

Shepherding a scattered mob



Bernard Gabbott

I HAVE JUST BEEN CHATTING WITH OUR PARISH Administrator. We talked briefly about the current state-of-play with COVID. One of her comments resonated with me – she described a ‘churning feeling in your stomach’. The gross uncertainty, the breaking of community, the isolation, and the constant changes have affected all of us in this pandemic.

As an under-shepherd of God’s mob, this is not something I was trained in. My job seemed fairly simple until 18 months ago: feed the sheep and shoot the wolves (at least, I reckon that is what Paul is describing as he chats with the Ephesians elders in Acts 20!). But now, I often don’t see the sheep face-to-face, the wolves lurk everywhere, feeding the sheep is becoming a more diffuse and intangible task, and

many of the sheep might be struggling to even join us (let alone return to us) as we gather as God’s mob.

This is not a unique situation at the moment. However, across our Diocese, many of us are dealing with these complications in different circumstances, and in different ways. More specifically, many of us are sad that some of the sheep – some of our dear brothers and sisters – are struggling to return to gathering as God’s mob. Let me offer some brief reflections on this, in terms of reasons why, and some of the things we have tried to do to encourage God’s mob to stay meeting face-to-face.

Before the latest lockdown, Narrabri Anglican Church had been meeting in two services at the Town premises each Sunday. Our services were at 8:30am and 10:30am, with morning tea in between.



Until the latest round of change, we had been averaging about 150 people (including children) across those two services. And the return of morning tea *had* been a delight, with fellowship between services on the front lawn a real pleasure.

During the lockdown in 2020, we provided ‘service resources’ each week, so that households could run church in their own homes. We encouraged people to invite others over for church, and a meal. And the resources included pre-recorded sermons and Kids’ Talks, Kids’ Sheets, a service outline, and song clips.

During the latest lockdown, we provided one livestreamed service each week, with 40 people gathered in the Town church, and others joining us at home. All other face-to-face ministries were suspended.

In both scenarios, we have noticed a slight drop in people ‘attending’ church. It has caused me to think of the reasons around this. Here are some that I have thought of, not necessarily in order of importance, and not necessarily all applicable to Narrabri:

- people have been so discombobulated by the constant changes that they are just surviving;
- people are fearful of returning in person due to the nature of COVID;
- people are resentful of changes and so are ‘doing their own thing’;
- people have taken the opportunity to let other priorities seep in and so take over;
- some people have drifted away, exposing a lack of commitment to God and his mob.

In all of these possible reasons, there are no specific Bible verses that speak to the pandemic we are experiencing. But we are constantly reminded that our world is broken by our sin, that we struggle to be wholehearted as student-followers of Jesus, and that fear and anxiety

and laziness are lurking at the door of our hearts and minds.

How, then, do we deal with this, and encourage each other to remain deeply rooted in Jesus, as we started (Colossians 2:6-7)? *Moreover, how do we return to the substance of our God’s design and command for his people: that we gather physically together as his church (Heb.10:19-25)?*

Well, I suspect the answer lies in the continued application of the description of the under-shepherd’s role: feed the sheep and shoot the wolves.

First, feeding the sheep is about making sure we know the condition of the sheep and feed them appropriately. This is really just a long-winded way of saying, ‘Look out for each other, and encourage each other’. In my role as Vicar, that means consistent pastoral contact – in person, via email, through text messages, and in phone calls. It means making sure that the sheep, where possible, are followed up and talked to, and then fed.

Second, this is actually a job that the sheep can do for each other. So, encouraging the mob, without systematising it, to look out for each other is so important. And modelling it from the front, through an open Vicarage, through regular hospitality, through constant contact where possible.

Third, shooting the wolves is a matter of preaching and prayer. It is a matter of making sure that the sheep are fed the right food – God’s Word – so that they can identify wolves and run. It is a matter of prayer (where this under-shepherd is pretty negligent!) – praying through the parish list consistently, a little bit at a time.

Now, let me say, none of these reflections are rocket-science or original. Moreover, none of them undercut the great confidence we already have that the sheep will not be forgotten by THE Shepherd (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:38-39).

A Fireside Chat with Bishop Rod



TO MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS
in Christ across the Diocese,

Greetings from Armidale. I hope you've weathered the winter and stayed warm in your patch. Since moving to Armidale, I've rediscovered the joys of sitting by the fire. So, this letter from me comes as a kind of fireside chat to share some of the things that are on my heart.

