



The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2023 AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Jesus in the city

Angus Martin
St Peter's, South Tamworth

CITY BIBLE FORUM (CBF) WANTS TO reach the world through workers with the good news about Jesus. It is a national organisation and movement that seeks to build relationships with Christians in the workplace, as well as those who do not yet follow Christ. We want to train and engage workers with the good news about Jesus, and to provide structures and networks that allow

this to happen. Our prayer is that we would see 1,000 people investigating Jesus in the pages of Scripture by 2025.

CBF grew out of the campus ministry at the University of New South Wales as a number of graduates were heading into the CBD of Sydney for work. It formally began in 1991 under the leadership of Craig Josling, who

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saw the vision of partnering with workers in the CBD to reach those who need to repent and trust the Lord.

Over the last few years, CBF moved from having a particular focus on workplaces and individual cities to focusing on workers right across the country.

At around the same time, Al Stewart and I had coffee and talked over the opportunities for the gospel in regional cities. After talking over some research I had done into the numbers of workers in some of the regional cities in NSW I called Peter Kaldor, who was until recently the managing director. Peter and I began having a conversation about a CBF – style ministry in Tamworth and thought it was worth a shot! I began working for CBF in Tamworth in January 2023.

Tamworth is a growing regional city with a variety of industries and employment opportunities. It attracts people from different walks of life. There is a large number of Bible-believing churches in Tamworth so it is probably the most-churched regional town in NSW based on regular attendees. But there are still thousands upon thousands of people in Tamworth who have not yet turned to follow Jesus.

This is the same story across every other regional city in our country, and so I thought it would be worth considering whether a specialist ministry to workers could be used by God to see more people come to Christ. It didn't have to be Tamworth, but Tamworth seemed to work out on paper and also in reality with local churches who were eager to give this a go. It also seemed appropriate given I grew up in Tamworth and know the area well.

CBF has deep experience helping workers in the CBDs of major cities. There are particular challenges that go along with working in these types of environments; challenges which are replicated in similar industries in Tamworth. The work of CBF isn't exclusive to "white-collar workers" but is designed to equip any Christian with the tools and structures to help them reach their colleagues. Whether blue-collar or white or anywhere in between, if you're spending work hours alongside someone who needs Jesus then CBF is here to help.

I work for CBF and St Peter's, South Tamworth, for three days a week each. There is minimal crossover in the type of work I am involved in for each. St Peter's has a pastor



To get to 1000 people in 2025, Angus knows it begins with just one.

and teams dedicated to mission work, but we have intentionally avoided my involvement in that area of the church. That is because parachurch ministry – such as CBF – should seek to support and equip local churches, rather than promoting one particular church over another. I want CBF to be a ministry that helps all churches in Tamworth who want to be involved. I want all churches in Tamworth who believe the Bible and preach the gospel to grow, because there are far more people who aren't believers than who are.

I'm hoping under God that in 10 years we would have 100 Christians regularly meeting before work in small groups to pray for their colleagues. That we would have regular events that spur on teachers, and medical workers, and tradies to live their lives for Christ in their industries and find opportunities to proclaim the gospel to those they work with. I pray that we would have a weekly meeting open to Christians and explorers where Jesus can be talked about openly. To get there, this can only happen under God and so I am praying that CBF would be useful for Tamworth and used by God for his kingdom.

It starts with baby steps, trialling one thing at a time to see if it works. It took many years for the Sydney CBF ministry to become viable,

but with the support of the now well-established national CBF ministry I hope the local ministry in Tamworth will see fruit - even if it takes a few years.

I often think of 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 when thinking and planning the CBF ministry.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

If you would like to support the work of CBF, please start by praying for your colleagues and friends. Consider financially supporting the ministry. Jump on opportunities as they come along, and if you cannot participate then pray relentlessly when you hear about different activities that begin in town.

As well as churches, Tamworth has a great array of coffee shops! That is where I love to get together with people to talk about the opportunities CBF can provide. So, if you are interested give me a call and we can have coffee and do a bit of brainstorming to see how CBF might be able to continue and enhance the vision of introducing people to Jesus and helping them home to heaven.

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Comings, goings and answered prayer

Rod Chiswell



DO YOU EVER GET TIME TO STEP ASIDE a little from the busyness of life and reflect? When I finish this article that privilege will be mine as I go on long service leave for a few weeks. Please pray that Jenni and I relax well and enjoy life's blessings during our time away. Before I head off however let me just share a few thoughts that I hope will be of encouragement to you.

God has been kind to us as a diocese.

