth Conference as *The Melbourne Anglican* went to press.

The conference usually takes place every 10 years, but was cancelled in 2018 with the organisers saying more work was needed on "the structure of the Anglican Communion and the need for a continued journey towards a post-colonial model of global church".

In 2020 it was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Sydney diocese spokesperson said Archbishop Kanishka Raffel had written to the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, confirming that the Sydney bishops would not attend.

"Sydney Bishops have not attended the Lambeth Conference since 1998, due to the presence of some who have flouted the resolutions made at that meeting, and the

absence of some who have upheld them," the spokesperson said.

It came as organisers prepared for the opening of the Lambeth conference, despite a boycott from the Anglican primates of Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda. The primates issued an open letter to Archbishop Welby saying they would boycott the conference because the Church continued to fail to address questions of revisionism in line with the rise of secular culture in the Church. In a separate statement the primates said they represented almost half of the world's Anglicans.

The Diocese of Tasmania also confirmed Bishop Richard Condie would not be attending but gave no

reason. The North West Australia Diocese said that because there had been no replacement since Bishop Gary Nelson's retirement, they would not have a representative.

Bathurst diocese's Bishop Mark Calder said cost considerations were why he was unable to attend.

Tickets alone were an estimated \$8500 per person.

However, Bishop Calder said he wanted to see the Church concentrate on making spreading the good news of Jesus the main item on the program. He said climate change and other matters on the agenda were important, but the Church's call should be Jesus's call to go into all the world and make disciples.

"If we made that the central focus of what the Church is all about, then actually everything else will fall into place, because people who are mature disciples will take care of the environment, and we'll look after the poor, and we'll look after refugees," Bishop Calder said. "But if we don't make that the main theme, then we actually lose sight of what the actual main thing is."

Brisbane's Bishop Cameron Venables said he and other Brisbane bishops would attend instead of Archbishop Phillip Aspinall, who had already travelled a number of times this year to conferences.

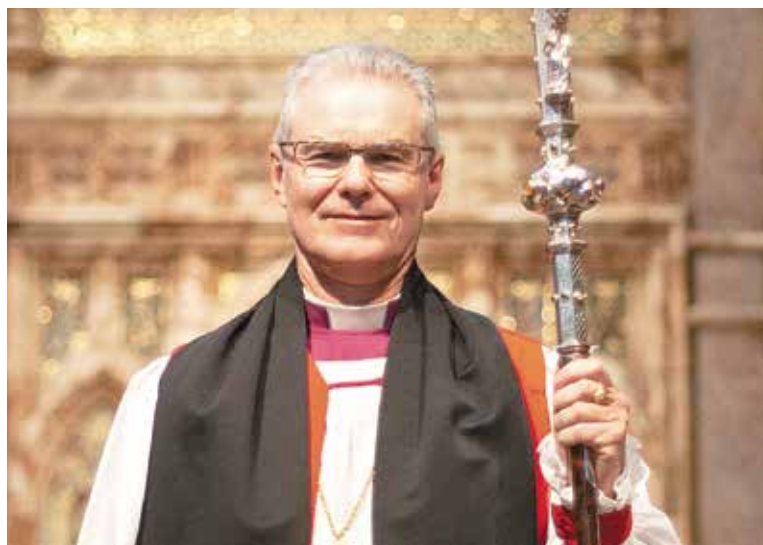
• Continued – P6

Pray for first steps towards reimagining future

Archbishop Philip Freier

THERE HAS BEEN SOME interesting commentary about the results of the 2021 Census, particularly in respect to religious affiliation. This question is optional but was answered by 93 per cent of those who completed the census. That high response suggests to me that it is a relevant question that Australians have clarity about and about which they are willing to identify their own position. As it has been in previous censuses, Anglicans were the second largest Christian community with about one in 10 Australians identifying as Anglican. Compared with the 2001 census, when Anglicans were 21 per cent of the Australian population, this represents a very significant decrease in terms of the proportion of the total Australian population. Similar declines are recorded in other denominations as well.

Quite apart from the internal dynamics that these changes activate within Australian Anglicanism and many other Christian communities, there is a risk that the decline of Christian identification lessens the engagement of Christians in the public life of our society. It is a paradox that over the past two decades there has been a strong growth of Anglican community service organisations as well as Anglican schools across the country. In



“It is vital that we are out and visible in our community, engaging with people and not retreating into sectarian isolation.”

Melbourne the financial turnover of our three largest community service organisations, Anglicare, Benetas and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, exceeds that of the diocese, including all of the parishes, by many times. The combined Anglican schools would be greater by another order of magnitude

again.

I'm glad that we enjoy a very constructive relationship with our agencies and our colleges and schools. They are separately constituted bodies and seek to interpret their Anglican and Christian character in some very creative ways. Of course they are not the



parochial church that is, by and large, the constituent element of the diocese as an organisation. It is in the parishes and authorised Anglican congregations that the foundational responsibility of the church to “make the Word of God fully known” is exercised. It is vital that we continue to forge strong connections with the congregational life of the Church and its community service and educational organisations.

Back in 2011 I held a conversation in Federation Square called “Better to give than to receive”. I asserted then that Australian society and public discourse was marked by “an optimism about a secular ethic, but a doubtfulness about the value of explicitly Christian motivation”. I think that the past decade has confirmed that observation, at least as evidenced in our press and broadcast media. The census figures may well be further evidence of this disposition.

We are embarking on a further

stage of our “Reimagining the Future” project. The first step was to offer resources to each of our parishes; this next step will be to work more intensively with a cohort of around 30 parishes that have emerged out of COVID with significant challenges to their ministry vitality. At the heart of this work is the conviction that the life-giving power of the gospel to transform human life is as important to our society as it ever was. God's faithfulness exceeds our human response, we will always be faced with the reality of this gap.

In some seasons the headwinds of secularism and even cynicism about faith seem greater but I suspect that every generation has needed to face the fact of its unique task of proclaiming the gospel in its own cultural context. If the census is any guide, contemporary evangelism will be met with clear views about religion and religious people. Some of these views will be unsympathetic or perhaps even hostile. Notwithstanding this possibility, it is vital that we are out and visible in our community, engaging with people and not retreating into sectarian isolation. Pray for the next steps of “Reimagining the Future” and for our combined Christian witness in the world around us.

Philip Meller

Clergy Moves

Vacant Appointments as of 19.07.2022:

Holy Trinity, Bacchus Marsh with Christ Church, Myrniong and St George's Balliang; St Stephen's, Bayswater; St Martin, Belgrave Heights; Parish of Box Hill (from October 2022); St Edward, Blackburn South; St Peter, Bundoora; St John Chrysostom, Brunswick West; St Faith, Burwood; St Mark, Camberwell (from December 2022); St Catharine, Caulfield South; St Alban, Coburg West; St Luke's, Cockatoo; St Philip, Collingwood; Darebin South; St Mark, Dromana; St Margaret, Eltham; Christ Church, Geelong; St Stephen, Greythorn; Holy Trinity, Hampton; St James, Ivanhoe (from October 2022); St Matthias, Mernda; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; St Matthew, Panton Hill; St George the Martyr Queenscliff and St James Point Lonsdale; St Mark, Reservoir; St Stephen's, Richmond; All Saints' Carlotta Tye Memorial, Selby; St Andrew, Somerville; Christ Church, South Yarra; Christ Church, St Kilda (from October 2022); St Luke, Sydenham; St Thomas, Upper Ferntree Gully; St Thomas, Winchelsea with Holy Trinity, Barrabool and St Paul's, Deans Marsh; St Paul, Westmeadows; St Matthew, Wheeler's Hill (from November 2022); Christ Church, Whittlesea with St Peter's, Kinglake

Appointments:

AROU, The Revd Joseph, appointed Assistant Priest, St James, Pakenham, effective 23 June 2022

BOWIE, The Revd Michael Nicholas Roderick, appointed Incumbent, St Peter's Anglican Church, Melbourne, effective 5 July 2022

CARRICK, The Revd John, appointed extension of Area Dean, Deanery of Waverley, effective 24 July 2022

LANCASTER, The Revd Christopher, appointed extension of Area Dean, Deanery of Williamstown, effective 23 June 2022

PACKIANATHAN, The Revd Santaseelan, appointed Incumbent, St John's Anglican Church, Bentleigh, effective 21 June 2022

WESLEY, The Revd Glen, appointed Priest-In-Charge, St Aidan's Anglican Church, Strathmore, effective 14 September 2022

Permission to Officiate:

LANG, The Venerable Edwin, appointed as Renewal of Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 16 June 2022

PROWD, The Revd Roger, appointed as Renewal of Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 16 June 2022

RAIKE, The Revd John Alan, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 9 June 2022

Resignations:

GARCIA, The Revd Christopher Mark, Priest-In-Charge, St Luke's, Cockatoo, effective 30 July 2022

HEALY, The Revd Matthew, Priest-In-Charge, St Stephen's, Burnley, effective 18 September 2022

Retirements:

CRISPIN, The Revd Gerald (Jed) Hugh, Priest-In-Charge, St Matthew's, Wheelers Hill, effective 25 November 2022

See Tributes at www.tma.melbourneanglican.org.au

Correspondence regarding clergy moves may be emailed to the Registry Office at registrar@melbourneanglican.org.au



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Wednesdays	1pm	Lunchtime Concert Series (see website for upcoming concerts)
Sun 7 Aug	10am 4pm	Hiroshima Peace Day Service Choral Evensong with members of MCCA Preacher: The Revd Alister McCrae
Sat 13 Aug	12–4pm	Moorhouse Symposium: 500 years of Martin Luther's <i>September Testament</i> 1522
Sun 21 Aug	3.30pm	175th Anniversary Service at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral
Fri 2 Sep	6.30pm	ANZCO NextGen Organ Concert

REGULAR SERVICES

Sundays	8am 10am 11.45am 4pm	Holy Communion (BCP) Choral Eucharist Bible Study Choral Evensong
Weekdays	12.15pm 5.10pm	Holy Eucharist Choral Evensong or Evening Prayer

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Hospital chaplains vital, undervalued

Jenan Taylor

HOSPITAL CHAPLAINS ARE still being viewed as non-essential even though they have supported more people than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spiritual care workers say they have been helping patients, families and an increasing number of health care staff in hospitals. But according to the peak body for spiritual carers in the health sector, some hospitals did not value their contributions.

Spiritual Health Association chief executive officer Cheryl Holmes said this was especially the case in some regional areas, and in hospitals where models of spiritual care relied heavily on volunteers and external faith representatives.

Ms Holmes said in those settings many had been stood down as non-essential.

She said in one Victorian hospital there was a chief executive who had become particularly aware of the capacity for spiritual care to support staff and had enabled that to happen.

Outside of Victoria, however, there was considerable variation around how spiritual care was thought about and delivered, Ms Holmes said.

Anglican chaplain the Reverend Dennis Emery said he had supported an increasing number of staff as well as patients and the families of patients at the Austin Hospital.

Mr Emery said anxiety and stress levels had soared among medical staff in particular, as restrictions continued for patients, visitors and staff inside hospitals.

Because of that staff had few opportunities get away from their work or turn to families or their usual social networks, and were often highly traumatised, he said.

Researcher and Barwon Health pastoral care coordinator, the



Hospital chaplain the Reverend Dennis Emery at work in the Austin Hospital.

Picture: supplied

“People’s spiritual, emotional and religious domains also have to be looked after.”

David Drummond

Reverend David Drummond said that in general although lots of facilities were constantly requesting support for patients, many chaplains were still largely regarded as non-essential clinically for the ongoing care of a patient.

He said that where emotional support and end of life ritual was essential for faith reasons, liturgical and spiritual support providers usually had to negotiate access to patients.

But Mr Drummond said health care staff usually changed their perception of chaplains if they

had a built a relationship of trust with them. He said there had been some recognition of the role of the spiritual workforce as part of a shift from a clinical interventionist stance to more holistic person-centred care in hospitals.

“For hospitals to offer person-centred care, it has to be more than just the treatment of the condition. People’s spiritual, emotional and religious domains also have to be looked after,” Mr Drummond said.

He said in some settings some chaplaincy work was being regarded more and more as an

allied health discipline, akin to social work and occupational therapy. He said this was a trend likely to continue, as would the focus on support of hospital staff.

Ms Holmes said Spiritual Health Australia was encouraged by a recent national study from McCrindle Research on the spirituality, wellbeing and spiritual care in hospitals.

It showed that particularly young people wanted emotional and spiritual sources of strength and support in hospitals.

Ms Holmes said that meant they wanted a spiritual care workforce that was well qualified and skilled at being able to listen deeply to stories. She said the association had been working toward having spiritual care practitioners recognised as health professionals, so that they would be seen as integral members of the multidisciplinary team.

‘Danger’ in misrepresenting Roe v. Wade

Kirralee Nicolle

ABORTION LAWS in Australia are unlikely to change in the wake of the US Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade, according to legal experts and activists.

Experts say that the decision to overturn constitutional abortion legislation in the US will have little effect on the handling of the topic in Australia.

Former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton stated to US talk show host Gayle King that she believes “women will die” due to the resulting restrictions on abortion.

On the other side of the debate, American conservative commentator Allie Beth Stuckey tweeted on 25 June that Roe v. Wade had been “a scourge on our nation for 50 years”.

Medical ethicist Dr Denise Cooper-Clarke said the decision would have little effect on Australian approaches to abortion.

“There is a danger in misunderstanding and misrepresenting the situation,” Dr Clarke said.

“In Australia, it’s very unlikely that the laws will change, but there may be a lot more noise about it.”

She said that rather than being necessarily providing a judgment call on the moral and ethical nature of abortion, the decision handed the matter to individual states to decide.

Dr Clarke did say, however, that there was likely to be more activism and lobbying about the matter in Australia because of the decision.

Australian human rights lawyer and National Justice Project principal solicitor George Newhouse concurred with Dr Clarke that the decision would have “virtually no impact” on the Australian legal context.

He said that since Australian abortion laws were already decided by individual states, they weren’t enshrined in the constitution as was the case in the US until last week.

“It’s very unlikely that the laws will change, but there may be a lot more noise about it.”

Denise Cooper-Clarke

Mr Newhouse said the absence of human rights in the Australian constitution should be a matter of great concern to all citizens.

“Issues of women’s rights are generally dictated by our parliaments. They can be taken away at the will of the parliament,” he said.

Australian Christian Lobby

political national director Wendy Francis said that the decision wouldn’t really change the nature of the political conversation around abortion in Australia, but that it provided encouragement to pro-life advocates that their message was being heard.

She said that the decision pointed to a change in how the matter was to be handled in the US rather than a significant change in public opinion.

“In one way, the States copied Australia for once. They have put abortion back in the hands of Americans,” she said.

“It’s a much more democratic way of approaching any of these controversial issues.”

Ms Francis added that the ACL was hoping to see more traction on the issue of abortion, particularly regarding the *Children Born Alive Protection Bill* which lapsed in April and the removal of Medicare funding for sex-selection abortions.

Clive Tadgell mourned

Family and friends are mourning the death of former chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne Clive Tadgell AO.

The Honourable Robert Clive Tadgell was also a longtime member of St George’s Anglican Church Malvern.

He has been remembered for his outstanding legal career, sharp mind, sense of service, and sense of humour.

Mr Tadgell was Chancellor of the Diocese from 1981 to 2007, serving five Archbishops. He served as both deputy president and president of the Appellate Tribunal of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Mr Tadgell is survived by his wife Christina, two sons, Hamish and Malcolm, and three grandchildren.

New direction for *Eternity*

Eternity News has announced its decision to move away from reporting on current events from a Christian perspective.

It said it would instead seek to serve the church and speak with hope, faith, and love about the issues that affect Christians in their everyday lives.

Owned since 2011 by the Bible Society, the outlet published the news in an article by executive director Grant Thomson.

Mr Thomson said in the article that the news cycle was an increasingly contentious space, particularly due to the role of social media.

“Moving forward we will continue to tell stories, but they won’t be as news-focused,” he wrote.

Synod dates announced

Melbourne Synod is set to be held from the 12 October 2022 as a hybrid event.

