

InterSections



Editorial

Welcome to the August 2014 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue marks 5 years since the journal was first published. We are thankful to God for the way he has blessed us in this work. We would also like to recognise the contribution of the many gifted writers whose articles have challenged and inspired us over these years. Of course, all this activity would be meaningless without the support of all our loyal readers. *InterSections* aims to be a tool for encouraging the brethren and fostering communication between churches, and we trust we have lived up to that goal.

In this issue we take a look at mental illness. The subject of mental illness and those affected by it, often dwells in the shadows of our society and our churches. God has a special concern for the sick and lowly (Matt 5:3-12; 25:34-40), so we shine a spotlight on this often misunderstood issue. In our *Feature* article, Steve Wilson looks at what the Bible has to say about mental illness, especially depression and anxiety. In our *Food for Thought*, Jenny Ancell offers some practical suggestions for helping those who suffer from a mental illness.

Tom Bunt, who served many years in Perth, Brisbane and PNG, passed away in February this year, and we feature a tribute to his long and passionate life. Mary Nelson writes an *International Letter* from New Zealand about her work creating Bible school resources for children around the world. We interview Stuart and Lyn Penhall about their lives and ongoing service in the church. We share some news from Westchurch in Sydney about their recent appointment of elders, and also hear about the MSOBS Lectureship and a reflection on the first 10 years of ACCET (Australian Church of Christ Evangelistic Trust).

We hope that you find this issue thought-provoking and we look forward to continuing this journey with you in the years to come.

The editorial team.



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*Why are you down in the
dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God -
soon I'll be praising again.
He puts a smile on my face.
He's my God.*

Psalms 43:5, The Message

According to a 2007 Australian Bureau of Statistics national survey, one in five Australians aged 16-85 experience a mental illness in any given year.¹ The most common mental illnesses are depressive, anxiety and substance use disorders. These often occur together or in comorbidity (e.g. sufferers of depression may also suffer from anxiety and/or substance abuse).

Feature

Mental illness and the Bible

Mental health organisations such as Beyondblue and Black Dog Institute routinely claim that 45% of all Australians can expect to experience a mental illness in their lifetime. They also say that the prevalence of mental illness is increasing. All these issues suggest it is timely to consider some biblical insights regarding mental health generally, and depression and anxiety in particular.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results* (2007).

It is important that Christians avoid the temptation to be simplistic in their understanding of mental health. Fear and ignorance leading to the stigmatisation of those with a mental illness is common enough in our society. Christians should not add to the burden of believers suffering from mental illness by carelessly equating mental illness with a deficiency in faith.

Many forms of mental illness have biological antecedents and/or repercussions (e.g. inherited genetic dispositions and chemical imbalances in the brain). They require medical intervention just like any other physical illness. Some forms of mental illness are more directly linked to psychological and environmental causes. Traumatic experiences and personal tragedies (including physical, emotional or sexual abuse; especially in childhood) can also give rise to mental illness.

Given the dynamic and inter-dependent relationship between our body, mind and spirit, as well as the complex interaction between nature and nurture that is unique to each individual's history, the whole issue of cause and effect with regard to a person's mental health can be complicated to say the least. Humility should lead us to be cautious before apportioning blame when it comes to a person's mental illness or any other form of suffering. Let's not make the same mistake as Job's unhelpful friends.

Bible References

The Bible makes few direct references to mental illness. Nebuchadnezzar was temporarily afflicted with a rare psychiatric disorder (boanthropy). It was apparently allowed by Yahweh to teach the Babylonian king humility (Daniel 4:1-37). King Saul was troubled by a 'distressing spirit from God' and only found relief through the young David's skilful artistry with the harp (1 Samuel 16:14-23). This troubling spirit came upon Saul after the Spirit of God departed from him – signifying God's rejection of Saul as king (1 Samuel 15:11, 26; 16:1, 12-13). Was this some form of depressive and/or anxiety disorder, perhaps brought on by Saul's experience of grief and loss?

It seems certain that king David and his contemporaries were familiar with symptoms of insanity or psychosis, for David was able to convincingly fake madness to escape his enemies (1 Samuel 21:10-15). David's psalms of lament are replete with expressions of his own sadness and anxiety that periodically brought him to the point of despair. Sometimes David's sadness was provoked by guilt and godly sorrow for his sin. Sometimes his disheartenment was the result of opposition and threats from his enemies. Sometimes David's melancholia flowed from his fear of being abandoned by God.

