

Bringing God's love to the wards

"I think God won't have me". But, as the Reverend Sam Lo talked more with the woman, there were tears in her eyes when she heard the promise that God's arms were open wide, ready to embrace her – that she would never be turned away.

Hearing this woman's story was just one part of the Reverend Sam Lo's work as a hospital chaplain. Her role is to be with patients, their families, and hospital staff, on their journey – often at painful moments.

For Mrs Lo, her role has been a gift.

Story – P14-15.



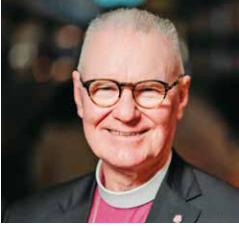
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A delight to share in Orthodox centenary celebrations

■ Archbishop Philip Freier

Later in the year, in October, the Greek Orthodox Church will host a visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew 1, the 270th bishop to exercise ministry in the see of Constantinople.

The Ecumenical Patriarch is *primus inter pares* (first among equals) amongst the Eastern Orthodox bishops. The occasion of his visit is the centenary of the founding of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia. I hope that we will have opportunity to welcome this successor to St Andrew to Melbourne and to St Paul's Cathedral as his schedule is settled. The visit to Australia of the Ecumenical Patriarch comes at a difficult time of military conflict between two predominantly Orthodox nations, Ukraine and Russia.

It was a pleasure to meet Professor Anastasios Tamis in April and to receive his

book on the growth and recognition of the Greek diaspora and with it, Greek history and culture throughout the world. Of particular interest to me was his commentary on the role played by Melbourne Anglicans in the welcome and recognition of Orthodox Christians from the 19th century onwards. Notable amongst these early initiatives was the encouragement of the third Bishop of Melbourne, Field Flowers Goe, for Orthodox Christians to gather in the Anglican Mission Room in East Melbourne for services in Arabic and Greek. Goe himself attended these services and pronounced the blessing in Arabic to those in attendance. He authorised a prominent member of the Melbourne Syrian community, Katarr Keamy to act as a Lay Reader and to interpret the sermon given in English by a member of the Anglican clergy. With a generous sense of compassion for this small community, Bishop Goe approached the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem to ask

for his blessing on this ministry amongst the Melbourne Syrians and Greeks.

In 1892, the Jerusalem Patriarch, Gerassimos, granted permission for Orthodox people to be baptised, married, and buried by Melbourne Anglican clergy according to the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church. Further Anglican representations, including to the Patriarch of Antioch, were made to encourage the appointment of an Orthodox priest to serve this community. Friendly relationships continued over the next decades and were demonstrated in 1932 when Metropolitan Timotheos Evangelinidis, the second Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australasia, was welcomed by Archbishop Frederick Waldegrave Head to St Paul's Cathedral. Well attended by both clergy and laity, the service in St Paul's witnessed to the Anglican work that had helped the Orthodox believers maintain their faith and community in those difficult early days in Melbourne. Timotheos also declared his commitment to work towards the unity of Christians and the reunion of the separated churches.

Conflict in Europe prompted large numbers of Greek people to emigrate to Australia in the 1920s and in the post World War Two period. A large and confident Greek Orthodox community is now visible in many parts of Australia. For all of the reasons of history and contemporary witness it will be a delight to share with this community in the celebration of the centenary of the founding of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia.

Vacant Appointments as of 19 July 2024:

St Alfred, Blackburn North [from September]; Christ Church, Brunswick; St Michael, North Carlton; St John, Camberwell; St Matthew, Cheltenham [from September]; Redemption Church, Craigieburn; St Mark, Emerald; St Oswald, Glen Iris; St Alban, Hamlyn Heights; St Mary, North Melbourne [from October]; St Thomas, Moonee Ponds; Ormond Anglican Parish; St Aidan, Parkdale; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; Mullum Mullum, Ringwood; St Luke, Vermont; St John, Wantirna South; St Thomas, Winchelsea

Appointments:

BLINCO-SMITH, The Revd Julie Katherine, appointed Vicar [from Priest-in-Charge] All Saints, Greensborough, effective 22 July 2024
CLAYTON, The Revd Colleen, appointed Vicar, Mornington-Mt Martha, effective 24 September 2024
CROSSLEY, The Revd Lynda, appointed Vicar [from Priest-in-Charge] All Saints Rosebud with St Katherine McCrae, effective 10 August 2024
EVERETT, The Revd Bruce, appointed Deacon in Charge, St Philip, Collingwood, effective 23 July 2024
FERNANDO, The Right Revd Dr Watte Miti Waduge Devapriya Keerthisiri, appointed Vicar, St Peter, Murrumbena with Holy Trinity, Hughesdale, effective 20 July 2024
FLYNN, The Revd Michael, appointed Archdeacon, Archdeaconry of Essendon, effective 7 August
NEWTON, The Revd Robert Keith, appointed Vicar Extension, Holy Trinity Kew, effective 30 October 2024
POWYS, The Revd Dr David, appointed Vicar, St Agnes, Black Rock, effective 11 September 2024
SIMON, The Revd Saurabh [Josh], appointed Vicar, St Thomas, Langwarrin with St Peter, Pearceedale, effective 22 January 2025

Permission to Officiate:

BOYD, The Revd Julia, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 9 July 2024.
COLE, The Revd Dr Graham Arthur, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 12 July 2024
KELLAM, The Revd Dr Jocelyn, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 22 July 2024

Resignations:

BOWLES, The Revd Andrew Zachary, Vicar, St Mark, Emerald, effective 30 June 2024
BOYD, The Revd Julia, Assistant Curate, St James, Glen Iris, effective 10 June 2024
JACKSON, The Revd Jonathan Cedric, Project Officer-Reimagining the Future, effective 31 July 2024

Obituaries:

WANDMAKER, The Revd Frederick, 11 July 2024
BEAUMONT, The Right Revd Gerald, 10 July 2024

Clergy Moves



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The Reverend Dr Graham Stanton found young people's integration into the broader life of the church was vital to them remaining. Picture: Hannah Felsbourg

Parents key to keeping youth in church

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Children and young people are more likely to stay in churches where parents actively disciple them and they are a part of broader community life, according to new research.

Researchers hope churches will invest more resources in children's and youth ministry and training, to help young people stay engaged with their faith.

The research identified discipleship and parental involvement were key to keeping young people in churches through their teenage years into young adulthood.

Ministry that emphasised parents as primary disciple makers had higher rates of retention for children and young people, according to newly released Children's Ministry Futures Research in Melbourne.

The findings aligned with a recent Youthworks study in Sydney, which highlighted practicing spiritual habits at home, biblical teaching and discipleship as key to keeping young people in church.

Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry director the Reverend Dr Graham Stanton said his research found young people's integration in the broader life of the church was vital to help them stay in the faith.

He said equipping parents as disciple makers was crucial as passing on faith to the next generation was central to God's mission for Christians.

But churches were often preoccupied with ministry to adults, while children were simply being entertained rather than disciplined.

Dr Stanton hoped his research recommendations would help young people feel valued and respected, fostering a sense of belonging in churches.

"We want to teach children and young people of the good news of Jesus and to encourage them and enable them to make a response of faith and to be involved in the ministry of the church," he said.

The CMF Snapshot Report indicates children's and family ministries thrive where children play a visible and willing role in the intergenerational life of a parish.

Including children's and family ministry in parish planning, and build partnerships between parishes, and with schools, were two recommendations the research team made.

Researchers also advised expanding support for the Diocesan Children and Young People Ministry Team and investing in training for children's and family ministry leaders.

They also recommend using CMF health indicators to evaluate the health of children's and family ministries. The indicators are as follows:

- Children participate as members of the church family.
- Parents and caregivers are recognised as the primary disciple makers of their children.
- Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.
- Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.
- The church has an outward vision for

children and families outside of the church.

The research data was gathered by interviewing parish leaders from across 124 parishes of the Melbourne diocese.

Youthworks adviser Al James hoped for more investment in youth and children's ministry, as his research showed only about 65 per cent of children remained in church into adulthood.

He said he hoped faith would give young people a robust and coherent way to navigate life that benefited them as well as wider society.

"I want to see ... churches recognise that young people have a meaningful place and a meaningful part to play in the body of Christ," he said.

Mr James' research combined NCLS Research and Youthworks' Effective Ministry Tool data to assess Sydney Anglican ministries' effectiveness with children and youth.

The results suggested ministries should focus on evangelism, teaching key biblical concepts, and fostering a robust faith to help young people stay committed.

Discipleship, spiritual habits at home, biblical decision-making, and support for young people to address doubts were all marks of high-retention Sydney Anglican churches.

More about the Children's Ministry Futures Research Report can be found [here](#), and more on Al James' research can be found [here](#).

More change vital for vulnerable youth

■ Jenan Taylor

Advocates want more action to keep young people from reoffending in Victoria despite proposed changes to the state's youth justice laws.

They have welcomed raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 but believe other changes fail to address the rates of incarceration.

Advocates say addressing the causes of youth offending rather than locking up children would reduce incarceration rates, particularly those of First Nations youths.

Senior Indigenous cleric and school chaplain the Reverend Canon Helen Dwyer said the proposed laws fell short of keeping young children out of jail, particularly Indigenous youths.

Canon Dwyer said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more likely to be in the child protection system, a cohort that often encountered the judicial system.

She said they were also more likely to languish in remand centres because they were less likely to be granted bail.

Canon Dwyer said addressing causes, including family breakdown, could lead to breakthroughs about how to prevent offending.

She said youths in the child protection system needed stability rather than being moved around, and the community and the state needed to be better at trying to bring consistency in their lives.

Canon Dwyer said it grieved her the age of responsibility would only be raised to 12 because most 12-year-olds were too

under-developed to grasp the repercussions of their actions

Victoria's Youth Justice Bill 2024 includes a measure to enable police to transport and place into care children under 12 whom they believe to be a risk to the community and themselves.

The government would also trial electronic monitoring under the proposed reforms.

“Being tough on crime is bad for the kids. It doesn't help them, it just criminalises them.”

