

InterSections



Editorial

Welcome readers to our first *InterSections* issue for 2017!

This issue focuses on women in ministry. The task of serving in ministry is a privilege yet it is borne with the cost of patience, single-mindedness and fortitude. How does a person carry out their ministry well and not grow tired and weary? This issue explores ways to maintain ministry with both energy and vigour.

Our *Feature* article by Norainie Bargholz considers some vital spiritual practices which can increase women's resilience when serving in ministry. In our *Food for Thought*, Pam Paull, a school teacher by profession, considers the ministry of teaching children and the principles of a teaching program. We also interview Ronya Johnson who, with her husband, Brad, have reached out to remote indigenous communities and those often left on the sidelines of society. Ronya reflects on her journey and how God has sustained and enabled her in this ministry.

In our *International Letter*, Gill Raine from New Zealand informs us about her involvement with Angkor of Faith, a thriving short-term ministry reaching out to street kids in Cambodia. And, in our *ChurchScope* section, from the top-end of Australia, we hear about the church in Darwin, Northern Territory.

An autobiography - *Hiding in the Light*, by Rifqa Barry - is reviewed by Colleen Golafshan. This book provides a valuable insight into the immense personal cost of a young Muslim girl's decision to follow Jesus. Finally, we wrap up with exciting news about a pilot Marriage Mentoring Weekend in Victoria and the annual Camp Challenge held in Tahmoor, NSW.

We hope that this issue will encourage and inspire you in your area of service in 2017. May all the glory be given to our eternal Father.

InterSections editorial team.



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ChurchScope

Darwin Church of Christ, Northern Territory



The church in Darwin has existed in various iterations over the years. Most notably, in the early 1990s, Neill and Betty Massie from the USA came to Darwin as missionaries to plant a congregation. They received occasional support from Neill's sister, Anita Brock, who used to fly in to help them conduct Marriage Enrichment seminars to prospective Christians. However, due to Neill's ill-health the family had to go back home and the work could not be sustained after their departure. However, some of the people converted at that time are still faithful Christians and live elsewhere in Australia.

The congregation in its current existence dates back to late 2011 and early 2012 when, by the grace of God, a few Christian families migrated to Darwin for work, within a few months of each other. These Christians, both from interstate and overseas (USA and Botswana), were able to find each other through their networks with other Christians elsewhere in Australia.

The members then included Keven and Carmen Jones and their two daughters, Leighton Bestmann (all originally from Queensland), Allen and Nona Petree from the United States, and Bopelo and Itabo Boitshwarelo and their two little children from Botswana. The Jones moved back to Queensland in December 2012 and the Petrees moved to Perth in

Top photo: Mary Nelson, Bible Class Teacher,
Otumoetai Church of Christ, Tauranga, NZ
missionbibleclass.org

Side photo: Ian & Diane Coker
Townsville Church of Christ, Queensland

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mid-2013. Previously, between 2001 and 2005, Leighton, who was in the RAAF, used to drive from Katherine to Darwin to meet with Keven and Carmen Jones. (Keven was posted by the Australian Army at the Robertsons Barracks).

Since mid-2013, the Boitshwarelos and Leighton have been the 'permanent' members. In 2015, brother Peter Cox joined the congregation but went back to Queensland at the end of the year after resigning from Charles Darwin University (CDU) to be closer to his family. For about six months up to around April 2016, the church also had brother Jacob Littlebear, a US marine who had been deployed from Japan to Darwin. In January 2016, brother Glen Burgin, who had been transferred by the Australian army to Darwin became part of the congregation; Glen went back to his family in Wagga mid-year when he decided to retire. Around the same time Glen left, brother Obinna Solomon Nwangor, an international student at CDU from Nigeria, joined the congregation.

Currently, the church has a membership of four adults and two children. The church receives occasional Christian visitors from interstate and overseas who are in Darwin for holiday and/or work. One memorable example was a visit by retirees Ray and Lynn Gritten from Gosford, NSW, in 2013. The Grittens, who were holidaying in their campervan around Australia and also visiting small congregations in the process, were kind enough to worship with the church over three consecutive weeks. They had previously planned to stay only a week in Darwin but because they enjoyed the fellowship and wanted to be an encouragement to the congregation, they stayed longer.

