

The Link

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Fostering love



Robyn Powell

MY GRANDSON GILBERT WAS BORN INTO A LOVING FAMILY. He has two besotted parents, four adoring grandparents, aunts and uncles who will do anything to make him laugh; and eight cousins who can't wait to see him, either in person or on Facetime.

Like many modern Aussie kids, Gilbert has a family that is a bit of a mixed bag. Three of his grandparents are normal, old, garden-variety Aussies, but one is Irish. He has an uncle who is Vietnamese and an aunt who comes from El Salvador.

So his cohort of cousins is an interesting one. On his father's side of the family, two of his cousins are step-cousins. Two of his cousins have the characteristics of both their beautiful blonde, blue-eyed mother and their handsome, brown-eyed Vietnamese father. On his mother's side of the family (that's where I come in; Gilbert's mother Jane is my eldest daughter) his cousins James and Richard are a mix – in looks and personality – of their parents, grandparents and even great grandparents. Gilbert's cousin Richard looks so much like him

they could be brothers, with their fair skin and hair and bright blue eyes, just like their mutual great-grandfather. And Gilbert's final two cousins? Well, they are foster cousins.

Matthew and Luke (not their real names, pictured on the front page) have been a part of my family for almost five years. They were removed from their birth family when they were one and three, and came to live with their new family, where they have remained ever since. Their birth parents were unable to care for any of their children, so over the years six children in total were removed and placed into foster care. Matthew and Luke's four birth siblings were placed with family members, but there was no one else in the family who could care for them, so they came to live with my daughter Anna and son-in-law Dan.

Until they joined the family, I knew very little about foster-care. I heard the terrible statistics from time to time on the news. I saw the shocking stories of children who had died through neglect or mistreatment and like everyone, I felt sad and angry and often thought "Someone should do something about that!"

When Anna and Dan decided that they actually *would* do something about it, I confess my first reaction was neither charitable nor Christian. I argued with them, urging them not to take on such a huge burden which, as newlyweds, might prove too much to bear. I urged them to think of the biological children they would have, and how they would be affected. I wondered how I could possibly love these children; whether I would be able to treat them as true grandchildren. When Matthew and Luke arrived, I worried even more. Both have significant global delays and some measure of intellectual disability. Both have psychological scars left over from their earliest days when they were neglected and malnourished, and these scars cause some behavioural issues that can be challenging and frightening to themselves, their parents and teachers...and their grandparents. To say that the past five years have been easy would be to tell a lie.

When they first arrived in my family, little Matthew (then nearly three) could say only one word: bubba. It had been his job to make sure the then 10 month-old Luke got food. He discovered the pantry and began stuffing anything he could reach into his pockets. We were told that a lot of foster kids do that. Luke was unable to hold his head up and made no sound. He did not cry, gurgle or laugh. His eyes were blank. They had been neglected, and they did not know how to hug, how to play, how to respond to the words "I love you".

Five years later Matthew and Luke are at school, and the little country school in the small town where they live deserves a medal. They are learning, they are participating, they are part of a community. Their teachers, the school counsellor and the principals understand that children in out-of-home care need a little bit more patience than many other children. They work in full partnership with my daughter and her husband to make sure they get the best education possible. The video of little Luke, gamely pushing on at the kindergarten cross-country, as his schoolmates shouted encouragement (in last place but he finished!) made me cry. His chunky little legs and his low muscle tone will never see him at the Olympics but finishing a cross country for five-year-olds is enough to make this grandma's heart swell with pride. They now have two more brothers. James and Richard were born after Matthew and Luke joined the family, and together they make a lot of noise and a lot of mess!

Luke's anger outbursts are slowly subsiding as he becomes more



Richard's birth in 2020 completed the family. All three brothers were thrilled to have a new member of the gang! Anna hovers close by to make sure Mathew, Luke and James don't get too enthusiastic in their welcome.

able to express his feelings. Matthew is becoming more confident, more able to say what he thinks instead of going silent and hanging his head as he did in the early days. They have nutritious food, warm beds, clean clothes, rambunctious games and lots of books...things they, sadly, did not have in the home of their birth. They have pets, household chores and prayer time at night.

So now, five years later, what has become of my fears? Matthew and Luke are my grandsons. End of story. I love them as I love my three biological grandsons; Gilbert, James and Richard.

To James and Richard, they are their brothers. It never occurs to them to wonder why Matthew and Luke don't look like anyone else in the family. They see no difference, and they never will.

To Gilbert, they are his cousins. His cousins *all* look totally different! He sees no difference and he never will.

I thank God frequently that Matthew and Luke came into their new family, where they are given the love, care and help they so desperately need. But then I get very, very sad. What about all the other children who are in similar – or worse – situations?

