

InterSections



Editorial

Welcome to the November 2013 issue of *InterSections*.

In this issue we have a focus on missions. When we think of missions we often imagine dedicated missionaries toiling in far-flung places. But really the mission field extends from deepest Africa to our own next door. Our engagement in missions is limited only by our own imagination. We hope to give a small taste of what God's call to spread the Good News can look like in each of our lives.

For our *Feature* article, Dale Hartman reflects on the life of Ina Shepherd who was baptised a century ago. Her long life demonstrates the power of a humble life lived in faith and service, and the mission opportunities that can be found in our daily lives. As *Food for Thought*, Steve Collins tells us about the recent mission trip he led to Papua New Guinea where Christians from several congregations in Australia joined together to continue the work begun by Tom and Rens Bunt many years ago. In our *International Letter*, Mark Jent writes about the way Lipscomb University short-term missions can change lives.

Our *ChurchScope* focuses on the Cleveland Church of Christ in Brisbane. Michel Cheketri shares their avenues of outreach through their children and the disadvantaged. We also interview Allan McNicol – an Australian who became a professor of New Testament in America. In the *News* section, we carry reports about the Shining Light lectureship at Heidelberg West in Melbourne and Camp Revive in Healesville, Victoria.

We hope that you find this issue uplifting and it encourages you to think about how you can get involved in God's mission. The fields are ripe for harvest, but the workers are few (Luke 10:2).

As always, your comments and feedback are welcomed.

The InterSections editorial team

ChurchScope:

Cleveland Church of Christ, Brisbane, QLD

Cleveland Church of Christ is an energetic congregation of 55 people meeting at the Redlands Memorial Hall in the Brisbane suburb of Cleveland. Cleveland has a strong commitment to building and living in community and the love between its members is easily felt when walking through the door. Personal relationships are emphasised and regarded as an important value in living as Jesus' disciples.

The ethos of this small congregation is one that encourages the freedom of its members to exercise their individual, God-given gifts in personal ministry. As a result of this, a broad range of active ministries has been established and are bearing good fruit. Many members of the congregation are involved in evangelistic endeavours, both locally and in distant communities.

The founding members of Cleveland, Fran and Michel Cheketri along with John & Jane Whelan, recognised the need for a bayside congregation and commenced worshipping at the Redlands College facility in 1983. This team had a passion for taking the Gospel to

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the unchurched. These early years were characterised by hard work and a strong sense of community. After some time, the group then moved location to meet at Cleveland High School, where the group grew to over fifty.

During this period, the Lowe and Little families were added. Later, the assembly moved to meet at the CWA Hall in Cleveland. During this period Warren Holyoak, Michael Evans and their families joined the group. In its early years, the congregation hosted numerous campaigns from Harding University and these efforts resulted in many people connecting with Jesus. A number of men and women who were part of the work at Cleveland then have gone on to become leaders in other congregations in the greater Brisbane area, such as Holland Park Church of Christ and The Point Church.

Currently, children are one of Cleveland's most precious (and numerous) resources. Over half of the congregation's number is made up of children under the age of ten. The education and spiritual development of these children is a priority and a visible feature of life at Cleveland. A centrally organised curriculum is part of a systematic program of growing young disciples and over 80% of the congregation's adult members have been or are currently involved in teaching and mentoring children and tweens, as well as supporting young families.

The congregation comes together on Sunday mornings for worship, prayer and the reading of God's Word before the adults enjoy a lesson led by a capable group of men. At this time, children break into various "age & stage" groups for Bible class, with an emphasis on learning truths from the Bible and how a life dedicated to God works in their own young lives. Parents and other volunteers share in teaching responsibilities as well as building mentoring relationships with children in other contexts. Helpers and prayer warriors ably support the teachers as well.

Small groups are another characteristic of Cleveland. They are generally fluid in their organisation, adjusting for varying opportunities that present themselves. The need to develop an ever-growing understanding of Scripture in its context is pursued in community through women's

groups, new members' studies, adult weekly Bible studies, as well as individual studies. Various men and women share the responsibility for leading and teaching during these sessions.