Another notable visit was by Betty Masie and Anita Brock, mentioned earlier, who came back to Darwin in 2013. They have since co-authored a book called *Upside-Down-Under: An Outback Odessey* which chronicles their missionary experiences in Darwin in the 1990s. (For more details of the book see: <https://www.tatepublishing.com/bookstore/book.php?w=978-1-62510-236-2>)

The church in Darwin is a reflection of its location. Darwin by its very nature is a transient city. People come to live here mostly for short to medium term periods of time, either on holiday, work or study. Consequently the church tends to have a very high turnaround of membership. Military personnel are a good example of this trend as evident with Keven, Glen, Jacob and Leighton.

Another distinct feature of the Darwin church is the dominance of men in the membership. This is a reflection of the Darwin population which has a relatively higher male-female ratio. For its size, the church is also multicultural, currently having people from three nationalities. This also is a distinct feature of Darwin.

Currently the church has no formal evangelism program. An application in 2014 for ACCET (Australian Church of Christ Evangelist Trust) grant to engage somebody short to medium term to facilitate evangelistic efforts was unsuccessful. The congregation hopes that with individual efforts of the members and support from the brotherhood, it can grow and begin to make a difference in Darwin. The church has provided modest financial support for benevolent purposes and evangelistic efforts. These include contributing towards the forthcoming trip of Peter Mandalidis (from the Eastside Church of Christ in Sydney) to India. Until recently the church has been providing some regular financial support to some congregations and individuals in the Philippines, where Leighton has some contacts.

Because of the relatively small number of saints in Darwin, we currently meet in homes usually from 10am -11.15am on Sundays. This is usually followed by an additional hour or so for fellowship over a snack or a meal. Contact and other information about the church can be found at: <http://www.darwinchurchofchrist.net/index.html>. □



Darwin Church 2012



Darwin Church 2015

Bopelo Boitshwarelo teaches at Charles Darwin University and is a member of the Darwin Church of Christ bopelo@gmail.com

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 (© Klesis Institute, 2017). Copyright permission is given to anyone wishing to reproduce an individual article for non-commercial purposes, as long as due attribution is given to the author and InterSections. Klesis Institute is a division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

Editor: Benny Tabalujan
 Managing Editor: Jenny Ancell
 Associate Editors: Nathan Holyoak, Christian Bargholz
 Board of Advisors: Dale Hartman, Allan McNicol, David Mowday
 Enquiries: Klesis Institute, PO Box 700, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150, Australia.
 Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox igekko.com.au
 Publisher: Klesis Institute www.klesis.com.au
 Email: info@klesis.com.au Fax: +61 3 8677 9575

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Food for Thought

The Ministry of Teaching Children



The ministry of teaching children God's messages from the Bible is a vital part of their education. Children should learn principally from their parents both by observing their way of living and through instruction both formal and informal. If children learn God's truths through everyday example and instruction they will be able to better relate these truths to everyday living.

At the same time, other Christians who are in contact with these children can have a valuable supplementary role to the parents' instruction. This does not mean that the church's efforts are intended by God to be a replacement for the parents' role. Rather, it is a reinforcement of the home teaching. When there are deficiencies in a parent's teaching, then the church's role becomes even more crucial. In either case the church has many opportunities both personal and corporate to help children learn about God. Every member should plan on helping the children who attend the church's meetings and then grow in their effectiveness of putting this plan into action. Obviously, the church should also encourage parents regularly about their responsibility of instructing their own children.

The following Scriptures are relevant to the instruction of children: Proverbs 22:6 'Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it'; Ephesians 6:4 'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord'; Colossians 3:20 'Children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord'; Titus 2:3,4 'Teach the older women to... train the younger women to love their husbands and children and to be busy in the home'; 2 Timothy 1:5 'I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also'; Mark 10:13-16 'People were bringing their little children to Jesus but the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for such is the kingdom of heaven."'

The rest of this article will concentrate on the church's ministry of teaching children about God. A first principle for the church (and parents) to remember is that the goal of our instruction is the eventual salvation of the child's soul through a relationship with God.