The longer I am in the job the more I realise what a great legacy has been left to us by the godly leaders who have gone before. The fruit of over 50 years of strong evangelical leadership is seen in the faithful preaching of God's word by both clergy and laity in every parish of our diocese. At the recent lay preacher training day in early June, and at the annual clergy conference in mid-June, I was struck yet again by the quality of our leadership team. Such a team has not come together overnight of course. It comes as successive evangelical leaders have consistently sought to recruit and train godly men and women for gospel ministry in our patch. The result is a fine team of church leaders both laity and clergy who love God's people and faithfully seek to teach and apply God's word every week.

With privilege comes responsibility.

Of course, with privilege comes responsibility. The continuation of vital gospel ministry in parishes both large and small across the Armidale diocese means that we can sustain up to eleven curacy training positions. A curacy position provides opportunity for

someone coming out of theological college to consolidate their training under an experienced country ministry trainer. Most country dioceses around Australia have hardly any such ministry training positions, but by God's grace we have many. This puts us in a unique position of potentially being able to train and send curates into other less well resourced dioceses across our vast continent. This is a vision I have been casting for the past eighteen months in conversations with other evangelical bishops around the country and with students and faculty during recruitment visits to theological colleges. Thankfully, I am discovering that it is a vision that resonates with many.

For us to train and send we need to pray to the Lord of the harvest.

Such a vision should prompt us to take to heart the instruction of Jesus in Matthew 9 to pray fervently. As Jesus looked and saw the people harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd he said to his disciples. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." This is a prayer that I pray most days now as bishop of the Armidale Diocese and I urge you to pray it with me. It should not be a prayer prayed just for us, but a prayer prayed also for North-West Australia where Darrell Parker is now the bishop, and for Bathurst Diocese where Mark Calder is now the bishop, and for Rockhampton where Peter Grice is now the bishop. Despite the growing tide of opposition to Christianity in our nation,

gospel opportunities are everywhere. Friends, please keep praying earnestly about this matter. We long to see the next generation of church leaders raised up, equipped and sent.

We need to thank God for answered prayer.

Praise God, we have already started to see this vision of training and sending becoming a reality. At the start of this year the Reverend Ben Connelly went from a curacy in Narrabri to become the vicar of Cowra in the Bathurst Diocese. At the start of next year, the Reverend David Thompson will go from a curacy in Moree to become the Vicar of a parish in the Diocese of North-West Australia. Also, at the start of next year we are hoping to see another of our ministry trainees head with Bush Church Aid to a remote rural parish in another state. Closer to home in the year ahead, we are expecting at least three new curates coming to serve God in our own diocese. Thank God for all these answers to prayer.

Finally, prayer requests.

Invariably when you go on long service leave there are some loose ends that remain. Three particular concerns come to mind at this time. Pray for God to raise up godly men for the positions of vicar of Wee Waa Parish, assistant at North Tamworth and chaplain for The Armidale School. I'm certain that though we don't (as yet) have all the answers, God will provide.

May God help us all to rest in His grace and trust in His purposeful sovereignty.

With love in Christ, Rod Chiswell.



David and Emma Thompson with Reuben and Paige.

DAVID THOMPSON IS CURRENTLY MINISTERING AS A CURATE in Moree, but originally he came from Western Australia. In one of God's neat circles, he and his family are soon to return to the west to take up ministry in the Diocese of North West Australia. He told us:

"After working in a secular job for a bit, and getting married to Emma, I started a ministry apprenticeship in a small Anglican church north-east of Perth. It was a wonderful time of experiencing full-time word ministry firsthand. We had our two children during this time too! As I was finishing there, both my trainer and the church encouraged me to pursue theological education.

Many of the men who had influenced me in Perth had studied at Moore Theological College. After months of prayer and discussion, we decided we would follow in their footsteps. This led to me spending three wonderfully challenging and joyful years as a full-time student, while being open to where God might lead us after college.

In my cohort there were three men who had originally come from the Armidale diocese. Emma and I had been thinking about rural ministry for a while, knowing there is great need for people to serve in faithful rural churches. So, when Bishop Rod came to visit Moore College to chat with students about the diocese, I was more than intrigued. Emma and I soon began investigating the possibility of us serving in the Armidale diocese. After many prayers, and a few coffees with Rod, we agreed to me serving as a curate in Moree.

In Moree I've had the opportunity to preach, meet up with young men to read the Bible, lead a Bible study and help with youth group. I've also had the opportunity to take funerals, to take responsibility for one of our branch churches, make pastoral visits and oversee our bible studies. I've also recently had the chance to think through, plan and run men's ministry at the church, particularly with an evangelistic

focus.

One of Bishop Rod's hopes for the Armidale diocese is to be a sending diocese in order to bless other rural dioceses, particularly ones that don't have the capacity to train curates. Once I'd been made a presbyter, Rod asked me to consider a parish in this diocese and we also spoke about me approaching the Anglican Diocese of North West Australia to seek out opportunities there.

