Learning from trees...

I think we live in a culture that encourages and applauds busyness. For when we ask each other what we did on the weekend, it would be unusual to say that on one afternoon we’d sat quietly on the veranda with a pot of tea thinking about nothing in particular! Much more likely that we’d respond with a tally of small achievements: that we’d weeded the garden, done the washing, called the kids, and responded to the never-ending requests of work-related emails.

Even in our down time we have extraordinary opportunities to be entertained and distracted with endless streamed TV series and movies, and many rabbit holes to go down on Facebook and Google.

In his three years of ministry, the Gospels tell us that Jesus took time out from his busyness and the demands of the crowds that followed him to be quiet and still. Perhaps recognising the wisdom of that, and seeking to model our life on his, we could resolve to make such times a priority next year?

For each of us the rhythm and places would be different, but the principle would be the same. In God’s grace we seek to become better calibrated in such activity and find through it, among other things, renewal, peace, and insight.

Over the years, I have found trees to be helpful companions in times of reflection, particularly trees that are older than me! For, when we look at a tree we have to stop because they are stationary...and sit or lie down.
We might contemplate some of the things that the tree has had to endure in the course of its long life: many months without rain; destructive storm winds; fire, perhaps; borers, termites and fungal disease...and, yet it has endured. Recognising this we might bring to mind the tough stuff of our own lives and be encouraged, or even inspired, to keep going.
We might also consider the many living things that the tree gives life to in some way. The creatures that are fed by flower and fruit, and the creatures that find shelter in its bark and branches. And we might consider those who look to us for food, shelter, and life-giving friendship, as well as those who share such things with us.

I’ve probably fallen into another trap of our culture and which is to think of what a tree might teach us as individuals and not what trees might teach us collectively.

So, let’s imagine trees living together in a forest and us being in that forest quietly observing. What do you imagine? Are there many kinds of trees in your imagined forest, or are they all one species?

In natural ecosystems there are many kinds of tree and each supports a variety of insects, birds and animals. The greater the biodiversity the more there is to see, and the noisier it is. A good example are the tropical rainforests of North Queensland. According to people who understand these things, the greater the biodiversity the healthier the ecosystem because in these there is greater resilience to disease, and everything is interdependent.

In contrast if there is only one tree species present – like the large plantings of conifers created by forestry – there is very little biodiversity – invasive species are controlled by herbicides and pesticides – and there is an eerie silence.

With this in mind, if we were to imagine our Diocese, or national Church, as a forest...what kind of forest would we imagine ourselves to be? Would there be many kinds of trees offering different flowers and fruit – or the monoculture of a single tree species? Do we recognise the value of theological diversity and interdependence, or do we reject this in favour of a theological monoculture?

Would love to hear your thoughts.

Reflections • Thursday 17 December 2020 • By The Rev’d Deborah Bird

Softening the ground for peace to break through

"The idea of peacemaking being about "the work of preparation" is what inspired me the most about the devotional book" (The Rev’d Deb Bird)
While searching for Advent material, I came across *Keep Watch With Me: An Advent Reader for Peacemakers*, a devotional highlighting the work of dedicated peacemakers around the world.

The daily stories reflect the human need to find a place of peace wherever we are – in our homes, communities, and with others, and explores the action of peacemaking as the Advent work of preparation during which we grapple with the uncertainties of the world and our call to address the brokenness we witness as we keep watch for the movement of God among us.

The devotional begins with a reflection by Michael T McRay, who worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron, the largest Palestinian city in the West Bank. He describes how he documented violence towards Palestinian civilians at the hands of Israeli soldiers, noting that “We needed to keep watch.”

McRay goes on to write about a close friend, Jeannie, who is working to help release her partner, a political prisoner:

“In my study, teaching and practice of peace building, I’ve learned that the work of peace is the work of preparation. We wait, yes, but we have much to do while we wait. My best friend, Jeannie Alexander, is waiting for her beloved to be freed from the cage of prison. Year after year, she waits. But part of her waiting is working to make better laws so he can return home sooner. The waiting of Advent, like the waiting of peacemaking, is an active waiting. As the African proverb says, “When you pray, move your feet.”

After a wearing year juggling shifting ministry needs in the COVID-19 environment, I found this devotional a bit of balm for the soul. Reaching out to ordained and lay faith and justice leaders across the Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic and Uniting Churches, we discovered a common need to spend time in reflection and reorientation and agreed to make this devotional the centre of our Advent practice.

We read the daily devotional individually and gather for conversation on Thursday mornings at St Anne’s Anglican Church in Toowoomba. We chat about the stories that spoke to us, about the questions that have confronted or illuminated our experiences, and finish with one of the week’s prayers.

Simply getting together and holding space for each other in the course of our Advent devotional journey has been restorative, enabling us to do some reconciliation with the events of this year and make peace within ourselves.

Our discussions have helped soften the ground for peace to break through for us in Advent, and in doing so have highlighted the importance of keeping watch for each other, seeking out networks that nurture us and forming organic deaneries of souls who connect in a way that offer us rest amid the work of caring for our communities.