Thomas Feng

University of Divinity then School of Indigenous Studies committee chair the Reverend Janet Turpie-Johnstone said the age of responsibility needed to be higher than 12 because when children were criminalised they were often jailed alongside adult criminals.

Ms Turpie-Johnstone said the reforms needed to be extra considerate about Aboriginal youths in the system, as ingrained poverty caused by unjust national and state laws led to Aboriginal people becoming caught up in the criminal system.

She said First Nations-led initiatives were best suited to addressing the offending because they understood why Indigenous people were hurt and angry, and likely to break the law.

Ms Turpie-Johnstone said this included long term counselling programs that worked among the communities and with individuals.

Common Grace national director Gershon Nimbalker said raising the age of criminal responsibility was symbolic and practical.

Mr Nimbalker said nationally young Indigenous people were 50 times more likely than their peers to be arrested and raising the age showed a concern for justice and compassion.

He said he wanted to see more children safe, free and flourishing and shown they were loved by communities and authorities, rather than being locked up.

The incarceration rate for young Aboriginal people in Victoria was 51 per 10,000 people compared to 4.8 per 10,000 people for non-Indigenous youths in 2022-23 according to the Sentencing Advisory Council.

The Human Rights Law Centre said the planned new laws would fail children and communities as engagement with the criminal legal system, including first contact with police, harmed children.

Acting engagement director Thomas Feng said Victoria needed to focus on providing wrap-around services for them instead that helped them better connect with education and with their communities.

“Being tough on crime is bad for the kids. It doesn't help them, it just criminalises them,” Mr Feng said.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service was contacted for comment.

The Victorian premier has been contacted for comment.





Picture: iStock

Staff, students 'gutted' as university shuts Indigenous studies school

■ Jenan Taylor

Indigenous people will feel less safe in the Australian Church after the closure of the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity, an academic has warned.

Its former head believes the school had "impossible" funding models for a new institution.

The School of Indigenous Studies was closed on July 16 when the University of Divinity ruled it financially unsustainable, after about three years of operation.

The school's head Professor Anne Pattel-Gray said students and staff were gutted by the decision.

Professor Pattel-Gray said without the school there would be no way to raise next generation Indigenous theologians and a hole in the development of quality First Nations church leaders.

She said this would have a devastating effect on Indigenous theology students because there would be no Indigenous people there to support them in their studies.

"It's unclear what's going to be provided to them in the way of a culturally safe learning environment and working environment. It raises significant uncertainty and leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of Indigenous people," Professor Pattel-Gray said.

The University of Divinity announced the

school's closure in budget adjustment advice issued in mid-July.

The school offered education and research, including in the fields of theology and ministry, led by and for First Nations people.

Vice-chancellor James McLaren said in a statement the University Council decided the school's financial model was not sustainable in the current higher education environment.

"It raises significant uncertainty and leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of Indigenous people."

Anne Pattel-Gray

Professor Pattel-Gray said the school's funding model meant it was set up to fail.

She said staff discovered only at the start of 2024 that they were expected to raise all the funds for the school's running.

She said the school's funding model was philanthropy-based but its committee and staff believed the university was providing some base finance throughout its three-year history.

"It's impossible to establish a new institution without having at least base income to support us while we raise funding, prove ourselves through our research, and build those relationships that would enable

us to have sustainable income," Professor Pattel-Gray said.

University of Divinity Vice Chancellor Professor James McLaren said he was unable to comment on the background of the funding model because he was not at the university when it was set up.

Professor McLaren said he wanted to clarify that the model was a combination of elements that included revenue-raising through fundraising and grant applications.

He said the university budget was approved late last year and as far as he was aware the university's executive, of which the school was a member, was part of that process.

He said First Nations students would continue to undertake their Indigenous theology studies or be taught by Indigenous academics, as theological studies were still being offered through the university's colleges.

Professor McLaren said the university was an institution with 12 colleges where the majority of students who were enrolled undertook their studies.

The National Tertiary Education Union said it was appalled and profoundly disappointed at the decision.

NTEU Chair of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Committee Dr Sharlene Leroy-Dyer said Indigenous students were one of the most under-represented groups across Australia's higher education sector.

Works vie for Christian book prize

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Reflections on spirituality in contemporary society and personal narratives of faith are among contenders for the 2024 SparkLit Christian Book of the Year Award.

The 10 shortlisted books range across topics including environmental stewardship, missional guidance, and understanding suffering.

They include works by Melbourne-based authors Monash City Church of Christ teaching minister Siu Fung Wu and University of Divinity lecturer Sally Douglas.

Finding God in Suffering traces author Siu Fung Wu's journey from East Asia to Australia, reflecting on faith's role in understanding suffering.

Sally Douglas' *Jesus Sophia* explores ancient views of Jesus as the female divine, challenges traditional male-centric imagery, and offers practical insights for modern faith.

Charles Ringma's *In the Midst of Much-Doing* encourages the church to rejuvenate its inner life through spiritual practices that nourish, support, and sustain Christian work.

In *A Curious Machine*, editors Arseny

Ermakov and Glen O'Brien present essays on the theological and practical implications of emerging technologies.

Mission is the Shape of Water by Michael Frost argues for a fluid and adaptable approach to Christian mission in the modern world.

Danielle Treweek's *The Meaning of Singleness* offers a profound exploration of the significance of singleness within the Christian life.

Andrew Heard and Geoff Robson present *Growth and Change*, a book focused on growing the church while maintaining theological integrity.

Kate Rigby's *Meditations on Creation in an Era of Extinction* provides a timely reflection on environmental stewardship and a theological response to ecological crises.

Searching for Paradise by Charles Nombo Lapa and Janet Dickson is a true story from Papua New Guinea about gangs, colonisation, politics, and transformative faith.

Katherine Thompson's *The Discipline of Suffering* examines the role of suffering in spiritual growth and resilience, offering both personal insights and practical strategies.

SparkLit National director Michael Collie said shortlisted books were chosen based on their originality and relevance to Christian life in Australia.

He said judges from different denominations, states, and vocations were selected to ensure the judging reflected the diversity of the Australian church.

With over 80 book submissions but too few for genre-based awards, the shortlist itself was also a way to celebrate Christian books from different genres.

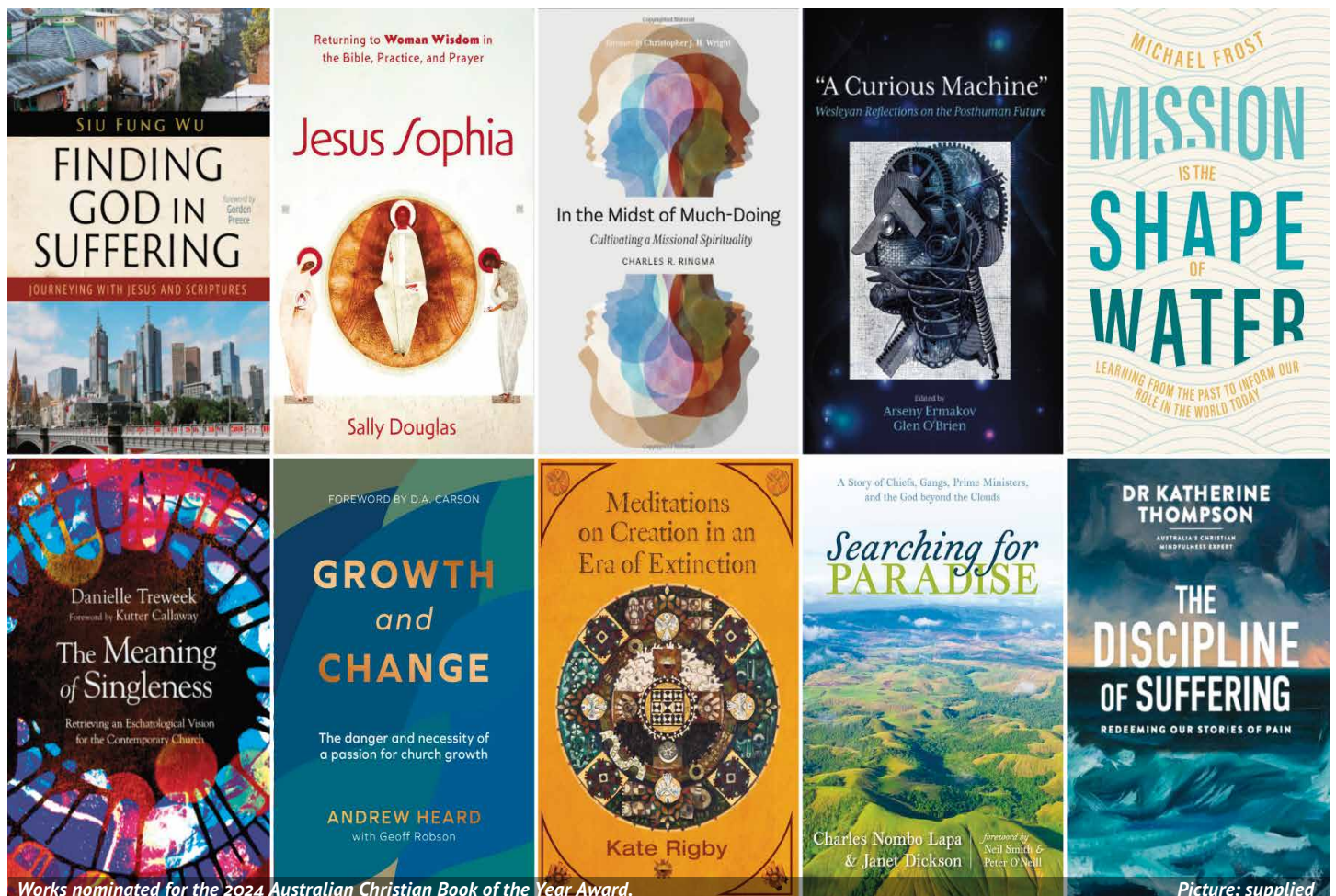
Mr Collie said the purpose of the award was to generate and cultivate an appetite in readers for Australian Christian writing.

