

The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

DECEMBER 2017 / JANUARY 2018



Sharon and Brian Kirk.

Christmas all over

THE REVEREND BRIAN KIRK, VICAR OF URALLA, IS A BUSY man. The varied responsibilities of leading the work of a parish take up his time and energy. He also serves as the Vicar-General of the Diocese. This is a job not unlike those done by the Deputy Prime Minister or Vice President of the USA! When Bishop Rick Lewers is away or on leave, Brian stands in for him.

At this time of year, the lot of a vicar is particularly busy, with Christmas and other end-of-year business to attend to, as well as deep planning for the year to come. We know that if you want something done, you ask a busy person, so it is only appropriate that we asked Brian to tell us why the celebration of Christmas, in all its forms, is so important.

“We live in a world where the devil is very active in trying to keep people out of God’s kingdom”, he said. “The confusion of the media and the commercialism of Christmas are two reasons why we need to keep telling people about Jesus at Christmas so that people understand the real reason for the Christmas season. That real reason is found in the well known Bible passage, John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life’. Christmas is the time when we remember that God had not forgotten the world He created. He sent His only Son to be its rescue plan, and to demonstrate His everlasting love. God is calling unbelievers to believe and receive Jesus that they

may enjoy life forever with Him.”

We wanted to take a look at a few of the different types of Christmas events run by various parishes in the diocese, and asked Brian to kick it off with what happens in Uralla.

“Each year the Uralla Anglican Parish works with the Catholic and Uniting Churches in Uralla, as well as the Rotary and Lions Clubs, to organise a community event called “Uralla Carols in the Park” on the first Wednesday in December”, he said. “The event is normally held in Alma Park (or in the Memorial Hall if it rains), and we invite the schools from Uralla, Rocky River and Kentucky to contribute an item to the program. We sing lots of carols, have some items from the schools, three Christmas Bible readings read by church members, and a speaker with a Christmas message from one of the churches. The Rotary Club provides a free sausage sizzle; the Lions Club sells soft drinks; the Fire Brigade provides lollies, and the SES collects donations for a different charitable cause each year. As well as that, Sharon and I have instigated an annual “Vicariate Christmas BBQ”. We invite the whole parish to join us at the Vicariate as a way of concluding the small groups in the Parish for the year. We always want to provide opportunities for people to hear the message of the gospel in our community, and to give opportunities for God’s people to invite the unchurched to hear that same message.” With this great message in mind, let’s begin the Christmas celebrations!

Some Christmassy things

Throughout the Diocese plans are underway to bring the message of God become man to those in church and outside church. Christmas events can take just about any form a creative mind can dream up! Here is just a short look at a few of the events different parishes have planned in the weeks leading up to December 25th.

Coledale Front Yard Church, Tamworth

Giving gifts

Annette Gill has been involved in this ministry for a long time now.

"I'd like to say that, although the Front Yard Church is technically an indigenous ministry, I don't see it only as an indigenous ministry - I see it as oneness



ministry. My desire is that we all be one in Christ and week by week we are working towards that end as the Lord enables. To me, the members of Coledale Front Yard church are family; we are family together, whether we are indigenous or not. We give gifts because Christmas is a time of giving. God gave to us the greatest gift by sending Jesus into the world that first Christmas.

God's gift of Jesus was an evidence of His love for us.

We give gifts to replicate His love to others. I'm excited about the gift we are giving this year. It is the DVD, *The Story of Jesus for Children*.

I gave this to my grandchildren many years ago. My four year old grandson watched it by himself while I minded his little brother. After the video had finished my grandson came to me and said, 'Grandma, the video has finished. I prayed the prayer.' I had no idea that, at the end of the video, there was an invitation to accept Christ. So my prayer for our Coledale family is that they too might accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour."



St Peter's Walgett

Engaging and remembering

"At Walgett we have Carols in the Park. It is organised by the Sing Australia group, and one of the three churches is invited



to provide the Bible talk each year" the Reverend Tory Cayzer told us. "The other churches participate each year in other ways. It's our turn to provide the 'Bible input' this year and I'm hoping we can narrate/MC the whole night this year rather than have a Bible talk. We want to thread fun snippets of the Christmas story



throughout the night to keep the kids engaged. We don't know if it will work -the kids have been notoriously difficult to keep engaged. Please pray for us! We'll also go to our dementia nursing home Kookaburra Court and run a Christmas service. Each year we see people who have no memory of their families or their early lives singing along with the old familiar carols. We can only pray that memories of what they know of Jesus also come to mind."