The two *anglican focus* ‘Creating communities of care’ and ‘Clergy mental health’ series, highlight the need for active caring and sharing of ministries across a parish, that faith communities might be places where laity and ordained alike are able to flourish.

*Keep Watch With Me* is a devotional with wide application that I’m eager to use with a broader group next Advent. It has been an unexpected joy that has reminded us there is much we can do while we wait and underscored the small, but significant, ways we can walk together in the way of peace.
Kevin Giles writes within the large evangelical Anglican tent in Australia. This is his contribution to an important current debate when a ‘de facto’ infallible tradition of interpretation tries to face contradictions within its own ranks.

While the book is a ‘must read’ for evangelicals, it also deserves a wider readership. Why? Because what is at stake is vital – namely, the lives and well-being of women and children affected by domestic and family violence. The book charts the occurrence of this abuse within Church contexts, as well as its wider national and international spread.

Giles takes the reader through the available statistics in this field and cites the 2019 study by Jess Hill that males “are the heavy weight champions when it comes to (domestic) abuse and violence; they out-perform women by at least nine to one”. He asks the reader to consider what is the phenomenon that we hear about most: a mother and children fleeing a violent domestic situation seeking shelter or a father and children fleeing from a violent mother. The preponderance of the need for women shelters in Australia answers that question.

The book presents a cumulative case for Giles’ assertion that there is “a causal connection between biblical teaching about a wife’s submission to her husband and the scourge of domestic abuse.” He asserts that “male headship is a dangerous doctrine with malevolent consequences for many women.”

He focuses on synodical discussion in two religious bodies – the Southern Baptist Convention in America and the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.
As well, he exegetes key texts from the Christian scriptures which are germane to the debate. Passages such as Ephesians 5.21-33; Colossians 3.18-19; 1 Peter 2.18-25; 3.1-6; and 1 Timothy 2.8-15. He notes, in particular, the historical contexts shaping these writings.

He refers to abuse amongst regular churchgoers in both American and Australian contexts. His chapter titled ‘The Abuse of Women in the Developing World’ makes grim reading. Anyone who believes ‘male headship’ is God’s ordering for society needs to take into account what this chapter reveals about cultures where ‘male headship’ is prevalent throughout the world.

Giles asks why he has never heard a sermon in church that directly addressed the realities of domestic violence. I suggest one key factor is that the Bible’s male writers express no interest in, or acknowledgment of, the phenomenon (Colossians 3.18-19) itself begs questions. Does “not harshly” mean beatings only once a week instead of daily?)

In the Australian context, public statements by any churches about domestic and family violence only started appearing in the last quarter of the 20th century. In other words, there was almost 2,000 years of silence from the ‘male headship’ Church! Giles observes that we are indebted to successive waves of feminism, from the late 19th century till today, for the rousing of Christians on this issue. They provided the initiative, vision and information.

For example, compare Giles’ survey of the history of English law condoning rape in marriage over the centuries, and its recent repeal in Australian states – in New South Wales, opposition to that repeal came from some Church leaders.

This book is long overdue. While at times it becomes repetitious, it is an essential read, including for Anglicans. If one doubts this, simply consider the statistics on domestic and family violence in present-day Australia, including in the COVID-19 environment.

Are ‘male headship’ and domestic and family violence related? This book answers with a firm and convincing ‘yes’.


Growing up as I did in a small community, it now seems strange to me that I never considered myself to be an Aboriginal person. The little that I knew was whispered about. My nanna was of Aboriginal descent, I was told. My education was at the local state school. Without boasting I was usually in the top three of the class. That meant that when the time came for leadership in any of the school activities other than sport, as I was no good at sport, the lot fell to me.

This involved making speeches on parades, being chairperson of project clubs and welcoming special guests to the school. One of my old school friends reminisces that if there had to be a speech made at school, then they always asked Bruce Boase to do it. Everyone else was relieved. I never said ‘no’ and probably still don’t. There was not too much authority in this because I was just doing what I was told.

Leadership was thus thrust upon me from an early age. One of the things that I do remember from my childhood and schooling was that there was no separation of the non-Indigenous and First Nations students at school. What that meant is that I was used to being a leader and spokesperson for all the school students.

As I grew into adulthood, the opportunity to lead came in the form of work as a manager. I was chosen as a sort of example by the corporation I worked for. They used my image for recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This taught me about authority and the responsibility that comes with it. The community also called me to lead in the Lions Club and the Church. I was also a leader in a student Aboriginal Support Program at my sons’ school. The growth here was the learning that decisions had to be made and responsibility had to be accepted.

But it was God who called me to my current leadership experience. God called me to the priesthood. I remember being interviewed by Bishop John Noble before I began the formation process. He asked me if I
saw my ministry in a parish or in Aboriginal ministry. I was definite in that I felt my call was to parish ministry. Here I am now, almost 20 years on and I am still in parish ministry.