He said it was important to encourage and celebrate Australian Christian writers given the small size of the Christian publishing industry in Australia.

However, books were only shortlisted for the award if they could stand out on the international literary stage as well.

The winner will be revealed at the SparkLit Awards Night at St Alfred's Blackburn North and via livestream on Thursday 22 August.

In 2023 the award went to Christopher Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory*.



Works nominated for the 2024 Australian Christian Book of the Year Award.

Picture: supplied

No time, no question: Life in a cult

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Deep on Reddit, Georgia Barron found stories of personal encounters with a high control group. It hit her: "I think I'm in a cult."

She was feeling the same depression, isolation, and exhaustion ex-cult members described. But she had been told it was just a normal part of following Christ.

While also studying full-time, Miss Barron spent up to 12 hours a week in Bible classes in Melbourne. She was told to keep them secret from her friends and family.

Any questions Miss Barron asked in class were brushed off, and she was eventually told her questioning was the devil's attempt to lead her away from God.

It took her five months to learn the name of the group she had been studying the Bible with. They had warned her not to search for them on the internet.

She was desperate to visit their church, so she ignored their warning and searched their name: Shincheonji.

That was when she read what the teachers later confirmed to her when confronted. They believed cult founder Lee Man-hee was the second coming of Jesus.

If what Shincheonji taught her was the truth, leaving them meant giving up her only opportunity for a relationship with Christ. But what she had learned did not sit right.

She decided it was finally time to tell the people around her about Shincheonji so they could help her decide if it was the truth.

Miss Barron's housemate was the one who first invited her to a Shincheonji event. They progressed through the Bible classes together.

One of Miss Barron's Christian friends set up a video call with leaders from her church to help her debrief. Miss Barron invited her housemate to join too.

During the call, her housemate was uncharacteristically angry and defensive. She brought up Shincheonji teachings Miss Barron had never heard before.

Miss Barron later found her housemate's notebook, which contained notes on all the people her housemate was trying to indoctrinate into Shincheonji, including her.

After this housemate moved out, the only person available to replace her was a young Christian woman. This housemate was different.

She showed Miss Barron a gentle kind of love and contentment of faith that slowly softened her heart towards Christianity again.

"I'm just so grateful God put her in my life ... I was like 'Oh, so this is what a Christian is



Chris Varughese. Picture: Elspeth Kernebone

"I'm so glad you're out of it, and I'm so glad that you've actually started finding Jesus."

Chris Varughese

like. Maybe they're not all that bad after all," Miss Barron said.

One evening, her new housemate told her she felt prompted by God to give Miss Barron a new Bible. Miss Barron was moved to tears and shared her Shincheonji experience with her.

They decided to try some new churches together. Miss Barron was nervous at first, but she found they were much healthier than the cult environment she left behind.

Miss Barron said her faith was lukewarm before her involvement with Shincheonji, but since leaving she learned God's word and Christ's character for herself.

She said outside of the high-pressure environment of the cult, she learned to ask questions again and grew closer to God.

"I fully believe God had his hand over me during this time because I just don't know how I would have gotten out of it without Jesus," Miss Barron said.

Miss Barron's original housemate dropped out of university and cut contact with her

friends. Miss Barron prays that one day she will leave Shincheonji too.

Chris' story

A familiar face approached Chris Varughese at church. "[He said] 'I don't know if you can ever forgive me,'" Mr Varughese said.

The young man had invited Mr Varughese to a Bible study a year earlier. He told Mr Varughese he had targeted him for cult-recruitment.

The young man said Shincheonji taught him it was justifiable to lie to people if it meant he was winning souls for God, but he realised now that was wrong.

Seeing how genuine Mr Varughese's love for Jesus was, and how he shared it with others, sparked the young man's doubts about the group he was involved in.

It was the second time Mr Varughese became involved with the cult. This time, he was only involved briefly.

During his first three-month long encounter, Mr Varughese went to Shincheonji classes three times a week, on top of full-time work, another Bible study, and small group leading.

He became involved after an approach from a cult member at Melbourne Central Station.

After questioning the teachers in class, he was told he was being used by Satan.

Mr Varughese said these questions helped him understand the theological problems of the group. He now recognises the teachers' unwillingness to answer as a red flag.

Understanding who Jesus was according to Scripture also helped him see the flaws in Shincheonji's teaching.

Due to his disagreements with the teachers and his busy schedule, he left the Bible classes. But he still did not know it was a cult.

He knew there was something wrong. But it was not until the young man apologised that Mr Varughese discovered the name of the group.

Mr Varughese told him he had nothing to be sorry for, saying he sensed something different about him compared to others from Shincheonji. He believed God had guided his journey.

"Brother, all I can say is I'm so glad you're out of it, and I'm so glad that you've actually started finding Jesus;" was Mr Varughese's response.

Gaza hospital shut, patients forced out

■ Jenan Taylor

Sick and injured patients, staff and people sheltering at Al Ahli Arab Anglican Hospital in Gaza have been thrown into jeopardy after the Israeli army forced it to shut.

The Diocese of Jerusalem reported that the army ordered an immediate evacuation of everyone in and around the hospital vicinity in early July as military activity escalated.

The diocese said staff and those relying on Al Ahli's care had to leave the safety of the hospital premises as a result.

It said the hospital was now out of operation when there was significant demand for its services, with few other options for urgent medical care.

Anglican Overseas Aid Disaster Response and Resilience coordinator Tim Hartley said Al Ahli was the only remaining clinic where surgeries could be

“We appeal to the Israeli forces to permit us to continue our sacred ministry of medical care and healing.”

Tim Hartley

conducted in Gaza.

Mr Hartley said there was no way of knowing at this stage where patients would be able to get emergency and critical treatment and where they would be evacuated to. He said the hospital had been receiving 300 patients a day, even though it was an 80-bed facility.

According to the Jerusalem diocese an ambulance was also fired at on its way to the hospital and there was no information

about its driver and patients.

Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum condemned the forced closure, pleaded for an end to the strikes, and demanded all parties agreed to an immediate ceasefire.

“In a time of warfare and great suffering it is essential that emergency healthcare services are maintained to treat the injured and the dying,” he said.

“We appeal to the Israeli forces to permit us to continue our sacred ministry of medical care and healing.”

Mr Hartley said the hospital almost ceased to operate in December 2023, but staff managed to keep it going.

He said the hospital's director, Suheila Tarazi saw it as a beacon of hope in Gaza, which was why she was determined it would keep functioning then.

Mr Hartley believed the staff would be doing all they could to reopen the hospital.

Hope for religious freedom in India after election surprise

■ Jenan Taylor

Religious minorities in India have a better chance of religious freedom after voters showed they were unswayed by hate politics during the country's recent election.

Church and human rights leaders believe the result paves the way for minorities including Christians and Muslims to raise their voices against radical policies and persecution.

Hopes are even high that Christian workers will be able to return to business as usual.

More than 600 million people voted in the election which saw Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party returned for a third term.

Despite winning, the BJP's majority hold on power has been reduced because it must form government in alliance with two other parties.

Advocates said it was a largely positive result given the divisive nature of the BJP's campaign and their record of human rights violations.

An Indian cleric said there was a sense of change in the air because people felt the BJP's freedom to hurt others was curtailed by having to govern along with others.

The cleric, who requested anonymity because of reprisal risks, said a big surprise

was that the BJP suffered huge defeats in places where it traditionally enjoyed strong support.

He said many people were hopeful their voices would be heard now that there was strong opposition presence in India's parliament as well.

Human Rights Watch Asia deputy director Meenakshi Ganguly said the result was reassuring for many minority communities who had long believed the wider Indian population supported the BJP's politics.

She said many felt isolated and intimidated amid this.

Ms Ganguly said the broad message for the government from election was that many Indians saw little currency in its arguments against minorities.

St Dunstan's Camberwell vicar the Reverend Jobby John was in contact with friends in India, and believed voters were concerned it would shift towards Hindu fundamentalism under the BJP.

He said they believed such a move could spell a change for India's constitution, its flag and even its name, and rejected it as the way forward.

Mr John said India's poorest communities were more politically literate than the country's leaders had anticipated, and had responded so that their votes mattered.

An Australian international development

worker, who also requested anonymity, said his Christian colleagues in India were confident they would be able to return to business as usual. He said some worked in areas where anti-conversion laws were implemented and had been targeted because they criticised the government in its previous terms.

The worker said this Christian community would see the election outcome as an answer to their prayers for democracy to prevail rather than Hindu right-wing nationalism.

Open Doors Australia said a new, more diverse Indian parliament made it harder for radical Hinduism to prevail in politics.

Its partner in central India said the election outcome was a reprieve from the ideology that strangled the freedom of minority communities, and was a small step in the right direction.

But Ms Ganguly said it was yet to be seen whether the government would change its ways, because its policies and laws were problematic.

She said these included its anti-conversion laws which it used to target Christians and Muslims.

“Those still exist and are still the policies that enable ideologically-motivated attacks on people, and that prevent people who engage in religious violence from being properly prosecuted,” Ms Ganguly said.

“That has not been addressed as yet.”

Help vulnerable children like Maria build a new future!

Maria fled to Uganda to escape the war in South Sudan, running from the shooting with her parents and siblings.

She says she was one of the lucky ones who made it out with her life. Her friend did not.

"We were the same age," the 15-year-old says softly. "When she was trying to move... war was there. She died in that war."

There was no war in the Ugandan refugee settlements. But Maria and her family faced a new enemy there – hunger.

A second meal per day was a luxury. There were many days when she ate nothing at all.

Despite her hunger, Maria did her best to concentrate in class. She knew that education held the key to building a new future.

"In South Sudan, I didn't go to school. I was not knowing anything," she says. "But when I came here, they taught me how to speak English and how to write."

With the help of friends like you, Maria became one of thousands of hungry refugee children to receive a hot, nutritious meal each day at her school through Feed The Hungry – a global organisation committed to fighting hunger and helping the most vulnerable to live a full life.

And your generous, tax-deductible support through Feed The Hungry can help more children like Maria receive the nutritious food they need to thrive.