Archbishop Philip Freier has announced that the program is set to run from 7pm to 10:30pm from Wednesday 12 October until Friday 14 October, and from 9:30am to 5pm on Saturday 15 October. If it is needed to complete the Order of Business, Synod will then reconvene on Saturday 3 December.

The evening sessions will be held by videoconference, with the first Saturday session at St Paul’s Cathedral.

The possible session set for 3 December will be held at a venue which is yet to be confirmed.

This session will be the 53rd Melbourne diocese synod.

Why this Surf Coast church meets outdoors

Jenan Taylor

HOLDING SERVICES outdoors, even in winter, has proved practical for a Surf Coast church as it connects with new people.

City on a Hill Surf Coast has adapted its weekly services for the outdoors, and people attend whatever the weather.

They stay in their cars when it rains, and when conditions are fine, they bring their camp chairs or picnic blankets and set up under the trees. Some people bring firepits, and others their dogs.

Lead pastor the Reverend Louis Glazebrook said the outdoor church resonated with people who were reconnecting with the church again or going for the first time.

"We found that this very different type of meeting, literally a church without walls, is very disarming for people," Mr Glazebrook said.

He said the church launched in 2019 but moved to Zoom with just 40 worshippers when the pandemic began. The Victorian government's COVID rules then pushed them towards holding services outside, when gatherings of up to 50 people only were allowed.

But Mr Glazebrook said when the first lockdowns finished, the church found that the building they had intended to use was closed for



City on a Hill Surf Coast meets outside on the grounds of St Wilfred's Anglican Church.

Picture: supplied

renovations. Because their goal was to facilitate community, and being outside seemed to give them means to do so, the church decided to stay there.

"At the time social distancing was a really big thing, so if people were using their cars, then they were already socially distanced, so we were killing two birds with one stone," Mr Glazebrook said.

He said as summer of late 2020 approached, more and more people began to attend.

"Even though people were saying it was great, I decided to ask people individually, especially our

older parishioners how they felt about it, and to my surprise they really loved it," Mr Glazebrook said.

Despite that, leaders were continuing to scout for potential venues, Mr Glazebrook said. But they conducted a cultural analysis, and found reasons to believe that in that area, the church would succeed if it continued outdoors.

"People who lived on the Torquay coast loved the great outdoors, the bush, the sand and sunshine, so we kept meeting in that way" Mr Glazebrook said,

Now around 65 to 70 people attend each week. Most are fami-

lies and singles, and a quarter are retirees and empty nesters. Services take place on an auditorium-shaped block of land owned by St Wilfred's Anglican church.

Mr Glazebrook said City on a Hill paid an honorarium to use the space, cut the grass and clean the existing chapel's bathrooms, to help St Wilfred's aging congregation.

During the City on a Hill services there are no projector screens, and every second Sunday the church distributes printed bulletins with the readings and prayers.

But members use a radio transmitter, so that people who are in

their cars during rainy weather can follow along with the radio, drive-in style.

Mr Glazebrook said the church made a feature of the peace greeting, making it an intentional ritual where individuals would spend 10 minutes meeting and getting to know someone else. He said if people were in cars because the weather was bad, they were encouraged to move to another car and meet other people.

Mr Glazebrook said because of the large cohort of children there were also weekly children's programs and an intergenerational service focused on what the children had done for that month.

He said people who weren't engaging in church were engaging once again because it was a very easy access, non-intimidating way of being with people. The new mode of church also helped dispel some of the reasons many people might use for not attending.

"The old age excuse of 'I could never go into a church building, I'd burn up', is just not cutting it anymore because they don't have to go into a church building, they just have to go through a church gate," he said, "So, it is a viable way of investigating the story of Jesus."

"I don't think it would work in Melbourne, but here it works really well."



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Sunday numbers hit by fatigue, COVID cases

Kirralee Nicolle

ANGLICAN CHURCHES across Melbourne have been hit with a drop in attendance on Sundays due to exhaustion following COVID-19, ministers say.

It may be putting extra pressure on regular attendees, who then take on more tasks on rosters.

Merri Creek Anglican senior minister Reverend Dr Peter Carolane said that the average attendance rate had lowered, according to statistics he kept.

Dr Carolane said that overall numbers in the church had not dropped. Instead, he said that prior to COVID-19, the average adult had attended 59 per cent of Sunday services. Following the pandemic, this number had dropped to 44 per cent.

But Dr Carolane said that the drop in attendance rates didn't necessarily reflect his parishioner's commitment levels.

"It has the overall effect of looking like people aren't attending," he said.

"Our thinking is that the main reason numbers have dropped is that if one person in a family has a sniffle, the whole family doesn't come.

"This year's been one of the worst years for influenza. On top of that, there's still a general lethargy



Reverend Luke Pedersen says attendance at his parish has changed since COVID-19. Picture: supplied

around. There's a residual effect after the lockdown years where people are more tired."

Dr Carolane said that mental health issues had been cropping up in the community as well, and that many were still fearful of crowded environments.

"It feels like as a minister, you have to have a lot more patience

and lower expectations for what you can achieve," he said.

"The most important thing is that we can keep meeting in person [and] care for people."

All Saints Clayton senior minister Reverend Charles Fletcher said that attendance at All Saints had become more erratic since COVID-19.

"There's a residual effect after the lockdown years where people are more tired."

Peter Carolane

"Every week, numerous people are pulling out at the last minute," he said.

Mr Fletcher said that he had thought this would be the year that the church got ahead in planning and organising programs for reaching the community, but he said that instead it had become clear that the focus would instead be on recovering from the effects of the pandemic.

He said that despite this, parishioners seemed to still feel like they belonged in the community, and that they had even welcomed new attendees.

He said he believed this was due to the use of Zoom for services during lockdowns.

"It wasn't as slick as a livestream,

but it made people feel connected," he said.

NCLS Research found little change in overall religious service attendance levels in Australia since prior to the pandemic, with 21 per cent of research participants reporting regular attendance in 2021, as compared to 22 per cent in 2019.

However, recent census results from 2021 show that there has been an almost 10 per cent decline since 2016 in the number of Australians who identify as Christian.

RAFT Anglican Church Rowville assistant curate Reverend Luke Pedersen said that the pandemic had changed church attendance habits, but said it was mostly among those for whom church was a secondary priority to other Sunday activities, such as sporting events.

"Those who are regular – [attending] weekly or fortnightly – remain just as faithful and committed in their attendance," Mr Pedersen said.

"Those who [were previously] attending once a month have returned even less regularly. But our regular faithful members have returned in a similar way to before the pandemic."

But Mr Pedersen said this trend had put extra pressure on those regular attendees who shouldered the burden of volunteering.



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Alpha course absorbs aged care residents

Jenan Taylor

ABURWOOD CHURCH'S efforts to help people in aged care connect with Christianity is showing promising results.

St Thomas' has been running an Alpha course at the Freedom Burwood aged care facility since May.

Lead minister the Reverend John Carrick said a group of 10 residents had joined the course, and most seemed to come back every week.

Some had told him it was because they found the course very worthwhile, Mr Carrick said.

Having conducted monthly church services at the facility for years, he said he had noticed that the residents were particularly engaged.

Mr Carrick said it was something that in his experience was not usually the case, so it encouraged him to start the course there.

The Alpha format usually involves a group meeting over a meal, a video presentation and then a discussion about faith. At the end of the program there would be a retreat for participants.



Reverend John Carrick running aged care Alpha with residents of Freedom Burwood.

Picture: supplied

But at the aged care residence, Mr Carrick made sure each session ran for no longer than an hour and that it comprised the typical video program along with 30 minutes of discussion.

The meal part was naturally incorporated because the program started at 11.30am and the residents had lunch at 12.30pm.

He said the participants were absorbed with the video and conversations and that he kept things interactive and interesting by asking questions and trying not to use too many notes.

"Some people are very much into it and ask some quite probing questions. Then there are some who won't say as much but

are still engaged, and others who following along, quietly," he said.

He said some of the talk revolved around their children and how they engaged with faith.

One of the participants had been 102 years old, Mr Carrick said. "He'd been lucid and particularly thoughtful," Mr Carrick said.

Unfortunately, the man had moved out of the facility recently, but Mr Carrick was hopeful that there was a way for him to return to finish the program.

Instead of the retreat at the course's culmination, Mr Carrick was considering asking the group to do two intensive final sessions.

He said it would mean splitting each session into a morning and an afternoon gathering. But Mr Carrick said running Alpha at the facility had entailed negotiating some minor challenges.

They were usually around the odd person falling asleep, as the room where he conducted the gathering was warm and very comfortable.

He said occasionally a resident might walk out and that one or two of the participants were wrestling dementia.

Even so, the responses had been heartening, he said.

The facility's managers had also been pleased at the engagement they were seeing among the residents who participated.

"They seem keen for this to continue, so I wouldn't be surprised if Alpha was something that became offered annually," Mr Carrick said.

Faith groups seek law guidance

Jenan Taylor

FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS are among groups that have begun seeking guidance about the lawfulness of their approach to LGBTQIA+ people.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission say it has run workshops and courses for faith-based and professional organisations to educate them about their activities under the state's new conversion therapy law.

The Victorian government's conversion therapy ban started in February. Outlawing conversion practices in all settings, the law has been described as the toughest of its type in the world by advocates and critics.

Under the law, the Equal

Opportunity and Human Rights Commission can introduce criminal offences which would be overseen by Victoria Police.

But it also has a non-criminal response function enabling it to investigate reports of activities and educate individuals and organisations, among other operations.

Strategic communications head Aram Hosie said the commission had run education function workshops for an assortment of religious and professional bodies since the ban started. He said so far there had been no need for investigations, which would be the most serious aspect of the function, but were a last resort.

"The threshold for us to conduct the investigations are quite high, so we would do it if

there was evidence of multiple instances of practices occurring or if very serious harm has been done," Mr Hosie said.

He said the groups had approached the commission because they wanted a full understanding of what the law meant in the context of their work.

La Trobe university historian and social researcher Dr Tim Jones said he was aware that several churches or church organisations had been in touch with the commission for direction.

Dr Jones was a co-researcher on a recent study about the effects of faith-based conversion therapy on LGBTQIA+ people.

It had recommended that pastoral workers be better trained to support survivors of such activity.

Australian views mixed on Lambeth Conference attendance

• From – Page 1

He said that since the convention had been deferred because of COVID Anglican leaders around the world had been encouraged to form online Bible study groups and networks, connections which being physically present would advance.

Bishop Venables also said the opportunity for spouses to attend a dedicated program that included opportunity for discussion and prayer, would also enrich the life of the Communion.

The Melbourne Anglican understands that Melbourne diocese Assistant Bishops, and Archbishop Philip Freier will be at the conference.

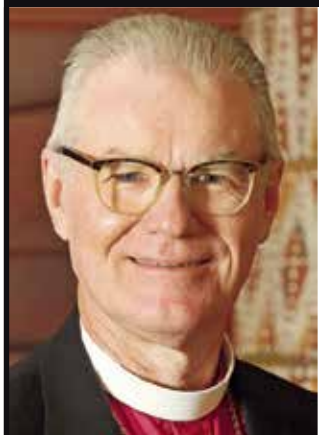
Writing in *The Melbourne Anglican* last month, Archbishop

Freier said the Lambeth Conference was one of the worldwide Communion's four instruments of communion. He anticipated that the discussions that would take place could be seen as contrary to the negative discourses pervading many forums.

Archbishop Welby and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon issued a joint response to the three African primates saying there would always be disagreements about faith and the Church but that they were usually dealt with through prayer and discussion.

Lambeth Conference had just begun as *The Melbourne Anglican* went to print. Full coverage will feature in the September edition.

Coping with the climate crisis



A new global survey carried out in 10 countries illustrates how anxious young people are feeling about climate change, the BBC reports. Nearly 60% of young people approached say they feel very worried or extremely worried. More than 45% say feelings about the climate affect their daily lives. Three-quarters of them say they find the future frightening. Over half (56%) say they think humanity is doomed. Two-thirds report feeling sad, afraid and anxious. Many feel fear, anger, despair, grief and shame – as well as hope.

Is the crisis as inevitable as they fear? Is there still time to stop the worst effects? What can young people do? Melbourne Anglican **Archbishop Philip Freier's** second public conversation for 2022 will focus on the climate crisis. He is joined by **Tony Rinaudo, Olivia Livingstone** and **Jack Lowman**. The discussion will be hosted by Melbourne Grammar School at 10:30 am **August 19**. As this is an **online event** please book via this link – <https://www.trybooking.com/CAGIG>

Tony Rinaudo
World Vision's senior climate action adviser, who achieved fame as "the forest maker" in Africa. A documentary about him described him as the man who might actually save the planet.



Olivia Livingstone
of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, activist and coordinator of their national schools program.



Jack Lowman
Melbourne Grammar School, secretary Sustainable Lifestyle Initiatives Committee.



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Brotherhood of St Laurence



Reverend Helen Dwyer.

Engagement beyond NAIDOC week vital

Jenan Taylor

ANGLICANS COULD be part of groundbreaking change for First Nations' Victorians according to an Indigenous church leader.

The Reverend Canon Helen Dwyer would like Anglicans to support Victoria's Indigenous communities beyond NAIDOC week by actively seeking to understand what was important to them and engaging with them.

Ms Dwyer said that would include learning about how Aboriginal Victorians were working towards a treaty, as well as the truth-telling process.

"Australia remains the only Commonwealth nation without a treaty with their First Nations' people. So, Victoria is leading the way in Australia," she said.

A St Paul's Cathedral Canon and chaplain of Melbourne Grammar school, Ms Dwyer's comments came as the Yoorrook Justice Commission released an interim report in July.

It details the harm and pain experienced by 200 elders, and the ongoing effects of discriminatory policies and beliefs.

Among the many who had related their experiences was Uncle Jack Charles who had spoken about his life-long struggles after being removed from his mother as an infant.

Ms Dwyer said Mr Charles' story was traumatising in a variety of ways, but that the injustices towards him and others were continuing.

"While it can be cathartic to share your story, it's only cathartic and useful when it's listened to and acknowledged and affirmed," Ms Dwyer said.

But Victorians could take charge of their own understanding of Indigenous people and culture.

The commission, and the First Peoples' Assembly's efforts to work toward self-determination, were a current opportunity for people to educate themselves about history and stay informed about what perpetuates their trauma, Ms Dwyer said.

She said just through reading the Yoorrook Justice Commission documents people might start to have questions about colonialism and could then research further.

"It's happening before their eyes. They can be a part of really positive change in Victoria," she said.

Christians urged to push for change

Jenan Taylor

AUSTRALIANS HAVE BEEN urged to celebrate the work of First Nations' church leaders by a Christian organisation during NAIDOC week.

NAIDOC's 2022 theme was Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!, a clarion call to keep pushing for changes that recognise the contributions of and support positive change for Indigenous people.

Common Grace said that in keeping with that theme, it was focussing on sharing the stories of past Aboriginal Christian leaders in the spirit of recognising their contributions to the Australian church.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Coordinator Bianca Manning said often Aboriginal Christian leaders' achievements went unheard, but that this year Common Grace had worked with Aunty Jean Phillips to bring attention to them.

Ms Manning said the stories that would be shared included those of William Cooper, Aunty Pearl Gibbs and Pastor Don Brady.

"So, we wanted Australians to reflect on their hard work and the sacrifices they had made to create change, and to feel encouraged to do the same," Ms Manning said.

But Ms Manning said another of Common Grace's major aims through and beyond NAIDOC week was to keep encouraging people to speak up about raising the age of criminal responsibility.

She said the group was asking people to take practical action and write to their state premier or attorney general about it, and had produced a template letter to make it easier to do so.

"We're trying to advocate that the age be raised to at least 14 and not 12 years old, which is what human rights standards also say it



Common Grace's Bianca Manning pictured with Aunty Jean Phillips.

Picture: supplied

"We wanted Australians to reflect on their hard work and the sacrifices they had made to create change, and to feel encouraged to do the same."

Bianca Manning

should be," Ms Manning said.

St Augustine's Moreland vicar the Reverend Angela Cook said she often uses Common Grace material to involve and engage

with Christian Indigenous perspectives in her church services.

