

# The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

DECEMBER 2022 – JANUARY 2023

## Good news for everyone

Margaret Webster

**JESUS CLUB IS A CHURCH-BASED MINISTRY RUNNING A** program for adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) to bring them the good news about Jesus in an atmosphere of acceptance and friendship. Jesus Club Tamworth has been running at the Oxley Vale Anglican Community Church (OVACC) since May 2022.

The beginning of Jesus Club at OVACC was linked to the closure of the Tamworth branch of Crossroads NSW (a ministry for adults with ID) at the end of 2021. Crossroads had been running locally since the

1970s and I had been helping out, especially in more recent years when there was a shortage of leaders. This led to me becoming a committee member together with a small number of elderly helpers.

I came to love working with the Crossroaders but it was becoming increasingly difficult to continue with insufficient help from other churches and so, reluctantly and sadly, we closed down Crossroads at the end of last year.

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Above: Dianne, Alan, Peter, Talitha, Carrie, David, Les, Tina and Margaret Webster (Jesus Club Leader)  
Cover image: Talitha preparing for her role as Mary.

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I was concerned for the spiritual nurturing of those former Crossroaders who had no church links but I could not see any solution. Early in the year our minister Simon Carter told me that he had heard of Jesus Club Ministries and encouraged me to do some research. Their website [jesusclub.org.au](http://jesusclub.org.au) was enormously helpful as a tried and tested program with numerous resources ready to use. After connecting with Josh Reid, we followed his advice on how to start a Jesus Club. We then gathered a team of six helpers from OVACC and I was appointed as co-ordinator. We began orientation training over several meetings using the Jesus Club Handbook and watching the referenced videos. We were impressed with the aspects covered in the comprehensive training and felt so much better informed and equipped. We were also required by our church to have a Working With Children Check number and to have Safe Ministry Certificate. The Jesus Club resources file which we are now able to access has many prepared themed lessons with suggested songs, videos, craft and games. A bonus for us were the 'Buddy Sheets', which are worksheets linked to each lesson.

We had our first meeting in May with six members (some were former Crossroaders) using a party mood to present the parable of the Great Banquet from the theme 'Stories Jesus Told'. At each monthly meeting on Saturday afternoons, we begin by gathering in a seated circle for afternoon tea with time for greeting, chatting and celebrating any birthdays. Then follows the Name Game, when each person gives their name and answers a given question such as, *Who lives at your house?* or *What is your favourite animal?* This is a lovely time of getting to know each other and having a sense of family. The group then moves to the church seats for prayer, singing and a dramatised presentation

of the day's story. After that we move to tables for the 'Buddy Sheets' which reinforce the teaching. There is usually time for craft or a game before going home. Singing games such as The Chicken Dance and Hokey Pokey are so popular and hilarious!

Even though we are still in the early stages, our numbers have grown to about 10, and we have had very positive feedback from both members and carers. Tina said, "I love coming to Jesus Club and learning about Jesus". Alan loves the singing and joins in enthusiastically even if he doesn't know the words. It is beautiful to have responses such as, "I can feel Jesus at my shoulder". For our December meeting we have courageously stepped out and practised a Christmas drama called 'Jesus was born to save', to present to invited parents and friends. Our members are excited to be dressing up and being on stage.

It is so important to have a ministry for people with ID as all are created by God and no one should be excluded from access to the gospel message or put inadvertently into the 'too hard' basket. Personally, our Jesus Club members are easy to love, and it is a joy to work with them and see their responses. After six months of feeling our way, we are praying and planning for ways to expand our core group of members next year, as there are many others in our district who have no access to Jesus' gospel message.

If your church is thinking about the desire to meet the needs of contacts with I.D., Jesus Club may be the way to go. Pray about it and check out their website as a great starting point. With all the encouragement, training, resources, annual conference, Zoom meetings and monthly newsletters which are offered, this means that much of the work is done for you already. We at OVACC have been blessed through this ministry!

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# The main game

Rod Chiswell

**GREETINGS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD** Jesus from Armidale.

I trust this brief update from me will both inform and encourage you as we race into the Christmas season.