David appears to have been a passionate person whose mood swings were extremely broad, ranging from despairing lows (e.g. Psalms 6; 38 and 51) to exuberant highs (e.g. Psalms 27 and 138; 2 Samuel 6:14). Also consider Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-10), Jonah (Jonah 4), Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:1-18), and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3-5). Any or all of these persons could arguably have suffered from a depressive and/or anxiety disorder at certain times in their life.

But the tentative and speculative nature of the preceding observations highlight a difficulty surrounding much of what we call mental illness today. At what point does normal sadness and healthy fear or stress become a mental illness warranting a diagnosis of depressive and/or anxiety disorder? Typically, the answer relates to duration (experiencing a low mood for two consecutive weeks or more) and degree of disability (having a significantly negative impact on a person's normal functioning and quality of life).

Although explicit references to mental illness appear rarely in the Bible, there is much to glean from Scripture about mental health generally. This is true especially for those conditions driven largely by environmental and psychological factors such as mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

It is safe to assume that in the beginning (Genesis 1-2) the first human pair – made in the image of God and deemed very good – enjoyed perfect mental health. Following their rebellion against God, the corrupting influence of sin brought brokenness and dysfunction to humanity (along with the rest of creation, Romans 8:18-25). The Creator's image bearers now reflect a damaged and distorted image.

Consequently, the human experience is now characterised by shame and fear and blaming (Genesis 3:1-13). This quickly manifests as pride, alienation and violence on an individual, family and national scale (Genesis 3-11). Thus our fallen world provides the perfect recipe for all manner and degree of suffering – including mental illness.

As Australian society increasingly marches to the tune of secularism, materialism and self-centred consumerism, one might anticipate a corresponding increase in all manner of psychological and social dis-ease. A climate of selfish competition creates winners and (mostly) losers. Hostility, alienation, isolation, insecurity and a sense of victimhood often follow. A godless society is, at the end of the day, a society without meaningful or authentic hope and purpose. No wonder more and more Australians are turning to illicit drugs, alcohol, prescribed medications, pornography, retail therapy, and other addictions to numb the pain of our existence. No wonder more and more of us are going crazy!

Recovery

Of course, the path to recovering and maintaining the best possible degree of mental health in this fallen world lies in our being born again (John 3:5-8; Acts 2:38) and being restored to the image of God as apprentices of the One who is the 'express image of God' (Colossians 1:9-23; cf. Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Matthew 11:27-30; 28:18-20; John 10:9-10).

Space limitations demand that I be brief, but I want to conclude by suggesting a few biblical themes and spiritual disciplines crucial to good mental health:

- First and foremost, be reconciled to God through his Son (Acts 2:36-39; Romans 6:1-13; Ephesians 2:1-10). Through Jesus' atoning death on the cross, all of humanity can be reconciled to God and freed from the guilt and bondage of sin. Forgiveness (justification) and the gift of God's Spirit (sanctification) empower us to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26; cf. Ephesians 5:10-17). This is the beginning of the peace of mind, purpose and hope that promotes sound mental health.

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Feature cont. *Mental illness and the Bible*

- Be diligent in practising prayer, fellowship, confession and repentance (Matthew 6:9-15; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9-2:6) and you will keep loneliness and guilt at bay.
- Be generous with dispensing grace and forgiveness and, wherever possible, seek reconciliation and peace with everyone (Matthew 5:21-26; 6:14-15; Romans 12:17-21).
- Live by the golden rule (Matthew 5:43-48; 7:12; 22:37-40; John 13:1-17, 34-35) and you will avoid the many pitfalls of self-absorption while developing the heart of a servant.
- Foster spiritual priorities and ministry and you can trust God to take care of the rest (Matthew 6:24-34).
- Nurture an attitude of gratitude, rejoice by choice and you can find contentment and peace regardless of

your circumstances (Ephesians 5:15-20; Philippians 4:4-13; Colossians 3:15-17).

- Memorise portions of encouraging Scripture and recite them often (Psalm 23 probably should be on top of everyone's list).
- You are God's beloved (worth dying for!) and God is on your side. Always remember those truths and you will never suffer from low self-esteem (Romans 8:31-39 ... better add that passage to your memory list).