During my first eight months in the job as bishop, at every opportunity in parishes around the Armidale Diocese, I have been underlining the central importance of God's word. We live in a world that no longer believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God and which questions its authority in determining all matters of Christian life and doctrine. I've discovered first-hand in recent months that holding this view of Scripture puts us on a collision course with our culture, particularly in matters related to human sexuality. When we dare to gently challenge those who claim to be Christian but are not living in accordance with God's word, we are vilified as hateful and homophobic, evil and even anti-Christian! However, nothing could be further from the truth. As ministers of God's word, we must continue to speak the truth in love. If wilful sin according to God's word is ignored, then eternal salvation is at stake. Therefore, to not address it would be unloving and indeed negligent on the part of the pastor. **Pray for ongoing wisdom, patience and strength to speak the truth in love according to God's word going forward.**

On a happier note, I've been putting my mind over the past few months to organising a new diocesan gathering called *Next Phase Conference 2021*. Due to the uncertainties of the COVID season this conference has been postponed from this year and will now be held in Armidale on 6-7th May 2022. The aim

of *Next Phase* is to motivate and mobilise an army of committed gospel work volunteers amongst those approaching retirement.

The need for this was confirmed to me recently when I received a very helpful page of thoughts from a friend entitled *Retirement and Ministry Thinking*. It began like this:

"At the heart of the following (paper) is a desire to keep working in retirement for the Kingdom of God. Retirement brings a new stage of life and with it comes more time and flexibility. As people enter retirement, they often do so having completed a successful career at the height of their particular skill set. This skill set isn't lost overnight. Prior to retirement, 'work' was the main outlet where these skills were utilised. Now, these skills, along with other skillsets retirees have developed throughout their life, can be focused on supporting ministry. The challenge: How might the local church/diocese utilise these people and their skills to support the work of the gospel?"

I was greatly encouraged that my friend raised the question, because I agree it needs careful consideration. In every season of life as followers of Christ we should be asking, "How can I serve God best with the gifts he has entrusted to me to further his kingdom?" The *Next Phase Conference 2022* is hoping to help people over 50 years of age answer that question. My prayer is that, through encouragement from God's word, brought to us by former Archbishop Peter Jensen, and through sharing from keen lay-people, many will have their eyes opened to see possibilities for fruitful service in the life of churches all over the Armidale Diocese. With electives on pastoral care, technology teams, lay preaching, lay locum work, evangelism teams,

leading bible study groups and children's ministry, there will be opportunity to learn, ask questions and find pathways into training. If you would like to be part of the first *Next Phase Conference* in our Diocese, simply go online to register at armidaleanglicandiocese.com, or ask your minister for the *Next Phase* brochure, complete the application form and send it in.

Please pray that the organisation of the Next Phase Conference 2022 will come together well and that many will come and think through how they can best use the gifts God has entrusted to them to further his kingdom.

Before we get to that of course, this term I looking forward to gathering with brothers and sisters in Christ from around the Diocese at our annual Diocesan Synod gathering in November in the Tamworth Town Hall. In first term next year we also look forward to an ordination of new clergy in February, and gathering for *Men @ Glen* and *Kindred* women in March. Though this year has been one of ever-changing plans, I find myself feeling very thankful to God for the way he continues to build His church in our Diocese as we seek to be faithful in introducing ALL people to Jesus and helping them home to heaven.

Please pray that diocesan events will come together smoothly and that COVID restrictions won't hinder the running of these important gatherings.

Thank you all for your partnership in the gospel across our diocese. May God strengthen us all by his Spirit to keep growing in Christ's likeness, according to God's word, for His glory.

With love in Christ, Bishop Rod Chiswell

Ministry in the next phase

There are many stories of people within the Diocese who are using their retirement to continue, or even increase, ministry. Here are just two of those stories

Retirement? Yeah, right!

Except for a handful of years, training and working in Sydney, Brian Kirk has spent his whole life in the Diocese of Armidale. He was born in Inverell, baptised in Delungra and grew up in the village of Warialda Rail (known as 'The Gully'), the railhead for Warialda. Since 1992, he has served in the Special District of Ashford/Delungra, in the Special District of Manilla, as Director of the Anglican Counselling Service, as Senior Minister of Moree and Archdeacon for the Barwon region, and finally as Senior Minister for the Parish of Uralla and Vicar-General for the Diocese. He also served on Diocesan Council for about 20 years, and as the Diocesan representative on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAAC) also for 20 years, where he became the National Chair. In his spare time, he co-chaired a General Synod taskforce, served on General Synod and Standing Committee, and served on an international committee for Anglican Alliance, all the while serving on numerous Diocesan committees over the years.

To say Brian Kirk has been important in and to the Diocese of Armidale is a very large understatement.

But in 2012, he had a stroke and despite a good recovery, he and his wife Sharon came to the difficult decision to retire from full-time, paid ministry. But what now?

