

Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLI

DEC
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2015

Joy to the world – no, really

WHY CHRISTMAS NEVER GETS OLD

- + The greatness of God amid dementia
- & Holiday movies to see – and avoid



16

COVER

Visible and celebrating: how churches are bringing Christmas to their communities.

NEWS

- 3 Sydney
- 12 World

COMMUNITY

- 13 Letters
- 14 Changes
- 15 Archbishop writes

FEATURES

- 16 Cover feature
Real joy to the world
- 22 Dementia
Always in God's care.
- 24 Moore
Our good news is for every day.

LIFE

- 26 Positions vacant
- 26 Classifieds
- 26 Events

CULTURE

- 29 Books
Marcus Loane biography and Paul Barnett on the man from heaven.
- 30 Films
Holiday flicks



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I can
also help other
people understand
[asylum seekers]
as well.

Ariento

7



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10



31



Southern CROSS DECEMBER 2015

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Garrison facelift



From left: architect Hector Abrahams, Church Hill's senior minister Justin Moffatt and assistant minister Craig Tubman.

ANNE LIM

THE GARRISON CHURCH IN Millers Point has been a lot of things in its 170-year history. These days it's popular for weddings, and is admired daily by people on walking tours of The Rocks.

What the church has *not* been for the past 100 years is a functioning parish. Records show there were about 20 people each Sunday in 1914, and about the same number in 2014.

Millers Point was traditionally Catholic and working class. But with the State Government selling off public housing, young people are buying the old terraces. Up to 600 new residents are expected in the tiny suburb over the next few years.

The Rev Justin Moffatt, senior minister at Church Hill Anglican – an umbrella name for St Philip's, York Street and the Garrison Church – approached Hector Abrahams Architects for a plan that would create a new approach to church life at the Garrison and position it to attract new members. Mr Moffatt wanted to focus "not on preserving a museum but making a place functional for gospel ministry".

The plans include renovations to make the church lighter, brighter and more welcoming, as well as a larger vision to open the grounds more to the public and make the church a community hub.

The two churches amalgamated last year because St Philip's had plenty of people but little space, while the Garrison had lots of space but few people. The 40-50 members of St Philip's 4pm congregation moved to the Garrison and, at first, met in the hall because the church was gloomy and had no proper sound system. But since the installation of new lights, sound and an extended chancel, they love the space.

Mr Moffatt says Hector Abrahams' advice was to move pews from the back to the front. This created space at the back and brought the front closer for "more intimacy in worship". In addition, the lighting now illuminates people rather than architecture. Says Mr Abrahams: "It focuses on people being able to see, hear, interact and serve each other. It needed to look good, but look good as the setting for people."

Not only does the extended chancel have disabled access, it means a bride now stands only two metres from her parents in the first pew rather than seven metres away.

"The extended chancel really has answered every [need] with respect to each of the groups we're connecting with," Mr Moffatt says. "When you come in now to church or a wedding or whatever, you can see and hear everything. And those two things are at the heart of the gospel. It fits Paul's insistence that everything is done in order. There is order to it – beauty and order."

Church Hill is now raising funds for the second stage of its plans, which include opening a new gate to allow tourist "through traffic", and turning the car park into a central courtyard with new meeting rooms. "What we've done inside the

church is really just the start," says the Rev Craig Tubman, who became assistant minister in charge of the Garrison four months ago.

"The next step is to work on ways that we can seek to serve, love and engage our community."

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Dulwich Hill commemorates ministry

AHEAD OF THE CENTENARY OF Dulwich Hill's church building, and 25 years of the parish being led by the Rev Dave Smith, a new book commemorating the history of Holy Trinity, Dulwich Hill has been released.

A *Church for Our Times*, written by historian John Coleman and architectural historian Robert Irving, documents ministry in the Dulwich Hill area from its beginnings in 1886 to the present day.

"We did this with the centenary of the existing church in mind, which opened on December 6, 1915," Mr Irving says. "We wanted to have this available for then, and it also coincides almost exactly with the 25th anniversary of David Smith's arrival.

"Of course, we also figured there had not been a history written of the church for 30 years, and that was fairly sketchy in terms of detail. We wanted to have another go, particularly given how much has changed in the church and the parish over that time."

The chief theme to emerge from the book, according to both Mr Irving and Mr Smith, is a focus on mission following a trend established by the parish's fourth rector the Rev Gregory Chambers.

Mr Chambers worked to encourage young British men into rural Australian ministry during



Memories: Sunday school in the old Dulwich Hill parish hall, c.1960

the war years, and later became the Bishop of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania, creating another connection between Australian ministry and mission in Africa.

"The parish became very much a missionary parish," Mr Irving says. "It had a strong focus on raising up and supporting missionaries, particularly in Africa. George Chambers personally recruited dozens of missionaries, particularly from his missionary visit to England. One of his recruits, Bill Wynne-Jones, came here from England, was ordained and himself became

Bishop in Central Tanganyika after Chambers.

"There was a certain continuity and drive... and that drive remained in the parish for many years. That's reflected, I think, in the current minister as well, and the drive he has shown through his boxing ministry and general outreach. There's certainly a line that runs through the history, and therefore the book."

The book also looks to the future and a new phase in the ministry at Holy Trinity. In addition to centenary celebrations planned for December 6, there will also be a grand opening

of the church's new ministry centre, replacing the parish hall and original church building lost in a 2013 fire.

"We've been running a drop-in program and ministry for many years and that began when this was the heroin capital of the inner west," Mr Smith says. "But that's not really the case any more – it's gentrified quite significantly in recent times. There's room now for us to also do more traditional Christian youth work in the new centre.

"I am interested in trialling a drop-in program again and see how that goes, but this all gives us a chance to reassess what is most needed in the community and try to develop youth works that are most appropriate now. We're hoping to relaunch with the new centre into the local area with the same enthusiasm and relevance as in the past, even if it takes a different form."

The celebration of the centenary and the new ministry centre will be attended by Archbishop Glenn Davies, as well as former Archbishop Harry Goodhew, who grew up at Holy Trinity and will preach at the event.

The lunch that follows, Mr Smith says, is being provided by the local Islamic community, and the event is geared towards participation of the whole community in the church's celebration.

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Kingsford's new chapter

JUDY ADAMSON

WHEN A PARISH GOES THROUGH a "repotting" process often it's after a rector has left, the congregation is struggling and another church steps up with a bunch of new people to help rekindle the local ministry.

With Kingsford, however, it's more of an ensemble effort – with the outgoing rector involved from the outset.

The Rev Steve Bligh, who has been minister at Holy Trinity, Kingsford since 2010, has been talking and praying with other rectors in the Eastern Suburbs Mission Area about possible support partnerships for a few years.

"I realised we didn't actually have a critical mass of people here to look after administration and various other ministries," he says, "but our Mission Area group has all been on the same page in terms of being mission-minded, so as a group and one-to-one we've talked about ways Holy Trinity could benefit from that collegiality."

A solution was reached for unexpected reasons in recent months. Mr Bligh needs to resign from full-time ministry on medical advice, so cannot continue as Kingsford's rector in the long term.

He, and the rectors of Wild Street, Maroubra and Malabar, got their heads together to talk the options through. Who was the right replacement? And how should it work? Their answer as to the man for the job was unanimous: the Rev David Doran, assistant minister at Wild Street. The plan then fashioned itself around him, with Wild Street committing to send at least a dozen adults, some with kids, to Kingsford, while members of the other churches were also asked to prayerfully consider making a move.

Mr Doran, who was made a presbyter at Holy Trinity last month, had not yet considered putting himself forward to lead a church but was heartened to discover his own rector the Rev Rod Cocking, as well as others, considered he and his



Planning together: the Rev Steve Bligh (left) and the Rev David Doran.

wife Huong ready for the challenge.

"It's not a small thing to leave a church family but we've been really encouraged that several people have committed to coming," he says. "It's encouraging to see people seriously consider how they can best serve the kingdom – to have caught the vision of working together under God to see revitalisation in Kingsford, both in the church and in the community, in terms of the gospel."

The Bishop of the South Sydney Region, Robert Forsyth, is delighted by the plan.

"It's the first time I've had a repotting scheme come from the ground up – not from me thinking about it," he says. "Wild Street will be giving up their beloved assistant, and they and other churches will be giving up parishioners, so it's a genuine act of selflessness from the churches."

The rector of Maroubra and head of the Mission Area, the Rev Jim Crosweller, says the wider story is the value of "churches building relationships in such a way that they can do this together. This is the perfect combination of a welcoming rector, a well-trained young leader and two groups of gospel-hearted people – those at Kingsford and those who will come. If any of those elements aren't there, this doesn't happen."

The transition phase has already

begun, with Mr Bligh and Mr Doran meeting regularly to talk and plan. Mr Doran officially begins in February, and both men will serve together until Mr Bligh finishes up

the following month.

Says Mr Doran: "It's a pretty exciting time. We have a great God and my confidence isn't in myself but in him and his word."

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Rock and magic collide for asylum seeker night

Abracadabra: Ariento and his assistant Claire perform at St Anne's, Ryde. PHOTO: Cole Bennetts Photography

NICK GILBERT

ST ANNE'S, RYDE RECENTLY HELD its second "Rock 'n' Magic" show, aiming to raise awareness about asylum seeker issues and create links between people, churches and the asylum seekers.

The night's magician, who goes by the stage name Ariento, is an Iranian asylum seeker who has lived in Australia for three years, with connections at St Anne's for much of that time. After working as a professional magician overseas, including for large corporate functions and public events, more recently he has concentrated just on getting back into his art, working back into paid performances.

"When I left Iran I did many shows in other countries – when I was in the UAE and Malaysia – but I did not do shows when I first came to

Australia," he says. "The first time I did a show here, I did not have a work visa. I just wanted to make people happy and help them. I've also done shows at a hospital, and some clubs as well, and have been doing more paid work. But for me it's not just about taking money, but also to enjoy the art again. At this kind of event I can also help other people understand [asylum seekers] as well."

Ariento's magic is largely based on illusions, ranging from close-up tricks to more extravagant stage magical pieces. The fun feel of the night was helped along by a range of audience participants, both young and old. Ariento is continuing to find more work, including a performance at a Persian community group function set for the end of the year.

The senior minister at St Anne's, the Rev Greg Burke, also participated in the evening, singing and playing with his band Old Play.