First, let's consider the church's formal teaching program through such media as Sunday and midweek Bible classes. Some important points to adopt are:

- Teachers should be eager to teach classes—rather than having to be pressed into service.
- Teachers need training and experience both in the Bible and in classroom management. Assisting and observing classes already in operation can assist with this.
- Teachers should be active in those aspects of the church's activities relevant to them so that they set a good example to children.
- Teachers should be well prepared for classes through Bible study, lesson planning, collecting resources and practice. They should also develop a keen interest in the children, praying for them regularly.
- Teachers should create an environment where children are provoked to learn and are excited about being in class.
- Teachers should develop a good relationship with the children both in the classroom and at other times. This includes contact with and encouragement from parents.
- Teachers should give feedback to parents regarding the progress and needs of their children.
- In cases where there is a range of ages in the class there will be a need for differentiated learning for all students including age-appropriate materials. This can be facilitated by having assistant teachers and by the more advanced students assisting the less mature students.

Teachers should investigate their own potential and develop their skills related to teaching. For example, I became interested in puppets as a child and began using them to teach Scripture classes when I was a teenager. Speaking with accents and dramatic voice are other skills I developed. I have used puppets ever since, both for Bible classes and in my primary school lessons. I also learnt to make puppets. I also bought puppets representing biblical and modern characters and animals. They are very beneficial in capturing and holding attention and can be used interactively to great effect, with the children being able to identify with a variety of characters and their personalities. Both Bible stories and application lessons can be emphasised by using puppets.

Since Bible class teachers are teaching on behalf of the church, the whole church should support and encourage their teachers by:

- Emphasising that Bible classes are a teaching function of the body of Christ.
- Providing regular information about the Bible class program such as in church announcements, bulletins and notice boards.
- Organising training opportunities for teachers and prospective teachers by holding workshops, lectureships and giving opportunities to learn from more experienced teachers, both in the local congregation and by visiting other congregations and visiting teachers.
- Providing a budget for classroom resources and facilities in consultation with the teachers.
- Personally and publicly thanking and honouring those who organise and teach Bible classes.
- Acknowledging the progress of the students.
- Giving instruction to the whole church about the biblical importance of teaching children.
- Providing an atmosphere in which teachers are encouraged to provide feedback to the church on their work and students' progress.

Teaching children is an important and rewarding experience as we see children develop their knowledge of Scripture and grow in their relationship with God. May we all work to that end. □

Pam Paull, along with her husband Ted and family, are members of the Macquarie Church of Christ, Sydney pauls4@bigpond.com



Book Review



Hiding in the Light: Why I risked everything to leave Islam and Follow Jesus by Rifqa Bary (Waterbrook Press, 2015)

Hiding in the Light is Rifqa Bary's first book. True to the title of this fast paced autobiography, Sri Lankan born Bary boldly proclaims her choice to give up her family and Muslim community to follow Jesus – running away from home at age sixteen after her family emigrated to the United States. The book is written about five years after she gained legal release from her family's custody at age 18. Since then she's been a college student studying psychology and her passions are prayer, missions and people.

In response to national and international media reports in 2009 and 2010, Rifqa Bary wrote her story to give an accurate record of her family and community experience – with no intention of maligning Muslims or Islam. She explains that she not only left Islam; she also shamed her family. This is far more than most of us in the West could relate to (and perhaps even believe) if we're unfamiliar with strict Muslim law.

Bary believes many in her Islamic community want her dead. So she continues to take precautions to protect her life and safety, living in an undisclosed location. She's proud to be one of many who have accepted Christ as Lord in hostile situations and who live in hiding. She hopes her story stirs Christians living less passionately to be renewed in their fervour for God.

Bary skilfully draws readers into her story. She tells of her search from a young age for a God who provides more meaning to life than merely keeping the obligations of Islam. Her experiences often reinforce a focus of her message: where oppression is found, freedom is possible in Christ. She writes to demonstrate that God's power is greater than the evil in our world; God is able to influence even nations and governments.

The prologue and first 14 chapters of the book describe Rifqa Bary's childhood in her family home. They detail a transition from a carefree childhood to an increasingly abusive one after her right eye was blinded when she was six. This was followed by a sexual violation by her uncle a year or two later. She relates how in her native Sri Lankan Muslim community she – the victim – bore the dishonour for the violation. The incident, in turn, brought disgrace to her family. To manage the ramifications, her family moved quickly to the United States when she was eight.

In Sri Lanka, as a five year old, Bary had a brief encounter with what she described was a warm enticing presence. She felt this presence to be God. Later, this led to her desperate plea for God to reveal himself when she contemplated suicide as a 12-year old in Ohio. The story then portrays how she was drawn to Jesus and a loving Father – unlike the distant angry God she felt she had dutifully served with her family.