There are currently several activities taking place among members at Cleveland with the specific aim of connecting with unchurched people and growing the community of believers. A number of Cleveland members teach religious education each week in local schools. A bi-weekly "tweenage" Kids Club is also organised by some Cleveland members and has been successful in introducing community kids to Christian kids whilst teaching Jesus. This year Splash Kids Camp also took place, where members and the local community were invited to a weekend retreat designed to deepen the faith of children in grades 3-6, as well as creating an opportunity for children to deepen their friendships with each other in a godly environment.

In addition to local endeavours, the Cleveland congregation supports a variety of other Australian evangelistic works as well as overseas mission points. West End Christian Fellowship in Brisbane as well as indigenous ministries in Moree and Brewarrina (NSW) are among the Australian works that Cleveland supports both financially as well as through the personal involvement of its members. Overseas missions include India, Ukraine, Africa and Vanuatu, with members both spending time there as well as maintaining relationships with native Christians.

Brad & Ronya Johnson have worked with the Cleveland congregation full-time for the past 5 years. The Johnsons have participated in establishing some of these evangelistic ministries, as have others alongside them.

The Lord's family at Cleveland is focused on the building of community both inside and out. There are many behind-the-scene ministries taking place that have helped the family to grow and function, both spiritually and numerically. Cleveland is blessed by a culture in which individuals take initiative to be led by God's Spirit, where members are supported in trying new things, and where the fruit of such things is a shared blessing from God for which everyone is grateful. ■

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InterSections

InterSections is a quarterly journal designed to inform, inspire and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s). Advertisements in *InterSections* are broadly consistent with the ethos and goals of the journal; however, they do not necessarily constitute endorsement by the journal. *InterSections* is published by Klesis Institute, the ministry division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

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Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox

Publisher: Klesis Institute www.klesis.com.au

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Feature

Ina Shepherd - a century on

One hundred years ago, a small seemingly insignificant event took place that has had a dramatic impact on the history of the Lord's church in Australia. Ina Shepherd was twelve years old and was riding a train with her mother and aunt. A kind man from Merrylands, NSW (Bro. McGregor) gave them a tract describing the Gospel plan of salvation. Their lives were never to be the same. The tract pointed out key verses that they had never noticed about the plan of salvation. After a period of study, Ina's mother and aunt decided that they needed to be immersed in order to be saved. Ina agreed with this decision and they were baptized in 1913. That was a century ago.

In October 1990, I visited with (Ina) Nana Shepherd in the nursing home where she lived before she died. Her body was tired and weary, but her spirit and soul was alive and well. She stated that since the tract only told them what to do to be saved, they had no real idea of how to worship and live as New Testament Christians. At twelve years of age Ina began regularly going to the orange orchard behind their house, praying that God would send them someone to tell them more about what they were supposed to do. She married Cecil James Shepherd in 1921 and moved to Kurrajong. Eventually Grace, Pearl, Clifton and Audrey came into their family. However, one thing remained constant; Ina continued praying that God would send someone to explain the word of God more fully to them.

In 1937, John Allen Hudson, an American preacher, arrived by ship to visit Australia. Ina had been praying for his visit since 1913! She quietly said: "The poor man hardly got any rest at all while he was with us. We kept him up day and night with all kinds of questions. By the time he left, we had a really clear idea of how we were to worship and to live as New Testament Christians."

Ina's husband, Cecil, began studying with Ted Simmons which resulted in Cecil being baptised. Cecil was disfellowshipped by his own family because he had left the teachings of the Church of England. Yet he remained a faithful servant of the Lord until he died while picking peas next to Ina in 1962.

While Cecil was alive, he and Ina were an outstanding influence for good to hundreds of people. Cecil was the caretaker of the park next to where they lived and he cared for the park immaculately. He knew people all through the district and frequently invited them to come to lunch on Sunday afternoon. They had up to thirty people at a time in their home on these occasions!

Pearl reflected on her parent's hospitality and service to the community in which they lived and said, "Christianity is a living thing for all our family." Ina fed a lot of swagmen as they crossed the countryside looking for work. They fed those who were sick and were constantly helping those in need. Their house was known for its open door to visitors and being a place of refuge.