## Synod 2022

It seems a long time ago now, but Synod was a great gathering of faithful saints from all over our diocese. From my point of view our time together was a wonderful expression of the unity that comes through genuine faith in Jesus Christ. We heard encouraging reports from many on how diocesan resources are being used to 'Introduce All People to Jesus and Help Them Home to Heaven.' We also debated and passed significant motions on some of the key issues facing our church and society today including: Human Sexuality, Religious Freedom, Voluntary Assisted Dying, and Gambling Reform. A highlight for me was some of the thank you motions that were moved and spoken to. Daniel Avenell, Richard Newton, Darrell Parker and of course Ran and Jenny Mitchell were all acknowledged. These outpourings of thanks underlined for me the strong love we have for one another as partners in the gospel. Bishop Mark Calder, who spoke superbly at the closing service, spoke of the remarkable unity in the gospel we share and the love that flows from it, as things he observed during the morning he spent with us. I was reminded of how kind God has been to us in the Armidale Diocese in bringing us to where we are now.

## Anglican Bishop's meeting, Melbourne.

Less united was the Anglican Bishops' meeting in Melbourne that followed soon after our synod in October. Tensions were always going to be present in the house of bishops following General Synod debates on human sexuality which saw 10 bishops voting conservatively, 10 voting progressively, and four floating somewhere in the middle! At the Bishops' conference we heard from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and I concluded that while he sounded conservative,

being willing for example to discipline clergy on not preaching the bodily resurrection of Christ, when it comes to the matter of human sexuality there was an unwillingness to bring clergy into line with the plain teaching of the Scriptures. As the conference progressed there was opportunity to discuss this serious division. It was necessary to do so, not only because of the General Synod outcomes but also because of the formation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross (DSC). While no one was persuaded to change their position on the human sexuality issue, I felt encouraged that relationships were built with some bishops that may help us navigate the stormy seas we are currently in. I left the meeting under the impression that the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) is in no immediate danger of imploding. Together with all the other evangelical bishops present I left determined to stay in the ACA and play the long game as I think that evangelicals are currently gaining ground.

## Holidays and batting on with the main game.

I was very thankful for a two-week holiday in Woolgoolga at the end of October, and Jenni and I returned refreshed to bat on with the main game which is threefold:

- To recruit godly clergy who love God's people and preach his word faithfully and passionately,
- To support them and their families on the ground in parishes to persevere and get on with the job, and
- In special districts where there are no clergy, to support them to maintain a vital Christian witness in their community, and consistent Christian nurture through the faithful teaching of God's word.

## Sector Clergy Conferences

In line with main game, the Sector Clergy Conferences were held at Copeton Dam in early November. Simon Manchester spoke to the clergy on the book of 2 Timothy and his input was superb. Steve McAlpine also came

and spoke to help us get our heads around the culture wars that are now raging in our society. In a climate of rising opposition to the biblical worldview, Steve helped us think about responding wisely as church leaders. More training needs to be done in this space and he agreed to return and do further work with the clergy in 2023. The goals of all our clergy conferences are quite simple: feed the under-shepherds of Christ's flock well from God's word and give plenty of opportunity for fellowship and mutual encouragement.

In light of the feed-back I've received both goals were met at the sector conferences, and I came away very thankful for the clergy team God has drawn together in our diocese.

## Clergy Recruitment and clergy movements.

Speaking of the clergy team that God has drawn together, we have seen a number of answers to prayer on the clergy movement and recruitment front:

- Ben France is moving from Walcha to take up the role of Vicar at St Paul's West Tamworth. Jeremy Lin will join also join the West Tamworth team as a curate in January.
- Angus Martin will also be starting as a curate at South Tamworth working half time for City Bible Forum and half-time for St Peter's.
- Matthew Hearne will be going to Barraba as curate in charge in January under the supervision of Dave Fisher at Manilla.
- Dan Rowe will join the team at Narrabri as a lay stipendiary worker while finishing off some training online through SMBC. That may turn into a curacy role in a year or so all going well.
- Another new position is a third worker at Moree. Philip Van't Spyker joins Geoff Hearne's team there and will be presbyterized at the ordination in February. This I hope will give greater capacity to that team in coping with the growing responsibilities of looking after North Star/Boggabilla and

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# Youth. Encouraging!



Elliot Chapman

"I got to meet a lot of new people and discover more about faith. I've learnt just how much Jesus truly loves us and how we can respond to that through our actions. I'll definitely be back next year!" - Chevy

"Where I live, it's very isolated and there are not a lot of Christian kids around, so I just love coming to the Muster. We all have something in common and it's just so nice. Something that I really love is singing together and sharing the Word, I don't get a lot of that where I'm from. I've learnt the enormity of Jesus' claims. We don't often think about how outrageous His claims are like 'I am the light of the world'. I'll be back next year, and I'll bring all my siblings." - Sally

"I really enjoyed the worship and the opportunity [on Saturday night] to respond to what we've heard. It was so nice to see people walk out [in response to the talk]. Hearing in the talk today that they were no longer servants but instead friends, that was really pertinent. Mike's emphasis on loving as Jesus loves, not just how I want to be treated - it's not about me, it's about loving others. I think that stuck out to me." - Bethany

AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE COMMENTS made by youth who attended Youth Muster 22, it was a fantastic event. Youth Muster is an annual conference for youth from all over the Armidale Diocese, encouraging them to know and trust Jesus as their Lord and saviour.