For the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, I have been called to a certain leadership in the First Nations space. I say ‘certain’ because my contribution as a leader in the Aboriginal community is via the Anglican Church, primarily as Co-Chair of the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group. As such, this gives me the chance to work with gifted and enthusiastic First Nations and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as volunteers, staff and clergy from diverse backgrounds. I am also a member of the National Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAC) and have served in the leadership team of this organisation.

God still calls me to do what I can. Lead? I am never sure if I do. Authority? That is all God’s.

Features • Monday 21 December 2020 • By Michelle McDonald

Taking pics of peeps: tips and tricks

"With Christmas approaching, our phone cameras and DSLRs will be used even more than usual, as we take festive shots of people at our services and parish and ministry events, as well as while celebrating with loved ones"

Quality images make a huge difference when it comes to social media engagement, website and e-newsletter user experience, publication readership and the likelihood of a journalist to publish your media release.

With Christmas approaching, our phone cameras and DSLRs will be used even more than usual, as we take festive shots of people at our services and parish and ministry events, as well as while celebrating with loved ones.

While a professional digital camera is necessary for bigger or more formal events, especially in poor lighting when flash cannot be used (such as in the Cathedral), a quality phone camera is often sufficient.
When I started taking photographs of people in a professional environment, instead of trying to memorise everything I learned in a half-day photography course and what I had read online, I focused on three simple easy-to-remember (and therefore achievable) things. Once I had these three elements down pat, I built my photography skills from these.

Taking quality images of people for publication on your own, as well as external, communication channels is simple with these three easy-to-remember tips.

1. Ensure eyes are in the top third of people shots

The most important part of a person’s facial features in photography is the eyes. When we look at photographs, our eyes are naturally drawn to the top third of the shot, so this is the ideal place for people’s eyes to be.

Set your phone’s grid lines to help break the composition of your shot into thirds (for iPhones, go to ‘Settings’, select ‘Camera’, and then select ‘Grid’ and for Samsungs, go to ‘Settings’ and set the ‘Grid Lines’ option to ‘on’). Use the top grid line as your guide for where to place the eyes in the composition of your shot.

Most DSLRs have grid lines – in either or both the view finder and ‘Live View’ (via the LCD screen) options. If they don’t appear automatically, use the on-demand functions to set these.

The ‘rule of thirds’ applies whether the subject (i.e. the focus of your shot) is far away, close up or very close up.

2. Ensure images are sharp

The primary reason why I (often) need to ask people to reshoot images sent to me for publication is because they are not sharp, and this is usually because the image is not in focus. To ensure images are sharp:

- Clean your phone camera and DSLR lens of lint and grime.
- Hold the phone steady or set the DSLR camera body or lens ‘image stabilisation’ or ‘vibration reduction’ to ‘on’ (or use a phone or camera tripod).
- Get closer to your subject (i.e. the focus of the shot) when using a phone, rather than zoom in.
- Submit high-resolution images (images that are at least 1 MB in file size) – this is especially essential for print publications such as newspapers and magazines. A 25 KB image appears pixelated when inserted into online templates and a 100 KB image will appear pixelated when used in print media.
- Use your phone or camera’s functions to ensure images are in focus.

Most phones enable you to focus on a given person’s face in a frame by tapping on the screen where the face is, including with iPhones and Galaxy S10s. You can also use the ‘Portrait’ (iPhone) or ‘Live Focus’ (Samsung) function on newer phone models in order to add a depth-of-field effect so that your subject is sharp and the background slightly blurred. The ‘Portrait’ function is found between ‘Photo’ and ‘Square’ (above the white round button) on iPhones, while ‘Live Focus’ is found between ‘Pro’ and ‘Photo’ OR under the ‘More’ option (above the white round button) on Samsungs.
When using a camera, put the focal point on the subject’s eye, rather than the shoulder or head – your camera can only focus on one point at one time. As well as half pressing the shutter-release button, DSLRs have different functions to assist with focusing, variously including spot focus in the view finder, the green squares on your ‘Live View’ and the AF (auto focus) button (sometimes called ‘back button focus’).

3. Take (mostly) landscape-orientation images

Generally speaking, landscape-orientation images are the most versatile, as news and organisation websites, e-newsletter templates and social media channels tend to favour landscape-orientation, rather than portrait-orientation, shots. There are a few exceptions, most notably Instagram which is set up to favour portrait-orientation images for ‘Stories’.

A landscape-orientation shot is longer across the top than the sides, so take most pics by holding your phone on its side or your camera horizontally.

So, next time you take images of people, remember to:

1. Ensure eyes are in the top third of the shot.
2. Ensure images are sharp.
3. Take (mostly) landscape-orientation shots.

