

InterSections



Editorial

Welcome to the February 2015 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue examines the interior life of Christians. Spiritually, our hearts and minds are the hidden battlefield of our Christian walk. Everything we do springs from our thoughts and motivations. Yet the struggles inside us are easy to conceal or ignore. So what are some of the spiritual disciplines which can help us to cultivate our relationship with God and grow more into his likeness?

Our *Feature* article by Nancy Wu Won reflects on prayer and fasting. These disciplines often go together in the Bible. But, in our world of plenty, fasting has often been neglected. In order to correct this oversight, we shine a spotlight on it. In our *Food for Thought*, Ron Bainbridge considers another spiritual discipline – solitude – and reflects on how important it is for our spiritual journey.

Spirituality ought to be manifested in good deeds. So our *International Letter* is from Ray Walker who writes about the good work he saw firsthand being done by Jeremiah's Hope in Ukraine. Even as the media reports on the civil war in Ukraine, Ray tells us of dedicated Christians pointing refugees and at-risk children to Christ.

For our *Interview* we ply James and Sarah Chan with questions about their ministry to a Mandarin-speaking congregation in Melbourne. Through our *ChurchScope* article we learn about the Metro church in Adelaide. Our *News* section covers two recent camps (Camp Gidawarra in Queensland and Camp Challenge in New South Wales), an Eldership Weekend in Perth, plus an online directory of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia.

We hope this issue helps to deepen your spiritual life and strengthen your commitment to walk closer with Christ and fellow Christians.

Enjoy.

InterSections editorial team.

ChurchScope

Adelaide Metro Church of Christ, South Australia

Recently I was asked to write something about our congregation in Adelaide. I wondered just what it is that other Christians would want to know. I also wondered if facts and historical events alone might be enough; or, conversely, whether that is too clinical, too institutional and will not convey a true picture of the heart and soul of this congregation – which, of course, is its people.

Not just any people, but the Lord's people.

However, we did not emerge out of nothing. So, for those who do enjoy historical facts, Metro began life in 1998 with eight Christians who, after much prayer and discussion, joined together to form an inner city congregation to service a need identified by the Holy Spirit. Today, we have an attendance in excess of 80 people and our growth is entirely due to the providence and blessings of God. Praise be the Lord!

The real question is, 'what is Metro like?' To me the best way to describe Metro is to describe my best friend, my family. So, let me tell you about my family.

The first thing that immediately strikes you when you walk in the door is just how diverse Metro really is. It truly is multi-cultural with brethren from Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, The Philippines, China, Italy – and even some from Australia. (Fellowship lunch is something worth looking forward to). This wonderful diversity gives expression to another truly



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Adelaide Metro Church, SA



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From the Ukraine



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Solitude - for spiritual growth



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Elders' Weekend & 2 Camps



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Ruminations on fasting & prayer



Interview ⑧
James & Sarah Chan

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remarkable trait – its friendliness. It's amazing to watch how friendly and welcoming the brethren are and how well visitors are treated, since many are themselves far from their homes and may be alone in a strange and foreign land.

I have never seen a stranger stand awkwardly alone wondering what to do or where to go, nor have I seen anyone leave without giving us their name. This friendliness is not something reserved for special occasions, but is deeply entrenched in our culture as Christians. The willingness to be welcoming is an adoption of Christ's teachings to love the Lord and our neighbours as ourselves in a meaningful way. Such conduct and behaviour has been invaluable when it comes to sharing the Gospel with newcomers who know nothing about Jesus.

The second thing that strikes many is the natural and easy friendliness among brethren. Not only is this diverse mix of saints nice to visitors, they are also genuinely nice to each other. This is demonstrated every time we assemble together as brothers and sisters and re-acquaint themselves with one another. I believe there can be nothing more assuring to our Lord than to know that we truly want to greet one another with a 'holy kiss'. It tells me that we want to be together. It tells me that each child of God considers the other as special and precious. Visitors looking on are impressed to see this 'love for one another' in action. I have felt on many occasions that visitors have returned because they saw openly displayed Christian love between members and they wanted to experience such affection themselves. In fact, many have stayed and over time have joined the body of Christ simply because they felt a genuine connection to Christ through the Metro congregation.

