

The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2016 OCTOBER

No longer missing



Diocesan Registrar Ron Perry, Bishop Rick Lewers and Editor of The Link, Robyn Powell

Rick Lewers

GROWING UP, I HAD SOMEONE CLOSE to me describe me as ‘the missing link’. I don’t think he intended it as a compliment, but to be the missing link is to be the link that holds the rest together. As I introduce the first edition of *The Link* I rejoice that a missing link is being resurrected.

To say that someone is missing a link or two is the same as saying you are a sandwich short of a picnic and that is also rather discouraging. However, to put those links in place is to offer the complete package. Links are great things but missing links suggest the incomplete.

The business world has LinkedIn, Facebook links you to friends you didn’t know you had, you link hands in marriage, and the linked circles of the Olympics symbolise the fellowship of the sporting world. Life itself is an adventure of discovering links, making links and establishing links. Radio links the hearer, television links the visual, while print media invites us to imagine the events they link us to. It is hard to think of anything in life which does not link us to something. But is there something or someone that links us to life itself?

Thankfully, God makes that link. Because of His great love, rich mercy and amazing grace, God’s people know that we have been made alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Christians know that life is linked to Jesus Christ, His life, death and resurrection. Christians know that we have life, because God in His kindness chooses to link Himself with us.

That is truly good news which God intended for the recipient to link others to. Indeed, our vision as the Armidale Anglican Diocese, ‘To introduce people to Jesus and to help them home

Continued on page 2

From page 1

to heaven', is a vision to link people to the God and Saviour of life. Christians are a linked and linking community: linked to God and to each other in a glorious fellowship designed to serve and build each other up, and active in seeking to link others to Jesus for the glory of God.

I am not surprised that Christians across our Diocese called the Diocesan paper *The Link*. Linking us in fellowship and encouraging people to be linked to Jesus Christ is at the very heart of God's eternal purposes. As a Diocesan family that delights in our fellowship in Christ together, but is challenged by geographical distance and cultural differences, any linking of each other offers us the privileges of edification, understanding, encouragement, equipping, discipline, various other forms of assistance and of course, prayer.

The Diocesan website has offered such a blessing and I remind you to access it from time to time. There is a library of information from news and events through to safe ministry resources and ordinances. But as my friend might say, there remains the missing link. With that in mind I rejoice in a new day of new editions of *The Link* – the magazine version that will be delivered to all Diocesan churches on a regular basis. Like all links, *The Link* has

a purpose. It is my hope that every edition of *The Link* will deepen faith in Christ and encourage our unity via story and information, giving us all reason for prayer and praise.

I am delighted that Mrs Robyn Powell has agreed to become part of our Diocesan ministry team, taking up overall editorial responsibility for *The Link*. Robyn's expertise is in writing copy, with a wide range of media experience in print, radio and television. Originally from the Central West of NSW, she now lives in the Southern Highlands with her husband Russell, who currently serves Christ as the CEO of Anglican Media in Sydney which produces, among other things, *Southern Cross* magazine. God has kindly blessed us with the gift of Robyn's expertise, her love for our Diocese and her desire to see the Diocese flourish. Her generosity and that of others offers exciting possibilities for the return of *The Link*.

As *The Link* is put in place, I hope it will serve to bring us increasingly together in our fellowship - no longer a sandwich short of a picnic but a picnic that honours and rejoices in the participation of all. If you would like to offer some financial support to this project as a ministry to the Diocese, please contact the Registrar.

If you have read this, we have now linked and I look forward to *The Link* in the future.

Sanctity, Sanctuary, Selfishness, Sex, Speech and Sustaining Church Life

THE ANNUAL SYNOD OF THE ANGLICAN Diocese of Armidale was held on the weekend of September 23-25, 2016, at Calrossy School in Tamworth. Over 130 people representing 33 parishes, special districts and chaplaincies came together to share news of Diocesan activities over the past year.

But a Synod is so much more than just hearing about events, numbers and finances. This yearly gathering offers an opportunity for those ministering in isolated areas of the Diocese or in smaller churches to meet new and old friends and seek encouragement, help and a sharing of ideas that always results when gospel-centred Christians are together.

Traditionally, Synod begins with the Presidential Address from the Bishop, which sets the tone for all that will follow. This year, Bishop Rick Lewers opened proceedings on Friday night with a stirring quotation, which he continually re-visited as the evening went on. The quote, from John Piper's book *The Pleasures of God*, says, "This world is far too dense with man and too distant from the sweet sovereignty of God."

He then went on to note the retirement of several key ministry leaders and to express his thanks for the contribution made by so many people, in both clergy and lay roles, over many years. He reserved his greatest appreciation for those throughout the Diocese who commit themselves to prayer. He said, "Self-dense people are often looking to make a name for themselves, to leave their mark and receive

The Registrar and *The Link*



Ron Perry PSM (left) has been the Registrar of Armidale Diocese for almost four years. During those years he has seen from his spot in the centre of the Diocese many ministries, initiatives, partnerships and relationships grow and flourish all across the Diocese. He has found it all very, very exciting.