The band added some classic musical entertainment to Ariento's illusions, but Mr Burke says the centrepiece of the night was a presentation by Anglicare's Amelia Savage on the organisation's work with asylum seekers.

"The main thing was to inform people about the current situation for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as to think about the Syrian situation," he says. "It was an information night. We didn't charge for it but encouraged people to donate to Anglicare if able, particularly as they support asylum seekers going through legal and review processes. And, of course, we wanted people to have fun, and to have fun together."

Mr Burke says other churches are also working with asylum seekers through a variety of ministries, and he hopes to see the ministry continue to grow, particularly as the country prepares to welcome

thousands of Syrian refugees from UNHCR camps.

"We're keen to help other churches to get involved, if they're willing," he says. "A lot of the guys who were with us as asylum seekers at the beginning have moved on to other places, mostly because Ryde is just too expensive to live in for them. We refer them to other Anglican churches, particularly places that do ESL or have Farsi-speaking ministries. We're always keen to develop those kinds of links with people and we want others to feel this is something they can get involved in."

As for Rock 'n' Magic itself, can we expect a third iteration?

"Well, our band needs gigs – we need incentive to learn new songs," Mr Burke jokes. "And, of course, Ariento is always getting hold of new illusion gear and trying to add more to his act, so there's always scope for more shows."

SRE in depth

NICK GILBERT

YOUTHWORKS HAS DEVELOPED a new curriculum for Special Religious Education (SRE), with the high school component due to be rolled out in Term 1 next year.

"We've been looking mostly at years 7-10 in terms of curriculum and associated resources, but we've done work across the Kindergarten to Year 12 curriculum," says Youthworks' director of curriculum and teacher quality, Dr Kaye Chalwell. "When we look at a program like SRE, we want to make sure that we provide resources that support quality teaching and learning in the classroom."

One of the key aspects of the new curriculum is that it attempts to bridge the gap between primary and secondary learning.

"A curriculum that is intentionally



Youthworks staff and SRE teachers together plan the new curriculum.

designed with the needs of different students in different contexts is important in SRE," Dr Chalwell says.

"The other key things to look at with this kind of process are the educational philosophy at work, the theology being expressed, and the variety of people who will be using the resources and how the curriculum can support them. We also have to be aware of the world

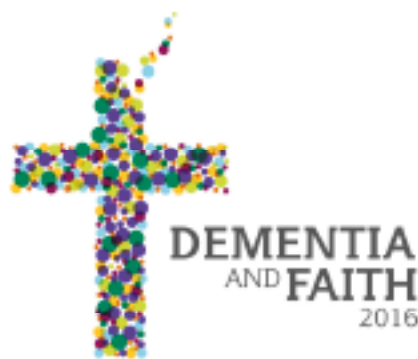
we live in, its attitude to the things of Christ, and how we can be appropriate in the classroom in that environment as well."

Dr Chalwell says that because SRE provides the opportunity to teach the beliefs and tenets of the Christian faith it is very important that the Bible is the foundation text. The review has identified the value of having a "spiral" curriculum, where

concepts and ideas are revisited as a student grows older, but with more detail and in a wider context.

"A lot of students might say 'Oh, I've heard this story before – it's all been done,'" Dr Chalwell says. "Of course, it hasn't. What they mean is that they've heard the content of the story before, but what they haven't done is unpack the story, what it means about how we live, and how to think deeply about what it means for them at an age appropriate level."

Resources accompanying the curriculum are designed to give clear guidance to teachers about what should be taught, but will allow flexibility depending on student needs and interests and the teaching environment. Resources for the years 7-10 curriculum will be available online in January and through CEP subscription, and Youthworks is seeking to provide optional training to teachers in the new curriculum.



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KEYNOTE PRESENTERS

Professor John Bainton
Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care,
University of Aberdeen.

Ms Christine Brylles
Dementia advocate, author and international speaker.

Professor Elizabeth Macdonald AM
Founding Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral
Studies, Charles Sturt University.

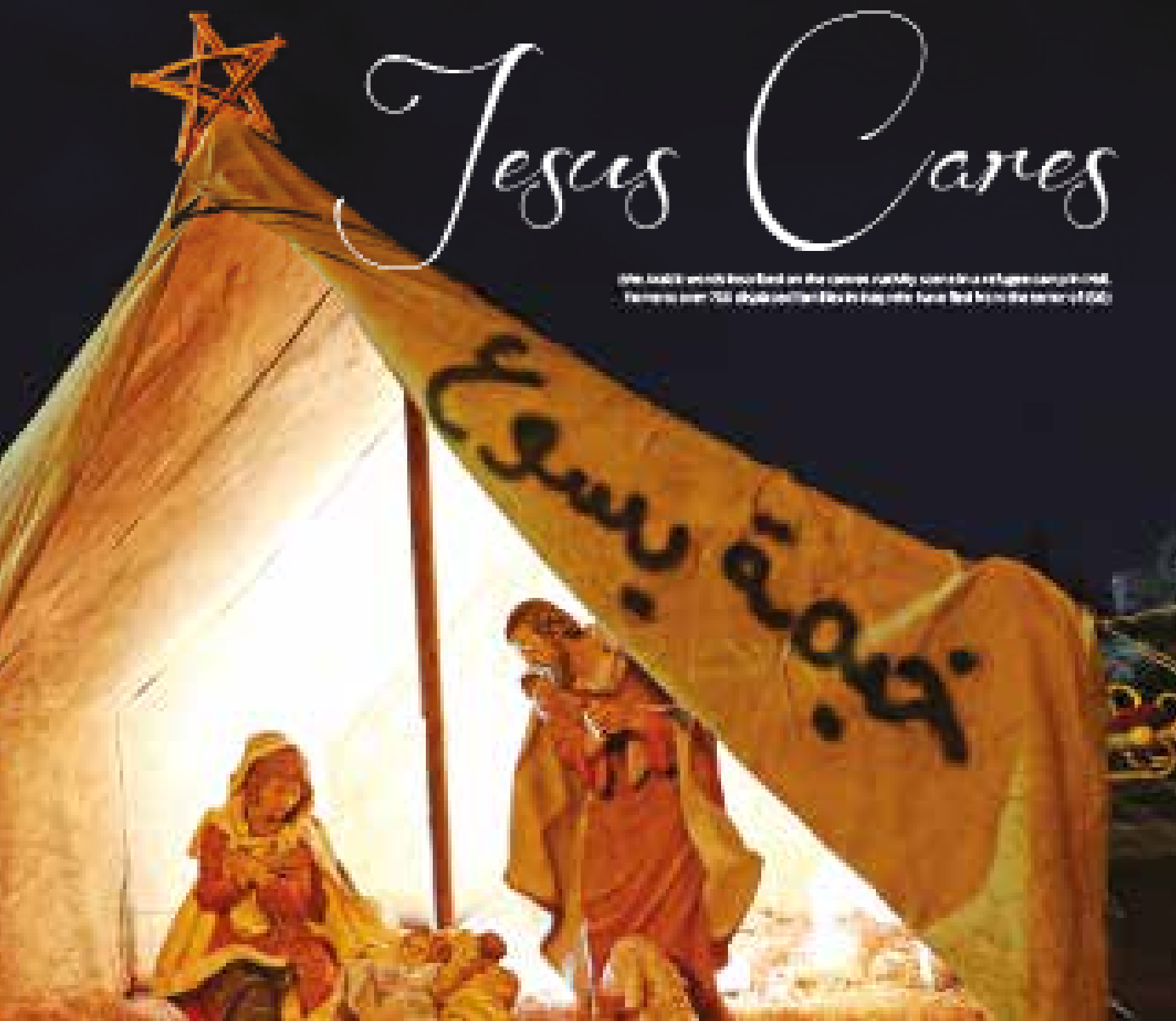
WITH:

Dr Glenn Davies Archbishop of Sydney
Chris Edwards Bishop of North Sydney and ARV Board
Professor Julian Trollor Head Dept of Developmental
Disability Neuropsychiatry, UNSW Australia
Dr Andrew Cameron Director St Marks National
Theological Centre, Charles Sturt University
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"We are thankful to Anglican Aid for their continual support over many years as we have been able to help refugees and asylum seekers with groceries and bibles to supplement the benefits they receive from the Government."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa

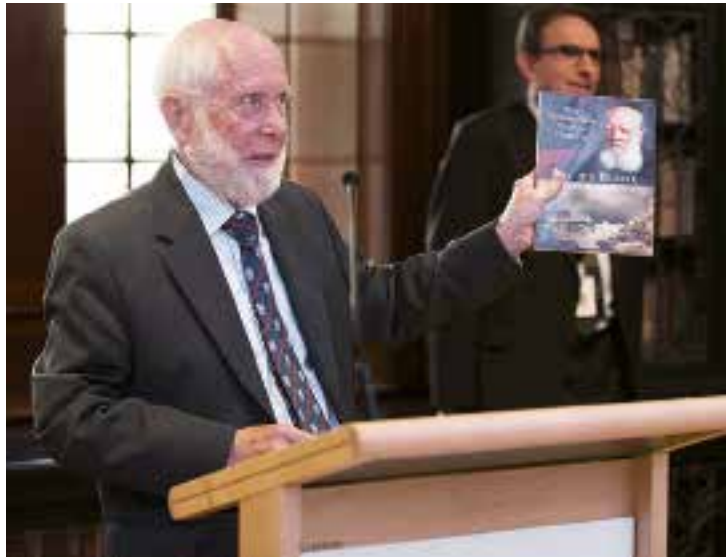
Colonial faith and science

A NEW BOOK HIGHLIGHTING A historical Sydney clergyman has also shown the close links of theological and scientific thought in colonial Australia.

This Wonderfully Strange Country by retired professor, geomorphologist and Anglican lay reader Dr Robert Young documents the life of the Rev W.B. Clarke and his contributions to the burgeoning colony in Australia during the 19th century.

"I've always had a strong interest in how geology and other natural sciences developed," Dr Young says. "Clarke in particular always struck me as a major feature in understanding the history of Australian science. Of course it was all done in his spare time, as he was also the rector of St Thomas', North Sydney over that period.

"The thing about Clarke is he covered such an enormous amount of material. He is known as the father of Australian geology, he was



An inspirational clergyman: Dr Young holds up a copy of his book at the launch.
PHOTO: Merinda Campbell, State Library of NSW

almost certainly the discoverer of gold and was also one of the first to conceive of the idea of former supercontinent, Gondwana. But quite apart from the geology he

supported explorers – the likes of Leichhardt and Kennedy – and was a figure in the media as a journalist as well, particular through his work in and for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He was quite remarkable."