"I am retiring from full-time parish ministry but I was always open to doing something part-time", he said. "Since making that decision, the part-time position of Chaplain to the Armidale Hospital and a couple of aged care facilities in Armidale has become available. I have expressed my interest to the Bishop. I still believe I have something to offer and want to be able to contribute to the ministry of the gospel in this Diocese. It is never too late for people to come to know Jesus and to seek Him at vulnerable times in their lives.

I hope to continue to grow in in Christ, to introduce people to Jesus, to disciple people, to serve the Lord through my local church and the Diocese through locum ministry. Sharon's sister, Maria has been trying to get me to assist with a Scripture Union Cricket Camp for several years. This year, she succeeded. I hope to be able to spend a little more time with my children and their families. I also hope to learn some new skills in carpentry, give more time to reading and the garden and enhance my fishing skills.

When I made the decision to take a step back from full-time parish ministry, Sharon was successful in obtaining a part-time position at the Armidale Anglican Cathedral. Her focus is the discipling and equipping of women. She is enjoying her role and seems to have been well received by the Cathedral parish.

The only mention of retirement that I have found in the Bible is in Numbers 8:25. It refers to the Levites (the priestly tribe of Israel) who had the responsibility of moving the tabernacle and its furniture in the wilderness.



It required much strength and was better suited to younger men. They stopped working at 50 but were allowed to help the younger men. Many people today hit retirement and stop serving at church or in the community altogether, wanting to live a life of leisure. Is this biblical?

We learn from God's Word that God created us to work. I don't think we were ever meant to 'not work'. Retirement is not wrong, but I wonder if retirement for Christians should mean making time to devote to serving others more fully without the necessity of getting paid for it. It is time to repurpose how and why you invest your time and resources.

As you enter the next phase of your life, don't think of it as stopping work and living a life of leisure. Rather, ask God to show you how you may repurpose your life so that you may be a blessing to others as you willingly serve our Lord in serving others."

Still teaching



Kerry and Lindy Kurtz are retired teachers. They spent their teaching careers in country towns, beginning in Taree and Tuncurry areas before accepting permanent teaching jobs in Broken Hill. Six years in Broken Hill then led them to Tamworth where they taught in a number of schools before retirement a couple of years ago. Lindy's last position was Teacher Librarian at Tamworth Public School while Kerry finished up as Principal of Quirindi Public School. Both became Christians at college over 40 years ago. As retirement loomed, they realized that their ministries at their home church, St Peter's Tamworth, would need some careful re-thinking.

"A retired friend involved in different ministries suggested that we take a bit of time to think about where we should serve, not rushing into filling up all the spaces of the week," Kerry said. "It has given us the opportunity to think about what retirement means for the both of us. There is a lot to negotiate together, with time to do lots of good things, as well as the ordinary things that need to be done. We retired at different times, so we have had to adjust to each other's choices of how we spend the day. It has been important to think about what we do together and independently to give each other space, and time to pursue our individual interests. Having more time to develop friendships and getting to know new people at church has been a bonus. An initiative in our church over the past couple of years has seen retired men from the different St Peter's services meet together to have coffee once a fortnight. Low key and no agenda other than getting together. Some of us now do it every week.

It has worked well for us to focus our ministry in certain areas and be very committed to those specific things. Attending Coledale Frontyard Church is our regular commitment. Lindy does visiting beforehand and we have committed to teaching a scripture class at Hillvue school on the same afternoon. A majority of the children who attend come from Hillvue

Primary School. Kerry plays music each week and Lindy oversees the supplies and set up for the meal. We plan to be on a team of a new initiative through Anglicare, called the Coledale Pantry Ministry. This will involve distributing grocery supplies and providing a social morning tea setting for the community, on the St Peter's Frontyard church site once a fortnight. We have also been involved in Scripture Union camps in a variety of helping roles."

Kerry and Lindy have always seen hospitality as a vital ministry. "Hospitality takes a bit of thought and preparation but can be such an enjoyable way to spend time," Lindy told us. "It works well for us to gather people together at our home for a meal or a coffee and having the extra time to chat helps people get to know each other better. I know that many people are not particularly interested in cooking, and perhaps preparing a meal for a lot of other people can be a bit daunting. But it need not be! Cheese, biscuits, fruit and dip make an easy platter for an unexpected gathering; soup and bread for any meal works well; a slow cooker or one pot meal with lots of vegies and rice prepared in advance makes for a manageable time with a few families. During our COVID lockdown time Kerry learnt how to make scones, a bonus for any crowd!

Retirement can be a very difficult time to negotiate, especially when you have come from a job where you had a status, and a particular place to fill. Kerry and Lindy want to encourage those facing retirement to see it not as an end, but as a beginning of new opportunities.

"Older Christians have an important part to play in their families, the church and community...being a listening ear, sharing trials and difficulties in their own lives, praying, encouraging," they said. "Many of these things are also achievable for the less mobile older folk or those with health issues. Christians of all ages have a part to play, even in retirement!"