We contacted Bishop Darrell Parker and he was enthusiastic about the possibility of us serving in the North-West. Over the next few months, we prayed about and discussed the two options: to stay in the Armidale diocese or travel across the country to the North West. Although we are sad to leave the Armidale diocese, we are excited at this opportunity to serve, where we were originally from, the west of Australia.

I'm absolutely delighted to be working with Darrell. He's a godly, pastoral, Bible-believing man with loads of experience in rural ministry. Emma and I have appreciated his encouragement and support throughout the process that led to my appointment.

We're going to the parish of Dongara, the rock lobster capital of Australia!

One of the best things I have learned during my time in Moree is that you can't do ministry without the support of other clergy, and their families. I have greatly benefitted from the wisdom and humility of clergy in this diocese as I've thought through ministry matters. I thank God for them.

Please pray for us to finish well in Moree, and settle into Dongara quickly - especially the children at a new school. And pray God would be pleased to grow his kingdom in Dongara as we continue to rely on God and trust that he works through his word."

A Moree girl in Italy

WHEN JESSICA ASSEF WAS TEN YEARS old her parents began taking their family of six from Moree to Mount Tamborine in Queensland for the Church Missionary Society's Summer School. After hearing stories of transforming work being done around the world she said to her parents, "I think I'd like to be a missionary when I grow up". Years later, while studying law at Sydney University, Jessica met her future husband, Simon Cowell. "I had already been wanting to go somewhere in the world that was less reached, but the place came through Simon who had learnt Italian through high school and university. A CMS missionary had approached him and asked, 'Have you ever considered using your language skills for the gospel in Italy where there is a great need?'"

For the majority of the past five years the Cowells have lived in an apartment in Bari, an ancient and beautiful port city in Puglia – the heel of the Italian boot. Jessica reflects, "The desire started when I was little, but this was also influenced by my parents and dad's cousin, Lynette, talking about their faith as a very real and true thing and living it out by loving people and wanting them to know Jesus. I knew this was an obvious consequence of trusting Jesus as saviour. I also saw it lived out by people giving up their time and prioritising their commitment to each other at All Saint's Anglican Church in Moree."

Unlike Jessica, the Cowell children won't grow up with a house and people who have known them their whole lives in one place, yet Jessica feels confident that God will use this for their good. "The children see us as a little Australian family in Bari and other ministry families and missionaries, Gillian Law in Rome and the Faircloughs in Florence, are their Italian family. Getting to experience two cultures, their eyes are more open to different people's experience and common experiences in different places, such as feeling uncomfortable. I know God is teaching them



Simon and Jessica Cowell with Sofia, Lydia, Timothy and Emma.

kindness. They also take an interest in people with different cultures and languages. They can see more easily what it means to look for Jesus and follow him. They are thoughtful about their faith and who they are."

Moree is a lovely base for the Cowells to return to, and they stay in Jessica's childhood home where the children can play safely in the backyard with cousins. Another significant contrast for Jessica and Simon's children in Italy is that playgrounds are few and far between and there is no playground at school. "Playing habits are so different. At least one adult has to be free to take the children outside or to extracurricular activities. Sport and music are not part of school in Italy and there is a large emphasis on daily completing two hours of homework, which is seen as more important than family time and other things. Timing is different too, creating

more pressure and more rushing. Often the children's friends want to meet up at 6:30 or 7pm so we have learnt to be flexible, but a lot of our work with students or church also happens in the afternoon and evening."

The hardest part of the last few years for the Cowells has been being so far from family and support, and experiencing a sense of isolation in ministry and missional thinking. "When people care about our work and are praying for us, our families don't feel as alone in missing us. When as a diocese Jesus' lordship is taken seriously and mission is kept on people's hearts, not only in sending people to Italy and other places but in using lives to serve Jesus –prioritising opportunities to share him, and meeting and encouraging each other as churches – it encourages us. We're glad to see that this continues. It helps us to feel that we are all part of that same ministry."

Indigenous Ministry Day: a relief!



Frontyard church at Coledale is a flagship ministry.

Neil Hunt
Vicar of Walcha

‘SO GUYS...HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP THE DAY?’

It was a question asked to a Prado full of folks heading home from the Indigenous Ministry Day on Saturday 20th May.

“Relief!” came one enthusiastic reply.

“Relief?”

“Yeah, I was a bit nervous about coming today. I’ve never been to anything like this before and I was worried I’d have to learn all this new stuff about how to share Jesus with Indigenous people. I wondered if I was cut out for it. But now I just feel relief. Because sharing Jesus with Indigenous people is just the same as sharing Him with anyone else!”

Someone else from the back seat piped up. “That’s what that missionary from the Top End said, wasn’t it? ‘One humanity, one problem, one solution’”. The missionary in question had been quoted by Phil Wheeler in one of his very encouraging Bible talks.