And don't neglect your physical well being (1 Corinthians 19-20; 1 Timothy 4:8; 5:23; 3 John 2). We are embodied spirits. What affects one part of us affects the other parts. So let us eat well. Sleep well. Exercise well. And don't dismiss the appropriate use of prescribed medication, including anti-depressants (1 Timothy 4:8; 5:23). ■

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Tribute to Tom Bunt (1925 - 2014) ❄️ "Till we meet"

Tom was born in 1925 in Holland and grew up during the Second World War. At the end of the war Tom married Rensina (Rens) Schouten. Tom and Rens were married for 67 years before his passing on the 10 February 2014.

Following the war, Tom and Rens spent some time in Indonesia before returning to Holland. Coming back to a cold, wet climate caused them to think that there must be a country with a better climate to live in and raise a family. So in 1952, with two young daughters – Hilde and Elly – the decision was made and the journey began which would change their lives forever. 'Let's make Australia home.' And this they did.

Arriving in Perth, WA, in October 1952, Tom immediately set about searching for work to support the family and to begin to be an Aussie. There were some obstacles along the way, including the unfamiliar language and a lack of trade skills (he was a policeman in Holland and was also in the Dutch army). But, with Tom, where there was a will there was a way. He soon found work as a general hand in a hospital. Then he tried other areas of work before moving into concreting work.

In 1956, with a further addition to the family (Michael), Tom and Rens decided to move the family to Brisbane to pursue more work opportunities and see more of Australia. Then in 1959 the family became complete with the arrival of their fourth child, Mary.

Whilst on a building site in Brisbane, Tom met Bill Selbourne, a member of the Holland Park Church of Christ. Tom was a member of the Dutch Reformed church and entered into a religious discussion with Bill. Being passionate about what he believed, Tom saw this as an opportunity to try and get Bill to become interested in his church. Many Bible discussions and studies followed with Bill and also Carmello Casella, the preacher for the Holland Park church. Eventually, the tables were turned. Tom and Rens were baptised into Christ on 3 February 1963. This was the beginning of a long and passionate call serving Christ in whatever way they could.

After ten years being actively involved with the church at Holland Park, and with Hilde and Elly both married, Tom and Rens with Michael and Mary returned to Perth. They were active first with the City Beach church and then the Embleton church. It was at this time that Tom and Rens developed a desire to do more and accepted the challenge to move to Papua New Guinea and take the Gospel to people who were begging to hear the message of Jesus.

With limited finances, but with great faith and desire to do the Lord's work, Tom and Rens went to PNG in 1977 to begin the passion of their lives: working with the PNG people. This passion remained till Tom's passing.

Tom's ill health forced them to return to Australia in 1984. But his passion for the PNG work never waned. If anything, it grew stronger. Tom made return visits to PNG every two years (14 visits up until 2011). Eventually, his health prevented making any more visits.

Tom encouraged others to accompany him on several trips, developing their own passion for the PNG people. These mission trips are still continuing under the leadership of Steve Collins from the Warwick church in Queensland. Such was Tom's passion and commitment to the work that he helped to plan and coordinate the 2013 mission trip to PNG from his sick bed.

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Food for Thought

Responding to mental illness

Throughout history, various schools of thought have attempted to explain the cause of mental illness. These explanations influence society's treatment of the mentally ill. For example, God delivering an evil spirit on King Saul causing a pathological jealousy was used in rabbinic literature to suggest the association of sin with mental illness¹. In 460 BC Hippocrates believed that behaviour was influenced by bodily substances and an excessive amount of a particular substance could influence mental instability such as depression, anxiety or rapid mood swings. Treatment involved the draining of these excess fluids from the body.

During the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD) mentally ill people were regarded as being under the influence of the devil and multitudes of afflicted people were burnt at the stake in an attempt to drive the devil out. In the Renaissance confining facilities were developed where mentally ill persons were often chained to walls or floors and the cure included severe discipline carried out in prison-like conditions.

In the late eighteenth century, treatment began to be less punitive. There was recognition that kindness and therapeutic endeavour proved more successful than the use of whips or chains. The later work of Sigmund Freud and scientific rationalism was influential in the distancing of religious influence on psychiatry.

The cause of mental illness has been a controversial subject for many Christians. Some have thought that mental illness is a by-product of sin and that restoring mental health could simply involve becoming obedient to the Word of God. Depression and anxiety may be perceived as a lack of trust in God. The negative symptom of apathy in some types of schizophrenia may be judged as laziness. A closer look at the cause of mental illness however, reveals that there are a variety of factors for which a person may not be responsible: genetics, medical reasons, early childhood losses or family dysfunction. How then can a Christian respond in supporting a person dealing with mental illness?