The originals at North Tamworth

NORTH TAMWORTH ANGLICAN Church began on the 16 February 2020, after many years of planning and prayer from the Diocese, involving discussion, property acquisition, and meetings. God provided a small but strong core team of 16 people to plant the new church, with services held in the Resource Centre, of the William Cowper Campus of Calrossy school. We began by meeting weekly for services, and fortnightly after the service, for a planning, training, and prayer meeting. A strong and united team quickly formed.

Then COVID-19 hit, just seven weeks later. Moving to Zoom, we continued services, as well as the fortnightly planning, training, and prayer sessions. We built a website, joined Facebook and Instagram and took advantage of the lockdown to build our online presence across the new parish in North Tamworth and the Moore Creek valley. Many people followed us and listened to our services online.

Funding from the Diocese and an individual donation were used for church signage on Moore Creek Road, website development and set up, outreach materials, flyers and postcards, a photocopier, office equipment and other service needs. Monthly prayer points have been produced since the church started and to date the prayer points go out to 88 email addresses of over 100 people. Regular prayer meetings are also part of the culture of the new church, and personally I have tried to take seriously the commitment to be devoted to both ministry of the Word and prayer.

In mid-June 2020, we were able to start meeting back 'live' for church in the Resource Centre. This involved a soft launch of the new church, with the core team inviting family

and friends they had been praying for, as well as inviting contacts made online during COVID. This resulted in the church starting to grow. A Sunday School was started, bible study groups were established and, as contact was made with some teenagers, a Sunday afternoon youth bible study began.

In September 2020, we moved from our 'start up' structure to our 'up and running' structure, which involved changing from the fortnightly planning, training, and prayer meeting with the core team, to establishing a parish council and other Anglican structures. Also in term three 2020, outreach events were started for men and women, with the new church family showing a great heart for outreach, with many people being prayed for and invited.

Being a church in a school and with many families in our local area, we have been keen to grow and expand our ministry to children. As a result, we have employed Lisa Newnham one day a week from the start of 2021 to continue the work she was doing in an honorary position in 2020. This has enabled the parish to keep growing in strength and building on the momentum we currently have in this area. By mid-2021 we had a Sunday School of 14 kids and youth group of 15 teenagers.

At our very first service just nine people attended, and in those early months over COVID lockdown God gave us a small but strong united core team of just 16 people. A year and a half later over 75 people are coming regularly to services and four adult mid-week bible study groups are operating.

Humanly speaking, there have been many things against us this past year, but despite



A sign to consider God

the challenges God has guided, strengthened, and grown us up and out in Christ. It has been a humbling reminder that God builds His church and doesn't need conditions to be good from a human perspective in order to grow His church. Great fellowship exists in our healthy united and friendly church family, and there is plenty of evidence of people growing in Christ. It is worth noting that there has been very little transfer growth from other Anglican churches in town but most of our growth has been through conversion, people new to Tamworth living in the area who saw the church signs and came, lapsed church attenders in the area who saw the new church as an opportunity for a fresh start, or contacts made through COVID online. Looking to the future, we continue to greatly value the diocesan prayers and support, that our gracious Heavenly Father might continue to build His church, as we continue Jesus ministry in North Tamworth.



Scott and Jo Dunlop with Cassie and Tom Penrose on their wedding day

CASSIE SMALL AND TOM PENROSE WERE A YOUNG COUPLE, engaged and living in Tamworth, with a newborn son called Edward. Cassie grew up in Gunnedah. She went to school with Scott and Jo Dunlop's children, and often attended the church youth group. Tom grew up in a Christian household in Tamworth, but a lot of what he heard went over his head as a child, and he fell away from Christian teaching as he grew older. What Tom and Cassie did not know was that God was seeking them out.

"When Eddie was around eight weeks old, God planted in me an urge to learn more about Him," Cassie said. "There were a couple of reasons. The first was that I couldn't help marvelling at God's perfect and purposeful Creation since having our little boy. The second was that I was experiencing postpartum anxiety, and I honestly felt like something was missing within me. I remember walking with Eddie in the pram one day, thinking 'I feel like I'm missing something, and I think it is God'. So I started to pray. I remember exactly where I was walking as I started to say that first prayer to God, beginning with something like 'Dear God, I don't really know how to do this but here goes...'. In the weeks after that, I prayed more and more often. I spoke to Tom's mum about wanting to know more about the Lord, as she is a Christian, and we had a wonderful afternoon of fellowship.