The focus of Youth Muster 22 was 'Seeing Jesus Clearly' as over 200 youth and youth leaders explored the 'I AM' statements from Jesus in the gospel of John. Mike Dicker - Principal of Youthworks College - and Brett Hookham - Lead Pastor of Menai Baptist Church - gave six talks that clearly explained how Jesus is the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection, the way, the truth, and the life, and the true vine. Youth were challenged to see that living for the things of this world offers empty promises that lead us away from God. Instead, Jesus makes huge claims that are ultimately fulfilled in his death and resurrection, offering true and everlasting life.

As you may already be aware, Tim Stevens is the current Youth Encourager and has been faithfully serving in this role for the past 6 years. Sadly, this is Tim's last year in the position but he is continuing to serve God in a new role with Bush Church Aid, helping young adults to consider the needs in bush churches.

Despite the challenges of ministry over the last three years in particular, God has used Tim's passion for youth ministry, his technological tact, and his desire to see God's kingdom grow to enlarge the number and maturity of young people in the Armidale Diocese. I'm sure you are well aware of the fantastic job he has done.

While this Youth Muster was the fourth I have attended, this year was a little different for me. As a beneficiary of this ministry in the past, this is the first time I was involved with the running of the event, with the view to transition into the role of Youth Encourager for the Diocese. I feel incredibly privileged to be serving God in this role and am looking forward to the ways he will continue to use this and other events to grow his kingdom. I am also excited and encouraged by the fantastic work that is happening in so many youth groups and churches in the north-west, it is incredibly important. As we know, the majority of Christians make the personal decision to trust Jesus as children, youth or young adults. So why not jump on board with me? Chat to your minister about joining the youth team, encourage the young people

serving in your church, or come help at one of the upcoming youth events in 2023.

In March 2023, we will be running the Barraba Bash for the second time. This is a one-day event for youth around the diocese where we will look at identity - a pertinent theme currently for many teens - as we dive into the book of Ephesians. Later in the year Lighter Fuel 23 will be running for youth (and their leaders) in years 10+ and young adults, challenging them to think through how they will use the rest of their life to serve Jesus.

Please be praying for ministry to young people that is occurring in our diocese. Pray that God would be continuing to grow the number and maturity of youth that trust in Jesus in the North-West. Pray for next year's Barraba Bash, Lighter Fuel, and Youth Muster, that these events would proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and how this shapes our life while we wait for his return. Pray also for ministry happening in your local parish, that it would keep raising up and equipping young people to serve Jesus.

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Mungindi while juggling a large funeral load and the need to get on the front foot with other ministry opportunities. Now, five new recruits is a wonderful answer to prayer, but don't stop praying because we still need to find for 2023 a curate for North Tamworth, a new chaplain for The Armidale School and a new Vicar for Walcha. In 2024 I hope to see four or five new curates placed in parishes, with two of them entering the pipeline for training and sending to Bathurst or further afield.

## Clergy Christmas Picnic

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> December Jenni and I hosted our annual Clergy Christmas Picnic. What a delight it was to see clergy families and other ministry workers come together. About 120 men, women and children made the journey up the hill to our home in Armidale and it was a wonderful time of fellowship, food and fun. Seeing the clergy team all together, enjoying one another's company was a reminder again of God's kindness to us in the Armidale Diocese. The unity we have in Jesus and the

obvious love for one another that flows from it is a rich blessing indeed.

Finally, may God strengthen us all, clergy and laity alike, as we prepare for the gospel opportunities that come with the Christmas season. I'll be praying for creativity and energy across the board to share the good news of Jesus boldly in the days ahead. Let's persevere in the task at hand together, in His strength alone and for his glory alone.

With love in Christ,

Rod Chiswell.





# Northbridge goes north

*The Northbridge team at Walcha.*

**KIDS' GAMES 2022 WAS A GREAT SUCCESS!** THE ANGLICAN and Presbyterian Churches in Walcha co-hosted a team of 21 men, women and children from St Mark's Northbridge to run programs for participants from Kindergarten to Year 12 during the September/October school holidays.