Features • Monday 21 December 2020 • By The Rev’d Selina McMahon

The Christmas card

The first Christmas card, designed by John Callcott Horsley for his friend Sir Henry Cole, 1843 (Image: Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Marley was dead! This year there would be no Christmas card from him for his erstwhile business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge. Miser that he was Scrooge, was firmly of the opinion that, although he’d never send one himself, one day Christmas cards would be used by prince and pauper alike to pass on the compliments of the season to their friends and neighbours both near and far. “Humbug!” he muttered as he glanced up at
the single card he’d received from Marley the previous year resting gently on his mantelpiece, and reflected that “‘twas not always so…”

As the fire crackled, keeping the harshness of the winter night at bay, Scrooge dozed, dreaming. As he slept, he was suddenly aware of being seized by a strange figure, a white-haired bearded man whom Scrooge instinctively knew was the Ghost of Christmas Past. Scrooge was aware of the passing of years as the ghost took him to a time before Scrooge was born.

Throughout his unexpected journey, Scrooge was aware of exactly who each figure was in the various events that unfolded before him, as if some unnatural narrator was detailing each incident purely for his benefit. He watched in fascination as the date rolled back to the year of Our Lord 1611, as the physician and counsellor to Rudolph II of Hapsburg, one esteemed Michael Maier, sent to His Majesty King James I of England, a simple card wishing him “a greeting on the birthday of the Sacred King”. Scrooge instinctively knew that he was witnessing the first recorded Christmas card ever sent – one that would also be the last for 232 winters.

At the snap of the ghost’s fingers Scrooge was propelled forward to 1840, when, with Queen Victoria still relatively new to the throne of England, the Uniform Penny Post came into being. Scrooge remembered (or was he being spectrally told?) that hard-working citizens could now send any letter from any address in the United Kingdom to any other for the uniform rate of one penny per item, to be paid by the sender. This removed the embarrassment and stigma from the recipient who, until then, may have found that they had insufficient funds to pay for the transaction – something that Scrooge had secretly enjoyed in his years of business. He recalled how that winter, his budget for the following year included, for the first time, ‘postage’ since he would have to pay to send bailiff’s letters henceforth.

The Ghost of Christmas Present arrived, a young woman with long white hair and piercing blue eyes. She took Scrooge by the hand to show him the year he had commenced his unexpected journey – 1843 – the same year that Scrooge’s story was written by that blaggard, Charles Dickens. Scrooge saw that people were sending many more letters now and, as custom dictated, it was impolite not to write in return. This was causing consternation for citizens such as Sir Henry Cole, whom Scrooge recognised as a prominent educator and patron of the arts. It was he who had helped set up the new postage system and was seeking to identify ways that people could use it more. In addition, as something of an A-list celebrity himself, Cole was in receipt of a great number of letters and fretted over how he would be able to respond to them all.

Scrooge watched as, in a moment of Christmas inspiration Cole asked a friend of his, John Callcott Horsley, to design an image depicting a family at table raising a glass of wine to toast the card’s recipient. On either side of this central image were charitable illustrations, with food and clothing being given to those living on society’s margins. Along the top of each card was the salutation “TO ___” which allowed Cole to fill in the recipient’s name, and at the bottom was the greeting “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year To You.”

The Christmas card had been born.

Without warning the Ghost of Christmas Future, a shadowy figure Scrooge couldn’t quite focus on, took Scrooge by the scruff of the neck and took him on a journey through time. Scrooge marvelled at the images of the Christmas cards and how they had changed over the years. He chuckled at the designs of just a few years hence, with their grotesque and morbid imagery. In particular, he appreciated the image of Santa kidnapping naughty children, along with the one of a mouse riding a lobster. As he moved into the 20th century, he noticed, however, that the cards took on a far more religious tone – nativity scenes and wise men were more popular than in the Victorian period. English country churches with snowy landscapes
suddenly proliferated and instead of a simple “Happy Christmas” cards were far more likely to contain Biblical phrases such as “Unto us a Son is Born”.

As he moved into the 21st century, Scrooge watched as electronic letters were now the norm, but still marvelled at the billions of Christmas cards still being posted throughout the world. Turning to the spectre he asked, “Spirit, how many trees were felled to make all of these cards?” At once the shadowy figure showed the vast forests that were consumed in humankind’s propensity to send greetings at the end of each year. In fear and trembling Scrooge asked, “Mighty Spirit, what will happen to the planet if we simply discard the used cards once Christmas is over?” Scrooge looked again at the warming climate and the huge areas of landfill that covered vast areas of the world.

And then he awoke, still seated by the roaring fire, but cloaked in a cold sweat. He looked up again at the card that Sir Henry Cole had sent him and resolved to find some way to reuse or recycle it once the season was over, and to try and persuade his business acquaintances to do the same. He reached into his bag of black and white striped mints, extracted one and smiled.

“Ahhh, humbug.”

News • Friday 18 December 2020

St Andrew’s wins at national educational awards

A local school with a global outlook, St Andrew’s Anglican College in Peregian Springs has been awarded the for Best Co-Curricular Program at this year’s recent Australian Education Awards.