There are around 20,000 children in New South Wales who need loving foster families. Some of these children are little babies whose parents just need a bit of a boost for a few weeks before they take over the responsibility of parenthood. Some of them are toddlers and pre-schoolers who may need a few months to allow their parents to grapple with problems of addiction or financial difficulties. Some are older – teenagers, perhaps – whose parents will never be able to care for them properly. Many of them come with physical, emotional or psychological scars that can be a challenge to deal with. But all of them need the same thing...a family. A family that will help, teach, care, and most of all, love them as God loves them. Sometimes that family will be called upon to do these things for just a few weeks. Sometimes it will be for a year or two, and sometimes, it will be forever. We hope,

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cover: Rod Chiswell and Archbishop Glenn Davies make their way through the rain into St Peter's in Armidale.

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God willing, that Matthew and Luke will be with us forever.

Because of my own passion for foster care, and because a number of people have suggested this as a subject for a story in *The Link*, I am devoting several pages of this issue to foster care. I wanted to talk to all the people involved, the parents, the workers, the agencies, the siblings, the prayer warriors who make up the vast tapestry of a foster-child's life.

Most of all, I want to encourage the readers of *The Link* to pray for the foster care system in New South Wales, for the children and their broken families; for the workers who have to spend their working lives

sorting out messy and often heart-breaking cases; and for the families who step up and take in these children. Perhaps there are some of you who have vaguely thought about fostering over the years. If so, I urge you pray about it, and then to contact any of the agencies or groups we mention in the following articles.

I want to express my thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue. It is a big subject, with big uncertainties and big challenges. How wonderful it is, then, that we have a big God who loves every child made in His image and who sent his only Son to die that they might have life, and have it to the full.

Becoming a foster parent

Simon Carter

ERIN AND I HAD THOUGHT ABOUT foster care for a long time. The big driver for our thinking was answering the question, how can our family be a blessing to children who needed a family, and how do we respond to the Bible's command to love the orphans and fatherless?

We started with respite care for a number of different children which involved looking after them on weekends, holidays and when a carer went to hospital. We have been doing long term care for one child for nearly three years.

Bringing another child into a family always has an impact, both in terms of blessing and cost. This is true when you bring a baby into a family, but more complicated when you bring a hurt child into your family. Our children have been blessed by the opportunity to care for another child, and it has grown them. But that growth hasn't always been easy.

While the Bible doesn't imagine a situation where society removes children from their parents, it does address caring for children without parents. The Bible speaks often about the care for the vulnerable and fatherless and there is an expectation that those who have been given much, will share much. A few passages come to mind – Proverbs 31:8-9; *Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy* and, James 1:27; *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* Deuteronomy constantly talks about the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, and our care and compassion for them. If you follow the theme of justice through the Bible



you see, because of our new life in Christ, that we should take initiative in our care for the vulnerable.

Our church has been incredibly supportive. They have given the children in our care a community who care for them. Church has given them the wider family that they effectively lost when they were put in care. Our church has helped us in our journey with foster care more than they know. From regularly praying for us, to families having our foster child around after church on a Sunday, to just loving him and being patient with him. One family have even become official respite carers for our foster child. Respite care means that there is a formal supported arrangement where a foster child can go and stay with a suitably trained and accredited family to give the host family a break. Respite care with a family at church means that our foster child doesn't feel like he is a burden to be shared, but actually asks to go and have sleep overs with them, enjoys being part of their family, goes to birthday parties with them and thoroughly enjoys his time with them, and we get to have a quiet weekend.

We went into foster care with a firm faith, a supportive family and a supportive church. Children in care have none of that and their

needs are greater than our potential hurts. We know that love can hurt, but that shouldn't ever stop us loving others. We are so thankful that we have a God who doesn't hold off loving his people because it might have hurt him. We serve a God who gave up everything in order to love us and adopt us into his family.

You would have to be incredibly strong to do it on your own, but we don't. We do it with the support of Challenge, (our agency) and all that they provide, the support of our church family, but most of all we do it under the strength of God. We are not special, and we are not super parents. The idea of foster care requiring being some sort of being a superhero makes it easier to avoid the sacrifice and excuse not to do foster care. I've heard people say, "I couldn't do what you are doing". That may be the case, but I think everyone should think about the possibility of foster caring for a child. There are different levels of foster care and we encourage people to at least think of respite care.

But there are other ways to be involved. Look around your church and look for the people doing foster care and love the children in their care. If there aren't any, consider whether you or someone else ought to be looking into doing foster care. If every church had one family in it doing foster care, then we wouldn't have a foster care crisis in our country.

These children need to know the love of God. More than anything, these children need to know a Father who is perfect and who will love them. I think that Christians, individually, need to consider how they can love children in foster care. Not everyone can become a permanent foster carer but, being obedient to God's word, we can all play some part in caring for the fatherless.

The modern day orphans



JOSH AND RACHEL WELLINGS LIVE IN WALCHA. RACHEL'S interest in foster care began at a very young age.

“When I was a teenager I knew a boy at school who was in foster care, and seeing just a regular kid needing help sparked something in me,” she said. “When Josh and I were dating I said to him the prerequisite to marrying me was to be willing to do foster care at some point in our marriage. We both thought we would start when our biological kids were teenagers, but God stirred something in both of us much earlier than we anticipated.”