I continued to feel that I would like to go to church. I remembered my Pop telling me over a year or more beforehand that Scott Dunlop was planning to start a church in North Tamworth. A quick google search took my mum and me to the North Tamworth Anglican Church website. A little while later (the weekend before Easter), I was headed out to a baby shower at Moore Creek and I saw the sign for the North Tamworth Anglican Church, advertising their Easter services. I thought, 'Right, I'm going to church on Good Friday!' I told my Mum and she said that she would come too. She did, she has continued coming since then! I hadn't spoken to Tom about wanting to go to church prior to this point in time. When I did speak to him about it, he was happy for me but wasn't yet eager himself. He didn't come the Easter weekend as he was working, but he came for the first time a couple of weekends after.

For Tom, an eagerness to learn more about Jesus developed through doing our Marriage Preparation course and Christianity Explained course with Scott, which we started a month or two after first coming to the church. That was another way that God worked

through interesting circumstances... We had wedding plans booked in elsewhere for well over a year. However, COVID restrictions at the time meant that we couldn't fit our original guest list in the venue – even though we ended up having less than 25 people in the end! So we decided to change our plans, and Scott kindly agreed to marry us. He said he could marry us at any Anglican Church in the Diocese. We booked in at St Paul's Anglican Church in Tamworth, where Tom's grandparents were married in the late 1950's.

In May, we started Marriage Preparation with Scott, and during our first session, we took up Scott's offer to do the Christianity Explained course with us. Scott and Jo would come over to our house for dinner every two or three weeks (as we all decided it was best for Edward's bedtime routine), and Scott stayed on after dinner to do the Marriage Preparation and Christianity Explained with us. Both Tom and I were struck by the gravity of what we were reading in the Bible, about Jesus, His love for us, and what it means to follow him. It was like we were seeing with fresh eyes or hearing with fresh ears. After the first couple of sessions, we keenly awaited our next session as we were hungry to learn more. We started reading the Bible together as part of the "homework" from the courses, and also began to pray together.

At this time, God really worked in Tom's heart by showing him that the struggles of the world today are no different from the struggles of the world throughout time, caused by sin. Scott gave us a list of Scriptures to read through to choose the readings for our wedding ceremony, and one of them comes from Ecclesiastes 4. One verse particularly hit home for Tom, and it was clear from then on that God was very much at work in Tom's heart.

"There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. 'For whom am I toiling?', he asked, 'and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?' This too is meaningless – a miserable business!" Ecclesiastes 4:8

Tom and I both decided to commit our lives to Jesus during our final session of the Christianity Explained course (three or four months after we first started attending the North Tamworth Anglican Church). The start of the rest of our lives! And how Jesus has already changed our lives so much since then! I always remember something that Tom's grandmother says, 'Our God is a God of miracles'. He certainly is and He works in infinite ways – seen and unseen – in the lives of His people."

COVID-19 India: Aussie Christians partner with rural hospitals through Anglican Aid

EARLIER THIS YEAR, INDIA experienced a devastating second wave of COVID-19. The death toll doubled from the first peak of the virus. Crematorium cities were burning day and night as the world watched on in horror.

Herbertpur Christian Hospital in Uttarakhand state in Northern India was asked by the Indian Government to treat the ever-growing number of COVID-19 patients. At that time there were about 50,000 confirmed cases: roughly 1 in every 200 people.

The Christian hospital, which services anyone regardless of race, caste, or religion, was the only COVID-19 hospital in the area, servicing a population of 2 million people.

By God's providence, Anglican Aid had a pre-existing, long-term partnership with India's Herbertpur Christian Hospital stretching back to 2002, which enabled our rapid response to their COVID crisis.

Robert Kumar is the Project Director for Community Health at Herbertpur Christian Hospital. He described the situation as they transformed overnight into a COVID-19 hospital:

"The moment we started, within 2 days all the beds were full because so many people were coming, and our emergency department was overflowing because every two or three minutes a patient was coming with low oxygen levels.

"It was a life changing experience for the health worker as well because we had never experienced so many deaths. The trauma was very high.

"The supply chain was completely stopped. Getting monitors, ventilators, all those became so challenging, and medical equipment."

Together with supporters in Australia, Anglican Aid was able to provide desperately needed medical supplies including oxygen, ventilators, PPE for hospital staff, and meals for Covid patients.

"We are profoundly grateful that we have you standing with us," said Robert Kumar.

The Doctor leading the Covid response for



Donations from Anglicans in the North West have helped supply vital equipment to Indian hospitals.

Herbertpur Christian Hospital described it like this:

"Being a part of the COVID Core team of our hospital, I could experience God's help and providence from the starting of the crisis till today. Many a time I had no answer, why there is this magnitude of suffering?

"But God in His wonderful ways taught me about patience during suffering. It gave me great satisfaction in taking care of COVID patients and being a channel of hope and peace amid the despair. I believe the pandemic has taught us to leave our pride and completely depend on God."