A hot, nutritious meal at school changes everything for Maria. She explains the difference between hunger and a hot meal in her life, saying:

"When I feel hungry, I feel like I don't talk to anyone because... I have no energy. But when I eat... I will be telling the teacher the answers because I'm very strong now!"

Just \$6 feeds a child like Maria for a whole month at school. More than a meal, you're providing a future!



TAKE AWAY HUNGER DAY 22 AUGUST

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LeSEA Global

FEED THE HUNGRY

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Help needed to keep shelters open

■ Jenan Taylor

A faith-based charity for people experiencing homelessness in outer and metropolitan Melbourne is asking for more volunteers for overnight shifts as temperatures continue to plummet.

The volunteers enable the Yarra Valley and Frankston Winter Shelters to stay open overnight to provide unhoused people with care, hope and respite from the bitter cold.

Stable One said it was hard to get people for overnight shifts at the Yarra Valley shelter because many had work or family commitments.

Chief executive Katherine Kirkwood said the night shifts were a crucial part of the network's goals of providing more than a place to stay.

She said most guests had meaningful, often therapeutic conversations with the volunteers in this night setting.

"They've eaten a hot meal, and maybe played a jigsaw, and then settled down. Sometimes, it might be very late, they get up and move around and just open up about their lives," Ms Kirkwood said.

She said the shelter managed to cover the shifts so far, because it could never imagine asking guests to leave after dinner to brave the cold.

Frankston Winter Shelter said despite having more volunteers than ever since it opened three years ago, it struggled to

fill the night shifts across the five days it operated.

Project Manager Lara Waldron said these shifts suited people who were retired or who didn't have too many commitments over a period of just three months.

Part of the Stable One network, the Frankston and Yarra Valley shelters opened in June for this year's guests staffed by volunteers from the community and a range of churches. These include Peninsula City Church, St Anne's Catholic and St Paul's Anglican in Frankston, and Baptist parishes in Lilydale.

Each shelter caters for up to 10 guests a night.

Volunteer and St Paul's Frankston congregant Blanche Dzur said she did overnight shifts for a while, but it was getting harder as she became older.

Ms Dzur said she became a volunteer because there was a need for it, and she was able to help.

She felt it was important because Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me", had always moved her.

Ms Dzur said it was a privilege to provide an ear to people who rarely had the chance to sit down and talk to someone who listened.

She enjoyed being able to contribute to a group that needed a good gender balance

because plenty of unhoused women as well as men sought the help of the service.

Ms Dzur said it was wonderful being part of a group of people drawn from so many different churches who were committed to helping others who had nowhere to go.

"My granddaughter often asks me what churches do, and it is especially wonderful to be able to tell her that this is what they do," she said.

Homelessness support and referral service Anchor Community Care said it had been called out to assist about 60 rough sleepers this calendar year so far, more than in previous years.

Youth and homelessness services manager Peter Dinsdale said they were the cohort most reflected in the homelessness death rate.

Mr Dinsdale said Anchor dealt specifically with the Yarra Valley Winter Shelter and found multiple good outcomes from its program over the years.

He said these included some volunteers helping guests find housing solutions and getting them off the streets.

Overnight shifts at the Yarra Valley and Frankston winter shelters run from about 11.00pm to 6.00am, and are usually split into smaller shifts.

For more information see stableone.org/yarra-valley-winter-shelter and penc.org/wintershelter.



Frankston winter shelter volunteers.

Picture: supplied



St Mark's Spotswood vicar the Reverend Dave Fuller with painting by Indigenous artist Rhett Wilson.
Picture: Hannah Felsbourg

Artwork highlights God's presence in Indigenous story

■ **Hannah Felsbourg**

An Indigenous painting has become a symbol of healing and reconciliation for St Mark's Spotswood.

The artwork by Gunditjmara artist Rhett Wilson depicts praying hands and a cross surrounded by Indigenous imagery of the divine.

St Mark's vicar the Reverend Dave Fuller said the project was significant for the artist's healing process, adjusting to life on the outside after being released from prison.

Mr Fuller said Mr Wilson's vision highlighted the presence of God in the Indigenous story before colonisation.

It included portrayals of Indigenous deities including the Rainbow Serpent and the Ancestral Wedge-tailed Eagle Bunjil.

Mr Wilson's painting was exhibited in the display window at St Mark's during NAIDOC Week.

Christians urged to sit and listen at NAIDOC Week

■ **Hannah Felsbourg**

Indigenous people have come together during NAIDOC Week 2024 to celebrate and encourage one another in their journey of empowerment.

Its theme, "Keep the Fire Burning: Blak, Loud and Proud," celebrated the resilient spirit of First Nations communities and called for solidarity in pursuing justice, truth, and hope.

In keeping with the theme Christian organisation Common Grace hoped churches would continue to support and stand with Indigenous people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice coordinator Bianca Manning said it was heartening to see the Indigenous community strengthen each other during NAIDOC Week.

Melbourne's NAIDOC Week events included a flag raising ceremony, community march, market, workshops, and performances honouring Indigenous heritage and successes, from 7 July to 14 July.

"It's a great opportunity to learn more, have fun, connect and celebrate Indigenous people's achievements and contributions to culture," Ms Manning said.

Ms Manning said Christians played a unique role in reconciliation through peacemaking, forgiveness, repentance, truth-telling, love, and recognising God's

beauty in everyone.

She encouraged Christians to pray, listen to and build relationships with Indigenous people, and acknowledge Australia's history.

"It's a perfect opportunity to sit and listen – to embody that deep listening that we often talk about at Common Grace," she said.

Ms Manning said Indigenous people's voices needed to be prioritised in policy-making, as they held the solutions to issues affecting their communities.

She said she hoped people would continue to engage with First Nations justice by listening to Indigenous people.

"Aboriginal communities do know what is

best and have hold many of these solutions but are just needing more resourcing and more support in these areas," she said.

A current issue Common Grace advocates for is raising the age of criminal responsibility at a national level to ensure young people can flourish.

"Changing that narrative so that our children can receive love and care and support and rehabilitation rather than punishment," Ms Manning said.

All Saints' Greensborough said a prayer by Common Grace's Safina Stewart on the Sunday of NAIDOC Week.

All Saints' honorary minister the Reverend Joy Sandefur said parishioners committed to pray for Nungalinga College since visiting in 2023.

She said they wanted to empower Indigenous people by supporting the theological college which trained them for ministry.

Through their visit they also developed an understanding about culture and faith from an Indigenous perspective.

Dr Sandefur encouraged Christians to pray, be informed on Indigenous issues, help inform others, and support Indigenous people in their journey.

"I'm hoping that people will want to actively support Aboriginal Christians and their leadership on some of these issues," she said.



Bianca Manning.

Picture: Common Grace



Students gathered for the Anglican schools service at St Paul's Cathedral.

Picture: supplied

Schools service inspires students to seek the Lord Jesus

■ Jenny Sonneman

On Thursday 25 July, St Paul's Cathedral was filled with 600 or so students from our 29 Victorian Anglican schools. These students had volunteered to attend the biannual Combined Anglican Schools Service.

The students were the special guests, and they led much of the service. We heard our students play, sing and speak, from the processional, with a Year 11 student playing the organ, and throughout the service, including an extended Call to Worship, dramatic Bible readings, a testimony from a recently graduated student, and prayers, and a sung blessing at the completion. Dotted throughout the service were two string orchestras and choirs from various schools.

The theme of the service was pilgrimage, and all who attended were encouraged

to seek God and to experience his leading and his love. At the very centre of the service was a reading and sermon on Jesus' journey with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. Archbishop Philip Freier wonderfully explained the text and helped us all to seek Jesus and to share the blessings of knowing Jesus with our communities.

For many of our students, this was their first time in the cathedral, and they were struck by the grandeur of the building, the music that sounded so heavenly and by the attention paid to God's words in the Bible. We hope and pray that they were inspired to seek and follow the Lord Jesus who was honoured. We long for our students to go back to their schools and have more chats with their chaplains and one another about this amazing God who is with us every step of our life.

At the completion of the service, there was a very special presentation to Dr Freier and Mrs Joy Freier. They were extensively thanked for their years of encouragement and support to Anglican Schools and the principals in particular. They were fittingly presented with gifts of a pilgrim staff and pilgrim purse. The staff was made by a student and the purse was made from images of the land where each of the schools is situated. They were asked to keep our schools and students in their hearts as they continue their pilgrimages beyond 2025. May God continue to bless our schools, their leadership and students for many years to come.

Jenny Sonneman is chaplain at Ivanhoe Girls Grammar.

Sunday switch helps sporty families make it to church

■ Jenan Taylor

A Mount Waverley church is offering opportunities for worship to people who are unable to make it to Sunday morning services this winter.

Its new initiative Winter Warmers aims to connect with children and families who have commitments such as sport on Sunday mornings.

St Stephen's and St Mary's assistant curate the Reverend Candice Mitrousis said the church wanted to keep inspiring and nurturing their faith through offering them a flexible attendance time.

She said it was imperative churches

encouraged young worshippers because their dwindling numbers meant there might be no Church in a few years' time otherwise.

Ms Mitrousis said the Winter Warmers intergenerational service attracted young and older people, and the time worked for families who could only attend later because of sport. She said some children even came straight from footy games with mud still on their boots.

Parishioner Rozlyn Gaffney said she loved to be able to go to her son's Sunday morning football matches. She said the service allowed her to keep up her church life.

"I want my son to be exposed to and engaged with Christian faith, and learn and grow from it," Ms Gaffney said.

"I want him to be educated in Christianity, even if I don't know where he'll be with it when he becomes an adult."

Ms Gaffney said the interactive nature of the service helped her son engage with it more.

Ms Mitrousis said she adapted for the church's context resources specifically developed to keep young people engaged and connected with Bible readings.

Winter Warmers is held fortnightly on Sunday afternoons.

St Agnes' celebrates 125 years sharing in God's love

■ Jean Oliver

On 21 July 1899, Bishop of Melbourne Field Flowers Goe consecrated the church, St Agnes.