The Prado travellers really had captured the mood of the day: that is, ministry with and amongst Indigenous people was really no different to any other ministry. At our core, all of humanity is the same. We all need to be saved from the same problem: sin. And our Maker has given only one name under Heaven by which mankind *can* be saved: the Lord Jesus Christ. And what a relief that is!

At the same time, “one humanity, one problem, one solution” doesn’t mean we don’t need to try and understand the different ways the groups that make up our world do things: this thing we call *culture*. Something that was helpfully explained on the day in the panel session.

This is why our diocese holds an annual Indigenous Ministry Day.

According to the 2021 Census, 11.5% of the population of North-East NSW (the approximate area of our diocese) is Indigenous. That’s 25,000 people! Many of those 25,000 know the Lord Jesus and are members of our parishes around the diocese. So, the Indigenous Ministry Day is a wonderful opportunity for our Indigenous brothers and sisters to share about what the Lord is doing in their own lives and the lives and ministries of others. It’s a time for mutual encouragement as an expression of our oneness in the Lord Jesus.

There are many Indigenous Christians in our diocese, but there are also many who do not yet know the Lord. So, the Indigenous

Ministry Day is also a chance to hear from people who can help us non-Indigenous folk better understand their culture. We are often unaware that the way we do whatever we do has our own culture’s distinct flavour, including sharing the gospel. So while the gospel never changes, hearing from our Indigenous church family, and those who minister alongside them, is an invaluable way of learning how best to share Jesus with our Indigenous neighbours, work mates, and family members.

Bible teaching for the day was from Phil Wheeler on the book of Acts. A child of the Armidale diocese, Phil currently works at Living Water Church which has a particular focus on Indigenous outreach and discipling in the Redfern area of Sydney.

One particular highlight of the day was an interview with Terrence Lennon, Indigenous youth worker and Youthworks trainee at Living Water Church. Terrence couldn’t make it in person, but even over Zoom he held us all captive with his story of God’s grace in his own life, as well as the wonderful things the Lord is doing in the lives of those he works amongst. Someone in the Prado remarked, “Even though it wasn’t face-to-face his story was so powerful!”

It was a delight to hear updates from some of our own Indigenous ministry workers including George Ferguson in Walgett-Collarenebri, Dixie Skuthorpe in Uralla, and Brian Kirk with Armidale Hospital Chaplaincy. Jum Naden from South Tamworth was also unable to attend in person, but brought us a moving and very encouraging history of the “Front Yard Church” in Coledale.

Other workers from around the diocese also shared their stories about God’s work amongst Indigenous people in their respective patches. A Q&A panel took questions from the floor and helped us think through some of the issues raised throughout the day. By the end, there was much to pray about so that’s how we brought the day to a close.

As our Prado crew discovered, Indigenous ministry is no more or less daunting, different, or delightful than any other gospel ministry. All of us broken and sinful people need to hear the news of the loving God who, through the life, death and resurrection of His Son the Lord Jesus, offers forgiveness and reconciliation for His glory and our joy.



Preaching in and out of season

Xavier Lukins addressing the need for big picture thinking in sermon preparation.

FORTY ATTENDEES WERE BLESSED WITH LOVELY WEATHER, great teaching from Bruce Bennett and the hospitality of the Barraba Parish at the annual Lay Preacher Training Day in early June. Gospel-centred lay preaching plays a crucial role in the life of our diocese. Lay preachers serve in a variety of contexts, notably assisting clergy with preaching duties, teaching in vacant parishes and special districts where there is not an incumbent minister and contributing to women's and children's ministries.

Lay Preacher training sessions have been a regular fixture in our diocesan calendar since the early 2000s, when the first 'Stand-up and Deliver' days run by Christopher Pears and Bruce Bennett took place. Events such as this one, organised by the Commission for Evangelism and Discipleship, endeavour to continue this training into the future to help bring glory to God and present everyone mature in Christ.

Participants were led through James chapters 1 to 4, analysing context and key themes as well as developing application points. Attendees also worked in smaller groups to examine passages and discuss how to present them in creative and practical ways. Bruce later preached on James 5, which trainees were then encouraged to critique and engage in a question-and-answer session.

Attendees were able to learn more about Lay Preacher development pathways, including the '3-lane model': meeting one-to-one with an experienced preacher, undertaking one-to-one preacher training and Lay Preacher Training Days. Xavier Lukins interviewed Ben and Robert from St. Peter's South Tamworth, who spoke positively of their experiences being mentored using this process. Xavier noted that godly lay preachers can help share the joys and responsibilities of teaching God's people.