Last month's book launch, hosted by the State Library of NSW, was attended by Anglicans, scientific society members, university professors and direct descendants of Clarke himself. The Bishop of South Sydney, Robert Forsyth, spoke at the event, along with Dr Young.

One of the features of Clarke's life, apart from his extensive scientific contributions, was his interest in social development. He spoke in favour of government-supported education and the primacy of teacher training, and was also

very concerned with the status of Aboriginal people in the colony.

"He was very much a social critic," Dr Young says. "He was very much concerned about what was happening and could happen to the Aboriginal population and, throughout his work, particularly his roles in the media, he was looking to see how Australia could develop itself into a more humane nation."

The wide-ranging and exhaustive nature of Clarke's work had an impact on his family, with his wife and three children returning to England for 12 years because of homesickness. Clarke supported his family financially until they returned.

What drew everything together for Clarke, Dr Young says, was his Christian commitment.

"It was in no way limited by science," he says. "[Clarke] saw nature – a term he hardly ever used himself – as having no barriers and that allowed him to pursue everything.

"The theme that crops up over and over again in all his roles was a commitment to truth... whether in doctrine, in social investigation, in journalism, in geology or whatever, it was a commitment to the truth.

"That link between his Christian commitment and science is an answer, I feel, to anyone who feels there is a conflict there, from Huxley and Darwin – who he spoke to at the time – all the way through to Dawkins. For Clarke that just didn't occur, and that makes him still relevant today."

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ARV expands into Minto

RUSSELL POWELL

ANGLICAN RETIREMENT Villages (ARV) has bought land for a new village in the south-western suburb of Minto.

The site, extending to almost six hectares on Pembroke Road, is expected to transform into a village of up to 250 retirement living units plus a 120-bed residential care home.

In announcing the move ARV's chief executive Rob Freeman said, "A few years ago ARV made a clear and unambiguous strategic decision to serve a broader cross-section of people within the Diocese by expanding into areas where it didn't have a presence.

"Since that time ARV has acquired sites at Rooty Hill and Milperra and plans for these locations are advancing. The acquisition of this wonderful site at Minto is



An aerial view of the land purchased by ARV at Minto.

a further step in ensuring ARV's accommodation and services are accessible and affordable to the people of south-west Sydney."

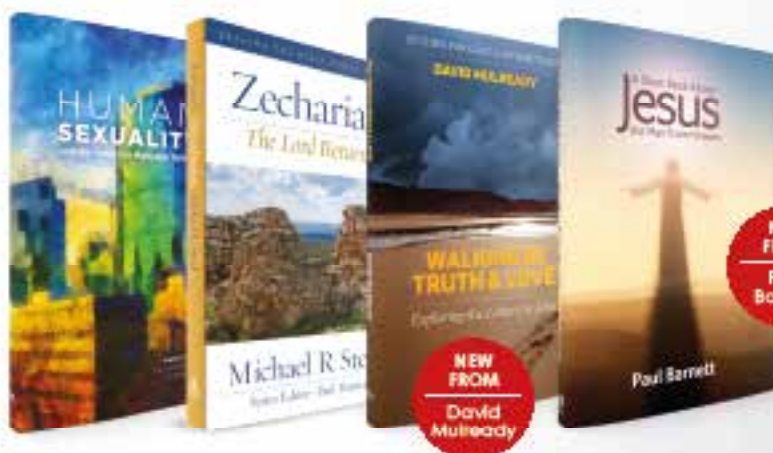
Mr Freeman indicated that the village would be designed with affordability as a major consideration. "It is our intention

to offer a significant proportion of the village – around 30 per cent – on a rental basis," he said. "This will ensure that older people who haven't had the opportunity to build up equity in a family home can still enjoy the benefits of living in one of our communities. These same principles for ensuring affordability are also being applied at Rooty Hill.

"In addition to Minto we will continue to seek out a suitable site in the Fairfield/Liverpool area, and development of ARV's property at Menangle Park is likely to commence within the next five years. Meanwhile new villages already established at Warriewood, Glenhaven, The Ponds and Caddens (Penrith) continue to expand, as does ARV's flagship site at Castle Hill."

The announcement came during Synod, where church planting and ministry to disadvantaged areas was on the agenda of the church's yearly "parliament" meeting.

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Downton ditched God Hope for Asia Bibi

A BRITISH NEWSPAPER HAS revealed there was a deliberate decision to excise Christianity from the popular TV series *Downton Abbey*, even though it was historically inaccurate to do so.

Downton, which has received huge ratings around the world, is strangely devoid of everyday events such as church attendance and grace before meals, despite early 20th century England being steeped in religious observance.

The period drama was created to showcase the lives of the aristocratic Crawley family from the sinking of the Titanic to the rise of Nazism. The final series finishes in Britain this month with a Christmas special.

A review in *Christianity Today* said it was "striking how much divine trapping there is in *Downton Abbey*, for what little role explicit faith plays in its characters' lives".

Another commentator wrote: "As far as I can make out, no one at *Downton* actually ventures



inside a church... [but] religion, and especially the Sunday service, would have been a basic element of life".

Downton Abbey's historical adviser Alistair Bruce told Britain's *Telegraph* that the show's producers had ordered the fictional family's life be stripped of any religious references. For example, they are never shown in the process of sitting down to dinner, because that would have meant saying grace.

"The view was that we'd leave religion out of it, and it would've taken extra time too," Bruce said. "Everyone panics when you try to do anything religious on the telly."

THERE IS RENEWED HOPE FOR Pakistani Christian mother of five Aasiya Noreen, also known as Asia Bibi, who has been in jail since 2009.

In 2010, a court sentenced her to execution by hanging and she has been on death row ever since. An appeal is pending.

Now, a ray of hope has emerged. Judges considering another case have called for reforms to Pakistan's blasphemy laws to provide safeguards against their misuse. This is seen as a step that may have a positive impact on Bibi's appeal.

She was arrested under the blasphemy laws, accused of insulting the prophet of Islam when she drank water from a well in her village and then offered some to a Muslim woman. A crowd gathered, claiming she had polluted the well by drinking from it and demanding she become a Muslim.

"I'm not going to convert," she said. "I believe... in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of mankind."



Bibi with Governor Salmaan Taseer, who was assassinated in 2011 after campaigning against blasphemy laws.

What did your prophet Mohammed ever do to save mankind?"

Bibi's lawyer was recently allowed to visit her in the overcrowded Multan Women's Prison. According to *World Watch Monitor* her defence lawyer Saif-ul-Malook said, "She looked healthy and normal" and denied she had any serious illnesses.

Bibi's husband said he could see "a glimmer of hope" on her face.

Rivers of Justice and Mercy

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Time to sing – and rejoice

IT'S DECEMBER AT LAST, AND there is much rejoicing at our house.

Much of it stems from my younger daughter who, after 11 months of waiting, is finally allowed to sing Christmas carols again.

It's not that I don't love carols – far from it. However it irks me that, in

the neverending search for a buck, our shops start oozing Christmas "cheer" two months before we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Lord most of them don't know and care nothing about. Of course, we're also much more likely to hear "I saw Mummy kissing Santa Claus" than

"Joy to the World"!

Yet we have good news of great joy to share. The best news. And it's all in the carols for those who listen more closely.

So, this month as we look at some of the ways churches across our Diocese reach out to their

communities at Christmas, let's consider how we can show the joy we feel and share it with friends and family who don't yet know the importance of the baby in the manger.

And sing with gusto!

JUDY ADAMSON

Law-faith complexity

In response to the reminder that Prince Charles once said he wished to use the title "Defender of faith/s" rather than "Defender of the Faith" as Elizabeth II has chosen to do (Letters, SC, November), the laws of Australia are based on the Bible and lawyers continue to draw judges' attention to biblical principles in their arguments from the bar table.

It may sound fine and grand to refer to the monarch as "defender of faiths" but which one when it comes to our law?

Reg Lobb
Stanwell Park

Engage with marriage debate

If marriage laws are changed religious freedom exemptions will be a waste of time because, almost inevitably, they won't amount to much. The main game is to defend God's wonderful institution of marriage.

Having seen what has happened overseas Australians are in a unique position to recognise that these new sexual "rights" will trump all other rights if marriage laws are changed. Despite this, too many people shy away from speaking their mind on the issue. Unfortunately, silence begets silence. Yet, as Billy Graham said, "Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand the spines of others are often stiffened".

So let us boldly speak the truth in love. Not only because we are right, but because we care about God's purposes for humanity.

Homosexual relationships by definition and biology are unable to reproduce. It's not



discrimination to say so. Not all love is equal because not all love is geared towards reproduction. Homosexual "marriage" is a legal fiction. It's like talking about a round square. Removing the chief characteristic of marriage, gender complementarity, renders the institution meaningless. It's bad public policy.

Clearly, in God's eyes, marriage is gender specific. It's for a man and a woman with a view to creating new life. That is God's perfect plan in creation, so let's champion it!

Many people are unprepared to defend marriage, but we must make an effort to speak for it using biblical and secular arguments, as our Archbishop has encouraged us to do (SC, November). Most importantly, we need to pray.

William Mitchell
Annandale

Can we take more?

The story "We can take more" (SC, November) prompts me to provide feedback on the Rev Dr Mark Thompson's motion at Synod about the expected 12,000 refugees from Syria.

"This nation of ours is obscenely

wealthy," said the principal of Moore College, without acknowledging that this nation is living beyond its means and will eventually be insolvent unless the reckless spending stops. Through questionable management and the vagaries of the market this nation lost several hundred billion dollars over the same time that the Sydney Diocese lost several hundred million dollars.

Jesus was very clear about the need for the separation of church and state, something that was quite the antithesis of what Mohammed later advocated. Jesus did not leave an immigration policy for nations to follow as that is a concern of the state. He was, however, a refugee for a short time with his family, but the Lord told him to return home when it was safe to do so and, without considering the relative welfare policies of modern states, most displaced people would want to return home.

Christians administer charity best on an individual level with modesty, because displays of conspicuous compassion might be seen to spring from moral vanity.

As a citizen I will be advocating that at least 95 per cent of the Syrians be non-Muslim because the future of this country must be considered. We know the children of Mohammedans can be more revivalist and prone to violence than their refugee parents. Refugees with non-compatible language and skills are a drain on welfare budgets, sometimes to intergenerational extent.