But there was one big concern. How could he share this great news with a wider audience?

He quickly realised that a major problem was that *The Link* had not been published since the retirement of former editor, Barry Blair. So he set out on a mission to restore *The Link*.

"When Barry retired, we looked far and wide for someone to take up the challenge of reviving *The Link*. As a last ditch effort, I approached

Southern Cross, the newspaper of the Diocese of Sydney, to see if it could help. It was through this avenue we found Robyn Powell, a freelance writer with many years of experience, and the hunt was over", he said.

"It is my hope and prayer that when people get their copy of *The Link* it will act as a spur to engage in ministry. I want it to encourage people. Sometimes it is easy to forget that God is doing something significant in the north west... but He is! I hope the paper will be a stimulus to ministry as people introduce their friends to Jesus and help them home to heaven. We can all contribute to the growing of the Kingdom; it takes many manifestations. As we read about what people in another area are doing, maybe we can do something similar where we live.

"When we read the newspapers or watch television, we can often feel that we are in times of danger and the evil one seems to be winning. Anti-Christian forces in our society are on the march. Through the pages of *The Link* I hope people will remember and practise 1 Corinthians 15:58:

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

We at *The Link* covet the prayers of everyone within the Diocese. Our prayer is that you will be encouraged, helped and emboldened as we seek God's Kingdom together.



Members of the 2016 Synod. Photo courtesy of James Levingston

accolades. The prayerful, by contrast, empty self in dependence upon God - seeking not a name for themselves but the glory of the Name that is above every name, Jesus Christ. ...Prayerful people seek not a name for themselves but to leave the fingerprint of Christ's name on everything they do."

The real meat of his address began as he outlined the symptoms of cultural, not Biblical Christianity creeping in to our churches and suggested that the tide is moving quickly on matters of life and death. These matters were outlined under the headings Sanctity of Life, Sanctuary for Life, Selfishness of Life, Sex Life, Speech for Life and Sustaining Church Life.

He began to unpack these headings by speaking movingly on abortion and euthanasia.

"The Christian world-view understands life from an eternal perspective and teaches that God desires not the death of a sinner, but that all might come to repentance and live," he said. "It is this Christian world-view that offers an alternative view to abortion and euthanasia."

He went on to commend especially Anglicare's 'Hope For Life' initiative, which was born in Moree and acts as an advocate for the welfare of unborn children and their teenage parents. .

Next, Rick addressed the contentious and complex issue of refugees and asylum seekers. "In one breath, the Bible exhorts God's people to care for the alien or foreigner in the land

and to do so generously. In the next breath, it needs to be said, the Bible found space to speak of border protection. How does one balance the two?" Alluding to the difficulty of rightly responding to the issue, he said, "[I] may not have all the answers, but alongside faithful brothers and sisters [I] prayerfully seek a church where its soul is swallowed up in its contemplations of Jesus Christ, where the love of Christ so dispels the fear of man that we would all give ourselves to love the alien in our land, such that they will never be alien to God."

While Tamworth seems a long way from Greece, the Bishop used the current financial difficulties of that country to point towards the dangers of greed and entitlement. "Prayerfully, we must ask God to raise up leaders for whom the lust of power is surrendered to the humility of service and for a people who rest content to receive what we need, not sacrificing others to our greed."

It takes bravery to speak on the topic of sex, especially in these days of political correctness. That did not deter the Bishop. The tidal wave of pornography and the same-sex marriage debate were dealt with clearly. "It is a sign of human confusion that we are unable to, or will not, make a connection between pornography and the many sexual sins of our culture... When we combine sex and violence in films and computer games, why are we surprised by violent sexual crime?"

The issue of same-sex marriage, he said it

"...has revealed the soft and shallow belly of a vulnerable Christianity that is too dense with man and too empty of the sweet sovereignty of God.....This issue will not go away and to that end, we as a church must continue to consider how we will respond."

During the Speech for Life part of his address the Bishop made the suggestion that politics, sex and religion be returned as suitable topics for dinner table conversation. "We ought not ditch the important for something more superficial", he said.

In his conclusion, the Bishop brought the talk back to where we are now. Even though he had been speaking of Big World issues, they are no different for us in our regional towns and villages. He reminded us that there is no such thing as a small Christian, "...just Christians with a great God: our Father in Heaven, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit, who is daily transforming us into the image of Christ and bringing new birth to those dead in their sins."

The following day and a half were taken up with the business of Synod, which included many inspiring reports on various ministries from all across the Diocese. Over the next three pages, we have some snapshots of just a few of them.