Fourteen months ago the Commission for Evangelism and Mission organised a Lay Training Day in Barraba to train and encourage lay people who wanted to be better equipped to share Jesus in any context. "Someone at church suggested that I go," recalls David Axon, a member of St Andrew's Kootingal. "I always enjoy hearing a sermon and I went with no particular purpose in mind, just to listen and learn. I got talking to Simon and Julie Blake who said they'd been doing regular lay ministry at Tingha and asked if I could fill in for them while they went over to England. If someone said I want you to build me a set of sheep yards I'd say, 'Yeah, no worries,' but not when it comes to words. I guardedly said, yes."

After preaching at Tingha the first time, using skills gained at the Lay Training Day, David was asked to return and preach every fifth Sunday. "I thought, 'I have to do what I can to help there'. Margaret Parker is an inspiration. She's the engine of the church and people come because she keeps it going. It's a nice drive and I go and deliver the message, enjoy the fellowship there and come home again."

David has found that lay preaching is less stressful than he anticipated because he can rely on his thorough preparation. "My wife Ruth passed away in 2021, and my son has her gift with words. I get him to read my sermons and check that they flow well. As long as I'm delivering the truth, and not putting in anything of my own, I know I can leave it to the Lord. There was never a time that I didn't know that the Bible was true and that it shows the way to go. I've grown closer to Christ by reading his word. At times I've been amazed by a new revelation and thought 'Wow!'. It keeps drawing me on. I worry that today people can become malnourished if they don't know what the Bible says. Along with appreciating the logic and learning in studying Scripture it's one of the things that keeps me putting in the hours of preparation to preach."

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Science in the lab at eCalrossy...

THREE TIMES A YEAR THERE IS A PALPABLE SENSE OF excitement among the eCalrossy students as they come together for a week in residence at the Calrossy Anglican School campuses in Tamworth. During these weeks, when the remainder of the school is on holidays, the eCalrossy students share the experience of being a boarder – participating in intensive days of practical tasks in areas like Science and PDHPE/Sport and enjoying social interaction and activities together. The residential aspect of eCalrossy is a vital ingredient in students feeling connected to their peers and the school. The students come from a wide variety of locations from White Cliffs to Woolli, Tibooburra to Hay. Some students even cross state borders and join eCalrossy from Queensland and Victoria.

eCalrossy is a full-time distance education program where students access live online lessons each day of the term from their homes via Zoom. The classes are taught by Calrossy teachers, following the same programs experienced by day and boarding students. Focusing purely on the students in the distance education class, teachers deliver course content, facilitate discussions, and allow students to ask questions and receive clarification and feedback. From an initial group of 10 students at the beginning of 2021, the enrolment has now grown to 47 students. Within our diocese, there are eCalrossy students from Attunga, Baradine, Barraba, Boggabri, Gunnedah, Narrabri, Quirindi, Upper Horton and Walgett.

This service provided by Calrossy allows students in geographically isolated circumstances to be connected to a quality educational experience. It has also benefitted families for whom boarding is financially unattainable or work demands frequent travel, along with those who have children experiencing health conditions or participating in elite sporting opportunities. Now in its third year of operation, eCalrossy has classes for Year 5/6, Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9. One student from a town in our diocese, who recently transferred to eCalrossy from another school, commented that she is now actually learning in her lessons, another motivation for change.

When various groups at school have their major excursion for the year, the eCalrossy students also have the opportunity to join in. Recently, the majority of the Year 6 eCalrossy students enjoyed getting to know the wider Year 6 cohort and benefitted from the experiences while on the Canberra excursion. Earlier in the year,



... to science in the kitchen at eCalrossy.

secondary students in eCalrossy joined in excursions ranging from those of an outdoor adventure nature at Pindari Dam and Tea Gardens, to urban experiences in Sydney. For those students who desire to join Calrossy's full-time boarder community in later years, these relationships can be invaluable in aiding a smoother transition to their home away from home.

While at the residential week at the end of June, Flossy from Milparinka said, "I love catching up with my friends and experiencing new things. The only thing I don't like is the long (15 hour) drive!". Jack from Brewarrina's comment was, "I love that when we come down to do a residential week we do heaps of stuff. We don't just sit around but go out to venues around Tamworth. I just think it's great."

As well as the educational service this initiative provides to a wide range of families, the school sees the ministry opportunity it affords. eCalrossy students are exposed to the gospel and Christian thinking through their Mentor teachers during online lessons each day, as well as the daily devotions each morning at breakfast while they are in the residential weeks. The June residential week involved looking at Jesus' *I am* statements. Please pray these will be seeds which God graciously waters through His Spirit.

The Bible - still on track in the bush



Tim Stevens

Vicar of Guyra and Co-ordinator BCA ONTRACK program

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES FACING COUNTRY CHURCHES that I became acutely aware of during my stint as the Youth Encourager of the Diocese is the lack of faithful, trained, & godly young people in our churches. There are many reasons for this which I don't have time to outline here, but I'll give you one.