Chapters 15 to 29 describe Bary's fight for her freedom to choose to be a Christian. She persisted until she was finally granted a US green card one day before her 18th birthday. The last pages of the book summarise her life since: her developing passion for justice, a greater understanding that what she's given up is incalculable; and the forgiveness she extends to her family as she continues to seek reconciliation.

Hiding in the Light outlines life in one Muslim household. Bary's father remained a faithful leader in their mosque. She and her family prayed five times daily, memorised the *Qur'an* (Islam's holy book), and fasted and feasted at set times. Although this is only one example of a Muslim household, reading about them in the book gave me an appreciation of the possible shape of Muslim daily life and the intensity of their religious fervour – even if they live in Western societies.

Rifqa Bary's story has similarities to others I've read where individuals from Muslim cultures convert to Christianity from Islam. A significant difference is that the latter part of her story occurred in a Western country – one where her research revealed honour killings have taken place. This is something I hadn't been previously aware of. I was alarmed when I thought that threatened or actual honour killings could happen in Western countries like Australia. In this way, *Hiding in the Light* may increase awareness of possible persecution of children of different faiths within our communities.

Bary claims that her conversion occurred when she answered a call to pray for forgiveness in a mid-week church meeting. However, the book reveals that her journey included her insistence on baptism at age 16 even though the official Christian influences in her life discouraged this – ostensibly due to possible implications before she turned 18. This brings up questions about the possible legal ramifications of baptism for children of other faiths who may want to obey God against the wishes of their families and religious leaders.

Hiding in the Light is a compelling book to read. I recommend it as a challenge to our own faith as Rifqa Bary reveals what she's been willing to give up for God. It also helps to expand our understanding of what individuals, especially children, of other faiths may be experiencing even in our own Western communities. □

Colleen Golafshan is a home educator, massage therapist and member of the Blacktown Church of Christ in Sydney, NSW.
colleen@freah.com.au

So how does a week-long mission trip for youth and young adults (plus some older ones) produce long term benefits for God's kingdom?

International Letter



Angkor of Faith: Long term benefits from a short term mission in Cambodia

Cambodia is a country of great beauty and great sorrow. It is a country with great needs on many levels: economic, employment, health care, education, and emotional healing after the rule of the Khmer Rouge. Human trafficking and prostitution are rife. Most importantly, Jesus is not found in many places in Cambodia.

I became involved with the work in Cambodia when I attended Angkor of Faith (AOF) in 2014 recruiting for the South Pacific Bible College (www.spbc.org.nz). Although I'd been to Cambodia as a tourist before, and had also attended AOF previously on my own accord, 2014 was really the year God opened doors of connection for me. So, let's start at the beginning and discover what AOF is and then see what long term benefits have been birthed from this wonderful short term mission.

AOF is a week-long mission designed for young people to come to Cambodia and serve the street kids of Siem Reap. I quote Robert Reagan, one of the founders of AOF, so that you may be able to understand the initial concept for AOF – and thus explore how long term benefits can come from the (sometimes maligned) notion of 'short term mission': 'Angkor of Faith. The name is a play on words.... Angkor Wat is the name of the ancient temple in Siem Reap. It sounds a lot like the English word 'anchor'. The best way to keep a boat safe during a hurricane is to take it out into the middle of the ocean and throw down a deep anchor. The boat will get tossed around, but it won't get smashed against the docks and other boats in the marina. In the same way AOF has been creating 'anchor experiences' in the lives of hundreds of youth and youth workers throughout Asia... I was mesmerised by the street kids and how well they spoke English. (These kids sell postcards and books to tourists every day at Angkor Wat and on the streets in town). We were planning a Cambodian/Thai retreat and had the idea of making an outreach to these kids part of it. Seventy people signed up for AOF 1. God did amazing things in our midst'

So AOF was born. Street kids, mainly from one village, were fed, de-iced and given hygiene lessons. We played with them, introduced them to Christian songs, and showed Jesus through hands which served with love and kindness.

So how does a week-long mission trip for youth and young adults (plus some older ones) produce long term benefits for God's kingdom? After 10 years of 'outsiders' organising this event, for the first time local Cambodian Christians have taken over its planning and execution. This took courage and faith but they know the needs of their own community better than we ever could. AOF has become an 'anchor' experience for them, allowing them to step out and lead in new ways. Not only have local Christians stepped up, but they are on the organising team with some of the AOF kids who have been attendees for 10 years. One of these girls is now a Christian, and others are believers with a growing faith.