If you would like to read the complete version of Bishop Rick Lewers' Address to Synod, you can find it on the website at <http://www.armidaleanglicandiocese.com/in-focus>

A Few Snapshots From Synod

Youth

The Reverend David Swan, Vicar of Bingara has another title: Youth Encourager, but he believes a better name would be Youth Encouraged! He leads a team of people whose job it is to work out ways to do youth ministry better.

"We need to keep forming partnerships within the Diocese. We are spread out across thousands of kilometres; we can't try to resource ourselves in our own spaces. It is so much harder to improve if you are battling away on your own. All our ministries - schools, youth groups, kids' ministries - have crossovers with each other. We need to show leaders the pathways to stay in ministry, whether as part-time, lay workers, or as full-time ministers."

He urged other leaders at all levels to suggest ways youth ministry can grow. Sending both youth and their leaders to conferences in Katoomba and Mount Tambourine was just one pathway to enormous training and growth opportunities.

"We want our youth leaders to get networked and one way of doing that is through our Facebook page", he said.

To make sure everyone there really understood the importance of Facebook, he snapped a selfie with the whole of Synod behind him, waving, to express their love for the youth and the youth leaders of the Diocese.

And the one thing he would ask us to pray?

"Please pray that we will stay on the one team and keep spurring each other along. We can't do this on our own."



David Swan takes the Synod selfie.



Anglicare

This year, Synod was introduced to the new CEO for Anglicare Northern Inland, Veronica Rodenburg. The Synod also thanked and paid tribute to the outgoing CEO, Larry Apthorpe and to David Maddigan, Chairman of the Anglicare Northern Inland Board who concludes his term at the end of this year.

In her first address to the Synod, Veronica Rodenburg said, "We need to guarantee our services are relevant to the changing needs of the community we serve, and that we are mindfully expressing our faith as Christians in an appropriate way."

She pointed out that the Anglicare staff team of 22 part- and full-time workers provides support and counsel to 1200 individuals and families, and provides education to a further 1400 people each year.

"It is important that we are more recognisable in the community and in the parishes - that the community knows where to find help and knows how it can contribute to that work", she said. "Our counsellors are busier than ever before with the consequences of gambling, drug and alcohol addictions, poverty and family breakdown...We have up to a six-week waiting list in the Tamworth centre. They are also doing more with less, as funding from governments has been reduced over the past 18 months."

She urged the members of Synod to remember that "Anglicare Northern Inland is your mission in this region, and we need your help and support through your prayers, your financial giving and volunteering."

Mothers' Union

Maree Stavert (right), standing in for Sharon Kirk, asked the Synod, "What is your mental image of Mothers' Union? Is it an antiquated organisation for mums totally irrelevant to modern day issues? Well, it's time to change the image! In a world struggling to redefine marriage, we must remember that marriage and family life matter to God. This is why MU exists, and it is the reason we are trying to live out that purpose in this Diocese."

Maree went on to urge the Synod members to make use of the Facebook Diocese of Armidale Women's Network (DAWN) page and to read the 'Family Foundations' newsletter. She spoke briefly about the visits from Jim and Lesley Ramsay to Uralla and Gunnedah, and Christine Jensen to Inverell, all of whom had addressed the issue of marriage. She then invited everyone to attend the next MU meeting in Armidale on November 28th.

"How can you help?", she asked. "Please promote Mothers' Union in your parish...sign up as a supporter - you don't have to be a mother! The bigger we are as a group, the more clout we will have. Most of all, please pray for us, and especially for the issues and challenges facing marriage in our communities today."



Indigenous Ministries

The Reverend Brian Kirk from Uralla introduced the Indigenous Sub-Committee report, and explained that the vision of the Committee is to reach Indigenous people in the Diocese with the gospel, and to resource and support ministry among Indigenous people. He passed on the Committee's belief that evangelism is the highest priority with Indigenous people, supported by Christians who are praying intentionally and explicitly for their salvation, discipleship and training.

He reminded the members that the Synod of 2012 agreed to make available up to \$50,000 per year to support Indigenous ministries within the Diocese. He then introduced three Vicars to speak.

The Reverend Bernard Gabbott from Wee Waa, Pilliga and Burren Junction began by commenting on the difficulties associated with indigenous ministry, and how many of those difficulties were the same as those in any ministry. He spoke winningly of 'God's Mob' - the people of God - and how easy it is to have too small a view of how we meet and minister.

He was followed by the Reverend Tory Cayzer from Walgett who told the Synod about the highlight of his week: the lunchtime children's club in his local school called JAFFA (Jesus A Friend For All) which is attended by 20 to 30 children each week. The highlight of his year is the holiday program which his church runs in partnership with a team of people from St Peter's, South Tamworth.