There were two separate programs running over Tuesday to Friday with the K-4 age group meeting at the Anglican Hall and the Year 5 to Year 12 students meeting at the Presbyterian Hall. There were more than 70 children each day spread across the two sites. The activities they enjoyed included completing crafts and hobbies like cooking and billycart making as well as games and challenges. Kids from Kindy to year four looked at the story of Joseph while those in years five to twelve considered some of the people that Jesus met and interacted with as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Everyone then met in small groups to consider what they learned from the Bible. They were very thankful for the way that God used the week to speak into children's lives with the good news of Jesus, with 13 children taking bibles home to read more for themselves.

Sarah Spark was one of the team from Northbridge. This was far from her first time...she, her husband and children have a great love for the town and people of Walcha and are always keen to give a week of their holidays to minister there. But this year was a little bit different for Sarah...she had, only weeks before, begun work as the Executive Assistant to the Archbishop of Sydney, Kanishka Raffel! It is never easy

to start a new job by asking the boss for time off, but she need not have worried. "I was delighted that Sarah and her family are committed to mission beyond the Diocese of Sydney, and serving together with other churches, especially the churches of the Armidale Diocese!" he said.

Walcha vicar Ben France was thrilled with the way Kids' Games went this year. "This week of ministry is a massive encouragement to the Anglican and Presbyterian churches in town," he said. "The joy and excitement that the team from Northbridge brings to our church families is obvious as they enthusiastically serve God with the gifts He has given them and encourage us personally in fellowship. The children of our congregations take particular joy in the visit, as well as the week of ministry because they can be a part of it. It is also a great week for our church families to be encouraged to express and grow their hearts of service as they come together to help in any way they can to make the ministry possible.

For me personally, the team coming is an energising experience. It gives a picture of the wider body of the church and it is a personal challenge to continue to serve joyfully as you witness people using their holidays to travel to do this in our town. The rich fellowship that we enjoy as like-minded Christian brothers and sisters during the week is a real joy. The prayerful commitment over many years of the Northbridge Church in supporting us in seeking to see the gospel go out into the town of Walcha is something for which we constantly thank God."



# Supervising for ministry

The Synod of the Diocese in 2021 created a policy regarding supervision for all clergy. A register of suitably qualified supervisors was established and made available to all clergy and parishes. The Venerable Simon Waller, vicar of Gunnedah was asked to oversee the implementation of this program.

But what is supervision? Who and what is it for? If it is something for clergy, why should congregations be interested? We sat down with Simon Waller and asked him to explain it to us.



*Simon Waller (right) has a lot of practice when it comes to speaking to people.*

## **What is supervision?**

Supervision is creating a safe place for clergy to confidentially discuss events and issues that directly relate to pastoral work in Parish. The issues might be something they struggle with, like dealing with grief, or how to lead people well or even events that lead them to notice patterns of their own behaviour that might be unhelpful. The safe place allows them to reflect on their practice and with the help of the supervisor find ways to do things better. It takes three main forms. There is a supportive element, a formative element and an element that helps track issues like personal boundaries, and ethical concerns (technically it is called normative) but not everyone knows what that means.

## **How did it come about?**

It came about when I did the Graduate certificate in Professional Supervision (Pastoral). I found the process of supervision, which was a requirement of the course, incredibly transformative. I had heard many discussions over 25 years of Ministry about how church workers can be protected from burnout and falling into sin and just improving what we do. It was always ad hoc and never mandated so we did see brothers and sisters fall in the stresses of ministry. I saw this as a chance to formalise it. Thankfully Rod Chiswell also did the course and recognised its potential. Bishop Rick Lewers also saw how helpful it could be and encouraged me to pursue it for the Diocese.

## **Why do clergy people require supervision?**

Clergy need a place to be free to talk about the worries and stresses of pastoral ministry. It needs to be a confidential place to explore these and to be supported and formed into better pastors without something hanging over our heads. There is a perception that weakness or vulnerability can be 'held against you' by peers or worse, by those above you. As well as this, it is incredibly important to recognise that we are human beings, not Jesus. We are not whole people or even fully developed. A safe place to share and explore what is really just human sin and weakness can and does help us overcome sin and weakness and even personality flaws.