It was named after the child saint, because the work in Black Rock started with a Sunday School.

This little weatherboard church would serve its congregation for 14 years until sadly on Shrove Tuesday 1913 a bush fire demolished it. The church today, which stands on the same site, was consecrated just over a year later on 11 April 1914 by Archbishop Lowther Clarke, Melbourne's first Archbishop. Except for a small extension it is the same today.

In 1919 Black Rock became a parish in its own right, and the first vicar was the Reverend Wilford James who died four months later with Spanish flu. Since then, St Agnes' has been blessed with a variety of priests, both men and women, who have all added to the rich tapestry of spiritual direction and worship.

To sit comfortably in the sanctuary is to be surrounded by the past and present. There is the beautiful stain glass windows of William Montgomery, lost in the fire, but replicated by him for the new church; the carvings of Elsie Truill and Duncan Gawler; the 1904 lectern by Robert Prenzel; and the little silver cross made out of a ball of



The St Agnes' Black Rock choir performs.

Picture: supplied

silver, once a chalice, found in the ashes; blend seamlessly with the embroidered banners of Suzanne Savonna and the modern stain glass.

The boy scouts, the tennis tournaments and the flower festival are no more, but today the outreach to the community is still a vital part of the St Agnes life. It features monthly concerts, an op shop, book and craft groups, fetes and special events as well as monthly Taize and weekly services. The choir is in full voice under the direction of Jacquie Bennett who has been musical director for over 40 years.

We live in a world totally unrecognisable to that of 125 years ago. What a

comfort, therefore, to believe in a God who never changes, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

It is God's love, and the love of God, that for more than a century has showed itself in the lives of faithful parishioners. At St Agnes, the same spiritual and practical love is genuinely shown to anyone who walks through the door.

We are looking forward with joy, and in faith, trust and hope, to sharing God's love in Black Rock for another 125 years!

Jean Oliver has been a member of St Agnes' Black Rock for 25 years. She is parish secretary and produces the church's magazine *Reach Out*.

Planet-friendly halos to warm chilly St Paul's interior

■ Penny Mulvey

Synod representatives attending June's special synod came dressed for the weather. St Paul's Cathedral, with its soaring ceiling, is not known for its warmth.

However, that is about to change.

The cathedral will trial United Kingdom-designed radiant chandeliers known as "Halos" in August-September.

Dean Andreas Loewe explained this was part of the cathedral's strategic commitment to sustainability.

"This investment in greener technology in sustainable heating is a significant milestone in the Chapter's ambition to reduce our carbon emissions by 2030," Dean Loewe said.

The Halo heaters, designed by UK engineers Herschel Infrared, were first successfully used to heat the nave in a

local Bristol church in 2022.

As well as reducing heating costs, the Halos are designed to blend with the cathedral's aesthetic. The infrared panels are integrated into a classic octagonal chandelier, and will not compromise the visual integrity of the cathedral.

Installer Capisco Australia managing director Mark Coory said the heaters were a big deal because they delivered radiant heat, looked terrific, and retained the cathedral's heritage aesthetic. The St Paul's crest and the individual heraldic symbols have been integrated into the design.

Mr Coory said that up to 70 per cent of the energy consumed by any church was heating the building, and this meant that the right heating was an important choice to achieve carbon and energy reduction goals.

Dean Loewe said St Paul's was

committed to reducing carbon emissions because Christians were called by God to steward his good creation.

"I hope that experiencing the positive effect of these fully carbon neutral 'Halos' in the cathedral next winter will also encourage other heritage places to invest in sustainable heating," he said.

Grant funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and the William Angliss Charitable Fund is enabling the cathedral to introduce this new eco-friendly heating.

The cathedral is raising \$175,000 to cover the remaining costs for the heaters. A facility to make tax deductible donations through the Melbourne Anglican Cultural Organisation has been set up. Donors should make sure to select "Melbourne Anglican Cultural Organisation Inc (MACO)" and then the "Light up St Paul's" options.

'We are "with" as God is with us'

■ Elspeth Kernebone

The Reverend Sam Lo is an Anglican deacon, and Pastoral Care coordinator at St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne. Here she shares about how she sees God at work through her chaplaincy. Mrs Lo's story is part of a series profiling workers engaging in God's work in the world, in many different ways.

Tell us about your role?

I'm based at our Fitzroy hospital, which is our central hospital. Our team of 17 chaplains covers almost 600 beds across oncology, maternity, orthopaedics, paediatrics, acute surgical, gastroenterology, brain and spinal surgery, cardiac, intensive care, and busy day oncology units.

How did you end up in the position you're in? How do you see it fitting into the big picture of God's work in the world?

I'd worked in healthcare chaplaincy for a bit over 10 years, in hospital and aged care. Eighteen months ago I answered an ad at St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne and haven't looked back since – it's been like coming home.

It's been such a gift. What I particularly love about being at the hospital here, is that pastoral care is embedded right through the hospital. You don't need to fight for oxygen, it is simply part of the place. St Vincent's Private Hospital is deeply committed to providing outstanding spiritual care.

I'm aware what an incredibly privileged position it is to walk into a hospital and have this culture, where there is dedication to supporting the spiritual care of the sick and dying. Every day I go to work, it's clear that this is such a privileged place to be.

How do you see your work fitting in the big picture of God's work in the world?

So many of my patients are not able to go into a church, for whatever reason. They might have a connection to a church, they might not. And it's bringing God's love to them, as they are, where they are, in whatever way they need at that point.

For instance, I went to see a patient who was referred to me because she was Anglican. When I offered her communion, she initially said, "Oh no, I don't want communion." After we talked a little more, she looked down at her hands and said quietly, "It's not that I don't want it, it's just that I think God won't have me".

"It's bringing God's love to them, as they are, where they are, in whatever way they need at that point."

For the first time in decades, she felt able to tell the story of the rejection she'd experienced the last time she went to church. She was a young single mother (her husband had left her) with a premature baby. The day after the baby was well enough to be discharged from hospital, this patient went to church, seeking peace and solace. She heard a sermon about the evils of divorce. She never went back. That little baby is now 60 years old, and all this time she thought, "I've not been able to go back into a church because I don't think God would have me". There were tears when she heard the promise that God's arms are open wide, ready to embrace her and that she would never, ever be turned away.

I often hear experiences of disconnect with the church, of rejection, of wounded-

ness, of this deep sadness and fear that God won't have us because we haven't been "good Christians", that somehow we have to earn God's trust or God's favour. I hear time and again that "Surely we can't just turn around when we need God." Actually, yes we most certainly can and will be welcomed with open arms!

That's the faith based part of the job, but many of the patients I work with do not have a religious faith. Yes it's a Catholic hospital, but we welcome and care for people of all faith traditions and none. I still see my role as bringing God's love. I might not name it in front of patients, but God is still very much there.

So often a patient will say to me, "I'm not religious, I don't want any of that."

By assuring them that I'm here to see them (not their religion), it opens up a space to talk, for them to be heard and seen and honoured and valued. I then find it hard to get out of the room!

We don't have to change for God to love us, we don't have to be a certain way for God to love us; that deep love is already there.

A lot of the work I do is also with the staff. Being there day in, day out, I get to develop that trust, that relationship. When there's a crisis, the staff will find me.

It matters that there is somebody who knows them, who knows what they do, who sees what they do, who knows what it costs them. Having someone to honour that is tremendously powerful.

"With" is the most powerful word in pastoral care; we are "with" as God is with us.

What is your dream for this ministry?

My dream would be to continue the work of spiritual care at St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne.

In addition, I have a background in

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Picture: Elspeth Kernebone

ministry to people with dementia. One of my dreams is to encourage and equip clergy and laity in this area.

There's about 400,000 people in Australia living with dementia. Within the next 20-25 years that number is set to double. That's 800,000 people who will find it difficult to connect into a church because of their illness. Churches are not set up for people with dementia. We're often not comfortable around people with dementia.

Even going into an aged care home can be such a daunting prospect. How do you minister to someone who's not going to remember you were there? What's the value of ministry if that visit is going to be forgotten the minute you walk out the door?

Speaking publicly about this has been

“The work may be by its very nature done quietly, but is of immeasurable value as we follow the lead of Christ.”

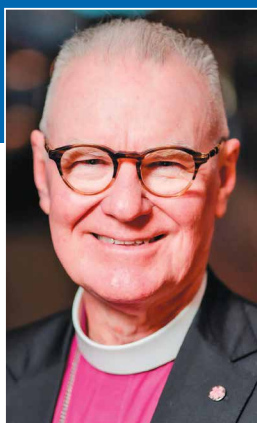
really well-received. I've heard of clergy and laity growing in confidence and being inspired. I'd love to be able to put it into book form, to develop some resources.

What's one thing you'd like Christians in Melbourne to know about your work?

Please pray for us. Following the call to minister to those who are sick and dying

is not always easy. It is an amazing job to do, as we see God's healing at work (very different to curing) each and every day as we take a tangible expression of God's loving presence onto the wards. The work may be by its very nature done quietly, but is of immeasurable value as we follow the lead of Christ who tended the sick and dying with great compassion and no judgement. It brings me right back to reflecting what an enormous privilege it is to minister to those in hospital.

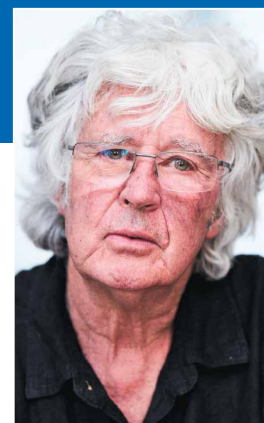
This story forms part of a profile series on ministry workers taking part in God's work in the world. If you know of someone with an encouraging story, let us know at tma@melbourneanglican.org.au.



Is our society allergic to God? ***Why are we reluctant to discuss spiritual matters?***

Join cartoonist **Michael Leunig** in conversation with Anglican **Archbishop Philip Freier** at The Edge, Federation Square, **Wednesday 2 October, 8.30am-10am.**

This is a free event.