Some suggested responses

Obtaining specific information about the illness enables a Christian to deal sensitively with the person and struggle ahead. There are many types of mental illness. The more severe disorders such as schizophrenia and psychosis involve serious alterations in thinking, perception and judgment. The mood disorders such as depression and bipolar affective disorder involve a severe change in mood. The personality disorders involve deeply ingrained patterns of behaviour which can cause relationship difficulties throughout adult life.

The Christian's willingness to accompany a person to a doctor or mental health service and ask advice on how best to support a person reveals a measure of love that will not easily be forgotten. Christ himself praises these types of actions when he said: 'I was sick and you visited me...' and '...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me' (Matthew 25:36-40).

Listening to someone 'unburden' their anxieties can also relieve the suffering. I have noticed the impact of simply listening to a patient can have a transformative effect on a person's outlook. Feelings of validation, acceptance and a confidence that one can possibly survive the illness become noticeable in the person. No wonder we are instructed to cast our cares on the Great Physician: he listens, he cares and provides a way through the raging storm. The act of respectful listening can be therapeutic for the person.

The need for people who can offer confidentiality and moral support becomes even more crucial when a person faces the crisis of a mental illness. Psalm 88, for example, reveals David's reactive depression when he faces the loneliness and mental anguish of fleeing King Saul. David reveals his longing for support from his loved ones – those who were 'safe people'. These were friends who believed in him, appreciated the mortal dangers he faced and protected his vulnerable position. Having 'safe people' helps maintain the integrity of the person whilst they are unwell.

Moving forward

The duration of some mental illnesses are brief, while some will accompany the person to the grave. A Christian may have to make courageous decisions against a person's expressed wishes if there is a temporary loss of mental capacity. In the case of a psychiatric emergency, calling mental health professionals provides the acute, expert help which the person needs. Here, it's important to recognise that lay people face limitations when it comes to diagnosing and recognising symptoms of mental illness.

The pendulum is now swinging back in psychiatry. There is a growing recognition that a person's spiritual faith has a positive effect on managing mental illness. For this reason, many mental health practitioners are now treating the whole person with an awareness of their spiritual beliefs². Likewise, Christians can strengthen a person's spiritual resources in a time of illness, knowing this will have a positive effect. In everything, our great example is Jesus who 'took up our infirmities and carried our diseases' (Isaiah 53:4). ■

- 1 E. L. Loschen, 'Psychiatry and Religion: A Variable History' 13 *Journal of Religion and Health* (1974, No 2) 137-141.
- 2 H. G. Koenig, 'Religion, Spirituality and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications' (International Scholarly Research Network) *ISRN Psychiatry* (2012), Article ID 278730.

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Tribute to Tom Bunt cont.



Terry and Elly Gill are members of The Point Church in Brisbane. Elly is one of Tom's daughters. telagill@spin.net.au

One of Tom's final wishes was for his library to be shipped to Lae, PNG, so that students in the Melanesia Bible College and the local preachers and teachers there could have access to more teaching and educational material. Michael fulfilled that wish by selling Tom's car. With the proceeds, about 500 kg of Tom's books were shipped to Lae. The remaining money was sent to be used for the work of the Lord in PNG.

Tom was a passionate man in what he believed and what he did. In his later

years he was active with the Point Church in Brisbane. He was preaching, teaching and serving whenever and wherever he could until a few months of his going to be with the Lord. He was also very much a family man. He left behind a large family whom he loved. He is survived by his wife Rens (who recently turned 101), four children, twelve grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.

Tom has gone to receive his reward and is missed by family and friends. As Tom would say each time we left him, 'Till we meet! ■

News

[Link to Lectureship photos](#)

MSOBS Lectureship 2014

This year is the 17th year my family and I have trekked up from Melbourne to the Macquarie School of Biblical Studies Lectureship in Sydney. As usual we enjoyed a great time of fellowship and spiritual nourishment. Every year we look forward to strengthening the bonds we have developed there.

Around 20 congregations were represented during the course of the lectureship. We heard lessons from various brethren about 'Faith in Operation', spurring us on to put our faith into practice. Russell Bell also presented insights about the work in India, having worked there for many years. On Saturday there were separate classes for men, women and youth with panels sharing practical ways to help develop the faith of others.