So should we take more? No!

Brian Doak
Lindfield

Update: From Bishop Ivan Lee

I write to thank the many brothers and sisters who have been praying for me and my family. For those not aware, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in early October. It was, of course, a great shock, and I informed all the clergy of the Diocese.

At that time I wrote that the words of Paul "to live is Christ and to die is gain" became very real to me. I am no apostle but I do long to continue my ministry helping churches reach their communities with the good news of Christ. At the same time I trust in God's sovereignty and know my times are in his hands.

Late in October I underwent a 10-hour operation called the Whipple procedure at Royal North Shore Hospital. The painful days following were the most difficult of my life, physically and emotionally. My family was by my side every day and I was deeply aware of the prayers of God's people.

The Lord has been gracious and I am now recovering at home. The current struggle is to sleep at night and to eat despite no appetite. Building up some strength and weight is important to prepare for the next step, which is chemotherapy.

As is the experience of many who suffer, I have learnt greater dependence on our compassionate heavenly Father, and confidence in Christ who died and rose again for us.

I look forward to ministering in the churches again, God willing.

Your brother in Christ,
Bishop Ivan Lee

LETTERS

COMMUNITY



QUEENSLAND BOUND

After six years as rector of Turramurra South the **Rev Tom Henderson-Brooks** moves to Queensland early next year to lead the sprawling, five-church parish of North Rockhampton.

He says that after only six years at St Philip's, and with more they wanted to do there, he and his wife Caroline had not been looking to move. However, God gradually made the way after the Bishop of Rockhampton, David Robinson, sounded them out in January.

The timing didn't seem right at first, so the bishop offered to "put our names at the bottom of his cabinet and call us in several

years' time – and I said, 'Fine'," Mr Henderson-Brooks recalls.

A few months' later, after a talk with Archbishop Davies, Mr Henderson-Brooks got another call. "He [Bishop Robinson] said, 'I'd really, really, like you to consider coming to Rockhampton' – so we began to pray about it."

As they prayed they could see a number of potential obstacles, such as whether the parish and presentation board would want a Sydney minister, whether they could work well with the bishop, and whether – as a couple whose ministry had mainly been inner-city focused – they would be a good fit for a more rural parish. Yet Mr Henderson-Brooks had, in the back of his mind, a conviction developed years ago on his first Bible training trip to South Sudan. "I realised that even though there are great needs in Africa and we need to keep supporting them in whatever way we can, they have a lot of gospel enthusiasm... there's a greater spiritual deadness in Australia than across the continent of Africa," he says. "At that point my heart began to look out for what can we do for the gospel in the rest of Australia."

The couple flew to Rockhampton

mid-year and found all the obstacles gradually melted away. They were warmly welcomed, and soon officially invited to come. The greatest challenge became leaving their children, who through studies and work availability aren't yet independent. Mr Henderson-Brooks says Matthew 19:29 kept reappearing in sermon preparation and Bible readings – leaving loved ones for Jesus' sake. "It was a challenge to us: 'Are you prepared to trust me with your children?'" he says. "It's a hard one, but we trust God with everything."

The family recently said its goodbyes to Turramurra South, confident in the prayers and love of its people, and Mr Henderson-Brooks will be inducted at North Rockhampton on January 27. The parish is 180 kilometres long – reaching halfway to Mackay – and Rockhampton's northern suburbs are growing at a "phenomenal rate" with lots of schools plus Central Queensland University. "There's a real need for mission and resources and caring for the wider community," Mr Henderson-Brooks says. "But we're all on the same team looking to glorify God and looking for the body of Christ to grow."

IN BRIEF

The **Rev Dr Michael Stead** will be consecrated as the new Bishop of South Sydney on December 5 in St Andrew's Cathedral. He replaces the Right Rev Rob Forsyth who, after 15 years as bishop of the region, retires on December 14.

The **Rev Kanishka Raffel** begins his new role as Dean of Sydney on January 1, 2016. His installation as Dean will be held on February 4 in St Andrew's Cathedral.

VACANT PARISHES

Parishes and provisional parishes, vacant or becoming vacant, as at November 23, 2015:

• Artarmon	• Bossley Park*
• Baulkham Hills	• Leura
• Canterbury - Hurlstone Park*	• Petersham
• Caringbah	• Sadleir*
• Concord and Burwood	• St Marys*
• Enmore - Stanmore*	• Turramurra
• Epping	• Turramurra South
• Fairfield -	• West Pennant Hills

*Provisional parish or Archbishop's appointment

Dr Jane Mathieson (right) died on November 1.

Her name is one that most *Southern Cross* readers will not recognise, although we can confidently say each one of you has benefited from her skills. Dr Mathieson (along with editor Judy Adamson) proofread each edition before it went to press, in addition to her role as personal assistant to Bishop Rob Forsyth and Bishop Chris Edwards.

A great lover of language with meticulous attention to detail, Dr



Mathieson's humble and careful contributions – over a number of years – were always valued

tremendously by us (and by you, although you didn't know it). We will miss her.

The **Rev Grahame Defty** died on July 24.

Born in 1935, Grahame John Defty began his studies at Moore College in 1957. After graduation he was curate of Lindfield for three years, with further curacies in the parishes of Vacluse and West Wollongong.

He and his wife Beverley offered

themselves for missionary service, training with the Church Missionary Society in 1965 before going out on the field in Tanzania from 1967-1975.

Upon the family's return to Australia, Mr Defty spent three years as resident minister of the then new housing district of Glenquarie, moving on from there in 1979 to become rector of Berrima cum Moss Vale. He then served for eight years as rector of Hornsby Heights before retiring in 1996.

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Saving season

DR GLENN DAVIES



COMMUNITY

DECLARING WHAT WE believe is a fundamental aspect of Christian faith. Christians are exhorted to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We should therefore never be ashamed to “tell of his salvation from day to day” (Psalm 96:2), and Christmas provides us with an excellent opportunity to do just that. Amid preparations, present buying and card sending in the lead-up to Christmas Day, we should declare the salvation of our God, joining the angels’ praise: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14).

The wonder of Christmas, of course, is that God became human and took on created flesh. A bold statement that has been a stumbling block to proud minds that cannot understand, let alone accept, how divinity and humanity can co-exist together.

The early church saw the importance of the incarnation, in particular the virgin birth, for our salvation. It found expression in the Apostles’ Creed (“conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”) and the Nicene Creed (“who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary”). These are succinct and somewhat dense statements that portray a mystery which is difficult for the modern mind to grasp. Of course, the miracle of incarnation is more to do with a virginal conception than a virginal birth. The birth is merely the result of the miraculous conception, though we tend to use the term “virgin birth”


to describe the mystery from conception to birth. The wonder of God’s overshadowing of Mary – to use Luke’s description – is that Mary would conceive without a human agent, without the aid of a man’s sperm, but through the power of the Holy Spirit creating new life from a female ovum and thus generating a human zygote, an embryo which is at the same time fully human and fully God.

The virgin birth was necessary to God’s salvation plan so the man born to Mary was seen to be fully human (born of a woman) and yet without sin (not born in the usual way). If Jesus had been conceived by the physical union of Mary and Joseph he would be no different to their other children (Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3), each of whom were born into sin, as are all who inherit Adam’s sinful nature. That Jesus was conceived by Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit not only makes him unique, it enables him to be fully human yet without sin. God had been planning this event from eternity, and the initial fulfilment in King Ahaz’ day has now been superseded by the virgin birth of Jesus – God with us.

The question naturally arises as to why Mary’s own sinful nature would not also have “contaminated” Jesus’ conception. This was of such concern in the early church that a mythology of Mary’s sinlessness arose to counter any suggestion of Jesus being contaminated, thus safeguarding his sinless nature. However, this false teaching fails at two levels. First, the biblical witness makes it clear that Mary needed to be saved. If she were sinless, she could not have sung: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God

my saviour” (Luke 2). Second, it fails the logic test: that if God could enable Mary to be born sinless (the so-called “immaculate conception”) from two parents each with a sinful nature, why could not God enable Jesus to be born sinless, despite his mother’s sinful nature? If the premise of the Roman Catholic doctrine of a sinless Mary was really true, namely that sinless nature cannot be born of sinful nature, it would require an infinite regression of Mary’s lineage for her to be born sinless. However, such speculation is unnecessary, for the power of God was at work in Jesus’ conception so he could be truly human and one like us, yet without inheriting a sinful nature.

Unless the Son of God were to become fully human, we could not be saved. Unless Jesus were sinless he could neither fulfil God’s law in its entirety nor become the perfect sacrifice for sin. Yet God’s gift is that “he who knew no sin became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

The virgin birth is therefore a doctrine to be believed and proclaimed. Without it we would still be in our sins; with it, we have access to the Father because our brother Jesus, who shares our nature, has lived the life we could not live and died the death that we deserve. 

A PRAYER FOR MISSION 2020

Our heavenly Father, fill our lives with the fruit of your Spirit, so that we may walk in joyful obedience, share your love by word and deed, and see Christ honoured in every community as Lord and Saviour.

Amen

Simply having a wonderful Christmas time

Come, let us adore him: the Rev Bruce Clarke from St Matt's, Manly leads the annual three kings' camel procession up The Corso.

.....



Often the busyness or familiarity of Christmas can make us forget how great the news of Jesus' birth really is, writes **BEN McEACHEN**.



ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER CHRISTMAS. DRAG OUT THE mothballed nativity clothes and make some cute kids at church put on dressing gowns to become Mary and Joseph.

Like pretty much anything else you can think of, we can even become bored with celebrating Christmas. And that's for people who want Jesus to be Lord of their lives, let alone those who only give baby Jesus a passing thought every December 25, if at all.

Familiarity can breed contempt. Or apathy. Or that unsettled feeling of going through the motions of something we know should spark excitement, not just polite acknowledgment.

That unsettled feeling is a far cry from the first Christmas being enthusiastically heralded as "good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today... a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

If you're uninspired by the good news of great joy about the birth of Jesus, prepare to get excited. Across the Sydney Diocese there are many, many, people who love to celebrate the seismic impact of the Christmas events. We've gathered together some of the ways they do this, from camels walking down the main street of Manly to a musical created for babies, harbourside carols and community lunches for those doing it tough.

