

# The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

WINTER 2025



*Conversation Hour at St Peter's Cathedral, Armidale*

## Peter Kirk

St Peter's Cathedral, Armidale

**WITH** SO MANY INTERNATIONAL people in our communities there is a wonderful opportunity to serve people in need of help with their English-speaking. There are various ways of doing this.

As with any outreach ministry of the Christian church, the aim is to introduce people to Jesus. Providing spaces to learn and practise English speaking is key to what we have to offer and the development of warm and trusting relationships between volunteers and participants will inevitably foster conversations about faith. There are also many opportunities to invite participants to outreach events and to Christmas and Easter services and activities.

There are many different models for approaching this ministry: some are mainly conversation based, some include explicit

teaching, some include cultural awareness, some include practical guidance for life in Australia and some include excursions and other special activities. What you offer will depend upon your particular situation. Churches typically run English classes in weekly two-hour sessions which include morning or afternoon teas and time to open the Bible. In my experience people who attend, including volunteers, enjoy and appreciate the time so much that they stay and linger over afternoon tea.

### Who Can Be Involved

This is a ministry of the church and volunteers need to be culturally-sensitive Christians from the congregation who can reliably spare the weekly lesson time. Relationship building requires commitment.

The ability to speak English clearly and a little more slowly, a desire to serve, a loving attitude towards others, a willingness to be a team member and an ability to participate in conversation is enough. Volunteers also need to understand that the ministry fits with the mission of the church and be willing to share their personal faith in Jesus if asked by anyone attending the class.

### What You Need

It is most important to have a team of volunteers and a coordinator who provides leadership, reports to Parish Council on the ministry and consults with church leadership, including deciding on a regular timeslot which does not conflict with the weekly church programme. Currency with Safe Ministry

*continued on page 2*

training is essential and, because children will probably have some involvement, a Working With Children Check clearance.

The support of the parish is also important to maintain the ministry and it's vital that it is undergirded by prayer from both the team and the congregation.

## Getting started

Anglicare provides initial teacher training, ongoing tailored and diocesan-wide training, lesson materials and resources and personalised support to church teams. They also provide a range of teaching resources for different ability levels, freely accessible online or in hard copy.

Please contact Amelia Hohne on 0429017830 [amelia.hohne@anglicare.org.au](mailto:amelia.hohne@anglicare.org.au) or [crossculturalservices@anglicare.org.au](mailto:crossculturalservices@anglicare.org.au)

## Fantastic opportunities

Ania Thomas

Ministry Apprentice, St Mark's UNE church

Our Everyday English Class focuses on international mothers in the community and has only been running for about 12 months or so. The coordinator had some pre-existing relationships with these women through taking kids to school, saw the need for an English class and invited them. Ezedi women come along with women from places like Afghanistan and Iraq, whose husbands are doing their PhDs. We also have a Japanese woman join us. Often it's the husbands who have all the English in the family, so we're giving these women an opportunity to build community with other women and learn English.

The class runs simultaneously to a Thursday morning women's Bible study at St Mark's and these mothers can meet over coffee with Christian women. There's a creche operating at the same time for children not yet in school. The group is very much a conversation class. Our approach is to have a simple topic, for example, the weather or family or what driving in traffic is like, that they can use to ask one another questions and have a turn of answering. It's very basic English, just getting them familiar with the language. We try



to find a Bible verse in simple English that relates to the day's topic and it's wonderful to see them comfortable in reading God's word and to be able to answer their questions. We have women from different religions and there was a week when it wasn't my intention to talk about death but it was raised and we ran with it. This brought the opportunity to talk about Jesus' death and resurrection and one of the non-Christian women said, "If this is true, then we should worship Him". There are fantastic opportunities.

For anyone considering this ministry I'd say pray that God would open your heart to it. We need more volunteers. You don't need an ESL background - native Australians all speak English well, so that qualifies you!

## Rewarding ministry

Helen Etherington

Gunnedah Anglican Church

The Australian Language and Culture Class started at Gunnedah Anglican Church in Term 4 of 2022. Two years prior to starting this group for non-native English speaking women, I joined the local committee of the Gunnedah Multicultural Association to develop links within the multicultural community and discover what was already available to migrants and refugees and what was lacking.

We have contact with a smattering of nations from Mexico to South America, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, South Korea, Mongolia and Papua New Guinea and usually meet on Tuesdays from 10-12 noon during the school term. Our volunteers are Christians and include myself, Bethany who has a young baby, and Ivy who lives in Tamworth but travels to Gunnedah to help out. Classes fluctuate in number from three to fourteen and added connections with children and husbands/partners can enlarge the group.

Our aim is twofold: to increase the confidence of migrants and refugees through speaking, listening, comprehension and friendship skills whilst also introducing them to some of the basics of Australian culture and navigating life in a rural town; and to introduce people to Jesus or help strengthen their faith if they are Christians. These beautiful women are influential in their own micro communities here in Gunnedah, and if we give them good information, they in turn can stand up for what is right and help others that we perhaps don't have access to.



We run our classes by springboarding off lessons from Anglicare as well as writing our own materials after listening to the ladies and following up on their interests or their lived experiences. For example, we had one lady traumatised following a machete attack in her home by intruders and this helped us focus on questions such as: How do we ask for help in an emergency? Who can help? Where to next? We also had a police liaison lady come in for a chat, as accessing police in other countries may be a complete no no (bribes/coercion/rape).