## **Why did the Synod think this would be a good thing?**

Synod recognised the stresses placed on clergy and in many ways increasing pressures considering the relatively hostile social environment for Christian leaders. I think there are three main reasons why Synod saw this as important to pass. First, we value the

reputation of the gospel so Synod feels this is one tool for clergy that might circumvent a falling which devastates churches, clergy families and the reputation of the gospel. Second, it does allow a measure of safe distance between the clergy and those who 'employ' them. Having said this there are areas that Supervisors MUST report on. If there are breaches of the law supervisors, in consultation with their supervisees, will report this to the correct authorities. Thirdly, the people of Armidale Diocese love their clergy and want the best for them. They want their clergy to come with great training, ongoing support and opportunities to grow and develop. If the clergy grow the people grow. Aside from all this there is increasing pressure from government, following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, to mandate this type of process. It is good for us to show the powers that be that we are as concerned and proactive in taking measures that will prevent what has happened in the past from recurring.

## **The process of supervision could sound a bit confronting to some people. What do you say to those who aren't sold on the idea?**

I think if people aren't sold on the idea then they don't really understand supervision or the benefits. Most objections people have come from not understanding what supervision is and what it can do. It is a new area for many clergy though all other helping professions have supervision to help them deal with work pressures and work difficulties. For example supervision is not a boss appointing someone to train you and make sure you are pulling your weight and keeping to your output targets. Ministry doesn't work like that and nor does pastoral supervision.

I also think some people find exploring themselves a little or a lot threatening. I understand that. Supervisors aim to establish trust first of all. That can take time. Supervisors want the best for their clients too. This trust relationship allows the supervisees to see the safe place and to open up at their own pace.

## **What were you looking for in the people you have invited to be supervisors?**

This is a great question because there was some push-back with people concerned that supervision was a purely secular profession and would not relate well to clergy. We have a fairly rigorous selection process which involves the supervisor being fully accredited with support and professional development from the Australasian Association of Supervision (AAOS). There are other organisations we also accept but there are too many acrostic to go into. We look for people with

ministry experience, supervision experience and also people who will work within our reformed evangelical heritage.

#### **Are the supervisors paid? Who pays for them?**

Supervisors are paid at an agreed rate, reviewed each year and standardised across all parishes. The cost is split 50/50 between the parish and the Diocese.

#### **What does supervision involve?**

Supervision can be face-to-face but many supervisors are happy to use technology. As many of our clergy are far from suitable supervisors I believe all is done with technology. It's also a requirement, for confidentiality and accountability that there be a level of separation from the supervisor / supervisees relationship and the Diocese. Local supervisors could result in a conflict of interest so all our supervisors are from out of the area bar one. There are two ways to do supervision. Clergy are required to do between 8-10 hours per year in the form of one to one (1 hour each) or group supervision which is 2 hours but counts as one hour.

#### **Why should people in parishes be happy that their clergy is getting supervision?**

Great question! I believe supervision is very often a preventative. If it works well it works to get clergy in touch with their own weaknesses, strengths and foibles. If they are honest in the trust relationship they can deal with things quickly and early and be better able to stave off the stresses and potential failures that can occur in pastoral ministry. As well as this, if clergy are growing in their ministry the people will also grow. Direct life experience and tackling our own mistakes, biases and sinful attitudes makes us all better able to relate the scriptures to the everyday life of the people we serve.

#### **Is there any sort of Biblical underpinning to the idea of supervision?**

This is probably the best question. We have included a biblical rationale with our Supervision Policy. I have tried to summarise it with three assumptions: the world is broken, we are broken, in Jesus we have been given grace and offered forgiveness.

Supervision gives us a reflective space to consider how our sins and failures affect others and to a space to reflect on best practice for ministry and best support practices for the benefit of our Christian pastoral service.

#### **Why is it important for our clergy to take every opportunity to keep the flocks under their care safe?**

Clergy have a Christian duty of care to serve and help our people flourish. We all operate from a place that has its own limitations; mental, emotional and spiritual. Supervision allows us to explore our personal limitations and grow into new and better habits.

From my own perspective, I truly and deeply love the people who I am called to serve (and miss those whom I have had to move on from - you know who you are). It is a great joy and privilege to be in this strange job of pastoral ministry. It is a unique job with many pressures that an ordinary person in the pew might not see. I grieve when they grieve. I grieve when I see people stuck in life patterns. I pray fervently. I often cry.

More than I care to admit and more often than I wish, I fail these people I love. Some of it is a lack of faith, and courage. Most of it is a combination of my upbringing and sin. I not only want to keep them safe, I want them to flourish under God. I want them to see how God uses even weakness to grow us and those around us, but not to feel like we are trapped in them. I can't do that properly unless I understand my own. We walk a tricky road but we do it together. I want to do it better and better and even more so as the end approaches.