BE EXCITED

Such varied and creative activities provide examples of what Campbelltown Anglican Churches' children and youth minister Mark Schroder also wants his community to share.

"A few years ago our theme was just 'Joy'," Schroder says about the special kids club and Christmas services he helps to lead. "It was all about joy. I would call out to the kids, 'Jesus is...' and they would yell back, 'Christmas joy!'" At Christmas time, we



Joy in action: Campbelltown Anglican's Christmas kids club.

- remembered that it's all about Jesus coming into the world that brings us great joy.

"As Christians, we do celebrate the most joyful news we will ever receive – that Jesus our Saviour has been born. Let's celebrate that with everybody."

Campbelltown's two-day kids club has been steadily growing during the past four years, and its quirky and fun vibe is also apparent in the Christmas Eve service. Last year, a giant game of "Guess Who" was played, with a big barrier dividing the church into two teams. Schroder hopes children and adults alike can experience just how enjoyable it is to be brought together by Jesus.

"One of the big strengths is that being a Christian is excellent," he says, about what a church's special Christmas events can help to demonstrate. "It's joyful, not a burden. And you actually walk away from church thinking, 'I'm glad to have met with God's people in that place for an hour, and I'm encouraged to keep on meeting'."

DRAW A CROWD

At least people were able to get into the Christmas services at Campbelltown. St Matthew's at Manly defies the suggestion that people in Sydney are no longer into celebrating Jesus' birthday. People queue for hours outside the grand church on Manly's famous main street, The Corso. Several hundred people want to attend each of the services but, like Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, not everyone who wants to come in is able to fit.

That's right: at Christmas, at least one church has to turn people away.

"We try to preach the gospel to people... it's a massive time in terms of just putting St Matthew's out into the community," says senior minister the Rev Bruce Clarke about the double-barrelled aim of the Christmas services.

But what has helped put St Matthew's so far out into the community that people line up to get in? For about a decade St Matthew's has hired camels. Wise men ride the camels from the beach to the church on Christmas Eve, loudly worshipping the newborn Messiah



No room: the queue for Manly's Christmas services.

for several hours. At dramatic moments during each service, the wise men park their camels out front and enter the church, bearing gifts of praise.

"Where we are, it's a unique spot in terms of being able to ride camels," Clarke says.

"I don't know if there are other places that you can do this. You couldn't do this in a suburban setting because we've got The Corso out the front, where we can ride them up and down."

Each year, other notable characters get involved with the church's traffic-stopping Christmas services. Plucked from the likes of *Toy Story* and *Star Wars*, pop culture figures

find themselves "rediscovering Christmas". You can find the same thing... if you can get into St Matthew's.

Such a desire to see us all rediscover the joy and core of Christmas also is shared by Mittagong Region Anglican Church. On December 18 and 19, Mittagong will join St Matthew's in taking a time-travel approach to getting into the good news of Jesus.

Walk Through Bethlehem is an interactive event that transforms the church grounds and hall into the place where God's beloved son entered the world he came to save. More than 50 church members dress up and display skills from 1st century Judea. Shepherds herd sheep or goats and metal workers work a forge while carpenters, stonemasons and potters demonstrate their crafts.

But such a vibrant journey doesn't get in the way of the destination. As visitors pass through the little town of Bethlehem, they're embraced by the excitement generated by the one awaiting them at their last stop. Played by a newborn from the church, baby Jesus the Messiah always has the starring role in his own show.

Although it takes several days to erect and arrange the full-sized sets, Mittagong's senior minister the Rev Richard Mills loves the positive impact Walk Through Bethlehem has on his community and congregation.

"When you go to the local shopping centre, you get all the Christmas 'stuff' – the presents, the Santas," he says. "We want to give people what is the real meaning of Christmas. We want the whole family to think about what is the origin of Christmas."



GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

With this year marking its fifth outing, Walk Through Bethlehem is only slightly older than the huge Christmas in the Hills festival, held at Bella Vista Farm. Similar to Mittagong, Manly and Campbelltown, this Hills festival is fuelled by Jesus as the joy, excitement and central meaning of Christmas.

Just over four years ago, 2CH personality Gareth McCray put it to St Paul's, Castle Hill that the district needed an annual, public Christmas service. Senior minister the Rev John Gray has been involved with Christmas in the Hills since that initial conversation. He says that from the outset the festival of markets, games, food, fireworks and carols was *for* everyone – but was going to be *about* Jesus.

"It was always going to be a community event but always the Christian message – the gospel – has been protected," he says about an event that, in four years, has grown in attendance from 3000 people to 10,000. "It's very clear this is a Christian event. All the business and community leaders know that."

Enjoying the support of local businesses, government representatives and charities, Christmas in the Hills has provided a terrific opportunity



Bethlehem in Mittagong: (from top) soldiers, "local" shops, a bakery, scribes at work, pottery classes and a real live "Jesus".



CHRISTMAS IN CONVOY

Carols delivered to your door? That's the extra special service offered this year by members of Sutton Forest parish in the Southern Highlands. About 20 people, with musical instruments and a baby's crib, hit the road as a carols "convoy", bringing a memorable note of Christmas cheer to those unable to travel.

"We get a little bit of a choir together and go to the homes of people who are now basically shut-in – elderly, fringe people who have sick husbands and so on," says Sutton Forest's rector the Rev Jeremy Tonks. "We stand out on their footpath or in their yard and sing a few carols."

Sounding like a delightful scene from a black-and-white movie, the carols convoy began last year. The plan for 2015, on one afternoon in the week before Christmas, is for members from the parish's six congregations to pack their cars and spend several hours travelling

the area as a mobile musical team. Tonks says they'll be making about 10 stops along the way, and the homes chosen to be "carolled" by the group are suggested by concerned church members. "There are people who are amazing at pastoral care and who know what is going on," he says.

Last year the convoy drew a fair bit of neighbourly attention, and Tonks hopes that this year it will again be able to memorably bring Jesus to the local community.

"We're always trying to engage with people and serve people," he says. "It's one of those things at Christmas, especially for older folk who have fond memories of Christmas carols but struggle to get to church... We want to be seen to be [reaching out to them]. We want to love, serve, sing carols and let people know about Jesus."



Christmas in the Hills: volunteers from St Paul's, Castle Hill hand out candles.

- for neighbouring churches to proclaim the good news of Jesus together. It also allows the Hills community to see Christians in a positive light, something Gray says can encourage people later on to consider approaching a church when they need help.

Elaine Purser agrees. Elaine is event manager at Carols by the Bridge, held annually at Kirribilli in the picturesque shadow of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. She says the approach

and vibe of the carols service has helped some people feel comfortable about seeking out the nearby Church by the Bridge, which has organised the event for 11 years.

For those who might be coming into contact for the first time with the joyful, exciting message of salvation in Jesus, Elaine says Carols by the Bridge may not be "quite as confronting as church". Yet the beautiful sound of Jesus' arrival still rings out.

A DIFFERENT TUNE

Music and one special baby are also at the heart of a unique Christmas offering at St Mark's, South Hurstville. Rachel Greenwood is married to St Mark's rector the Rev Peter Greenwood and she has previously worked as a children's entertainer. She began infant music classes several months ago and was amazed at how fast they filled up. The demand made her think about doing something for Christmas that would help her community know the real reason for the celebratory season.

"It's very multicultural [here] but 70 per cent of my clientele are Chinese – and Chinese people don't really understand Christmas. They generally just think Aussies have Santa," says Greenwood, who wanted to "do something that puts Christ back into Christmas".

Rachel wrote a "baby Proms" Christmas concert for small children and their families, revealing the joy of Jesus' birth through music and humour. The baby Proms debuted at the end of November to provide a Jesus-centred entry point to the time of year where Jesus *should* be at the heart of the celebrations.

"I want people to go, 'There's something different. There's something in that,'" Greenwood says about how she would like her "silly" show to impact her audience. "I believe God can reach in and touch someone's heart, [even] through a baby Proms that I'm running. "I want people to become Christian."

QUIZ WORX WORKS

If your Christmas events are crying out for fun, colour and furry friends call on Quiz Worx, the Sydney-based drama company that mixes puppets, music, drama and storytelling into popular shows about the awesome awesomeness of Jesus.

"We love it. It's a real privilege for us that we get to play a small part in some of those celebrations by doing a show and sharing the good news of Jesus from the Bible," says Quiz Worx general manager Nic Koeck about the group's participation in SRE classes, school assemblies, church services and other Christmas events.

Bringing the good news to children and families since 1998, Quiz Worx puts on about 500 shows throughout the year (mainly in NSW, but also in Queensland). During the Christmas period alone this year, Koeck says Quiz Worx will do almost 200 shows. Most will be across Sydney, as well as in the Newcastle and Wollongong regions.

Koeck is excited about this bustling period and is grateful for the partnerships Quiz Worx enjoys with Anglican churches and other denominations. "We really can't do everything we do at Quiz Worx without the believers in their local churches," he says, particularly praising SRE teachers for helping them perform at so many local schools.

The relationship between Sydney Anglicans and Quiz Worx is long-standing. Koeck describes it as a "good collaboration" that takes many forms, from Quiz Worx HQ being located at Yagoona Anglican to the company creating a DVD resource for last year's "Jesus Brings" campaign and Youthworks Year 13 students being cast members in this year's Christmas shows.

Teaming up with St Anne's, Ryde, one of Quiz Worx's most unusual shows this year will be at the Top Ryde shopping centre.

"We don't do a lot of shows in shopping centres and we go over a few



days," Koeck explains. "It's trying to reach out to the community and share the good news of Jesus in a fun and engaging way."

Quiz Worx is on a mission and keen to expand. During the next five years, the hope is to triple the amount of shows it performs annually. While important activities include creating resources and providing training, Koeck says the opportunity they have within schools is what "we want to make the most of".

He doesn't know of many other organisations doing what Quiz Worx does on the same scale. But he would love for that to change because the group wants others to share the goal it has.

"Our goal is to get kids excited to look at [Christianity], to explore the Bible and get to know Jesus for themselves."



Performer: Rachel Greenwood at ABC Kids Live.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Greenwood's hope for her baby Proms' audience is shared by the many others already mentioned who are also celebrating the true joy found in Jesus' birth.

The message delivered by Jesus – that our offences against God can be forgiven if we trust in him – is such good news that Kristy Griggs loves being able to tell others about it. Griggs is Village Church Annandale's children's pastor and involved with a kids club like Campbelltown, as well as organising a massive community lunch on Christmas Day.