On one occasion, Ina found a pair of newlyweds who had moved in next door. They were in the Air Force and their luggage had not yet arrived. Ina lent the young bride sleeping clothes and this began a lifetime relationship

with Roy and Nancy Courtney. The Courtneys were fed, loved, and cared for while they were neighbours. Cecil died while the Courtneys were living in Victoria. When Roy and Nancy moved back, Ina learned that they had lost a child while they were away. Ina began caring for them, loving them and inviting them to come to services with her. Ina later arranged a film strip study through Dave H Roper which eventually led to the Courtneys' conversion.

Ina was a one person educational department. She was always teaching children and inviting children to Bible class. She taught classes under orange trees, on back porches and at kitchen tables. One of the young men she invited was Wally Gray who is a long- time member of the Blacktown congregation.

This year I have talked with nearly a dozen people who knew Ina. Here are some reflections:

"She was gentle, always putting God first in her life. She was very faithful and was a huge influence on her husband obeying the Gospel."

"Ina was very hospitable. She cooked from a fuel stove which was fuelled by a log feeding into the stove as it burned. She always had an open house - her home was always being used for meals and fellowship. Friends, travellers, and strangers were all equally welcome in her home. She lived in a fibro farm house that had water tanks (that means no running water!)"

"She always had tracts available. As people came and went from her table and her house they always left with Gospel tracts in their hands. She was first introduced to the Gospel by a tract and spent the rest of her life giving other people that same opportunity."

Pearl remembers her mother taking the children and wading through flood waters to attend worship. Ina loved worshipping with the Lord's church and especially loved singing, "Give Me the Bible" and "Blessed Assurance". Ina's entire life was an extended prayer to God.

The prayers for God's guidance and blessing on the church started a century ago with a young girl in an orange orchard and never stopped. As successive men, women and families came to work with the church in Australia through the next century, Ina saw them as a specific answer to her lifetime of prayer. She saw men like Colin Smith and Allan Flaxman when they returned to Australia as men who were "God sent." She spent her life praying that God would send workers to "help us understand the Bible better and help us to spread the Gospel".

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During my last visit with Ina in 1990, I told her how much I appreciated her personal faithfulness, her constancy in prayer, and the influence of her family on the Lord's church. Her quiet voice spoke with such deep conviction from her frail body as she reminisced on the hours she had spent in prayer since she was a small girl. Her verdict of seventy six years of faithful prayer was summarised by her heartfelt conviction that: "I will always be convinced that He answered my prayers!" Here is James 5:16b in the flesh! Ina died in 1991.

Today, I wonder who will be influenced by Ina's quiet persistence and take her place of prayer for the Lord's church in the coming century? Who will continue praying for the multitude of large cities around Australia that do not yet have New Testament churches worshipping God in spirit and truth? Who will continually pray that the Lord's church come to understand his Word more fully and grow in our ability to teach the Gospel to the millions around us who are lost? Some of the greatest things that we can do for God are not in leaping over tall buildings in a single bound. They may be taking small, simple things and making them a part of our daily communion and walk with God.

In 2013, there are many Christians around Australia who haven't had the privilege of knowing Nana Shepherd. I present to you Ina's story here so that we can all reflect on the influence of one godly woman who has quietly blessed the Lord's church and has helped to increase the population of heaven. In closing, I would like to offer a prayer paraphrasing words from Walter Brueggemann: "I pray that not only will her children (and future generations) have faith, but in the spirit of three quarters of a century of faithful prayer, I pray that her faith will have children!" ■

Dale Hartman is a minister and an elder with the Eastside Church of Christ in Midwest City, Oklahoma. Dale and Sheila and their family were missionaries in Sydney for many years. Dale is a member of the InterSections editorial advisory board. dale.hartman@gmail.com



Food for Thought

PNG Mission Trip

September 2013



In 2006, while on a mission trip in PNG, Tom Bunt asked me if I would take over from him and continue the legacy that he had created over many years: supporting and encouraging brethren and spreading the Gospel in PNG. Thereafter Tom led us for the next two trips. During this time David Payne also agreed to become a regular team member and has greatly assisted me.

This year our team was made up of members from congregations in Australia and PNG: myself from Warwick, Queensland; David Payne and Catherine Campbell from Belmore Road congregation in Melbourne; Elvia Funes and Lito Batoon from The Point Church in Brisbane. Tupolin Wosse (Wesley Wosse's wife) and her son Willie were our guides and translators. Wesley had hoped to come but was unable due to a serious heart ailment. For the first time, Tom, due to his declining health, was unable to lead the mission trip. But he played a key role in raising funds, recruiting team members, organising flights and corresponding with those in PNG before we arrived. Although Tom did not travel with us he was definitely there in spirit.