The final speaker was the Reverend Rod Chiswell from St Peter's, South Tamworth, who told the story of the Coledale Front Yard Fellowship. This remarkable initiative began six years ago with a handful of people in the front yard of a Coledale home. In the years since, it has grown to a weekly meeting of around 50 people, including a team from the church who cook and serve food.

Please pray for the protection of the teams as they minister, and that God will help adults and children to respond wholeheartedly to Jesus as Lord.

Malaita

The Reverend Xavier Lukins from St Peter's, South Tamworth presented a report on the partnership with the Diocese of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. He spoke about the visit of a team from the Tamworth Anglican churches which visited the Diocese in November 2015. One of the highlights was a visit to Fiu village where a four-day mission was held, around the theme of Two Ways To Live. It was attended by approximately 250 children each day!

A visit from a team from the Armidale Diocese and St Hilda's Anglican Church in Katoomba was scheduled for May 2016, but had to be postponed. A visit has been re-scheduled for late 2017, when two teams will undertake training for the clergy, as well as children's missions. They are especially hoping that some local youth groups might be willing to expend some energy in helping to run the children's programs.

If you want to know more, drop Paul Harvey an email on harveypaul@bigpond.com

North Kigezi



Delegates working on their Bible studies at the NextGen Conference

The Reverend Simon Carter from Oxley Vale Anglican Community Church got the members of Synod up to speed with the partnership that exists between the Diocese of Armidale and the Diocese of North Kigezi, in Uganda.

This partnership exists to equip, encourage and support gospel workers in that Diocese in their efforts to make disciple-making disciples of Christ.

"There are four facets to the partnership: the NextGen Conference, Sunday School teachers' training and marriage enrichment courses for clergy, clergy training and the pairing of Bible study groups in the Armidale Diocese with ministers in the North Kigezi Diocese so they can pray for each other," he said.

Early next year, a team of 12 leaders and one Year 13 trainee will be running a conference to equip the local youth leaders and clergy to be able faithfully to

teach the Bible. The team will be there when the new Bishop is installed.

Meanwhile, Bob and Sue Boland have been conducting Sunday School teacher training across the Diocese. They have written a three year syllabus, which covers the whole Bible, using Biblical theology in the local language. It is designed to equip Sunday School teachers, but they have discovered that a number of the clergy they have had contact with model their preaching program on the Sunday School program, enabling them to preach through the whole Bible.

Simon urged parish members to speak to him about lining up a prayer partner in Uganda. He urged the members of Synod to pray for North Kigezi, for the teams who will be travelling there next year, and that everyone in the North Kigezi Diocese will grow in love and knowledge of God.

Philippians 1:3-5 *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

There are so many partnerships at work in the diocese, we have decided to regularly feature them in *The Link*. In this edition, we look at some the partnerships between churches in our Diocese and those with congregations in the Sydney Diocese. These partnerships seem to reach a high point in the September school holidays every year.

Cherrybrook and Barraba

FOR THE PAST 11 YEARS, A TEAM OF BETWEEN 25 AND 50 people from Cherrybrook Anglican Church has taken a week to head north and minister in Barraba.

Hamilton Trotter from Barraba said “It’s a real encouragement to talk with other Christians. So often, the news from outside is bad... disaster, accidents, ISIS attacks. It’s wonderful to know that other Christians all around are having their struggles and joys. It reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ.”

For the people from Cherrybrook, the sentiments are similar. Mark Payne has led the team for the whole time. Barraba is a long way from his hectic job as the CEO of the Sydney Diocesan Secretariat.

“In 2006 we decided to think broader than our own parish. So our partnership with Barraba was born,” he said. “I’ve been here through the depths of the worst droughts, yet people have a confidence in the Lord that He will provide, even in the worst of times. To be able to leave all the city stuff behind, to live and minister together with my friends recharges my own personal batteries. For Cherrybrook as a whole, it’s a wonderful opportunity to exercise ministry gifts. I’m standing here watching a lawyer from a big Sydney firm leading games with the kids! Just an example of stretching yourself in ministry for the sake of the gospel! We all keep coming back because, quite simply, we take back far more than we give.”

Tamworth and Walgett



Fun for young and old at the Walgett holiday club

WHEN TORY CAYZER LEFT HIS JOB AS AN ASSISTANT AT ST Peter’s South Tamworth to become the Vicar of Walgett, one of the first things he knew he wanted to start was a lunchtime club at the local school. By the time 20 to 30 children were regularly attending each week, it became obvious that a next step in the ministry was needed.

But how? The church at Walgett is small. Tory and Jo’s children are the only ones there each week. Enter Rod Chiswell, and Tory’s old friends from South Tamworth.

Rod explained, “In little places you don’t have lots of people to make things happen. We run a kids’ club in the July holidays in Tamworth, then that team heads out to Walgett in September. We have a wide-ranging team—the youngest, my daughter Georgia, is 13 and the oldest is over 70.”