Chaplaincy

Not just for the kids

Gus Batley, Chaplain at the Tamworth Base Hospital said, "Here at the Base in early December we run an annual Carols in the Corridors event. It is designed as a low-key outreach (except for the sopranos!) that even kids can enjoy. We meet in the hospital Chapel late in the afternoon, cover some protocols around visiting and patient contact, spend time in prayer, then don silly hats and head off! We divide the whole campus (13 units or wards) into three sections and just take our time slowly moving through the ward, singing carols and occasionally taking requests, before moving on. Over time we've experienced various, generally positive, responses. Doctors on duty and nurses love it as much as patients (one doctor said, 'Where are you going to sing next? I'll find an excuse to be there too'). Elderly patients love the old songs and will often end up in (good) tears...and so will the singers. Dementia patients really respond and will sing along. Patients in the mental health unit will respond in their unique way...frequently the singers will walk in feeling a little intimidated, but walk out feeling utterly blessed. Children and teenagers love singing in the kids' ward. It's hard to gauge the impact it has had over years, except that staff have come to expect and enjoy it, and



quite simply it's worth continuing while we are still able to do so. In many ways it is a parable of the Gospel truth that God has not left us alone in our pain."

Christmas Thoughts

Calrossy

Family Time

The kids who board at Calrossy Anglican School are kept busy at Christmas time, thinking about others.



This year, they packed 170 shoeboxes for *Operation Christmas Child*, and filled women's handbags with feminine products to give to those in need, as a part of the *Share the Dignity* project. They also ran a mid-week Christmas service during the term to celebrate the year in boarding, to thank God for the year that has been, and to share the gospel message. The



service was followed by a bush picnic, a cricket game on the oval, and lots of hugs and thanks to those who have served through the year behind the scenes. To finish the term in high spirits, students make and send invitations to their parents and grandparents to attend a Christmas high tea and Christmas Tree with a focus presenting a Jesus-centred celebration. The parents love this event. They very much appreciate seeing their children included, and developing the quality of thankfulness. For the students, this event reinforces a sense of appreciation and community. Traditional events such as these ground the students of the school in a deep understanding of community, sharing and thoughtfulness towards others.

Bishop Rick Lewers



THE SLEIGH BELLS ARE NOT RINGING and not a snow flake is to be seen when Christmas comes Down Under. The Christmas trees are shining and coloured lights exciting. Children are all smiling but with late nights of excitement there is the inevitable crying. Presents are beneath the tree with rules to not touch or shake. Personally, I have never been one for such a rule and were there the opportunity to test and try, I would probably risk a look and feel, and if caught...deny! That doesn't sound like something a Bishop should do...but it is Christmas, after all!

I love Christmas with church at night and a Christmas Eve sermon to deliver. Of course, you will only know you have heard a good sermon if you can't escape the person about whom the preacher speaks. To walk away from any church without Jesus Christ on your mind would make for a disappointing Christmas. To walk away with Him in your life is the greatest Christmas gift of all. Feel free to forget the Christmas preacher as you consider the brilliance of Jesus Christ. From manger to the cross, from grave to resurrection, from resurrection to His heavenly throne, He is the best. Humbling His majesty by mundane birth, emptying self of glory to become one of us, obedient in life and death, Jesus came to turn all our griefs to joy.

I love Christmas. A short plane trip is not the transport of Santa but it will be mine on Christmas day to destination "family" in Sydney. Each Christmas day begins with a row full of loved ones listening to the story of the birth of our Divine King. The church is full and everyone sings. It even sounds pretty good. And I thank God year after year for the Christmas child who lived to make my family God's friends. The business man and an apprentice chippy, the speech pathologist, the marketing professional, the teacher and a sparky sit side by side to worship One greater than all, and who gives so much more. They

are my family, each considering the one who manufactured this world, the Word of life who spoke in time and space, the healer of human souls, the source of all wisdom and the light of the world which no sparky could ever cut off.

The children are older now but they are still my children. Every year I see the look of expectation, the glint of joy in the eyes of appreciative recipients who now with wisdom make no comparisons with toys. Thankfully, they acknowledge that a family with God in it, is the best gift of all.

I love Christmas, the mess of paper, the colour of it all as it hides the tatty old carpet on the floor. All of this and we're not even at the lunch and dinner-time table with food galore. King prawns and ham, four different types of salad, a red or a white or some boutique kind of beer to celebrate that this day is something special.

With all these blessings, Christmas would mean little if we did not look to give to those who are poorer than us. So how about we invite a lonely friend to join us for church and Christmas lunch? How about we give a gift to someone we don't know because it could just make their day? I reckon we should spend a moment this Christmas in prayer for all who struggle with life or who grieve its loss. As God gave us His only Son, the greatest gift of all, perhaps we could all seek to become a Christmas gift from Him and try to show God's love to all.

If I had one hope for Christmas it would be that Christians all across the Diocese would invite their friends and neighbours to meet Jesus Christ. Let's open the church doors wide and encourage everyone to come in. Let's think of special events to proclaim our special Saviour and pray that this Christmas, Jesus Christ becomes special for every person in town.

