

THE SCOTS' CHURCH

THE LEAFLET

Spring 2022



IN THIS ISSUE

CITY LIFE | COMMUNITY | DISCOVERY | FAITH



The SCOTS' CHURCH, MELBOURNE

LOCATIONS

The Scots' Church, Melbourne,
77 Russell Street (corner Collins Street), Melbourne
Assembly Hall, Werner Brodbeck Hall, Ground Floor,
156 Collins Street, Melbourne
Assembly Hall, Robert White Hall, First Floor,
156 Collins Street, Melbourne
St. Stephen's, Flemington and Kensington,
26 Norwood Street, Flemington.

WORSHIP SUNDAY:

10.00 am Service, St. Stephen's Church
10.30 am Indonesian Christian Church
(www.icc-melbourne.org), W. Brodbeck Hall
11.00 am Traditional Service, The Scots' Church
5.00 pm ScotsCity, Werner Brodbeck Hall.
Sunday School – held during Sunday morning services
for the Traditional and Indonesian congregations.

MINISTRY TEAM:

Senior Minister Rev Phil Campbell
Minister Pastoral Care Rev Litha Heshusius
Minister, Indonesian Christian Church Rev Christian Tirtha
Minister, St. Stephen's, Flemington Rev Andrew Wong.

MUSIC MINISTRY:

Director of Music Mr Douglas Lawrence AM
Assistant Organist Ms Ria Angelica Polo.

EDITORIAL TEAM, THE LEAFLET:

Rosalie Strother, Phil Campbell and Phil Court.

Welcome to The Scots' Church Melbourne,
and this edition of our quarterly newsletter

THE LEAFLET

ISSUE NO. 1092

You may be reading this edition of The Leaflet because you're visiting Scots' Church, or maybe you've been handed it by a friend - or perhaps you're a regular reader. We hope you'll find it a fresh and enjoyable read.

Scots' Church Melbourne is full of history, and full of life. We look back with thanks at our history, and look forward with excitement. And we love our city. All of those themes are reflected in the contents of this issue.

Beyond our weekly gatherings, we seek to love and serve Jesus by caring for our community. You can read about our work at the Flemington Mission, and learn about the fantastic health care initiative of one of our members. And though we love the great traditions of our faith, you'll see that we're fascinated by the latest scientific breakthroughs too - take a look at the feature articles on the James Webb Space Telescope and the astonishing world of subterranean tree communication.

Our *Christ and Culture* section invites you to consider both the formative, and the ongoing, place of the Christian faith in our 21st century world. Even if you're unpersuaded, these three short essays will be food for thought. Then there's coffee, music and some fascinating Melbourne history as our *City Life* theme invites you to soak up some of the wonderful aspects of living in Melbourne City.

If you're not already part of the Scots' community, we'd be delighted to meet you at any of our Sunday church services. If you want to know more about the Christian faith, or about becoming part of Scots' Church, please don't hesitate to contact us.

1st Floor, 156 Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic, 3000

Tel: (03) 9650 9903/9650 9904

Email: admin@scotschurch.com

Web: www.scotschurch.com

Search for **ScotsCast**, our weekly podcast, on Spotify or Apple.

Rosalie Strother, Phil Campbell, Philip Court - Editorial Team

Cover Image – Big Issue vendor Matt in Bourke St, Melbourne.

IN THIS EDITION

CITY LIFE

- 2 Inside Hamilton
- 5 Tram Stop
- 7 Taking On the Big Issues
- 10 William Barak and Friends
- 13 Melbourne's Best \$1 Coffee
- 15 Let There Be Light

COMMUNITY CARE

- 17 Sharing the Load – Teamwork at Flemington Mission
- 19 Teaching Kids to Care for their Kidneys

DISCOVERY

- 21 Trees That Talk
- 24 Getting the Big Picture

CHRIST AND CULTURE

- 27 Do it Yourself Self.
- 30 Losing Faith?
- 33 The Air We Breathe
- 38 All in the Family

ACTIVITIES

- 42 Wordsearch
- 43 Crossword

Photo Credits

*P 5 Mal Rowe for Melbourne Tram Museum
P 24 First deep field image JWST, July 2022, NASA
P 25 Cartwheel Galaxy JWST, NASA
P 26 Stephan's Quintet JWST, NASA
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INSIDE HAMILTON

Violinist Daniel Lopez is part of the ensemble in the Melbourne production of Hamilton, the musical that has taken the world by storm. Dan shares some behind-the-scenes insights with Phil Campbell ...

Dan, you're a musician playing in the band for Hamilton in the Melbourne Theatre District. But before we ask more about that, tell us a little bit about your personal background.

I grew up in Geelong, and being a Cats supporter in the 90's pretty much set me up to overcome whatever hardship life could throw at me after that! Happy to see the tides turn in the last few years. Dad was (still is) an aircraft engineer and we moved around a bit. Mum loves music and encouraged me in that direction when they discovered I had an ear for it. I've taken on the family tradition of being a nomad and covered the East Coast now, as well as some stints studying and working overseas. Australia's a huge country but small at the same time, especially in the music industry!



Share a little of your professional CV before becoming violinist in the Hamilton band.

Most of my work has been in the classical world. Before Hamilton I was mainly working with the Opera Australia Orchestra, playing seasons at the Opera House or performing on their national tours. I split my time between Sydney and Brisbane, playing with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. I do a fair amount of studio recording work too. Hollywood and Netflix have been sending more of their film scores to be recorded in Australia so there's that kind of session work up in Sydney. I also do some touring with contemporary artists and bands. My wife Eleanor is a cellist and we run an agency putting orchestras together for shows around Australia. It's a varied and somewhat chaotic life and we're lucky to work in the same industry or we'd probably never see each other!

Tell us a little bit about the storyline behind Hamilton. (In 50 words or less!)

An extremely intelligent, hardworking, ambitious and outspoken law student gets swept into the American War of Independence, after which he uses his legal acumen to mould America's economic and political systems into one that he believes it needs to be. He's never far from controversy and there are enough plot twists and ethical / moral dilemmas to keep it interesting.

How do you avoid creative boredom when you're playing the same show every night?

The more you pay attention to the little details, the more variation you'll find. Put every beat, chord, or musical phrase under a microscope and it really is a totally different show every night!

What are some of the highlights of playing in a show like this?

Seeing how the audience connects with the characters and the story. We have little screens so everyone in the band can see the conductor. On the screens we can also see the front row of the audience literally laughing, crying, singing and rapping along. The number of people who know every word to every character is mind blowing! The other highlight is getting to work with a really world class band every night. Melbourne has some amazing musicians and it's a privilege to be able to work with this band.



You've been part of our ScotsCity Church this year. Tell us about that.

Ely and I stumbled across Scots City on the very first night the evening service took place. The highlights for me are seeing a new community develop and grow before our eyes. Often in large communities people can get lost in the crowd, but at ScotsCity it seems like there are a lot of ideas, things to do and in and for the community, and not enough hands to do it. There's a sense that every person can feel useful and valued. Personally it's amazing to see that sense of friendship and community growing among individuals who at first glance seem so different from each other and from so many different walks of life. For an hour out of the week, we can leave our echo chambers and connect with people who are interested in researching some of life's big questions.

What are some of the challenges of being a Christian in the entertainment industry?

For me the evidence that Jesus existed as a historical figure is too compelling to ignore. That fact raises an unending stream of questions about what He said and how His ideas and teachings should affect the way we live in terms of morality, truth and love. The actions of the church, and Christians, throughout history is often in sad contrast to how He lived and taught us to live. For me one challenge of being a Christian is that the voice of conscience becomes a very present part of life. There's an assumption that the presence of conscience is what leads to judgment. But the fact is that Jesus never instructed anyone to judge, only to love. The nuts and bolts of what that means in different situations in life - how to love - is the challenge. ■



Sometimes, city landmarks can open up fascinating glimpses of our history, says Michael North...

In the City of Melbourne there are many interesting landmarks. It may surprise you to know that one of the most meaningful to me is the tram stop opposite Flinders Street Station. It's called the *Robert Risson Memorial* tram stop.

So who was Robert Risson, and why would his memory be meaningful? Major General Sir Robert Risson CB, CBE, DSO, ED was a man who had the strength of his convictions, so that when it seemed the world was against him, and many ridiculed him, and the media belittled him, he stood his ground. Risson, an engineer from Queensland, distinguished himself in World War 2, before a career first in the Brisbane Tramways, then from 1949 as Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board.

His appointment came as many cities in the western world abandoned their tram networks in favour of diesel buses. As the number of cars increased it was claimed that trams, or streetcars as they're called in America, were outmoded. London progressively abandoned its vast tram network, until the last tram ran in 1952. Australian cities did likewise, with the last tram trundling down George Street, Sydney, in 1962. Most other cities did likewise. But not Melbourne.

Powerful forces were at work to scrap the trams, which was backed by opinion pieces in the media. Behind the scenes automotive companies and supportive trade organizations were working to convince tramway operators and the general public

that public transportation using their products, such as oil, fuel, tyres, vehicles and services were the recipe for good service in modern times. In America, where more services were run by private enterprise the tactics were even more aggressive - tram companies were bought out and the services allowed to fall into disrepair so that efficiency demanded replacement by motor vehicles.

This subversive marketing activity was not the only one American industrialists were engaged in at the time. In the 1950s moves were afoot to drive British automotive manufacturers out of the marketplace. Until the mid 50s British vehicles were all over the world - we drove Austin, Morris, Hillman, Humber, Standard, Vauxhall and Jowett cars and trucks named Bedford, Commer, AEC, Leyland. Almost all have vanished. Again, the tactics were to buy out competitors and discontinue them (as with Holden) or to set up manufacturers in countries that could compete price-wise with products that returned profit to America. These vehicles were also marketed to replace trams.

Confronted by such ruthless entrepreneurs, Robert Risson and his board stood firm. Internal sales reports from aggressive companies of the period expressed frustration because the Melbourne Tramways Board was immovable. Not only did Risson stand firm, he taunted those companies and infuriated the protesting public, by not only refusing to replace trams with buses, but by replacing buses with trams on the busy Bourke Street routes and renewing miles of other track elsewhere. He stood resolute when most of the world opposed him.