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a kid like me  
needs someone  
like you



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# Church and community

**AFTER** THE DIFFICULT TIME OF COVID, IT IS GREAT TO SEE our churches getting back to hosting events that will bring church and local communities together. The approach of Christmas is always a good time to invite family and friends to take part in something fun, and to hear the great news of the moment when God entered our world as a baby.

North Tamworth Anglican Church recently hosted an event for men featuring meat, and a Christmas wreath-making evening.

Vicar Scott Dunlop explained, "We had 30 men at the *Men and Meat* evening, and about a third of them were not church members. We have been encouraging our men to pray that a family member or friend might come to faith within the next three years, so we are trying to keep evangelism on the agenda by providing events where they can bring people to hear the gospel. John Cooper from St Peter's in Armidale gave a great talk. I didn't realize that he worked in an abattoir as his first job! So he spoke a bit about that, then outlined the importance of not turning up in front of Jesus unprepared. We have a new member of our congregation who is a butcher, so he showed us how to cut up a hindquarter. I interviewed him as he was doing that, and he was able to share his testimony along the way.

Now that COVID is largely over, we aim to have an outreach each term, so we planned the wreath making to fit into Term 4. There were 37 women there, and 15 of them were not church members. Ruth France from Walcha spoke about God making our bits and pieces into something beautiful. Sarah Ireland, who is a member of our congregation, demonstrated how to put the wreath together, and there were some pretty impressive products at the end of the night.



Lisa Newnham and Sarah Ireland and their wreaths.

I think that it is really important to be a personal witness to our family and friends, and to be praying for them regularly. Having these outreach events certainly helps to keep that in the forefront of people's minds. It's been great to overhear someone say something like 'Wow... Bill got his mate to come along', that is just fantastic. It encourages everyone.





# Don't know what it's called but it's heaps of fun.



*One thing is certain, the kids had heaps of fun.*

IT ALL BEGAN AT THE END OF 2020. TORY CAYZER AND THE team at Kootingal Moonbi Anglican church decided to hold a Christmas Picnic in place of the local carols event (which couldn't happen for COVID safety reasons). It had to be outdoors so that locals would feel comfortable to drop in.

It went down so well with both church members and the community, they decided to do it again in 2021. But this time, they decided to call it a "concert" as many people were coming along to hear their kids perform.

Another success, so why not do it again?

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Alas, this year, the musicians who did such a great job last year were unavailable, so it became not a carols event, nor a concert, but a Christmas party!

No matter what it is called, it has become a chance for the members of the church to welcome the community onto the church property and to begin, or continue, friendships formed throughout the year.

Vicar Tory Cayzer said of this year's event "It was an absolute win for the gospel in celebrating the amazing news of Christmas with local families"



# Getting resourceful

Kurt Langmead

**IF YOU GO TO THE DIOCESAN WEBSITE** and click on [www.armidaleanglicandiocese.com/christian-education-and-discipleship-resources/](http://www.armidaleanglicandiocese.com/christian-education-and-discipleship-resources/)

you will find yourself on our resource hub.

**What is a resource hub?** is one of the frequently asked questions I get, so I'm pleased to have the chance to answer this and other FAQs! The resource 'hub' on the diocesan website is a place to access high quality resources designed to support local churches in growing devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

## **Whose idea was it?**

The hub was set up by the Commission for Education and Discipleship (CED) in response to a survey of clergy and ministry leaders taken across our diocese back in June 2021. Local churches were looking for quality resources to assist in discipling, and the CED was keen to help provide them!

## **Who is it for?**

The hub is freely accessible to all, and designed especially for use by members of local churches - both lay and clergy - right across our diocese.

## **What is on it?**

Currently the hub has locally-produced and/or recommended resources under the following five topics:

1. Bible Study Leadership
2. Children's Ministries
3. Daily Bible Reading Guides
4. Lay Preaching
5. Teams.

In particular, we are excited to have recently added the new 'Lay Preaching Development Pipeline' document that the CED has developed to help support lay preachers and their trainers across our diocese. The new Pipeline is designed to be used in conjunction with the existing Lay Preacher's Handbook,

and back up by the planned return of the annual CED Lay Preaching Days from 2023. Stay tuned for more details!

## **Why is it there?**

The hub is there to help support YOU - members of local churches on the front-line of discipleship. As the world seems to turn more and more against the gospel of Christ and his people (see David Robinson's excellent article on the next page) we need to be prepared to meet the challenge!