The award-winning Global Learning Program, which focuses on building personal capacity and cultural intelligence, is a focal point for the College, offering a variety of service and experiential learning opportunities, as well as training modules through the College’s research and innovation unit, St Andrew’s Institute of Learning (SAIL).
In a year where co-curricular programs have been difficult to execute due to physical distancing and travel restrictions, the hands-on nature of the program at St Andrew’s made it especially challenging.

However, Director of Sail Mr Tim Barrett saw this as a learning opportunity and a chance to focus on growing the structure, integrity and foundations of the program at a grassroots level.

“Our regular service trips to Cambodia and Thailand, experiential learning trips to New York, China and Everest Base Camp, and visitations and exchanges with our partner schools in China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Spain were all cancelled this year,” Mr Barrett said.

“This limited our communication with our partner schools to Zoom calls and increasing our focus on local opportunities.

“What we can attest to is that 2020 gave us many examples of cultural intelligence (CQ) in action and, unfortunately, many instances when it was obviously lacking. We were able to draw on world events and help the students to observe, discuss, reflect and articulate how their global perspectives changed as a result.”

Whilst containing many different opportunities, the overarching aim of the Global Learning Program is to provide opportunities for students and staff to increase their cultural intelligence, build local and global connections, improve relevant skills and establish values and character that will allow them to become the change agents of tomorrow.

Whilst many schools might run similar trips, the thing that sets this co-curricular program apart is the CQ testing and training that is done in partnership with the Cultural Intelligence Centre (CIC) which is based in the US. These online training modules and face-to-face workshops are crucial in developing the right mindset and attitude when it comes to living and working with those from other cultures and backgrounds.

“Our program focused on building our students’ personal capacity in the areas of cultural intelligence, cross-cultural communication and ethical decision making,” Mr Barrett said.

“We believe that in a world that is increasingly interdependent and growing, measuring the skills needed to function effectively in culturally diverse situations is incredibly important. This approach forms a key part of our strategic intent that seeks to ensure the holistic development of our students.

“The need to equip students with empathy, understanding and respect has been highlighted by recent world events in 2020.

“This Global Learning Program aims to not only influence St Andrew’s students and our Partner Schools, but other students throughout Australia through the CQ testing and training aspect of this program through the St Andrew’s Institute of Learning.”

In 2015, the College first saw the need to develop CQ with students who participated in overseas trips and cultural exchanges. This stemmed from an observation that many of the students were from a monocultural background and, through no fault of their own, were not accustomed to thinking, speaking and acting in a way that was culturally appropriate. This would not only have an impact on their interactions with those from other cultures on school trips, but, looking ahead, it would negatively impact their ability to collaborate with those from different cultures in the global workforce of the future.
Based on the belief that developing a global and intercultural outlook is a process – a lifelong process – SAIL Director, Tim Barrett engaged CIC to partner with St Andrew’s in order to prepare their students for cross-cultural interactions both in Australia and overseas.

With a realisation that no program is perfect and a desire to continue to evolve, Mr Barrett and his team are already looking at ways to improve on the program into 2021 and beyond, ensuring that it is continually reflective of global trends and needs.

“The College gathered a host of data from post-remote-learning surveys that were taken by students and parents,” he said.

“This data reminded us of the importance of growing personal capacity, especially in the areas of resilience and self-regulation, and the benefits of student voice and choice.

“We will be incorporating these aspects in our 2021 co-curricular programs so that we can continue to improve what we offer. Despite the uncertainty that still exists around next year, we will maintain our desire to provide co-curricular opportunities that develop well-rounded students who are equipped with the skills and capabilities necessary to face whatever the future may bring.”

**News • Friday 18 December 2020**

**FCAC teacher takes out national teaching awards**

“As teachers, we pour our heart and soul into creating the most valuable and stimulating activities and opportunities for our students” (Merilyn Westrop, Fraser Coast Anglican College)

The NEiTA Foundation, through the National Excellence in Teaching Awards, has been acknowledging exceptional teachers across Australia and New Zealand for over 25 years.

Mrs Merilyn Westrop, a Primary School teacher at Fraser Coast Anglican College, was one of 450 nominees who were then shortlisted to 43, and is one of 12 teachers around Australia who recently won the NEiTA Award for Innovation in Online Teaching for 2020.
In addition to this award, Mrs Westrop was also awarded the Futurity Parents’ Award.

Principal Joe Wright said that the College was thrilled that Mrs Westrop was recognised for her giftedness, enthusiasm and dedication.

“Of course, the College as a whole is incredibly proud of Merilyn,” Mr Wright said.

“Those who know and work with Merilyn recognise she is an exceptional professional – talented, committed, caring, innovative, passionate and dedicated to her students, our College and the community.”

Across the world, schooling changed owing to the effects of COVID-19 and was fundamentally impacted by lockdowns and the necessity to adopt online learning techniques for all school ages.

Mr Wright said that 2020 has proven to be a year like no other.

“The teaching profession across Australia, including our FCAC educators, as a group rose to the challenge magnificently,” he said.