And why do they do it? “People come home highly encouraged in their own faith; it’s an opportunity to train our people (especially the young ones) and to set them up for ministry down the years. Then of course, there’s the joy we see on the faces of the kids each year!”

For Tory, the benefits are wide-ranging. “It’s wonderful for my children to see other children in the church! But beyond that, my prayer is that it will encourage us to be gospel minded for the rest of the year. It takes a long time to build relationships with people. The consistency with Tamworth people coming back year after year speaks loudly. This time in the September holidays is a real witness to the town of Walgett. I hope we show Christ-like love with no strings attached.”



DIOCESAN ACCOUNTANT

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The Armidale Diocese wishes to appoint a highly motivated person with a financial and accounting background to its Registry team in Armidale.

In line with its growth and the ever-widening extent of its responsibilities, the Diocese of Armidale wishes to appoint a highly motivated person with a financial and accounting background to its Registry team in Armidale in northern New South Wales.

The successful candidate would work closely with the Diocesan Registrar on all aspects of the Diocese’s financial administration, including managing its budget and investment and property portfolios.

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For further information contact the Registrar, Ron Perry:
02 6772 4491
registrar@armidaleanglicandiocese.com

*Introducing people to Jesus
and helping them home to heaven*

Speaking, playing, singing, crafting and sharing in Walcha

Ben France

FROM SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER TO SUNDAY 2 OCTOBER, A team of around 10 volunteers from St Mark's Northbridge and other churches in Sydney came to Walcha to help run the annual Walcha Outreach week.

This week of outreach is a combined ministry of the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches in town, conducted with the support of the local Council.

At the heart of the week is the Kids' Games program where as many



The adults set-up in Walcha, while the children think the fun has already begun.

as 60 children from in and around Walcha hear from God's word every day, play games and get crafty.

Every day one member of the team told about his or her journey as a Christian, helping the children to understand that a walk with Christ is for life.

This year, the team's mission expanded to include a visit to one of the town's aged-care facilities, so they could encourage the Christian residents there through the communal singing of familiar hymns. And for the first time, the local skate park was the venue for older teens to gather and be a part of the week's events.

The culmination of the week was a family barbeque, where parents were welcomed and had the opportunity to hear and see some of the things their children had learned during the week. The week was rounded off with an evangelistic service on Sunday, which included a potluck lunch and farewell the team. We hope they will be back next year!

2016 October

From Engadine to Ashford

IN ASHFORD, BISHOP RICK AND HIS WIFE JANENE LEWERS dropped in to say hello to some of their old friends who were making clowns of themselves!

Eleven men and women from the Heathcote Engadine Anglican Church in Sydney (where the Bishop and his wife ministered before coming to Armidale) led a mission in Ashford during the September school holidays.

Matt Richards, one of the group's leaders explained this year's circus theme. "We had a lot of fun and looking from the outside you would be forgiven for thinking we were just clowning around, but really we wanted to show the young kids and their parents that Jesus has a message for everyone," Matt said. "We set up a huge circus tent and had lots of circus-themed kids' activities, and at night we had a fire in the church grounds at Ashford, kicked the footy, toasted marshmallows and had a short talk about Jesus. One child told his Mum that this was the best day of his life!"

Warren Richards, who spent the past couple of years ministering in Ashford said, "The combined Anglican and Presbyterian churches approached us to have a go at a holiday kids' club, so this is the first time its been done. The team was as thrilled as the Ashford community. The children responded so well to the message. It was great to have a group of mature people who want to share the gospel...the children are thirsty! We had wonderful feedback from the community, and I know that the team leaders are starting to think about what they can do on their next trip."



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A Boost to Marriage

Sharon Kirk

ONE OF THE COLDEST NIGHTS IN A NEW England winter did not deter twenty-five couples from across the Diocese from attending a marriage enrichment course at the end of July. At the invitation of Mothers' Union (MU), Jim and Lesley Ramsay (right) facilitated a marriage enrichment course in Uralla called 'Making Good Marriages Better' as well as two workshops specifically for clergy couples.

At the first workshop the range of ages and life stages was broad indeed – the youngest couple having been married for just 18 months, and the oldest for 53 years! The older couple attended because they were aware of their age and the uncertainty of how much time they had left together, so they wanted to spend the rest of their years investing in their relationship and making it as good as it could be!

A couple of days later 20 ministry couples from across the Diocese attended the clergy



workshops. Many commented on how valuable it had been to take time out to discuss issues as a couple. Many expressed their appreciation for Jim and Lesley's honest, practical and humorous presentation. Not only have Jim and Lesley been married for over 45 years, but they have served most of this time in Christian ministry, so their wisdom and experience was

greatly valued.