Becoming a foster carer is neither an easy nor a quick process. Checks must be made and training is needed as well. “Because we are in a regional area we had limited choices in agencies to go through,” she said. “But after choosing one, we did a weekend training session about the basics of foster care, completed a lot of paperwork, had a few interviews and had staff from the agency do home inspections to make sure our house was safe.

It took about four months to be licensed foster carers. In 2016 when our biological sons were one, three and four we took in our first foster child, and since then we have cared for 12 precious children. In that time we have done emergency, lots of respite and short term care. We would love to do long term care, now our children are all at school.”

When biological children are involved, foster care becomes much

more about the whole family. Josh and Rachel's eldest son Simon has made an astonishing contribution to foster care in the area. Rachel told us, “Last year Simon decided to ask for items to fill backpacks for kids entering foster care for his ninth birthday instead of receiving presents. He had noticed that children often enter foster care with just the clothes on their back and maybe a few extra things (often in a garbage bag). Simon wanted basic and fun donations to fill the backpacks with things like soft toys, toiletries, pyjamas, underwear, textas, books and hand balls. His goal was to pack ten backpacks, but he ended up with just under 200 by the end of last year. The idea was supported by people far and wide and he distributed them to child safety government offices and foster care agencies within the New England/North West region of New South Wales. His plan is to continue providing backpacks to kids entering foster care in our area, with the help of the Walcha Rotary Club.”

After five years of fostering, both Rachel and Josh have learned a lot about themselves, as well as the children they care for. I have learned that every child deserves a place to call home,” Rachel said. “They need a home and family where they have a secure attachment, where they can thrive and are loved unconditionally. For myself, I have learned how easily I can love children who are not biologically my own and how emotionally vulnerable I can be.” For Josh, the uncertainties have taught him a lot. “The unknown in fostering makes me very anxious,” he said, “But I can see that how working through my emotions is worth it for these children.”

Fostering, like all things in life, has highs and lows. “The most difficult thing about fostering is its unknown and unpredictable nature... having decisions made outside of our control and never seeing or knowing how kids are going after they leave our home. The best things are being able to see that we are making a difference in a child's life, and the way it brings our family together as a team. Fostering has changed the way we parent all of our children for the better.”

We asked Josh and Rachel if they would continue to foster, and their answer is unequivocal. “Absolutely! We have a passion to step up and help children who need a loving home and a secure attachment. They are the modern-day orphans, as Christians we can help make a difference in their lives, whether it be for a short or a long time.”

If readers of The Link would like to contribute to Simon's backpack scheme, they can find his Gofundme page at <https://gofund.me/0a4e28cd>



Simon and the backpacks.



The prayer behind the job

Hannah and Caleb Dobos (above) are members of St Mark's Chapel at the University of New England. They have been foster-carers for the past year, but their interest in and plans for foster care extend much further than having children in their own home. Hannah works specifically with kids in out-of-home-care as a support teacher at a public high school. "These kids really are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and they need a lot of support to manage school, relationships, as well as the trauma they carry and the ongoing difficulties and stresses of being in out-of-home care," she said. "I love my job! I love being another adult who can get to know these kids and have the opportunity every day to try and show them that they are important and valuable. It has shown me how much someone can be a support to these kids from a role other than a carer. And these kids need that support from as many places as they can get it! It has also shown me that teenagers in out of home care aren't scary! They just need someone to listen to them, to advocate for them, to give them a voice and to love them. I love the opportunity of coming in contact with these kids just to be someone that can pray for them. There is so much that I can't change about their past, the trauma they still carry and their lives, but I love being able to take these kids to God in prayer knowing that He loves them and can do something!"

It is the whole idea of praying for foster children that led Hannah and Caleb to begin a very special group. "Before we were registered as foster carers, we organised a group called Ark to come and talk at our church, and to run an information night about foster care, specifically encouraging Christians to get involved in foster care," she told us. "From the interest generated from the information night we formed a support group for foster carers and those interested in it. We call this group *An Extended Family*. We meet every six weeks at a park to form supportive relationships with others who are like minded and even with those who just want to be there to support foster carers and vulnerable kids. We support each other practically and through prayer and encourage our churches to do so as well.

We first started thinking about foster care because of some podcasts that

we listened to about Christians in foster care from the US. The need and the value of being involved just clicked for us and we thought 'why haven't we heard about this in any Christian setting we've been in before?'. I remember one thing the podcast said was that foster care is a way to live the gospel and share the gospel over breakfast and in the car to school. From there we kept reading and listening and we were so captured by the opportunity for Christian community to step in and show Jesus' love to the most vulnerable in our society. We also felt like it was a very clear reflection of the gospel. Jesus stepped into our brokenness and mess to bring us into God's family as adopted sons and daughters!"

Recently Hannah and other members of the group came up with an idea!