Anglican Aid has provided humanitarian relief to communities devastated by the pandemic, natural disasters, and conflict. Working with local churches and trusted organisations on the ground who are deeply involved in their communities, Anglican Aid seeks to meet needs in the name of Jesus.

Presently, Anglican Aid is raising funds to support Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban. We are again working with a long-term partner. Our main contact is himself a believer from a Muslim background, who was forced to leave his home with the help of Anglican Aid due to religious persecution.

Together, we are asking Australian Christians to support the resettlement of

Afghan refugees by making donations towards basic accommodation and daily necessities like food and clothing, as well as trauma counselling, local language classes, schooling for children and short vocational education courses for the adults, and ongoing pastoral care through the local church. You can respond to this appeal at <https://anglicanaid.org.au/aid-for-afghan-refugees/>

Please pray for countries around the world suffering throughout the world from COVID-19. Anglican Aid continues to help support countries with medical equipment and food relief for impoverished communities in lockdown, like Nepal and Myanmar.

Medical equipment supplied by Anglican Aid to a hospital in rural India has saved many lives, even beyond the Covid crisis. "We are so grateful to the Anglican Aid for your support of a ventilator. Last week we had 15 snakebite patients and we were able to save 13 of them by putting them on [the] ventilator," said Dr Helen Paul at Nav Jivan Hospital.

Dr Paul said patients needing ventilation would usually be referred to a hospital 150 kms away, but most would not be able to travel that distance.

"It has given immense joy to our doctors and nurses to see the patients recover. Honestly, we are grateful to you all for this support."



Ride like a girl!

Julia Anderson, Charlotte Hunt, Tori Lockrey and Rebecca Eastment at the end of a successful camp.

IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT LIFE IN THE NORTH-WEST for country kids in the school holidays then you are likely to know something of 'Pony Camp'. Usually held in September, children and teenagers who own a horse (or can borrow one) enjoy a few days of fun and games on horseback under the auspices of local Pony Clubs. But how about a Christian Pony camp for young people in the Armidale Diocese? What a great way to present the gospel to the next generation!

This was the idea conceived in the horse yards at 'Newstead', the property of John and Julia Anderson at Mullaley. Armidale teacher and school chaplain, Rebecca Eastment, suggested the idea to Julia as they saddled their horses, and as they say, one thing led to another and after much prayer and support, the Scripture Union Camp, 'Ride Like a Girl', was born.

Mr David Tankard, (Tamworth Scripture Union Representative) was delighted by the idea and supported the initiative from start to finish. The team was made up of horse and gospel loving members, who gave their time and expertise to run activities for 18 riders of high school age (years 7 to 10) at the Tamworth Paceway. Horses of all shapes and sizes began arriving with their teenage owners on Wednesday morning. The activities included dressage, ground work, sporting and jumping. Volunteers worked tirelessly, lending their expertise in all those fields. Loomberah Anglican Church graciously hosted the group and the Memorial Hall was used for eating and meeting. The transport was generously provided by Carinya Christian School, ferrying the girls back and forth from the Paceway. The food was delicious and plentiful.

Each day of camp began with Bible readings over breakfast and finished with 'Horse Talks' by Rebecca Eastment pointing the girls to a God who loved them and desired them to know Him personally. The girls were encouraged to understand this relationship with God to be not like that of a cowboy dominating a bucking bronco, but rather like a dressage champion, working together with his horse to produce



a harmonious unity, ultimately bringing glory to both horse and rider. By Saturday, everyone was thoroughly exhausted, but the Gymkhana was attended by parents and friends, many prizes given, and the 'Most Improved' applauded.

God, our Good Shepherd, blessed this camp with safety for all - not a small concern. We are so grateful for this, and for granting a hearing for the good news of life in the Lord Jesus Christ. And after some wonderful feedback from the riders and their families, plans for next year are underway. What a great opportunity to present round two of what life with 'the ultimate trainer' is all about!

Our local SU NSW staff love to explore ideas for new camps or other ministries. Contact 0401571978 (Dave Tankard) or 0490111610 (Olivia Ruigro).



Gospel lens or COVID lens?

Nick Stone

Church Missionary Society Northern NSW rep

OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN ALTERED THESE PAST 18 months with the advent of COVID-19. Our COVID-19 lenses threaten to turn our focus inwards. Talk of border closures, social distancing, quarantine and lockdown, though necessary measures to love our neighbour, all have the potential to draw our gaze much closer to home.

To live by faith, we need to hear from God's Word of unseen realities: of the Lord who is King, whose reign extends beyond earthly borders and lockdowns, whose gospel is not, will not and can never be quarantined. Likewise, to replace our COVID-19 lenses with our gospel lenses, and have our focus turned outwardly, we need to hear of the mission that's unseen.