This is a truly valuable ministry but is time consuming and costly in terms of meeting needs of people in the community, especially as we have added a dedicated Bible Study group on Thursdays from 10-12 noon or 1-3pm with six students. Please don't ever promise anything, unless it can definitely be delivered - pulling the focus away from the good work that is being done, is not advisable in my mind.

Please pray for us that we may continue as the rewards are so there! Multicultural people are much more likely to want to discuss faith and what it means to them than ordinary Aussies. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

The Link, Number 96  
WINTER 2025  
ISSN 1834-0741

Anglican Diocese of Armidale PO Box 198 Armidale 2350 02 6772 4491 [armidaleanglicandiocese.com](http://armidaleanglicandiocese.com)  
Editor: Rachel Doran [rachel@editoria.com.au](mailto:rachel@editoria.com.au)  
Art direction and assistance from Stephen Mason and Anglican Media Sydney.  
Thanks to all photographers who contributed to this issue.

*The Link* is published by the Anglican Diocese of Armidale as part of the Diocesan vision to "Introduce all people to Jesus and help them home to Heaven".





## Multigenerational ministry

Lydia Martin

St Peter's Cathedral, Armidale

St Peter's Cathedral runs an English language program on Sunday afternoons which we call Conversation Hour. Smith House and an ex-nursing home, Strathlea, both offer accommodation for overseas workers and students and are within a few blocks of the Cathedral. That was really where it started us thinking, "Wow, people are on our doorstep." Our lessons start at 3:30pm and finish at 5:00pm, with a break for afternoon tea. Students are mainly from Vietnam, Sri Lanka and China, but we also have regular students from Iran and Bengal. We have itinerant workers and several graduate students from UNE along with quite a few spouses, either of workers or of UNE students, all ranging from their early 20s through to their early 50s. We don't offer any childcare, but children often come along for special excursions.

We have a very regular team of ten, representing each of the congregations at St Peter's, and ranging in age from their 40s to their 80s. We have four teachers/lecturers, a ministry couple, a grazier, two local business people and one PhD student in our team. All the volunteers are actively involved with the students because about half of our lesson time is one-to-one small group work, but no teaching experience is needed. We focus on conversation and pronunciation to help students make themselves understood, basing

our lessons on an Australian phonics curriculum produced by a Christian organisation - Light Educational Ministries. We use printed sheets and work through those in the one-to-one time after the formal lesson so we can have relaxed conversations about language and vocabulary and cultural items. Afternoon tea time is an opportunity for unstructured social conversation.

We've held special lessons associated with Easter and Christmas, using Anglicare's material. When we have lunches and barbecues we have prayers before those meetings. We've also had two Christmas lunches in the hall, with a short address given, and students have been invited to attend outreach events occurring in the church. We had a request from one of our students just recently asking to know more about the Bible and I'll be taking her through *Christianity Explained*.

Whilst it can be quite an effort if the students do not have a lot of conversational English, this is also why we do it! Lesson notes and conversation cards are helpful supports. Some of the joys we experience are that our students are polite, respectful, appreciative, hardworking, motivated and a delight to teach. It's a lovely intergenerational ministry and a great joy to work with others in practical Christian fellowship.

## Making connections

Lyndall Elliott

St Peter's, South Tamworth

St Peter's Everyday English class has been running since about 2010 and we meet in the church building on Saturday mornings from about 10 - 12 noon. Over time we've had a large range of people from many different nationalities - backpackers, short-term workers, restaurant workers, aged-care workers and those who need an English qualification to get into a course. Tamworth has three meat processing industries and most of the people attending our class currently work in one of those. The majority don't have free access to day classes or English classes because they are not considered immigrants.

In 2004 we had a large influx of people from Timor Leste and we still have one or two people from that group attending. One in particular has been coming to church regularly and we're



delighted that he's basically been adopted by members of St Peter's.

Our team of eight volunteers ranges from those in their late 20s up to 88 years old. We try to stick the principle of 20% teacher talk and 80% student talk which can be difficult if students don't have consistent English or their accents are hard to put together. We have somebody introduce a subject, such as weather or colours or animals and the vocabulary that goes with it. We're using the Anchor material so then usually break into ability groups, working one-on-one

or one to two or three, reinforcing what's been talked about and helping with any worksheets.

We also use the Anglicare material, which often incorporates a Bible story and special lessons at Easter and Christmas time.

We currently have a large number of Chinese parents on four year work visas and before Easter we had a congregation member who is fluent in Mandarin translate the passages I was reading to make sure that people really understood what was being talked about. We then provided flyers about services happening at the church and also

*continued on page 4*

encouraged children to attend our holiday club.

I think this ministry is an opportunity to fulfill part of the great commission – the world is coming to us, we don't have to go out to the world. You don't have to be a teacher, it's more important to show an interest in people from other cultures, make connections with them, follow friendships and practise listening skills. Men are an important part of a mixed group, especially when relating to particular cultures, so please don't leave this ministry solely to women. Even if you're not involved in the classes perhaps you can find out who is coming to your church and invite them home for a meal. They love getting to know more about Australians!