From me to all of you, happy Christmas!

Too small for God?



PAMDC from left to right: Rev Danny Morris, Mr Steve Goldsmith, Mrs Sam Brennan, Rev Gus Robinson, Rev Phil Coghlan, Mr Jake Etherington. (Absent from Photo: Rev Nick Stone)

The Reverend Danny Morris

OUR DIOCESE HAS LOTS OF ACRONYMS, and here's another one for you. PAMDC is the Parish and Ministry Development Commission. Its aim, in line with the Diocesan mission statement, is to help people home to heaven by recruiting godly leadership across all ministries in order to build Christian communities in every town...no matter what the size of that town. When you add up the populations, according to the 2016 census, there are about 7,500 people living in the small centres of our Diocese where there is currently no paid gospel ministry. Most of these people do not attend church, and about 3,000 live around the edges of these towns and villages on properties. If we lose our gospel ministry in these areas, how will these people come to hear, know and grow in the gospel of our Lord Jesus?

I have been serving on PAMDC for about 10 years, and as Chairman since the end of 2016. It was a privilege to be asked but it is also a daunting responsibility. PAMDC has had many wonderful saints who served faithfully on this team for a long time, who in the past two years have now retired or moved into other areas, so now we have a new team established. This team consists of both clergy and laity from across the Diocese who are very committed to fulfilling our responsibilities, for the glory of our Lord.

One of our responsibilities at the moment is to consider ways of strengthening Christian

community and ministry in the smallest towns and villages that do not currently have a paid ministry worker. We have talked about many ideas for a very long time, but because this is a difficult issue, no real solution has yet been found. Sadly, this means that little action has taken place. Meanwhile, these small churches have largely had to struggle on, by themselves.

Now, with encouragement from the Bishop, we are really knuckling down, and hopefully will be able to put a proposal together for Diocesan Council in the near future. Our ultimate hope is that all of our centres will be strengthened and will continue to develop and grow a thriving, even if small, Christian community that seeks to introduce people to Jesus and help them home to heaven.

We want to ensure we keep a strong mission focus across small centres rather than defaulting to "maintenance mode". In our small centres I fear that if our mentality, even subconsciously, is simply to keep the doors of the church open for another year or two, then are we simply biding our time until there is no one left to keep the doors open for? Surely our focus must be discipleship and mission; a ministry with a focus on training and equipping local people in all areas of ministry and evangelism will, God willing, see these centres not only survive but thrive into the future. At the recent Diocesan Synod, some very helpful ideas

were proposed by parish representatives and we are hoping to incorporate some of those ideas. The Bishop was excited to see Synod engage with the issues. He said, "The Diocese is not made up of independent churches who bear no responsibility for the wider work. Relationships in the Diocese are very important and we function as a team with a view to seeing all people have access to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Diocesan Council will survey the wide range of thoughts expressed at the Synod. The Bishop reflected, "There may not be one answer that fits all circumstances but change is inevitable if we are going to respond to the challenges ahead. The numerous suggestions from the Synod offer the Diocesan Council and the Commissions much food for thought."

I hope that readers of *The Link* can help us as we consider the best way forward with these plans. The first thing we want everyone to do is to pray as we seek the Lord's wisdom on how to move forward. We need to ask Him to send out workers into the fields. Secondly it would be good to ask, "How can I be involved?"

Some possibilities could include a travelling chaplain ministry or the creation, by larger centres, of sister-church relationships with smaller centres. We know that nothing is too large or too small for God, so as we make these large plans to benefit small communities, let us pray, think and help as much as possible, and wait on the Lord for His reply.

The Link

Music Festival fun

Dave Tankard

TAMWORTH COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL is a big deal – 700 performers, 2,800 events and 50,000+ music lovers! Since 1992 the churches of Tamworth under the banner of Scripture Union have run Country Music Mission. A Beach Mission style marquee on a grassy patch in the busiest part of town, offering precious shade, live music, kids activities, free hot and cold drinks, tasty treats and listening ears. The current organizers, including Juanita Doody and me (both Oxley Vale Anglican), Howard Barnes (St Paul's Anglican) and Margaret Love (St Peter's Anglican) think it is a taste of heaven – and many Festival goers seem to agree!

Precious relationships are formed with visitors who return each year. Travelling retirees, carnival operators, musicians and families galore roll in across the long January days and nights. Many are Christians who in one way or another “join in the work”. Many never attend a church. Many say that this is the only church they ever attend – and if church were more like this they would go every week! Some wander away with a new tune in their hearts, a gospel portion in their



Wingnut (Tom Magill) and Leah Griffiths from Oxley Vale Anglican entertain the crowds.

pocket, or the caring touch of a praying person still on their shoulder. Through songs and stories, conversations and reading materials, the good news is shared – and shown – by the army of volunteers.