"At the moment *An Extended Family* is working towards running a holiday activity program for kids in out-of-home care in Armidale during the January school holidays," she said. "The purpose of this is to help kids have something fun and interesting to do during the long holidays and to give carers some respite. But we are hoping one big benefit will be providing connection and building relationships between kids and other caring adults and between carers. We always say that everyone can do something to care for vulnerable kids in foster care, but what Christians need is the opportunity to meet and get to know these kids and their carers in order to care and support them. Our vision is to really see an extended family for these kids and carers through the Christian community."

We asked Hannah what readers of *The Link* could do to help out.

"We would love others to become involved in *An Extended Family*. If you are in Armidale or close enough to join us every six weeks for our get togethers we would love to hear from you. You can contact us through our website www.anextendedfamily.com If you are too far away but are passionate about foster care, please contact us, and perhaps *An Extended Family* could continue to grow into other towns as well and we would love to support you in that. And please pray for the holiday camp in January."

Backing up Mum and Dad



CANDY MALCOLM WORKS AS THE co-ordinator of Anglicare’s Casework Support Scheme in Narrabri. She supervises a team of nine support workers who travel all over the New England and North-West of New South Wales. Candy (above) has a long history of working with children in out-of-home care, having been a caseworker at Family and Community Services (FaCS) for many years.

Just as all things change, so the name of New South Wales’ child protection organisation has changed. What used to be FaCS is now the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). While the name may have changed, the core business of this government department – child safety – remains the same.

Candy’s job is to provide an array of services for children and their families if they are in care or currently being supported by the child protection service. Children in out-of-home (or foster) care need to maintain contact with their biological families, and Candy’s job is to ensure that happens in the best possible way.

“Visits can occur in a variety of settings depending on safety concerns for a family. We stress that children’s safety is paramount in all visits,” she said. “A visit may be one child and one adult or a family of children and 20 of their extended family members. Family visits are adaptable and as diverse as the families we support. At times a transport may be required, and children could be driven hundreds of kilometres to visit family who live far away.”

What this means is that the families who

foster children do not have to be responsible for taking those children to visit their biological families. Providing supervised family visits is a complex task, from ensuring children are safe at all times but allowing visits to flow and be natural for a family with little interference.

“Children who are in care for a short time (three to six months), need to maintain their relationship with their parents,” Candy said. “This is to reduce the traumatic impact of not being able to live with their parents to being able to return just weeks later. Children may be able to experience change in their parent’s behaviour and this can be reassuring for their return home. Sometimes, it is impossible for children to return to their biological families, so a court will issue final orders, meaning the children will stay in foster care for the long term.

When children receive final orders (this process can take about two years) the family connections change but are no less important but the purpose of a visit is different. Visits are generally not as frequent but are significant for a child to experience the love of and connection to their parents. External supervisors, such as the ones we at Anglicare provide, are best placed to support children and their parents as well as the foster families. Benefits for children and their parents include having caring and professional people who are impartial. Support workers are not aware of the private details that prevent a child living in the family home (although

generally aware of the overarching child safety concern – to ensure safety during visit). During a family visit, support workers are not looking for parent’s past behaviours they are looking for what is happening at the current visit, they observe relationships, connection, body language, the spoken interaction. Observations are done free from bias and purely from the interaction at the visit.

Foster parents benefit from support workers providing supervised family visits or transport in a variety of ways. Firstly, by being reassured the children they care for are able to have safe visits with their family. Secondly, it provides a buffer between foster carers and parents. At times this is not required but having this option available for foster carers can provide one less pressure. Foster carers can have someone else to negotiate the details of booking visits with family. During a family visit support workers are able to speak to parents when their behaviour may be inappropriate, and this protects foster carers from having to confront parent about behaviours. There is a clear benefit for carers to have someone they can count on to look after the children when it is not possible for them to attend.”

The old adage that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is certainly true in the case of fostering. Because of Candy’s work at Anglicare, foster parents- both new and experienced- know they will have the support they need to raise these precious children in the best possible way.



The story of a caseworker

NATASHA MCKAY IS THE MANAGER CASEWORKER AT THE Armidale office of Challenge Community Services. Natasha, (above centre) heads up a team of four other caseworkers who are responsible for around ten foster children each. We sat down with her and asked her about the joys and challenges of being a caseworker.

***The Link:* What does a caseworker mean to a foster child?**

Natasha: When our young people get a new caseworker, they are learning the child's story...who they are, what they like. We have caseworkers here who have been responsible for the same children for three or four years, and their relationships have grown so much over that time, it's really wonderful to see!

What is the best part of a caseworker's job?

The best part is certainly seeing the young people evolve and reach their goals. Every 12 months we set what we call "smart goals" for each young person. That is when we work out who can help them with these goals. Seeing these kids reach their goals and hit certain milestones is just amazing! People on my team often comment that the young people on their caseload are like their own children...they want them to do good things in life, and to have the very best opportunities available.