## Persevering for the gospel

Maddie Heap

St Augustine's, Inverell

Our classes started in May of 2024 with four consistent members from Malaysia and the Solomon Islands. We've also seen people from Nepal and Vietnam come and go in that time. We use a variety of Anglicare resources as well as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) resources as for many this is their goal with English: to one day pass the IELTS for permanent residency. Some of our consistent members have been coming to our church for years and are Christians.

We meet in the hall at St. Augustine's, Inverell on Thursdays from 4pm-5:30pm and have a printed flyer posted around the church and at Bindaree Beef (the abattoirs where many people learning English work) advertising our classes.

We have gone through periods of high attendance and no attendance which has led us to be more prayerfully dependent on God and his provision. We have also had trouble with reaching out to the wider community as many want a certified IELTS course for English, which is not our main focus. We have been praying for new members to join but with no response yet.

While there have been trials throughout this journey, we have seen many blessings in being able to learn more about cultures and traditions from around the world with a focus on Jesus and the Bible. We have been able to share in meals together that brings a piece of their home to us (and ours to them).

We pray for perseverance for our leaders during the no-attendance times (and our students who deal with other things that make attending difficult). We pray for new students who are keen to learn English, for us to help that to happen and for students to start coming to church and learning more about Jesus.

# Reasons to give thanks



Bishop Rod Chiswell

**GREETINGS** FROM ARMIDALE, THE leaf-raking capital of the Diocese. As autumn closes and we move into winter we have much to be thankful for in the life of our church family.

One of the chief things I am thankful for is the many faithful and godly ministers, past and present, who have served in our patch over the years. Our dear brother, Reverend Keith Doe, was a case in point. I trust that many of you by now know that Keith was called home to heaven on the 15th of April.

Keith Doe was a man of many talents: he was a commercial pilot, a computer programmer, a maths teacher, a sports coach, a lecturer in outdoor education, an HSC study camp director, a Corindi Capers camp leader, an Emmaville/Deepwater Vicar, a CMS missionary to Nepal, a champion of Young Life and a locum minister in Uralla. In all of these different spaces and places Keith touched and helped transform the lives of many. His was such a fruitful Christian life! Wholehearted and generous in everything he undertook, Keith poured himself out in love for God and others. His life was lived to the glory of Jesus and we are the richer for it. I will miss Keith. He was a godly, warm, enthusiastic, energetic, and deeply encouraging church leader with a good sense of humour and a contagious positivity. His leadership was both strong and kind and he will also be sorely missed by all here in the Armidale Diocese.

Another thing that I am thankful for is our Diocesan conferences that give opportunity for brothers and sisters from all over the North West and further afield to come together for high-quality Bible teaching and encouraging fellowship. The most recent of these was the Next Phase Conference held in early May. It was a terrific gathering! The superb talks on Hebrews from well-known Bible teacher Mike

Raiter and stimulating input on evangelism from Dave Jensen are now up on the Diocesan website: [armidaleanglicandiocese.com/next-phase-conference/](http://armidaleanglicandiocese.com/next-phase-conference/)

Dave suggested evangelism is a bit like a game of soccer. The **kick off** requires *godliness* of life, *gossip*—the preparedness to be open about our faith, and *guts* to engage. The **in play**, which passes the ball down the field, involves asking questions that move us from background to belief with people. **Taking the shot** involves explaining the gospel which can be summarised by three simple pictures —God made it, —we broke it, —Jesus fixed it. All of this was wonderful encouragement to keep sharing the best news people will ever hear.

But my favourite part of the weekend was the Friday night dinner at the Armidale Bowling Club where I had the privilege of interviewing Dave so we could hear his life story. I won't try and recount it all again now, but you can read it for yourself in an article that appeared in Eternity Magazine called *Rebel turned evangelist*: [eternitynews.com.au/in-depth/rebel-turned-evangelist/](http://eternitynews.com.au/in-depth/rebel-turned-evangelist/)

If you missed the Next Phase Conference this year, don't worry! It will be on again in May 2026. We may be rebranding it a little to help people realise that it is a conference not only for those making transitions in life, but for everyone 50 years old and above to be encouraged to keep growing in the knowledge and love of God that they might remain faithful and fruitful.

These are just a couple of things I'm thankful for at this stage of the year. May God give all of us eyes to see the good things he has given us that we might continue to praise and thank him often.

With love in Christ,  
Rod Chiswell.



# A history of commitment



The logistics involved in organising an event in some of our more remote parishes are not for the faint hearted. Coordinating the toilets and cool room alone for the Poppinguy Union Church Centenary Service required trips to Moree totalling 480kms, and catering for the lunch included a round trip to Goondiwindi of over 200kms. **Geoff Cruickshank** has lived in the Poppinguy area for most his life and shares some little-known diocesan history.

**I'M NOT SURE WHEN THE PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING THE** church actually started, but in the 1920s it would have been a very brave decision to build a Union church that any Christian denomination could use for worship. The church was built by Mr. George Collingwood with the help of local Christian families – Makim, Howieson, Uebergang, Cosh, Von Drehnens and Cruickshank – who also banded together to run the church. Most of these families were represented at the recent centenary service. The opening ceremony of the Poppinguy Union Church was conducted on Wednesday 9th December 1925 with about 100 people in attendance. The first baptism was my late aunt, Marion Enid Cruickshank on June 13th, 1926.