## **Where do you get the resources from?**

The majority of our resources are locally-produced or sourced from the CED or parishes in our diocese.

## **Will you be adding to the resources?**

Each semester the CED has a particular focus area for our resources and training. This year (2022) we have focussed on leading better Bible studies and lay preaching. Next year, God willing, we will be focussing on 1-to-1 Bible reading and raising up leaders. We try to add or recommend at least one or two new, quality resources for each focus area.

## **If someone comes across a particularly helpful resource, can it be added to the website?**

It sure can! If you know of a good resource for one of our focus areas, there is a resource 'coversheet' that can be accessed on the front-page of the hub. It's as simple as filling out the coversheet, and returning (with an electronic copy of the resource, if possible) to Emily in the Diocesan Office.

## **What is "discipleship" and why is it so important?**

I love the picture of discipleship found in Matthew 8:23: following Jesus into the boat and beyond! A slightly wordier way of defining discipleship is the lifetime attitude and activity of being 'schooled' by Christ, through



The CED team (left to right): Neil Hunt, Xavier Lukins, Kaylene McClenaghan (back row); Emily Speed (front row), Kurt Langmead.

his Word and Spirit in the good company of other disciples. And if this is discipleship, then discipling is helping others to do the same! That's the reason for the emphasis on doing discipleship in good company. While Christ calls each of us to follow him personally, good discipling (like good schooling) is inescapably communal - right through from 1-to-1 Bible to our regular public gatherings. As one recent book on discipling notes, the local church is itself the basic 'discipler' of Christians. This is where the CED comes in. The CED does not exist to do the discipling in our diocese. The CED exists to support local churches in growing devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. That's why the CED is committed to getting quality discipling support to where it is needed most - out in the parishes! And especially in our smaller, more isolated, and especially our vacant parishes, where the absence of resources and training (not to mention the sense of 'aloneness') is felt most keenly. We hope the hub will help the people in parishes to get on with the good work of education and discipleship!







David Robinson

**“EVERYONE HAS A PLAN UNTIL THEY get punched in the mouth.”** Thus spake the great philosopher, Mike Tyson.

As Christians, it feels like the culture has been swinging pretty hard at us lately. We’re familiar with recent examples, such as what happened to Andrew Thorburn, the Manly Sea Eagles and Israel Folau. But it isn’t all out there. While at work, out with friends, or even sitting around the family dinner table, when will someone have a swing at me? When will I be asked a question about my views on some hot-button cultural issue? The issue on which my Christian beliefs make me a danger, a bigot, a bad guy.

Recently, Stephen McAlpine spoke to a gathering of our clergy about his excellent little book, *Being the Bad Guys*. Do yourself a favour and either read it or listen to the audio version. Stephen not only gives an account of how Christians became the bad guys, he offers several thoughts on how we might continue to stand up for Jesus as the fists come at us. Let me give you three encouragements I’ve taken from reflecting on his work.

First, our war is not the culture war. As Christians, the last thing we should desire is Christless Christendom. Our Lord told us to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20), not a society with the merely external appearance of godliness. What people need is to be forgiven by, and reconciled to, the king of kings. And we are the ones entrusted with the message through which God will make that happen.

As God’s people, let’s not get so distracted by a momentary cultural skirmish that we lose sight of the eternal war that rages over humanity’s hearts. I am sure Satan is not much fussed about how moral or immoral people

might seem to us so long as they reject Jesus. So let’s remember that the fight to which our king has called us is to introduce all people to Jesus and help them home to heaven. After all, *when we’ve been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun. There’ll be no joy if souls were lost while culture wars were won.*

Second, you are weird so embrace it! Seriously, what we believe and how we behave as Christians is really weird. Too often, we try to minimise the differences between us and the wider world. “We’re just like you,” we tell them, “only forgiven.” But it just isn’t true. At our best, we don’t have the same hopes, dreams and aspirations as others. We don’t find meaning, purpose and happiness in the things that the world does. We aren’t sensible and rational in the way that the world defines these things. We’re weird.

But our weird story is also an infinitely better one! We have the promise of forgiveness for a harsh and unforgiving culture. We have the promise of God’s redeeming love for a world where you will only be loved if you keep performing on its terms. We have the promise of eternal life for a world terrified by sickness, decay and death. We have the better story! Yes, it is a story that will confront and upset many, and we need to be ready to bear the brunt of that. But we need to embrace the weirdness of it because when refugees, crushed by the present culture war, wash up on the Church’s shores, it’s in the weirdness of the gospel story that they will find hope for eternal healing.