Young children too were ably catered for too during all the daytime sessions. They were taught stories of faith from the Scriptures. During one lesson, the adults could hear the walls of Jericho falling down as the children marched around with their handmade swords and trumpets.

We are greatly blessed by the Macquarie congregation who work hard each year to arrange speakers and song leaders, prepare an abundance of delicious lunches and refreshments, provide accommodation, teach the children – and the list goes on... See you there next year, Lord willing. ■

Lesley Christensen, South-East Church of Christ, VIC.
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HARDING SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Hogan-Cate Asian Missions Sabbatical

2014 Sabbatical recipient: Ong Kok Bin, Seremban Church of Christ, Malaysia

2013 Sabbatical recipient: Tan Beng Chuan, Pasir Panjang Church of Christ, Singapore

Harding School of Theology invites applications for the annual Hogan-Cate Asian Missions Sabbatical. The sabbatical is made possible by the Hogan-Cate Endowed Asian Missions Fund established at Harding University in honour of longtime missionaries to Asia, Gordon & Jane Hogan and Steve & Jean Cate.

The sabbatical recipient will be an accomplished male or female missionary, church worker or ministry leader from among *acappella* Churches of Christ in Asia, Australia and the South Pacific. The sabbatical period is 3-5 months commencing from August.

Whilst based largely at HST in Memphis, Tennessee, the sabbatical recipient will also spend time at the main campus of Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. Funds may be used to cover airfare, food and accommodation, HST tuition fees (audit or credit), visiting churches and ministries and participation in the Harding University Bible Lectureship for spiritual renewal and to promote missions in Asia.

An information sheet and application form are available from www.hst.edu and applications should be emailed to dean@hst.edu as early as possible, ideally before 1 December in the year preceding the sabbatical.

Harding School of Theology

1000 Cherry Road | Memphis, Tennessee 38117, USA | (901) 761-1350
1-800-680-0809 | Fax (901) 761-1358 | www.hst.edu

Eldership Weekend, Perth 31 Oct – 1 Nov 2014 (Fri-Sat) Malaga Church of Christ, Perth, WA



Organised by Klesis Institute, this is a special time for elders & prospective elders and their wives to pause, reflect, share, encourage one another and be uplifted.

At this stage, we're expecting participants from various congregations including Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Singapore and New Zealand. Also coming is our guest, Evertt Huffard, a missiologist, former elder and current dean of Harding School of Theology, Memphis, USA. ■

Inquiries: Alan Rowley (rowley@klesis.com.au 0419 264 931)



International Letter

Mission Bible Class – a Global Ministry

For years I have been writing children's Bible lessons and sharing them with others. The bulk of this writing was done during the process of creating curriculum for the Otumoetai Church of Christ in Tauranga, New Zealand. In 2011, I began migrating basic lessons and resources to an online blog. This included over 170 bible stories, simple background study material, Scripture references, relevant games and activities. I taught myself how to use Wordpress and even dabbled reluctantly in html code. I even lost all pride and posted videos of myself singing - so teachers could learn children's songs!

So Mission Bible Class was born. What began as a timid attempt to help Christians in mission locations and small congregations quickly exploded into an active global ministry.

The number of MBC website visitors has risen each year on www.missionbibleclass.org and the site now averages over 2,000 page hits per day. Since the site was first published in May 2011 it has been accessed by people in over 200 countries. There have been over 1.6 million page views in all. I am still amazed by how many people are in need of such basic help.

Why is this so? The reason is probably because churches and individuals around the world desire what is best for children but, when it comes to spiritual matters, many are sometimes at a loss to know where to begin. The vision of MBC is this: Christians around the world equipped to value and spiritually nurture children.

The mission is to:

- Equip individuals and churches globally through free online resources at www.missionbibleclass.org as well as provide training seminars in strategic locations.
- Mentor and provide consultation for those interested in the spiritual development of children in mission situations.
- Promote God's plan for passing the faith on from one generation to the next.

Teachers around the World

My intention has always been that people who use the website resources tweak them to their own local cultural situations. Africa International Missions has included children's lessons on the life of Christ into a CD that they distribute among larger Churches of Christ, house churches and others throughout Africa. Wycliffe Bible translators in Indonesia have asked permission to use the material as a basis for children's Bible lessons – to be translated into local languages and used in 170 churches in Indonesia.

The free resources are not limited to those who teach formal Bible classes or Sunday school. Other users have included: parents who want to share God's Word with their children; home-schoolers; small group leaders; and those involved in short-term missions. Christians running orphanages or camps have also accessed the website to help them provide biblical training in addition to their other services.