So has history deemed Robert Risson to have been a foolish man? Sir Robert retired in 1970, by which time the tramway carnage had run its course almost everywhere in the western world - except Melbourne. Systems in most of Eastern Europe and places that were untouched by industrial marketeers remained intact, but cities in most western countries were now tramless - except Melbourne. However, by the time Robert Risson died in 1992 the mood was changing.

Cars took over the cities of the world in the 1950s and 1960s, cluttering kerbsides with parked vehicles and deadlocking the streets. Buses had become just another vehicle in the melee, belching diesel fumes with the four dozen or so passengers having no priority over cars containing a single occupant. Passengers began to demand greater efficiency, reliability and comfort, as well as a cleaner environment - all of which trams were already positioned to provide.

From the mid-90s, cities began to rebuild tracks and new systems came into existence, some on former routes, others engineered to overcome earlier disadvantages. The restoration of services was often carried out at enormous expense. In some cases, instead of trams being banished, cars were given restricted access to city streets. At the last count trams, sometimes redesignated light rail vehicles, operate in nearly 30 American cities, and ten cities in the United Kingdom. In Australia abandoned tramway networks have been rebuilt or new services have been introduced. Once again trams rumble down George Street, Sydney. In Melbourne, the legacy of Robert Risson is seen in the world's largest tramway network. For me the moral of this story is that we should think carefully before discarding our convictions, and I am reminded of that at the end of Elizabeth Street. ■

Before his retirement, Michael North was Administration Manager of The Scots' Church.

TAKING ON THE BIG ISSUES

Louise Campbell introduces Matt, her friendly local vendor of The Big Issue magazine...



I catch up with Matt, my favourite salesman of The Big Issue, on a typical cold, wintry and wet Melbourne afternoon just outside Kmart in Bourke St. He has just finished his day's work, and it's been a much better day than the day before. Matt has just marked his first anniversary of selling The Big Issue - "a magazine produced by an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and creating work opportunities for people experiencing homelessness, marginalisation and disadvantage."

The Big Issue started in the UK in 1991 and hit the streets of Melbourne, outside Flinders St Station in 1996. They not only set people up to sell the magazine but also run social enterprises to create work opportunities for people who are unable to access mainstream work. These include The Big Issue magazine, the Women's Workforce and The Big Issue Classroom, as well as the Community Street Soccer Program.

According to their website, "People come to The Big Issue from a wide range of circumstances, including homelessness, long-term unemployment, intellectual and physical disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency and family breakdown." Their programs provide low-barrier opportunities for people to earn a meaningful income, build their confidence and connect with their community and support networks.

It seems like an excellent model for helping people help themselves, but I also really enjoy the magazine - it's always topical, and the articles are well written and presented. While there are vendors on almost every corner in the CBD, I've decided to become one of Matt's regular clients.

Starting out with the four free copies that The Big Issue provide to new sales people to get them started, these days Matt usually sees a steady stream of sales each time he hits the streets. Matt likes the fact that the magazine is non-profit, non-political and non-religious and is supported by an international media network, so articles are sourced from further afield than just within Australia. The stories are always current, and include reviews, recipes and biographies.

Prior to working with The Big Issue Matt was a handyman, but having been injured in an accident when he was 14, he has endured many surgeries culminating in a hip replacement eleven years ago. "The surgeon suggested I choose a simpler lifestyle to keep my hip working," says Matt. Then after a broken relationship Matt found himself in a downward spiral, and after a period of couch surfing and living in a number of different circumstances Matt eventually applied for an assisted social housing spot and things started to improve. He found work shining shoes in Hosier Lane but was unable to continue this as under council regulations he needed a full business plan and fixed premises. After another tough period, Matt took up art at the drop in centre at Youth Projects when the Covid 19 Pandemic hit. So after lockdown he, like many others you'll meet around Melbourne, became a Big Issue vendor.

Setting up five days a week, Matt has settled on three locations - the corner of Swanston and Little Collins St on Wednesday and Friday, Hardware Lane on Saturday and Sunday mornings, then Kmart in the afternoons. I chat to him regularly outside Kmart on a Thursday when I pick up my copy. Like all vendors, Matt pre-buys copies of the magazine for \$4.50 and sells them on for \$9. This is a world-wide business model.

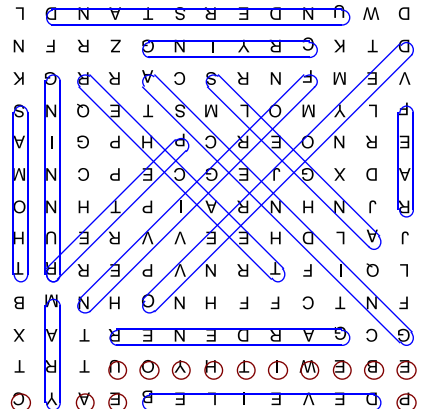
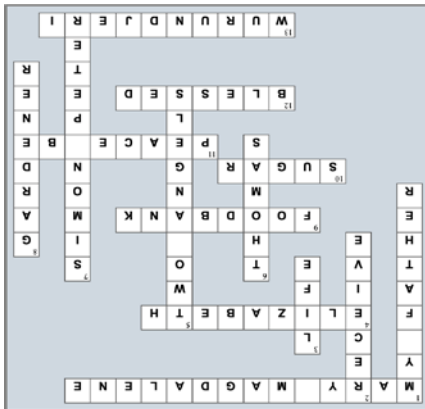
Selling The Big Issue has given Matt a huge lift. “My self worth has gone through the roof,’ says Matt – he’s less anxious, he’s fitter, he doesn’t smoke and drink as much as he’s not just sitting at home, and his electricity bills have gone down. He can even afford to go to the gym!

When you see Matt on Bourke St he’s full of cheer and has developed a friendly sales pitch as he engages with passers-by. Matt isn’t an intrusive salesperson, but a friendly word and his cheeky patter will often lead to a quick chat. His set up is simple: a hand trolley to cart his things, a couple of milk crates to hold his gear, a wooden table and a perspex display for the magazines, plus some trusty Blue-tac to put up posters. As an added touch Matt proudly displays a Ukrainian flag - although Melbourne born and bred, his grandparents were Ukrainian, having met in a work camp before immigrating to Australia in the early 1950s.

The downsides of being a Big Issue salesman? Sometimes people are abusive, says Matt. Occasionally, he’s felt threatened. But equally, just being ignored as if he doesn’t exist can be hurtful. The slow, cold wet days are hard but the good weeks and the friendships he’s made balance this out. As he says, it doesn’t take much for people to give you a smile and some words of encouragement!

But for Matt the upsides of selling The Big Issue are obvious - it’s given him a new sense of independence. The Big Issue offers support and promotional days to help. On a recent Corporate promotional day extra profits and funds raised benefitted The Big Issue crew. Matt is proudly Melbournian, he even has a 3000 postcode, but loves that he can be a positive force in the city and likes to think he can pass forward the benefits he’s been given by The Big Issue by supporting local businesses. Lastly it has enabled him to save for a few treats - ask him about his Akubra Hat! He also has a personal goal of treating himself to a trip on the Ghan for his 50th birthday in a couple of years’ time. Why not find him, buy a copy of The Big Issue, and help him on his way - “though if it’s too cold and wet, I may not be there,” says Matt with a smile. ■

Hidden Message: PEACE BE WITH YOU



WILLIAM BARAK AND FRIENDS

With his likeness gazing down Swanston Street from the façade of a 32-storey building, and an elevated footway to the Melbourne Cricket Ground named in his honour, the Aboriginal leader William Barak has become an entrenched part of Melbourne's iconography of the built environment. Philip Court shares his reflections on this remarkable man and the three Scottish Presbyterian immigrants who were his friends and allies...

Victoria is moving step-by-step towards a formal treaty with its First Nations people, while the Federal Government is seeking to establish a constitutionally recognised Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. Given all that, it's a good time to reflect on the life of a man who, more than any other, is associated with his Wurundjeri people's interaction with Victoria's 19th century colonial society.

That man was William Barak. He was born around 1824 into a tribal aboriginal society which, apart from the runaway convict William Buckley, had never seen a European. The clan system's age-old lore and the season-by-season rhythm of life must have seemed to him to be an eternal constant.

All that changed in 1835 with the arrival of a small ship that sailed from across Bass Strait; a ship bringing John Batman. Soon after, a white settlement was established,

named in honour of British Prime Minister Viscount Melbourne. Barak was around 11 years old when Batman landed.

Over the next 68 years, Barak - who died in 1903 - witnessed a transformation that his ancestors could never have imagined. But he was far more than a passive onlooker. He became actively involved in the plight of his people as they were dispossessed of their traditional lands and relocated on three separate occasions onto reserves.



Along the way, Barak was married three times. His first and second wives, Lizzie and Annie pre-deceased him, but his third wife, Sarah survived him. None of his children survived to adulthood.

In 1875, on the death of his close friend, Simon Wonga, Barak became the acknowledged leader of the 150 Aboriginal inhabitants of the Coranderk Reserve, near present-day Healesville. He led several delegations of his people, walking the 60+ kilometres to Melbourne to petition the colonial government and to air his community's grievances and pleas. He strove to preserve what he could remember of the ceremonies and traditions he'd witnessed as a child. His efforts included some remarkable and now highly prized paintings in ochre and charcoal.

Though Barak often felt the need to push back against the white settlers' hunger for Wurundjeri land and Government policies which, by today's standards, were thoroughly racist and heartless, three Scottish immigrants in particular bucked the prevailing attitudes. They stood with him as close personal friends and staunch advocates for a people experiencing dislocation, disease and distress.

JOHN AND MARY GREEN

John Green married Mary Benton in a Free Kirk of Scotland church in Aberdeenshire in 1857. They departed for Australia the very next day. John's occupation was listed as Missionary on the ship's manifest. He was 27, and Mary was 22.