“For Merilyn to be recognised for her leadership and extra efforts during this time is very well deserved.”

When assessing the finalists, the panel of judges was looking for examples of outstanding leadership, expert knowledge, exemplary and innovative teaching practice, and professional engagement with colleagues, parents, carers and the community, especially by providing exemplary support for student wellbeing during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Mr Wright said that Mrs Westrop transcended the challenges of the COVID-19 period.

“Merilyn has always been an amazing educator; however, during the online learning period she went above and beyond, motivating her students by interacting frequently with them in creative and varied ways, which enhanced her students’ learnings and their interactions with each other, all during a difficult and unusual time and having to stay at home,” he said.

Mrs Westrop remains very humble and said that it’s hard to accept an award for doing a job that she is so passionate about.

“As teachers, we pour our hearts and souls into creating the most valuable and stimulating activities and opportunities for our students. Then, we are faced with even more challenges like online learning,” Mrs Westrop said.

“To be honest, I absolutely loved the chance to be creative and thrived in developing innovative ways to engage my students and make them want to come online and see what crazy things my teaching partner and I would be doing that day.

“However, I couldn’t wait for my students to be back in the classroom with me once again.

Mrs Westrop shared a quote by Robert John Meehan that resonates with her: “Teachers who love teaching, teach children to love learning.”

It is not just a job, but a life’s work for this dedicated educator.
Bundaberg Anglicans say ‘no’

‘16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence’ is an international campaign, launched by UN Women, which takes place each year from 25 November until 10 December. For the second time, Anglican Mothers Union Bundaberg held three events to support the ‘16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence’ campaign. This year, we partnered with Bundaberg Regional Council, who show their commitment to raising awareness of domestic and family violence through the Red Bench Project.

The Red Rose Foundation launched the Red Bench Project to build a permanent reminder that domestic violence occurs within all our communities. The presence of a Red Bench in a public location aims to raise public awareness and ensure this important issue remains visible. To date, Bundaberg has four Red Benches, one being in the grounds of Christ Church, Bundaberg with a plaque that reads, ‘Change the ending – let’s stop – domestic violence’.

Anglican Mothers Union Australia (AMUA) joined other local organisations at the large community gathering at the Red Bench in Bundaberg’s Alexandra Park. At 9 o’clock in the morning, the day was launched by the Mayor, Cr Jack Dempsey, who spoke passionately about domestic violence and his previous experience as a police officer. A visiting member of the Red Rose Foundation spoke on the Red Bench Project before the Walk Against Violence commenced. Event participants carried a large banner on which the logos of AMUA and all other supporting organisations were displayed.
At 10.30 am, the bells of Christ Church rang 54 times to acknowledge the women and children who were murdered in Australia due to domestic violence this year to mid-November. The AMUA prayer service followed with the lighting of candles and a speaker from the EDON Place Domestic and Family Violence Centre. Some community members who had participated in the Walk Against Violence also joined the prayer service.

AMUA members Bev Perry, Gail Bauer, Pam Cooper, Fr Robert Perry and Rhonda Dawson with guest speaker Brett Hayes (from EDON Place Domestic and Family Violence Centre) at the 10 December 2020 prayer service

At the end of the day, the ZONTA Club of Bundaberg launched a ‘NO to Violence Against Women’ event at the Bundaberg Multiplex Sport and Convention Centre. It was well-attended, with speakers and The Rev’d Danni Clark closing the proceedings with appropriate prayers. The historic fig trees located in the grounds were floodlit with orange, the colour designated by the UN Secretary-General’s UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign, in remembrance.

AMUA’s next event was on the evening of Friday 4 December at the Good Shepherd Anglican Church Hall where The Rev’d Andrew Schmidt and his helpers provided a meal, COVID-19 style, and we heard from a local solicitor who discussed her work with domestic and family violence and the work of EDON Place.

On the UN Human Rights Day on Thursday 10 December, AMUA held a closing prayer service to mark the conclusion of the 16 days of prayer campaign, again incorporating the ringing of the bells. Sadly, the bells rang 61 times this time, marking an additional seven deaths in the 16 days prior. The service included prayers with lighting of candles and a speaker from EDON Place, the Coordinator of the men’s intervention program, Responsible and Respectful Choices.

During the 16 days, a prayer tree was placed in the church to provide the opportunity to write a prayer and hang it on the tree. These prayers were offered to God at the final prayer service. A pamphlet of 16 days of bible verses and prayers was also made available.
Dr Agnes Abuom: “We pray that churches will recommit to the search for visible unity”

How have you experienced the impact of COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr Abuom: Initially, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was low in terms of affected people and the death rate. However, during this second phase, more people are testing positive and the death rate has been on the increase. The reason could be that more people are being tested and also political groups have been holding rallies without observing protocols such as wearing masks and social distancing.

Further, poverty is widespread as companies have closed or reduced the number of workers. Already the level of poverty among young people was high and informal settlements are more affected due to poor sanitation and related services. Many relatives go without food and I personally have lost friends and a number of church leaders.