Thirdly, the brethren are not only engaging and welcoming on the local front, enjoying a good reputation in the

local community, but are and have been actively engaged with outreach missions both here in Australia and overseas – in particular, the Philippines. I would say that Metro is

enthusiastically evangelistic. Locally our growth can be attributed entirely to personal evangelism. Almost every new contact is by word of mouth or personal reference – to friends, colleagues, students, family and so on. By being close to the inner city area with its shops, offices, schools and university, we're ideally situated and easily accessible from almost anywhere.

On several occasions we have hosted brethren from interstate and overseas and accommodating them has been relatively easy due to our close proximity to the city and airport. But, I would have to say that Metro's greatest contribution has been the ongoing support over 15 years of two separate works in the Philippines – the Central Luzon School of Preaching and several smaller churches on the island of Palawan. This tiny congregation has

over the years helped many brethren in those regions. God willing, we will continue to do so for many more years. In fact, to Metro, evangelism is living – spiritually living! Without it we would be dead.

Finally, there is one more thing: our spiritual condition and nature. Metro is not perfect and I'm sure we have much to learn. But one thing stands out to me above all else: the love for the Lord. We earnestly try to learn to be like Jesus and to be pleasing to him and only him! This attitude is essential for our personal relationships, spiritual growth and works. Jesus gives meaning and purpose to our lives and jobs. This is what we try to share with non-believers.

In future it is hoped that we will be able to install elders and deacons. Meanwhile, I'm proud to be associated with each member of my family. So please come see us. ■



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North Coast Enrichment Seminar



Healthy Relationships – Healthy Families

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Toormina, Coffs Harbour NSW



Enquiries: Coffs Coast church of Christ.
www.coffschurch.org.au

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International Letter

Australian Ray Walker writes from Ukraine

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' (Jeremiah 29:11)

These words are foundational to Jeremiah's Hope, a non-profit organisation based in Ukraine established by missionary Andrew Kelly, who was born in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. These words are also a personal go-to Scripture for my involvement there.

At Andrew's request, I returned to Ukraine for the fifth time in June 2014 to work in a little village of 200 called Kolentsi, about one hour's drive north of Kiev. This is where the Pine Branch Christian Camp and Ministry Hub is established. Normally, during summer, Jeremiah's Hope hosts 6-8 weeks of camps for orphans and at-risk village kids.

However, due to the war in eastern Ukraine, we served hundreds of refugees instead. In fact, when I left in January 2015, about 19 people from Donetsk were still living there. A church minister named Dudnik from Slavyansk had arranged for thousands to escape from his city, as well as Luhansk and Donetsk. As some of these refugees came to us, we housed, fed, and clothed them and offered a sympathetic shoulder to weep upon. We prayed with them and for them. It was a joy to partner with 16-year old Edic, son of another minister named Anatoly, in conducting weekly worship.

With the assistance of teams from the Holland Park Church of Christ in Brisbane, Australia, and churches in the United States and Netherlands, we conducted three camps where refugees and village children were taught Bible, constructed crafts, enjoyed sports and games and participated in skits and Bible plays. This was the time when relationships were developed and the love of God demonstrated. It was also a time of great encouragement to those living on the camp property as we partnered with other English speakers to serve others. Some of the Ukrainians helped us learn their language (either Russian or Ukrainian) and one boy, Vova, got a lot of laughs at my attempts.

Over time, Andrew and his wife Jenny have helped many families find work and alternative housing in safer regions. Some were even able to return to their home cities when these became safe. The constant coming and going was stressful and emotional for those of us serving in the camp. But God's plan was evident in our being there at this particular time to offer practical assistance as well as friendship to these traumatised people. What a privilege and honour it is to be his servant caring for people in these circumstances!

When the number of refugees settled a little, the Jeremiah's Hope core ministry of serving at-risk children in surrounding villages (the Sasha Project) was able to restart. Two of us, twice a week, would drive to the 9-10 families in each of the four surrounding villages to deliver food packs, visit, play with children, hand out Christian literature and ascertain



other areas of need. With help from others, we completed service projects, including building a doorstep and digging a trench to bring water to a home comprising of a single mother with three children.



Showing God's love and care in such practical ways was addictive. So I began a database on all the families we saw. I recorded our visits and observed how the kids were doing. I noted whether parents were present or drunk, if kids attended school, what they enjoyed, what additional needs existed and so on. This information can now be shared with sponsors.