Right from the start, the Greens had a heart for the indigenous people of their adopted land. John was instrumental in helping Barak and his people secure Coranderk as their home. He became Coranderk's first manager. He was also the one who passed on the good news of Jesus to Barak, who embraced it and maintained his Christian identity for the rest of his life. He was baptised by Green in 1865 who then married Barak to his second wife, Annie, in a publicised Presbyterian wedding ceremony.

Neither Barak or Green had any problem balancing their Christian convictions with their respect for Wurundjeri culture. In that regard, their example is a timely reminder that faith in Jesus is not the monopoly of our own or anyone else's culture. Rather, the Gospel of grace transcends all cultures. Barak's entry in the 1969 Australian Dictionary of Biography describes him as deeply respecting "a wide range of customs, beliefs and kinship patterns" yet evaluating them "maturely against his Christian faith."

John Green died at Healesville in 1908. Mary died, also at Healesville, in 1919. Theirs were lives of faith in Christ, great sacrifice and humble service.

ANNE FRASER BON

When Anne Fraser Bon died at the ripe old age of 99, the Melbourne Argus of 6 June 1936 reported: *“All her life she was a devout Christian, and to the time of her death, which occurred after only a few hours’ illness, she attended the Communion services regularly in Scots’ Church.”*

Born in 1838 – the same year Scots’ Church was founded – in Scotland’s Perthshire, she married John Bon when she was 19 and he was 52. After migrating to the Port Phillip District in 1837 and becoming a wealthy farmer, John returned to Scotland to repay some debts and marry Anne, who accompanied him back to Australia. He died suddenly in 1868, leaving the management of his Wappan cattle station to Anne, who remained in charge until her sons were old enough to share the load. She befriended the dispossessed Aborigines who found shelter on her station and later, when she shifted to Kew, her home was a welcoming refuge for many. She made it her business to visit Aboriginal patients in Melbourne hospitals.

Like John and Mary Green, Anne believed that, as the traditional custodians of the land, the Aboriginal people ought to be respected and cared for in every way. She formed a lasting friendship with Barak, who knew he could always rely on her support and advocacy. When his 17-year-old son, David, was ill with tuberculosis, Barak brought him to Anne, who got him to hospital before he died.

We can get an idea of her compassion from this extract of a letter she wrote in 1882:

“We have robbed them of their beautiful colony – deprived them of their hunting fields and fishing grounds and given them vices and diseases which are rapidly doing their work... They are neither paupers, lunatics, nor criminals; then why treat them as such?... The greatest crime of which they have been guilty is having been the original owners of the soil.”

There’s much to admire about Anne Fraser Bon. Surely she set an example, as a member of our own Scots’ Church; an example we would do well to follow. Of course, Anne Bon, John and Mary Green, and William Barak were all following the example set by Jesus of Nazareth, the one who came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So the next time you walk the William Barak Bridge from Birrarung Marr to the MCG, or look up Swanston Street to the 32-storey likeness of William Barak, take a moment to reflect on the lives and contributions of these four brothers and sisters in Christ. May their legacy continue to bear the fruit of justice, compassion, generosity and reconciliation. ■



MELBOURNE'S BEST \$1 COFFEE

Exhibition St
199 228

You're shopping til you drop in the Melbourne CBD when the coffee urge strikes. Don't overlook these bargain options in your quest for a brew, says Phil Campbell...

Melbourne is rightly famous for our thriving coffee culture. Archaeologists working near the Young & Jackson Hotel recently unearthed more than 500 coffee beans in a Pompeii-like deposit. The perfectly preserved beans, apparently sourced from Sri Lanka, were stored in John Connell's grocery that burnt down in the early hours of September 19, 1855. According to the CBD News, "It's believed the gold rush drove an increase in coffee consumption despite the city's love of coffee having long been attributed to late 19th century Melbourne coffee houses and then the waves of Greek, Italian and Turkish immigrants in the 1940s and '50s."

Among the lattes, piccolos, and doppios at the city's best present day cafes, though, it's good to know you can pick up a reasonably good quality coffee for a single dollar... if you know where to look. There are three major outlets slugging it out for The Leaflet's best budget coffee award. Who comes out on top?

The winner: 7-Eleven

The best publicized option - and perhaps the easiest to find - is the famous \$1 coffee at your nearest 7-Eleven store. Advertised on buses, trams and billboards everywhere, the offer is hard to miss. But maybe you never actually thought to try one.

In the ten minute walk to work, I pass four 7-Eleven outlets, and all of them have regular early morning queues at their self-serve coffee machines. These high-tech machines feature a full colour touch screen, making the self-serve process painless. (The store at the corner of Exhibition and Lonsdale Streets has four machines, one of which offers soy milk.) Choose your option from the first screen (flat white, long black etc), press the button and stand back while the beans are ground, and the fresh coffee pours into your cup. If you prefer something non-standard, like a long black topped up with hot milk, simply step in at the right moment and take command of the sequence.

The resulting shot has a good crema and well-rounded flavour. It's not by any means a match for the best barista-made coffee (Alimentari in Brunswick Street takes my award for that) but for the price it's more than reasonable. You're paying 20 per cent of the price for around 60 per cent of the quality, which makes it a pretty good deal.

There's no decaf on offer, but there's a \$2 hot chocolate option if you need slightly less stimulus. In addition, there's a good range of \$3 muffins and treats, and a healthy selection of affordable lunch wraps. Highly recommended.



CT Mart - Little Lonsdale St

Driven by a Franke A600 semi-automatic machine, the menu offers similar options to the other vendors in this review. Coming in at number 2, CT Mart's coffee was not far from the mark. Though harder to find around the city, the store on the Elizabeth St end of Little Lonsdale Street is serious about options, with hot chocolate and powdered Chai available too. The coffee pour was a little fast (the grind setting should have been finer), and the shot looked small. There's quite a nice nutty undertone to the coffee, though on the default setting the dominant flavour was milk.



Ezy Mart - Bourke St

The Ezy Mart offering is similar, with self serve machines offering a matching range and price point. With slightly fewer stores in the CBD, Ezy Mart are the new kids on the block. In a comparison taste-test, flavour was slightly less balanced, with a sharper edge. The serving size is slightly smaller, so if you're keen to make every sip count, maybe the 7-11 option is superior. But again, for a buck you simply can't go wrong. There are however fewer options - no hot choc, and certainly none of the same range of lunchtime goodies. ■



LET THERE BE LIGHT

Recently Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens were the setting for an after-dark winter experience. Our botanical correspondent Rosalie Strother investigates...

Usually off-limits after sunset, the Royal Botanic Gardens recently hosted the Lightscape festival, allowing visitors to experience the gardens in a unique new way. Changing colours and light effects brought the gardens into sharp relief against the surrounding inky black depths. The scene was spectacular as we moved along darkened paths between displays, and everyone, from the very young to the very old, enjoyed the spectacle. Most tried to capture the moment on their phone cameras - always at the risk of missing the moment in real life!

The Gardens are a place of peace and tranquillity close to the heart of Melbourne and a resource for professional and amateur botanists. Established in 1846, they're considered one of the world's best-designed botanic gardens, with landscaped slopes and lakes providing a home to about 50,000 plants displayed in 30 collections. Paths wind through beautifully manicured lawns, past tranquil lakes, well-established trees and shrubs, and artfully contoured herbaceous borders. There's an abundance of wildlife - including native birds - in the range of habitats across the 38 hectare site.

The after-dark experience starts at the Observatory Gate, where the first path is illuminated with aboriginal motifs. The Gardens are a significant site for the local



Kulin Nation, an alliance of five indigenous Australian Nations extending around Port Phillip and Western Port Bays, up into the Great Dividing Range, and the Loddon and Goulburn River valleys.

The next path features the State floral emblem of Victoria, common heath (*Epacris impressa*), leading to a spectacular display of giant ‘flowers’ in the lawn, constantly changing colour. Throughout the walk there are trees beautifully highlighted by subtle changing colours.

As the route descends to the lake, a kaleidoscope of laser beams penetrate the ‘fog’ that continually envelops the path and the surrounding trees, making an ever-changing display. Vegetation is awash with vibrant colours, vivid in contrast to the surrounding darkness. Then on past the lake with massed lights on the surrounding lawn and up the hill to the ‘winter cathedral’ – an arched tunnel of light made up of more than 100,000 tiny lights – quite wonderful! The fern gully, which follows soon afterwards, is in total contrast, with the fleeting interplay of beams on the foliage high above resembling ever moving ‘fireflies’.

Close to the end of the walk was the ‘neon tree’ – a fig draped with neon-lit vines highlighting the structure of the trunk and branches. A background of gentle music accompanied the walk, providing another dimension without being intrusive. As we left the gardens by the Herbarium gate, it was to move from an ‘other-world experience’ of light, colour and deep darkness, back to the ordinary world of Melbourne. It was reassuring to know that experts had ensured the wild-life and plants were not disturbed by this wonderful event.

Lightscape was first staged in England’s Royal Botanic Gardens around a decade ago. It has since travelled to many locations around the world before arriving in Melbourne this year after a two-year delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The experience led me to reflect on the extraordinary way in which light was used to highlight aspects of the Gardens that often go unnoticed; the skilfully placed lighting effects along the way providing a stark contrast to the surrounding darkness. It brought to mind the words of the gospel writer John, who said: ‘The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.’ Turn the smallest light on, and the darkness is gone - in John’s mind, the perfect metaphor for ‘the true light’ of Jesus Christ. But on any level, Lightscape was a fascinating display. If you didn’t see the light this time, make sure you catch it next time around. ■



SHARING THE LOAD - TEAMWORK AT FLEMINGTON MISSION

People work best when they work together in teams for a common goal, says Flemington Mission co-ordinator Rosemary Fethers...

For the last 140 years the Presbyterian and Scots' Church Joint Mission has operated in some form or another where the need is greatest, and devoted people have spent decades of their lives as part of this rewarding endeavour. Based at St Stephen's Church Flemington, our work is all about community caring for one another. Each week, multiple teams work together in different roles to achieve this, sharing food, stories, happy times and problems, with even a regular mission chapel service led by missionary and pastor Andrew Wong.