This is the third successive year that MU has offered a marriage enrichment course in the Diocese. Given that the purpose of the organisation is to be 'concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life', they hope to offer many more similar events in the years ahead.

Marriage Matters: Challenges to Marriage Today

CHRISTINE JENSEN IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE CAUSE OF Christian marriage and family life, so much so that in January this year she was awarded an OAM for her services to the Anglican Church community in Sydney; a large part of that service being her work with Mothers' Union (MU). It was for this reason that MU in the Diocese of Armidale invited Christine, wife of the former Archbishop of Sydney, to come and speak at Inverell at an event specifically focussed on 9 September.

Approximately 70 women, and a few men, from across the Armidale Diocese gathered to hear Christine address the topic, *Marriage Matters: Challenges to Marriage Today*. In her two talks, Christine began with a biblical portrait of marriage, after which she addressed the many threats and challenges to biblical marriage within our current climate.

Those who attended the day were overwhelmingly appreciative of the opportunity to discuss this topic, and commented on how beneficial it had been in a variety of ways. One young Mum spoke of the personal value: 'I've been encouraged to make my marriage better everyday and not idealise my husband, but have a view of marriage that is God's view'. Another woman saw the wider ministry value of the day: 'One of the things that struck me from Christine Jensen's talk was the need for us to make a safe space for discussion of marriage-related issues in our churches. Often people are struggling or burdened and are afraid to share with their church families for fear of being judged or criticised at the precise time they need our support and encouragement'.

In our modern climate, it is crucial that Christians take seriously the challenges that marriage is facing. MU, the worldwide organisation that champions the cause of Christian marriage and family life, is



Christine Jensen with her husband Peter and daughters Anna and Beth, receiving her OAM earlier this year

doing just that. As Christine commented: 'Marriage as we know it is under threat and MU has been concerned with supporting marriage from a Christian perspective since the very beginning of our organisation. The purpose of MU is to be specially concerned with upholding Christ's teaching on marriage and with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life. If we want strong families in years to come, families which nurture children and create supportive bonds, we will need to go back to study what God says. Already it is clear that the Bible's teaching on marriage fits in exactly with our humanity. MU is making its contribution by raising this issue as frequently as we can'.

For further information on the work of MU in the Armidale Diocese, please contact Robyn Perry on rrperry@bigpond.com or 0409314011.



Jordan and Allee Wright have been married for 18 months

Allee said, "We are not yet desperate for help, but we were looking forward to a couple of days away together. It was good to re-hash things like our hopes and dreams and really check in with each other.

Jordan agrees, "We want to build on the foundations we already have, rather than waiting till there's nothing left to build on. In my job as a nurse, I have learned about reflective practice, and that's what this workshop allowed us to do...listen and reflect."

Jim and Lesley spoke to *The Link* about their time in the Diocese.

Why do you do these workshops?

Jim: It's important that a view of marriage is biblically grounded. We need to understand God's purpose expressed in marriage. As I learnt in my early days as an apprentice, "When all else fails, read the manufacturers instructions!"

Lesley: It's always good to work on our marriages...even if we have a good marriage. Throughout our marriage, things will crop up. We need to remember that we are both sinful, and that doesn't change.

Are country marriages any easier than city marriages?

Jim: No matter where you are living, every person is living outside the garden. Only Adam and Eve had a perfect marriage before the Fall. Different situations throw up different challenges...isolation, lack of services, illness, hard work etc. The environment may change, but we know the heart's propensity to sin.

Why should every married couple come to your next workshop?

Lesley: When we do these workshops in Sydney you can get 10 couples from one church quite easily. Distances in the country make it more difficult yet so many people said it was worth every penny and every minute. We understand that it takes sacrifice to come but we'd love to see lots more people next time. Meanwhile, we highly recommend Christopher Ash's book "Married For God" as a great conversation-starter.



Joshua and Jane McIntosh attended.

Josh said "It was encouraging to be biblically reminded of God's design for marriage- especially in the world we live in. The most important thing I took away from the weekend was to

love my wife, sacrificially, like Jesus loves the church." For Jane, the most important thing she took away was, "...just how good it was to get away and spend time working on our marriage - keeping the communication lines open!"



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Kurt Langmead, the Assistant Minister of Gunnedah, and his wife Bec were among the first to sign up for the clergy workshop.

"Bec and I couldn't speak more highly about the importance of investing time and effort into our marriage. All marriages face pressure at times, but there are some unique challenges for marriages in ministry. Looking after my own household is part of the promises I made at ordination. A strong marriage is one of the best gifts we can give our kids and our parish. Every marriage is a glimpse into the gospel - the relationship between Christ and the church - so it's worth the investment.



Why Conferences?

YOU KNOW THE FEELING. YOU ARE sitting in church and the notices are read. All the usual Sunday School and Bible study and roster news is there. But there's something else. The announcement that always throws you into a bit of a tizz....there's a conference coming up!