Tamworth Council highly values this unique contribution to the Festival, which is located in the Kable Avenue “Family Zone” as advertised in the official maps and apps.

It isn't all about evangelism, but discipleship too as the hundreds of volunteers from local

churches form teams and perform tasks together that they may not otherwise have a chance to experience.

2018 will see a further resurgence in ministry to children, young people and families, through an expanded morning Kids' Club, and activities for children and teens throughout the day. Mission dates for 2018 are January 22-27.

Contact Dave Tankard for information or with your ideas! davet@sunsw.org.au

Parenting wisdom

Janene Lewers

JAMES AND SIMONE BOSWELL FROM Figtree Anglican Church flew north for the weekend of 27-28 October to share some wisdom on parenting with parents in the New England and North West.

One of James and Simone's aims for the weekend was to help parents think biblically about how to manage technology and its impact. Over 70 people attended the three events in Gunnedah, Tamworth and Armidale. Parents were challenged with what goals they had for their children and what attributes they wanted for their children when they left home. Different parenting styles were discussed and parents were encouraged to establish a firm foundation. On the topic *Teens and Screens* one alarming statistic was that

“the average Australian child (8-18 years old) spends nine hours a day in front of a screen.” So what are parents to do? We were urged to model wise use of technology, to remember that we – as parents – are the gatekeepers and to utilise filters. Most of all, we were urged to remember that biblical principles do not change, despite the massive, almost daily changes in technology.

Ruth France from Walcha was encouraged by the workshop. “The stuff regarding internet and screens was interesting and I walked away less freaked out and better equipped than I thought I would be”, she said. “It is scary to think about what our children's generation will look like as adults in terms of the impact of screens. I learned so much great



Simone and James Boswell

stuff to implement straight away... Possibly too much!”

If you missed out this year, Mothers' Union plans to follow up in 2018 with some more parenting workshops.

Diary of a new Vicar

Tim Stevens

Twelve months! It seems like it was only yesterday that I wrote our first "Diary of a new Vicar". But upon sitting down to write this, our last diary entry for *The Link*, I have realised how much has happened in this little town, and how much God has taught us over the past year. There is also (always, I think) a lament that perhaps more hasn't happened, but maybe more could be written on that topic at another time.

Since I last wrote I feel like God has given me a crash course in some of the harder aspects of small-town ministry. While it would be easy to write a cheery account of life up here on the border, the editor of *The Link* has instead asked me to write the following to give you some insights into what can be hard for a Vicar in the bush. Now, don't hear me wrong, the benefits of small-town life are abundantly clear. No traffic. Quiet nights. Open spaces for our kids to play in. A ministry with lots of time for people, because there are fewer programs to run etc. But just as the benefits are excellent, the difficulties can sometimes seem heavier, and often come at times of crisis. God is always teaching us things, but some lessons are harder to learn.

The first lesson that I have learnt in the last couple of months has been about funerals. What I have discovered is that small-town, country funerals are hard. Just like many of the Vicars in our Diocese, I am the only minister in Mungindi. This means that I am involved in every funeral that happens in town, which is an excellent opportunity to care for people and to let the gospel be their comfort at such a difficult time. But it also means that I take all the funerals, which means that after some months, I have been heavily involved with the death of many people. It is, I have to say, particularly exhausting.

Before entering into ministry, I trained as a nurse, which meant that I had experienced the death of a person before. But in a medical setting, you are somewhat removed from the holistic effect of someone's death on their family and friends. I have found in this role of Vicar that I'm caring for people in a very different way to that of a medical practitioner. So there was a funeral in town recently, where over 800 people attended, and there was another one out of town where people fainted at the church and graveside. Both these funerals were for men who, you could say, "died too young" and they left me exhausted. Please pray for those of us who are working on our own. Being the go-to person in town for all things emotional and spiritual can be very difficult.

The second lesson that we have learnt recently has been about doing ministry as a young family. It's exciting to let you know that since I wrote last, we have had our second child, Edward Donald Stevens. He is a great kid, and we are all loving getting to know one another. When we had our first child, William, we were living and working at St Peter's Tamworth, where Rod Chiswell was terrific and gave me lots of time at home as we adjusted to being a family. But this time we were not so able to ease back into things, because of the above



Mustering cows.

funerals, and the daily running of the church which still needs to happen. So the lesson that I have learnt has been that there are seasons of life, and this season just means that we are more tired and less able to drop everything at a moment's notice.