Here's how our teams make it happen. First, there are our volunteers and staff who enjoy the logistics of dealing in large amounts of food, interesting conversation, being part of a diverse community, cooking and eating together and sorting out important issues of administration and governance. Volunteers, who are mostly drawn from Scots' Church and St Stephen's Church communities, pick up food from Foodbank on Mondays and distribute it at Flemington on Tuesdays. Cultural and family requirements are catered for, and lunch is served.

Our community is what it's all about. We all learn from each other's experiences. We can all fall on difficult times and a helping hand and a smile in times of trouble can change lives. People who are helped by our service are also helping others.

Foodbank Victoria has been operating for more than 80 years as an independent not-for-profit organisation. It has almost 800 corporate and community partners, of which the Flemington Mission is one. Foodbank is Australia's largest food relief organisation and works with farmers, packing sheds and retailers for support, reducing food wastage by redirecting food resources to areas of need. Foodbank is sponsored by corporate and government funding and has many corporate donors. Food is supplied to partners like our Mission at reduced or no cost depending on the item. The value of the food supplied by Foodbank and distributed from the Mission has been enormous. Every week our Mission team collects up to 1000kg of food from Foodbank, which we stack into the back seats and boots of our cars to transport to Flemington and sort for distribution.

Recently, we've enlisted Orange Sky Laundry to add to our services. This mobile laundry service provides free clothes washing and free hot shower services from their cleverly equipped van. Founders Nic Marchesi and Lucas Patchett saw a need among the homeless community in Brisbane in 2014, fitted out a van with washing machines and dryers and visited parks around the city to wash clothes. They were awarded joint Young Australians of the Year for their initiative. They then travelled to cyclone affected areas in Queensland and bushfire affected areas in Victoria. Gradually they fitted out more vans and have spread around Australia and beyond. As well as washing, the service enjoys getting to know its customers. It provides orange chairs for their clients to sit on and enjoy conversation while they wait for their wash.

Funded by corporate and individual donors and staffed by volunteer and paid staff, Orange Sky is now a multimillion-dollar not-for-profit charity.

The Orange Sky arrives at the Flemington Mission on cue every Tuesday morning and washes for those with difficult laundry access. (The name "Orange Sky" comes from a song of the same name by Alex Murdoch.)

Our Scots' Church donors are a very loyal group who keep our community supplied with special items and who devote a considerable amount of time, money, and effort in choosing, creating or contributing to the items that our weekly clients always appreciate.

Other Presbyterian Churches around Victoria provide regular donations too, especially after Harvest Festival Services - it's always a delight to see a familiar face pull up with a car full of goods. Other local churches provide and receive support and provide an opportunity for networking and helping each other too.

We're also grateful to local and State Governmental organisations that provided funding for food and equipment during the pandemic; this has enabled services to expand and to be more suited to the needs of our local community.

The Flemington Mission has a real buzz on Tuesdays with all this activity. Each week over 100 food hampers are distributed and around 30 meals are cooked and served. About five people have their laundry done, and about 30 people attend the chapel service. We're privileged to be part of such a dynamic, interactive atmosphere where the load is shared, and everyone is part of a friendly, caring community. ■



TEACHING KIDS TO CARE FOR THEIR KIDNEYS!

Deb Court chats to Yvonne Farquarson about the healthy message she's spreading around schools...

One of the hardest things to do is to get people interested in preventing illness and injury to themselves.

It needs nationwide campaigns to persuade people to change their behaviour and to save lives.

Think of slip slop slap, Belt Up, BreastScreen, cigarette advertising bans, Drink, Drive Bloody Idiot: all great initiatives that have made a huge difference to our community's health.

Yvonne Farquharson, a member of St Stephen's Flemington congregation, is not one to shrink from a challenge. She has been advocating for children to make better health choices since 2017 when she founded Filter Your Future and developed the Healthy Kidneys Education Project. She is motivated by having an inherited kidney disease herself and was told she would be on dialysis by the age of 60. This has not happened; not even close.

Yvonne is passionate about reducing the incidence of preventable chronic diseases. Two such conditions, Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure are the major causes of chronic kidney disease.

The Healthy Kidneys Education Project is aligned to the national curriculum. It aims to encourage primary school-aged children to understand kidney function and to show how they can preserve good kidney health. Yvonne receives funding from the Dialysis and Transplant Association of Victoria Inc. and works in collaboration with Cool Australia and SugarByHalf.

How do you get children to make the link between nutrition and kidney health, let alone the link between kidney function and overall health as an adult?

Yvonne says, "you make it fun and set it to music". The early versions of the program were presented in person by Yvonne assisted by Ashlee, a musician and composer, to local and regional schools with enthusiastic involvement from students and staff.

Yvonne knows the content and method succeeds. She has surveyed all participants since the beginning of the project and shown it to be effective in changing children's attitudes to nutrition and lifestyle. She adds that, importantly, the children then educate their parents.

Since 2020 and the onset of the pandemic Yvonne converted Filter Your Future to online lessons.

The online lessons are free and have been used in schools in every Australian state and territory and New Zealand. So far around 76,000 children have participated in Filter Your Future.

Yvonne and Ashlee together with Amy, a playwright, are now creating a musical based around the Filter Your Future themes. This will be made available for schools to perform. I listened to a couple of tracks. It should be a real hit!

The link for Filter Your Future is www.filteryourfuture.com.au ■

TREES THAT TALK

Rosemary Fethers
reviews a fascinating
TED talk exploring
the world of tree-
communication...

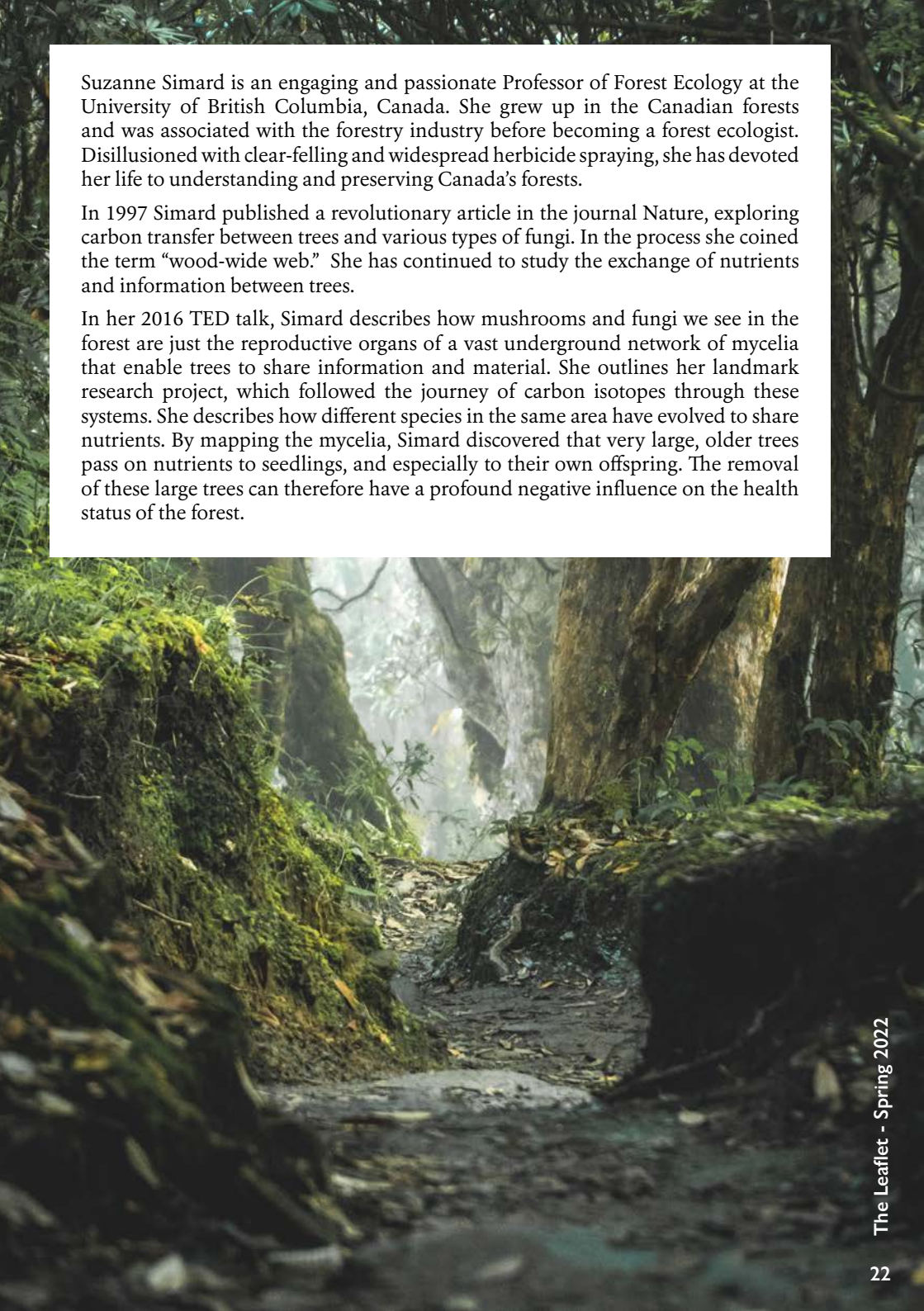


WATCH TED TALK

There's a beautiful remnant of grassy old-growth woodland near the Werribee River that remains much as it was for thousands of years. There are signs of the original Woiwurrong inhabitants, and early colonial settlement as well as modern farms, industry and ever growing residential estates. It's an area that is now critically endangered, both flora and fauna - a small, but very special island of indigenous biodiversity. I'm a member of a group that helps preserve, regenerate and extend it.

It makes sense that everything lives in relative harmony rather than one species dominating all resources. As we better understand the impact of rapid, man-made change on life on earth, we're starting to better understand some of the consequences of our resource consumption. Delicately balanced symbiotic systems can be destroyed without us noticing. One such symbiotic system, only recently understood, is the enormous subterranean network of fungal mycelia, the subject of one of my favourite TED talks on YouTube.