What, then, is the most challenging part of the job?

I think that would be the caseload numbers. It can be very hard to manage when you have two or more families who need a lot of support at the same time. It is hard to prioritise. However, my team works so well together, someone is always willing to put up their hand to help

out if another caseworker is struggling.

What do you think about the families who step up to become foster carers?

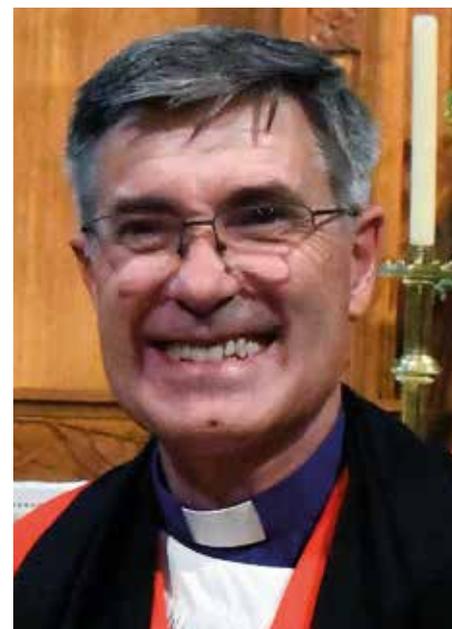
I think being a foster carer is so under-recognised. It is not an easy decision to make...to take traumatized and vulnerable children into your home. It is a process that takes a lot of time and consideration. But I really hope that there are more families out there who maybe thought about fostering and then forgot about it, and who might be willing to think about it again. Or there may be people who have never given it any thought, but who realise that they are capable of doing this.

So what would you say to anyone who is starting to think about the possibility of becoming a foster parent?

Reach out and talk to someone! Please don't underestimate the support that you will get. Financial support, psychologists, therapists are all available to help you in this work. You are not alone!

But it is the difference you will make to these young people's lives that is the main thing. A lot of our foster carers tell me that they can't explain how much they love being foster carers. The kids are part of their families and they know they are making a difference.

From the Bishop



Rod Chiswell

DEAR FRIENDS,

One of the questions I am most frequently asked these days is, “How are you going in your new job as bishop?” The short answer is pretty good, the longer answer which I will share with you now explains why.

Firstly, it is good, in that Jenni and I are absolutely loving the parish visits. We are catching up with many old friends we’ve come to know over the years, and making lots of new friends as well. We are greatly encouraged by fruitful gospel work happening in parishes both large and small. Everywhere we have been we’ve observed hard working clergy and committed laypeople, godly people together getting on with gospel ministry in often difficult circumstances. In a way being the bishop feels a bit like being the NRMA mechanic. When you show up people are always pleased to see you. You preach a sermon, share a meal, listen to how people are going and maybe respond with resources where necessary and people are very grateful. Being a clergyman on the ground week in week out, I know, is a much harder job. It’s more like being the regular mechanic who gets the car that’s not easily fixed, or the complaints about the bill. So, as the NRMA guy I’m loving the appreciation, but can I urge you never to take your own vicar or clergy-people for granted, rather thank them and affirm their good gospel work whenever you can.

The only downside for Jenni and me in the new role so far is that because we are on the road four Sundays out of five it’s hard to find

our feet in new friendships in Armidale. The congregation at the cathedral has been very friendly but we are rarely there, averaging just under 1000km car travel per week! Pray that in time we will feel more settled in Armidale and specifically that we find a mid-week Bible study group to join soon.

Another way in which my start to the job has been pretty good is that I am having many encouraging conversations with theological students interested in serving in the Armidale diocese. Visits to Moore College and Sydney Missionary and Bible College have yielded over a dozen good conversations with at least three resulting in people wanting to sign up as candidates for ministry in our patch. I have also spoken to at least three experienced clergy who are eager to join our ministry team in the next couple of years. All of this bodes well for the supply of quality clergy in the years ahead.

There have also been some challenges in starting the bishop’s job. The state of the Anglican Church of Australia is of ongoing concern. Divisions in matters related to human sexuality continue to threaten unity within the broader Anglican community. This has not been helped by the cancellation of not one, but two bishop’s conferences due to COVID-19 concerns in recent months. Despite the lack of opportunity to hammer out the differences, good relationships with a number of other bishops are developing. I’m looking forward to attending the GAFCON Australia conference coming up where we will hear

Bible teaching from Ashley Null, and input from many others including Archbishop Kanishka Raffel, Claire Smith, Peter Adam and former archbishop Glenn Davies. Pray that God will give us wisdom regarding the way forward for the Anglican Church in Australia.