Doors open to community connection

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Anglican churches across Melbourne opened their doors for an Open House weekend to connect with their neighbourhoods and show people welcome.

Open House Melbourne's The Weekend showcased the city's architectural and cultural heritage.

The 2024 theme is "RE/DISCOVER your City", encouraging people to seek out new places and reconnect with old favourites.

The churches also hoped to give their visitors a sense of their artistic, historical, and community contributions.

All Saints' East St Kilda vicar the Reverend René Knaap said participating in The Weekend was a great way to connect with community members

He said visitors might be stepping into a church for the first time.

Volunteer parishioners created a welcoming atmosphere by greeting people and lead them through the space during the open times.

Mr Knaap said he hoped visitors got a sense of the wonder of the mystery of faith

"[Church buildings] can communicate the faith in a way that oftentimes our words don't manage..."

René Knaap

through the architecture and art on display.

"[Church buildings] can communicate the faith in a way that oftentimes our words don't manage, and they communicate our presence to the wider community," he said.

St Mark's Camberwell assistant minister the Reverend Tim Collison said he hoped their participation in The Weekend would give people a safe and easy step into church.

He said St Mark's wanted visitors to feel welcome and see the church as part of their community, countering the perception that churches are unwelcoming.

Mr Collison said organ, choir, and

contemporary music performances would take place during the weekend. There would also be tours and a children's activity.

"We just we want people to feel welcomed and feel that safe and fun environment to enjoy one of Melbourne's most beautiful churches," he said.

St Faith's Burwood churchwarden Joan Scott said the church wants its active faith community and its efforts to find new ways to serve and engage to be more visible.

She said although visitors might not have been members of the church it was valuable for them to know the church community was available to them in times of personal need.

She hoped people would come to see the church not just as a place of worship but as an aspect of the community where they could feel belonging.

Mrs Scott said visitors could explore the unique 1950s round building, view archival construction footage, and learn about the bookbinder's group also using the space.

Open House Melbourne's The Weekend took place on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 July.



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Call to repentance, reconciliation and justice

Picture: iStock

■ Glenn Loughrey

As Australia celebrated the first NAIDOC Week after the failed referendum what were we celebrating?

Official NAIDOC documents suggest we celebrated resilience and culture: the resilience shown by First People to remain hopeful despite all that has happened, and the culture which remains the oldest living tradition and is held up as a key difference between Australia and other nations.

Resilience is the essence of the slogan, “Keep the fires burning”. It encourages us not to lose hope for a better future for ourselves, our children, our elders and our country.

This hope we are called to is not hopeful but feels deeply hopeless for we are dispossessed repeatedly of its fulfillment. Despite the many commitments, declarations and promises, what we hope for has never materialised. Is this a slogan of possibility or of disempowerment? Does it keep us locked out of the decision making, equality of voice and power, and marginalised in a story of deficit and disorder?

Culture remains our prison. Mainstream Australia celebrates and benefits economically from our culture, art, and land care, but fails to recognise the people who are responsible for its production. The divide is glaring – we only recognise First People when they assimilate into the middle-class

aspirations of education, career, home ownership, faith and success, not when we are our original selves, pushing back against the capitalist anthems of growth, success and progress. Culture is powerful when in synergy with country but powerless when separated from it and used for economic or ideological purposes.

The NAIDOC website suggests the second theme, “Blak, Loud and Proud” encapsulates the unapologetic celebration of Indigenous identity, empowering us to stand tall in our heritage and assert our place in the modern world. This theme calls for a reclamation of narratives, an amplification of voices, and an unwavering commitment to justice and equality.

At the recent Provincial Evensong, the Anglican Province of Victoria took an important step towards “reclamation of narratives, an amplification of voices, and an unwavering commitment to justice and equality”. The collation of a Provincial Archdeacon for Reconciliation, First Peoples Recognition and Treaty is a Treaty action in itself. It signifies that the Church is open to covenanting with First Peoples to address past actions and to come together for a better future for all.

In the presence of church leaders and representatives of the Yoorook Truth and Justice Commission, the First Peoples Assembly and other First Peoples present, the church confirmed its response to

Commissioner Lovett’s question at the recent Yoorook hearings, “Is the church open to treaty as a firm and confident yes?”

In his sermon Bishop Richard Treloar stated;

In the written submission of Victorian dioceses to the Yoorook Justice Commission, and at the hearing, the emergence of a Provincial Aboriginal Anglican Council was an example of how we are seeking to address historic and systemic injustices, with Indigenous clergy and lay people being supported in key leadership roles.

He continued:

Today represents an important step forward in that process, and the project Archdeacon Glenn now leads is potentially transformative – if we are open to what First Peoples in our church might ask of Second Peoples in our church, and, indeed, open to the recommendations the Commission will make in due course.

“Keep the fires burning” calls the Church to faithfulness to repentance, reconciliation and the call for justice and love at the centre of the gospel, while calling First People to remain faithful to the cause of justice and repair at the centre of country.

May this NAIDOC see us beginning this exciting adventure together, Blak Loud and Proud as we all keep the fires burning.

The Venerable Canon Uncle Glenn Loughrey is Archdeacon for Reconciliation, First Nations Recognition and Treaty.

Should it stay or should it go? The humble

■ Christopher Porter

“What to do with the humble parish?” Why do we seem to be so entrenched within ideas of “my parish” or “their church?” Why do parishioners identify as more “members of the Parish of St Aethelredstone” rather than as “Anglican”? And why do they identify with their parish in opposition to say the Parish of St Cuthbertstonwick?*

As we consider the question of parish boundaries, I want to consider here the sociological elements of the parish. Aside from ecclesiological and pastoral specifics, for these sociological challenges lie at the heart of a wide variety of present questions for our church. Questions of parish boundaries, church mergers, church planting, minster models, evangelism, normativity, and diversity, all have theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral dimensions, but their sociological aspects are often left uninterrogated. Here I want to consider these social aspects and how they may contribute to our understanding of parish life.

Aside from all of theological and ecclesiological services of the parish one of its most significant features is the social group formed around it, one for which those within the parish – and those engaging from outside – find their identity. Parishioners are often not merely “Jane” or “John”, but “Jane member of Parish X” and feel a great community with their parish. The formation of these social identities around the parish structure are sociologically one of its greatest strengths – and I would also argue its greatest weakness.

We may consider the great benefits

of social groups in general to be also applicable to the social group of the parish, even aside from specifically theological aspects of the parish, and the appropriate benefits of public worship etc – as these logically will continue with or without parish boundaries. Individuals who identify with a social group are more likely to engage with the work of that group – in this case the work of the parish. In turn, this is more likely to impact their own personal identity and sense of belonging within the social group – the church. Formally we can understand “social identity ... as that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1982: 2). As Christians we value this identity structure, especially as it is positively correlated with other social items such as belonging, behaviour change, self-value, etc. Indeed, as we can see with civil parishes, and other local social enterprises such as “Good-Karma” Facebook groups, this desire for social connection and engagement is also highly sought after and valued in our broader community.

However, it is this same desire for social engagement and identity which is perhaps also the parish’s greatest Achilles heel. For with strong identity structures, comes the challenge of what is technically termed as “positive distinctiveness”. That is, the challenge for a social group to be sufficiently different from other competing social groups that members feel attracted to and can identify with their specific social group instead of those other groups. This is

especially the case where those competing social groups are normatively and geographically close. In these cases “positive distinctiveness” will often require exclusive claims about one’s own social group, and similarly denigrating claims regarding others nearby. For example, the members of the Parish of St Cuthbertstonwick may pride themselves on their liturgical style and support their own sense of belonging in that parish by denigrating the members of the Parish of St Aethelredstone as “Aethelredstoners” and generating negative appellations regarding their musical preferences.

This is exacerbated in situations where near neighbours share the same normative belief and identity structures. Their similarities mean the demands of positive distinctiveness require sharper invective to create points of division. As Lewis Coser observed, “A conflict is more passionate and more radical when it arises out of close relationships. The coexistence of union and opposition in such relations makes for the peculiar sharpness of the conflict. Enmity calls forth deeper and more violent reactions, the greater the involvement of the parties among whom it originates” (1998, 71). It is perhaps unsurprising then that we find parishes effectively competing with each other in the work of the vision and mission of the Diocese, instead expending energy on maintaining social distinctiveness of their own parish.

Is this a good argument then for the abolition of parish boundaries, to remove the competition for positive distinctiveness?

This may seem like a logical way of reducing these challenges and uniting the



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le parish

church around a single focus for distinctiveness. But unfortunately it will likely only lead to further competition. As groups cease to have avenues for generating positive distinctiveness outside of themselves, the natural place to derive distinctiveness becomes within the group. This is usually seen through internal perceptions that certain members are not sufficiently normative, or somehow abrogate what some members consider the “core” identity of the group, despite remaining within the group. Indeed, this can be clearly observed within the Good Karma Network phenomenon. A couple of years into the project large numbers of these neighbourhood groups devolved into schismatic fractures over internal accusations of members not upholding the rules (i.e. the norms) of the groups, and significant disagreement over what these rules were, and their relative importance. Similar examples are found in civil parishes – and especially their American counterpart, the Homeowner Association. Lest we think that the church is immune from such debates, one need only look at the plethora of churches which have split over musical styles, modes of preaching, or a host of other disputed norms – let alone theological and ecclesiological points of difference. Schisms and the exclusion of members as black sheep for not being normative enough are part and parcel of group existence.

So far this seems to be a fairly dismal view of parish life: conflict with or without boundaries. Are there any avenues out of this social quagmire?

Ironically the same ecclesial inheritance that gave the Anglican church the parish



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structure has also provided a resource for addressing the impetus towards division for positive distinctiveness: episcopal structures. While Anglicanism often tends toward a congregational and parish emphasis, the most common social gathering points, the proven mechanism for defusing schism is to direct social impetus towards finding distinctiveness within larger groups, rather than the smaller immediate group. Indeed, theologically, this is the purpose of the church universal.