On several occasions, team members hosted a boys' or girls' weekend where these village kids were brought to Kolentsi to enjoy fellowship, have fun and learn from the Bible. I hosted two weekends with younger boys that I'd met in previous trips. I was delighted when they asked whether they could come again. On one of our Sasha Project visits, a babushka (Russian for older woman or grandmother) expressed a desire for her three grandchildren to learn English; so I went once a week to teach them. We had tons of fun and deeper relationships were formed.

One special joy for me was mentoring Andrei and Misha, refugee orphans from Donetsk and babes in Christ. They would travel 4-5 hours from their trade school south of Kiev to visit me. We have become as close as brothers and I'm thankful to have been a small part of their growth as Christians. Again, I see God's plan in allowing me to fill the gap in their Christian development during the time when Tony and Shanna, Youth Reach directors and mentors, were away in America. Tony and family moved back to live in Ukraine the day after I left.

Ukraine is not just caught up in a civil war. More importantly, it is experiencing a battle for people's minds. Ukrainians are at a crossroads to determine their future. One option is an independent and free state, with freedom to worship and to depend on God's help. Another option is to go back to dependence upon Russia, relying on its might and constricted by its anti-religious ideology.

I am encouraged by the strong faith and conviction of the people I met there. Truly they live out this Scripture: *'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.'* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

I ask that you uplift the people of Ukraine in your prayers. Pray for peace and pray that God will win the battle for their hearts. ■

Ray Walker, from the Wynnum Church of Christ in Queensland, recently spent nearly seven months with Jeremiah's Hope (www.jeremiahshope.org) in Ukraine. raptoray@iinet.net.au



Food for Thought

Solitude - Necessary for spiritual growth

In our century too many Christians are caught up with a frenzy of activities. While some activities are important, many just sap our time and energy. They cause us to be driven along at great speed to fulfil the tasks at hand. As a result, many of us can become ineffective witnesses for Jesus. Too often, we take pride in explaining to each other about our busyness. And we feel vaguely guilty if we relax.

Yet, our God did not intend for his people to live in a state of perpetual hurry. As we read through the pages of the Bible, it becomes very clear that God wants each of his children to take time out for solitude and to find rest, refreshment and new strength for body and soul. In Exodus 20:8-11, we read where God commands his people to observe times of physical and spiritual refreshment. In Psalm 23:1-3, the psalmist reminds us that *'The Lord is our shepherd; who lets us rest in green meadows; He leads us beside peaceful streams. He renews our strength.'*

In the gospel of Mark, we read that, towards the end of Jesus' first year of public ministry (which was filled with teaching, preaching and compassionate healing), Jesus was in an exhausted state. His physical, mental, and spiritual resources were drained. Then we read in Mark 1:35, *'In the early morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and departed into a solitary place. And there he prayed.'*

The Greek word used in this instance, *eremos*, implies a lonesome, desolate, solitary, wilderness kind of place. What Mark reveals to us is that Jesus went to a place where there were no people. In fact, throughout his ministry, Jesus often went to places where he could be alone, to concentrate on praying to his Father in order to regain his spiritual energy (Mark 6:46; 14:32ff; John 17; Luke 5:16).

It seems to me that if we busy Christians follow the example of our Lord Jesus and take time out for solitude, then we will experience the rest and refreshment of his presence as he relieves our burdens and leads us in a life of peace and rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

However, solitude is not simply a quiet time and place. It's not only a matter of stilling the many inner voices so that we can come to a point of quietness and inner peace. It's much more than that! It is in essence a withdrawal from the pressures and stresses of life in order to experience a greater intimacy with our Father in heaven, who normally gets crowded out of our lives.

Obviously, as children of God, we can be with him in our active serving. We can be with God in our corporate worship and we can be with God through attentive study of the Scriptures. But in a place of solitude, we are with God *in a different way*. We are there not so much to be blessed, but as the psalmist states in Psalm 46:10, to *'cease striving and recognise God...'* Thus, in solitude we not only come to peace and quietness, but also to a new attentiveness. We are not there to get nor to give, but to be attentive. Solitude helps us to practise the presence of God as attentive listeners and as companions who are at peace in each other's company.

The discipline of solitude makes us more sensitive to the good in people. It also makes us more aware of their needs and concerns (Philippians 2:3-4). And our Father in heaven, who probes our deepest thoughts during lengthy times of solitude, helps us come to terms with the superficial things we are too often engaged in. He opens our eyes to the important things that need attention. He helps us determine in our hearts what, if anything, needs to stop.