Surprisingly, the formal classification of fungi did not occur until 1969 and only a small fraction of species has been identified. Yeasts, moulds, mildew are all fungi. Only some fungi produce mushrooms for reproduction. The mycelia are threadlike structures that form the main body and feeding parts of the fungus. Most plant roots are covered with mycelia called mycorrhizal fungi, which you can see whenever you dig up a plant. Mycelia are the most abundant organisms in soil. Plants and fungi use this network as a nutrient transport system between one another.

A photograph of a forest path. The path is a narrow dirt trail winding through a dense forest. On the left, there are large, moss-covered rocks. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and small plants. In the background, several large, thick tree trunks stand tall. The lighting is soft and dappled, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

Suzanne Simard is an engaging and passionate Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She grew up in the Canadian forests and was associated with the forestry industry before becoming a forest ecologist. Disillusioned with clear-felling and widespread herbicide spraying, she has devoted her life to understanding and preserving Canada's forests.

In 1997 Simard published a revolutionary article in the journal *Nature*, exploring carbon transfer between trees and various types of fungi. In the process she coined the term “wood-wide web.” She has continued to study the exchange of nutrients and information between trees.

In her 2016 TED talk, Simard describes how mushrooms and fungi we see in the forest are just the reproductive organs of a vast underground network of mycelia that enable trees to share information and material. She outlines her landmark research project, which followed the journey of carbon isotopes through these systems. She describes how different species in the same area have evolved to share nutrients. By mapping the mycelia, Simard discovered that very large, older trees pass on nutrients to seedlings, and especially to their own offspring. The removal of these large trees can therefore have a profound negative influence on the health status of the forest.



The trees provide the fungi with carbon (sugar) and the fungi provide the trees with nitrogen, phosphorus and other mineral nutrients and also pass along carbon and water to other trees. It is thought that through these mechanisms, trees with more nutrients - for example, in a sunny position - can supplement trees with less nutrients. A large proportion of the carbon metabolised by trees is stored in the mycelial network.

Land clearing can decimate these underground networks, both as a direct effect of tree removal and by unprotected overheating of the soil. Tree stress (from heat, flood, fire, clearing, and parasites) can result in a fungal imbalance and broad scale tree death. This is an area in which there is still much to learn, especially in Australia where little is known about the local fungal network.

Further research is examining other modes of tree communication. There's evidence electrical pulses may form the basis of a signaling system between trees, especially in times of distress. Further, pheromones and chemicals are released by trees when under attack - for example, ethylene gas is emitted by African acacia trees when they are being eaten by giraffes. Surrounding trees detect this signal and begin pumping tannin into their leaves making them unpalatable!

Around the world there's an increasing interest in tree communication. Some scientists believe that we should try to see the world from a tree's perspective rather than a purely selfish resource-driven view, to better understand and preserve their place in the balance of creation. Suzanne Simand's message ends with four achievable positive goals (and a standing ovation):

- Be involved and become a steward of our own local forests.
- Preserve old growth forests because they hold the biodiversity above and below the soil.
- Cut down trees sparingly and avoid cutting down the large old "hub" trees.
- Regenerate forests with indigenous diversity to promote resilience. ■

GETTING THE BIG PICTURE

As images from the new James Webb Telescope make us marvel about our small place in the universe, what are we to make of it all, asks Rosalie Strother...



Astronomy has made news recently with the release of the first images of the extreme edge of the universe from the James Webb Space Telescope. The world has marvelled at images of our extraordinarily beautiful universe, filled with unimaginable numbers of celestial objects including far off galaxies – all in far greater clarity than ever before.

Named after the administrator of NASA from 1961 to 1968, the telescope was launched on Christmas Day 2021, and took a month to arrive in orbit around the Sun, about 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth. By comparison, the Hubble Telescope orbits just 550 kilometres above the Earth's surface, and the Moon is about 400,000 kilometres away. As the largest optical telescope in space with greatly improved resolution and sensitivity, it can view objects too distant or faint for the Hubble Telescope.

Apart from the beauty of the new images, we can now see light from the first stars and the formation of the first galaxies. A light-year is the distance light travels in one year, which works out at 9.5 trillion kilometres. Travelling at 300,000 kilometres a second, light takes 1.3 seconds to travel from the Moon to Earth, and 8 minutes to reach us from the Sun. Our nearest stars, the Alpha Centauri group of three stars, are a little over 4 light-years away, and form one of the pointers to the Southern Cross - which means the light we see from there is already four years old! A little further away, but still in our Milky Way galaxy, is a nebula (or gas cloud) in Orion – seen in the handle of the 'saucerpan'. This is 1,344 light-years away, which means the light we see left there in 678 AD, about the time that Bath Abbey was founded in the UK. The nearest galaxy, Andromeda, is about 2 million light-years away, and the most distant object we've seen is a galaxy 13.5 billion light-years away. This allows us to look back in time to the early days of the universe - what an amazing thing!

Does this new knowledge raise new questions that set science against thoughtful Christian faith? Michael Drinkwater, a Christian and a professional astronomer with the University of Queensland, reflects that “the universe continues to surprise us in how wild a place it is. It is so beyond anything that humans could ever imagine. For me, creation appears more and more beautiful... and faith and science are different parts to the same discovery of creation.”

Robert Evans, a retired minister of the Uniting Church, NSW is an amateur astronomer of note, holding the record for visual discoveries of supernovae. As stars explode, they dissipate most of their mass with a brightness that can briefly equal that of an entire galaxy. It all happens very quickly – in seconds or minutes – although the remnants of the explosion can last many years, and can be spotted from light-years away. Evans observed his first supernova in 1981. Since then, with consistent and methodical astronomical observation, he has discovered a record 42 supernovae; an achievement recognised by astronomical societies and associations around the world. Along with his passion for astronomy, Evans has published a number of books on the subject of Spiritual Revivals across Australia and the United States. In his mind, both are evidence of the majesty, power, and sheer surprise that God loves to spring on his children.

Meanwhile, historian and author John Dickson argues that Christianity has advanced science, and made it possible, by bridging the gap between spirituality and rationality. “Christianity helped the ancients by persuading them that Nature is not magical, capricious, unpredictable, or foreign, but is, rather, the orderly gift of a good and rational Mind. It thus gave the world a more rational spirituality,” says Dickson.

Christianity saves us from a reductive rationality that sees the universe only as cold matter and mathematics, and invites us to see the universe as a gift from a good and rational Mind. “We don’t have to choose between the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’,” says Dickson. “Both are maximally true at the same time. My claim is that Christianity is the Rationality that is most spiritual and the Spirituality that is most rational.” ■



Melbourne academic and author Brian Rosner suggests that looking inward to find yourself isn't always the best advice...

Dylan Alcott, 2022 Australian of the Year, says, “Be yourself and watch your world change. The hardest thing to understand is that it’s the easiest thing in the world to do. You’ve gotta believe me, mate. It changes your life.”

Accepting her honorary doctorate, Taylor Swift offered similar advice: “I know it can be overwhelming figuring out who to be but I have some good news: It’s totally up to you. I also have some terrifying news: it’s totally up to you.”

Conventional wisdom these days is that there’s only one place to look to find yourself, and that is inward. Personal identity is a do-it-yourself project. All external authorities are to be rejected, and everyone’s quest for self-expression should be celebrated; personal happiness is the ultimate goal. Self-determination, once a principle for nations emerging from the First World War, is now the responsibility of every individual. A novelty in the history of ideas, this strategy of identity formation is sometimes labelled “expressive individualism”.

Clearly, there's nothing wrong with looking inward. There are many benefits to living an examined life. And the alternative is far from attractive. As the philosopher Charles Taylor explains in his book *A Secular Age*, the movement of expressive individualism is a reaction against a 1950s culture of conformity, which is believed to have "crushed individuality and creativity".

Authenticity is desirable too. It's much better to inhabit an identity that you own and can fully appropriate for yourself; there is something to be said for feeling comfortable in your own skin. Psychologists generally regard authenticity as a basic requirement of mental health.

So, are there any downsides to looking inward and being yourself? I can think of three pretty big ones. It seems to produce fragile selves; it's failing in terms of outcomes for individuals and society; and it is faulty in its assumptions about human nature.

Though there have always been life experiences that can destabilise a person's identity, the rise of expressive individualism, aided by the powerful tools of social media, means that more people than ever are unsure who they really are and have a fragile sense of self. Defining yourself via social media is fraught with dangers and can lead to projecting an inauthentic self.

Along with the exciting opportunity to find yourself comes the daunting possibility of not succeeding, or of not liking what you find. The cruel irony is that while it's never been more important to know who you are, it's never been more difficult.

Expressive individualism is also failing to deliver on its promise of the good life. Anxiety, depression, narcissism, anger, and resentment are all on the rise. And happiness, by any measure, is actually in decline.

While we can't lay all the blame on looking inward to find yourself, it would hardly be surprising for such a self-focussed approach to personal identity to produce selves that are self-deceived, self-absorbed, and self-centred. Francis Fukuyama writes: "The problem is that the inner selves we are celebrating may be cruel, violent, narcissistic, or dishonest. Or they may simply be lazy and shallow."

"Look into your heart and follow your dreams" is the frequent advice from celebrities, with the sometimes-explicit message that you can achieve greatness if you do the same. But, by definition, we can't all be exceptional. After all, the people in question are being interviewed precisely because they are set apart from the rest of us!

Jane Caro puts it well when she says that the constant message that we all can be exceptional is a lie: "You are not fabulous. Nor are the [men and] women—no matter how fabulous they may look or sound—who like to sprinkle such adjectives around. No one is. We are all flawed, insecure, tired, self-indulgent, often bewildered human beings who mostly struggle to stay on top of the demands of everyday life." (See Jane's article "*Why I am Okay with Being Flawed and Ordinary*" at smh.com.au). Despite the amazing advances in medical science in our lifetime, all human lives are inevitably marked by serious illness, heartbreak, tragedy, loneliness, and grief.

A few years ago my younger son finished primary school. At the graduation ceremony, every student was introduced by their teacher as they walked across the

stage, beaming with promise; in every case the teacher gave a glowing description of their likely future and promise. I was struck by how fortunate I was to be in the presence of so many forthcoming music and movie stars, world leaders and captains of industry! Interestingly, there was not a single office worker or tradie in sight.