How then can we leverage these often-denigrated episcopal structures towards that bigger theological vision and social purpose? A significant part of this is the need for a distinctive vision for the larger structure to inhabit. What is the purpose of the episcopacy? What is a diocese for? As part of that vision for there to be positive distinctiveness of the whole, there must be a similar allowance of diversity within the subgroups which make up the super-ordinate, the parishes which constitute a diocese, the churches which contribute to the denomination – lest there be a devolution to solely finding distinctiveness in the local. It must be such

that the Parishes of St Cuthbertstonwick and St Aethelredstone can engage in that same vision side by side. This vision setting and diversity of engagement can find a wide range of expressions and outcomes, and while it is well beyond the scope of this piece to provide a singular answer, we can find a series of biblical and historical examples for inspiration. Indeed, one example is given by Scott Goode's examination of 1 Corinthians, where he finds Paul organising that nascent church around the framework of “Salvific Intentionality” that allows for both coherent missional imagination alongside diversity in the Corinthian community.

Ultimately the overriding question about the parish is not whether it stays or whether it goes. Rather, the question is, how can we build an encompassing vision to unify our churches around, with or without historical geographical and social boundaries?”

The Reverend Dr Christopher Porter is Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Trinity College Theological School. This article was first published in a modified form in the Winter edition of EFAC Essentials.

**Names changed to protect the guilty everywhere.

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Does space exploration fulfil God's creation mandate?

Humanity might significantly expand its presence across the solar system this century, both in person and via robot emissaries. This raises questions about a Christian approach to space exploration. Fellow of ISCAST (Christianity and science in conversation) and president of Mars Society Australia, Jonathan Clarke, explores C.S. Lewis's writings on this topic and their relevance to modern space exploration.

We are experiencing a surge in human activity in space.

Investment in space exploration and settlement by governments, institutions, companies, and private organisations has increased exponentially over the past 50 years. Robotic spacecraft have travelled beyond Pluto, Earth orbit is a hub of profitable commerce, astrobiology is now a respected discipline, and interest in moon and Mars settlements has grown among billionaires and private groups.

But should there be limits to our exploration? With questions around the ethics of mining asteroids and lunar rare earth minerals, ever-increasing amounts of human-produced space junk orbiting our planet, and the recent dilemma of astronauts stuck on the International Space Station after technical difficulties, it's important to consider our responsibilities as stewards of creation – even beyond Earth.

God's quarantine?

Clive Staples Lewis was one of the first Christian writers of the 20th century to engage with the subject of space exploration. He was an avid reader of the science fiction of the period and wrote several science fiction novels and short stories of his own.

While he was fascinated by space travel's allure and excitement, Lewis was appalled by some of the attitudes towards space exploration portrayed by other science fiction writers at the time. In his novel *Voyage to Venus* (1943), he criticised those "obsessed with the idea ... that humanity, having now sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area: that the vast astronomical distances which are God's quarantine regulations, must somehow be overcome".

He developed this theme further in *Religion and Rocketry* (1958), writing: "Man destroys or enslaves every species he can. Civilised man murders, enslaves, cheats, and corrupts savage man. Even inanimate nature he turns into dust bowls and slag-heaps. There are individuals who don't. But they are not the sort who are likely to be our

"Our ambassador to new worlds will be the needy and greedy adventurer or the ruthless technical expert."

CS Lewis

pioneers in space. Our ambassador to new worlds will be the needy and greedy adventurer or the ruthless technical expert."

Less well known is his caveat, given in an interview in *Decision Magazine* only two months before his death: "I look forward with horror to contact with the other inhabited planets, if there are such. We would only transport to them all of our sin and our acquisitiveness, and establish a new colonialism. I can't bear to think of it. But if we on Earth were to get right with God, of course, all would be changed. Once we find ourselves spiritually awakened, we can go to outer space and take the good things with us."

However, this could be seen as a rather narrow view of space exploration and its potential benefits to humanity – if done responsibly.

Space exploration is an extension of the creation mandate through technological advance, just as maritime technologies brought new islands and continents into human habitation.

Exploring God's creation

Since Lewis's death in 1963, space exploration has been carried out by the usual mixture of sinner and saint. What would Lewis have made of the Apollo program, a product of the Cold War but featuring the reading of Genesis 1 from lunar orbit, or Apollo landing on the moon "in peace for all Mankind"?

Lewis seemingly fails to recognise that one can support space exploration and settlement while objecting to their misuse. Arthur C. Clarke called Lewis one of the

"most dangerous enemies of Astronautics" for the views expressed in *Voyage to Venus*. Nonetheless, in response to R. L. Farnsworth, who advocated that the United States claim the moon as its own territory in the first step to building an interplanetary empire, Clarke confessed he was "forced to agree" with Lewis. He wrote: "the 'quarantine' will have to remain in force for a few more centuries yet if many advocates of interplanetary travel think as Mr Farnsworth appears to do".

Lewis also ignored the idea that space exploration might be driven by scientific curiosity exploring God's creation and a legitimate theatre of human endeavour. No matter how misused and abused, the creation mandate (Genesis 1:28) still stands; humanity remains instructed to fill the habitable space, use it as a gift, and is accountable to God for its stewardship. While ancient worldviews had no concept of humans venturing beyond Earth as they knew it, we should now consider how this verse applies with our more contemporary understandings of space travel. Space exploration and utilisation is an extension of the creation mandate through technological advance, just as maritime technologies



ion mandate?



Picture: iStock

brought new islands and continents into human habitation.

Lewis does not seem to have considered the role of governance over the conduct of space travel. Space exploration and utilisation does not occur in a legal vacuum, but is formally regulated and guided by agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty (1967) and the Artemis Protocols (2020). These show that space exploration need not become a lawless frontier dominated by the needy, greedy, and ruthless, but an arena where all parties desire rules and guidelines for conduct.

Finally, Lewis, who had little exposure to human accounts of space flight, did not consider the “overview effect” – the awe, wonder, and spiritual awareness experienced when gaining a cosmic perspective, even if only for a few minutes.

A Christian theology for space exploration

Awareness is growing about how to live sustainably and protect the environment here on Earth, influencing how we might think about space exploration. Lawyers, philosophers, ethicists, scientists, and engineers alike are exploring how to

“Space exploration is an extension of the creation mandate through technological advance, just as maritime technologies brought new islands and continents into human habitation.”

Jonathan Clarke

balance human expansion into the solar system with preserving nature.

Christians knowledgeable in aerospace engineering, planetary science, resource economics, space law, and creation theology have an opportunity to take advantage of these conversations and make an informed impact on the future of space travel. They might develop:

- A creation theology that moves from an earth-centric to a solar system-centric perspective.

- Suggested solutions for the physical, engineering, biological, and economic constraints of space settlements, resource utilisation, and terraforming.
- A theological basis for preserving common off-Earth resources.
- A theological basis for accessing the benefits from space settlements, resource utilisation, and terraforming for those on and off Earth.
- A theological economy for protection of basic human values and access services in small, enclosed, and isolated communities in hostile environments where basic life support—air, water, temperature, pressure—are all manufactured and controlled commodities.

These are the challenges that will face Christians as we expand our presence beyond Earth. Who will rise to meet them?

Geologist and former ISCAST director Dr Jonathan Clarke has had a lifelong interest in space exploration and planetary science. He and his wife attend St Matthew’s Church in Canberra.

A timely text amid political turmoil

■ Rupert Balint-Smith

NT Wright and Michael F Bird. Jesus and the Powers: Christian Political Witness in an Age of Totalitarian Terror and Dysfunctional Democracies. Zondervan, 2024.

As George Lucas reminds us in his *Star Wars* prequels, global progress towards greater democracy amongst all nations, alas, is not inevitable. Indeed, since 2008 there has been a significant decline in global democracy.

It is in this context and more recent political turmoil, the 2024 publication, *Jesus and the Powers*, is a timely exploration. The text emphasises the “wisdom and discernment” and “freedom of conscience” required in this time of divisive public debate and partisan political pressures.

The text is co-authored by the prolific United Kingdom professor and author NT Wright, as well as Ridley College deputy principal, New Testament lecturer and theologian, Michael F Bird.

Wright and Bird are in their element using historically informed biblical scholarship to place key questions within a larger historical context. Both wisely avoid specific wedge issues, emphasising the kingdom of God as something built upon earth, and questioning the Neoplatonic influence on Christianity. It is a wide-ranging discussion travelling from Old Testament understandings of power through to the compromises of Christendom, from explorations of civil disobedience through to the case for liberal democracy.

One strength is the authors establishing the significance of Jesus’ mission, death and resurrection, transforming broader political culture over 2000 years. To emphasise the legacy of Jesus’ countercultural “revolution”,

the text opens by placing Jesus’ kingdom in direct contrast to the world of empires. They frame the significance of how Jesus, as a member of a colonised community, was executed by an instrument of “state terror”, reduced to suffering the “punishment of a slave”. They perceptively observe the significance of the timing of Jesus’ mission, when the Roman occupiers in Israel had begun building “lavish temples” to allow the worship of the newly appointed “Augustus Caesar”. As a clarion call questioning autocracy, the authors observe: “To declare that Jesus is Lord was to imply that Caesar is not”.

For those interested in the broader cultural influence of Christianity, another strength is in exploring the remarkable rise of Christianity within the Roman Empire. They emphasise the profound cultural transformation that took place within the fabric of communities. A Greco-Roman culture that “despised the feeble, the poor, the sick and the disabled” (Nassim Nicholas Taleb) became a world where “the weak and the victimised are given almost sacral status”. They argue that advancement of human rights is a direct consequence of this Christian legacy, questioning claims of some scholars that it is exclusive to the Enlightenment.

Their biblical exploration of the early theology around Jesus’ authority over earthly and spiritual “powers” is thorough, returning to the refrain that “all authority comes from God”. The consequence is that all authorities will ultimately be held to account. Yet, by inference they argue that the faithful have a responsibility for: “holding the powers of the world to account”.

Arguably, this reviewer found less defined, their exploration of living “The kingdom of God as vision and vocation”

here and now. On one hand, the authors argue that we are called to a life within community, public service and political engagement. Yet, they are quick to acknowledge “public discipleship is fraught with risks”.