We planned to travel and minister to the village of Aroba in the Waria Valley, where Tom and Rens lived many years

ago. As part of the preparations, Ruth Zimmerman, Velma Foreman and the Wosse family worked hard to organise matters at the PNG end. We flew to Lae via Port Moresby and were met at the airport by Wesley Wosse, his son Willy and others. We were greeted at the Agape House Mission Centre by more Christians. The next day, after some rearrangements at the airport due to having excess cargo and unexpected weather, we were blessed with a capable pilot who navigated his way into the Valley and landed us at Asama, only a 45 minute walk from Aroba.

At Asama we were met by a huge crowd comprising Christians and non-Christians who had come to see and welcome this group of "white skins". So willingly, our brothers and sisters picked up our bags and carried them for us all the way to Aroba. Arriving there we were again welcomed and presented with a house and toilet which had been built specially for us. We rested and were treated to *kulou* (coconut water). Those who had been here before were reacquainted with our dear friends while the first-timers began forging friendships that would grow over the coming days. It felt like coming home.

Our goal was to teach the Gospel of Luke in nine lessons, seen through the lens of Philippians 2:7-9: "Taking the form of

PNG Mission Trip cont.

a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross. God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name." This message had been sent ahead of us into the Valley, so many were eagerly awaiting the lessons. Some had walked for three days or more to study and fellowship with us.

The next day we delivered a message based on the story of the Prodigal Son and a number of Christians came forward and repented. To see people come forward with tears streaming down their faces in repentance is very moving. In the afternoon we conducted our first health clinic led by Catherine (an intensive care nurse), backed up by Lito (also a nurse) and their understudies, Willie and Elvia. We helped everyone who was in need. Members of various churches in Australia gave money so that we could purchase medical supplies. That night David taught from the Gospel of John. This schedule would form a pattern for the rest of our days in the Valley.

Separate ladies' and men's classes were held where we gave answers from Scripture to various questions raised by Christians. Ladies' classes were led by Elvia and Catherine and translated by Tupolin. Many tears flowed as the ladies heard of God's love for them and what he had intended for them. We also spent time in Asama. There Lito taught the Word and Christians from Aroba sang praise songs while we all helped provide a clinic treating mostly non-Christians. The village leaders commented that they had never seen Bible teaching displayed this way in their village.

Our first Sunday saw more Christians come forward in repentance and six young people came forward to give their lives to Jesus in baptism. We went down to the stream,

placed large stones across it to create a dam then lined it with greenery to seal it off. This made the water deep enough to baptise. Everyone from the village came and there was much singing and praising God.

We learned that the house of a Christian, Simeon, had recently burned down and that the family had lost all their belongings. The church expressed their love by giving from their hearts to help Simeon's family. Our mission team also contributed. We also witnessed the baptism of a man and his wife. They had listened to the teaching of the Word and had witnessed the lives of Christians from Aroba and surrounding villages. The man was a student in a literacy program conducted by some Christian ladies and through this work became interested in knowing God more fully.

While we were in the Valley many requests were made to us for financial support: solar lighting for the church building so they can have evening meetings; corrugated iron for a church building roof in another village; financial support so that ladies can attend

ladies' retreats in other parts of PNG throughout the coming year; Bible study materials and financial support for the full-time workers in the Valley (who have limited time to work their gardens and support themselves). There is such a great need in PNG and I'm so thankful for everyone's support of this work.

This mission trip was an amazing experience and I have such a huge respect for Tom and Rens and other missionaries for their contribution over the years. Thanks also to my wife and family, team members and their families, and for those individuals and congregations who supported us financially and in prayer. Most of all I am grateful to God. All this is to his glory. ■

[Click here to see more photos of PNG mission trip.](#)

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News 2013 Saving Light Series

The 21st Saving Light Series was held at the Heidelberg West church building in Melbourne from 10–13 October. The theme for the series this year was "Family", which is also the theme the church has been concentrating on during 2013.