Like most people you will be in two minds about the announcement of another conference. At first, you'll be excited. Another opportunity to hear a speaker you've long heard about, to see friends from all over, to refresh your Christian life. Then the questions start. "Have I got the time? Have I got the money? How can I make this work?"

Phil Coghlan, Vicar of Barraba understands this only too well.

"It's a great thing as a vicar to go to a conference with people from my church so

we can learn together. Hearing someone who is a specialist in their field provides an incredible opportunity for growth. For someone who is struggling in their Christian walk, a conference can be a great help. There is always a buzz when you are sitting under someone like Peter Adam, who spoke at the Teach In at Moree this year. It brings us back to the Bible, gets us excited again! It is also a great time to build relationships. When we get back home we have shared memories of being together."

Janene Lewers, Chair of the New Life North West Christian Women's Conference, concurs. "We want women to take away from our conference the same thing the Diocesan vision expresses: To introduce people to Jesus and help them home to heaven. We always emphasise Bible reading and prayer, so

interviews and book reviews can help to show practical ways people can keep going. We try to feature both young and older women so we see a breadth of views and experience, and it's important to provide a safe environment where all women can speak about their struggles."

The Conference roster for the next year is looking full already. Men @ Glen, Youth Muster, FUEL, New Life Conference and more will be urging you to come along. While it can be hard to find the time, the money and the energy, it's worth remembering that a conference is about both giving and receiving. You will be taught, trained and encouraged by what you hear and the people you meet, but it's also true that your presence at a conference next year may be just the encouragement someone else needs.

The Politician and the Kids



IT CAN BE A BIT OF A MIXED BLESSING when a politician comes to visit, but that was not the case when the Leader of the National Party, and Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce visited St Peter's Anglican Cathedral in Armidale recently. He came with good news, and a cheque in his hand!

The congregation at the Cathedral has had a problem recently - too many children, and nowhere to put them. They applied for, and received, a grant from the Australian Government's Stronger Communities Program. This grant will be used to upgrade the exterior play area, making it safer and more user-friendly.

This area is used not only on Sundays, but also as a key component of the Play Day mothers' group which meets weekly. Play Day is a structured group which has been steadily growing over the past five years to now include up to 40 children.

The Kids' Church which meets on Sunday mornings caters to four groups of children from pre-school to high school.

Mr Joyce was pleased to be involved with something so obviously important to a community he knows well. "The principles that the church promotes in the community provide safety and stability for all people and ought to be rewarded and encouraged," he said.

Cousins Joel Reeve, Jacinda Bell, Sabrina Bell, Ella Reeve and Zoe Reeve with Barnaby Joyce and Alison Reeve.

Hope For Life



Off to a good start, thanks to Hope for Life.

IT WAS A SIMPLE CONVERSATION WITH friends that led Claire Dunlop to start thinking about the lack of support for pregnant teenage girls in her town of Moree. Later that day, Claire was having her usual devotional time, when an idea popped into her head.

“The bare bones of an idea to help pregnant teenagers came to me, and by the end of my devotional time, there was a project before me!” she said.

Because she had spent her working life in various aspects of social welfare, she knew she had to test the idea. So she spoke to some trusted friends. They thought it was a great idea. She then widened the circle and spoke to the local people around her - those who understood the needs of a town like Moree.

They thought it was a great idea because there had never been any specific support for pregnant teens. Finally, she spoke to some professional organisations which all had the same reaction- a great idea.

“Still, I needed to test the idea further, so I put a brief together and approached Anglicare Northern Inland because I knew it needed an organization to support the program. They put together a committee to really flesh out the plans and soon after, Anglicare was convinced that the project was workable, but first, they wanted a business plan.”

Not only had Claire never written a business plan before, she had never even seen one! For nine months she worked on it with the help of her father, all the time wondering how she

could possibly find the time to fit this into her life, which was already crammed with work, a husband and young children, as well as ministry commitments at her church.

“Wherever I went, as I heard sermons or read the Bible, God kept confirming that I needed to press on with the plan to care for this very vulnerable group in our society.”

Eventually Claire presented the plan to Anglicare and they signed on. They also invited Claire to become a member of their board. While she was never going to be able to



Claire Dunlop

help to implement the program day to day, she could certainly oversee it as a board member.

“We put a proposal together and received some government funding for the program, but only as it applied to Aboriginal girls,” she said. “We were able to do some fundraising, and donations started to come in to help us apply the program to girls of all cultures. The aim was never for the program to help just one culture – we want to help and support everyone who needs it. We want this program to be sustainable long term and we are dependent on significant donations and funding for this to occur. At this stage we don’t have enough to continue beyond the end of next year.”