The psalmist realised our need for this kind of in-depth examination. In fact, he invited God's laser-like probe into the innermost chambers of his heart and thoughts (Psalm 139:1-4, 23-24).

The apostle Paul was equally committed to solitude and self-analysis. Without hesitation he admonished the Corinthians for their shameful behaviour at the Lord's Table when they met corporately (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Following those words of rebuke, Paul then instructed each one to spend time in solitude and personal, unassisted self-examination before the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:28-31).

In our century, I believe it is time for the Lord's church to discipline ourselves by pulling back from our meaningless talk, cliché-ridden responses and mindless activities. The body of Christ was never meant to be that way. Yet, more often than not, that's the way we are. To break the habit, solitude is required and the hard work of self-examination on a frequent basis is absolutely essential.

In Mark 6:30-32, we read about the time when the disciples of Jesus returned from the mission he had earlier sent them on. Although he appreciated their hard work and faithful labour during the mission, he also saw their need for rest and reflection. Jesus was well-acquainted with the draining impact of *'many people coming and going'*. So he encouraged them to slip away on a boat and sailed with them to *'a lonely place'*. Why? So they could be in a place *'by themselves'* for a time of rest. Clearly, Jesus saw the value of solitude. He saw the need for escape from activity.

This year I pray that each of us will carefully schedule times of solitude so that we may be more effective servants for our Saviour. This is one way we can guard against things that disconnect us from a deeper intimacy with our Father in heaven. Obviously, sin will do that; but so will weariness. We can't remain connected to God if we are weighed down by busyness. ■

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Eldership Weekend – Perth, Western Australia

The flight was a long one for many of us, but well worth the trip. The destination was Perth and the purpose was to participate in a seminar facilitated by Klesis – focusing on eldership – over the weekend of 31 October to 2 November 2014. Malaga Church of Christ graciously hosted the event. It attracted 52 participants (most of whom were elders or prospective elders and their wives) from churches of Christ in Queensland, New South Wales, ACT, Victoria, Western Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

A keynote speaker was Evertt Huffard (Dean of Harding School of Theology, Memphis, USA) who did a great job facilitating reflection on what God's Word teaches about the calling to be a shepherd in the Lord's church. Of immense benefit also was the opportunity for participants to share their personal experiences of the challenges, hopes and blessings this calling entails.

Elderships do it hard in this part of the world. Our democratic and ego-centric culture and the infamous tall poppy syndrome work against the establishment and maintenance of biblical elderships. The role of the shepherd is a demanding and often thankless task. An event designed to equip, edify and encourage elders and their wives in their good work was both timely and important. I hope there will be similar opportunities in the future. ■

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Camp Gidawarra, Queensland

Christians from eight congregations spent the first week in January together in the beautiful lush mountains of the Gold Coast hinterland, a little over an hour south of Brisbane.

The theme for Camp Gidawarra 2015 was 'The Contagious Holiness of God'. Dr Kevin Youngblood, from the Bible faculty at Harding University, was the guest teacher for the adults class. Zac Brantley, who is spending a year with the Holland Park Church of Christ while on a break between studies at Lipscomb University, led the teenagers in their class time.

Kevin brought the book of Leviticus to life, exploring what it has to say to followers of Jesus and showing God's desire for His people to experience joy and freedom. The lessons uncovered the richness that the book of Leviticus provides in understanding atonement, the Cross, and defining the holiness of God and his people. We were even 'ordained' as priests during the week. If you are interested in getting a copy of the lessons on DVD please send an email to jonathan@hodos.com.au and we'll see what we can do for you.

The kids didn't miss out on great classes either with activities including clowning around, puppeteering, movie-making, newscasting, and science experiments—all used to tell them the amazing stories of love, adventure, courage and rescue that are a part of God's awesome story. There was, of course, the traditional game of ultimate frisbee one afternoon and plenty of time available enjoying catching up with old friends and making a few new ones. If you would like to keep up with plans for Camp Gidawarra 2016 you can visit www.campgidawarra.net, sign up for email news updates, and join the Facebook page. ■

Jonathan Leijen is a member of the Holland Park Church of Christ. jonathan@hodos.com.au

Camp Challenge, NSW

Camp Challenge was held at the beautiful Kiah Ridge camp site in Tahmoor, NSW. It ran from 27 December 2014 to 1 January 2015. The camp theme was 'The Best is yet to come'. Frank Cunningham from the Southwest congregation, Sydney, taught the first two lessons. These were followed by a lesson from Jason Whaley of Wollongong and, on the last day, we had a lesson by Graham Fry from Canberra. The teaching was divided into two sections with a lecture in the morning followed by small group discussions.