The final lesson that we've learnt is about our family and friends. One of the strategies I've had for getting through the first few months of having a newborn was to have a few sermons up my sleeve that I have delivered elsewhere, that I could easily preach again. This was in the event of a stressful week, where I hadn't had much time to prepare a new sermon. For those funeral weeks, it was beneficial! This meant that for four weeks in October, we spent some time in our Sunday sermons learning about wisdom from Proverbs. We were taught about the source of true wisdom, making wise decisions, and speaking wisely. Though it was the week that we thought about being a wise friend that cut particularly close to home for us. This is because the Proverbs teach that good, long-term, and faithful friendships are the best.

"Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?"
~ Proverbs 20:6 ~

Sometimes in the Christian life, we need to hold what seems like two opposing truths in our hands at the same time. Those two realities look like they might naturally cancel each other out, but the Christian is able to hold them together. With some give and take, the two realities – instead of cancelling each other out – actually help each truth grow and flourish. In one hand, we love living and ministering in Mungindi. We have so many things to give God thanks for. The



Kirsty holding Edward.



ministry that I have been involved in is a gift from God, as He has been pleased to include me in His work of introducing all people to Jesus and helping them home to heaven.

But even though we love being in Mungindi, the truth that we hold in the other hand is that for us to be in Mungindi, we have left our families and long-term friends behind in Sydney. In a sense, we are still very new to all this. It was only two years ago that we were living in a city of five million people. And at the moment we are trying to work out what it looks like for us to keep growing our friendships with our closest friends. We are very conscious of the problem that many people have, of never really having any close friends. But, God's wisdom is to be a good, long-term and faithful friend.

So we need to somehow – even from eight hours drive away – make sure that we continue to grow our friendships with our friends, and relationships with our families. We need to give our little boys a chance to spend time with their cousins, grandparents, aunties and uncles. We need to give ourselves time with our long-term friends, whom we have known for years, and who actually encourage us to keep working hard in our little town, to make Jesus known, so that many people in our small town will be saved when Jesus returns. And in this last point, I have uncovered what I think is the most challenging thing we have had to work at since we left Sydney and I suspect we are not the only ministry family that has to deal with this. While I haven't asked any of them, I believe that if your Vicar isn't from the town that he is currently ministering in, his family is probably trying to work this out for themselves too.



Making pizza with Will on my day off.

A birthday party for chaplaincy



Former Prime Minister John Howard speaks at the celebration

IN OCTOBER THIS YEAR THE PUBLIC Schools Chaplaincy program turned 10 years old. The initiative, launched by the government of Prime Minister John Howard in 2006, was celebrated at the Museum of Sydney, and featured chaplains, school principals and chaplaincy providers alongside Mr Howard as guest speaker. Howard Barnes, chairman of from the Tamworth Chaplains' Board could not be present, but sent a video message.

He recounted the story of a primary school principal who originally wanted nothing to do with the chaplaincy program because, "We don't need a chaplain...our children are nice children." That same principal called him soon after this conversation saying, "Can I change my mind about applying for a chaplain? I'm at a Principals' conference and everybody here is absolutely raving about how good chaplains are!" Howard went on to say, "This has been our experience. We are currently managing nine chaplains and wherever they are, people are raving about how good they are."

There are many organisations which provide chaplains. Generate is the organization which



Howard Barnes on video at the celebration.

oversees the work of Tom Magill. As well as his school chaplaincy work, Tom is an assistant at Oxley Vale Anglican Community Church. He sees the work he does in the church and the work he does in the school being two parts of one whole. "As a School Chaplain and a church worker, I am able to see the resources of both school and church make a difference in the lives of the kids and families in our community. Existing in both environments assists in forging helpful connections between the two. Church volunteers staff our breakfast club and cook meals for school families in crisis. Our school opens its doors for church functions and groups. Church members otherwise unconnected with the school join in on campus working bees. It becomes a partnership through which our whole community benefits."

At the celebration in Sydney, former Prime Minister Howard warned that the school chaplaincy program is not something to be taken for granted.

"I don't need to harangue an audience such as this about the incredible need for these programs, particularly in government schools," he said. "Government schools cater for many of the lower socio-economic groups and whilst family breakdown and dysfunction is by no means confined to low socio-economic groups, it is certainly very prevalent amongst them. The capacity of motivated chaplains driven by strong individual religious faith, means that individual needs are being met in a way that I wouldn't have imagined possible 10 years

ago. I have had some recent discussions with senior ministers in the current government and have received assurances about their continued commitment to this program, but don't rely on that. It is very important that you press home the value of this program because the argument for winding it back or letting it die on the tree can become attractive, especially to the forces that are at work in our community now. Today is a celebration of something that was sneered at, at the time. It was labelled as an invasion as the separation of church and state, but in reality it was fulfilling an increasingly growing need within our community."

James Flavin, General Manager of Generate Ministries, summed up the events of the celebration. He said, "The first group of chaplains in New South Wales served in 80 schools across this state. In 2017 there are over 400 public schools with a chaplain in this state, served by 80 chaplaincy providers. The program is so popular, the last funding round was oversubscribed by 200 schools. I think we can all agree that the government receives excellent value for the five million dollars it spends on these 400 odd chaplaincies."