The speaker was Ian Coker from the church in Townsville, Qld. Ian presented five wonderful lessons around the family theme, with a focus on building strong homes and families and raising children and teenagers. The lessons were well received by all who attended as they were full of practical, scripturally based information to better equip us to encourage and maintain godly homes and families.

The series was advertised to the community through flyers letterboxed by brethren and also a campaign on the local radio station. As a result there were some visitors from the community. Attendances were generally up on previous years, mainly due to the support of brethren from Heidelberg and some other congregations in the Melbourne area and interstate. The series concluded with a luncheon after the Sunday worship service. ■

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International Letter

Lipscomb - A Vision for Short-term Missions



For decades Lipscomb University has been facilitating short-term mission trips around the world. In 2002, the university made the decision to dedicate full-time staff to the coordination of mission efforts so that they could be better organised and more sustainable over time. In 2013, we made 50 trips and mobilised nearly 700 people across our city, our country and around the world. While students comprise the largest percentage of our nearly 700 servants each year, we're a whole lot more than just students. With faculty and staff volunteering their time, along with alumni and local professionals like doctors, nurses, ministers, engineers and artists, we involve people from all walks of life simply aiming to connect their skills and passions with the heart of God. Our vision for Lipscomb Missions is simple: short-term missions with long-term vision. So, how effective can a short-term mission be? Why are they important?

It is an opportunity to be of service. From spring break onwards, our missions may be based in Nashville where our team stays and works with immigrant communities in their own backyard, or New York City where we partner with Camp Shiloh and Public School 179 in the Bronx. They may extend to the small Eastern European country of Moldova, where our teams provide counselling and emotional support for girls caught in human trafficking, or the remote areas of Guatemala where our engineering teams work with local Mayan tribes providing life-saving infrastructure like bridges and clean water solutions. All of our trips were started by someone in our community who noticed a need and listened when God prompted them to do something about it.

It is an opportunity to encourage change. Students and others come to us during the most spiritually formative years of their lives, eager to serve and make a difference. We want to take that raw talent and passion and channel it into opportunities for worldwide evangelism, community development, humanitarian aid and, of course, the student's own spiritual formation. They come to us, wide-eyed and ready to change the world, and in the process often find that God uses the world to change their own hearts, lives and expectations.

It is an opportunity for discovery. We can all discover ways to serve, no matter what we do. Sure, we'd love to see more full-time missionaries. But the reality is that only a few of us will ever sell our houses and move to Africa. But, for the teacher with a calling to love and nurture kids in an inner-city school, that classroom is her "Africa". For faithful accountants who find themselves crunching numbers in a high-rise office building, that workplace can be just as missional as any mud-brick town in Honduras. Serving in short-term missions changes the way we see our lives, and we want to help people discover the mission field that awaits them, no matter what they study or do for a living.

It is an opportunity to make a difference for the long-term. Lipscomb Missions intentionally partners with host

ministries who are already doing amazing work around the world. We know we can't do much in a week or two, but over time, year after year, we build deep relationships with great partner ministries, serving them as they serve the communities they live in. Effectiveness in ministry comes from relationships, and relationships come from spending time together. So we take a long-term view of our involvement, even though we just send short-term teams. Aside from the occasional emergency relief trip, we don't do "one and done" trips where a team shows up and then never goes back. The ministries we partner with come to know that they can depend on us, relying on the talent, resources, and advocacy which Lipscomb Missions provides. It's an involved process to start a new trip with us, because we don't go into any of this lightly. Out of the 50 trips that we made during 2013, we have been organising 20 of them for a decade or more. Another 15 trips have been returning to the same locations for 5-9 years. We look at the big picture and the change that we can help to create over time. For us, there is nothing more exciting than that.

It is an opportunity to build relationships. Our teams don't go back year after year because they love fundraising. They don't do it because they love the prep meetings week after week beforehand. They do it because they have a deep love for the people that they know they'll see after they step out of that car or off that plane. They do it because the experience of serving alongside fellow Christians in another context and from another culture is one unlike any other, offering a glimpse into the magnitude of what God is doing among his people throughout the world.