There were three different children's classes of varying age groups. Lucrecia Borgia from the Macquarie congregation, with the help of many others, organised and taught these classes. The camp site at Kiah Ridge is lovely and in the mornings one can see kangaroos on the grounds. We had many activities for everyone to be involved in – including things like table tennis, Aus tag, painting and cookie making. And James Scandrett was there again with his water bottle rocket launcher.

The evening activities are always a highlight with getting-to-know-you games, treasure bags, auction night and, finally, everyone's favourite – talent night. We had a good attendance this year and are already looking forward to see what Challenge 2015 has in store for us. ■

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Feature

Ruminations on fasting and prayer

A few years ago, my congregation studied a series of lessons on 'Spiritual Disciplines' for our midweek meetings. I became convinced of their value for Christians who seek to draw nearer to God. So I started fasting on Sunday mornings to give it a try believing, somehow, that God would reward me. Later, prompted by a steady stream of work stresses, including a denial from my superiors for leave, I fasted over a whole weekend. I missed six meals. Yet I was sustained by God through prayer and Bible study – so that my anger subsided over the unfair treatment I had received. I found that I could relinquish my will to God's will; I became more content with the unknown outcome. In peace I returned to work on the Monday. To my surprise, I was granted the leave I had requested. Praise God!

Fasting had played a minimal role in most of my Christian walk. Perhaps my cursory glances over the handful of verses of the early church practising this discipline had not caught my attention. But, when I dug a little deeper, what did I find?

While the prophets and teachers at Antioch ministered to God and fasted, the Holy Spirit directed them to send Barnabas and Paul to embark on their first missionary journey (Acts 13). Later in Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas were involved in the appointment of elders in every church. How did they do it? Yes, you guessed it: through prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting is raised again in 1 Corinthians 7:5 as an activity that married couples do. Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:5 suggests that during his ministry Paul suffered many privations willingly for the sake of the kingdom, including going without food (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:27). Could it be deduced from the above examples that prayer and fasting can help us gain clarity as to God's will and also help us make wise choices? Could it be that behind the scenes of Paul's exemplary life with its great feats of faith, is a fiercely guarded private spiritual life underpinned by fasting and prayer?

Jesus also practised fasting before his ministry started and he did not expect his disciples to start fasting until he had left them (Matthew 4:2; 9:14-15; Mark 1:12). The Pharisees, John the Baptist and his disciples also practised fasting (Matthew 9:14). In fact, I find that the practice of prayer and fasting was not restricted to New Testament times. There are numerous examples of those who sought God in the Old Testament having fasted and prayed. Moses, Esther, King David, Samuel, Ezra and Daniel all fasted and beseeched the Lord in prayer. As a consequence of their submission to God, battles were won, enemies routed, judgments averted, a queen received permission to speak and a nation was preserved so that the Messianic line could continue (Exodus 34:28; Esther 4:16; 2 Samuel 12:16; 1 Samuel 7; Jonah 3:5-10; Ezra 8:21-23; Daniel 10:2-3).

It is interesting to note that even in secular history, fasting and prayer can play a role. In the midst of the American Civil War, on 30 April 1863, President Abraham Lincoln called for a national day of prayer and fasting.¹ In fact, turning to God through prayer and fasting has made significant changes in the world. How about ourselves? Is there something for which you and I seek answers? A search for God's will perhaps? Fasting and prayer could be part of the process of that. Fasting could become a weekly, lifelong habit which helps us stay in step with God and facilitate change in the world.

As writers Gary Holloway and Earl Lavender state, 'Fasting reminds us of our deepest hunger, not the desire for food but the hunger for God.'² When Israel wandered in the desert, God taught them the value of true hunger: 'that man shall not live by bread alone; but.... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus reiterates this verse after he had fasted for forty days (Matthew 4:4). God calls us to look beyond the physical to see our real need: a hunger for him – not for money, sex, power, recognition and happiness.³ In order to learn to hunger for God, we turn to fasting. It is prudent to seek medical advice before fasting if you are in doubt.⁴ Pregnant women, diabetics and those with other medical problems are wise to consult their doctor before they begin fasting.