Ms Cook said there were no Indigenous people among her congregation that she knew of.

She also said that it was sobering that census statistics showed there were fewer Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders or people who have connections with them in Victoria than ever before.

"I think that's one of the sad things that we as Victorians have to face, the fact that there's just much less representation. So, there are fewer voices to hear and that's why it's important to hear them," Ms Cook said.

The Common Grace template is available at [Raise the Age Letter commongrace.org.au/letter_raise_the_age](https://www.commongrace.org.au/letter_raise_the_age)

Indigenous name a possibility for church

Jenan Taylor

A COBURG church will consider adopting an Indigenous name in line with a local council move this NAIDOC week.

The Moreland city council decided to change the local government area name because "Moreland" was linked to a history of slavery.

The vote to change the name to "Merri-bek", a Woi-wurrung word meaning "rocky country" was accepted as NAIDOC week celebrations started.

The theme for this year's NAIDOC week, Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!, was a call to keep pushing for change for Indigenous people and recognising their contributions.

St Augustine's Moreland said its parish council would be considering the municipality's change and whether to follow suite.

Vicar the Reverend Angela Cook said most of the parish was supportive of the local government's name change, even though many didn't view the council's area

"We can honour and encourage and hear those [Indigenous] voices when we're moving forward."

Angela Cook

as their community per se.

Ms Cook said for St Augustine's identified with the natural environment of the creek that was Merri Creek itself and that was a surrounding feature in the area.

"Merri Creek is very much part of our community, and the heartbeat of the local area, not just the church community. So, I think

"Merri-bek" will really reflect that we're wanting to be a church of the community, and a church that reaches out to that community," she said.

But Ms Cook said the church had been on a path of renewal for four or five years.

She said the church sometimes incorporated the Wurundjeri translation of a hymn that used to be sung at a mission along the Yarra River into their services.

She said that had prompted St Augustine's parishioners to think about where they had come from and to recognise the traditional custodians of the land on which they gathered.

She said the church wanted to honour the fact that they were not the first people who lived there and were not the first people that God had spoken to.

But Ms Cook said NAIDOC week was also significant for her because it had grown from the "Coming of the Light" celebration, in which the good news of Jesus was adopted by the people of the Torres Strait Islands.

"In terms of hope and light, I think it's really important to acknowledge the catastrophic pain and violence that has been done to Indigenous people. But then we also need to look forward and see how we can honour and encourage and hear those voices when we're moving forward," Ms Cook said.

She said although there were no Indigenous parishioners at St Augustine's that she was aware of, she was guided by the material of Christian movement Common Grace to help give space to and engage with Indigenous voices.

Common Grace said that this year it was encouraging people to be part of celebrating Aboriginal culture, stories and history by recognising the contributions of Christian leaders.

These included leaders of historical and contemporary significance such as Aunty Pearl Gibbs and Uncle Ray Minniecon.

Common Grace also urged people to attending local NAIDOC week events and engage with their community.



Girls take part in a Girls Friendly Society event at St Alfred's Blackburn North. Picture: supplied

Celebrating 140 years of support, faith, friendship

Valerie Murcutt

WHO WOULD have thought that the faithful initiatives of one English woman would still be reverberating in the Melbourne diocese 140 years on?

In 1875 Mary Elizabeth Townsend of London stood strong and with determination to meet the challenge of the industrial revolution, which saw many young women flooding from the countryside to major centres looking for work, opportunity and a new

life. The Melbourne iteration of the organisation Townsend founded is set to celebrate 140 years in October. In much the same way that younger women are under pressure today, many encountered predators and others who sought to take advantage of them. They needed the support, friendship and encouragement which Mary Elizabeth Townsend and others provided. And so the Girls Friendly Society was born.

The GFS began in Melbourne in 1882, expanding rapidly

until about 300 branches had been established. The branches provided a four-pillar ministry program focussed on worship, study, work and play. It's a model that the St Alfred's Blackburn North GFS branch still uses in a modern form.

All current and past members are invited to celebrate 140 years on Saturday 22 October, from 1.30pm at St Alfred's Blackburn North.

For information, contact Valerie Murcutt at gfsmelbourne@hotmail.com.

Church gets messy, begins to be fruitful again

Jenan Taylor



St Nicholas' Mordialloc Messy Church. Picture: supplied.

A MORDIALLOC parish's Messy Church program has some new faces and for organisers it means their plans are showing fruit. St Nicholas' Messy Church service was running smoothly before COVID and that's how organisers see it working again.

Parishioner Karen Hayden said St Nicholas' started Messy Church in 2019 to revitalise the congregation and attract people who might not otherwise make it to church. The Mordialloc Messy service runs only once a month in the late afternoon, with art and craft or cooking classes, a short minutes of reflection and a shared meal. Ms Hayden said since starting again, the church realised it was attracting unchurched children and grandchildren of parishioners.

Patronal Festival celebrates church links to St Paul

Kirralee Nicolle

ST PAUL'S East Kew has celebrated their yearly Patronal Festival with a ceremony marking its link to St Paul.

Assistant priest Reverend Heidun Kunoo said that the church has been celebrating its link to St Paul for about 30 years, firstly with a themed meal and later with a more traditional festival.

Fellow St Paul's assistant priest Reverend Stacey Slater said that there was a personal significance to the celebration of their patron saint. Ms Slater said that she was encouraged at Paul's commitment to living the light of Christ and unashamedly preaching Him crucified.

"I personally find it a great encouragement to come into

work and be reminded of Paul's ministry," she said.

"I too have been placed here in East Kew so that I might live the light of Christ and to unashamedly preach Him

crucified, risen and reigning. Paul's letters are a great example of a follower of Christ enduring all that the world may throw at him while not compromising his belief."



The annual event at St Paul's East Kew featured all female clergy for the first time. Picture: supplied



Community of the Holy Name associate the late Rosemary Stretton with oblates Sandra Clayton and Joan Durdin. Picture: supplied

Chance to explore contemplative practices with Anglican sisters

Kirralee Nicolle

A COMMUNITY of Anglican sisters is offering an opportunity to explore contemplative practices without leaving Melbourne.

Community of the Holy Name Mother Superior Sister Carol Tanner said Quiet Days offered a chance for those who are less familiar with contemplative practices to have a taste of what they are like.

The Cheltenham centre is an Anglican convent and spiritual retreat centre with a chapel, retreat accommodation, reflective spaces and manicured grounds.

"It is a very safe place for anyone to explore and be able to say what they want to say without being inhibited," Sister Tanner said.

Sister Tanner said that there were sisters present who were trained in spiritual direction and others who were available to answer questions or listen to concerns.

She said their hope for the Days of Prayer and Reflection was that attendees would be impacted positively by the opportunity to enjoy the quiet and the teachings from the sisters.

The Days of Prayer and Reflection are held on the first Thursday of each month from March until November. To find out more, see here: chnmelb.org/chn-prayer-days.

From the editor's desk



GOOD! VERY little space for me again. It's fantastic to read all your stories! What's most notable about this edition though is the volume and range of theological opinion in the next few pages. It's so valuable to hear and better understand people's different perspectives on an issue. Thank you!

Help needed to get bell ringing

Jenan Taylor

A PORT Melbourne church hopes a ringing bell will call locals to worship, but the bell needs a stand first.

Holy Trinity locum Bishop Philip Huggins has found a church bell with a missing stand in its courtyard and is appealing for help to get a suitable one.

Bishop Huggins said he didn't know what had happened to it, but that it belonged to Holy Trinity, was a good-sized bell, and needed a sturdy structure.

"We want the bell to sound in Bay Street, Port Melbourne calling people to worship, recalling that God is present and reminding us that 'All time is God's time,' as St Benedict says," Bishop Huggins said.

He said he had recently met a parish council member who said that he became involved with the church because he'd been in bed one Sunday morning when he heard a church bell ringing.

"He turned to his wife and said, 'I'm going to church,' and she said, 'You never go to church. What's going on? Is there something you're not telling me?' and he turned up in church and from then onward found the bell kind of woke up something in his soul," Bishop Huggins said. "So, that's what the power of a bell can be."

He said he hoped to be able to have the bell operational by September with the help of a St Paul's bell ringer.

"He's got the brains and I've got the doggedness so between us we reckon we'll get it going," Bishop Huggins said.



The Holy Trinity Port Melbourne bell.

Quarter century caring for Anglicare Victoria

Kirralee Nicolle

ANGLICARE VICTORIA IS celebrating 25 years as the state's leading provider of care for children and families in vulnerable circumstances.

Anglicare Victoria executive director Paul McDonald said in a press release from the organisation that the anniversary was a testament to all those who had been involved in various ways.

"In the last quarter of a century, Anglicare Victoria has grown to employ three times as many people and provide critical support to many more regional communities in distant corners of the state," Mr McDonald said.

"We now help more than 10 times as many people struggling with family violence, have grown to be the largest provider of financial counselling and have a thriving culture of innovation."

Deputy executive director Sue Sealey said while a big focus of Anglicare was providing services to families and those experiencing disadvantage, advocacy was also a



Anglicare Victoria says it has grown by three times over the past 25 years. Picture: supplied

major focus.

Ms Sealey said that Anglicare Victoria was advocating for reform, greater funding to those who needed it and for improved circumstances for vulnerable children and families.

"It's about raising the concerns and the challenges that vulnerable, disadvantaged people have," she said.

She also said that during COVID-19, Anglicare had become the go-to organisation for the government to approach for support with housing, food and other practical needs for those experiencing homelessness or disadvantage.

Anglicare Victoria was formed in 1997 from three Anglican missions – The Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne, which was established in 1886, the Mission of St James and St John, established in 1919 and St John's Homes for Boys and Girls, established two years later in 1921.

Archbishop Philip Freier hosted a celebration on 1 July at Bishops Court to mark the anniversary.

Service for workers launched

Kirralee Nicolle

AN INNER-CITY church has begun a new service which seeks to support a demographic who are seeking to live authentic lives of faith in the workplace.

Campus minister Reverend Alex Zunica said the vision for starting the new service was to equip workers for sharing their faith.

He said that when they were discussing ideas with the congregation for a new service, what gradually emerged was an interest among those of all ages who were in the workplace.

"Those leaving uni didn't necessarily feel like they fit [in the existing services]," Mr Zunica said.

"The two groups who were really interested were young workers and older workers."

St Jude's Carlton held their first 4pm church service on 17 July with



St Jude's Carlton is seeking to equip workers to live authentic lives of faith. Picture: supplied

90 attendees, which was far more than the expected 50 or 60, Mr Zunica said.

Mr Zunica said the first service went well and was a very positive start for the congregation.

Census results reveal new mix

Kirralee Nicolle

ANGLICANS IN Clayton are seeking new ways to engage their community after recent census results revealed a near-doubling of people identifying as Hindu.

The results also showed that most people in the area identified as having no religion.

All Saints Clayton senior minister Reverend Charles Fletcher said the results raised interesting questions for outreach.

2021 census statistics revealed a dramatic increase in the number of those in the area who identified as Hindu, with 2941 declaring it as their religious affiliation, up from 1422 in 2016.

Mr Fletcher said that while the All Saints congregation was very culturally diverse, it was not necessarily reflective of the statistics in the latest census.

He said while there was a large Indian demographic in the church,

most came from areas of India where the Hindu religion was less prevalent.

"Our parish is very multicultural, but the demographic isn't that representative of the area," he said.

The census results showed that the largest group in the religion category was "No Religion", followed by Christianity and thirdly, Hinduism. This showed a further shift from the 2016 results, in which Catholicism was second after "No Religion".

Mr Fletcher said the results were motivation for the congregation to find ways to reach out to those of no religious affiliation, as well as those from Hindu and Mandarin-speaking backgrounds.

Mr Fletcher said the results also encouraged the church leaders to consider whether their current vision and goals were still relevant to reaching the demographic of the community.

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Childlike faith helps navigate cultural baggage

Kirralee Nicolle

AN EXPLORATION of childlike faith and its ability to help us untangle our faith from Western cultural norms is among the books shortlisted for the SparkLit Australian Christian Book of the Year award.

Brisbane Uniting Church pastor Mandy Smith joins apologist John Dickson and missionary agronomist Tony Rinaudo among the authors on the shortlist.

Ms Smith's *Unfettered* explores the concept of childlike faith, and how embracing our childlikeness before God allows us to untangle our faith from Western cultural norms.

SparkLit national director Michael Collie said he believed *Unfettered* was to the 2020s what Philip Yancey's *What's So Amazing About Grace* was to the 1990s.

Ms Smith said that *Unfettered* began as a journey and experiment in her faith. It was a concept came to her while she was on an eight-week sabbatical, where she found she was unsure how to use the time wisely.

Ms Smith said that in response to the passage in Matthew 18 which discusses childlike faith, she decided to spend the time listening to the childlike urges within. If they weren't illegal or immoral, she



Mandy Smith is a Queensland Uniting Church pastor, and author of a shortlisted book on childlike faith. Image: supplied

would choose to follow them.

"It was really interesting because that just seemed really fun at first," she said. "[I thought] I'm just going to listen to those childlike prompts [and] just for fun, I'm going to say yes to all of

those things."

But she said that her choices led to a difficult realisation.

"There are some serious grown-up habits and Western habits in me that stop me from saying yes to my joy," she said.

"Every time I had one of these prompts, there was a shame [and] disappointment that went along with it."

Ms Smith said she became fearful that if she wanted to engage in childlike behaviours such as hugging trees, laying down in grass or dragging sticks, she would experience judgment from onlookers.

She said that she was also realising that there was a depth to the concept of childlike faith that she hadn't previously grasped.

"I started to think – maybe there's something really significant to [this] that I've never heard talked about," she said.

Ms Smith said she wrote four different versions of the book, having realised in earlier versions that she was attempting to write an intellectual book. Her first version was a very serious argument for childlikeness, but then she realised she had to begin with a story.

Ms Smith said she believed that children engaged with life more holistically than adults by integrating their thoughts and feelings and not believing it was up to them to fix all the problems they saw.

She said she believed the concepts of the book helped readers to realise that while their experiences and beliefs were important, they were just a small part of a bigger picture of church community,

where diverse beliefs and experiences offered richness to faith.

Ms Smith said she hoped the concepts in the book offered a new way to navigate some of the baggage of the contemporary Christian church.

"I think that it allows us to expand our way of engaging Scripture and spirit and community because we're not just having arguments about concepts but we're testing what is real and true," she said.

The other books shortlisted for the award are:

- *Bullies and Saints* by John Dickson
- *The Forest Underground* by Tony Rinaudo
- *Christians* by Greg Sheridan
- *Raising Kids Who Care* by Susy Lee
- *Refuge Reimagined* by Luke Glanville and Mark Glanville
- *Adopted in Love* by Rachel Herweynen
- *Topical Preaching in a Complex World* by Sam Chan and Malcolm Gill
- *Spacemaker* by Daniel Sih
- *A New Freedom* by Mike Snowdon

The Australian Christian Book of the Year Award will take place on 1 September in a hybrid event format.

More information: sparklit.org.



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Why the Church needs to talk about body image

Georgia Nicholas

REMEMBER THE DAY IN THIS picture vividly. It was the summer of 2003 and my little brother's first day of primary school. Dad had gotten us ready and driven us to school – a treat to avoid before school care.

This photo was taken as we prepared to walk in together, up the street from school. I remember how lush Melbourne's eastern suburbs looked and how cute the white weather board houses were. I remember how my usually boisterous brother was quieter than usual, and how he held my hand extra tightly.

I also remember feeling incredibly fat.

I remember comparing my thighs to the other girls in my class. Theirs were smaller than mine.

At the same age, I remember lying awake at night, dreaming of shaving my tummy off with a kitchen knife so it would go away. During the day, I was learning to write basic sentences and talking about the Saddle Club at lunchtime.

I was eight.

Now I was raised in a loving Christian home. My parents were affectionate and always celebrated us. I was taught that Jesus loved me from an early age, and I can still remember Bible verse songs from Sunday club by heart. Like all families we have our problems, but I was blessed with a foundation of love very early on.

I've had the privileged of knowing God loves humanity my whole life. But, at eight years old, somewhere, somehow, I'd concluded I was overweight and therefore undesirable to the people who could love me. I had concluded that being desired and wanted made you worthy.