Feedback

Here's what website users are saying:

- *'Here we struggle with every kind of difficulty regarding study material. Your site...provided me access to life-changing content.'* Website user, Brazil
- *'... so useful in planning for our small group of children of mixed ages and abilities and with limited resources. Thank you so much for your very sensible and practical ideas.'* Website user, United Kingdom
- *'I find that the lessons are designed and presented with small churches in mind.'* Website user, Australia
- *'Now I am teaching songs to the kids in our prayer group here in Saudi Arabia.'* Website user, Saudi Arabia
- *'I am integrating Bible lessons into my daily lesson plan and I am very thankful for you sharing with us some of your ways in teaching the kids.'* Teacher at a tutorial centre, Philippines

Thanks for allowing me to share some of the ways God is working through MBC. I'll leave *InterSections* readers with one challenge. There are many wonderful teachers of children's Bible classes in Australia. I know because I have met some of you. If you would like to help other teachers around the world then please visit the MBC website and add your own teaching ideas to the comment sections in the bible lessons. Your helpful ideas will travel the world. ■

*Mary Nelson and her husband, David Nelson, are members of the Otumoetai Church of Christ, Tauranga, New Zealand.
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Photo-link
Mary teaching

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On 2 June 2013 the Westchurch congregation in Sydney appointed five elders. The overall process took about six months. It began with extensive discussions within the congregation about eldership. When the congregation showed that it was in favour of pursuing an eldership, substantial public teaching followed. The congregation was then asked to reflect on what the New Testament tells us about elders and to nominate privately men whom they believed could fulfil this role. A number of men were approached and, once they agreed to stand, the congregation was given time for final reflection. Overall, the process was godly and mature, and reflected an attitude of 'honouring one another in Christ' (Romans 15:7).



As to the day itself, Rudy Wyatt, who helped start the Embleton church in Perth in the 1960s, penned the following words:

'Sunday night 2 June 2013 was a special time for the Westchurch congregation which meets on Sundays at the Kellyville Community Centre in Sydney. After communion, five men – Simon Bodley, Geordie Barham, Mark Johnson, Graham Ogle and Bryen Willems – were welcomed as elders of the congregation. I installed the men as shepherds over the flock. Challenges given to the five men were accepted by them as they began their work of shepherding. The congregation was also challenged to follow their shepherds, thus making the elder's leadership a joy and not burdensome. These challenges were unanimously accepted by the congregation.' ■

Stuart Plaskett, Westchurch, NSW. stuart.plaskett@gmail.com

ACCET: 10 Years of Service

The Australian Church of Christ Evangelistic Trust (www.accet.org.au), or ACCET as it has become known, had its 10th anniversary in May this year and we would be remiss if we let that pass without sharing how far we have come. Through the generosity of Christians just like you, ACCET was able to start distributing grants to congregations earlier than planned. Over the past seven years, grants have been made to 12 congregations to enable 15 men to remain in full-time work and support their families.

Spreading the Gospel, encouraging the local church, reaching out to people who need Jesus – this is all made possible because people like you and me believe that we can make a difference to evangelism in Australia. We make that difference through our gifts to ACCET. I can confirm that not only do we make a difference to evangelism, but we also make a difference in the lives of those men and their families who are serving God in a financially supported capacity.

To date ACCET has given \$120,000 in grants. We will make a further \$20,000 in grants available for 2015. All this because of the generosity of Christians just like you. Thank you for 10 years of wonderful service. ■

David Mowday, NSW, on behalf of the Trustees of ACCET. dmowday@gmail.com



10 Years Serving Australian Churches

The Australian Church of Christ Evangelistic Trust has now been in operation for a decade.

May 2014 saw the arrival of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Trust. Over those 10 years and through the generosity of Christians just like you, ACCET has helped to support:

- 15 men and their families as they worked in
- 12 congregations.
- through the distribution of over \$120,000

to keep these men working in God's service all across this great country.

There is a very real possibility that your life has been touched by one of these men or their families.

Matching Program

To mark the tenth anniversary, friends of the Trust have very generously agreed to match every dollar donated between now and 31st December 2014, up to \$15,000.

This means that every dollar you donate now becomes two dollars at the end of the year!

This is your chance to impact the spread of the gospel in Australia and support families as they serve God in their local congregations. Make a donation today!