The types of fasts listed in the Bible range from a partial fast, where certain foods and drink are avoided, to the fast where no food or water is consumed (Daniel 10:3; Esther 4:16). We can find fasts ranging in duration from one day to forty days (1 Samuel 7:6; Matthew 4:2). The likelihood is that a normal fast refers to the abstinence of food while the consumption of water is permitted. Jesus ate no food and was hungry at the end of his fast, implying that he had water to drink during those forty days (Matthew 4:2). If you have never fasted before, an easy way to begin is to skip one meal and keep up the fluids in the form of water with or without juices. After a few weeks, a fast over 24 hours (where you skip two meals) could be attempted; all the while, the time not spent eating can be redirected to prayer and seeking God in his Word.⁵

Jesus explains the importance of fasting and praying in secret so the Father can then reward openly (Matthew 6:6-18). But we must remember that the purpose of prayer and fasting is not to manipulate God into granting our wishes. The aim is to draw closer to God such that the time spent with him eventually leads us out to serve the community.

Given the bodily and mental discomfort that one must endure to practise fasting, this spiritual discipline could easily be relegated to the too-hard basket. Or one can rationalise that fasting has not been commanded and thus we don't have to do it.⁶ However, in my view, difficult though fasting can be, starting off with a small fast is well worth a try. It can lead to a lifelong habit which sustains you through the spiritually dry periods of life and strengthens your faith on an ongoing basis.

Are you curious, you who are God's image bearer, to see the effects of fasting and prayer on your life? God, from the beginning, longs to dwell with man, and desires our obedience because this transforms us into his likeness (Deuteronomy 10:12; Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). May we taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). May we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for we shall be filled (Matthew 5:6). May you and I see more of God in ourselves and each other so that we can be a light to the nations in order to reach the lost.

Continued page 7

Australian Church Directory

If you're looking for a directory of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia, you can find a recently updated one on the Klesis website (www.klesis.com.au). The directory is downloadable in pdf format. And it's free.

Providing the online directory is part of Klesis' mission to help connect and equip Christians and churches seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. In offering this directory, we're not seeking to be exclusive or exhaustive; rather, it's an attempt to facilitate communication and fellowship among people of like conviction. In so doing, we respect and seek to encourage the autonomy and eldership of local congregations.

The current edition of the directory, updated in 2014, contains names of congregations, details of meeting times and locations, as well as contact persons and websites of around 80 churches around Australia. Klesis will soon be contacting churches and asking them to review their directory details and to let us know of any changes. Of course, you can also share with us any changes as soon as they occur by sending them to Klesis (info@klesis.com.au) ■

Alan Rowley manages the directory for Klesis. rowley@klesis.com.au



Feature *Ruminations on fasting and prayer cont.*

Endnotes:

1. <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/fast.htm>.
2. Gary Holloway & Earl Lavender, *Living God's Love: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (Leafwood Publishers, 2004) p 110.
3. Ibid, p 110.
4. E L Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts* (Regal Books, 1996) p 3. Also: Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989) p 74.
5. Foster, p 71.
6. Foster, p 66-68.

Nancy Wu-Won is a physiotherapist and a member of the Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. tranquillilly@gmail.com

Interview *James & Sarah Chan cont.*

This career change has allowed me more time to prepare lessons and sermons and to study the Scriptures with people, while enabling more quality time with my family.

Sarah, since your conversion, you have experienced many life changes involving changes in countries, cultures, families and religious mindsets. What has helped you to adjust to these changes?

What helps me most is knowing that the only true God is my heavenly Father and that he is the one who loves me the most and that he will direct my path. My earthly family doesn't understand my pursuits. But having my eternal relationship with God in the big picture, I know what I can live with and what I can't live without.

What personal life lessons has working in the Chinese ministry taught you? Do you have any advice for our readers who are reaching out to people with differing ethnicities?

Time. That is the answer for the first question. We should ask ourselves, 'Why am I still alive today and not already in heaven with God?' Clearly the answer is that God still has *his* work for *us* to do on earth. That work isn't primarily about making more money or gaining higher worldly status. It definitely involves spreading the Gospel to people. They could be people in your family – including your children. They could be people around us. So God has given us a precious gift to do so and this gift is TIME. So I have learned to use my God-given time for God, trusting that in his timing someone's heart will be touched.