Now I don't want to suggest that being fat is a bad thing. It's not. God made some of us fat, some of us thin. Ultimately these are just descriptions and should be without the stigma we've associated them with. But to me as a child, it felt like being fat was one



At eight Georgia Nicholas already disliked her body. Image: supplied

of the worst things you could be.

Looking at that photo, today's 26-year-old me knows I was a healthy little girl, growing up at a healthy speed.

But even at this early age, toxic thought patterns had started to present themselves. These toxic thoughts about weight are often an early warning sign of mental illness, and for me this was well and truly what they were.

My feelings aged eight were the beginning of a very long journey, which I'm still travelling through. In this article, I want to unpack why a little girl, who had God in her life, had landed in such disordered thinking. I want to explore why I'm not alone in this experience and I want to suggest what we, today's church, can do about it.

According to the 2021 Mission

Australia's National Youth survey, 87 per cent of participants (aged between 15 and 19) expressed concern about their body image. About 33 per cent of that group expressed being extremely or very concerned.

Professionals are diagnosing children as young as 12 with eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa according to Eating Disorders Victoria.

When Big Kids' Table asked our audience in 2021 what their experience of body image had been, we received honest and vulnerable responses that indicated the prevalence of this issue.

"My experience is feeling like an outcast, different, and bigger than everyone else."

"It isn't talked about to males. Not heard direct teaching on it

"God whispers in love that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' with ultimate intention and purpose."

Georgia Nicholas

because it's a 'girl problem'. This led to bottling up of feelings in the past because I thought it was only me."

"My experience is one of much suffering, from [eating disorders] at 12 and only recovering at age 19."

The plastic surgery industry in Australia is booming having hit the billion-dollar mark in 2017 according to the Victorian Cosmetic Institute. "Cosmetic treatments" includes semi-permanent items such as fake nails and facials, but also more permanent procedures such as teeth whitening, anti-ageing injections such as Botox, and plastic surgery.

Like many of us, I enjoy a facial or nail treatment myself. But the more permanent cosmetic procedures worry me.

Australians are spending billions of dollars each year to make themselves look different, permanently.

Reasons for cosmetic surgery are complex, but I'd suggest a large portion of these people are doing so because they are unhappy with their appearance.

I have spent thousands of hours in my 26-years praying about my body image, and I'm still healing in this area. One thing I do know, however, is feelings like this are not from God.

The gospel shares a different

narrative. It's one that highlights that an individual's worth comes from something outside of their appearance, and honours our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

The gospel offers a completely different narrative to the one of the world around us.

The world tells children they need to look smaller to be loved. In Jesus, Paul says in Colossians 1 that Christ's followers are "...holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation".

The world encourages us to make insecurity-inspired decisions and alter our appearance for good. God whispers in love that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" with ultimate intention and purpose (Psalm 139).

I often think about what would have helped protect eight-year-old me. Ultimately there's not one single thing. But the church's silence about body image was one of the biggest issues.

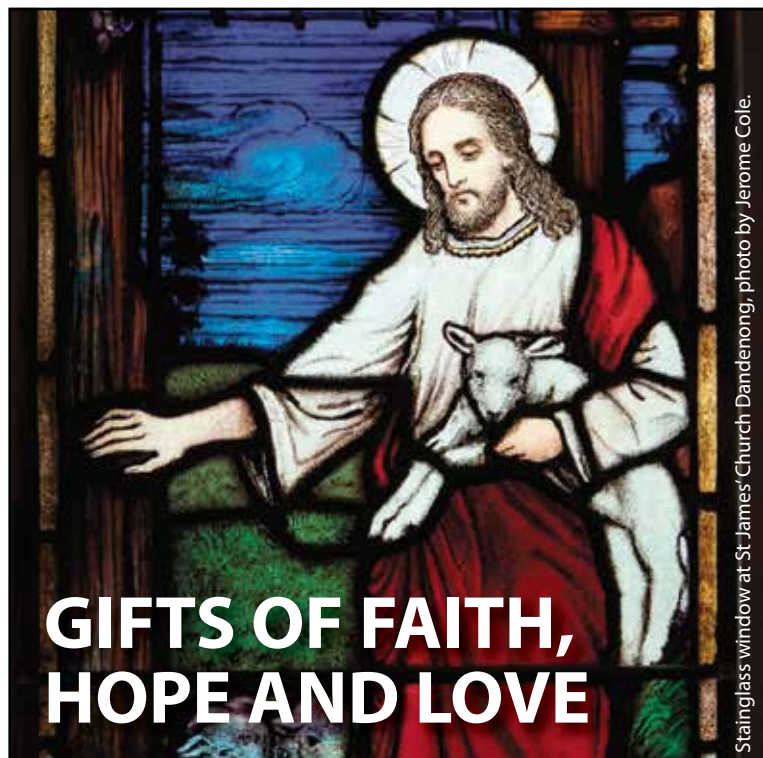
I needed the church then to be talking about our bodies and why they are good, making an emphasis on what this means, and what to do, when we don't feel this way. Children and teens today need the same, if anything more pressingly.

So as we move forward as today's church, let's be watchful with our words and self-talk, especially around young people. Often as adults we've accepted that we will always dislike our appearance. But what if that wasn't the case? I truly believe Jesus can heal our relationship with ourselves and lead us in teaching others to do this too.

Today, thousands of young people are struggling with body image issues. I believe in a world where Christians can help remedy this and empower entire generations towards change. Will you join me?

Georgia Nicholas is co-director of non-for-profit ministry Big Kids' Table, which exists to create

safe, honest conversations about Kingdom identity, sexual experience, and the expression of sexual desire for youth and young adults of faith. Find out more at bigkidstable.org.



Stained glass window at St James' Church Dandenong, photo by Jerome Cole.

"The Anglican Church has been part of my life forever and my involvement with the **Melbourne Anglican Foundation** has confirmed to me there is plenty of interest in ensuring that the Christian legacy passed on to us, is passed on afresh to future generations."

Geoffrey Court

Bequestor, Patron and Board Member of the **Melbourne Anglican Foundation**

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Time as a parish priest is vital for ordinands

MY FATHER, THE REV-
erend Rex G. Hayden was
ordained in 1926 in the
United Kingdom, occupying sev-
eral inner-city Manchester livings
until emigrating to Queensland, in
answer to the need at the time, for
“Good C of E Priests to spread the
Gospel”.

His first living in Australia
was the Parish of Drayton on the
Darling Downs, Queensland,
comprising six country churches.
Dad never needed to drive in the
UK, but aged 58 he had to learn!
A Queensland country parish
was very different to an inner
Manchester parish, but my Father
was very much up to the challenge
of visitations, youth work, services
at six churches, and a building
extension at one church.

Subsequently, he decided to
move to Melbourne, accepting the
living of St Cecilia’s West Preston.
Once again, now aged 61, he was
virtually nonstop, encouraging all
sorts of parish activities, all for a
very meagre remuneration. The
first thing Dad did in Melbourne
was apply to his bank for an
overdraft, where the manager told
him that his first-year clerk earned
more! Dad passed away in 1968.
Mum once said to me all Dad ever
wanted to do was to look after his
flock.

So with my Dad’s devotion
to parish life, I am continually



Time spent as a parish priest should be compulsory for ordinands, writes Martin Hayden.

Picture: file

surprised reading *The Melbourne Anglican*, when I notice not only a steady stream of new ordinands, but also an ever-increasing number of vacant parishes, which cannot be good for the future of our diocese.

I believe that a pre-requisite for every ordinand should be a mandatory term of at least three years as a parish priest, to learn the importance of looking after

the flock. Meeting the challenge of a parish priest would be beneficial to ordinands, and to the diocese.

Martin Hayden
Aspendale

Police more appropriate than referral

Am I the only person to spot the obvious in the following sentence in the story *Clergy often approached about family violence*

published in the July *Melbourne Anglican*? “A large minority [of Clergy] had also counselled and or referred perpetrators [of family violence to a service agency...”

Surely the only place perpetrators should be referred to is the police? I would have thought any individual or service agency that was caught counselling perpetrators rather than reporting them to the police risked being accused of

collusion or attempting to pervert the course of justice should the truth ever come to light – and there is nothing hidden that will not be known.

The study also found that being female decreased the odds of counselling perpetrators. Could that be because perpetrators fear that if they were to admit partner abuse to a female member of clergy they would be more likely to be held accountable?

Kathryn Rushby
Nunawading



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Christians, don't fear the census religion statistics

Natalie Swann

STATISTICS IS often accused of being a dry subject, but numbers can trigger some pretty emotional reactions. Right now, there’s a bit of handwringing going on about the drop in the number of people checking “Christian” on the Australian census. For the first time, this has dropped below 50 per cent and the number of those selecting “no religion” continues to increase. It makes for a dramatic headline for secular media, and is the cause of much analysis in Christian circles.

Sometimes it even feels like the census is to blame for the drop. There’s some truth to that. The statisticians at the Australian Bureau of Statistics have to carefully weigh up the value of keeping questions the same to ensure you can compare one census to the next, and changing the questions to reflect changes in the cultural landscape. Every time the religion question has changed – from inviting people to write “none” in 1971 to making “No religion” the first multiple choice option in 2021 – the number of people choosing “none” has jumped up.

But the thing is, the religion question doesn’t quantify religiosity. It doesn’t quantify church attendance or financial giving, it doesn’t measure a relationship with Jesus or even a sense of the transcendent. It’s a question about identity: “Do you identify as Anglican? Or Catholic? Or a Jedi?”. Therefore, it doesn’t measure a drop in church numbers, or even a drop in the community’s



Collecting data well is important, writes Natalie Swann. Picture: iStock

interest in spiritual things (indeed National Church Life Survey Research has shown the opposite). It measures a drop in the number of people that are prepared to be labelled as belonging to a particular religion or denomination.

It seems to me that the revelation of this statistic isn’t going to radically change the way we do ministry. Stan Grant’s recent piece for the ABC, asking “Why have

we chosen to live without God?” highlighted how long the decline of religion has been identifiable, and just how much ink has been spilled on the subject. Church leaders are well aware of this shift in identification and the rise of the “Nones” in the West.

I worry that as Christians our anxiety about this statistic is rooted in a fear that our voice in the political sphere will lose its sway, as peo-

“Christians need to advocate for collecting data well and interpreting it thoughtfully.”

Natalie Swann

ple realise we represent a smaller proportion of the population than long thought. Or that it represents a fear that our programs will attract less funding. In his piece, Grant notes that globally Christianity is still dominant and on the rise, it’s just that it’s growing in Africa and Asia while it declines in the West – God forbid our anxiety is based in a fear that Western Christians are no longer leading the flock. Greed and pride are not good interpretative helpers.

When statistics make you angry or anxious, it is tempting to think that they must be useless. Or worse – deliberately misleading, even manipulative. It’s tempting to write off interpretations of statistics that don’t fit our experience of the world. Sometimes, you just want to roll your eyes at the experts. And like accounting, or film making, or medicine, statistics can be done rigorously and ethically, or they can be done unethically, with carelessness,

even with the objective to abuse and oppress. Caesar’s census certainly had those vibes.

But an ethically conducted census in a democratic country is an incredibly powerful force for good. The results can challenge your blind spots and reinforce your best insights. They can help you decide where schools are needed now, and predict where they will be needed in the future. The results identify what languages we should translate forms and websites into so that all citizens can understand where possible and participate in our community. They can reveal how much of the population is struggling below the poverty line or is in rental distress. Christians need to advocate for collecting data well and interpreting it thoughtfully. Without a census, it is the vulnerable, those without purchasing power or the capacity to advocate for themselves, that become invisible.

So, don’t worry about the religion results. If you want to get worried about something, worry about people thinking they don’t need the census. If you want to make noise about something, make noise about making sure we rigorously count what really matters in a way that protects and honours Australian citizens.

Written by social science consultant Dr Natalie Swann. Dr Swann is a member of St Augustine’s Anglican Church Moreland and the Diocese of Melbourne Social Responsibilities Committee. These opinions are her own.

What we tolerate must be determined by God

Fiona McLean

IN THE AENEID, VIRGIL relates the legend of the Trojan Horse. The Greek army, seeking to find a way to infiltrate the city of Troy, pretends to sail away, leaving a giant horse as a votive offering. The unsuspecting Trojans pull it into their city as a victory trophy, but hidden inside are Greek soldiers, who creep out at night, let the returning army into Troy, and thus defeat Troy. The Trojans had been seduced by something which looked attractive and valuable, but which turned out to be destructive and dangerous.

In our Anglican context, we are being offered a Trojan horse – that of tolerance. This looks attractive. We are flattered to think that we are generous, inclusive, open-minded people. But, like the one in Troy, this Trojan horse is destructive and dangerous. It will defeat us from within unless it is recognised and resisted.

Of course, Anglicans should be tolerant, patient, sympathetic and willing to listen to others. We must think hard about how to live as Christians in our context, as we face new challenges and seismic shifts in society, including secularism, apathy, and changed ideas about gender and sexuality. The church looks different in 2022 in Australia from how it did in the past.

But there must be some limits to how much we change and how much we tolerate, or we will lose our identity as Christians and as Anglicans.

All agree that we should not tolerate some things. We do not tolerate embezzlement or adultery or plagiarism. As affirmed at General Synod, we do not tolerate child abuse or family violence.

So how, then, do we work out what to endorse and what to oppose?

Some see the creeds as the litmus test: a definitive guide that means whatever is not mentioned in the creeds is a matter of conscience. But issues like family violence and child abuse are not mentioned in the creeds, yet we don't tolerate them. Our faith is not limited to the creeds but includes the Bible, on which they are based.

Another line of argument is that the Church should be more tolerant in order to better reflect the society around us, that Christians should strive to be relevant and accessible. There is some truth in this. For example we read in 1 Corinthians 9 that Paul was willing to become like a Jew, or like those not having the law, to help them come to faith in Jesus. But our ultimate authority cannot be the society around us. As Christians, we are called to be salt and light – distinctively different, even at times profoundly out of step with societal norms. We live in a context where many people see Christianity as not just weird and irrelevant, but harmful and oppressive. If we were to conform entirely to society, we would stop being Christian.



Tolerance can undermine our identity as Christians, writes Fiona McLean.

Picture: iStock

“If we were to conform entirely to society, we would stop being Christian.”

Fiona McLean

These points of view find expression in what some (such as Archbishop Phillip Aspinall of Brisbane) call “comprehensive” Anglicanism. Supporters of this view suggest that we should allow for a diversity of views in our national church while we wait for God's leading on the vexed issues that confront us. This “comprehensive” Anglicanism is presented as inclusive, broad, rich, tolerant. But comprehensive Anglicanism becomes incomprehensible when it is so broad that it seeks to embrace fundamentally irreconcilable points of view, or when it lacks appropriate boundaries which help us work out what we as Anglicans must embrace and what we must reject (cf. Titus 1:9). I am reminded of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:13-14 that “wide is

the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction”.

What, then, is another way forward?

Firstly, we need to recognise that the appeal to embrace diversity has its dangers. There is good diversity in the Bible, seen in the glorious vision shown to the apostle John in Revelation 7, of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”. It is also seen in the wonderful diversity of gifts that the Holy Spirit gives his people which we read of in Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. There is a diversity of culture, gifts and people which enriches the church and is to be celebrated.

But other kinds of diversity are not good. Some behaviours and attitudes and identities are incompatible with being a Christian. The Corinthians weren't commended for tolerating “the old yeast” of sin, but warned that some behaviours, such as idolatry, reviling and greed, were incompatible with belonging to Christ in 1 Corinthians 5-6. Paul didn't rejoice in a diversity of views over whether or not to eat with Gentiles, instead, in Galatians 2:10, he publicly “opposed [Cephas] to his face”. In Revelation 2 and 3, the churches are not commended

for tolerating the practices of the Nicolaitans, the teaching of Balaam or the so-called prophet Jezebel, who mislead God's people into sexual immorality, instead they are sharply rebuked.

As Anglicans, we need to embrace good forms of diversity, while rejecting the kind of unhelpful diversity that undermines God's church.