The biggest problem with looking only inward to find yourself is that it is hopelessly reductionistic, ignoring crucial dimensions of what it means to be a human being. Sociologist David Jopling is right that “the self is too complexly configured to be accessible to a single finite mind inquiring into itself by itself.”

Along with looking inward to find yourself, we look around to others; we know ourselves in being known by others, especially those who know and love us intimately. We also look backwards and forwards to our life stories. Human identity does not exist in isolation, and it can’t be defined without reference to the narrative in which it finds itself.

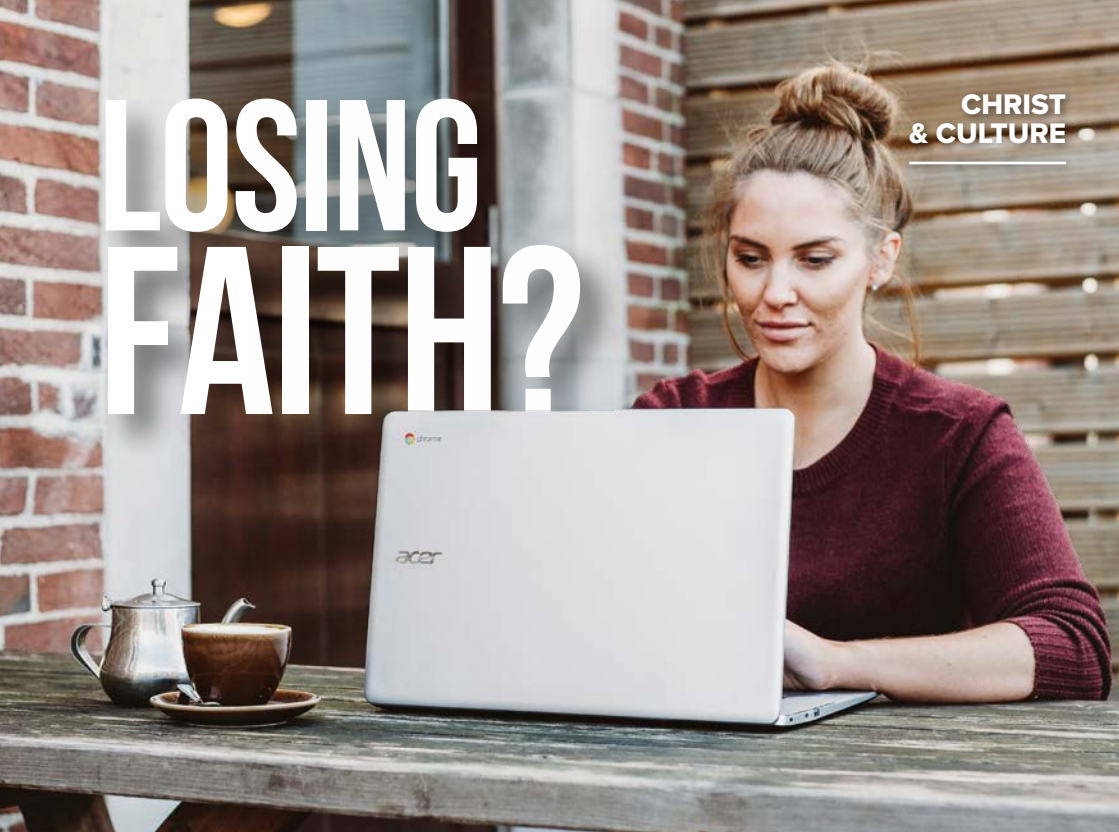
As much as we might like to think of ourselves as the narrator and main protagonist and as authors of our own script, each of us participates in shared stories. Christian writer Trevin Wax observes that “a restless, individualistic pursuit of happiness evolves into a strange conformist impulse. We think we’re blazing our own path, but the paths we take look strangely like everyone else’s.”

There is, in fact, a fourth direction in which to look to find yourself, which many believe provides a better story. They insist that personal identity requires *looking up*. In his book “Why Study the Past,” former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes: “Without the transcendent we shall find ourselves unable, sooner or later, to make any sense of the full range of human self-awareness.” On the other side of the ledger, Friedrich Nietzsche, often dubbed the first real atheist because of his fearless pursuit of the consequences of his antitheist stance, seems to have no place for the notion of personal identity. Does *looking up* have a role to play in identity formation?

The key to an authentic, stable, and satisfying sense of self is to inhabit a narrative identity that is worth living... one that deals well with life’s joys and sorrows, triumphs and disappointments, and responds well to injustice. ■

Dr Brian Rosner is the principal of Melbourne’s Ridley College and a Fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity. His latest book is How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward is Not the Answer. This article first appeared on the ABC Religion and Ethics website, and is reprinted with the author’s permission.

LOSING FAITH?



A whole bunch more people ticked “no religion” for the first time on the 2021 census compared to the 2016 census. Perhaps you were one of them. Stephen McAlpine explores the issues...

The stats from last year’s Census have made interesting reading in terms of demographics, lifestyle choices, living locations, and of course things like religious affiliation.

And religious de-affiliation. The decline in Australia of those who call themselves Christian has been remarkable over the past decade. In fact the past five decades have seen a dramatic drop.

Writing in *The Australian* (prior to the census results), Peta Credlin noted that fifty years ago, 87 percent of Australians identified as Christian compared with 51 percent in 2016. Now, apparently, Christian affiliation is down to 43 percent of the population according to the data. That’s a big drop off. And the decline is only set to continue.

‘No Religion’ has grown to around 39 percent, representing an 8-9 percent swing for both (in opposite directions) since the last census. This of course raises all sorts of questions, and some hostile ones at that, with groups like humanist societies calling for the abolition of funding for faith-based schools and the like, given the declining state of religion, particularly the Christian one.

But a closer look at the stats is more revealing. And more complex. It clearly isn't the case that hundreds of thousands of people who were in church five years ago, and who gave money, and served in a local parish, and sang worship songs to God on a Sunday, somehow just stopped doing that. Not at all. It's more likely that people who never did any of those things, decided that it was time to just get on and admit it in the census last year. A small stroke of the digital pen, and *voilà!*: we're not religious anymore. Perhaps you were one of them.

And that's something really different altogether. I still remember as a child in the early 1970s (back when 87 percent of us were still saying we were Christian), how few people went to church from my school. And that was a big thing for a young bloke from Northern Ireland, where not only did close to 100 percent of people claim to be Christian, but 87 per cent went to church!

We turned up in Australia as a family, and next to no one went to church. Yet the percentage difference of those who claimed to be Christian wasn't far off the 100 of Northern Ireland. So clearly something different was going on. I mean, the number of church buildings in Australia would have needed to more than double in order to accommodate all those people who ticked "Christian", but never showed.

So what was it? It was this: people were culturally Christian. They would walk past a church and if they even saw it, would say "that's the church I never go to". Oh perhaps they went there for the "hatch, match, dispatch" times in life. Maybe even Christmas and Easter. Perhaps you did that too. Perhaps you even still do, out of politeness to those who ask you.

If you ever did go to church, you probably couldn't wait to get away from it. You'd tick "Christian" on the census, but apart from the occasional guest appearances, there wasn't much more to it.

As someone who strongly identifies as Christian, I'm actually quite glad at the level of honesty that you, and others, show if you tick "no religion". It shows where things are truly at. There's nothing worse than being an organisation that's in denial about the true state of affairs. It means that the Christian faith knows what it has to work with.

And perhaps it's a bit like a footy fan who says they're a footy fan, but never goes to the footy, never watches the footy, never plays local footy or volunteers at local footy, or even stands around the coffee machine at work on Mondays talking about the footy. I mean, can you really call yourself a footy fan at that point?

And to that you might say, exactly, and each to their own.

However Peta Credlin does offer some words of caution, words that I think we should pay careful attention to. For whether you ticked "no religion" in a casual disinterested way, or whether it's from the hostility borne from bad church experiences, the Christian foundations of our Western culture, including here in Australia, bear up more load than many other things are capable of bearing.

"It may not be fashionable to say so, but the way we live is unimaginable without a Christian cultural foundation," says Credlin. "Our democracy, for instance, rests on the notion that everyone is equal in rights and dignity, something that's come down to us through the Christian gospels."

Had you thought of that? Did you know that? Or what about this?:

“Elsewhere in our culture, our justice system rests on the notion that we should treat others as we’d be treated ourselves; again, something that’s come down to us through Christian teaching. Our sense of community too rests on the notion that we should “love our neighbours as we love ourselves”. It’s a commandment that lies at the heart of our volunteerism and philanthropy.”

Here’s my question. How long do you think those things we take for granted: equality of rights and equal dignity, justice based on treating others the same, and love as the centre of community life, will survive if Christianity fades away?

Perhaps you’re confident that they will. But they’re going to have to be rebuilt (and I think this will mean that they will be redefined), on the basis of another belief system capable of holding their weight.

Another way to put it is this: the roots of the Christian faith grew a particular kind of fruit, a fruit that is not universal at all, and is indeed particularly located where the Christian tree has sprouted. British historian and writer, Tom Holland, in his book *Dominion*, observed that what we think are universal rights are not universal at all. The only trouble is, we’ll only find that out when those rights are gone, or brought under question.

And here’s a final thought. The rise in deep anxieties, worry, loneliness and mental health issues in the West has corresponded with the collapse in religious faith. Is it causation? Or is it correlation? The optimist in you would say “correlation”, but can you be so sure? Seems to me that the real crisis in our culture is a crisis of meaning.

In a world in which “you do you” and “be true to yourself” are our defining mantras, the end result is that when you fail to “do you” the way you wish to, or when being true to yourself results in a trainwreck, there is only one person to blame – you!

Because here’s what else you lose when you lose the Christian faith: grace. Grace and forgiveness. We increasingly inhabit a public life on social media in which gracelessness and unforgiveness are central. Do the wrong thing, say the wrong thing, write the wrong thing, and you’re cancelled. There’s no safety net of grace in our culture.