Janny and I were married in September 1986 and purchased a property next to my parents in 1989. Two generations of my family had been involved in building and then growing the local church community along with many other families and we tried to contribute to our local community. I became a trustee of the Poppinguy Union Church about 30 years ago. During my association with Poppinguy Union Church the services were held once a month at 3pm with pastoral help from the Moree Presbyterian Church. Their support ceased many years ago. The Boggabilla Anglican parish approached our community and proceeded to conduct services on the second Sunday of the month at 10 am. Reverend Daniel Avenel was our last minister and was based in North Star.

When the parish could no longer support a minister quite a few of our congregation members trained and became lay preachers and still

provide regular services within the Boggabilla parish. My lovely wife Janny is one of those special people and she conducts the monthly service at Poppinguy. With the aid of a portable generator we project sermons recorded by the clergy from All Saints Anglican Church, Moree onto a large screen and use a portable CD player for the hymns. At the conclusion of the service we gather to share a morning tea and fellowship.

## Centenary celebration and service

On a cracker of a Goldilocks morning in April this year, in excess of 100 adults and 20 children joined together for the centenary of the Poppinguy Union Church, located on the County Boundary Road north of Pallingamallawa NSW. People had driven from Sydney, Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Toowoomba, Pittsworth and in between to attend this special occasion, and the church overflowed to covered outside seating. Bishop Rod Chiswell conducted a beautiful Easter Sunday Communion Service and included the 20 children in a children's talk.

After the service most of the congregation travelled to the Crooble War Memorial Hall for fellowship and refreshments. Many families that had moved from the district returned and enjoyed the fellowship, including 20 members of the Cruickshank family.

The celebration would not have been possible without the enthusiasm of the current congregation of the Poppinguy Union Church. A special thank you to Bishop Rod and Jenni Chiswell, the Armidale Diocese and the Boggabilla Special District for their support.



# To the glory of God



**ON APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup>** BISHOP ROD CHISWELL RETURNED TO HIS former parish of St Andrew's, Walcha to celebrate the restoration of the Old Stone Church. Rod expounded Luke 10:38-42, reminding the 60 people gathered together that only one thing is necessary – to listen to our Saviour Jesus, a truth beautifully reflected in a stained-glass window on the south wall of the church.

The Reverend Neil Hunt of St Andrew's welcomed everyone present saying, "In one way there's nothing special about a church building.

It keeps people warm and dry as they gather week by week to do the things people *do* in a church building: listening together to what God says to us in the Bible; responding in prayer and praise; encouraging each other along the path. But this particular building represents over 160 years of people in Walcha actually doing that, and that is special.

The Old Stone Church is the oldest Anglican church in the Armidale Diocese and the oldest building in Walcha, with the foundation stone laid in 1862 and the building consecrated for use in 1866.



(L-R) Reverend Neil Hunt and Nerida Hoy, the south wall window depicting Martha's sister Mary with Jesus, a unique celebration cake





(Florence) Peg Easey and Gemma Roberts (R) with Bishop Rod Chiswell

## Reverend Paul Foster

St Albans, Quirindi

**WHAT A GLORIOUS DAY IT WAS AS MANY SAINTS GATHERED** in Quirindi to celebrate the centenary of the St Alban's Church building on March 16<sup>th</sup>. The air was filled with gratitude and praise as people of all ages—from the youngest children to our cherished seniors—came together to thank God for his faithful provision. The church building was alive with the vibrant energy of our community, united in worship and thanksgiving for a century of God's grace.

We were especially blessed by the fellowship of many visitors who travelled from near and far to join us and we were honoured to welcome among them Bishop Rod Chiswell, who reminded us from Ephesians 1 of the blessings we have in Christ Jesus, and how he is THE key to our inclusion into the family of God. We were also thankful to have two beloved former vicars join us, the Reverends Graham Fairbairn and André Grassy. Their presence was a beautiful reminder of the legacy of faithful leadership that has shaped St Alban's over the decades, and their warm reflections brought smiles and cherished memories to many.

The celebration spilled over into a time of rich fellowship where our planned morning tea joyfully stretched into lunch for many! Laughter and conversations echoed through the parish hall as generations swapped stories, rekindled old friendships and forged new ones. It was a true taste of the community that St Alban's has fostered for a century – a place where faith, love, and fellowship flourish.

For 100 years God has sustained this building as a place of worship, a beacon of hope and a home for his people. We praise him for his unending faithfulness and pray that St Alban's will continue to shine as a place where all are welcomed to know Jesus and grow in his love.

We also pray that God will continue to deepen our love and knowledge of him as we gather here into the future. We thank God for bringing us together in the mighty and victorious name of Christ, knowing we come together not for personal gain but to build each other up, growing more like Jesus in service of one another.

May he continue to bless and equip the gathered saints here in his service as we seek to live wholeheartedly for his glory.

Plans for restoration began over a decade ago and for over seven years, Friends of the Old Stone Church – ably led by Nerida Hoy, have jumped through multiple grant application hoops, raised funds and negotiated with local council, Heritage NSW, architects, engineers, builders, window repairers, other tradies and local vicars. I'm delighted that because of this restoration, people can now be reminded of such an important part of Walcha's history.

Many of these historic items have engraved on them 'To the Glory of God.' What does that mean? It means that the building itself and each window or piece of furniture all play a part in a bigger picture of people getting to know their creator God. This has been a building where people have discovered how powerful and kind, and good and merciful their creator is. God is glorified when those things go on display to the world. This building has been a place where the people of Walcha have heard that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, Jesus, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Over the years, sinners like you and me have realised what he's done in sending Jesus to save them. And they've given over their whole lives in delighted worship – and given him the glory he deserves. Friends, there's one thing in particular that's delighted me about this whole restoration project. The motivation behind it is that the building might once again be used to preach the good news of Jesus... to the glory of God."