AOF has been building trust with the local village for 10 years now. One of the local church workers has been invited into the village where many of the AOF kids come from and is now teaching children and adults each week about Jesus. This is a non-Christian village yet God has opened doors through the love shown to children on this short term mission. Recently two other villages who also received clothes and care from AOF participants - have allowed local Christians to go and conduct Bible studies with them.

There is a school very close to the village where many of the children live. It is run by a wonderful (non-Christian) Cambodian man who was using his own funds to try and help the local children learn English and thus have a chance at better jobs in the future. We were introduced to the school through AOF and found out that the funds for the school were running out. The situation was getting desperate and, after investigating and researching, my friend Sarah began a child sponsorship programme to enable this school to remain a positive influence in the community. (If you are interested in considering this long term mission work please look at 'Rooted in Love' on Facebook or email Sarah at mrskoby007@yahoo.com)

The Christian influence of the sponsors is apparent in the school now. After discussions between the principal and Sarah, Christians now visit, teach classes and provide material for the classroom. With great pleasure I am also able to say that Christians are providing educational scholarships for these Cambodian children.

None of this would have been possible without God opening doors of service through AOF. Those of us involved in this programme are praying it is an anchor of hope for the children and families who receive the scholarships. We are praying that Jesus becomes an eternal Anchor for souls being taught and loved by Christians from all over the world. We're excited for the many doors of opportunity that have opened through AOF. We're grateful for the faith of the few that stepped out 10 years ago to reach out in love to some beautiful Cambodian children. □



Gill Raine is the Student Affairs Advisor at the South Pacific Bible College in Tauranga, New Zealand. Gill along with her husband Steve and family are a part of the Otumoetai Church of Christ, New Zealand. gill@spbc.org.nz



Feature

Spiritual Attitudes and Practices that Encourage Resilience for Women in Ministry

Why the need for resilience in ministry – and for women in ministry, specifically? If the work we're involved with is ministry and mainly to Christians, shouldn't that inoculate us from many of the problems that occur in the world? Unfortunately, no.

Those whom we serve are human, just like us. They may respond to our ministry as the world would, out of envy (speaking evil of our good) or pride (rejecting our efforts to serve). Because we have high expectations of how Christians will behave and respond to our ministry, we can end up shocked and hurt.

Why women? Because the sort of services women in the church typically perform often go unrecognised or unacknowledged. This is often particularly the case with the work of the wives of preachers, elders and deacons. While we shouldn't serve for the praise of man (heaven forbid! Matthew 6:1-4), it can be wearying when our service is taken for granted.

So, what is resilience? I think it is the ability to recover readily from stressful or traumatic situations. It is the ability to 'bounce back'. It is closely related to fortitude (or endurance or perseverance), which is the mental and emotional strength to face adversity, danger or temptation courageously. (The latter involves the ability to handle adversity well; the former is the ability to *recover from* adversity well.)

What, then, are the spiritual practices and attitudes that help us develop resilience?

The first is prayer. While it is natural to want relief from current stresses and to pray for it, in terms of resilience-building it is better to pray for insight (wisdom) into what it is God wants you to learn from the experience. The lesson may simply be to have a thicker skin, so that we are not hurt in future by similar responses to our ministry. Or the lesson may be to learn better organisational skills.

We should also pray for strength to endure well. Remember, God loves us so very much and wishes for, and knows, what is best for us. Psalm 119:75 reads 'I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me'. While this may only have been how the psalmist felt when he penned these words, he understood there was something he needed to get from the stressful situation he was in. Remember, too, you will be of greater use to God by having endured and being able to bless, comfort and help others who may undergo similar stresses and crises (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Second, develop at least one close relationship within the church. This can be a spouse, a family member or a friend or someone you trust and know loves you but also someone who will not allow you to take yourself too seriously. If you're a preacher's wife, this should be someone other than your husband. (Whether consciously done or not, much of church work is abrogated to fulltime workers, and a husband in that situation probably has enough of a load of his own.) They can encourage and comfort and help share the load as well as share the joys that come from working in ministry. Ecclesiastes says it well:

'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up.' (4:9-10)

A friend can also help you maintain a clear perspective. Being an outsider, they will be able to better assess the situation – it may not be what it first appears or as bad as it seems. Within these relationships, be open to accepting help – trying to cope on your own under the apprehension of not wanting to be a burden just increases the stress.