Secondly, being tolerant does not mean abandoning our convictions. Being a Christian – in fact, holding any convictions at all – means affirming some things and rejecting some things. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the only way to God: this may well be seen as profoundly insulting to Muslims, atheists, and others. When we affirm each Sunday that Jesus died and rose again, we are implicitly saying that those who don't believe in the resurrection are wrong. We can hold to our convictions in a way that is insulting or arrogant and insensitive, or we can hold to them humbly and pastorally: but hold to them we must, or we compromise Christ.

Thirdly, it is foolish to be endlessly open-minded. It is important to listen, but, as GK Chesterton said, “The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid”. It is possible to listen

“In every generation, every context, there will be particular temptations to turn away from God's word.”

Fiona McLean

genuinely and compassionately to someone and yet still disagree with them. And, while we need to listen to others, we need to listen to God's word above all. God's people were repeatedly condemned in the Old Testament for failing to listen to God, such as in 2 Kings 17. Likewise in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul urges us to listen to God's teaching: “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter”.

Fourthly, be aware that, in every generation, every context, there will be particular temptations to turn away from God's word. Francis Schaeffer's warning is worth repeating here:

[T]he Christian must resist the spirit of the world in the form it takes in his own generation. ... It is our generation of Christians more than any other who need to heed these words attributed to Martin Luther: “If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point”.

What we should tolerate and what we should refuse to tolerate must be determined by God. We need to keep listening to and obeying his word, the Bible. We are being offered a Trojan Horse of ungodly tolerance. It looks attractive, it makes us feel good about ourselves, and it seems to avoid conflict. But it is dangerous and undermines our identity as Anglicans. If you tolerate everything, you end up standing for nothing.

Fiona McLean is a member of General Synod and was re-elected to Standing Committee of General Synod. She also serves on Melbourne's Archbishop-in-Council, on the Executive of the New Cranmer Society, and on the Gafcon Australia Board.

Context is vital to understanding Matthew 19

Bob Derrenbacker

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT unites us as Anglicans is our belief that Holy Scripture has a particular authority in our lives and contains “all doctrine necessary for external salvation through faith in Jesus Christ”, as we read in the ordinal in *A Prayer Book for Australia*. As such, the exegesis, interpretation and application of Holy Scripture is supremely important to us as Anglicans. Our exegesis and interpretation of Scripture needs to be sound and contextual if it is to be properly read and faithfully applied in contemporary life. We also need to be prepared for difference of opinion when we engage in Biblical interpretation, and participate in a healthy and respectful debate in the midst of these differences.

In the recent General Synod debate about same sex marriage, several references were made to Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19, specifically verses four to six, as an apparently implicit condemnation of same-sex marriage. But I ask, is this an appropriate reading of Matthew 19?

To understand Matthew 19 more fully, we must first look at Matthew’s source-text for 19:1-12, which is Mark 10:1-12. Without question, the Gospel of Mark is Matthew’s main source for most of his Gospel – nearly 98 per cent of the passages in Mark show up in Matthew.

As a result, much of Jesus’s teaching on divorce and remarriage in that passage of Mark appears in the parallel text in Matthew. For example, in both Matthew and Mark, it is a group of Pharisees that ask whether it is “lawful” for a man to divorce his wife. In both, Jesus makes reference to the provision of a “certificate of dismissal” from Deuteronomy 24:1. In both, Jesus justifies his words on divorce by quoting Genesis 1:27 – “God made them male and female” – and Genesis 2:24 – “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh”. In both Matthew and Mark, there is a statement from Jesus that a husband who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

However, there are also some



To be faithful readers of Scripture we need look at a passage’s context, writes Bob Derrenbacker. Picture: iStock

Some Pharisees came to [Jesus], and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” Matthew 19:3-9

interesting differences between Matthew and Mark. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ teaching imagines a secular, Roman legal understanding of marriage and divorce. In Mark 12:11-12 Jesus describes a scenario where either a husband or a wife could legally seek a divorce. In Matthew’s version of the story however, Jesus’ teaching in verse nine seems to only imagine a Jewish legal understanding, where it was only the husband who had the legal right to divorce his wife.

In addition, in Matthew 19:3 (but not Mark) we see the Pharisees ask Jesus the following: “Is it lawful

for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?”. The phrase “for any cause” is added by Matthew, and indicates that there Jesus is being asked to settle a debate between competing factions of Pharisees about the legitimacy of divorce. In other words, Jesus is being asked to take a position on “any cause” divorce – divorce for “any cause,” or any reason, was a position that Hillel school of Pharisees advocated. This scenario, scholars argue, would have left divorced wives in Jewish antiquity incredibly vulnerable, without any legal rights and the life-preserving pro-

tection of an ancient household. It allowed the husband to divorce his wife for “any cause,” with the wife not possessing the same legal right.

The Shammai school of Pharisees advocated a much more restrictive understanding of divorce, sanctioning it only for a few, narrow reasons such as certain types of sexual immorality. As well, only in Matthew do we see an exception given by Jesus for situations in which divorce initiated by a husband and remarriage was acceptable – *porneia*, what the NRSV translates as “unchastity” in Matthew 19:9.

“We need to be faithful to a passage’s cultural, historical, and theological contexts.”

Bob Derrenbacker

Thus in Matthew and only in Matthew, Jesus is essentially being asked to settle a debate among two groups of Pharisees as to whether “any cause” divorce is appropriate. Jesus responds by taking a fairly hard line against “any cause” divorce, arguing in verse six that an indissoluble marriage is God’s ideal, but in verses seven to eight that the law of Moses allows for a husband to divorce his wife. Jesus appeals to Genesis 2:24 in his response to argue against the Hillel position of “any cause” divorce and justify the indissolubility of marriage with very few exceptions. Thus, if Matthew 19 has anything to say to contemporary life, it is perhaps about Jesus’s fairly strong condemnation of divorce, Jesus’s affirmation of the permanence and ideal indissolubility of marriage. It is not about an apparently implicit condemnation of same-sex marriage.

Our goal as Anglican readers and interpreters of Holy Scripture is to engage in the process of reading and interpretation prayerfully, communally, and faithfully. To be faithful readers of Scripture we need to be faithful to a passage’s cultural, historical, and theological contexts. In doing so, our exegesis and interpretation will hopefully be more sound and orthodox, and will then be able to more effectively speak into to those places and times where we find ourselves in the theological disagreement as Anglicans.

The Reverend Canon Dr Bob Derrenbacker is dean and Frank Woods Associate Professor in New Testament at Trinity College Theological School.



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Be wary of simple categorisations in conflicts

Chris Porter

IN ACTS 22 AND 23 WE FIND Paul dragged before a series of arbiters intent on questioning him about his identity and belonging. They ranged from a baying mob who saw Paul as a quasi-Gentile threat to temple purity, to a Roman centurion wrestling with Paul's legal citizenship, and a council divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. Each group saw elements of Paul which cohered with their own understanding, and others which threatened the group's existence. Faced with the reality of a complex world these groups tended towards a violent simplicity to defend their own self-understanding. Furthermore, some of these groups saw their interaction as a nil-sum game, where Paul's membership within one group immediately removed his identity with another group.

We too follow similar patterns of rendering complex groupings simple in our hyper-complex modern society. We have categories such as vaccinated and anti-vaxxer, conservative and liberal, Jew and gentile, or in the church liberal, orthodox and evangelical. Not only are these categories a simplistic rendering of reality, but they often do violence – and incite violence – between grouped individuals.

In their base form these, patterns of grouping and categorising are natural and not particularly controversial. As Eleanor Rosch discovered in 1978, we very naturally draw on the characteristics of cognitive stimuli to categorise them and simplify the world to usable proportions. When surprised by an animal with fur, four legs, and a tail we naturally look for other criteria to determine whether it is a cat or a dog. We apply these categorisation practices to almost every aspect of life, leading to a situation where a 16-category personality test for a job interview or a magical sorting hat in a children's novel appear entirely logical.

Therefore, it is also unsurprising that individuals and groups employ similar categorisation practices for their own group and self-understanding. From jersey wearing outside the MCG, to social group-specific slang, we are constantly on the lookout for indicators of groups to categorise people into.

Lest we think in our Australian individualism that we are immune to this form of simplification and categorisation we need not look far for examples of this in our own city. Throughout the pandemic the categorisation of COVID responses into "Victorian" and "Gold Class NSW" promoted a strong reaction against anything



We can render complex groupings as hyper simple in our modern society, writes Chris Porter. Picture: iStock

"Any approach [to group conflict reduction] must consider means to deconstruct groups – social categories – and instead embrace some of the complexity that our categorical minds eschew."

Chris Porter

stemming from NSW. This was seen powerfully with a certain group of removalists in August 2021. Indeed, similar group-based and state-based suspicions lead some to cast aspersions over various clergy throughout our own diocese. We can think of this as priming, or preparing people to less-than-consciously respond in a certain way to certain identities.

More perniciously however is the pattern where certain religious identities also strongly correlated with fears of persecution, and political identity. This was identified by sociologist of religion Samuel Perry. In one study his team found that white Christians who scored highly on a Christian nationalism scale were up to three times more likely to believe persecution was increasing in the following 12 months. Black Christians showed no such

belief, no matter their Christian nationalism score. If this priming was not shocking enough, further studies highlighted that many American Christian leaders used these same priming patterns as dog whistles for their audiences, to strongly conflate "white" with "Christian" to the detriment of all others.

But what does America have to do with Australia? Perhaps a few examples will help the social imagination. Earlier this year I suggested that any archbishop's election will naturally lean towards an understanding of an effective archbishop as "one-of-us", as leadership is naturally a collaborative enterprise with dual action between leader and followers. Of course the danger here is that candidates will be categorised by certain characteristics, and that members of synod will only

vote for candidates who perfectly represent their group. Worse still, some candidates may be construed as inhabiting one group identity or another based on a primed identity construction.

Indeed, this pattern already occurs in many of our parishes. Characteristics such as Sunday service style form mental shortcuts for priming other categories such as theological or ecclesiological understanding. All these aspects some under the broad categories of how one understands "us" and the "other" – as I suggested in my Faith Seeking Understanding column in 2021.

Given that the innateness and power of these cognitive processes of categorisation, is there any way out of the situation we find ourselves in? Some solutions using exposure, interaction, and understanding have been proposed, but this broad "contact hypothesis" does not yield consistent results. In fact, in many circumstances inter-group conflict only seems to exacerbate the inherent group conflict and enmity generated by intrinsic difference. Harking back to Acts 23, the Pharisees and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin had constant and deep contact with one another, to the degree that Paul – a self-declared Pharisee – could invoke a strong point of difference with the Sadducees. Indeed, these two groups shared almost everything in common as Jewish co-religionists, yet single points of difference generated strong invective and polemic.

Rather an approach to group conflict reduction needs to take seriously the social reality of our humanity. After all, as John Turner famously noted, "All cognition is social cognition". Therefore, any approach must consider means to deconstruct groups – social categories – and instead embrace some of the complexity that our categorical minds eschew.

The paradigm set forth a little earlier in Acts is helpful for reducing social conflict. In Acts 10 and 11 we find a church strongly divided over the question of Gentile inclusion after Peter's foray into Cornelius' house. In that case the inter-group conflict generated by "Jew" and "Gentile" is initially lessened by the interpersonal – rather than inter-group – interaction between Peter and Cornelius, before finally being cemented by the coming of the Spirit upon the members of Cornelius' Gentile household. Indeed, these patterns of inter-personal interaction are also seen in a series of studies on inter-group conflict and prejudice reduction from Matthew Hornsey and Michael Hogg.

But what does this "walking across the aisle" look like in practice? One approachable example comes from the Boogie-woogie singer and pianist Daryl Davis, who found himself as a lone African American in close relationship with many members of the Klu Klux Klan. In biographical documentary *Accidental Courtesy* one poignant moment comes when he talks about his motivation for cultivating friendships with Klansmen. The overriding question he asks is, "How can you hate me if you don't even know me?" From sitting down in a bar with Klansmen, to being invited into their home, this question – and the associated inter-personal interaction – drives the conversation at hand, rather than the groups of white and black. The results show how successful it is, as Davis displays a wardrobe full of Klan robes that were given to him after members had left the Klan.

Davis follows the pattern of reducing inter-group prejudice to the level of personal interaction, akin to what we see in Acts 10-11. Furthermore, in the church we gain an extra layer of reinforcement for these interactions. Just as in Acts 11 the giving of the Spirit seals the Gentile inclusion into the Jewish narrative, we read in Ephesians 4 that so too the Spirit is our "seal for the day of deliverance". It is only by this means that we can devolve our natural inclination towards group behaviour to give up "bitterness, wrath, anger" etcetera, and instead relate to one another in forgiveness.

We need to talk like Australians to reach them

Nils von Kalm

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG Christian I was taught that the most important preoccupation for believers was the Great Commission. It was to go out and bring as many people to faith as possible. Evangelism was the number one task for the committed Christian.

It was a few years after that, influenced by people like Reverend John Smith and Martin Luther King, that the social demands of the gospel became equally as important to me. As I remember someone saying back then, the greatest command is not to preach the gospel, important though that is, it is to love God and neighbour.

At the time though, I didn't see much of that in the church. A major reason for that was the theology that many of us grew up with. It was an "escapist" theology that basically said that Jesus was coming back soon, the earth will be destroyed and we will all be taken away to heaven. As a result, issues like social justice and care for the environment – while good things to do – were nowhere near as important as people's eternal destinies.

One of the aspects of the Anglican liturgy I like is that we pray the Lord's Prayer every week in church. As I have grown older, I appreciate more the repetitive ritual of the liturgy. And what could be more beneficial than every week praying the very way that Jesus taught us? In my work of aid and development, the request that God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven is a reminder of why I do what I do and of the hope we share, that we can actually play a part in bringing in the reign of God – the reign of love, peace, justice and joy – right here on earth. It's not about having to wait to go to a place in the sky when we die.

Unfortunately, much of the church in Australia is not known for living out that message, either in word or in deed.

In 2020, the Barna research group in the United States released information about the



Churches must speak to the heart of where Australians are at, writes Nils von Kalm.

Picture: iStock

"Jesus is more relevant than ever in 21st century Australia. But the church is seen as so irrelevant. Something is not adding up."

Nils von Kalm

perceptions of the church by the general public. It revealed that a large percentage of unchurched people have negative views of the church, thinking that local churches are judgmental, hypocritical, irrelevant, disconnected from real issues in the community, and known more for what they are against.

That hits quite close to home. It does so because I'm confident that the same could be said of the Australian situation in many cases.

The most recent census results show clearly that adherence to the Christian faith is in serious decline. I don't think that's a real surprise to anyone, the census is stating what has been the reality for some decades.

So, why is it that the church seems to have done such a bad job

at bringing the best news in history to our society? Why is it that so many people respect Jesus but can't stand the church? What have we done wrong?

Firstly, there is much we have done and continue to do right. As the Centre for Public Christianity stated some years ago in their series *For The Love Of God*, Christians have been at the forefront of some of the greatest social progress in history. For instance, the abolitionist movement was almost entirely Christian, and the civil rights movement in the US was based on the teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Additionally, the birth of universities, hospitals and charities was predominantly led by Christians.

I have also seen an encouraging

trend over the last 35 years or so in the Australian church. I have seen more of an emphasis on caring for people who are marginalised, poor and generally underprivileged. More Christians are realising the social implications of the gospel, that caring for the poor and the environment are central gospel concerns.

Despite this, there is much work to do. It's the people who walk their talk who are the most respected by Australians. And when much of the church is more concerned with its own rights, fear of what it calls persecution, or a longing for the days when our churches were full, than it is about loving our neighbours, we are not following the Jesus of the gospels, the Jesus who said that all the Law and the Prophets is summed up in the command to love God and neighbour, and to do unto others as we would want them to do for us.

How can we rectify this? Many years ago, Reverend John Smith wrote that the church in Australia hasn't had a distinctive faith language that is understood by the average Australian. Almost 35 years later, I would say that is still the case as we continue to copy either the American mega-church

model or a British model that is hundreds of years old.