Provided for any lonely, vulnerable or disadvantaged people in the Annandale area, the lunch is one avenue at Village that Griggs prays will help visitors connect more deeply with Jesus. "My hope would be that this is not the last time we get to meet with these [visitors]," she says about the joy found in praising Jesus together. "Ultimately, I would love that they [come to] believe the message they are going to hear... and trust in the one

THE FORCE OF SHARING



Question: What do Jedis and Jesus have in common?

Answer: A recent sharing of ideas and resources between Sydney churches about how best to broadcast the Christmas message to local communities. Conducted online via Facebook, this open forum about form and content suggests that Sydney Anglican churches might benefit greatly from such collaborative creativity at a grassroots level.

In October, Toongabbie Anglican's senior minister the Rev Raj Gupta put out an online request for help with promotional campaigns for Christmas events. The response was immediate, generous and widespread, with artwork from previous years being posted by congregations from Wollongong to Forestville.

This online session of ideas spurred on Village Church Annandale, which wanted to run with Newtown and Erskineville's suggestion of a *Star Wars* theme for Christmas 2015. With the release this month of the anticipated film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Village and its inner-west neighbours publicly discussed whether Christmas could be "branded" in a similar way.

When the artwork was created, Village Church's lead pastor the Rev Dominic Steele posted it online and called for feedback. Positive and negative reactions were provoked, along with questions about copyright or where it's best to get printing done.

Whether Jedis and Jesus should go together at all is a fair issue to mull over. But a more valuable one might be considering the powerful potential for spreading the good news across Sydney when the resources and skills of different churches and church members are shared.

they are learning about on Christmas Day."

Also in the inner west, All Saints', Petersham's Hub of Hope ministry runs a special Christmas lunch for its surrounding community of boarding house residents. Started in 2009 to address these local needs, Hub of Hope has expanded to become an ongoing service of meals plus social and spiritual support. "There are many

disadvantaged men and women and some families," says Hub of Hope director Matthew Nutt about who they serve. "Many of these people have drug and alcohol addiction and mental illness. A lot of these barriers impact on how they live in the community."

For people struggling financially, physically and mentally, Christmas is like any other day when the incredible things Jesus brings seem to be absent. "Everything that you think about at Christmas – family, joy, happiness, great food – for many, Christmas is not that at all," Nutt says. "So for the people we serve, we try to provide that family and social element of Christmas and community."

The church is expecting 100 guests at this year's Christmas lunch, and Nutt explains how Hub of Hope's Christmas message seeks to present how the good news of great joy applies directly to them.

"Remember that many people standing back and listening to this have very little in terms of material things – very little in terms of what society values," he says. "But what's important is God's love for you and that you can have eternal life. That is the ultimate thing to aim for."

Given that's the ultimate thing for all of us to aim for, no wonder so many people across our Diocese remain so excited and joyful about Christmas. How about you?



Preparing Christmas lunch for Hub of Hope at All Saints', Petersham.

Good news every day



Amid the complexities of modern life we can forget one of the simple truths of our faith – that it's worth sharing, writes **MARK D. THOMPSON**.

IN TIMES WHEN CHRISTIANS FEEL UNDER PRESSURE, ONE OF the first things to fall off our agenda is evangelism. We quickly retreat from the telling of our good news – active proclamation of the lordship of Jesus and the salvation he brings – to the more passive notion of witness.

Not that there is anything wrong with witness. Far from it. Nor is it quite fair to describe witness as passive. Genuine Christian witness is both deliberate and active and it does involve talking about Jesus when the opportunity arises. After all, the New Testament idea of witness overlaps significantly with that of martyr! But in our own context, witnessing by my life and choices can be a safe place to retreat from a more proactive commitment to creating opportunities to speak of Jesus as Saviour and Lord and calling on people to "repent and believe".

I know the pressure to make that move in my own life. What's more, I can very easily find ways to justify it. The need of the moment, I can tell myself, is cultural engagement, a conversation rather than an invitation, looking for what I can affirm in the world rather than challenging the world with something radically opposed to its agenda – building bridges rather than burning them, or even necessarily crossing them just yet.

Once again there is nothing wrong with conversation or affirming genuine good in the world or building bridges, but I know these things can be my rationalisations for not seeking every opportunity to present Jesus and the claim he makes on every human life.

So what do I need to remember if I am to take the plunge and keep doing "the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5), even in an environment where Christian faith is very far from the flavour of the month? Let me suggest three things.

1 I need to remember just how good the gospel message is.

Of course I know that, but I need to keep being reminded. The message we have to take to the world really is good news. The genuine brokenness that is undeniable in the world around us and in our own lives is not the final word. Pain and suffering are not the final words. Neither are oppression, manipulation, exploitation or abuse.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He came into the world to overturn death and bring new life. He came into the world, not for his own sake, but for ours: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The things that hurt us most deeply and shadow us all our lives – weakness, sickness, death, the betrayal of broken relationships, the loss of those we love – none of these are unknown to him. He charted a course through all of them and offers peace and freedom from guilt, life to the full and hope for the future to all who come to him.

Time and again in the New Testament we are reminded of the scale of the blessing that is ours. What God has done for us in Christ is astonishingly good news. At the very heart of it is God's provision for

the forgiveness of sins. He has not only dealt with my personal sense of guilt and shame, but also the objective reality of my guilt before him. In a world where God is committed to justice and equity far more than we have ever been, in fact, this commitment is inseparable from who he is as God. Sin must be answered with judgment. So it is a most amazing cause of rejoicing that "There is therefore, now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

We have a message to share with our neighbours that is genuinely good. It is, in fact, the best thing they could ever hear. We don't have to be embarrassed about that message or feel that somehow it needs dressing up or modifying to make it attractive or relevant. I need to remember just how good the gospel message is – just how wonderful a thing it is to be saved by Jesus Christ.

2 I need to remember how lost people are without Christ. This is, of course, one of the reasons that makes the gospel of Christ crucified and risen such good news. The gospel is the answer to a desperate need, indeed the only answer to that desperate need.

Of course it is not always obvious that our neighbours are in desperate need. They might seem very comfortable and life might appear to be going very smoothly for them – after all, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Or their need might be obvious, just not the sort of need the gospel addresses directly. Our friends, and we ourselves, might be facing financial need or medical need. Some need physical security in the face of war or terrorism or oppressive and often corrupt political systems.

Yet the need that is most pressing, even when it is not recognised or felt, is the need to deal with the impending wrath of God. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ", Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:10. The writer to the Hebrews makes clear that "it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27). A little later he writes "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

From the moment of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, sin has corrupted and distorted every aspect of human life. Right down to the level of our DNA, our thinking, our will, our emotions, our personalities, our words and our actions – every facet of who we are is touched by the decision to be our own arbiters of right and wrong without reference to God. So it is hardly any surprise that this most basic need is not recognised, or is suppressed by so many.

It is also not surprising that, in the wake of a determination to keep to the trajectory we have set for ourselves, the gospel does not appear at first to be good news. The call to come to Christ carries with it a warning for those who will not come: "God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (Acts 17:31).

Long ago now a simple truth about the Christian life was put to me which helped to put so much else into perspective: if Christian living is all about being conformed to the image of Christ, growing like Jesus, that must mean growing in our concern for those who are lost. After all he came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). So alongside remembering how really, really good the gospel message is, I need to remember how lost my neighbours, friends and family are if they remain outside of Christ.

3 I need to remember the time is short. This is something that cuts across the grain of our experience. It is now almost 2000 years since Jesus' public ministry, his death and resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. Two thousand years does not seem like a short time to us and, what's more, everything really does seem to be continuing as it has from the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:4). The earth continues to revolve around the sun, we are born, grow old and die, nations and empires rise and fall, one new idea succeeds another. Yet God describes our time as "the last days" (e.g. Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2). We are called to be alert and ready because the return of Jesus, which brings all things to their conclusion, will come unexpectedly amid the normal rhythms



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of everyday life (Matt. 24:38-39). The time to respond to Jesus is not unlimited. The day has been fixed. The judge has been determined. As a friend of ours says, "Your perspective is different when the game is one-all and you're in the last minute of extra time".

Just at the moment many of us feel under pressure. A perfect storm of religious terrorism, institutional failure in protecting the vulnerable from predators, pseudo-intellectual attack from the new atheists, and a successful and carefully orchestrated campaign to change the moral compass of society, has made any attempt to speak of God and faith open to ridicule and worse. In such an environment it is very tempting to avoid anything that might be misread as confrontational. Let's try to recover our respectability and the right to speak.

So I need to get up each morning and remind myself that it is still true that Jesus died for the sins of the world. It is still true that Jesus rose from the dead to give new life to all who will come to him. It is still true that he sits enthroned at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. It is still true that he will come to judge the living and the dead. His call to come to him, to repent and believe, is still as relevant and vital as it ever was.

I have the best message in the world to share and my friends so desperately need to hear it. I need to remember the words of Jesus: "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). **SC**

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FEA
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God's care throughout life

Dementia is an increasing problem in our society, but our God is greater than any illness that might seem to block him, writes **MARK WORMELL.**

FEATURES



SO MANY PEOPLE I SPEAK WITH HAVE CLOSE FAMILY members or friends who are living with dementia. Their stories are often urgent, sad and filled with questions. Can a Christian lose his/her faith because of the cognitive changes that come with dementia? Can someone with dementia come to know and trust Jesus? How can we best care for people with dementia? Any many, many more.

My answers to the first three questions are simple. No, a Christian cannot lose their faith through dementia. Yes someone can, and many do, come to faith in Jesus while living with dementia. And good pastoral care starts, as always, with good theology: knowing how God sees us, knowing what faith is, knowing how God brings us to faith and sustains our faith, and knowing that dementia is no obstacle to our God of all power and goodness.

Dementia is a medical term that covers about 100 forms of brain impairment. The best known is Alzheimer's disease. In different ways, the various forms of dementia can affect short- and long-term memory, behaviour and moods, and all bodily functions. Currently there is no cure, although progress has been made in slowing some symptoms.

Alzheimer's Australia (which has a very helpful website) reports that there are more than 342,800 Australians living with dementia. This number is expected to increase to 400,000 in less than 10 years. Without a medical breakthrough the number of people with dementia in this country is expected to be almost 900,000 by 2050.