The Hope For Life initiative is the only one of its kind in Australia, but Claire is very modest about the part she played in its inception. “I don’t feel I can take much credit for Hope For Life. It wasn’t really my idea, and I don’t do any of the work from day to day. I was just obedient to God’s calling.”

Hope For Life is now running as a three-year pilot in Moree, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Inverell, Boggabilla and Mungindi. More information about the program is available through Anglicare Northern Inland.



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

John Bunyan

Dean’s journey

There’s a line in the Bible about the “peace of God which passes all understanding”. Dean Blomfield, a tall, strong farmer from Barraba had his first real understanding of this verse in the days after his father died, when Dean was just 13.

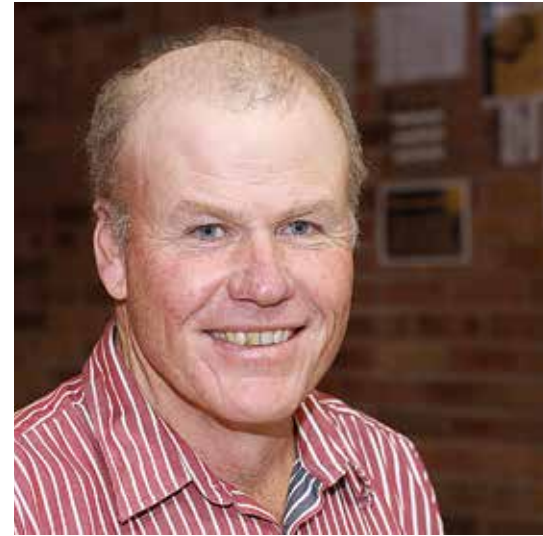
Raised in a Christian family, Dean always saw God as a bit distant until the day his Dad died. That made him willing to head off to a Youth Camp with a friend from school. At the end of the camp he made a public commitment to follow Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. He thought life would get easier. But he still had much to learn.

“I decided to leave school at the end of Year 10 and do a one-year TAFE course so I could get home and help Mum run the property. Half way through the TAFE course on the June long weekend in 1982, my friend Barry and I were riding motorbikes near Cobbadah, 8km north of our farm. Crossing the Cobbadah Bridge, I clipped Barry’s back wheel. On the roadside gravel my bike went from under me and my head hit the bitumen. My skull was fractured and my brain was bleeding. There were no mobile phones in 1982, however as I think about the next series of events I understand better what Jesus means when He says I am the Good Shepherd and I know my sheep. I see how carefully He watches His flock.

The June long weekend is a favourite for motorcyclists, and the second one who stopped was a doctor. Next there came two paramedics in a vacant ambulance. They were able to get me to Barraba to restock with oxygen and then it was on to Tamworth. He didn’t know me then, but one of the paramedics is married to my second cousin. He’s since told me he didn’t hold much hope for me.

I was transferred to Sydney where a doctor told my Mum, “...there are numerous clots on your son’s brain. Some are big and will never dissolve. Dean is unlikely to live through the night. If he does, his outlook is poor”. Experienced Christians know to go straight to God in crises. Mum told the doctor that she didn’t accept his diagnosis.....she was a Christian and would pray for my healing, at which point I think the doctor gave her up for a lost cause and walked off.

Apart from life support, the only intervention I had from people after that was widespread and persistent prayer. I was in a coma for over four weeks. The Falklands War ended and Charles’ and Diana’s son William was born while I was attached to machines and monitors, but faithful people kept praying.



When I did start coming around there was a lot of therapy because I had no movement down one half of my body. Then I needed to learn how to speak clearly again, but those immovable clots had vanished. My brain was restored and proven medical understanding had been breached. It’s kind of funny when experienced surgeons look flummoxed and have to admit that perhaps there is a God!”

Dean went home to the farm, grew up a lot, married Penny and had a family. But there was yet more to learn about trusting God.

“Two years ago, our middle child Sarah became suddenly ill during a school excursion. We discovered that she had a bleed on her brain. She was taken by helicopter to Westmead Hospital. A clot had stopped the bleed in the short term, and a well-qualified surgeon did a delicate 4½ hour operation between the frontal lobes of Sarah’s brain to prevent another bleed starting. A continuing bleed would, clearly, be fatal. It was a tough time for Penny and our other kids Eliza and Will who gathered with me to pray. Sarah’s fine now and back at school. We thank the Lord for delivering our dear girl from death.

The whole point of relating this episode is to say that after some practice at being committed to Jesus, Pen and I know that He delivers the good He promises. We know the sound of the Shepherd’s voice. We hadn’t known the outcome of the crisis with Sarah. We just knew to trust the Shepherd. We can’t imagine trying to cope without Jesus to follow.”

Dean doesn’t tell his story to many people, but we urged him to do so for *The Link* to show the face of someone small and weak who knows and trusts the power of a big, strong God, who is also a Shepherd to His flock.

About

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