There is still a huge gap between secular Australia and the church. The church is not just seen as irrelevant, it is hardly even considered by the majority of people.

More than ever, Australia needs to hear a message of good news, a message that speaks to the heart of where we are at. In one of the wealthiest countries in the world, that has some of the highest rates of loneliness, depression, anxiety and suicide, Jesus' words that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions speak to the heart of Australia. So to does his question, "What does it profit you if you gain the whole world but lose your very sense of self?". Jesus is more relevant than ever in 21st century Australia. But the church is seen as so irrelevant. Something is not adding up.

How do we present a God that Australians can take seriously? If Jesus is who he says he is, then he is central to all of life. So, let's talk more from our pulpits about economics, politics, sexuality, the cost of living and its effects on people of low income, the effects of a changing climate, and the war in Ukraine. Let's talk about what Jesus has to say to those issues. These are all central gospel issues because they go straight to the heart of God's concern for people. And let's do this by quoting people who are outside the church. Let's speak the language of the people. Acts 17 is a great example for us. St Paul, when in Athens, quotes one of their own poets in a song written to Zeus. By doing so, he convinced many of them.

Many churches are of course doing this and doing it very well. It is the churches that are outward looking and speak to the heart of where Australians are at that are respected. May we be more like those churches, and be followers of the Christ who speaks to the hearts of all people no matter who and where they are.

Nils von Kalm is a Melbourne writer who focuses on the links between Christian faith and culture.



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The accountant with a heart for holistic care

Jenan Taylor

FOR THE REVEREND KIRSTY Brown, answering God's call to service was the pathway to providing spiritual nourishment for the elderly.

Ms Brown's memories of school holidays and time off are somewhat different to what many people may have of their youth.

There were the visits with her mother to an elderly lady in their neighbourhood in Glasgow, Scotland. And the voluntary work she did as a teenager in a geriatric facility.

But it was the family trips to see her maternal grandparents in Australia, that she loved most.

Then she would go with her grandfather, a retired minister, on his rounds to take devotions at various aged care facilities.

Those visits cast an impression of God's work, and of connection to older people that has never left her.

She became a chartered accountant, like her father, while still living in Glasgow. Some years after finally moving to Australia, Ms Brown took on business management roles at Ivanhoe Grammar and then Trinity Grammar schools.

Though she loved the school environment Ms Brown was always certain that she would someday move into pastoral ministry. She just didn't think it would start to happen when she took long service leave to study a graduate diploma in divinity in 2019.

But Ms Brown was increasingly drawn to connecting with older people and decided to resign from her job altogether to focus on aged care chaplaincy.

It was then that God revealed the road, she said.

She had been considering the importance of holistic care of elderly people, an approach that ties together the spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing of people, when she realised that for her being a lay chaplain wasn't going to be enough.

"I thought If I have to call in someone, who is potentially a stranger to come and take communion for the residents, when communion is meant to be relational, where's the relationship?"

Ordination in that context hadn't been on her mind, but she



The Reverend Kirsty Brown has a heart for the elderly, developed at a young age.

Picture: supplied

decided if she wanted to look after people holistically, and within relationship, then it was probably going to be important.

"God was making it pretty clear to me, that that was the way for me to go if I wanted to nurture the spirituality of those in my care," she said.

Ms Brown became a deacon in February 2021 and an ordained priest in November.

One of the first things Ms Brown did after this, was find her grandfather's old sermons.

As a younger person she wanted older people to feel at ease with her and thought she'd try to get a sense of how her grandfather had communicated with them and encouraged them in their faith.

Ms Brown said there was no doubt that his style was different to hers, but it was inspiring to see how God had used him, and she prayed that He would use her in the same way.

Poring over his sermons brought those long-ago days spent in his company and his tone rushing back.

"He was a bit meandering, but also encouraging," she said. "He reassured people by challenging them, but not in a hellfire and brimstone kind of way. He was just a simple 'God loves you, and I want to share that love of Christ with you,' person."

Since then, Ms Brown has amassed considerable time ministering in hospitals, aged care residences, and within the Melbourne diocese.

Now a St Barnabas' Balwyn assistant curate, and chaplain at a large aged care provider, she said she's found joy getting to know the residents no matter their spiritual or religious background, and in seeing how God continues to work in and through them.

Part of her remit as chaplain involves being able to listen deeply to what older people say in order to understand their views and wishes.

In doing so, she could reflect their needs to their families, or help them look back on life to feel that it has been purposeful.

That could be much harder if

people had dementia, but at times some situations could still be resolved. At other times, however, they could only be resolved within Christ, she said.

"Then you're able to keep them feeling that they have agency, that they're the one making decisions for themselves. It is so important, because as soon as you lose agency, you lose purpose. And then you start to lose meaning," Ms Brown said.

Crucially, she's been able to focus on providing them with holistic care, something that Ms Brown believes is particularly relevant for those who have experienced trauma or who grapple with dementia. She said often when people had experienced ordeals of varying degrees, whether related to child abuse or domestic violence, it tended to come out later in life, especially for those who had developed dementia.

"They won't remember the happiness of the last few years, they'll remember the trauma," she said.

"The challenge is that they're not going to remember the con-

versation we had yesterday about it. The trauma will keep revisiting, so how do we help with that, so that they're not constantly re-traumatised?"

Despite some situations appearing insurmountable, there were often times that it was clear that chaplaincy was making a difference.

"It might be that the lady who hasn't been at church for eight years, who has dementia, starts singing a lively 'Jesus loves me', because she's connecting with when she was at Sunday school," she said.

"Or it could be that someone who you've been helping to work through the distress they've felt from having to leave their home of 50 or 60 years for a facility, finally says of that facility, 'This feels like home'. It means they're moving through that grief and they're looking forward. And so that's a special, special thing."

Ms Brown said that although being present and being able to listen helped chaplains to assist older people, having knowledge was vital, so she has furthered her understanding of dementia especially, with certificate courses.

For that reason, she believes knowledge is something she will keep building.

In the meantime, Ms Brown plans to teach other aged care workers how to help people approach the elderly with a more holistic perspective.

She admits that her becoming ordained was a change in direction that was so fast, that she's still not certain her family have had time to process it.

Her father who had passed away in 2019 just as she was beginning her journey did however get to see her Archbishop's Licence, she said, and he was very proud.

Would her grandfather have guessed what her path would be?

"I was about 23 when he died," Ms Brown said. "So, I was an accountant at that point and hadn't moved to Australia. I don't think he would be surprised. But I think he would be quite chuffed."

This profile of the Reverend Kirsty Brown is part of a series on women in ministry, marking the December 2022 anniversary of 30 years since women were ordained in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

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Even in the lab, Caleb seeks to keep God central

Here, ISCAST Publications Director Dr David Hooker interviews Dr Caleb Dawson, a post-doctoral researcher at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute for Medical Research in Parkville. This is the first in a new series of articles exploring the science-faith journeys of younger Christian scientists. Our hope is for these interviews to encourage those who may be thinking about integrating a science career with their Christian faith.

David: Caleb, as we get started could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Caleb: Yes, I'm 30 years old and born in Melbourne. I attend a church with my wife in Bundoora. Apart from science, I like music! I like to play guitar. We like to cook as well and eat our way around Melbourne. I'm working at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, known as WEHI, which works on a range of diseases – cancer, infectious disease and developmental diseases.

David: How and when did you first get interested in science?

Caleb: I've always been interested in science actually. Even as a young child I was fascinated by the way things worked and the fine details of things. My uncle gave me a butterfly collecting kit when I was 12 or 13 and that had me running and catching butterflies and seeing all the beautiful patterns on the wings. A love for science and nature seemed a part of me really. So later I did a science degree at Melbourne Uni majoring in biochemistry, and during that time I got some experience in a lab – researching platelet production in mouse embryos – that got me keen on medical research.

I knew of a team that was using really brilliant microscopy to make beautiful 3D multi-coloured images of cells and tissues. I thought that was impressive! So I did my PhD in breast cancer in that lab and learnt these imaging techniques. During that time I made a really surprising discovery of a new type of immune cell in breast tissue. That sent me off on a new tangent in immunology (the study of the body's immune cells) and cancer research using amazing microscopy techniques.

David: Ok, you've had several years to get a feel for medical research as a scientist. What have been a couple of the most challenging chapters in your science career, and what led to those challenges?

Caleb: I think the first most challenging time was in the later stages of my PhD. It was the expectations, both from supervisors and from myself. In thinking day and night about experiments I neglected other parts of life, more important things like spending time with God and family, and reading God's Word. So I do wish I had more balance there, in hindsight.

Now I have a different type of challenge as a postdoc. It's about making sense of career direction, balancing experiments, grant writing, publication, and work-life balance.

David: We're also here to chat about doing science as a Christian, so let's get more into the faith side of things now. How did you become a Christian?

Caleb: I grew up in a Christian family so I always knew about God and the gospel. But especially as a teenager in high school I was filled with doubts. I really wanted to be sure of absolutely everything, to have figured out all the controversies before I committed my life to God.

Then after uni, I came to the realization that God is far beyond anything that I can really understand and that the questions I can battle against are endless! I had to accept that I wouldn't be able to answer all of these things.

Eventually I said to myself, "Okay I don't need to figure everything out right now, but I know God is good and that he loves me". So from that point on I just trusted him. Now, sure I've been pondering these science-faith questions constantly but not as front and centre, more as background thoughts. Now it's about entrusting my life to God. Through that God has been growing me, revealing sin, steadily working in my life. Looking back, I can see the great blessings that he's given to me.

David: As committed Christian scientists we know that living out our faith in the workplace can be difficult. What's your experience in this regard?

Caleb: It's a challenge just to keep God at the centre. In science in particular, the research questions become a personal battle to find solutions: this constant



Scientist Caleb Dawson came to the realisation after university that his questions could be endless, he needed to trust God first.

Picture: supplied

pre-occupation can push God's centrality aside.

Also, being a logical-minded person doesn't lend itself well to a relationship with God because I don't think God really wants us to reason with him and to argue with him, he just wants us to know him, to be open and vulnerable to him.

I've thought a lot about how my faith should operate with work colleagues. I do find it hard to talk to colleagues, it often feels like my faith isn't very present in my work. If no one can see my faith plainly, then it's hard for God to get the glory.

I ended up making a website where I share a little bit about my thoughts, my faith journey and my research. That was really just a hobby for a while, but God has been working through that and encouraging many people, for which I'm very grateful to God.

I've had a few [faith conversations with colleagues]. I found that most people I've talked to are accepting – not of my faith for themselves, but in a way that says, "Oh that's good for you, happy for you, but it's not for me".

One person struggled with reconciling God and suffering,

"The science is one place I go to where I see God."

Caleb Dawson

and reconciling science with the Genesis accounts. But it seemed as if there was always going to be another question, similar to how I was earlier on. In the end, we really have to open our hearts to God, and God has to work in our hearts too.

David: I'm sure people will be thinking about what you have said to them, and seeds are being sown. To move to another topic: How has science shaped your Christian faith? Could you give us an example?

Caleb: The science is one place I go to where I see God. In microscopy I see really amazing and beautiful structures in the body, and it does make me so impressed by God's creation, how complex it is and how beautiful. The fact that any of it is possible is mind-blowing and we know so little about how it all works, we only chip away very slowly.

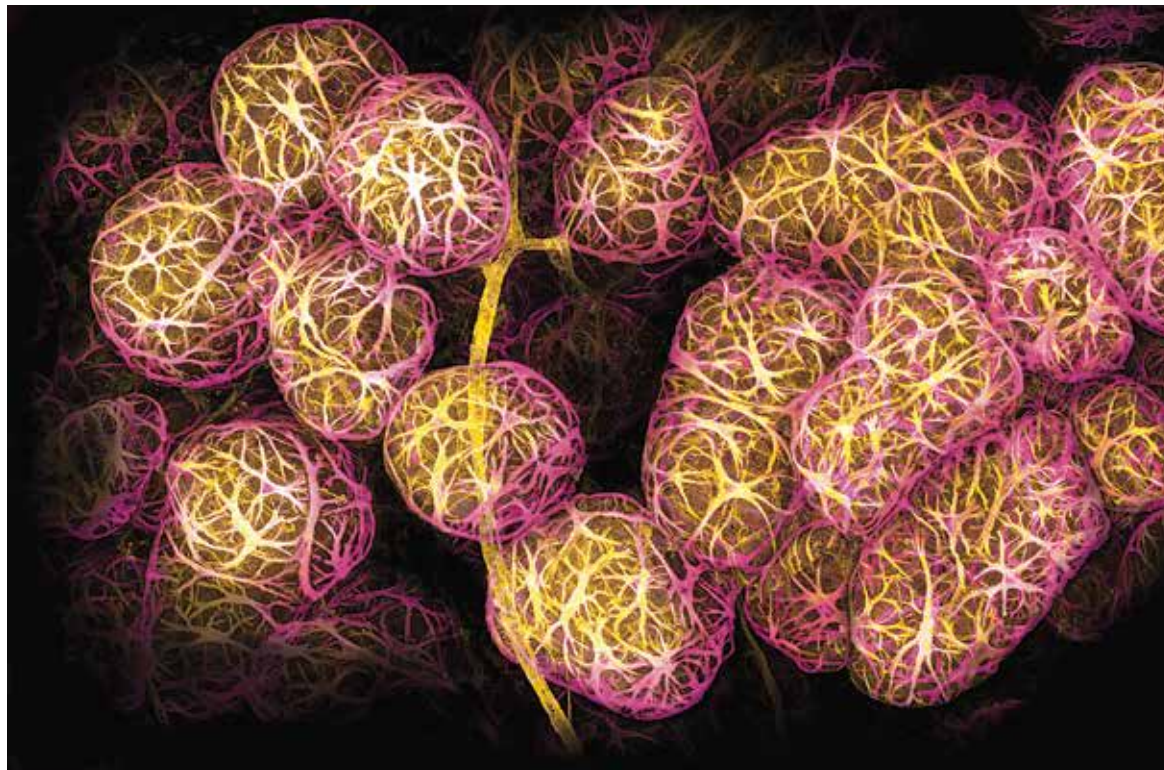
David: As a fellow biologist, I second those thoughts of awe and wonder! A few questions to close, and one of them is: Where would you like to be going in your science faith journey?

Caleb: It's an interesting question to think about. Firstly, in my faith I just want to grow stronger in discipline and reading God's Word and in prayer throughout all parts of my life. Whether science or life generally, that's where it starts. I'd like also to read more widely other people's views. And, to have conversations with non-Christians at work, and those who are struggling with faith and science, encouraging them. And doing my research in a way that honours God, with quality and integrity.

David: In closing, is there any advice and encouragement you'd like to give Christian readers, some of whom may aspire to be a scientist?

Caleb: I think the main thing is to have faith in God and to trust Him first and to put everything else in its right priority. All of the debates and the tough questions – the goal is not to put too much importance on them because they're not central to our life with God. They're really interesting and important questions but there are many things that we will never know for certain because God hasn't revealed them to us. God is far beyond what we can ever know so treat them as interesting questions and don't let them get in the way of knowing God and living for him.

David: Great advice. Thank you, Caleb! I really appreciate your openness, honesty and the helpfulness that your comments have for our readers.



Breast alveoli in lactation.

Picture: Caleb Dawson

Anglican efforts in Africa weakened by war

Jenan Taylor

AID AND RESILIENCE BUILDING efforts in many African nations are under strain because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, groups have warned.

Anglican Overseas Aid and the global Anglican Mother's Union reported that the crisis was driving shortages that in turn were imperiling Africa-based programs including work on gender-based violence prevention and children's rights.

Their comments came as Human Rights Watch noted that many African countries relied on Russia and the Ukraine for wheat, fertiliser and vegetable oil, and that shortages were leading to a spike in food prices.

Last week the United Nations World Food Program also said the Ukraine situation was exacerbating climbing food prices and fuel shortages that had already been affected by COVID, regional conflicts and climate-related disasters in many African communities.

The Mother's Union movement's headquarters in the UK said soaring food and oil prices had affected its literacy programs in Ethiopia.

The group's regional development lead Naomi Herbert said the programs used participatory Bible studies and activities to help local communities assess their challenges and identify ways to help them overcome them.