It is an opportunity for you. Many people often wonder how they can get involved. Excuses abound. But we often have more time on our hands than we think. What better way for parents to teach their kids about following Jesus than allowing their kids to see them serve? For those that are in the next phase of life, what better way to spend your latter years than in serving as a mentor and befriending a young couple in ministry? Is that second or third or fourth vacation really necessary next year? Granted, vacations are needed for rest, relaxation, rejuvenation and re-energising, but you can often find all of those through pouring yourself out to help others as well.

Many people ask the question, "Where do I begin?" Start with the local church. What opportunities are there for you to serve in your community? What missions or ministries does your church support where you can come alongside an existing relationship? Assess the needs of the community or ministry; ask how you can be of help while not being a hindrance; find out both their short-term and long-term needs; then simply go serve. Don't make it more complicated than it is! ■

Mark Jent is Director of Missions Outreach at Lipscomb University, Nashville Tennessee, USA. He has been involved in annual missions to Brisbane since 2000. mark.jent@lipscomb.edu

News continued Camp Revive 2013

On 20-21 September the Belmore Road congregation hosted Camp Revive at Healesville, just outside Melbourne. There were around 45 teens and young adults present, some travelling from as far as Brisbane and Coffs Harbour. Benny Tabalujan spoke on finding your identity. Friday night was opened with ice-breakers and singing. There was a short devotional led by Dale Christensen who challenged everyone to examine themselves to discover which characteristics they could change to look more like Jesus. Saturday morning started with a prayer walk when everyone joined with a partner, walked around the camp and prayed for each other.

The Saturday morning session focused on the promises God has given to his children in Ephesians 1. The midday session was an open discussion about the identity of the church globally and within denominations – using shoes as a visual aid. The focal point was when Benny said: “When we seek to become like God we will grow closer to one another.” Then we looked at Ephesians 4:22-32 to examine the qualities that we, as Christians, would like to “put off” and “put on”. Saturday night was a split session for the guys (taught by Benny) and girls (taught by Pauline Tabalujan). We used clay to represent what we wanted our lives to look like for Jesus. Saturday was finished off with games and singing in the dark around a bonfire made of glow sticks. On Sunday, we worshipped as a group and Benny preached on the importance of Christians building a good foundation.

The essence of Camp Revive centred on two things: strong fellowship and personal self-reflection for Christ. There is something beautiful about so many different people coming together as brothers and sisters in Christ to pray, eat, and grow closer to each other and to God. This interaction is one thing the world is attracted to and the reason why God placed us together. ■

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Interview continued

to know about its contents would have been discovered. Unfortunately, the question is a little more complicated. Sometimes it is very sparse as a source for important features of early Christianity. For example, the new covenant is very important. But aside from Hebrews very little is said about the new covenant in the New Testament. Just check a concordance. Many things are just presumed. There are many gaps in what we know about the faith and practices of the early church. It is in these areas where many of the disputes emerge.

Our understanding of the Lord's Supper and the purpose of believer's baptism is accepted by the consensus of scholarship. The only issue would be over other practices (viz. non-weekly communion, infant baptism) that developed in church history. Are they acceptable? My view is that the best way to prevent division in the Body of Christ is to follow the common practices of the earliest believers that were acceptable to all. This is where *acappella* singing comes in. This was the universal practice of the church in the earliest centuries. No one questions it is right. Let us keep it that way! The burden is on those who introduce different practices to justify them.

Of course, some have taken this to an extreme and with unwarranted pride introduced division by persisting in insisting upon marginal practices and courses of action that have little to do with the Gospel. As Paul instructs, we ought to “take note of those who create dissensions” (Romans 16:17). We need to exercise the good sense that we do not know everything about the procedures of the ancient church and some things must change in the

course of history. We attempt to warrant all that we do from the Scriptures. But there are limits.

This year you and Patricia visited Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne. What are your impressions of the church in Australia and what parting words do you have for us?

First, I was struck in my visits to the big cities about the changes in the membership of churches. At the Malaga congregation in Perth, a considerable number were people who have recently migrated to Australia and who have been converted. Escaping poverty they found true sanctuary in the church. What a wonderful witness by the hard-working leaders of that congregation to bring this about. In the Eastern cities the fruits of our earlier mission work in Asia can be seen in full display. There we find an extremely talented group of students and professionals from Asia now taking an increasing leadership role in the Australian churches. These changes are positive.