Oddly, one of the reasons we seem to lack young people is due to the success of the youth ministry that we run. Despite a lack of resources, our diocese has a track record of being very good at setting young people up for a lifetime of trusting Jesus and serving him wherever they land after school.

This success often means that after our six years of intentional youth-ministry discipleship have concluded, our young people leave for university in bigger cities. Then the closest evangelical church often snaps them up because they are generally more mature and capable than others in their cohort.

The reverend Phillip Jensen experienced this first-hand when he was the chaplain at UNSW. He speaks often about the joy of being able to put our young people to work on campus immediately!

Now, we should be thankful to God for this because it is one of the unseen ways that our diocese sends people out. Though the difficulty for us – and every other country church in Australia – is that we usually never see these young people again. The bush always feels like home, but the opportunities and excitement of the city is what keeps their attention.

That is, except for a distinct cohort emerging after the pandemic, who have discovered that country life and ministry has something to offer. They have often realised that uni has uniquely equipped them to be a blessing to gospel ministry in country Australia.

So you have someone like Gabby, who trained as a teacher in Perth and has recently moved to Karratha, WA. There's also Hannah and Abi, who are nurses in Alice Springs and Glen Innes, respectively. There's Emily, a physio in Port Pirie. There's also Elliot, a teacher who works part-time in Armidale while being our Youth Encourager one day a week. These young people (and many more!) have caught the vision of leaving the city to live, work, and serve Jesus in the bush.

But challenges still exist because transitioning from uni in the city to life in the bush can be tricky. Often, it's far more tricky than it needs to be! How do we help these faithful, trained, & godly young people stick around in country Australia for the long term? Well, that's where my new role as the coordinator of the BCA ONTRACK program comes in.

ONTRACK is a two-year program run by Bush Church Aid. The

Bush Church Aid Society of Australia (BCA) is a mission agency whose focus is sending and supporting gospel workers to regional, rural and remote Australia. BCA has been going the distance to reach Australia for Christ for over 104 years. ONTRACK is a fairly new initiative designed to help new uni graduates navigate the bumps in the road as they transition to life, work, and serving Jesus in the bush.

If you would like to hear more about this exciting country ministry rejuvenation project, come to the BCA Bush and Bible Day on the 16th of September at St Mark's Chapel, at the University of New England. I will be sharing the incredibly encouraging stories of these young people catching a vision for serving Jesus in the country and what God is going through them.

The Reverend Neville Naden (BCA's Indigenous Ministry Officer) will be speaking on "Reconciliation", and the Rev. Jen Hercott (Registrar, Diocese of Central Queensland) will be giving an overview of ministry in that part of the sunshine state. The Reverend Mike Uptin, BCA's Queensland/Northern New South Wales Regional Officer will be there to lead the day and answer any questions about any of the BCA programs.

Cost for the morning is \$10. Registration is encouraged for catering purposes via our website at <https://www.bushchurchaid.com.au/content/events-tours/gk6fdk>



Neville Naden is an engaging and powerful preacher of God's word.

Trading Places

IT'S OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW AS current editor of *The Link*, **Robyn Powell** steps down and hands over to new editor **Rachel Doran**. As a final hurrah for Robyn and to introduce Rachel to her new life, they interviewed each other.



With Robyn (inset) in Bowral and Rachel in Tamworth, their changeover meetings have all been virtual.

Robyn, what has been your favourite aspect of working as editor of the *The Link*?

The best thing has always been talking to people. Everyone has a story to tell, even if they think otherwise! I have been inspired, taught, cheered, encouraged and moved to tears as I speak to the people of the diocese, both clergy and lay. Because I live out of the Diocese, I have 'met' most people only over the phone, yet I feel that I have genuinely made friends. If I talk to someone in Tenterfield, I immediately want to move to Tenterfield! But it's the same with Walcha and Narrabri and Manilla and Mullaley!

What a privilege it has been for me to become a part of the diocese over these past seven years. I want to thank Bishops Rick Lewers and Rod Chiswell for their constant encouragement and for their outstanding leadership. But I particularly want to thank every person who has contributed to a story in *The Link*...from providing a few lines about where and when a conference was being held, to sharing one of the deeply personal *Pilgrim* stories. I have loved talking to you and hearing about the way you have come to know Jesus, and are being helped home to heaven.

What has helped you to grow the most in your relationship with God during the past seven years?

Hearing stories of faith, perseverance and the building of character through difficulties must help anyone grow in their knowledge and love of God! It has certainly helped me to know Jesus better. Curiously, the other thing has no direct correlation to being editor of *The Link*. For the past two and a half years, my husband and I have been listening to the Bible every day, via a podcast called *ESV Through the Bible in a Year*. Hearing large chunks of Scripture, beautifully read (several chapters of the Old Testament, a psalm and one or two chapters of the New Testament each day) has opened up the Bible to us so wonderfully. The people and personalities of Scripture live in a way we have not experienced before. We see God's plan being worked out over and over again. I highly recommend it!