Finally, something I am very excited about is a new initiative for lay training in fourth term this year. The *Next Phase Conference 2021* is a gathering to encourage people in serving God well, after the age of 50. With food from God’s word brought to us by former archbishop Peter Jensen and a range of elective seminars led by keen lay-people from around our Diocese, the goal of this conference is to give us eyes to see how we can best use the gifts God has entrusted to us to further his kingdom. The *Next Phase Conference* will be held in Armidale on Friday 5th & Saturday 6th November 2021, so mark it in your diary now. Over the next few weeks you’ll hear more about this exciting initiative. My prayer is that God will use the *Next Phase Conference* to mobilise an army of keen volunteers to serve in the life of churches around our diocese.

So, there are just a few thoughts about how I am going in the new job as bishop. Thank you all for your prayers for Jenni and me in these first few months. Please continue to pray that God will grant us wisdom, love and strength to lead well for His glory alone.

With love in Christ,
Rod Chiswell

The floods and Anglicare

IN MID-MARCH THIS YEAR, MOREE WAS ONE OF THE MANY towns in New South Wales to be flooded. Anglicare Manager Claire Dunlop (right) was activated as a disaster recovery volunteer when the floods hit. Her job was to be present at the town community centre, working alongside the Department of Communities and Justice which was overseeing the evacuation centres. She was there to give direction and emotional support to those who were affected by the floods

It is ten years since the last major flood in Moree. Claire said, “Over the past ten years, the people of Moree have built up a lot of resilience. As well as that, houses have been raised and levee banks strengthened, so when this flood occurred the townspeople were far more prepared both mentally and physically. Ten years ago, 400 houses had water through them, this time only 80 houses were directly affected. The other great effect is that people got back on their feet very quickly. Really, we saw more travellers than townspeople at the evacuation centre.”

For much of her working life, Claire has been involved with disaster recovery. For the past three years she has been working with the Anglicare Disaster Recovery Team.

Anglicare is now recruiting new volunteers for the team, and Claire is keen to hear from anyone interested in joining in this vital work. “There are quite a few people who have been members of this team in the past who may be interested in re-joining and brushing up their skills now,” she said. “Or there may be others who have never been involved in disaster recovery but who now see what an important job it is and who would like to join up. We will be holding training sessions soon and would love to get more people involved”

With everything that the past couple of years have thrown at us,



the feeling that another disaster may be just around the corner is one which has many people worried. Instead of worrying, give Claire a call at the Anglicare office in Moree and find out how everyone can have a part to play in disaster recovery.

Opportunity knocks in Glen Innes

When one door closes, another one opens, it is said. David Robinson, vicar of Glen Innes is always watching for an opening door.

“The Salvo’s store in town closed in early 2020,” he said. “I was sad that the ministry they had was ending. I was also sad that a service which many in the town needed was closing, especially with COVID threatening to cause further economic problems for people.

I chatted with one of my wardens throughout this and he felt the same way. We decided to approach the Salvation Army directly to offer to help them open, expecting that this would mean helping to find volunteers. As we talked with their regional leaders, we found a desire to not only reopen the store, but also to work hard to ensure that it was a place where ministry would happen.”

David made the first contact with the store in the early part of 2020, and by the end of the year, the doors were ready to open again.

“When we discovered that one of the key ingredients for the Salvos to reopen would be a strong Christian person to run it, I immediately thought of Dan Hayes. I knew he was about to finish in Wee Waa, so I talked with him and put him in touch with the Salvo’s leadership and it all went from there. Dan was very keen for the chance to be involved in the ministry and he was not the only one! A number of people from our church were very excited and have volunteered. It is wonderful that every time I have poked my head in, there are lots of people there. Obviously, the re-opening has been embraced. Our hopes are that the store will act as a hub for outreach. We want to see the

material needs of people met without losing sight of the spiritual needs which people have also. The store offers free coffee and snacks. One of our Bible study groups has begun to meet there to be a visible presence for those who come into the store,” he said.

Daniel Hayes sees this ministry as something new and exciting. “It is a great opportunity to be at the coalface...talking to people where they are at right now. One of the greatest benefits is that the Salvation Army has such a good name with people...especially people in need. I enjoy meeting such a diverse range of people...travellers, people in need, and the locals who often just pop in. I get opportunities to minister in quite a different way to the way it’s done in church. Sometimes it is not quite as deep, but it really is meeting people where they are. The other thing I have really enjoyed has been working alongside the volunteers and getting to know people in that way. There are often opportunities for quite deep conversations there. I think that if people from our churches in the Diocese are willing to go an volunteer at an op shop, it’s really a great way to meet people and to be involved in a different kind of ministry.

We would love for readers of *The Link* to be praying for our shop; for opportunities to minister every day, and for a chance to build on what we are doing. We also need prayer that the shop will make enough to make it sustainable, especially as the cold weather sets in, and people don’t go out as much. And we always need prayer for wisdom to discern just exactly how we best help people.”