Second, this observation leads to a comment. We will need a thoughtful, talented and educated leadership to match the quality of young people that are now maturing in our local congregations. Steps must be taken and implemented by the current leadership to provide the necessary theological training. If we do that there is no reason why we cannot grow.

Overall, I cannot express enough our thanks for the joy and friendship that my family received in Australia. The Australian churches have a special place in our hearts. I am impressed how you view yourselves everywhere as the brotherhood. May God bless you! ■

After Abilene Christian College, Allan McNicol studied at Yale University and gained a PhD in New Testament from Vanderbilt University. Allan recently retired from Austin Graduate School of Theology, Texas. He and his wife Patricia continue to live in Austin. Allan is a member of the InterSections editorial advisory board. mcnicol@austingrad.edu



Let's start with you telling our readers about how a Queenslander from Kingaroy has ended up half a century later as a Bible professor in Texas.

Born at the beginning of World War II, I spent the first 22 years of my life in Australia. These years afforded Australians wonderful opportunities and blessings that few people have enjoyed. Our family lived in various areas of South-East Queensland including Brisbane. Both the Sunshine and Gold Coasts were thinly populated, inexpensive, and easily accessible for lengthy summer vacations. The sights and smells of this beautiful area will always stay with me. To this day I remain an Australian citizen.

In those days interest in spiritual matters was already on the decline. Sport and outdoor activities were dominant in the Australian culture. It was different for our family; church was very important. Even though I spent years in small country churches I was shaped by the biblical story and respected the character and witness of many of the preachers we knew who sacrificed much to bring us the Gospel. The reason I went to America was to learn more about the Christian faith and prepare myself for church service.

Can you elaborate on your impressions of the Associated Churches of Christ in the 1950s-60s as you were growing up in Queensland? What were the key factors which led you to identify yourself with the non-denominational Churches of Christ?

As the question implies I was raised in the Associated Churches of Christ. My father was a deacon and one of my grandfathers was an elder in that segment of what Americans call the Stone-Campbell movement. As a teenager I finished a three-year correspondence course from the College of the Bible in Glen Iris, Melbourne.

Two developments were significant for me at the time. First, many of the Associated Churches in Australia were losing interest in the restoration of New Testament Christianity. Through strong participation in such agencies as the World Council of Churches they seemed more intent in becoming a significant part of the wider ecumenical community. I was not sure that I would want to spend the rest of my life in a communion where that was the central focus. I believed we had drifted far from the commitments of our earlier leaders who gave us the *raison d'être* of restorationism.

Second, I began subscribing to several journals in America that were representative of various segments of the Stone-Campbell movement. It was very clear that those in the non-denominational American Churches of Christ were far more serious about their commitment to New Testament Christianity than those that fellowshiped with the Associated Churches in Australia. I contacted ministers from these churches in Brisbane and became part of the Holland Park church shortly after my 21st birthday. Incidentally, one of the American journals to which I subscribed was *Restoration Quarterly*. Little was I to know that about forty years later I would be appointed to its editorial board.

What led you to choose teaching as a profession?

In my first year at Abilene Christian College I began to study New Testament Greek. I soon became capable of sight reading the Greek New Testament. I knew then what I wanted to do was to teach the New Testament. Fifty years

have gone by. I have been blessed to do nothing else. My studies and teaching have taken me across the world. Whilst in graduate school there were no teaching opportunities in Australia. An opportunity emerged to teach at the University of Texas in Austin and, at the same time, serve with the church. This accommodated my interests and I have been in Austin ever since.

Is it important for Christians – even those with no intention to enter into paid church ministry – to study theology? Why?

When I was thirteen I was faced with the question of the Darwinian version of evolution. My teachers in the regular schools assumed it was basic fact. But my reading of Genesis 1 seemed to present a different perspective. With the resources I had at the time I could not really find an answer. Somehow I was smart enough to assume that with all the brilliant minds that had graced the Christian faith someone had thought this through. The study of theology, rightly approached, makes available the wisdom of the Scriptures and how the greatest minds among the people of God have responded to the tough questions of the times.

As a Bible scholar, what are your thoughts regarding the appropriateness of our emphasis on believer's baptism, weekly communion, acappella singing and restoration of New Testament practices generally?

The New Testament is a relatively short book. One would think that after two thousand years of intensive study what we need

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