What do you look forward to/anticipate doing with your extra time as you relinquish your editorial role?

Maybe I will have a go at The Great Australian Novel which has been bubbling away in my head for...oooh....50 years or so! But with eight grandchildren and one more who, God willing, should be here by the time this issue goes out, I am sure I will be kept busy making birthday cakes and trying to come up with creative Book Week costumes.

(I am currently working on a volcano costume for my five-year-old future vulcanologist grandson. It has its challenges). One thing I have committed to doing is praying for the Diocese: for the bishop, for the clergy, for the Special Districts, for evangelism efforts, and for growth in every parish,

Rachel, why are you excited to be the next editor of *The Link*?

I can still recall the tangible joy I experienced when learning to soar solo into the realms of Dick and Jane, the Berenstain Bears, and the Faraway Tree folk. My love of the written word has only grown since then, in conjunction with a desire to work in Christian publishing. I have been blessed as others have shared their eternal hope and assurance of God's love alongside their experience of his mercy and grace in a multitude of situations involving trials, challenges, suffering and grief. Testimonies of God's ongoing provision for his children are one way that his grace equips and inspires us to keep our trust in him. I pray that *The Link* will be continue to be a resource that unites our vast diocese with stories of God's goodness and the encouragement to grow ever more like Jesus.

Will you be asking your family to address you as Madam Editor from now on?

I'm not sure that my position as an editor will feature strongly in our family's vocabulary, unless someone needs feedback on a document or University assignment! In addition to work on *The Link* I will be supporting my husband, Mark, in his role at Calrossy Anglican School, caring for our delightfully energetic grandson Teddy, and his parents Anna and Tyler and baby brother when they visit, and enjoying time with our three adult children, Will, Elisabeth and Sophie when they are not busily employed in tertiary education or elsewhere.

How can we pray for you as you step into this new ministry?

I would value prayers for wisdom when commissioning articles, good time management skills, opportunities to hear of God's ongoing work, the humility to serve well and courage to stand firm if persecution arises.

On behalf of readers and writers in the diocese, I'd like to offer our heartfelt gratitude to Robyn for her tireless work in restoring *The Link* into circulation, her compassionate wisdom and innovative creativity in producing it in its current form, and her untold hours, dedication and commitment to telling heartening and inspiring stories of Christians ministering faithfully.

Grateful for Tim Keller

Rachel Doran
Editor

WHENEVER I WAS ASKED WHICH WELL-KNOWN PERSON I'D invite to a dinner party I had no answer. I'd already discovered that the songs of a musician I liked made a lot more sense than his worldview. And after learning of the unorthodox lifestyles of some of my favourite authors, I wasn't confident that removed from the universe and characters they had created, we would connect. I was wary of meeting those I admired ... until I was introduced to Timothy Keller.

Tim Keller, American author, pastor and founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City who died in May this year, has been described as both a modern C. S. Lewis and Billy Graham. Given the scope of his influence, there are grounds for these analogies. Whilst he may differ to many Christians on some points of theology, so did Lewis himself. Tim was widely read, and I appreciated his ability to incorporate every aspect of the human experience into his sermons, referencing philosophers, historians, scientists, authors, poets, musicians, psychiatrists, theologians, sporting moments, the arts and other cultural events.

Tim's grappling as an undergraduate with the intellectual concerns generated by suffering, evil and judgement informed his ability to understand other's objections to Christianity. His commitment to understanding the culture he lived in and the barriers to faith in Jesus of the young, single New Yorkers he spent hours talking to, was tireless. Perhaps it is that deliberate intention that also enabled Tim to speak to me. He appeared to wrestle with things I wrestle with: suffering, losing a younger brother to an untimely death, the desire to please others, how to make God's love real to a lost and hurting world intent on rejecting him. Tim's position on our equal moral standing before God whether we are paid as ministers or assassins was unequivocal. He preached grace from every passage of Scripture and provided security by teaching me, "you're a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you're more loved than you ever dared hope."

I'm not suggesting that I have had to leave this diocese to find godly, practical teaching, or that Tim is the only Christian writer who has helped me. Neither is true. In God's kindness however, it has often been Tim who has ministered to me in the middle of the night with his characteristic warmth, wisdom and compassion when I have been struggling with my own or someone's else's suffering, or with the theological, moral or ethical issues that abound. He was trustworthy in expounding God's word and consistently displayed a supreme confidence in God's goodness, love and sovereignty which comforted my aching soul. I valued his ability to answer any question by pointing to God's holiness and astounding mercy in equal measure. That Tim was never daunted nor appalled when describing the sin I find in my own heart and those around me always filled me with hope. Through humble, calm reasoning in the context of humanity's doubts and rebellion, Tim demonstrated that he was never overwhelmed by the brokenness in the world, but more importantly, that Jesus isn't either.