# Sharing faith

**NEW SOUTH WALES IS UNIQUE IN AUSTRALIA IN ITS** maintenance of Special Religious Education (SRE) in public schools – a practice which began in 1880 with weekly classes called ‘Scripture’ or ‘Right of Entry’. Throughout the Diocese, Scripture Boards raise funds, appoint SRE teachers and promote the work in local churches to support chaplains and SRE teachers employed to work in our state schools.

Armidale Youth Futures, (AYF) is a not for profit charity begun in 2001 with the mission ‘*To establish, maintain and grow Christian Education in the Armidale state high school.*’ It now provides SRE for Armidale Secondary College and all seven Armidale state primary schools.

President and Chairman, Graham Truscott, is one of five AYF Board members responsible for governance and liaising with 15 churches and other Christian groups to raise necessary funds, including hosting an annual dinner and Monster Spring Sale.

Penny Clunas, Secretary of the Tamworth Scripture Board, shared recently at a prayer breakfast to support Darrel and Belinda: “Be hopeful. Scripture is growing in New South Wales. At a high government level people want Scripture, but we still need the workers on the ground. There are classes everywhere that could have teachers that don’t in the primary and in the high schools. Youthworks say

SRE is growing – that there is support out there. So we’ve got to keep fighting. Keep fighting in terms of bringing people to local Boards. Donate money; give regularly. It doesn’t have to be big, but we need more supporters giving small amounts. We would love you to put up your hand and say, ‘I’ll represent the church. I’ll help with an event.’ Fundraise. Pray. When I was teaching Scripture, we just coveted your prayers. Thank you for being the army behind the teachers.”

Overseeing the chaplaincy positions for which Scripture Union is the provider is Field Development Manager with SU Australia, Tom Magill who cares for others in the Diocese such as Peter Wiederman, Chaplain for McIntyre High School in Inverell for one day each week, and Henry Halder and Peter Volkofsky who travel from Dubbo each week to help part-time in chaplaincy and SRE respectively at Baradine Central School.

Tom says: If you have a heart for sharing the Bible with young people and have some theological education or are willing to invest in study, please consider seeking more information about employment as a Scripture teacher in a local high school – especially if you have teaching qualifications or experience. Enquiries about working as a chaplain or funding a local chaplaincy position are also very welcome. SU Australia is currently looking to fill a chaplaincy role at Boggabri Primary School. Contact [tom.magill@su.org.au](mailto:tom.magill@su.org.au)

## Hugh McCowen

I was born a farmer and became a Christian when I was 23 at same time as my girlfriend who is now my wife. The Holy Spirit immediately gave us a hunger and a desire to share what we’d discovered and I ended up working for the church as a part-time youth worker for 17 years.

In 2013 I became the SRE teacher at Tenterfield High School one day each week and started my Diploma of Theology. I’ve been in that role ever since as well as continuing to farm.

Three older Christian men from the South Coast took me under their wing and mentored me and one of the significant things they said to me was, “Don’t give up in the first three years. You’ll want to, but don’t.” I clung to that.

It costs \$12,000 a year to keep the SRE program going in Tenterfield and we don’t get big donations coming in. We just have a lot of people that donate regularly and consistently. When I visit churches in our town who support SRE I tell them, “I would love for you guys to see yourselves in the classroom with me. You know I am there as the teacher but it’s your generosity that has enabled me to be there.”

To me the opt-in system has great integrity. It also involves trusting God with who he brings to us. I might start in Year 7 with 5% of the kids in SRE and by Year 9 I’ve probably got 60%. In the end far less kids actually leave now. Like most schools we have experienced many tragic events. During these times it is very humbling as the Christian SRE teacher to be a part of the school community offering the hope of the Christian gospel and demonstrating Jesus’ love, compassion, kindness and care to those in need.

My prayer requests would be for a successor for me at Tenterfield High School when God decides my time there is done, and for more volunteers to go into schools. To walk into our classrooms, hand out Bibles and see kids open them and be reading God’s word is an amazing opportunity.



## Bill McIntosh

Chaplain at Warialda High School, Warialda Public School, Gravesend Public School

I began as a chaplain in 2008, a few years after John Howard started the chaplaincy initiative. I’m expected to stay true to what I believe but at the same time I can’t force my beliefs on people. The most valuable conversations I’ve had are whilst working alongside children, like doing leather work with them. They take home their projects, key tags mostly and some little leather boxes, pouches or belts, and hopefully they’ll remember the conversations we’ve had every time they look at that piece of leather. I get called Uncle Mac at times, meaning that some see me as a sort of senior figure in their lives. It’s an honour to be given such a title.

One day I was running a wide game at school and a parent came into the middle of the game. After about 10 minutes of conversation I cut out of the wide game and stood on the side to talk to this parent. She was saying how much she appreciated my work with her three children. I felt like she was giving me too much credit, so I said, “Well, it’s all for Jesus you know. I’ve just got to give him the thanks for that.” And she said, “I know.” That conversation with that mum took 10 years and it was a remarkable moment. I once heard someone say that the first 10 years are just breaking the ice.