In the past week over 2,000 students have been helped by a chaplain in a New South Wales public school!"

Chaplains are a great blessing to those communities. One school principal at the celebration said, "The chaplain adds soul to our school!" Chaplains deserve our prayerful support, especially as the year winds down, and as planning for next year begins.

Hating Christmas

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR, SINGS ANDY Williams from every shop and lift and telephone as we wait on hold. Sadly, that is not how many people feel about Christmas. For those who have been bereaved, suffer financial hardship or are estranged from family and friends, the days leading up the Christmas Day and the day itself can be just plain painful.

Sue Budden is the Support Facilitator for New England Partners in Recovery with Anglicare Northern Inland in Tamworth. She has seen countless people who struggle with Christmas, and has some wisdom to share when it comes to how we can care for those who suffer in this way. "Christmas advertising is often focused on buying items to show your love for someone. But what if you have no-one to love, or no money to spend?", she said. "Christmas for others is focused on family. This too can lead to much sadness, distress and even anxiety as people experience the heartache of lost loved ones, family members who are estranged, and the families experiencing shared parenting of children, who may be facing a Christmas period on their own for the first time. The coming together of family and friends can trigger conflict and unrest over Christmas. Many, many people from all ages and walks of life will be spending Christmas on their own this year. It is very common for people to feel awkward and uncomfortable around those who are experiencing sadness, grief, disappointment, loneliness and even confusion at Christmas time, when others are experiencing excitement, joy and happy anticipation of family times. The very worst thing we can do is to try and 'jolly' someone along. What can help, though, is to be there for someone going through a challenging time. Have a think... 'how would I feel if I were faced with their situation'

and express empathy. Sit, listen and empathise with their struggles, and just be there. Listen to what they are saying. At some point, you may be able to do something to help, but until then, be there and listen. There are many practical things we can do, but the main thing is to listen to what the person is expressing, and pick up on what may help them, which is not always the same as what we think will help. I once met a mum who had shared parenting. The first Christmas the children spent with their dad, she was devastated, and spending the day with friends and their children, heightened the grief of her children not being there. Sometimes we have to accept that there's not a lot we can do, except to pray for and love people through their tough time."

Even if nothing is disastrous in our lives, we can all have times when Christmas is not the joyous occasion we want it to be. Sue said, "My own personal experience is of celebrating Christmas as a Christian family and building traditions together. Once our children had their own families, and had to move on to celebrating with their own extended family, it was hard to find yourself at Christmas time with a great change."

So this Christmas, be on the lookout for the lonely, the sad, the lost. Can you stretch your lunch to feed someone else? Can you donate some money to Anglicare to help keep the counsellors working? Can you sit and listen as someone just talks and talks? Most importantly, are you able to pray for those who are suffering this Christmas, and perhaps even find an opportunity to hold out the hope of the gospel to just one person, so that they too may know the true joy of Christmas....the day God broke into human history as a child in a manger, to bring us into true relationship with Him?

Bible, Reformation and fun

ON SUNDAY THE 29TH OF OCTOBER, ST AUGUSTINE'S, Inverell celebrated two significant birthdays. The first was to commemorate 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses onto a church door in Wittenburg, Germany, thereby precipitating the Protestant Reformation.

Vicar Adam Draycott is adamant that this event, so long ago and so far away, is still relevant to the people of Inverell in 2017. "Those ideas were and still are world-changing, because people still have false ideas about God. People still think they can work their way to heaven. But that is not what the gospel says. The gospel tells us it is about what has been done, and that is Christ's purchase of us by His blood. We must continue to cling to this great truth, especially as we engage with the world today. The gospel is worth contesting and putting before people without apology."

The second reason for celebration was the 200th anniversary of The Bible Society. The importance of the Bible was obvious when people were asked, "Where and how do you read your Bible?" From painting pictures, to reading in another language, to reading in a place not mentionable in polite society, it was obvious that people love to read the Bible.

Jonathan Harris attended as the Bible Society's representative and he was on hand to cut the magnificent celebration cake, ably assisted by Nancy Wilkins who keeps news of The Bible Society front and centre at



Jonathan Harris and Nancy Wilkins cut the cake.

St Augustine's. There were lots of activities for kids and grown-ups to enjoy, a barbeque lunch in the shade of a tree, and the word "Eternity" was written on the church driveway, in the style made famous by Arthur Stace on the streets of Sydney. It was a fitting celebration for two landmark anniversaries.

Coming this Christmas

VICARS IN THE DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE are a talented mob! The Reverend Phil Brown from Moree and his former colleague Daniel Avenell are a great example of this talent, as they have just released a book, which is available for purchase just in time for Christmas.