Third, consider how you might redeem the situation so it works for the good of both you and others involved (Romans 8:28). Try to walk in the shoes of the one causing you stress; find out the reason for their actions – there may be mitigating circumstances. Lessening the focus on yourself and how hurt or weary you feel will help you cope better.

Fourth, make an effort to stay healthy. Eat well and, in particular, get sufficient sleep and rest periods. I have been reading *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* by John Ortberg. He makes the point that it can be hard to think, feel and act like Jesus when we are tired. We cope much better with stress and crises when we are well and rested. Jesus might have stayed up all night praying on a few occasions, but he also napped when he needed it (Luke 8). Learn to discriminate between requests for your participation in church and ministry activities and say 'No' when your plate is already full.

Finally, remember that while some people are naturally more resilient than others, resilience is a quality that can be learned. As with all learned abilities, it may take time to develop. Even though you're trying all the above suggestions, you may still find yourself falling in a heap when faced with new trauma or stress. Persevere. Be patient. It is God's desire that your zeal for ministry burn bright. Resilience can only help this. □

Norainie Bargholz along with her husband, Michael, and sons, Christian and Nicholas, are members of the Eastside Church of Christ, Sydney NSW.
mnbargholz@bigpond.com

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Marriage Mentoring Weekend, Melbourne & Sydney



Melbourne pilot program on Marriage Mentoring

Over the weekend of 11-12 Nov 2016, twelve couples from various congregations in Victoria and Tasmania met together at the Foothills Conference Centre in suburban Melbourne for a pilot Marriage Mentoring Program organised by Klesis. We were very blessed to have Dale Hartman from Oklahoma as the guest speaker assisted by David and Christine Payne from Melbourne facilitating the program. A similar pilot was also held in Sydney the following weekend.

This program is aimed to enrich mature couples who have been married for several years as well as to equip these couples to mentor other married couples. The emphasis of the lesson is that God's character and actions in keeping covenant promises provide the role model for husbands and wives in their marriage covenants. God considered himself 'married' to his people. God institutes marriage for mankind and he wants marriages in this world to reflect that covenant relationship.

The book of Nehemiah was frequently mentioned in this program. Building a strong marriage is much like building up a strong wall. We must first clear away the rubble (anything in modern life that tries to weaken a marriage), invest our personal interest in it and fight for it!

During the retreat, each couple received a confidential feedback report from the Prepare-Enrich Marriage Online Assessment which helped to identify the strength areas and the growth areas of each person. Couples were also introduced to online and other resources – like the 12 Conversations kit – and were encouraged to mentor a younger married couple through supportive friendships and conversations. It was a very uplifting weekend immersed in God's Word and encouraging one another in marriages for God's glory. □

Sarah Zeng sarahsxz@yahoo.com

Camp Challenge 2016

One hundred and forty people headed to Tahmoor NSW for the annual five-day camp. People from six states in Australia, as well as visitors from USA and Hawaii, gathered to follow the tradition of 'Christians having a loving learning encouraging nurturing godly experience!'

The guest speaker, Kent Hartman, did a fantastic job of leading us in the theme: 'Tell me the story of Jesus'. We were certainly encouraged and motivated to use our story and experiences with Christ and his church to influence others. The children too had fantastic and engaging Bible classes.

From one-year olds to grandparents, we listened to God's Word, sang together, laughed and cried, played sports and ate fantastic meals! Some afternoon activities included swimming, tie-dying shirts, baking, picturesque bush walks or just relaxing and enjoying fellowship with one another.

The evening activities were fun for all ages and helped people to get to know each other better. There were so many highlights, but what had to top it all this year was being witness to a wedding proposal! Dale Christensen from Victoria got down on one knee and proposed to Gina Kembrey, and she accepted!

This camp is always a great way to start the new year surrounded by godly people and encouraging Christian fellowship! □

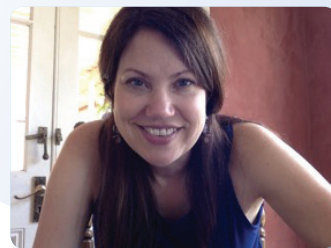
Claire Tickner clairedybear@hotmail.com



Dale Christensen & Gina Kembrey



Tenaciously nurture your personal relationship with God. Make it your number one priority above everything else.



Tell me a little bit about your ministry. How has it changed over the years?