SU took over the supervision of my chaplaincy about three years ago and their resources have made a big difference in my work: I think I’m more effective. I keep praying for wisdom and I ask people to pray for this very thing for me, that the Lord will give me wisdom – to fulfill my role, to know how to relate to people, to balance my life, and to follow Jesus without getting distracted or sidetracked or falling into error. Two final reflections: Grace is really important – we follow in the steps of people who are the embodiment of grace; and I often think about the example of my grandfather who had a way of asking the right question and led lots of people to the Lord.





## Belinda Gonsalves

SRE teacher at Oxley High School and Tamworth Public School and Chaplain at Oxley Vale Public School.

I had this opportunity late last year when I was hanging out in the quadrangle and one girl says, "Are you a Christian miss? I think I might need God." I said, "Okay, talk to me more about what you're thinking." She said, "I'm in a bit of trouble." So we kept chatting and she talked about knowing God and wanted me to pray with her. You don't get this very often.

Later one of the social workers came to me and said, "Oh, I saw you hanging out with H. Do you know anything about her?" and I said, "No." She said, "H doesn't really have a permanent home. She's probably got three homes. She rotates around." And I said, "She's lost one at the moment, so she's actually struggling." I rang H's church and said, "H has been coming to your church and has become a Christian. I was ringing to say can you take care of her spiritually? But I'm also asking can you take care of her physically?" I don't believe that I'm the answer to every question. I'm just a link in the chain. I'd love them all to come to my church, but that's not my goal. It's to send them where their family prefers them to go, or wherever they already go. So it is beautiful when you get those little moments and you realise this



An Oxley High family receives an Anglicare Christmas hamper from Calrossy via Belinda (R)

is important. I've only seen her about twice since then but I've done what I can to help embed H into a church and a community.

I've been given opportunities to walk beside people that are doing it tough, and some people do share deep, deep things and sometimes things that are a little bit disturbing, but they feel comfortable to do that. So that's an encouragement. Please give thanks for ongoing relationships with students and pray for opportunities to build relationships with school communities.

## Matt Mulready

This is my 10<sup>th</sup> year teaching Special Religious Education (SRE) in Armidale, following on from the good work of Les Moreman. Having previously taught SRE at Killara High School, our family moved from Sydney to Armidale for me to work in this role.



After teaching my first ever SRE lesson I walked away astounded that I'd just spent a timetabled lesson in a public high school teaching the Bible. SRE is a unique opportunity that enables students to make an informed decision about who God is, and how to respond to him. Another highlight in my role at Armidale Secondary College is coordinating BOOST, our Inter-School Christian Fellowship group, where students across all year groups give up a lunch time to grow in faith together. I get to see first-hand God's work in students' lives as they serve each other in Christian leadership.

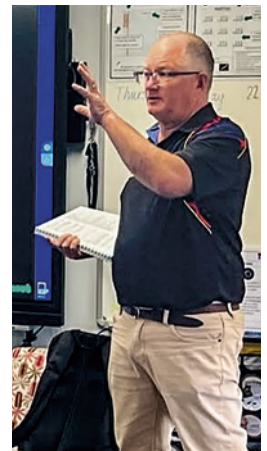
Years 7–10 have fortnightly SRE classes, where I mainly use the *Think Faith* High School SRE curriculum, produced by CEP (Christian Education Publishing), along with NUA Origins, produced by Scripture Union Ireland. *Think Faith's* approach to each lesson is to raise curiosity and find answers in the Bible. Years 11–12 have one SRE seminar each term, where I use *Jesus the Game Changer*, a curriculum produced by Olive Tree Media. The approach here is to stimulate thought and discussion around one-off topics, such as forgiveness, equality and leadership by exploring input from the Bible and experts in the field.

I look for opportunities to connect with people outside of the classroom. Sometimes this is through organised activities, such as school sport or school camps. Mostly it's about being available in a busy workplace to listen to people. Last week one of the school counsellors stopped me to say thank you for running BOOST. She shared how a student she was working with identified BOOST as her one safe place.

I like to think of myself having ministry partners – active participants, not supporters sitting on the sideline. I am very aware that I am not alone in sharing Jesus at school. Specific prayer updates are made available each month to those subscribed via email. Go to [ayf.org.au/](http://ayf.org.au/)

## Darrel Mole

SRE teacher at Tamworth High School, Peel High School, Farrer Memorial Agricultural School, Manilla Central School, also Chaplain at Manilla Central School – two different roles.



The biggest thing in our roles is showing respect. We're not saying to these kids your parents are wrong and you need to go home and tell them or anything like that. We just discuss the Bible. We discuss the truth of the Bible and allow them to come to their own decisions. That's important. We also make ourselves available by giving up time to help out with programmes as

volunteers. Recently students at Tamworth High were shocked to learn that Belinda and I don't get paid to go to their school once a fortnight to provide a card and conversation wellbeing option for them.

We get stories back through the SRE network and hear stories of people years later who say, "Oh I learnt this in Scripture, and later I became a Christian." It doesn't happen very often, but that sort of thing is the goal. Belinda and I were walking together one day and this guy goes, "I know you. I know you." I said, "I do know you, but you're not from this school." He was one of my boys from Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School. And he said, "Yeah, we used to be in your class. We used to have lots of debates about science and other things but you always answered my questions. You always took the time to listen." He said, "I went to Canberra and I've become a Christian." We then found out he had been in Belinda's class at Tamworth Public School as well and Belinda had given him a Bible, so there was a link for both us.