The One Coming: Old Testament Prophecies about the Coming of Jesus Christ and their Fulfilment in the New Testament was originally written as a sermon series and supplementary devotions for the parishioners of All Saints, Moree. It was compiled for the month of December as an advent series, and was then expanded to include 30 days of devotions. Phil and Daniel want the book to shed light on the biblical theology of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. So often, the rush and busyness of the Christmas period means we do not have the time to explore in greater depth the whole idea of God, becoming man.

"This book is for Christians and people thinking about Christianity", Phil said. "It seeks to deepen the richness of advent and ground Christ's coming not just seasonally but through biblical theology. It may also aid those exploring Christianity to see how the scriptures point to Jesus Christ both coming into the world historically and also again in the future. We hope the book will be used by individuals and groups to aid in devotions. You could read it with a staff team at work, in your family devotions, in your Bible study groups or you can just read it to get a biblical theology of The One Coming, Jesus Christ. To our great surprise, it is now being used as a template for a sermon series in both the Armidale and Melbourne Anglican Dioceses for the 2017 advent season!"



Christmas, as we know it and celebrate it within our secular world, can be both a help and a hindrance to us as we share the gospel with others. "Whilst traditional celebrations of Advent and Christmas are helpful in that they are biblical, they however present only part of the big picture", Daniel said.

"It is desperately important that we have a vigorous biblical theology of the coming of Jesus Christ. It is all too common to encounter bible-believing Christians with a small Jesus: a Jesus who is cute, innocent and a helpless baby in a manger who grew up to die a selfless, unjust and insignificant death on a wooden cross, some two thousand years ago. We need a much bigger picture of Jesus: a conquering warrior Jesus; who promised to crush the serpent's head in the garden of Eden, and did so on Calvary's Cross; a peace-making Jesus who humbly and meekly suffered betrayal and insult, and who stood in our place suffering for our wrong thereby enabling us to approach a righteous God; a majestic Jesus who will rule the earth with righteous justice; and a healing Jesus who mends all the brokenness so that joy abounds. We also need a Jesus who is not just a man who died long ago; but a Jesus who is the supreme King getting ready to return to His world; the future Lord about to embark for the last time to complete what He started on the cross."

Why not buy a copy of this book for yourself, and another as a gift for the friend who has everything! Books can be ordered online for just \$14.95 each from the publisher's site at www.morningstarpublishing.net.au

Phil Firth from Wee Waa was one of the first to grab a copy of the book, and he was impressed.

"I thought it was a very helpful book refocusing my mind on the coming of the Lord Jesus from the angle of the Law and the prophets. It was helpful to have my mind's eye drawn firstly through the Old Testament passages and then on to their fulfilment; to point me towards the first coming of Jesus and then on to His second coming. I have never had this concentration of those passages presented to me in such a way before. To read them in over a short period of days was uplifting. Thank you. The applications into our world today are thoughtful and practical. The little prayers refocused me on the main point and could easily be made mine."



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Boarding, caring and values

Maria Buster

SENDING CHILDREN OFF TO BOARDING school is part of the reality of life for many families in rural NSW. The decision to send children to boarding school can be one of the most difficult choices many families ever have to make. Apart from the financial costs and the time involved in travel, parents experience weeks and months of separation from their children through the crucial teenage years of life. In effect, they are entrusting the care and nurture of their children largely to the boarding school staff.

Life, for the modern-day boarding student, is rich and full with many opportunities to explore individual interests both within and outside the school. But despite their dreams of midnight feasts, the reality is that routines and schedules and boundaries are necessary to ensure a safe and stable environment in which students can grow and thrive (and meet assessment deadlines!). Freedom from home and parental control often brings with it homesickness as well as huge adjustments to be made to this new way of living, just at a time when the emotional roller-coaster ride of adolescence is occurring. This all highlights the need for an environment that offers sound guidance within a caring, nurturing and supportive framework.

It is my privilege and responsibility to be part of the team at Calrossy Anglican School, where we are entrusted with the care of

over 200 boarders, both male and female. At Calrossy, we are committed to seeing our students thrive not just academically, but also emotionally and spiritually. As the Leader of Wellbeing for Boarding at Calrossy, I can see how God has prepared me for what I describe as my 'dream job'. I heard and received the gospel message of salvation in Christ as a young teenager, and this became my motivation for life and service. Having worked in student ministry (St Mark's UNE) and youth work in the Armidale Diocese, my husband and I then spent many years literally out the 'back of Bourke', raising our five sons, watching many parents make the difficult decision to board their children, and then having to make that very same decision ourselves.