Teaching about the Rock at the Ridge

ROCKgarden engaging the kids on a Sunday morning

Heather Robinson has always had a heart for children. She studied Early Childhood at university, led a kids' club at her church in Sydney, worked as a therapist with children who have autism, and was on a summer mission team. She also travelled to Tanzania twice to teach Scripture and run school assemblies. She thought she had been called to overseas missionary work, but God diverted her course, and she worked for several years in paid children's ministry at churches on Sydney's Northern Beaches and North Shore. It was at St Matthew's West Pymble that she signed up to go to Lightning Ridge for a holiday mission. She travelled north with the team and loved her time so much, she found she could not stop thinking about it.

"God got me thinking about what happens for the kids the rest of the year," she said. "I wondered how a small church congregation could resource ministry to these children. I knew that after my contract at St Mathew's I would be looking for something longer term, because I feel quite strongly that ongoing relationships are important in children's ministry. Although there were various kids' ministry options constantly being advertised in Sydney, I couldn't help but feel that God had plenty of people who would be willing and able to do those roles. The question was, how many would be in a position to move to a remote mission field? I wouldn't be uprooting a family (it's just me and the dog), and my parents get it (as they said, at least it's in the same country, because I had also been considering Tanzania or the UK prior to COVID).

God kept opening doors, and by the time I visited for a week in early September 2020, we had received approval for a grant for two years with a possible third. The Bush Church Aid Society agreed to match it, and St Matthew's expressed a willingness to take me on as a mission partner. I was also able to see some houses, in particular the one that online seemed the best option for life and ministry here (which is indeed now my home). After that visit, there was a Zoom interview for the job; Mona Vale Anglican also committed to providing support, and eventually I moved here in mid-January this year. Someone recently asked who got me here in the middle of summer and my first answer was to name the moving company until I realised they were really asking the bigger question of why I would move in the hottest part of the year. So I said it was God who wanted me here, and who am I to argue with His plan or timing?!"

Lightning Ridge is, indeed, a long way from leafy West Lindfield, but the warmth of the welcome – measured both in degrees celsius, and in the wide smiles of people in the church – made up for it.

"My role is part time Children's Ministry Team Leader. When we were creating the job description to go with the grant application, Kurt was particularly keen to have the title reflect our goal for the role. We don't want it to seem that I am the only one doing the ministry. One of my main aims is to equip others to be involved.

My main responsibilities are leading our Sunday kids' church, teaching Scripture, and developing the children's ministry team. We now have ROCKgarden every Sunday, with a family service once a month. The goal of ROCKgarden is to help the children learn to trust Jesus as their Rock, and grow as His followers. For Scripture I have weekly classes at Lightning Ridge Central School, and also a fortnightly high school lesson. Kurt and I cover for each other as needed. Twice a term I also go to Goodooga, a mostly indigenous community that is about 75km away, where I teach two combined classes of students (K-2 and 3-6). I have also been trying to build relationships, both within the church family and also the community."

Kurt Langmead said "What a blessing it has been to have Heather join us! She brings heaps of experience in children's ministry along with a growing heart and capacity for life and ministry in the bush. Her focus in helping our little ones trust in Jesus as their Rock really complements our wider vision of Building Christ's Church- in the Ridge, on the Rock!"

This is important work, and Heather cannot do it without prayer.

"Firstly, we should give thanks for all the ways God has provided thus far for me to even be here," she said. "Please pray that I would not lose sight of His many blessings when things seem tough. I would love prayer for the ROCKgarden kids to keep growing in their faith and for the seeds sown in Scripture to grow (both for the super keen Kindy and stage one kids and the somewhat challenging stage three students). Pray also for the future ministry plans – for wisdom to discern the best use of my time and how to go about achieving things, while also being able to discern if things are truly God's will or just what I want to do."



A Walcha partnership

The youth group gathers together at Walcha.

WHAT IS A SMALL TOWN TO DO? THE ANGLICAN CHURCH wants to run a youth group and the Presbyterian church wants to run a youth group, but neither has the full resources to do it alone. The answer, of course, is to form a partnership!

That is exactly what happened in Walcha, and now the combined youth group is thriving.

Karen Barnes, whose husband is the minister at the Presbyterian church, has been one of the main organisers of the group.

“Walcha Presbyterian and Anglican churches have been partnering together for many years,” she told us. Over ten years ago the two churches together started running Kidsgames, a four-day school holiday program, in partnership with Northbridge Anglican church. After many years of prayer, the weekly youth group began.

We are now in our fourth year of Walcha Youth Group. The group caters for kids from Year five upwards and we now have kids all the way up to Year 11 who come along each week.”

The group now averages about 20 young people each Saturday evening during term time. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, most of the children who attend are not from church families.

“Walcha is a small town,” Karen explained, “and a lot of kids hear about youth group from their friends. We also have a free weekly newspaper where we can let the community know what we are up to and a banner out the front of the church to remind kids that it is on when school buses pass by each day.”

For most country youth groups, finding suitable leaders can be a problem, but this partnership seems to have worked wonders. “Youth group is run by my husband Graham and me. Our Anglican church family provides important prayer support and practical support, ranging from weekly helpers to volunteer cooks and offering their properties for special activity nights. Without this partnership we could not do youth group. Northbridge Anglican also partners with us, praying for the kids throughout the year and more recently having their Assistant Minister Pat O’Keefe as our guest speaker at our camp.”