Three other effects need to be highlighted. First, family and domestic violence and gender-based violence. Some men are frustrated because the lockdown means they must stay home, something they are not used to. In addition, without jobs and income to fend for families they feel humiliated and their dignity is compromised. COVID-19 has exposed serious levels of mental illnesses. Second, the indefinite closure of schools from March 2020 meant that children are confined to their homes and it would seem many parents were not prepared for such long recess and, therefore, young girls are impregnated by young men—or taken advantage of by older men—or family violence or incest. Third, the pandemic has affected the fellowship and community life of the church as worship spaces were closed for a number of months and when they opened the elderly were not allowed to mingle. This lack of fellowship has an economic impact on the finances of the church, as well as the pastoral and spiritual life. People are lonely in their homes or
hospitals. Pastors are unable to visit the sick and families are unable to conduct burials and final rites that protect the dignity of those who have passed.

What gives you hope at this moment?

Dr Abuom: As a woman of faith, my candle of hope must burn whether the context is good or bad. In other words, faith in the Lord Jesus affirms that nothing is permanent, for what has a beginning, has an end. COVID-19 has reminded me that we as a global human community belong to the one household of God in spite of race, gender, region, weather or wealth because the pandemic has not spared the rich, mighty, the poor nor the children and the elderly. There is, therefore, no need to exclude or marginalise anyone or any community. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals motto “leave no one behind” encompasses all created things. As the psalmist aptly states: “The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalms 24.1 NKJV). The power of love and the power to forgive implore the church and Christians to pray to God for healing of the mind, soul and body.

Despite the lockdown, people have found ways to navigate and normalise the abnormal. For instance, churches are using online technology to share the message of the good news with their congregations. In the past we read about house churches in some Asian countries but the pandemic has revived family and home churches, prayers and worship. Some remit the offerings collected during home churches to the church.

The 16 Days Against Gender-based Violence began on 25 November. In order to achieve sustainable peace and sustainable development; peace is a twin of justice. Today my hope is sustained as churches, people of faith, men and women of good will engage to overcome racism, xenophobia and other forms of injustice such as economic and ecological injustice.

Yes, today presents to me many concerns and I am hopeful because I am not alone; I have fellow companions on the journey and above all, our God promises that He shall not leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13.5). Because of this assurance we can face the challenges without fear.

There are many reasons to be hopeful, but let me point out the Green Faith International Network by the Anglican Communion that galvanises people as ambassadors for climate justice. The All Africa Conference of Churches engages young people to work towards restoration of ecology. Churches worldwide are more sensitive to community needs than before as they enable respective communities to frame their needs and potential solutions. There are many individuals whose service is a serious divine vocation, and they stay serving for many years. In as much as COVID-19 has overwhelming negative effects, I see hope in the impact if we can discern what God is saying to us human beings. No one or region can go it alone; we need to restore healthy, dignifying relationships with each other, with God and nature.

How do you imagine the church in 2040?

Dr Abuom: The church I envision in 2040 is one that celebrates the gift of life of all God’s creation. A church that acknowledges that, as human beings, we are all vulnerable to the effects of our abuse of one another and environment. This is a church that is fully inclusive of all God’s people—a rainbow (Genesis 1.26); affirming that all are created in the image of God, and are wonderfully made. In this 2040 church unity in diversity and celebration as well as use of talents are applied to the glory of God. It will be a church that is breaking silence on many taboo issues and building bridges between different people, faiths and nation/states. The 2040 church will remain faithful to its calling by God to proclaim good news; a church alive to prophetic ministry and tradition on behalf of people and nations—a sanctuary for all and a church that accompanies the needy through diaconal services. A church that is the light and salt of society, not one
compromised by political class or the economic mammon. A church that while on high moral ground shall not condemn those on low moral ground as dammed; rather the church’s high moral ground will journey with those on low moral ground.

**What is your vision for the ecumenical movement of the future?**

**Dr Abuom:** My vision of the ecumenical movement of the future is one that will stay focused on the prayer of our Lord Jesus, “that they may all be one, that the world may believe” (John 17.20-21 NKJV). This unity is not about uniformity but unity of purpose. When I survey the ecclesial landscape, there are more denominations that still need to develop self-understanding and cooperation with others. The different dialogues taking place between various communions are essential. It is my vision that we in the ecumenical movement shall worship together, accept each other’s baptism and Eucharist. We are on the way; at the same time, there is need to agree on the basics around these critical aspects of our Christian faith.

The future ecumenical movement is a movement that shall embrace family, local and organic ecumenism as this phenomenon is more apparent especially in Africa where a family has representatives from different denominations; the transformation aspect is also in the interfaith component thus cooperation for the survival, the affirmation of the web of life. And finally the vertical ecumenism must engage the horizontal movements which are issue-based such as peace and justice. An ecumenical movement with a voice that impacts discourse in the public space because it values every person’s contribution. An ecumenical movement that is prayerful, and one that has deepened inter and multi-generational dialogue on issues of concern. An ecumenical movement as a space appreciated, as a gift with diverse experiences, lessons learnt and resources.