True, we can live off the fumes of Christianity for a few more decades, but the car will stall on the side of the freeway eventually. And when it does, and if it does so for you, perhaps there’ll be a census some time in the future (maybe 2026, maybe 2031), when you hover the digital pen over the religious question, and ask yourself, what might it be like to tick “Christian” again? ■

Stephen McAlpine blogs for an audience of Christians and otherwise at thirdspace.org.au - this article is reprinted with permission.

THE AIR WE BREATHE



Believer or not, most of us value freedom, kindness, progress and equality. But far from being natural or inevitable, these values are the direct result of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that means many common objections to Christianity are actually “Christian” in their very assumptions, writes Glen Scrivener.

When I lived in Australia, I never noticed how it smelt. The eucalyptus trees mentholate the atmosphere. It's like a constant cold remedy – soothing vapours carried on the breeze. When you're born into it, it's no big deal. Now though, when I fly home from England, the first thing I notice is the warm, sweet air.

If you live in the West, Christianity is like this. It's the air we breathe. It infuses all our beliefs, our assumptions, our morals, our goals, our intuitions. Like air it is all around us, life-giving and, to most people, invisible. At this point, many people object, saying: "I'm not a believer." But don't be so sure. I'm fairly certain that the following values resonate with you:

- **Equality:** You believe in the equal moral status of every member of the human family.
- **Compassion:** You believe a society should be judged by the way it treats its weakest members.
- **Consent:** You believe that the powerful have no right to force themselves on others.
- **Enlightenment:** You believe in education for all and its power to transform a society by persuasion and argument rather than by force.
- **Science:** You believe in our ability to do science and its ability to improve the world.
- **Freedom:** You believe that people are not property and that each of us should be in control of our own lives.
- **Progress:** You believe we should reform society of its former evils.

In response, you may say: "Sure, I prize those things. But they aren't beliefs. Those are obvious, natural and universal values. Everyone holds to equality, compassion and the rest, right?" Wrong. These values are not at all common in pre- or non-Christian cultures. They have come to us specifically through the Jesus-revolution (in other words, Christianity). When we extract ourselves from Christian history (for instance, by studying the beliefs of the ancient Greeks or Romans), we discover a frighteningly alien world.

ANCIENT HISTORY

Plato and Aristotle, those fathers of Western philosophy, believed in inequality. They were convinced that some people were born to rule, and others were born to be ruled over (ie enslaved). They considered women, barbarians and slaves to be of inferior value to freeborn male citizens. Endorsing the practice of infanticide, Aristotle said: "Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared." In that society, justice did not mean liberation of the poor and the oppressed, or the equality of people, regardless of gender, race and class, but the very opposite. As Sir Larry Siedentop put it in his book *Inventing the Individual: The origins of Western liberalism* (Penguin): "At the core of ancient thinking was the assumption of natural inequality." Justice meant enforcing inequality, and wisdom consisted in knowing your place in this steep hierarchy of being.

Many consider Christianity a spent force, yet they live within a moral universe that makes no sense without it

Into this world Christianity crash-landed like a meteor. Jesus Christ showed up “assuming the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:7, HCSB) and died the slave’s death (as the Romans called crucifixion). He did so in order to plumb the depths of our pit and rise again to his palace. Now he invites the world into his royal family – a family in which none is lord except him, and all are brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:50). This catalysed, in the words of historian Tom Holland, “the most disruptive, the most influential, and the most enduring revolution in history”.

Consider the transformation:

- **Equality:** Ancient rulers kept ‘the little people’ in check with threats of crucifixion. God descended to a cross and rose to invite the world into spiritual unity.
- **Compassion:** Ancient societies were based on dominance. God came as a foot-washing “servant of all” (Mark 9:35) and handed us the towel saying: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).
- **Consent:** Ancient men felt they had the right to any body belonging to an ‘inferior’. Christ sides with the victim and gives incredible dignity to the weak and marginalised.
- **Enlightenment:** Ancient cultures would spread by force. Christ said: “put away your sword” (Matthew 26:52, NLT). Now we are to spread our influence by word, through gentle persuasion.
- **Science:** Ancient people thought their way towards knowledge of the natural world. God showed up in the world to found a movement that, in time, would itself invite the world to test things empirically.
- **Freedom:** Slavery existed in every ancient people group, yet the God of heaven came as “slave of all” (Mark 10:44) to bring us liberation.
- **Progress:** Ancient thinking considered history to descend from a great Golden Age in the past. Jesus rose from the dead to give enduring hope for a brighter tomorrow.

These seven values, then, are not natural developments for Homo sapiens to evolve into. There is nothing universal or inevitable about them. The rest of the animal kingdom does not sign up to this moral code. If we are just DNA replicators, as some believe, then the purpose of values such as compassion are not obvious – and certainly not the highest ideal in life. No, these values are not natural. They are super-natural; that is, they come from somewhere above the brutalities of the natural world.

People may not believe that he turned water into wine, but Christ performed an even greater miracle: he turned a God-forsaken execution into world domination

In my book, *The Air We Breathe: How we all came to believe in freedom, kindness, progress and Equality* (The Good Book Company), I explore seven movements in the history of the world that gave rise to these seven values. As we move through the Old Testament, the New Testament, the early Church, the Middle Ages, the scientific revolution, the abolition of the slave trade and into the modern world, I show how the morals we take for granted are the morals of a story; a specifically biblical story that has shaped the world we inhabit and the convictions we hold.

This comes as news to many Westerners.

Today, many feel that Christianity is unequal, cruel, coercive, ignorant, anti-science, restrictive and backwards. That is, in fact, a pretty common list of objections to the Christian faith and, at points, the shoe fits. But I didn't pick those seven objections at random. I simply reversed the seven core values listed above. The reason why those seven accusations bite is because, deep down, we believe in the seven values. Our problems with Christianity (and we all have problems with it, especially Christians!) turn out to be Christian problems. Allow me to explain.

Here's a list of some of the widespread criticisms of the Church. Let me put each of them in the first person, because as a Christian I wrestle with these issues too. Here's the point, though: we wrestle with them for Christian reasons:

- If I don't like the violence of Old Testament wars, or of Church history in the last 2,000 years, it's probably because I've absorbed the teachings of one who said: "Turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39).
- If I recoil at Israel's ancient practice of slavery, it's almost certainly because I've inherited biblical notions of redemption, freedom and equality.
- If I am devastated by church abuse scandals, I am standing with Christ and against the misuse of sex and power endemic to human cultures.
- If I abhor instances of the Church mistreating minorities, I'm assigning a sacred (and distinctly Christian) value to the weak, the poor and the oppressed.
- If I consider the Church to be on the wrong side of history, I'm considering history and progress in thoroughly biblical ways.
- If I hate the bullish colonialism that has at times accompanied the growth of the Church, I'm agreeing with profoundly Christian ideals – that rulers should serve, not dominate, and that differences should be valued, not dissolved.

I could go on. Criticisms of the Church abound, and many of them are entirely valid. They are often delivered with a zeal that is best described as...religious. But that is the point. They are. These critiques are blasts from a world that has borrowed Christian foundations and even Christian ammunition for their attacks. Since this is the case, we need to reframe the 'clashes' we witness in the world between the 'secularist' and the 'believer'.

THE CLASH WITHIN

The deepest clash between 'belief' and a purely secular worldview does not occur between Christians and non-Christians. It occurs within the Western secularist, because the secularist is a believer too. If you're a secularist, you probably navigate your life by roughly the same stars that committed Christians do – equality, compassion, consent and so on. On a daily basis, you might walk according to these convictions, and yet even as they are founded on supernatural values, you still insist that you're standing on purely natural ground. Many secularists claim to have an atheistic account of the world, while living by (basically) Christian assumptions. Consider the clash:

- We are clever chimps but possess inviolable human rights.
- We are biological survival machines but have a duty to care for the weak.
- We are nothing but mammals but we must honour each other's sexual boundaries.

- We are the heirs of a brutal evolutionary history but we should spread our influence by persuasion and never by force.
- Our brains evolved merely for the purpose of survival but we can trust them to fathom the scientific mysteries of the cosmos.
- Survival of the fittest is the deepest explanation for human life but pursuing the idea of a ‘master race’ is an unconscionable evil.
- We are clinging to an insignificant rock, hurtling through a meaningless universe towards eternal extinction but the arc of human history bends towards justice.

We all tend to believe the latter part of these statements. In fact, whatever your average Westerner says regarding their religious views, we all share a remarkable consensus on those beliefs. And such beliefs actually shape us day by day. Whatever your convictions about the existence of God, the afterlife, angels or souls, we venture out into the world and stake our lives on freedom, kindness and human value. The deepest clash between ‘belief’ and ‘secularism’ is not a clash between churchgoers and non-churchgoers. The ultimate clash is inside the non-Christian. Because none of our lives draws its meaning and sustenance from secular sources. Whether we know it or not, we all depend on Jesus.

COMING HOME

There is nothing natural about the values we live by. Biologists will tell us that life is propelled forward by the survival of the fittest (and therefore the sacrifice of the weakest) yet, into this world has come the most unlikely movement – one founded on Christ, the fittest, who was sacrificed for us, the weakest. He has upended all our assumptions and built the moral universe we inhabit. We are all, now, children of his revolution.

Jesus upended all our assumptions and built the moral universe we inhabit. We are children of his revolution

Many of my friends do not consider themselves to be believers, yet they live by unprovable convictions every day. They dislike the idea of the supernatural, yet they consistently reject the way of nature, “red in tooth and claw,” as Tennyson so brutally put it. They consider Christianity a spent force, yet they live within a moral universe that makes no sense without it. They consider themselves post-Christian yet all their objections to Christianity turn out to be Christian(ish) objections. They have given up on belief in miracles and yet they live within one: the miracle of the Jesus-revolution. People may not believe that he turned water into wine, but Christ has most certainly performed an even greater miracle: he has turned a God-forsaken execution into world domination. Christianity should have been dead and buried that first Easter but, somehow, it rose to take over the world. Christians have an explanation for this. They say Christianity rose because Christ rose. And we are now living in the world that he made.