Many people with dementia are cared for in their homes. This will only increase given the significant cost of residential care and the efforts of various governments to keep people in their homes longer. It is also worth mentioning that specialised aged care is almost non-existent in developing (and many developed) countries where Australian Christians serve as missionaries. Dementia is not only a "Western" condition.

When dementia is mentioned, many people fear losing their dignity, identities, independence, relationships and faith. There is a great deal we can do to help with these concerns but our pastors and people working with the aged need training, resources and encouragement with this essential ministry.

Our care starts with knowing how God sees us. God tells us he has made us in his image (Genesis 1:27). Each one of us is of infinite value to God, because he gave his Son for us. Our personhood and value are not based on our capacities or how we or other people see us, but on how God sees us. This God-given status is irrevocable. Paul tells us in Romans 8:38 that death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. If death does not destroy us, then dementia certainly cannot. No matter what happens to us in this life, we never cease to bear the image of God and be each other's neighbour.

One fear that some Christians have when they contemplate "losing their memories" is that they will forget God or their trust in him. There is a great deal that could be said here about the promises of Jesus to protect his sheep (for example, John 10:1-18) and his help in perseverance (1 John 2:1).

Our theology of death also helps. We expect to be "us" when we rise after death. When Jesus turned to the criminal who was crucified with him and said, "today you will be with me in paradise", we take it that he meant both he and the criminal would be themselves in paradise (Luke 23:43). God protects us through death so he can resurrect us, with whatever access to our memories that implies. Our memories ultimately are with God and are not contingent on our brains.

There is much more that could be said on this. But I hope you can already see why we can be confident that a Christian will not lose their faith in dementia.

Turning to the question of whether someone can come to faith in dementia, the major obstacle we face is not theological, but the way we put more emphasis on assenting to abstract ideas and the ability to articulate knowledge over a simple love for, and dependence on, God.

We know before we speak that our parents love us and we are dependent on them. Likewise, people with dementia come to love and depend on the God who saves.

Christians who are used to caring for people with dementia will always emphasise the need for patience and kindness, but they have also developed a number of other ways to convey the love of God to the people in their care. Evangelicals rightly emphasise the word in how we know God, and how he reveals himself to us. This applies also to people with dementia. The word of God is explicit in Bible readings and implicit in hymns, songs, liturgy (especially the Lord's Supper) and prayer, all of which work well at different stages of dementia. Some supplement the word with dramatisation, pictures and music, but the word still lies at the heart of how God speaks. Words can trigger and shape beliefs and, in God's hands, bring to faith someone with dementia.

God's ability and willingness to save is not limited by our ability to show that we remember things, or by a temporary loss of access to our memories. Compared to being held in the memory of God, our immediate access to our memories and the ability to articulate our knowledge seems quite fragile.

A couple of years ago I interviewed more than 20 Christians who cared for people with dementia in aged care facilities. Each one could tell me stories of people with dementia who had come to trust in Jesus. There is nothing in our theology that precludes us from believing that the Holy Spirit can bring people to Christ while they live with dementia, and much that suggests we should expect it.

We can work with the biblical truth that faith is relational and a gift from God that is not dependent on our capacities or effort. In some respects dementia may even make people more responsive to God's saving work, as "the lie of independence" is stripped away and replaced with the truth of dependence on God.

With the increase in dementia, a heavy load will fall on aged care facilities. But an increasingly heavy load will also fall on our churches, pastors and Christians caring for the aged. While recognising the vulnerability of these people, there is much we can do to help. Knowing that someone is always a person in the eyes of God, and God saves until the end of this life, should encourage us to persevere in our love of people in our care.

I have barely touched the surface here, but there are excellent resources to help. At a theological level the work of Professor John Swinton (author of *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*) and, at a pastoral level, the books of Professor Elizabeth MacKinlay, stand out.

Anglican Retirement Villages and the Centre for Ministry Development are running a full-day symposium called Faith and Dementia on February 15 in Epping, at which both these people are speaking. In addition, Mary Andrews College runs a course titled Ministry with Seniors that looks at both the theological and practical aspects of care for people with dementia. I also hope to publish a book next year entitled *Coming to Christ in Dementia*.

To conclude, if you ever have the opportunity to care for someone with dementia, please take it. Our powerful, loving God helps and saves to the end. So care for your family and friends who have dementia. Talk with them. Sing to them. Pray for them. Take them to church services. Hold them. Let God's love for them flow through you. SC

The Rev Mark Wormell is an assistant minister at St Barnabas', Broadway and a part-time lecturer at Mary Andrews College.

PRAYER FOR PARIS

WITHIN 36 hours of the Black Friday attacks in Paris last month, hundreds of people including the Premier, diplomats and the Governor of NSW filed into St Andrew's Cathedral to pray for the injured and bereaved.

Archbishop Glenn Davies told the congregation that, after the Lindt siege, Sydneysiders felt for the people of Paris.

"We in the city of Sydney know to some measure this pain, though we have not suffered the loss of life to this extent," Dr Davies said. "This service of sorrow and prayer is one small measure of our response – to come and mourn and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Paris, the people of France."

Premier Mike Baird read from Isaiah 65 while the French ambassador, Christophe Lecourtier, read from Revelation 21 and the Governor, General David Hurley, led in prayer.

Archbishop Davies read Psalm 23 in French and the congregation prayed the Lord's Prayer in both French and English.

More than 120 people were murdered and hundreds injured in co-ordinated attacks in Paris on Friday, November 13.



Just a week earlier the Cathedral had hosted Remembrance Sunday with the Governor-General, the Lord Mayor, the Police Commissioner, the RSL president and president of the War Widows Guild all taking part in a service that recalled battles in France and Belgium in 1915.

Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove gave the New Testament reading after an official party brought forward the flags of the Navy, Army and Air Force.

Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione led in the prayer of remembrance while retired Rear-Admiral Ken Doolan recited the ode.

GOD AND POLITICS?

A recent event held by Warrawee Anglican grappled with the age-old question of whether religion and politics can or should mix.

The event, structured as a lecture and Q&A session, featured NSW Premier Mike Baird, former NSW Auditor-General Peter Achterstraat, and former Moore College lecturer and current rector of St Mark's, Darling Point, the Rev Dr Michael Jensen. Public forums of this sort are held each year by Warrawee to cultivate links and relationships with an eye to inviting people to introduce them to Jesus, but this event was different.

"At the time he agreed to take part Mike Baird was not the Premier of NSW," says Warrawee's senior minister the Rev Bruce Pass. "The fact that someone who unashamedly identifies with Christ has risen to high office at a time when the legitimacy of SRE in public schools and the legal definition of marriage are contested has brought the place of faith in the political arena into sharp focus. I think accounts for why it was so popular."

The event was booked out in the pre-registration phase, although inclement weather on the night meant fewer people turned out than estimated. It was still well

attended, with a variety of people and perspectives in evidence. The three panellists each gave their own reflections on the topic, with Dr Jensen providing a theological reflection on the relationship between Christian thought and politics.

"In the end we had 220 people... and there was a great atmosphere," Mr Pass says. "We wanted the Christians in particular to reflect on the issues and think hard about them, and I think the different perspectives of the panellists helped to do that."

The Q&A covered a range of topics, including when a politician should leave politics if their faith conflicted too much with their political obligations, as well as questions specifically for Mr Baird concerning federal asylum seeker policy and his own views.

"I thought the most interesting question was to do with how people can pray for their leaders," Mr Pass says. "Peter's response was that people should pray for consistency – that they should ask God to help our leaders be consistent in how they lead. That was helpful and also encouraging to hear."

Go to warraweeanglican.org.au/god-and-politics for video of the event.

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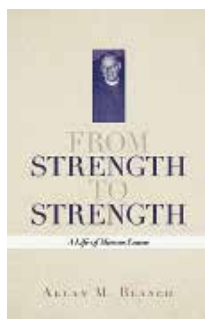


Distinguished leader

ROBERT FORSYTH

From Strength to Strength – A Life of Marcus Loane

by Allan M. Blanch
Australian Scholarly Publishing



ONE OF THE DECISIVE FACTORS IN this reviewer's decision years ago, as a young troubled theological student, to move from the church of his upbringing to seek ordination in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney was the quality of the diocesan leadership at the time – especially the Archbishop, Marcus Loane. I reasoned that although he seemed somewhat old-fashioned and aloof (I was quite young at the time) I could still take a friend off the street to meet him and Archbishop Loane could lead that person to Christ with clarity and gentleness. I wanted to serve in a denomination with leaders like that.

Canon Allan Blanch has done us a fine service by writing an appreciative biography of the distinguished man who served as Archbishop of Sydney from 1966-1982, as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia from 1971-1981, and died aged 91 in 2009.

Sir Marcus (as he became in 1976) rates as one the great bishops in the history of this Diocese. The portrait that emerges in this comprehensive biography is of a thoughtful, conservative and courageous man of integrity and transparent Christian virtue. Marcus Loane held a straightforward, uncomplicated Christ-centred theology, which owed much to the English Reformers of the 16th century, and their successors in evangelical leadership in the Church of England in the 18th and 19th centuries, with which he saw himself in continuity.

In a real sense Loane's surefooted, gradualist and uncompromising leadership put him out of step with the rapid social and intellectual change of his day. And yet this book gives the distinct impression that this was exactly what the Diocese of Sydney, and indeed the Anglican Church of Australia,

needed in those times. Sir Marcus Loane was indeed the man of the hour.

Blanch mentions not only changes in Australian society which confronted Marcus Loane but also signs of ferment in the Diocese itself, as well as the occasional crisis. And yet it appears the stability and surefootedness of Archbishop Loane provided a reassuring and safe context for others to experiment and explore, even if he didn't always agree with what they were doing.

Although Sir Marcus seems to have been a private person, Blanch uses his correspondence with close long-time friends, like Bishop Alf Stanway, to fill out the picture and give a sense of what he was really thinking. The result is an enjoyable and, in its own way, inspiring read.

There is one feature of this otherwise fine book that is a little disappointing. Allan Blanch passes over the sudden resignation of Archbishop Hugh Gough in 1966 without apparent interest in what might have been behind it nor of what Loane's part may have been in the events surrounding his predecessor's departure. This is a pity, as in a serious history like this the issue deserves more attention than that shown and, may I say, at least some curiosity. By not at least looking into the matter the author may well have denied the reader important further information about the godly, remarkable and distinguished life of his admirable subject.