Bill code: 107748
Reference: 100016

www.accet.org.au
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VIC 3116, Australia





Can we begin by each of you telling us a bit about your journey to become a Christian, how you met and a little about your family?

Our journeys to God could not be more different. I (Stuart) grew up in the Church of Christ and was baptised when I was 12 during an open air campaign at the Macquarie congregation in Sydney in 1969. Lyn grew up in a non-Christian household and left home early. She lived a 'wild' life until she was converted at City Beach church in Perth. We met at the Macquarie church where my family attended and where Lyn was enrolled at Macquarie School of Preaching (now Macquarie School of Biblical Studies). My mother tried to get the two of us together which I resisted. It was not until a year later that we began to date. One thing led to another and we were married in August 1979 at Macquarie. Our first child was born in late 1981 with Down syndrome. This was a pivotal point in our lives which changed almost everything and was the beginning of a very different journey to God.

Stuart, how do you see your current role as minister with the Gosford congregation?

My current role at Gosford is in a state of transition due to a variety of factors. I have always sought to keep ministry and leadership as separate as possible to ensure reasonable balance. But this position is proving impossible to maintain in recent times which necessitates further changes in my role.

Having been part of various congregations for several decades – often in leadership roles – how do you view the state of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia as we strive to restore New Testament faith and practice? What positive signs do you see and what challenges lie ahead?

I must choose my words very carefully in answering this question. Firstly let me say that there are some bright spots. The work being done by Brad Johnson in Brisbane among the urban youth and in western NSW among Aboriginal people is inspirational. The efforts to reach the disadvantaged in inner city areas of Melbourne through the SALT foundation and the Cornerstone church are heart-warming. The willingness of congregations such as those in Malaga (Perth) and Western Sydney to engage refugees, other ethnic communities and the world with the Gospel provides hope. ACCET trust is also providing a way forward in terms of funding support and special projects.

While these are encouraging, they do not alter what I see as a general downward trend. We face the loss of as many as a quarter of our congregations simply through attrition – the result of an ageing membership. I see increasing ignorance of the Bible in many congregations as people have not been adequately taught. As very few people are being trained in Bible, can we say that there is little real hope that this will change? Increasingly, some churches also seek to maintain their existing traditions and beliefs rather than the principle of restoring New Testament faith and practice. Worst, many of us have lost our evangelistic zeal and busy ourselves with programs for ourselves – giving the illusion of strength and vitality – but do little to reach the lost.

Shifting back to the home, your family has challenges and upheavals – perhaps more than its fair share. Can you describe how you felt as you faced these situations? What has enabled you to remain faithful in the face of those challenges?

Disaster visited my family long before Lyn and I married. My father died when I was 18 and within two years all my grandparents were dead. The birth of Jennifer with Down syndrome was testing, as have been struggles with drug addiction and alcoholism among our children. Add to this a failed marriage, miscarriages and the birth of our first grandchild with almost no eye sight – and you could say that we have had more than our fair share of troubles.

How did we survive all this spiritually? A healthy appreciation of the nature of God is probably the answer. I realised early that the simplistic and superficial concepts of a nice God were not reflected in Scripture. Also the realisation that no matter how hard is our experience here it is fleeting compared to eternity. This has always kept us focused on the reason for our faith: we want to go to heaven. Life's tragedies simply make that goal more desirable.

We have a loose theme in this issue of InterSections around mental health. This isn't a topic which Christians often talk about. From your perspective, how can Christians address more appropriately mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as other serious issues like eating disorders and self-harm?

This is a difficult subject. The treatment of people with mental disorders is not to be taken lightly. If someone is suspected of suffering from such a malady they need to be referred to suitable professionals. All too often we have seen well-meaning people do more damage than good with their misguided efforts to help. Probably the best thing we can do is to be there for sufferers and treat them as normal people despite their often disturbing behaviours. Jesus dealt with such people with compassion, love, forgiveness and, most importantly, acceptance. So should we.

What insights and parting words would you like to share with our InterSections readers to encourage us all in our spiritual walk with the Lord?

We all need to accept the challenge inherent in Jesus' prayer of John 17. Not just that we should be united (21-23), but that we must also be 'in the world' (14-18). We will never reach the people of the world if we do not spend time with them. We must stop our practice of being insulated from the world. We must embrace the world – not the sin, but the people. Jesus summed this up in the following passage when he said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (Matthew 9: 12-13) ■

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