As church gatherings have been allowed to meet in person over the past year, much time, rightly, has been spent on strengthening the gathering of God's people in each patch across our Diocese. Through this we've been able to put our gospel lenses on, replacing our COVID-19 lenses.

But what should we be seeing through our gospel lenses?

We should be seeing God continuing to work in our patch, but our gospel lenses will be blurry if we're not lifting our gaze beyond the 100km speed signs at the edge of our towns.

Just as we need to hear of the unseen realities of God's kingdom to live better for him, we also need to hear of what God is doing outside of our patch. We can be encouraged by the God who works beyond lockdown, so we're growing in our commitment to the gospel that is not bound. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy that, though he was in chains, God's Word was not chained (2 Tim. 2:9). And that is true today.

Yes, COVID-19 has affected global mission. It has meant timings of CMS workers' arrivals and departures have been altered. The sickness and death that COVID-19 has brought around the world makes us more aware of our broken world and how fleeting life is. However, just as mission continued through two world wars, and just as mission continues through other disasters, so too through COVID-19. CMS

workers continue to work towards a world that knows Jesus.

The Lord's people have continued to respond generously by giving and praying. God remains the Lord of the harvest, raising up workers for His harvest field. We are looking forward to sending out two new missionaries, early next year. J and S finished at St Andrew's Hall (CMS' training facility in Melbourne) in July and are visiting churches in our region before heading to Central Asia. They have shared a bit about who they are and why they're going, a testament to our faithful God.

Nick: J and S, can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how that has led you to go with CMS?

J and S: We both grew up in families that know and love God and long to see others know him too. J was born and bred in the New England and North-West regions of NSW as the son of an Anglican minister. He came to personal faith in his early teenage years. From an early age he was exposed to visiting cross-cultural workers and loved hearing their stories. S grew up in South Asia as part of a CMS family. She cannot remember a time that she did not know and trust Jesus and quickly caught the global vision. Over the years, our combined heart for God's global mission has grown and we have developed a deep desire to serve God wherever he would like to use us. Our journey has included studying agriculture for J and medicine for S, theological training, medical work and general practice training for S and a 2-year CMS traineeship for J. As we prayerfully pursued serving cross-culturally, God seemed to place people in our path to gradually zoom our focus to serving with CMS in Central Asia.

What are the challenges, generally, and for Christians, in particular, in the country you're going to?

Central Asia is an often-forgotten region marked by sociopolitical instability and material, relational and spiritual poverty. For many people,

mere survival is challenging. This has only been intensified by COVID-19 which has caused significant deaths, both directly and indirectly, because of increased food insecurity. Millions of people are earnestly seeking to live in submission to God but have never had the opportunity to hear the good news or even to meet a genuine follower of Jesus. The very few local followers of Jesus who are there face significant and often life-threatening persecution from their families and communities. They are unable to meet openly.

What will you be doing there?

J and S: We'll partner with a local Christian NGO who have served there for over 50 years. We'll spend the first 6 months learning language and culture full time and this will be an ongoing focus. CMS really values language learning, because it's a way that we can come into a context humbly, honour the community we are entering and communicate not on our terms, but on theirs – thus making our communication much more effective. We've been encouraged to think about this not as a hurdle we just have to get through before we start really serving, but as real relational serving in-and-of itself that enables us to increasingly engage deeply in the community. After the first 6 months we plan to join a team serving in word and deed in a rural community – J in agricultural development and S in community health. All the while, we'll seek to build intentional personal relationships with the people we are serving amongst and serving alongside. We feel very small, weak and ordinary, but we bear the light of life.

How can we be praying for you?

J and S: Please pray for us as we seek to build strong partnerships with churches and individuals over the next few months. Pray for creativity and patience as we adapt to changing COVID-19 restrictions and the implications for our visits to partner churches. Please also pray that God would continue to prepare us as a family to serve in Central Asia and that we would trust him in each step. As we arrive on location early next year, God-willing, pray that God would provide people who can be a bridge into the culture for us.



Through CMS, the gospel goes to old and young.

Why would a young couple, with their young family, leave a familiar culture and language, family and friends, behind, to go to a people, a culture and language they do not know?

They go because Christ's love compels us (2 Cor. 5:14). They know that Jesus loves the people of Central Asia, such that He died for them. They go with the conviction that, the Christian, the person who trusts in Jesus in 'insecure' Central Asia, will always be eternally far safer than the person who does not trust in Jesus in 'safe' Australia (Jn. 3:36).

Do **you** believe that? And does that motivate you to think and pray and act towards a world that knows Jesus and so therefore has lasting hope? Have you got your gospel lenses on, casting your eyes beyond your patch? As God lifts our gaze beyond our patch to His global mission, our love for His local mission grows too, as our neighbours hear about the love of God, their need of a Saviour, and the light that gives life.