Notwithstanding that omission, which I am sure subsequent historical writing will redress, *From Strength to Strength* is to be valued both for what can be learned of an important time in the life of the Diocese as well as for the example of an outstanding Christian leader. It is warmly recommended.

SC

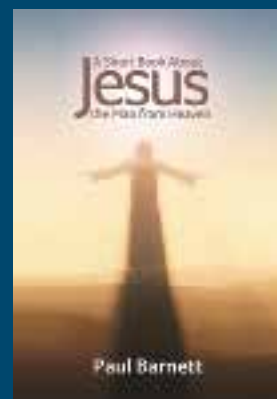
CLARITY AND EVIDENCE

A Short Book About Jesus – the Man from Heaven

by Paul Barnett
Aquila Press

Paul Barnett has once again provided us with a book that meets the need of the moment. Just at a time when some are once again trying to suggest that Jesus didn't exist at all or there is no historical evidence of his life, miracles or resurrection, Bishop Barnett reminds us of the solid grounding of our faith in the life and ministry of Jesus, who was "genuinely part of history as a transcendent figure". God really did come among us in this man.

This book is characterised by Barnett's clarity of thought, careful mounting of an evidence-based case, sound historical judgments and deep pastoral concern. It is a book I want to give to those young Christians I know are regularly bombarded with pseudo-historical arguments which claim to have "disproved the basis of Christianity".



A Short Book About Jesus is not cluttered with academic apparatus but it is obvious from the earliest pages that every considered statement is supported by a lifetime of careful scholarship. Each chapter ends with discussion questions that provide an opportunity to think further about what has been said.

Bishop Barnett's book looks at the integrity and reliability of the four gospels, and examines more specifically the miracles and the resurrection of Jesus. He looks at Jesus' teaching and contrasts what the New Testament has to say about Jesus with what is written in the Qur'an. The genuine humanity of Jesus – he is the bearer of the promises to David – and his genuine divinity – he is "the man from heaven" – are the only proper conclusions given reliable historical witness of the New Testament.

I enjoyed this book. It is worth reading and giving to others to read.

Mark D. Thompson

The Rev Dr Mark Thompson is the principal of Moore Theological College.

HOLIDAY FLICKS

December 3



In the Heart of the Sea (M)

The real story that formed the basis for Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is told here, but without Captain Ahab or the biblical allegory. Instead, we look back through the haunted eyes of old Tom Nickerson (Brendan Gleeson) as he tells the tale of a precarious life at sea, the great whale, the destruction of the *Essex* and three desperate months at sea. For those who know the tale, yes, there is cannibalism, although it's not dwelt upon by the camera. The dramatic, gut-churning action is directed by Ron Howard and stars Chris Hemsworth as first mate Owen Chase.

Boxing Day

Youth (CTC)

Alternately lauded and lambasted by critics *Youth* stars Michael Caine and Harvey Keitel as, respectively, an aging composer and director-writer. Holidaying at a resort in the Swiss Alps these old friends contemplate aging, loss, love and unfulfilled yearnings as the younger generation flaunts itself around them. There is comedy, but also pathos, in the long conversations, slow-moving action and

meaningful silences. Performances are excellent and the camera work lush, but whether it's profound or pretentious depends on the viewer. Be warned there is full-frontal nudity, as well as a sex scene and some distressing sequences.



The Good Dinosaur (PG)

Putting any thoughts about creation aside, the premise here is that, 65 million years ago, dinosaurs weren't wiped out by an asteroid – it missed. A few million years later the family of Arlo the young apatosaur are farmers. After he gets (scarily) separated from his family he befriends a Neanderthal boy, who doesn't speak (Arlo does), and whom he names Spot. Geddit? Arlo's the child, Spot's the dog. They team up to find the way home, and while there's fun to be had (including T-Rex cowboys and crazy creatures) in Pixar's most beautiful landscape to date, death and fear are very prevalent. There are lessons, as always – in this case about friendship and being unique – but it's not Pixar's best, and small kids will likely be too frightened to watch.



Suffragette (M)

I had conflicting emotions watching this. What more reasonable right could there be for women than to have the vote and be treated as of equal value to men? Ignored and marginalised, these women are fighting to have a real voice

and be considered as more than child bearers and fodder for abuse. Right on! Attacked for speaking up they choose to hit back because, as Maud (Carey Mulligan) observes, violence is all that men understand. Yet the decision to be destructively radical for the sake of the cause is a fraught one for me. Some characters in *Suffragette* are based on real people and the stories of what happened are painful, gritty history and worth telling. Not easy viewing, but brilliant performances from Mulligan and Helena Bonham-Carter in particular.

New Year's Day



The Peanuts Movie (G)

This film ends a long wait for fans of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Lucy, Linus and the gang. While it's animated, the "drawing" sits very well with the work of the cartoon strip author Charles M. Schulz. Those worried *The Peanuts Movie* will depart from the original comic in style or story can relax. There are no crazy plotlines, just the crises of perennial self-doubter Charlie Brown as he clumsily tries to impress the Little Red-Haired Girl and determines to become a "winner". In the meantime Lucy still dispenses advice and calls people "blockheads", Schroeder plays Beethoven, Snoopy fights the Red Baron and Marcie calls Peppermint Patty "Sir". It's all you expect from the classic bunch of *Peanuts* primary schoolers. The gentle story may be too simple for some kids, who are more used to wizards, aliens and things that blow up. It may also feel too familiar. But those who enjoy the adventures of Charlie Brown and his friends, and the everyday issues they face as they look for their place in the world, will find themselves on happy ground.

Judy Adamson

FESTIVE FIZZERS – FILMS TO MISS THIS CHRISTMAS



In *Krampus*, following a disastrous festive celebration with extended family a disillusioned Max (Emjay Anthony) rips up his letter to Santa and throws it out the window. This, somehow, magically summons up the horned "Christmas demon" of European folklore, who punishes children at Christmas who haven't been good. The moral, apparently, is don't diss Santa, kiddies (or at least, don't litter by throwing your letters out the window), or hell and horror will break loose. Literally.



Touted as "X-rated" Christmas comedy, *The Night Before* follows the adventures of three friends who, every Christmas Eve for years, have partied like it's 1999.

The film has nothing to do with Christmas apart from using the season as background for what the makers cheerfully describe as a night of "debauchery". Isaac (Seth Rogen) pukes very publicly in church because he is told that the Jews – of which he is one – crucified Jesus; his pregnant wife offers him

cocaine and magic mushrooms to have the last big night of his life before they become parents; and to top off a high-sweating, low-rent piece of cinema, Rogen gets onstage and sings "Wrecking Ball" with Miley Cyrus. Avoid if you value your sanity.



Finally, *Daddy's Home* focuses on adults behaving with breathtaking immaturity and selfishness.

Will Ferrell plays Brad, a reliable

stepdad to his wife's two kids. All is just peachy until Dad, aka Mark Wahlberg, comes for a visit. He is cool, edgy and magnetic – everything, of course, that Brad is not. He's also a leech, but the kids are delighted and, for some reason, mum doesn't put her foot down.

So it's on, as dad and stepdad compete in every underhanded way possible to win and keep the children's affection, particularly at Christmas. Apparently this is funny, although "sad" was the first word that came to my mind.

I may well get out my copy of *The Nativity Story* and thank God this life-crushing rubbish is not what Christmas is about.

Judy Adamson

Force reawakened



PETER COLLIER

MY BROTHER AND I WERE PLAYING soccer with our sons. It was a special time, but not particularly memorable.

Then I got a message on my phone. The second trailer for the new *Star Wars* movie had just been released. We crowded around my phone and watched in silence.

In so many ways it was nothing remarkable. Special effects are no longer special in the digital age. A few simple words are spoken; the longest sentence is seven words. It features an unknown actor and an old pro.

It's a bit like the Bible: if you don't get the narrative, most of it will be lost on you. To the one who does not have, even what little they have will be taken away from them.

"The Force is strong in my family. My father had it. I have it. My sister has it. You have that power, too," says an unseen Luke Skywalker in the trailer. At the end, after the Millennium Falcon dodges some tie fighters, Han Solo turns to Chewbacca and says, "Chewie, we're home".

To those who have, more will be given. On December 17, *Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens* will be released. Yet this seventh instalment of the series raises many questions. Why, almost 40 years after the first film, do so many eagerly await a new one in a way that seems unparalleled with any other movie franchise?

Of all the movies that could have captured

the popular imagination in the '70s, why did this become a such a phenomenon? Why does *Star Wars* seem to define a generation (of boys at least) in the same way The Beatles and Harry Potter perhaps define others? And should Christian parents be concerned about fantasy movies that assume the existence of almost occult-like spiritual powers?

For fans the real question is: now Disney owns the franchise and J.J. Abrams has been appointed director, will *The Force Awakens* be as captivating as the original trilogy or as disappointing as the "prequel" series?

The answer to each of these questions, in one way or another, relates to the narrative strength established by the first two movies. The original *Star Wars* was marked by unmatched (at the time) special effects, good humour, a better score, some killer lines and swashbuckling fights. But it was the simple plot of the good underdog in white overcoming the seemingly ultimate bad guy in black that made the fun and fantasy carry some significance.

When, in sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*, the bad guy was revealed to be the father of the good guy, the damsel who'd been in distress was his daughter, and the bad guy seemed to have all but won yet the kids hadn't given in, it touched on themes which resonated so deeply that, even after the four reasonably ordinary

movies that followed, the potency of the original epic remains.

Setting the films "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" masked the obvious: it's fiction and the Force isn't real. Yet with its major theme being the quest for justice through good triumphing over evil it was fiction Christians could cheer about and even identify with.

It is generally agreed that what made the prequels less impressive than the originals was their reliance on dazzling digital effects. This, ironically, got boring; the narrative was weak. But history would suggest Disney and J.J. Abrams won't disappoint when it comes to the new film's narrative. The trailers have enough allusions to the original movies to tantalise and instill confidence. Narrative tension abounds.

Consequently, there are predictions aplenty about what will happen in *The Force Awakens*. Everyone has their theory. Mine is simple: Luke will imitate his father. For if truth is stranger than fiction, the best fiction often resonates deeply with truths about human nature.

My brother and I literally gasp as Harrison Ford finishes saying, "Chewie, we're home". For a moment we are all in stunned silence, and then we go delirious. The experience of being captivated by a *Star Wars* sequel. I have had it. My brother has had it. Now our sons will have it, too.

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