Ms Herbert said food and oil costs were causing unrest and that the group's coordinator in that area had fled because of the violence and lack of food.

She also said that in Sudan, Mother's Union usually helped communities develop skills and small enterprises to enable food security.



Anglican aid groups are grappling with program delivery as the Ukraine crisis continues.

Picture: iStock

"Increases were also driving inflation upwards and especially affecting poorer populations."

Kylie Wingjan

But Ms Herbert said scarcity of bread and other staples from the past few years had contributed to coups in that area.

She said COVID lockdowns, fuel increases, and the indirect effects of the Ukraine crisis were threatening stability and were preventing program delivery teams from travelling.

Despite that, Mother's Union Sudan's female adult literacy participants were digging in their heels. "They are continuing to meet even in these difficult times to provide support and hope to each other as they become literate together. Just what is needed in these difficult times," she said.

Ms Herbert said the spiral-

ling cost of food put a strain on program budgets however, not to mention the family household expenses of many communities.

She said there was also a risk that rising costs of living and food would contribute increased incidences of gender-based violence and potentially cripple the organisation's efforts aimed at preventing this violence.

Ms Herbert also said that their literacy program in Burundi had stalled because of fuel shortages and their vehicle couldn't be moved for an entire month because there was no diesel in the capital.

Regional development program lead, Stephanie Mooney

said shortages would affect the GBV and mental health initiatives being delivered in southern Africa, Uganda and Kenya.

Ms Mooney said in Lesotho for example, facilitators were trained to raise awareness about issues such as sexual violence justice and advocacy within their respective dioceses and parishes.

They also worked with police, counsellors, survivors, and with primary schools children to challenge gender stereotypes, Ms Mooney said.

Mother's Union Australia provincial president the Reverend Anne Kennedy said Anglicans in Australia were helping to support the global group's initiatives in Africa through prayer and monetary donations.

Anglican Overseas Aid's international program's manager Kylie Wingjan said she had received reports of a large increase in the price of fuel which then had a knock-on effect on food and essentials.

Ms Wingjan said the spike affected the ability of producers in the African nations in which they worked to transport their goods and thereby created scarcity of local fresh produce.

She said the increases were also driving inflation upwards and especially affecting poorer populations who were also still dealing with the fallout from COVID.

All these were impacting on tensions around ethnic violence in Sudan and South Sudan and the 700,000 people who were internally displaced in Mozambique.

Ms Wingjan said AOA was working with a coalition of faith-based agencies to respond to those but were appealing to people to not forget Africa as the crisis in eastern Europe escalated.

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Christians urged to pray for, support Sri Lanka

Jenan Taylor

A SRI LANKAN CHRISTIAN organisation says prayer and material aid are the best ways to support the population's plight, as its economy faces a months-long meltdown.

Sri Lankans are facing severe fuel and food shortages, the shuttering of schools and businesses and the country is teetering on a humanitarian crisis. Anti-government protests turned violent in the last week and triggered a state of emergency.

It came after the country's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled without resigning and appointed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as the provisional leader.

According to a 2012 report from the UN expert panel, under Mr Wickremesinghe's watch the Sri Lankan government had committed some actions that may have constituted atrocities against the Tamil population.

Back to the Bible Christian bookshop director Dr Mayukha Perera said prayer was needed for Sri Lanka's citizens, the government and for the Church, as the crisis was challenging them on every front.

He also said material aid was vital, but that people should be discerning about who they provided it to and how they provided it.

A former officer of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne,



Sri Lankans face food and fuel shortages during a political crisis.

Picture: supplied

Dr Perera spoke from Colombo about the situation. He said failed government policies along with the president's incompetence and corruption had led to difficulty and suffering that was affecting everyone. Dr Perera also said Sri Lanka's currency had lost value, there were import restrictions, and the cost of living had skyrocketed amid hyperinflation.

Because of that people had been left without fuel for transport and electricity, and were also struggling to get gas for cooking, he said.

Dr Perera was particularly alarmed that the mood of some previously peaceful protestors had soured.

"Everybody was behind the protest to get rid of the corrupt president and his people, but now there are moves by some to use violence like attempt to take over the parliament building, and setting fire to the prime minister's residence, which is going down a dangerous road," he said.

He said the world community of Christians could pray for Sri Lankans who were suffering and for those who had become deeply angered, as well as for the elected parliamentary representatives.

But Dr Perera also asked people to consider the Christian churches in the country. Many church organisations were stepping up and

being channels of food distribution, opening soup kitchens and giving cash to support people.

He noted they had the motivation and energy to keep helping for the long term whereas most other types of organisations would give up after a while.

He said communities outside Sri Lanka could also support some of these Christian projects to get provisions to people who were facing difficulties.

The Anglican Church in Sri Lanka has called for more conscientious action and restraint from those in power, the protestors and the armed forces. In a statement Presiding Bishop Keerthisiri

Fernando of the Church of Ceylon, and the Bishop of Colombo Dushantha Rodrigo expressed their concern about the events, and the inability of the Parliament to manage the crisis.

"The state of emergency should not be used to suppress the fundamental rights of our people or cause harm to peaceful assembly. We call on the people to remain calm in the face of turmoil and resist any attempts to destroy state property," the bishops said.

Dr Perera also urged people who were going to provide material aid to be sure of who they were sending money to and to send it through the proper channels.

They could specify the project it was going towards and ask for a report or accountability to ensure the money would be used for the purpose it was intended.

In the meantime, Dr Perera said he was still managing to keep his business running.

"For a while we were able to put diesel in our generator and have power. But now we can't get diesel, so when the power is out, we sit in darkness. We've moved to a couple of days of working from home because of transport difficulties and staff are not able to come to work, or it's very difficult and costly. So, we have to make adjustments," he said. "Sri Lankans are resilient people and we find ways of doing what needs to be done, but it is unfortunate."

Our refugee policies remain unforgiving: Advocates

Kirrlee Nicolle

CHRISTIAN REFUGEE advocates are seeking greater recognition of those left waiting indefinitely for residency proceedings to be finalised.

Melbourne Bishop Philip Huggins said everybody won when those who had already been deemed safe members of the community were allowed to settle as permanent residents and find a pathway to becoming citizens.

Bishop Huggins said that this Refugee Week he and others were calling for the Labor government to announce an amnesty, a move he said would make it easier on everybody.

Bishop Huggins said that through their pastoral work, he had come to know many refugees as valued and respected members of their communities.

"Despite of the uncertainties,



Despite years lived on Australian shores, many refugees wait in limbo for permanent residency visas to be processed. Picture: Andrei310

they have made a new life," he said. "They are much loved in our parish communities and wider community."

He also said that detention caused trauma, and the government had an opportunity to bring

some permanency into the lives of displaced people.

"We want policy that only ever heals and never causes harm," he said.

Ahmet* is a refugee living in Victoria who attends an Anglican

church with his wife and two children, and has established a painting business to support his family.

Ahmet said he left a dangerous situation in his home country and arrived in Australia in 2013 by boat.

He said that he was still in the process of trying to obtain permanent residency.

"I need my wife, myself and my kids living here for a better life and my kids growing in whichever religion they want," he said.

Bishop Huggins said that Ahmet was an example of a nation-building citizen and a great contributor to the Commonwealth of Australia.

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project co-founder Sister Brigid Arthur AO said that we had much to gain as a nation from being welcoming and inclusive toward refugees.

"We are a country of migrants, and those who have been accepted

as refugees are always those who give back to society," she said.

"I think Australia could certainly have a sense of pride if we saw ourselves as an inclusive and accepting country.

"We've become known as that country which is punitive and cruel."

Anglican Overseas Aid executive director Jo Knight said that Australia's current refugee handling system was an unforgiving one, and that political leaders and lawmakers were only just catching up with its harsh realities.

"Christians and many compassionate people in our broader community have been working hard to raise the injustices of the system," Ms Knight said.

"We are seeing positive steps of justice and the community is being heard."

*Not his real name.

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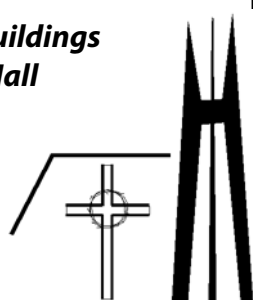
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A journey to understand how identity works

Kirralee Nicolle

INSPIRED BY THE CULTURAL diversity at Ridley College and concerned with the growing self-interest in the West, Ridley principal Dr Brian Rosner is fascinated with the concept of identity.

I caught up with him to discuss his latest book *How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward is Not the Answer*.

We talked about what his motivations were for the book, and what he hopes it will offer those who are searching for a more robust view of identity.

Can you tell me some background to why you decided to write the book, and what you are hoping it will offer?

The first book [I wrote on identity], *Known by God*, is a Biblical theology of personal identity. It is more technical – it's really written for ministers, students, scholars and nerdy Christians. This [latest book] is an attempt to address the cultural moment more directly. It comes out of two motivations. I find our society's approach to identity issues quite confusing and even confronting, and I think the Bible offers some really helpful and true ways of being yourself. From my own lived experience, I have found [Biblical] teaching to be very helpful. I had a crisis of identity myself in the mid-'90s, and since then I've been reflecting on the subject. One of the strange things is that when you do that, you find a lot of other people are doing it as well! So, it's ended up much more topical and current than I could have ever imagined. All sorts of people are wondering about who they are. It's never been

“In my own crisis of identity, it was being known by God as His child that really gave my life comfort and direction.”

Brian Rosner

more important to know who you are, so everyone says be yourself, be true to yourself, you do you. On the other hand, there's more uncertainty about who you are. The irony is it's never been so important, but it's also never been harder to know who you are.

[I have also been inspired by] the multicultural student body at Ridley College. The only way to evaluate your own culture is to learn from those who have a different culture. The rich community of Ridley College is a real benefit [to my understanding]. What it reveals is that maybe there's more than one way to do identity.

In the book, you focus on the most common places in which humans tend to search for their identity. Was there any other personal experience that led to choosing those in particular?

Authenticity is thought to be the consequence of looking within yourself and living accordingly. What I found was that personally, that was unsatisfying. Other authors – social critics, psycholo-



Dr Brian Rosner hopes his new book offers readers a more robust approach to identity. **Image: supplied**

gists, sociologists – have suggested that it's not working and it's not true to human nature. We're social beings, and we look to find ourselves by being known to others. We are storytelling beings – we look backwards and forwards to our life stories, which are shared stories. Each of us inhabits stories inherited from our families, our cultures, our nationalities [and] our ethnicities. And then finally,

we look up to find ourselves, which is obviously the Christian element. We're adoring beings. We're not just historic and social, we are adoring. We worship something. [Whatever it is we focus on], if it doesn't look up [to God], it doesn't really achieve its aims. When you look up, you're known by God. The life story of Christ becomes our own life story. We see that in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The most important thing that ever happens to us happened before we were born – Christ died and we died with him.

In my own crisis of identity, it was being known by God as His child that really gave my life comfort and direction. [This book] is me sharing what I have found to be of great comfort and help. [It] tries to say them in a way that's accessible and hopefully not just helpful for Christians but [also] for people who don't go to church.

You focus a lot on individualism in the book and its consequences to perceptions of identity. Do you think that Australia has a bigger problem with identity than other countries in the world, and can you tell me about that?

The idea in the West that you become yourself by excluding all other influences is ridiculous. Sociologists distinguish between what's called the “buffered” self and the “porous” self. The West has this view of the self as buffered, where you find yourself within your own self exclusively. Most cultures in human history and around the world today outside the West have what's called the porous self – you find yourself by connecting with those around you and by contributing to society.

A lack of contentment in our Western culture – the kind of restless insatiability, the fact that we've got so much anxiety – that's another example where expressive individualism is letting us down. Obviously, it's a complicated thing and there are other factors, but if you live in a culture which is more communitarian, there seems to be less opportunity to be discontent.

Prayer Diary

Find the prayer diary online at melbourneanglican.org.au/spiritual-resources

AUGUST

Mon 1: The Diocese of Grafton (Bp Murray Harvey, Clergy & People); Archdeacons of Geelong (Jill McCoy); St John Chrysostom Brunswick West (Len Firth, Locum Tenens);

Tue 2: Ministry with the Aboriginal people of Australia (Bp Chris McLeod, National Aboriginal Bishop, Aboriginal Clergy & People); Hume Anglican Grammar School (Bill Sweeney, Principal); Peter Waterhouse, Chaplain; St Timothy's Bulleen (Ben Wong, Ivy Wong, Paul Hughes, Penny Chartres);

Wed 3: Ministry with the Torres Strait Islander people of Australia (Torres Strait Islander Clergy & People); Social Responsibilities Committee (Gordon Preece, Chair); St Bartholomew's Burnley (Matthew Healy);

Thurs 4: The Diocese of Melbourne (Abp Philip Freier, Asst Bps Paul Barker, Bradley Billings, Genieve Blackwell, Kate Prowd, Clergy & People); SparkLit (Michael Collie, National Director); Church of the Ascension Burwood East (Anthony Frost);

Fri 5: The Diocese of Newcastle (Bp Peter Stuart, Asst Bps Charlie Murry, Sonia Roulston, Clergy & People); St Thomas' Burwood (John Carrick, Michael Prabaharan, Ros Armstrong, Terence Sing Ng, Joshua Millard);

Sat 6: The Diocese of North Queensland (Bp Keith Joseph, Clergy & People); Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School (Deborah Priest, Principal, Jenny Sonneman, Chaplain); St Dunstan's Camberwell (Jobby John);

Sun 7: The Church in the Province of the West Indies (Bp John Holder); The Diocese of North West Australia (Bishopric vacant, Clergy & People); Angliss Health Services; St John's Camberwell (John Baldock, Helen Creed);

Mon 8: The Diocese of Perth (Abp Kay Goldsworthy, Asst Bps Jeremy James, Kate Wilmot, Clergy & People); Archdeacons of Kew (Greg Allinson); St Mark's Camberwell (Greg Allinson, David Shannon, Angus Monro, Fiona Chia);

Tues 9: The Diocese of Riverina (Bp Donald Kirk, Clergy & People); Ivanhoe Grammar School (Gerard Foley, Principal, John Sanderson, Chaplain); St Mary's Camberwell South (David Huynh);

Wed 10: The Diocese of Rockhampton (Bishop Peter Grice, Clergy & People); Karingal - St Laurence Community Services; St Paul's Canterbury (Rachel McDougall);

Thurs 11: The Diocese of Sydney (Abp Kanishka Raffel, Regional Bps Chris Edwards, Michael Stead, Peter Hayward, Peter Lin, Malcolm Richards, Gary Koo, Clergy & People); Stewardship Agencies; St Jude's Carlton (John Forsyth, Natalie Rosner, Stephen Sonneman, Alexander Zunica, Amy Brown, Michael Phillips, Samuel Oldland);

Fri 12: The Diocese of Tasmania (Bp Richard Condie, Missioner Bp Chris Jones, Clergy & People); Defence Force Chaplains; St Michael's Carlton North (Steven Webster);

Sat 13: The Diocese of The Murray (Bp Keith Dalby, Clergy & People); Janet

Clarke Hall (Damian Powell, Principal); Parish of Caroline Springs (Jonathan Smith, Monica Kuol);

Sun 14: The Extra-Provincial Churches; The Diocese of The Northern Territory (Bp Greg Anderson, Clergy & People); Department of Theological Education (Bp Bradley Billings, Assistant Bishop, Monomeeth Episcopate); Casey Anglican Dinka Congregation AAC (Peter Alier-Jongroor);

Mon 15: The Diocese of Wangaratta (Bp Clarence Bester, Clergy & People); Archdeacons of La Trobe (Gavin Ward); Oaktree Anglican Parish, St Mary's Caulfield (Mark Juers, Andrew Stewart, Karen Winsemius);

Tues 16: The Diocese of Willochra (Bp John Stead, Clergy & People); Korowa Anglican Girls' School (Helen Carmody, Principal; Kirsten Winkett, Chaplain); The Parish of St Mary's Caulfield with St Clement's Elsternwick (Mark Juers, Andrew Stewart, Karen Winsemius);