You can follow J and S as they prepare to serve cross-culturally by being added to their newsletter list. Email qld@cms.org.au to be added. Find out more about CMS and our missionaries at cms.org.au

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had finally taken its toll. Tenterfield parish had gone into survival mode. I believed that the best course of action for a travelling chaplain was a ministry of compassion and encouragement. That would involve a lot of visiting. Unfortunately, the whole state went into lockdown.



A bogged removal truck is just one of the joys of country ministry.

And whilst clergy were allowed to carry out pastoral visits, I was excluded from the hospital and Aged Care facilities. Fortunately, the parish did have some good systems in place. And ministry continued.

As I continued a more personal ministry with the members, people started to voice their desire that I would be their full-time pastor. Those same people had also made approaches to the parish nominators, who, in turn, had approached the bishop. Initially the bishop advised that this was not possible since the travelling chaplaincy had been arranged up until Christmas. However, like the persistent widow in Luke 18, the nominators kept coming and the bishop agreed for discussions to go ahead. There were some difficulties which needed working through. I wanted to make sure that I was the proper "fit" for the parish and I wasn't being approached because the parish was sick and tired of vacancy and "anybody would do". As I am approaching retirement age, this would be a shorter-term incumbency than usual.

After much prayerful consideration parish, pastor, and bishop all agreed this was God's leading and I was invited to take up the role as vicar of Tenterfield. The position will begin in January 2022, after I have fulfilled my current job as the travelling chaplain at Baradine."

So, Tenterfield has a new vicar but the travelling chaplain has, for the moment, been put on hold. Please pray that a lasting solution may be found to the problem of remote area ministry and the lack of full-time clergy. And pray for Jonathan as he settles in, that he will gently pastor those who are tired and hurting and equip the saints there to continue God's work in Tenterfield.



The travels of Jonathan



JONATHAN EARNSHAW HAS DONE QUITE A BIT OF travelling over the past few years. He returned to the Armidale Diocese in 2018 after working in North-Western Australia. Since then, he has been serving in the parish of Bundarra for four days a week, and as the hospital chaplain at the Armidale Rural Referral Hospital. In a very definite display of the old adage *Man proposes, God disposes*, Jonathan then prepared for what he thought was going to be his next position – Diocesan Travelling Chaplain.

“My time at Bundarra was coming to an end,” he said. “It had become very difficult to maintain the enthusiasm for a ‘combination’ position, especially with the travel involved and the problems COVID caused to hospital chaplaincy. The questions which started to exercise my mind were: should I retire early? Should I transition to retirement? Or should I change positions? After speaking with the bishop and praying it became clear that the position of Diocesan Travelling Chaplain was one that I could fill.”

So, Jonathan set off for Tenterfield, which had been without a full-time minister for over eight months. Parish Warden Hugh McCowen was thrilled to be the guinea pig for this new ministry. “We are very grateful to previous Bishop Rick, Bishop Rod and Archdeacon Adam Draycott at Inverell for the support they have given us in this time. They have cared for us and helped us to maintain ministry. Lay people have been able to keep the Sunday services going, but what we have missed is the pastoral work a full-time clergyman can do. If someone calls to tell us they have just lost a loved one, a full-time pastor can go straight into action. When crises appear, it’s almost impossible for a lay person to handle. Lay people have jobs and other responsibilities. A pastor is

there to do that specific job. Jonathan has come in and, fair dinkum, you would have thought the guy had been here for years! He has come in among the people, and is humble, affable, approachable. He has been a breath of fresh air and a real lift to the people of the congregation. Everything stems from pastoral care in a country parish. I believe that Jonathan coming in and connecting with people, and engaging people and meeting people where they’re at, while encouraging them to be regular and more involved in church is going to be the biggest blessing for us. The very first sermon he gave us was from John’s gospel. He told us that he was here to partner with us. Together, we are going to help those people who need to see Jesus clearly.”

So far, so good. Jonathan is a hit in Tenterfield, everyone would love him to stay, but he has committed to the idea of a travelling chaplaincy.

Enter God’s plan B.

“The move into travelling chaplaincy did not run smoothly,” he said. “Having taken some long service leave, I was due to finish in Bundarra on Sunday the 4th of July. My worldly goods were to be packed and sent into storage and I was to move some personal effects to Tenterfield to start on the 11th of July. The problems started when the tate government locked down Sydney, and because I had been there for 2 hours I was forced to isolate. The next problem was that the removalist bogged his truck down to the axels which made the move more traumatic than usual. Thankfully the Council bailed us out, and I managed to arrive at Tenterfield to begin by the promised date.

On arrival I was greeted with great love and affection. It soon became clear that the parish had struggled in recent years and the long vacancy

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“...there’s no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim...”

John Bunyan