When Brad and I began our ministry journey years ago it was important for us to influence prayerfully the people God placed in our path toward a deeper understanding of and commitment to God, no matter where they were in their faith walk. Drawn to young people and desiring to see a generation of young Christians grow into a mature and lasting faith – especially after having seen many fall away from God – we were blessed with opportunities to lead Bible studies, retreats, youth and young adult camps, and teaching of this age group in local congregations we were a part of. It was such a blessed time!

Over the years, our ministry began to take on a new face: a focus on reaching out in a special way to those who ‘slipped through the cracks’. We recognised the challenge of stepping further out of our comfort zone to minister and share the Gospel in broader circles. With another couple, we initiated a ministry in inner city Brisbane, hoping to connect with university students and local young professionals to share Jesus with them by doing what was familiar, but in a very different environment.

As we moved in this direction, God gently but firmly shifted our focus even further: sending underprivileged members of West End’s city streets through the door of our rented meeting space. We slowly learnt to minister to those God sent, while encouraging young disciples to come along with us. This network of young people was a wonderful resource, as many were keen to share their faith.

The result, over time, is a vibrant and growing congregation that continues to be a training ground for practical Christianity. West End is a benevolent ministry to people who, for the most part, do not know God and are walking in brokenness – a brokenness that shows. This has been one of the richest experiences we have had in ministry, changing our perspective of the role of the local congregation dramatically and benefitting us so very much in our own faith walk. This ministry continues to be a walk of faith every week!

We have also become deeply involved in ministry to indigenous Australians in remote areas. These two ministries have many similarities in their focus on ‘the least of these’ (Matthew 25:40). God has taught our family so much about going ‘into the world’ to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15). Meeting people in their own circumstances and sharing the hope that we have in Christ is wonderfully fulfilling and extremely humbling. We still have much to learn and are excited about the changes God will bring about in us as he challenges us further!

What have you found to be the most satisfying aspect of your walk with God?

This would have to be the privilege of bearing witness to the way he heals and transforms people and being the recipient of that transformation myself. The sheer power of his love to heal brokenness completely and bring health to relationships that were once toxic and hopeless fills my spirit more than any other single aspect of my walk with him.

Tell us about your ministry challenges.

Some of the biggest challenges I have faced and continue to face in ministry are:

- Keeping things in the correct perspective regarding who God is and who I am not, to give way to his work and to be obedient in mine;

- Forgiving over and over; and
- Saying ‘no’ sometimes.

What advice would you give to Christian women contemplating fulltime ministry?

Tenaciously nurture your personal relationship with God. Make it your number one priority above everything else. Never stop learning about the nature of God: who he is and what he does. Challenge and grow your faith. Feast on his Word. Worship. Be hungry for his presence. Pray. Recognise what he has done for you, remembering it often. Be thankful.

How has God surprised you in your journey of faith?

There are not many ways God has NOT surprised me! A few of my wow moments are: God has surprised me by calling me into situations where I have been utterly ill-equipped and then equipped me through a completely unexpected source; he surprises me by using people who do not profess to have faith at all to challenge my own faith to grow stronger; and he surprises me by pointing out and changing my own poor attitudes by covering me with love instead of judgement.

God continues to surprise me by providing what is needed at just the right time, when I didn’t even know yet that there was a need. He surprises me by teaching me deep biblical truths through the questions of a child. He also surprises me by the questions he has answered and the ones he has not – and giving me peace about both.

What are your dreams for the future?

I wish to see my son grow into a wise, godly man of integrity, pleasing to God and living in freedom through Christ. I dream of growing old with my husband knowing that we have done what God has asked of us and served him with integrity.

I hope to see the Australian church flourish and grow, with humble, godly leaders who encourage humble, godly followers to use their God-appointed gifts generously to build up the body of Christ. This includes being part of a culture of honour within a local congregation where we trust God enough to be vulnerable and love each other deeply.

It’s my dream to see remote indigenous communities in Australia healed by God’s love and firmly planted in Christ, spreading the Gospel in their specific areas of influence. And to see the Lord’s church make a marked impact in the community by meeting the needs of the poor and underprivileged. Finally, I wish to be more like Jesus tomorrow than I am today. □

Ronya Johnson is married to Brad and they have one son. They live in Brisbane and minister to the West End church and to indigenous communities in northern New South Wales. Ronya was interviewed by Christine Payne. johnson.ronya@gmail.com