The youth group seems to have discovered the ideal mixture of Bible, fun and food! Karen told us; “We spend our first hour playing games – mainly running around outside. We then spend time looking at God’s word and having a time of prayer together. Dinner (which is usually provided by someone within the Pressy or Anglican church families) comes next. Being able to sit and eat a meal with the kids is a really valuable time to chat them. We then end the night with a game if there is time and let everyone know what is happening next week.”



Stuart Wellings and Kelly Hayton with Micah Hayton, Cody and Jake Wellings and Fletcher France from Walcha Anglican Church

At a time when we seem surrounded by so much bad news, the Walcha Youth group is a true good news story. “We are really thankful to God for the partnership between our two churches,” Karen said. “Living in a small town, it really strengthens and encourages both our churches, and crosses over to Scripture, youth, women’s and men’s ministries. Importantly, it also shows the community that we are one in Christ in both word and our actions. They are a great bunch of kids and I really love spending time with them. Their enthusiasm is fantastic and I really enjoy when one of them stops me in the street to ask me what’s happening at youth group. My biggest encouragement comes hearing them pray.”

It may be that there are other churches in our Diocese who could engage in a similar partnership, so we asked Karen if she had any encouragement to pass on to others.

“Pray, pray, pray and wait upon the Lord. Youth group has been an invaluable way to get to know local kids and families, and to be able to support them in really practical ways. Local support for youth group has also grown as our community really values the church providing kids with a free activity on Saturday nights. We now think of our youth group as our Saturday night congregation – it is an honour to look at God’s word and share the love of Jesus with these young people each week.”



Kanishka's welcome

Bishop Rod greets the new Archbishop of Sydney, Kanishka Raffel after his inauguration.

ON FRIDAY MAY 28TH, KANISHKA RAFFEL BECAME THE thirteenth leader of the Anglican church in Sydney. He also becomes the Metropolitan of New South Wales. As the chief bishop of our state, it brings him into a close relationship with our own Diocese.

Kanishka is the first person of non-European heritage to take up this ministry. Born in Sri Lanka and raised as a Buddhist, he came into contact with the gospel through a friend at university. When he was interviewed about this by Richard Glover on ABC radio he said,

“He was a good friend. Someone I’d known from high school. My background, of course, is Sri Lankan, and so we were raised Buddhist in Australia, which was an unusual kind of experience. Sydney in the 70s was a little quieter and a lot less multicultural! So I was a bit of a novelty wherever I went, but in my third year at University I really decided that I needed to do a kind of adult engagement with my faith of Buddhism. And so, I spent the year really reading Buddhism, and I think that, bolstered by my new confidence, I began to engage my Christian friends about their faith and that resulted in one of those friends giving me the gospel of John which I undertook to read.

Well, my life changed, Richard. Having spent the year reading Buddhist scriptures, I was very struck by how different the gospel of John was. It was transparently historical, clearly talking about a particular man, in a particular place at a particular time and the person of Jesus just emerged from the pages with vitality and vibrancy, and He was unusual! He wasn’t like the Buddha. He had friends and enemies. He got into verbal skirmishes and worse, in the end, and so I found His character intriguing and provocative and compelling. And ultimately, of course I decided I was for Him.”

When asked what makes a good sermon, Kanishka was unequivocal.

“Oh well, first of all, I’ve got a great subject...Jesus Christ and the love of God. God’s rescue plan for people, his welcome and forgiveness. It is the best thing to talk about! The first thing you need is a person who loves their topic. And if you’re a Christian preacher then you’ve got a topic you love...(so) you’ve got try to make it fit in the real world. But the Bible is full of God’s wisdom and God’s purpose for the real world, so it’s not as hard as it sounds, and preachers have the opportunities to put their mind to that question. I hope there are lots of people in Anglican churches around Sydney hearing engaging sermons every week because God is speaking to us through the Bible.”

Rod Chiswell attended the inauguration alongside bishops from all over Australia. However, his connection with the new Archbishop is a little more personal.

“I was greatly encouraged by the election of Kanishka Raffel to the position of Archbishop of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney,” he said. “Jenni and I were friends with Kanishka and Cailey during our time at Moore College. Kanishka has a warm personality, a winsome manner, and is a gifted preacher of God’s word. If you listen to the sermon he delivered at his consecration you will see how these things come together to make him a very effective servant of God for this important job. Kanishka knows how to be both kind and firm and I believe that he will speak the truth in love in all the spheres necessary to his new role as an Archbishop. I am looking forward to working with Kanishka and to his godly leadership as metropolitan bishop of the Province of New South Wales. Please pray that God will strengthen Kanishka, and his wife Caley, by his Spirit to carry out the work he has called them to.”

To see Kanishka’s inauguration and hear his address, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXz7lmqG5Sg>

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

John Bunyan