Finally, be confident because Jesus has already won. People today are not raging any harder against the Lord and his anointed than they were 3000 years ago when David penned Psalm 2 or at any time before or since. But

neither is God any more fazed by their raging now than he was then. If the cross couldn’t cancel Jesus, what hope does a Twitter mob have? Jesus is still enthroned. He still rules our hearts by his Holy Spirit. He still promises to return to take us to the new creation where all the trouble of this sin-cursed world will be done away with once and for all.

So let’s be confident! We are not victims of a culture war. We are those who have been saved into a better hope. Heaven is ours because Jesus has won and invited us to share his victory! We might not know what the years ahead will be like for the people of God. But we know that Christ has not abdicated his throne. No one has grounds for such joy and confidence as we do. As our bishop often reminds us, we know that “God is still sovereign. Jesus is still king. Heaven is 100% secure.”

### Psalm 2 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,

<sup>3</sup> “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.”

<sup>4</sup> The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

<sup>5</sup> He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,

<sup>6</sup> “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”



# Cowra's gain

Ben and Alissa Connelly are the first fruits of a new partnership between the Dioceses of Armidale and Bathurst, and the Bush Church Aid Society (BCA) which will see young ministers train especially for regional or rural ministry in Armidale, before being sent out to Bathurst – and other Dioceses, God willing!



I (Ben) had the great blessing of growing up in a Christian family and have always known Jesus as Lord. Alissa also grew up in a Christian family, but understood grace and decided to walk with Jesus at the age of 13. We met at a Scripture Union Family Mission (Beach Mission team) in Gerringong in the summer of 2006/7.

While I was undertaking my teaching degree, the youth minister at my church and the staff worker at the University Christian group both suggested to me that I should seriously consider going into vocational ministry. Soon after this I met and started dating Alissa. We married in my first year of high school teaching and I commenced a ministry apprenticeship soon after, before heading to Moore for theological study. We had considered leaving Sydney to serve God elsewhere at the end of college but couldn't at that time for health reasons. However, I had trouble finding full-time work in Sydney.

After two years working as a children's minister, I started looking further afield, mostly in other capital cities. One of the ministers I spoke to knew Bernard Gabbott, and knew they were looking for a curate in Narrabri, so he asked if he could pass my name and number on. I had never heard of Narrabri before that conversation, so God really made it clear that he wanted Alissa and me to start serving God in rural Australia.

I love the friendliness of everyone in rural Australia, I love the fact that I can teach scripture to all the students in a one teacher school and that I can speak to a whole town at an ANZAC day service. The opportunities in rural ministry are immense and it is such a privilege getting to know the locals in a town and sharing life with them. We delight in serving God as a family, and love that we can do that so effectively in the country. There is also such a need for solid bible teaching in rural areas, and those of us who are trained have, I believe, a duty to at least consider country ministry.

As my curacy in Narrabri was coming to an end, Bishop Rod Chiswell started to talk to me about positions for 2023. He was excited by the possibility of starting our partnership with the Bathurst Diocese and asked if I would consider talking to Mark Calder (Bishop of Bathurst) about taking a position in Bathurst. After talking with Mark we took a holiday and visited a few of the vacant parishes to meet people and learn about the churches.

After visiting Cowra, we saw that the town and the church really meshed with our personalities and strengths which would enable us to commit to ministry long-term in the town. So, after talking with the nominators, we accepted Mark's offer of working in Cowra. Technically I will be the Priest-in-Charge.

I loved hearing about Rod's vision of sending trained curates to other dioceses and am excited to help start what I pray will be a fantastic partnership between Armidale, Bathurst and BCA. We are nervous, but also excited about the opportunity to serve God in Cowra and see him work through us, for his glory.

I'd like to thank Bernard and the people of Narrabri for taking a chance on us as a family and showing us how ministry works outside of the big cities. We would also like to thank the other clergy in the Diocese of Armidale who welcomed the whole family and have really helped us to live away from our immediate family.

We move in the first week of January and I start work on the 28<sup>th</sup>. For Cowra we are praying that God will be preparing the congregation for the change that a new minister brings, and that God will open doors for our family to make connections in town and opportunities to preach his gospel and be a witness for him. Please pray for our kids as they say goodbye to their friends in Narrabri and adjust to a new town and new routines. And please pray that we will finish well at Narrabri Anglican Church.

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

John Bunyan