In terms of reaching out to people with differing ethnicities, I would say that first we need to see them through the eyes of God. They need salvation like the rest of us. Just find some common ground with them to start a conversation. At the same time, be sensitive to their cultural background. Often, because of a different cultural background, they may do or say strange things. However, we need to be patient and learn more about that background. It is very likely that this background knowledge will give us a key to point them to Christ. ■

James and Sarah Chan along with their children, Enoch and Eunice, are part of the Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne, where James ministers to a Mandarin-speaking group. They were interviewed by Jenny Ancell. facsing@hotmail.com

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Interview

James and Sarah Chan

Tell us a little about where you grew up, your family and how you came to Christ.

I was born in Hong Kong (HK) and grew up there until I was 20. My parents and my sister are still in HK. When I was about 16 years old, my father, who is still a preacher, went to teach at Sunset School of Preaching (now Sunset International Bible Institute) in Texas. Before he left for the teaching post, we had Bible studies. His intention was for me to be baptised before he went and I was indeed subsequently baptised.

When I was 20, I came to Australia to study. I attended Belmore Road Church of Christ then and have been doing so since (aside from a few years when I worked in medical research in America). In 1998, I was re-baptised at Belmore Road. I understood through a study of the Scriptures what God wanted from my heart. When I was first baptised in HK, part of my motive was to please my father. I did not want him to worry about me when he was away teaching at Sunset. But I later realised that God would not be pleased with that reason. So I asked Marvin Ancell, who was the fulltime minister at Belmore Road at that time, to re-baptise me.

Sarah grew up in Shenzhen, China, in a non-Christian family. During her university years in Guangzhou, she took an elective subject studying Bible literature. She wanted to have a real Bible. So she asked a fellow student who owned one where to get one. The student didn't only help her to get a Bible but also brought her to an underground church. After studying with an underground preacher from HK, she came to understand God's salvation plan and how to have a right relationship with her creator. In November 1999, Sarah was baptised into Christ in an autumn tree-lined reservoir.

What brought you to Australia?

I came to Australia to study in 1988. Sarah and I got married in 2003 and we decided to settle in Australia.

Has there been any person who has significantly influenced your life?

The answer to this question is my father. For as long as I have known him, he has been a faithful servant for God. He has been a preacher in HK for over four decades. For the last 20 years he has been evangelising in mainland China. He established a number of underground churches in different towns and cities throughout this period. Every time he enters China, he risks his life to spread the Gospel to people who are hungry for it and God has been keeping him safe. He is now 76 but he's still travelling to mainland China almost every weekend to preach and have Bible studies with people.

My father has also significantly influenced Sarah's life because he was the underground preacher who taught Sarah the Gospel. Sarah and I have been tremendously inspired by his dedication and perseverance in God's work and his respect for the absolute authority of God's Word.



You have been involved with the Chinese ministry at Belmore Road since 2008. What has been exciting about this ministry and what are the challenges ahead?

It's always exciting for us to share the Gospel with people. Seeing people wanting to know more about Christ and seeing God opening up their hearts bit by bit to the point of accepting Christ as their Saviour and being baptised – I think this is the best reward God gives us. The joy of seeing another soul being saved is beyond description.

The way people come to know Christ constantly reminds us of the power of God's Word and that God is always at work. Yes, there are always challenges, as Paul alluded to in many of his letters. Like many of the congregations around us, as the number of members increase, there are also more issues to deal with. It is the same with us. However, a particular challenge that stands out is the need for more Christian brothers to grow spiritually and serve. May God equip more servants.

James, you have moved out of a career in medical research. What caused you to change career pathways and were there any sacrifices involved? Have there been any advantages?

I obtained a PhD from the University of Melbourne in 1998 and was working in the medical research field for over a decade. At the beginning of 2011, Sarah and I were contemplating whether I should move away from my research career to something that will allow me to have more spare time to serve the Lord and also have a more balanced life. For almost three years, I spent most evenings and weekends preparing for Sunday lessons. I really struggled to spend much quality time with my family. We prayed about this desire during the whole of 2011. At the end of that year, I quit my job even though I was awarded new research funding for the following year.

In October 2012, after a knee operation and a period of recuperation, I found a casual position as an administrator with Monash University on a 16-week contract cycle. This new position meant a significant pay cut. But, so far, we lack nothing. God is faithful as he promised. In late 2013, my contract work was reduced to part-time due to budget constraints. This has allowed me to accept a one-day-per-week ministry position with Belmore Road church focusing on the Chinese work.

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