One of the biggest blessings we have, is that we know that others are praying for us. To know that what we are doing is not just our work – it's God's work anyway, but it's supported by all the churches. Please pray for our continuing good health, and for ongoing wisdom, direction and passion for ministry.



# Dementia. Why care?



Reverend Ben Boland

Aged-care Chaplain

**WHY CARE ABOUT DEMENTIA? LET ME** share three reasons: statistical, theological and pastoral.

## Dementia Statistics

Dementia Australia estimates there are currently 433,300 Australians living with dementia. The New England and North West region has a population of ~186,942. So, more than twice the population of the Armidale Diocese live with dementia in Australia today. This number is expected to increase to 812,500 by 2054.

Dementia impacts not simply the people with a diagnosis but their family and community. Dementia Australia estimates 1.7 million Australians are involved in the care of someone living with dementia. Thus,

## Dementia focus

What proportion of your church's ministry evangelistic focus is on ministry to people under 20 vs people over 80?

What proportion of Jesus and the New Testament Church's evangelistic focus was on children vs adults?

## Church attendance?

I suspect any church which counted 10% of the local population as congregants would have people talking revival.

As an aged-care chaplain, a small church service for me has only 10% of my residents present: 20-30% is normal and on a good day 50% attend. I am not an 'evangelist' or especially amazing: 20-30% of people attending church is normal in terms of aged-care chaplaincy.

there are 2.2 million Australians living with dementia or caring for someone living with dementia – over eleven times the number of people living in the Diocese.

Dementia prevalence is also important for our role in global mission. The continent with the largest population of people living with

dementia is – ASIA. The Lausanne Movement has identified older people as a critical unreached people group.

Dementia is a degenerative and terminal disease and the leading cause of death of Australian women.

## Dementia theology

If the sheer number of people impacted by dementia and the impact it has on them is not enough, Scripture is clear.

People living with dementia are immutably and incredibly valuable because they are:

- Created by God.
- Created in God's image.
- So loved by God he died to bring them into relationship with him now and eternally.

Moreover, Scripture commands we:

- Love our neighbours
- Honour our parents
- Show particular care for the poor and widows.

## Dementia ministry possibilities

The statistics and theology of the importance of gospel ministry with people living with dementia are profound. However, is dementia ministry even possible? YES!

People living with dementia can and often do come into relationship with Jesus. Every year I have served as a chaplain I have seen people living with dementia become Christians. This is normal for aged-care chaplains and evidence of God's work and NOT a reflection

## Dementia in the Diocese

I am a child of the Armidale Diocese.

My parents have been active members of their Anglican church since before I was a twinkle, serving in roles including preaching, parish council, mission work in Uganda and as synod representatives. With the exception of music, they have done almost everything at some point.

A few years ago, Dad was diagnosed with dementia and Mum with cancer, within twelve months of each other. Mum had so many people want to visit her she had to start making group appointments. Dad has people who he has hardly seen since his diagnosis.

Dementia is hard and some people have been amazingly faithful in their care of both Dad and Mum, but I share this to illustrate the need to minister with people living with dementia.



Bob Boland with one of his granddaughters



Ben at work, chatting with Pat





(L to R) Abbie at birth, Max, Connie, Matt and Olivia Peet with Abbie in front, competing in Perth at the Australian Athletics Nationals in April

to pray for Abbie. This was back before social media. I also rang the minister from our church in Orange and our previous church in Sydney and just said, “Pray for Abbie”. When Abbie was three days old our church in Orange met at seven pm and were praying for us. I told them that the doctors had said there was no chance that Abbie could live. At the same time, Connie and I sat in the NICU where I held my baby girl in my arms as the medical staff turned life support off and removed the breathing tubes from her and Abbie began gasping for air. It was hard to watch. I had the song, “Because He Lives” by Bill and Gloria Gaither playing in my head. I didn’t know why, but the second verse kept repeating that says, “how sweet to hold a newborn baby and feel the pride and joy it gives, but greater still, the calm assurance this child can face uncertain days because he lives”. I was thinking, ‘This child is dying. Why am I singing this song?’

Three hours later Abbie was still gasping for air. A nurse came and said “We need to take Abbie and feed her.” We asked why this was the case as Abbie was dying. She replied that they have a duty of care and cannot starve a child. As it was late and Connie and I hadn’t slept for three days and we had sent family members home earlier, the nurse took Abbie on the ward and said she would come and get us if anything changed. We slept a few hours more than we wanted to and when we woke we immediately thought, ‘We’ve got to find Abbie’. By seven that morning the staff were doing more scans trying to work out why Abbie was alive. At seven that night, the Professors met us in the same room they had previously met us in and said, “We do not know what has happened but we can’t see why Abbie can’t live a long life. However, no baby can survive this and she will be 80% severely disabled, not able to feed herself, walk or talk”. We know what happened; prayer happened. People from all over the world prayed for Abbie. They prayed for a

miracle and God was gracious and gave us the gift of Abbie and we would love and care for her.

Abbie was placed back on the ward as she still needed medical care and then she picked up a stomach infection in hospital. Our GP was also from our church and I remember reading Abbie’s chart over the phone to him. He came to visit us a few weeks later and said that the stomach infection Abbie had is fatal in infants. Abbie was released from hospital after three weeks in the NICU and came home a sweet baby girl with no medication needs.