Jesus made our world because he is our maker, and to embrace this is to embrace him. It is not to add to the list of improbable beliefs we hold, it is to explain beliefs that would otherwise be inexplicable. To come home to Jesus is to finally and truly appreciate the air we breathe. ■



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Is it possible that an inner-city church like Scots' can effectively reach the next generation? Conventional wisdom says no. But we should make every effort, says Senior Minister Phil Campbell...



The results of the 2021 Australia Census had a sting in the tail. While there was plenty of media coverage of the decline in Christianity across the population there was another statistic that should cause us more immediate concern. Writing in *The Australian*, demographer Bernard Salt said this:

... All the main branches of Christianity lost followers across the five years to last year but this downshift ranged from a mere 4 per cent reduction for Catholic to **a whopping 23 per cent reduction for Presbyterian.**

**Bernard Salt, “A matter of Faith in the Numbers”
The Australian, July 8, 2022**

According to Salt, our problem is “whopping.” Even against the backdrop of disastrous legal cases and child sex abuse dramas, Catholics declined only 4 percent; while public identification with Presbyterianism dropped by a quarter. In numerical terms, that’s around 120,000 people.

Now of course, that doesn’t reflect actual attendance at church - though in many cases news is grim there too. It’s more a measure of self-identification. We can no longer sit back waiting for “the Presbyterians” to turn up at church (though I’m not sure we ever could!) Literally, if we’re to survive, we have to start again and make a whole generation of new ones!



A FOCUS ON SCOTS' CHURCH

The recent National Church Life Survey revealed the average age at Scots' is 63, which means our future prospects are even more clearly highlighted. By and large, we're missing our kids' generation, and their kids' generation as well. Our children and our grandchildren have largely gone missing.

While it's tempting to blame an overall cultural shift away from Christianity, in many churches - including churches in the Melbourne CBD - family ministry is thriving. It's time to do some soul searching about how we could do things differently. Keep reading. Our elders are working on a proposal.

Let me acknowledge at the outset that there has been continuous, and very faithful, Childrens' ministry going on quietly in the background at Scots'; I keep meeting people who have been impacted by the work of our Sunday School over the last five, ten and twenty years. But I also hear discouraging stories of a previous generation young adults alienated by church protocols, of stern faces for mums of squeaky bubs, of lack of kid friendly facilities in church, and all those things that have led us to a point where the number of families attending Scots' is minimal.

Put simply, if nothing changes then in 20 years' time our average age at Scots' church will be 83, and Presbyterianism in general will have diminished to a fraction of our current social adherence.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

If you're part of the Scots' congregation, you may be tempted to give up at this point, complain about the way the world is going, and just hope that your church is here long enough to give you a decent send-off.

My preference is that we use this moment to confront the challenges facing Scots', and push hard to reach the next generation.

To be honest, it's not a new problem. When Louise and I arrived at our first parish appointment in Maclean, Northern New South Wales, the situation was the same. Our three kids, with one on the way, were the only children at church, with the occasional exception of a few irregular grandkids. We remember our excitement when a local family visited one Sunday - and the let-down when they said afterwards, "We really enjoyed that, but we're looking for a church with something for our family." So were we!

It wasn't until - in God's providence - two families visited on the same Sunday that things started to happen. It seemed miraculous - suddenly, nine noisy kids were running around outside after the service. They became firm friends, and formed the core of a group that eventually grew to over 40 kids.

We only need two or three families like this to visit on the same Sunday, and Scots' will be on a new trajectory - if we're ready to care for them well when they arrive.

Scots' is a remarkably well resourced church, though at the same time we face massive financial commitments. Maintaining a stone-and-slate church building in the middle of CBD is not for the faint hearted. We make a significant investment in our music ministry too, which draws visitors from all around the city.

Here's the proposal. What would happen if we made a similarly significant investment in building up a top class family ministry? What if we were to recruit an experienced and enthusiastic Family Ministries Director to inspire and oversee the work? What if families came from all over Melbourne to be part of our exciting Sunday kids activities, our mid-week playgroup, our parenting support networks, and ... who knows what else? The key goal of this position will be to strategise and innovate towards building a vibrant group of young families in the 11am congregation, recognising that the starting base is very low.

The suitable candidate (though we have nobody in mind yet) might be a mid-40s mum of young adult kids, who has had some Bible college training and passion for working with families and kids, or has had significant experience in a similar role. This person would engage warmly with young parents, having been through this life phase already, offering practical wisdom, encouragement, and a warm relational link to Sunday Children's ministry.

We plan to prayerfully and actively recruit for this role, and promote our efforts widely around the denomination and beyond, so that it becomes known that Scots' is pursuing excellence in this important area of ministry.

COSTING AND FUNDRAISING

At the request of our elders, the Board of Management and Trustees are looking at ways to fund this position, which may at first be part time. As things take shape, we're hoping there will be generous congregational funding towards the project too. Your prayers, ideas and eventual financial support - and efforts in welcoming a new generation into the Scots' community - will all be much appreciated!

RESOLUTIONS OF THE SCOTS' CHURCH SESSION - AUGUST 2022 FAMILY MINISTRY DIRECTOR ROLE

- Affirm Session's desire to develop a family ministry growth strategy at Scots
- Appoint a committee consisting of Robert Lowe, Rosalie Strother, Louise Campbell and Fiona Bligh (Safe Church) to draft a position description and terms of settlement for a Family Ministry Director role.
- Request the BoM to investigate funding sources for this role, and identify any shortfall that would require direct financial support via increased congregational giving
- Inform the congregation of our intention to develop this ministry, seeking indications of potential financial support
- Authorise Rev P Campbell to canvas for suitable candidates for consideration by Session ■

P D E V E I L E B E A Y C
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WORD SEARCH

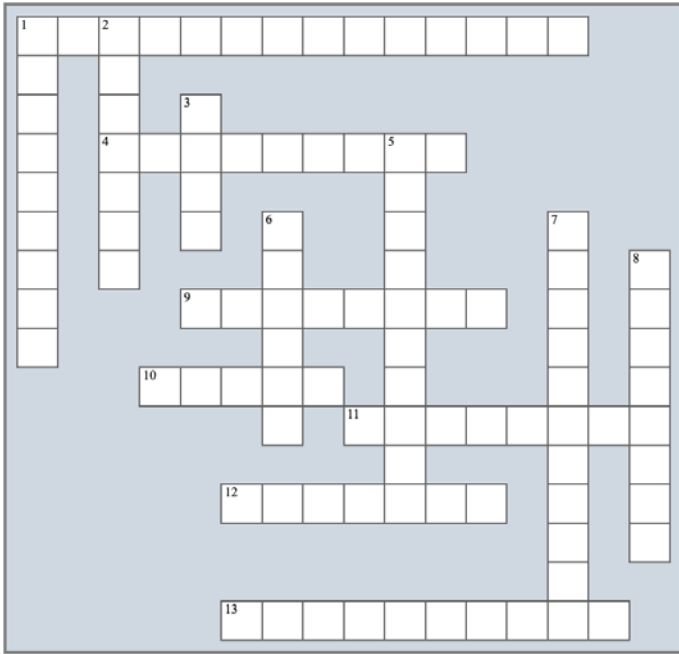
Wise Words from John Chapter 20 and more....

Find the words in the grid. When you are done, the unused letters in the grid will spell out a hidden message. Pick them out from left to right, top line to bottom line. Words can go horizontally, vertically and diagonally in all eight directions..

(Solution on page 9)

The words to find

Angels	Mary
Ascending	Overjoyed
Believed	Peter
Crying	Running
Fear	Teacher
Forgiven	Thomas
Gardener	Understand



BIBLICAL CROSSWORD

Wise Words from John Chapter 20 and more....
(Solution on page 9)

Across

2. Who found the empty tomb of Jesus?
(two words)
4. The Robert Risson Memorial tramstop is
in _____ Street.
9. Our Flemington Mission team collects
supplies from _____ each week.
10. Good kidney health is assisted by eating
less _____.
11. When Jesus joined the disciples in a
locked room he said, " _____ with
you." (two words)
12. Those who have not seen but have
believed are _____.
13. William Barak belonged to the
_____ people.

Down

1. Jesus said, "I am going to
_____. (two words)
2. Jesus said to the disciples,
" _____ the Holy Spirit."
3. John's gospel was written that you may
have _____ in Jesus' name.
5. Who were seated where Jesus had lain
in the tomb? (two words)
6. Who said, "Unless I see the nail prints
in his hands I will not believe" ?
7. Who was the first disciple to enter the
empty tomb? (two words)
8. For whom was Jesus mistaken outside
the tomb?

NO MINE FOR WISDOM ...AN ANCIENT POEM

There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.
Iron is taken from the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.
Mortals put an end to the darkness;
they search out the farthest recesses
for ore in the blackest darkness.
Far from human dwellings they cut a shaft,
in places untouched by human feet;
far from other people they dangle and sway.
The earth, from which food comes,
is transformed below as by fire;
lapis lazuli comes from its rocks,
and its dust contains nuggets of gold.
No bird of prey knows that hidden path,
no falcon's eye has seen it.
Proud beasts do not set foot on it,
and no lion prowls there.
People assault the flinty rock with their hands
and lay bare the roots of the mountains.
They tunnel through the rock;
their eyes see all its treasures.
They search the sources of the rivers
and bring hidden things to light.
*But where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell?*
No mortal comprehends its worth;
it cannot be found in the land of the living.
The deep says, "It is not in me";
the sea says, "It is not with me."

It cannot be bought with the finest gold,
nor can its price be weighed out in silver.
It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir,
with precious onyx or lapis lazuli.
Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it,
nor can it be had for jewels of gold.
Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention;
the price of wisdom is beyond rubies.
The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it;
it cannot be bought with pure gold.
*Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?*
It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
concealed even from the birds in the sky.
Destruction and Death say,
"Only a rumour of it has reached our ears."
God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells,
for he views the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he established the force of the wind
and measured out the waters,
when he made a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderstorm,
then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he confirmed it and tested it.
And he said to the human race,
"The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding."
The Book of Job, Chapter 28



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