I continue to grieve that Tim didn't get to write the book on identity he had planned and is no longer on the other side of the ocean, engaging with our ever-changing culture with grace and truth and helping me to do the same. Yet I'm also grateful for Tim's example in facing his death and fears with courage and honesty, leaving encouragement in his admission, "that to embrace God's greatness, to say 'Thy will



be done,' was painful at first and then, perhaps counterintuitively, profoundly liberating." I'm even more grateful that along with Tim, I am invited to the feast of the Father, and that my trust in Jesus' saving death alone provides my RSVP.

Tim Keller faithfully used his many gifts and has left a legacy in his books, sermons and the organisations he co-founded. His books can be purchased from The Wandering Bookseller (<https://wanderingbookseller.com.au/>) or Reformers Bookshop (<https://reformers.com.au/>), and his podcasts found at <https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/> among others.

a kid like me
needs someone
like you

If you... have time to care for a child, have experience in working with or caring for children, can instil hope in a child and help them have a better future...**YOU** could be that someone!

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Penny's thankfulness

Penny Clunas

I FEAR SUFFERING SO MUCH THAT I THINK MOST DAYS OF what terrible things might strike me, even though I've had tough times in life and seen God's provision. In June 2021, I had a symptom which led me to the GP. Three weeks later I had the necessary scans and biopsies. This was a scary time, wondering and waiting, pleading with God. I was diagnosed with breast cancer and had one week's notice before unilateral surgery and the preparation for chemotherapy and radiotherapy began. It was a six-month process.

During the diagnosis I was shocked and upset. I had so many questions: God will you kill me and leave my children without a mother? Will you let me die soon? Yet I also find in suffering, you can see God's hand caring for you. Had I not noticed my unusual symptoms, the diagnosis would have been worse. The GP I happened to see was an amazing help with incredible, specific knowledge. The timing of school holidays meant family could look after my kids while I went in for immediate surgery.

Surgery was distressing and chemotherapy initially horrific. COVID restrictions added sadness, as people could seldom accompany me to hospital or visit me there. I found the loss of my hair devastating and disappointing, but throughout that time I saw God looking after me as well through less side effects, good strength in between treatments and time to rest and enjoy nature on bushwalks. I am also blessed with an incredible husband.

I know God was showing me his care and answering prayers. I had nowhere to turn but to God's word and to ask Jesus to help me through. I frequently struggled to find the perfect verse, but as I lay under machines I found reciting Psalm 23, John 3:16, 1 Peter 1: 3-9 very comforting. Often I was so stressed I could only ask Jesus for help and repeat "Only you know best". I knew many people were praying for me and I wasn't alone in asking God to help me. When I couldn't sleep at night due to fear I listened to online sermons which fed me in God's word.

I saw God's kindness towards us as a family as we were showered with gifts, food, perfectly timed visits and so much care. It almost felt like the children had a great time because special meals and treats were constantly flowing – our church and my Bible study group were the hands of God at that time. There were other reminders of God's kindness too, like the time my husband visited me in hospital and we immediately realised that two of our children needed to be picked up from separate places imminently. At that moment a friend texted and was able to help the kids.

The promises of heaven, God's sovereign power over death and Satan and Jesus' words of assurance of our salvation in Him are my only hope in life and death. In times like these they come to mean so much more. I have since sought to think further and listen to Christian podcasts



specifically on suffering which have been a great help. Vaneetha Risner's 'Desperate for Hope' podcasts are worth listening to.

God did help me through that time and gave me eyes to see the amazing ways he was caring for us. I find thankfulness is a helpful path in suffering, even though I have to work at it. I am so grateful the cancer wasn't found in my lymph nodes. I witnessed God's faithful, steadfast hand, his love and his powerful Scripture, and was reminded that God can help us in suffering. I'm sorry that some people will read this and will have lost their spouse, sibling, parent or child. Life is hard while we wait for Jesus to return.

I'd say to people who fear suffering, practise thankfulness now, in little areas that bother, irritate and disappoint you. There are lots of things we all struggle with every day. Pray for God's help in all circumstances and keep believing his promises that "these things have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire can be proved genuine" and that "neither life nor death, angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future or any powers, neither height nor depth nor any powers nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ". Run to God not away from him, fix your eyes on Jesus, keep sharing God's word with each other and non-believers. We have such a precious gift from God. Let people know when you are suffering and accept support.

I have so much to learn and I still need to practise thankfulness to persevere in suffering. Every day we need the words of God "let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful", in order to keep running the race. My cancer could return, but I also know God doesn't let Satan win in the end. God promises that since we have been justified by Jesus' blood much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him, and I want to trust and believe that Jesus will be with me always.

"...there's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim..."

John Bunyan