My role largely involves helping to create a pastoral environment that is Christian, real and genuine. Fostering values is central to my work. Under the umbrella of the school values: integrity, selflessness, inclusiveness and resilience, the boarding community has also adopted the Christ-values shared with us by our previous Bishop Peter Brain in his final address. Based on the acronym CHRIST, the values of Compassion, Humility, Respect, Initiative, Service and Trust form the template for everything we do for the boarders.

At the beginning of the year we discuss each value, helping the boarders to understand

and apply it to the challenges of day-to-day life in a boarding community. We then work together to put those values into practice in the wider community through involvement in charity projects. This year, the male boarders have raised \$1,700 for Tear Fund. Also, each week we take some boarders to help at the Hillvue Public School breakfast club, giving them an opportunity to serve others who are less fortunate than themselves. Ultimately, we want to encourage the students to look beyond themselves and find joy and fulfillment in serving others, following the example given to us by Jesus, who humbled Himself and became the greatest of servants for our sake (Philippians 2:5-11).

I have the privilege of regularly praying with students as they share concerns and prayer points with me. When opportunity arises, I am able to share the great news of the gospel message and point students to Jesus and the fullness of life He offers. I am also able to encourage Christian activities such as Bible study and Youth Group amongst the boarders, and to promote the partnership that exists between Calrossy and the four Anglican churches in Tamworth.

In essence, I have the delightful opportunity of caring for young people from predominantly rural NSW and in so doing, show them a little of the life and love that Jesus has for them. How amazing is that!

We surged!

Youth Surge was held simultaneously at Armidale and Gunnedah on the evening of November 3rd.

Brea Thomason was one of the 160 or so people who gathered at Gunnedah High School to hear Steve Price, Chaplain at Calrossy Anglican School, speak from Luke 23. Brea has just completed Year 12, and has been attending Youth Surge since she was in Year Six!

"It is always super encouraging to see kids from youth groups from all around the Diocese. Coming from a place where there are not many Christians, it's great to know that we are not the only ones", she said. "One of the highlights for me each year is getting to catch up with people we only get to see at a few other times of the year. We can chat about what is going on at school, pray for each other, and help each other to live out our faith in that environment." Brea has an excellent tip for other youth group members when it comes to inviting their friends to events like Youth Surge. "Pray!", she said. "We know that only God can soften hearts, but we need to be prayerful and meaningful in our relationships with our friends. If we invest time and energy into those relationships, maybe by the time Youth Surge comes around, they will be willing to accept our invitations to come."



Brea Thomason and Amy Vincent love Youth Surge!



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

John Bunyan

Kohei’s Baptism

KOHEI YAMADA CAME TO THE University of New England to pursue a degree in International Studies. But his enquiring mind and eagerness to learn led him on a path he did not expect.

I started studying at UNE in February this year. I don’t spend my time here sitting in a chair and studying. Rather, I try to spend my time challenging myself with something different and new. One of the things is going to church and learning about Christianity. I had grown up in a non-religious family in Japan, so I knew nothing about God and Jesus Christ before a person in the same college invited me to the UNE church. I just followed her because I thought it was the chance to listen to native English for free. In the service, I was very surprised at how many students who are around my age singing songs and listening to the sermon seriously. I had never imagined that young people would be so earnest about a religion.

At the church, I met a lot of nice people. One of them was Nelson Parker. He studied for a while in Japan, so it was easy to get to know him. One day he suggested to me that we have dinner and read the Bible together and I was curious, so I said ‘Yes’. A couple of weeks later I told him that I could not believe in God’s existence because I could not see him and the world’s situation was so bad. However, Nelson then prayed to God that He would show His power and existence to me. After a few days, I suddenly started to think about myself and my life. At that moment, I realized how blessed my life has been. A large number of people around the world are suffering from starvation or war. Numerous people can’t move or eat freely due to their disabilities. Moreover, many kids and



babies die every day without knowing the joy of life. But I am alive without any disability, and enjoy my life freely without any danger. My life is blessed although there is no reason that I am different from the people who are suffering. I have never thought about those things. However, these thoughts arose in my head one after another. And then I was so thankful to God for giving me a life and choosing me. I felt His love for me. Since then, I have believed in God and what He has done through Jesus Christ.

I decided to become a Christian at the end of June. I repented what I had done wrongly by then, asked for forgiveness from God and got baptized on 30th of July. No-one could have expected that I would become a Christian here. Now, I have many, very nice Christian friends at UNE. I talk with them almost every day and think about what I can do for the rest of my life. I found the purpose and meaning of my life in Christianity. However, it has not changed what I wanted to do in the future, which I was thinking in Japan. I just wanted to help people be joyful about their life. I want to give a hand to as many people as I can. I am sure that Christianity can help people and save them because the teachings are filled with love. The meeting with Christianity at UNE changed my values and my life direction dramatically. I am so grateful to my parents, friends and people who helped me come and study here. I am so thankful for God to giving me a life and blessing me.

About

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