We had plane crashes and Head Professors of the NICU declaring Abbie had no brain function and failing organs and would not survive, and God overcame all of it. I must say that the power of prayer through faith wasn’t ours as Connie and I had prayed that Abbie would go quickly without suffering or any pain.

To see the power of prayer and God’s gracious love towards our daughter taking her to where she is now: not severely disabled; not unable to do anything for herself; and declaring her faith in Jesus is just such a blessing. She has a bright personality that always draws people in. Abbie has a diagnosis of cerebral palsy and a few other medical needs but this does not hold her back. Abbie has found a love for running and holds three Australian records in athletics and God has led her on a path that has been amazing. The doctors had given up. They said, “We cannot help Abbie. She will die.” God took over and showed his awesome power. So, we are sharing this testimony – that God does miracles and they still happen today – as an encouragement to all. We have a photo of Abbie taken just after her birth with so many cords going into her little body and it sits in a frame with the Bible verse: *From the day I was born, I have been in your care.* Psalms 22:10 (CEV). It reminds us each day of God’s love.

of me! In fact, the academic research shows that older people are more open to spirituality than younger people. Christians living with dementia do not lose their relationship with God, as that relationship relies on God. Scripture is clear that all people forget God. All Christians forget God regularly and will continue to do so until Christ’s return.

Finally, good ministry to people living with dementia is directed not simply to those with a diagnosis but to their family and community.

### How can we love people affected by dementia?

My prayer is that God has touched you mentally, emotionally and spiritually about the importance of dementia ministry, sparking or fanning into brighter flames your passion

and you are now asking: How can ‘I’ better minister in this context?

If so, I recommend some Diocesan dementia training being held at St Paul’s, West Tamworth on August 9th from 10:00am – 1:30pm with morning tea provided. Further

details: [stpaulstamworth.org.au/events](http://stpaulstamworth.org.au/events) or call 6765 8227. I have also written a book, *Priceless People*, to be published in July.

In the interim, can I please encourage you to love people living with dementia as Jesus loves them?

## Practical Postscript

Ministry with people living with dementia is basically the same as ministry with everyone else. The model I teach is PPPP:

**Prayer:** Ministry is all about God and his power which is normally dispensed via prayer – so we need to prioritise prayer.

**Presence:** Ministry is relational and relationships grow best through presence. Ministry with people living with dementia requires us to ‘turn up’.

**Pastoral Care:** Pastoral care is simply loving people, in word and deed.

**Prepare:** Preparation is critical to success in anything. If you want to preach you study and practise preaching; if you want to minister to people impacted by dementia, study and practise developing skills.





# God of miracles

On March 9th, Abbie Peet was one of several who confirmed their faith in a baptism and confirmation service at St Paul's, West Tamworth. Abbie's father, **Matt Peet** shares some of God's miraculous intervention in her life.

**ON THE FIRST WEEKEND IN MARCH, I WENT** to the Men@Glen event. We read from Mark 5 about Jarius' daughter being brought back to life and the woman who was bleeding for so long, being healed. During question time a bloke spoke up and asked, "Why do you think we don't see miracles anymore?". I was a little bit saddened by that because you do see miracles, I just think we don't hear about them. I'd like to share our daughter Abbie's story and the miracle that God performed. This is not in any way to glorify her, but to glorify what God has done in Abbie's life.

Abbie was born at 35 weeks. We were living in Orange at the time and my wife Connie had noticed that Abbie had stopped her vigorous kicks and wasn't moving in the womb. We contacted our obstetrician, who was a friend from church, and he squeezed in an appointment for us that morning at ten o'clock and then sent us across to the hospital for more testing as he could see from Abbie's heartbeat there was something wrong. The tests showed that Abbie was in foetal distress so they contacted our obstetrician and he came and performed an emergency C-section. Abbie was born nonresponsive and revived and placed in a humidity crib on life support. There happened to be a NETS flight team (Neonatal Emergency Transport Service), waiting at Orange airport for another baby, and Abbie was given priority as she needed urgent care. In the meantime, a small plane crashed and blocked the airport. The pilot had forgotten to put his landing gear down and he thought it was kind of humorous. Being one of the

local police in Orange, I rang work and said, "Don't set up some crime scene. Let's clear that airport as it is holding up our plane from leaving. We need to get Abbie out." The police at the scene literally lifted the airplane off the runway to clear it.

Abbie was flown to Westmead Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and I rang my mother-in-law and stepmum to go sit with her as we didn't want our baby to be left alone while I stayed with Connie after her C-section until she could travel. I rang the doctor that night, who was the Head Professor of the NICU Department and had taken on Abbie's case. He said,

"Abbie is very sick and they have started a new type of cooling treatment on her." Connie was able to travel down the next day and we could finally see our baby girl. They did three days of tests on Abbie including two MRI's and many ultrasounds and then met with us. There were a lot of doctors in that room: the Professor of the Neurology Department, the Professor of the NICU and all of their staff. They said, "Abbie cannot live. She has no brain function and all of her organs are shutting down, only the machine is keeping her alive."

Before I left Orange to meet Connie and Abbie at Westmead Hospital, I had sent an email to my entire mailbox asking people

*continued on page 11*