They rightly outline the dangers of being caught between the entrapment of “spiritual isolationism”, or being captive to a “political master”. This reviewer’s concern is that such dichotomies can make one wary of doing anything. Moreover, they often move into abstraction. For example, their metaphorical analogy of building the kingdom as a “cathedral” is edifying, yet would benefit from additional specific present or historical examples. This reviewer also wonders if this focus would benefit from more of a theology of talents – of the potential for sacred labour to meet the deepest needs of a community.

One strength of Wright and Bird’s argument is the encouragement around building the kingdom involving political engagement. However, within this, there is a weakness as the authors also seem to have to straddle both sides of a fence. They are questioning whether to seek involvement in public office and politics, or whether to remain in a counter-cultural position on the fringes. There are understandable warnings of the “seductive” nature of power and dangers of “hubris”, yet they acknowledge “it can be a great service to one’s nation to have men and women of deep Christian conviction in public office”. Understandably, they seem most comfortable with Christians playing a liminal role of having their voices heard – “speaking truth to power” – as distinct from being the ones in power. Arguably we need both.

Rupert Balint-Smith is a Senior Secondary English and Literature teacher. He attends St Mark’s Balnarring.

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Insight into Paul's outreach 'riddle'

■ Christopher Porter

Scott Goode. *Salvific Intentionality in 1 Corinthians: How Paul Cultivates the Missional Imagination of the Corinthian Community. Wipf and Stock, 2023.*

It is often noted that for all the emphasis which the Apostle Paul places upon evangelism in the book of Acts and the narration of his own endeavours, he seems to not have the same expectations for the audiences of his epistles.

In this short and accessible volume Scott Goode draws on this apparent "riddle" of evangelistic outreach in the Pauline epistles, and places it centre stage.

Taking his cues from a close reading of 1 Corinthians Goode helpfully examines the missional hermeneutics within the letter, and ties these with the social identity of the Corinthian church under the broad banner of "salvific intentionality". Here he reads salvation as directed towards "two distinct, yet related, directions". The first is a vertical salvation "action of God towards humanity through the eschatological Christ event", and the second, a horizontal aspect of "convey[ing] salvific influence towards one another and outsiders". It is the interplay of these two aspects which Goode explores throughout the work.

In the first chapter Goode examines the challenge of moral formation within 1 Corinthians 5:1-8 and sets it within the context of the social identity – including theological aspects – of the Corinthian church. This chapter sets up the complexity of social and theological relations for the nascent church, and Goode provides a reasonably detailed and cogent examination of the challenges therein. While it could always be expanded, this foundational work sets him up well for the investigation at hand.

The second chapter works from the social identity constructs at hand and examines the challenge inherent within mixed marriages in 7:12-16. Here Goode argues that the believing partner may have significant salvific impact on an unbelieving partner through a "theological vision to strengthen their marital commitment". But Goode is not blind to the challenges of imbalanced relationships, and cultural power imbalances inherent within first century patriarchal social settings. Rather, it is his attention to the mess present within these expressed social identities that demonstrates the compelling nature of the salvific intentionality. He identifies this as "worked out in the concrete social reality of first-century marriage, particularly for women".

The third chapter significantly expands on the prior vignette by throwing the doors open to the street, and considering how ethics of accommodation can generate missional opportunities for the believing community with their pagan neighbours. Goode carefully – and helpfully – navigates a fine line in his treatment of the "weak" and "strong" passages. He concludes that "the mission of the believing community cannot be limited to those of insider identity only. The mission of Christ has incorporated the Corinthians, although they were once outsiders". The verticality of salvation has temporal impact in the horizontal space.

The fourth chapter considers the nature of worship within the community (14:20-25), and Paul's assumption that outsiders may be present within the gatherings of the Corinthian church, and this should govern the activities of the church. From a detailed discussion of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, against the background of Isaiah, Goode then considers how this would spill over into the socioreligious nature of worship settings, suggesting that speech modes in the community should be "directed towards the

salvific welfare of outsiders".

Finally, Goode turns his attention to the nature of missional identity and salvific intentionality "then and now". Although the argument that church communities should be oriented towards a missional identity – even as missional communities – has been regularly made, Goode helpfully highlights the messiness of such a missional identity. This "untidy sociotheological profile" that he reads throughout the first Corinthian epistle emphasises the wrestling of the Corinthians with their own Christian identity. It is this wrestling that Goode seeks to apply as a salve to the modern church, highlighting that the Corinthian social identity is not so different from our present embodiment. Of critical note here is his section on "soft difference in ecclesial boundaries" proposing that "Paul imagines the community in Corinth not simply as a place of purity but one of 'spiritual formation'". Here Goode aptly observes that this untidy reality challenges contemporary expressions of community, and his diagnosis of requiring a "socially open community" to "serve the salvific welfare of outsiders as well as insiders" is a message that is sorely needed.

While Goode originally penned this work as an evolution of his MTh dissertation, he is to be well commended for his balance of academic rigour and pastoral readability. The book is firmly anchored within a scholarly foundation in social identity theory and missional hermeneutics yet is eminently readable and his insights spring easily from the page to the parish. This is recommended reading for anyone considering how to balance the challenge of inwards looking congregation for the edification of the comfortable with an outward salvifically intentional church on God's mission field.

The Reverend Dr Christopher Porter is Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Trinity College Theological School.

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We need a better book about Hillsong

■ Lachlan Vines

David Hardaker: Mine is the Kingdom: The rise and fall of Brian Houston and the Hillsong Church. Allen & Unwin, 2024.

“No one understands the Hillsong saga quite like David Hardaker”.

These are the words of Marc Fennell – presenter of SBS Hillsong documentary *The Kingdom* – prominently featured on the back cover of the book *Mine is the Kingdom: The rise and fall of Brian Houston and the Hillsong Church*.

This is an overarching theme of journalist David Hardaker’s new chronicle of Hillsong Church and its recently-resigned founding pastor. Hillsong is an enigma that most people don’t understand, but Hardaker does. The author regularly talks up the impenetrability of Hillsong’s particular dialect of “Christianese”, as well as his own specialised aptitude to penetrate it. Though not himself a church goer, his years following, researching, and leaking, the Hillsong story have qualified him to decode hidden meanings and subtleties in Hillsong sermons or conversations that are, he says, imperceptible to most outsiders.

It is very unfortunate that Hardaker falls far short of his own self-assessment. To anyone who has spent meaningful time around the movement it is conspicuous that Hardaker does not understand Hillsong nearly as well as he thinks he does. This isn’t because Hillsong’s jargon phrases are so esoteric as he claims, but because his own narrow research and relentless cynicism make for a book full of conjecture and basic misunderstandings.

Many of Hardaker’s misunderstandings are harmless, like frequently calling Hillsong congregation members “followers”, or referring to a campus pastor as a “senior pastor” (a title reserved for Brian Houston). Even the book’s subheading “The rise and fall of Brian Houston and the Hillsong Church” betrays a lack of basic acquaintance with the Hillsong community, who would never place a definite article before “Hillsong Church” – that just sounds strange, like saying “the Facebook”, or “the Sydney”.

But many of Hardaker’s misunderstandings are not so benign. His cynicism is, frankly, exhausting. From the outset loaded language of empire, corporation, and show business dominate his narration of Houston’s ministry. Hardaker’s determination to interpret everything in the worst possible



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light, coupled with his ultimate lack of expertise, leads him to fundamentally misinterpret ideologies and motivations, and to see connections that aren’t there.

Noting that Pentecostal former Prime Minister Scott Morrison took inspiration and instruction from Exodus 4’s burning bush passage – to use what’s in your hand like Moses did – Hardaker concludes that Morrison thinks himself a special Moses figure. And he makes much of the notion, not seeming to realise that this lesson about Moses was impressed upon every Pentecostal youth kid at least once. Hardaker also emphasises that Brian Houston (as well as Morrison) claims a “direct relationship with God”. He is apparently unaware that all Evangelicals understand a direct relationship with God to be the universal Christian experience, and would never see this as something unique to Houston.

Of all the stretches of logic that Hardaker makes throughout the book, the most baffling is his attempt to shoehorn Scott Morrison into the middle of the Hillsong story. In a book about Hillsong and Brian Houston, those versed in the subject will be amazed and perplexed to see entire chapters devoted to Scott Morrison, and a sustained attempt to portray Houston as a close friend and key mentor figure to the politician. The reality is that Scott Morrison and Hillsong bear little relationship. Hardaker’s characterisation that Morrison’s political career is in some way the product of Brian Houston’s influence is not so much an exaggeration as a fiction.

A couple of chapters contain good, enlightening accounts. The chapter on the sex crimes of Brian’s father Frank Houston

is well and respectfully told while it lasts. (Though Hardaker’s admission of Brian’s decisive acquittal for the charges of covering up his father’s crimes doesn’t stop him from repeatedly mentioning the charges, as if true, in later chapters.) The most enlightening chapter concerns Hillsong’s financial opacity. In light of federal MP Andrew Wilkie’s claims of financial lawbreaking – claims disputed by Hillsong’s lawyers – Hardaker turns his attention to the laws themselves. What follows is a fascinating exploration of the ACNC and the parliamentary processes that resulted in its lack of reach into religious organisations.

And here lies the biggest problem with Hardaker’s cynical, sensationalist approach: it undercuts his credibility to relate factual information about Hillsong’s genuine failings. Things that need to be said about, and learned from, the mistakes that Houston and Hillsong have made get lost in the noise of Hardaker’s generally unreliable narration. This book makes one thing clear: a better book about this needs to be written.

Hardaker does a bad job of something that Hillsong failed to adequately do first: hold its leadership accountable. When the church doesn’t do this, often the world does instead, and without grace. Let us all heed the warning that churches who want to avoid being lied about should start by telling the truth about themselves.

Lachlan Vines was a member of Hillsong Church in Sydney for 17 years before relocating to help plant Flow Church in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs. As well as working as a ministry assistant at Flow Church, he is studying an MDiv full-time at Ridley College.