Wed 17: Anglicare Australia (Bp Chris Jones, Chair; Kasy Chambers, Exec Director); Victorian Council of Churches (Dr Graeme Blackman, President, Ian Smith, Executive Officer); St Paul's Caulfield North (Jennifer Poulter);

Thurs 18: Theological Colleges, Church Schools & Church Kindergartens; Working Group on Aboriginal Matters (NATSIAC); Casey Anglican Dinka Congregation AAC (Peter Alier-Jongroor);

Fri 19: Mission Agencies of the Anglican Church of Australia; Police Force Chaplains (Drew Mellor, David Thompson

& other Chaplains) and members of the Police Force; St Mary's Caulfield (Mark Juers);

Sat 20: Religious Orders serving within the Anglican Church of Australia; Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School (Elisabeth Rhodes, Principal; Fiona Raike, Chaplain); St Paul's Caulfield North (Jennifer Poulter);

Sun 21: The Anglican Province of Alexandria (Bp Samy Fawzy); Locums and all retired clergy; Anglican Board of Mission (John Deane, Executive Director); St Matthew's Cheltenham (Colleen Clayton); St John's Bentleigh – Pastoral Visit (Abp Philip Freier); St John's East Malvern – Pastoral Visit (Bp Brad Billings);

Mon 22: The Anglican Church of Australia (Primate Abp Geoffrey Smith, General Secretary Anne Hywood, the General Synod & the Standing Committee); Archdeacons of Maroondah (Bruce Bickerdike); Inner West Church Kensington (Peter Greenwood);

Tues 23: The Diocese of Adelaide (Abp Geoff Smith, Asst Bps Denise Ferguson, Timothy Harris, Christopher McLeod, Clergy & People); University of Divinity (Peter Sherlock, Vice-Chancellor); City on a Hill Melbourne East (Nicholas Coombs);

Wed 24: The Diocese of Armidale (Bp Rod Chiswell, Clergy & People); Korus Connect (Dawn Penney, CEO); City on a Hill (Guy Mason, Andrew Grills, Matt Keller, Ben Hewitt, David Chiswell, Stephanie Judd);

Thurs 25: The Diocese of Ballarat (Bp

Garry Weatherill, Clergy & People); Anglican Development Fund; All Saints' Clayton (Charlie Fletcher, Jeremiah Paul, Abraham Amuom);

Fri 26: The Diocese of Bathurst (Bp Mark Calder, Clergy & People); Holy Trinity Coburg (Faraj Hanna);

Sat 27: The Diocese of Bendigo (Bp Matt Brain, Clergy & People); Melbourne Girls' Grammar School (Dr Toni Meath, Principal; Kirsty Ross, Chaplain); St Luke's Cockatoo (Chris Garcia);

Sun 28: The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia (Bp Philip Richardson); The Diocese of Brisbane (Abp Phillip Aspinall, Regional Bps Jeremy Greaves, Cameron Venables, John Roundhill, Clergy & People); Aged Care Ministry; St Andrew's Corio (David Milford); St Paul's Geelong – Pastoral Visit (Bp Kate Prowd);

Mon 29: The Diocese of Bunbury (Bp Ian Coutts, Clergy & People); Redemption Church Craigieburn (Akhil Gardner);

Tues 30: The Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn (Bp Mark Short, Asst Bps Stephen Pickard, Carol Wagner, Clergy & People); Melbourne Grammar School (Philip Grutzner, Principal; Hans Christiansen, William Peacock, Malcolm Woolrich, Chaplains); The Parish of St John's, Cranbourne w. Christ Church, Tooradin (Samuel Bleby, James Young);

Wed 31: Ministry to the Defence Force (Bishop Grant Dibden, Chaplains & Members of the Defence Forces); Anglican Boys' Society - CEBS (Bruce Anderson, Secretary); St John the Divine Croydon (John Webster).

Our quiet steps of faith count as we seek God

Carol Clark

ON HOLIDAY IN SYDNEY recently I attended the funeral of a family member of a close friend. The person we were farewelling had apparently lived an ordinary “unremarkable” life, which included managing an aggressive illness and series of medical interventions in their last 22 years. Despite their “unremarkable” life, a packed church and family stories pointed to a life of faithful contribution expressed in both secular and faith settings.

I came away inspired by the power of “one quiet life” – by an ordinary member of an Anglican church whose life had an impact. This has led to me to think about the current season of “Ordinary Time”, found in the church calendar between Pentecost and Advent.

For some, it can feel like a season of marking time, while others may be tempted by our cultures’ – secular and sacred – tendency to equate ordinary non-achieving time with wasted time. As churches lose members and critical mass, many are understandably feeling weariness at the thought of gearing up to achieve growth.

I have been encouraged by the reminder of one theologian that “ordinary time” is a season for living out our vocation – for persisting in our walk of faith as we recall that every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our scriptures tell many stories of leaders who are forced through challenging circumstances to encounter God differently – and then to be taking one small step after another in what the writer Eugene Peterson calls “a long obedience in the same direction”.

This was true of the prophet



Ordinary time is a season for living out our vocation, writes Carol Clark.

Picture: iStock

“‘Ordinary time’ is a season ... for persisting in our walk of faith as we recall that every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Carol Clark

Jeremiah as he delivered God’s call to the children of Israel exiled in Babylon to “seek the welfare of the city to which I’ve exiled you and pray to the Lord for it, for your welfare depends on its welfare” (Chapter 29). This call was followed by the Lord’s reminder of his plans for this community: “plans for well-being and not for calamity ... to give you a future and a hope ... you will seek me and find me when you search for

“Perhaps a first step ... is to be praying for increased well-being and healing in our parishes and local communities.”

Carol Clark

me with all your heart”.

I believe this is the call to all of us right now: to remember God’s promise of hope and a future as we continue to seek him. Perhaps a first step in this is to be praying for increased well-being and healing in our parishes and local communities. A second step might be to reach out to someone we notice who needs some support.

Over 120 diocesan priests and ministry leaders choose to take a series of small steps as they meet with a coach provided by the diocesan coaching program. In this confidential space they reflect each month on their faith and leadership journey. This regular investment helps them re-connect with their vocation as they explore how best to attend to parishioners of all ages and with their wider communities.

We can be all be on this journey. Formally or informally within God’s providence, our quiet steps of faith will count for something.

Carol Clark is manager of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne coaching program.

Delight in the rare days of simple joy

Clare Boyd-Macrae

MY MAMA told me, there’ll be days like this. For non-Van fans, the first verse of Van Morrison’s classic goes like this and the song continues in this vein: *When it’s not always raining/ when there’s no one complaining/ when everything falls into place like the flick of a switch/well my mama told me there’ll be days like this.* You get the picture.

I had a “day like this” last week. I’d just finished working at an intense conference, which took a lot of work beforehand and then 14-hour days at the gig itself. I was knackered, but the event had gone well, it was done, it was dusted. The night it wound up, I slept better than I had for weeks, and the next morning, the sun was shining and I felt renewed.

I walked to our local radiography clinic for a long overdue X-ray, feeling lucky that I have easy access to such tools. The way there is along a



a word for all seasons

fledgling park planted under a new overhead railway. I hadn’t walked there for a while, and the plants were growing and lush, covering the concrete pylons more than they used to. There were book boxes and children’s playgrounds, a dog park and table tennis, and I marvelled at the capacity for people, just occasionally, to create beauty out of the most unpromising material.

I met my younger daughter for lunch and on the way we met a Staffy – my favourite breed – who not only grinned at me and let me caress her ears, but even rolled over like a

big sook and let me scratch her tummy.

While we waited for our coffees, my girl, who has been so sick for so long but was having a better day, pointed out some blue and white mugs sitting nearby in a hard rubbish collection. I pounced, discovering that as well as being in my favourite kitchen colours, they were by one of my favourite potters.

Over the last decade in our family there have been plenty of the other kinds of days. Days when you simply put one foot in front of the other and try to keep yourself kind. I’ve learned

to revel in the days of uncomplicated happiness. I used to feel guilty about such times, now I accept that they are as much part of the human condition as suffering and death, that they are a divine gift to be held to our hearts in delicious delight, storing up warmth and connection and simple content for the darker times.

The monastics taught “otium sanctum” – holy leisure. Jesus took time to feast, hang with friends, or be by himself. The principle of Sabbath is central to the Jewish and Christian faiths and essential to maintaining the life of discipleship over the long haul.

In my sixties, I’ve learnt that rest is a holy discipline, that the creator God made us to need leisure and joy and companionship, and that I am living in God’s way when I let myself delight in “days like this”.

Clare Boyd-Macrae’s blog is at clareboyd-macrae.com.



Spirit Words

“He has made it clear to you, mortal man, what is good and what the LORD is requiring from you – to act with justice, to treasure the LORD’s gracious love, and to walk humbly in the company of your God.”

Micah 6:8

Elvis: Complex, ambitious, exploited, tragic

Wendy Knowlton

BEFORE SETTING FOOT IN A cinema many were prepared to dismiss Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis* as an exercise in style over substance. The bedazzled opening credits and frenetic editing of the first ten minutes might support this judgement. But, in classic Luhrmann style, things calm down as the story progresses. In the end, *Elvis* offers much more than its critics were willing to admit.

This is largely due to the mesmerizing performance of Austin Butler. He somehow avoids comparison with decades of Elvis impersonators and creates a totally committed portrait of a complex, ambitious, exploited and ultimately tragic individual. Drawing inspiration from Revival ecstasy and black culture Elvis is swiftly labelled a threat to conservative white values. But efforts to control him with threats of jail and a stint in the army can't contain a man who Luhrmann presents as being driven by a fierce desire to be true to himself. Elvis sings and moves the way he does not to inflame his hyperventilating



Austin Butler plays the young Elvis Presley electrifying audiences.

Picture: Warner Bros.

female fans, but because he must. The youthful exuberance and the tightrope act required to balance fear and triumph, doubt and belief makes for a fascinating opening.

Far less successful is Tom Hanks as Elvis's long-time manager, Colonel Tom Parker. The fact that he feels so unconvincing, swamped

by prosthetics and burdened with a strange accent, could be deemed a cunning choice rather than an unfortunate failure. Parker was indeed a construct, an identity invented by an AWOL Dutchman: a carnival grotesque eager to find and exploit the next rising star to line his own pockets and support

his gambling habit. Despite his self-serving narrative and proclamations of love for "his boy" the parasitic Parker's actions are enough to establish him as a villain. A more subtle portrayal may have made him a more interesting one.

Elvis wants to tour the world and at one point, the possibility of

a legitimate acting career beckons with a role in *A Star is Born* on offer. Instead, he is forced into a series of trite film roles and trapped in the glitzy world of Las Vegas with Parker pulling the strings, feathering his own nest whilst bankrupting his oblivious charge. In the last years of his life, Elvis is propped up by meaningless affairs, drugs and drink, his health and mental well-being sacrificed so the show can go on. The still loving Priscilla (Olivia de Jonge) can't stay, and the ageing star is increasingly entombed in shadowy hotel suites, cut off from the wider world by the fall of each curtain.

Luhrmann's protagonist worries that he will be forgotten, that he has left no mark on the world when he had such dreams. *Elvis* is a cautionary tale about the often-hollow nature of fame and the dangers of misplaced loyalty and trust. Handsomely shot, embellished by Catherine Martin's stunning costumes and largely strong performances it is a film that will still divide audiences, but proves many critics wrong.

In cinemas now.

Aesthetics hold up a film that falls short of the novel

Wendy Knowlton

THE STAND-OUT stars of *Where the Crawdads Sing* are the landscape and the cinematography. Shafts of greenish light penetrate the gaps between trees festooned with Spanish moss and a labyrinth of watery channels divides the mysterious marshes where abundant life does what it needs to do to survive. When the seemingly idyllic setting is disturbed by the discovery of a body at the foot of a fire observation tower, suspicion quickly falls on "the Marsh girl" Kya (Daisy Edgar-Jones), who has been living there alone since she was ten years old.

The body belongs to Chase Andrews (Harris Dickson), an entitled womaniser who enticed Kya into a relationship with false promises, and then abandoned her, just as her whole family had done before, leaving one by one. This,



Daisy Edgar Jones in *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

Picture: Sony Pictures

and a few scant pieces of potential evidence are enough for the town to condemn the girl. The girl they humiliated on her only day of

school as a child and left in illiterate isolation and poverty after she evaded the forays of truant officers and social services.

Despite its loyalty to Delia Owen's bestseller, and its beauty, this film doesn't quite manage to capture the power and fascination of the marsh in the way the immersive novel does. Kya's obsession with her environment and her meticulous observation and recording of the natural world around her is key to who she is and what she does. Her abusive father, and the local boys who view her as a trophy to acquire, have taught Kya to be suspicious of men. Nature has become the mother she lost, and her prime teacher. So, a murder charge against a girl used to observing female grasshoppers bite off the heads of their mates, or fireflies luring others to their deaths, carries a significance it would lack when directed elsewhere.

Edgar-Jones is a passionate, damaged and sympathetic Kya. Taylor John Smith is a warm contrast to the repellent Chase, playing Tate the sensitive friend who teaches

Kya to read and shares her love for the marsh. Kya's few supporters, local couple Jumpin' (Sterling Macer Jr.) and Mabel (Michael Hyatt) bring love and hope to Kya's history of trauma.

Much of the film's publicity claims it is a story of empowerment, and Kya's resilience is impressive, but the story is more a tale of desperate loneliness. Kya's lawyer Tom (David Strathairn) asks whether Kya was rejected because she was different, or different because she was rejected. Many want to pin the crime on her because it would be convenient to believe an outsider rather than one of their own was capable of such a deed. Kya's guilt or innocence is kept ambiguous until the end, but it is disturbingly clear that Chase's death was a premeditated, carefully planned act. Lurking beneath the waters of the marsh is the question of who, in the end, is predator and who is prey.

On its face, it's ridiculous ... but this film is never entirely so

Tim Kroenert

BRUNO (Damon Herriman) stands befuddled before a supermarket shelf stacked with innumerable varieties of tinned beans. He tries unsuccessfully to engage assistance from a store employee. But he's speaking gibberish – as all the actors do in this delightfully absurdist comedy – and what he actually says depends on which version you're watching.

If you've tuned to the subtitles written by Ronny Chieng and Celia Pacquola, he's raging about the impossibility of choosing between so many kinds of beans. In Julia Davis' interpretation, he's complaining that there's "no fish in the fish aisle".

This device is a stroke of genius by director Armagan Ballantyne and writer-star Jackie van Beek. Having the actors speak a fake language and enlisting different comedians to pen their own unique subtitles adds layers of unhinged glee, and virtually demands repeat viewing – at the very least for the intrigue of seeing how different writers interpret the same essential scenario.

The scenario itself is fairly ordinary. Bruno and his wife Laura (van Beek) have problems. Laura is stressed at work, their sex life is kaput and it's been years since they shared any emotional intimacy. At breaking point, they decide to escape to a compound in the wilderness for a couples' retreat.

Here they encounter an eclectic assortment of other couples, who are enjoying the guileless sex- and body-positive tutelage of guru-like Bjorg (Jemaine Clement). Thoroughly shaken from their comfort zones, the buttoned-down pair are forced to face up to the ways in which they are both closer to, and further apart from, each other than they ever guessed.

Sex- and body-positivity are the orders of the day. The film's frank approach to talk and acts of sex, and to nudity, are confronting. At the same time, it is heartening to see the diversity of relationships and bodies on display. Sure, the film is irreverent, but it is endlessly affectionate toward its characters. While their carnal high-jinks are



Damon Herriman, Armagan Ballantyne and Jackie van Beek
Picture: Kerry Brown

often played for laughs, it is never at the expense of their humanity.

All the actors commit to the gibberish language with aplomb, giving emotional and narrative significance to the meaningless words. The whole thing on its face is ridiculous, but the characters themselves never entirely are.

This is especially true of Bruno and Laura. As portrayed by Herriman and van Beek, they feel like an authentic long-married couple, once deeply in love and genuinely trying to bridge the distance that has grown between them. Whichever version you watch, it is this emotional arc that grounds the story and allows its idiosyncrasies to be more than a gimmick.

Nude Tuesday is screening on Stan.