**What does justice mean for you with a view to living together and solidarity worldwide?**

**Dr Abuom:** If Christ humanised his mission, evangelisation and meeting the needs of the people. Thus the Gospel is a compelling force that should make us restless on any form of injustice and in whatever geographical sphere it occurs. Thus pilgrimage motive allows us to be risk takers and leave our comfort zones. Perhaps it is this risk taking and denial of comfort that gives us the impetus as pilgrims for justice. Therefore as a body of believers called by Jesus Christ to serve humanity and to preach the good news of salvation (Luke 4.18-20); we are called to serve individually in our local contexts and collectively to restore justice. For example, economic injustice fuelled by greed at the expense of the majority left languishing in poverty demands that churches together interrogate and challenge the development paradigm that exploits resources and human beings for a small group with impunity. We encounter cultures that defend dehumanisation and inferiority of other human beings as being less human; we need concerted efforts of standing in solidarity with one another to overcome such atrocious injustices. We work until we witness the image that Amos 5.24 provides: “But let justice run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.” It is about justice for all and all for justice. We address oppressors just like Jesus did. I am saved by Jesus to serve and through salvation I am equipped by the scriptures to serve and witness against unjust structures.

**What images of the good life/images of hope are important for you?**

**Dr Abuom:** In the midst of the recent war (2013) in South Sudan the image of women converging once a month for fasting and prayer is a powerful image: that they defy military forces and, unrelenting, they continue to march once every month, although many have lost their loved ones. They do not use arms to drive home the point that life is sacred and peace with justice is an imperative. Over the years they have appealed to their maker with lamentations and petitions as they also have participated in peace negotiations.
The second image is one where people of all social classes, races, genders, ages are sitting together, as church, and mutually sharing the fruits of spirituality and humanity.

A third image is of a community of men, women, boys and girls gathered under a tree and resolving communal conflicts by using traditional methods of mediation, conflict resolution and thereafter holding hands and praying together.

A fourth image is one of development: workers and church leaders discussing priorities together with communities and those from the north accepting to listen and offer wisdom at appropriate moments – otherwise no longer the masters of change.

Fifth is the image of a Nigerian Imam and pastor traversing the African continent preaching peace. This was to illustrate that religion is not the cause of conflict but the abuse and misuse of religion.

**How can we shape the changes or the change together?**

**Dr Abuom:** In order to shape change we should first and foremost understand that change is inevitable and if we do not plan to manage it, we will be overwhelmed or even destroyed. To begin with, we need to scan the context, map the different trends and as we envision change/transformation, it is important that we also take into consideration the other person. We normally reflect on issues and desired change from our own position. When we have reflected from our own interests and needs then we should look at the changes from other people's standpoint. If we stay truthful, we are able to take into account relevant changes that are a result of multi-pronged discourse. This opens up a window for better appreciation of the different changes required by those involved. A key factor is to listen, to discern the will of God and people at a particular juncture in history. Another factor is to avoid being dismissive of other’s views and perspectives. In other words, create enabling spaces to determine the needed change and how to go about it.

**What are your hopes for the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022?**

**Dr Abuom:** The WCC will be coming back to Europe after 50 years since the last assembly held in Uppsala in 1968.

A lot has changed in Europe and at the same time some of the issues addressed at Uppsala remain or have resurfaced. First, we hope that all our delegates and other participants will be able to attend especially after this COVID-19. We look forward to an enabling environment for prayer, celebration, discussions, exchange of views and ideas. Above all we hope to get to have a glimpse of church life in Germany. As a global ecumenical movement it is our prayer that the assembly will energise and inspire churches to continue to work for unity of the church and unity of humankind. That many young people will find the WCC and ecumenical movement relevant as it addresses matters affecting them. We pray that assembly participants will give program and policy priorities and direction for the future. We pray that churches will recommit to the search for visible unity.

**Interview: Marianne Ejdersten, WCC Director of Communication.**

First published on the [World Council of Churches website](https://www.wcc-church.org) on 7 December 2020.
Q&A with ICU doc, musician, Paralympic gold medallist, Franciscan and newly-ordained Deacon, The Rev’d Dr Gemma Dashwood OAM

The Rev’d Dr Gemma Dashwood is a modern-day polymath. She was ordained a Deacon earlier this month at St John’s Cathedral and volunteers in a number of Anglican Church Southern Queensland roles when she is not working as an ICU Specialist.

Where do you currently live and where do you worship?

I currently live in Grandchester, west of Ipswich. My personal worship occurs at St Paul’s, Ipswich, and I am working as a non-stipendiary Deacon in the Parish of Goodna.

How long have you been involved in the Anglican Church and in what roles?

The Anglican Church has always been part of my life – I was baptised as a newborn because no one was sure if I was going to survive. I have since worked in the Dioceses of Canberra-Goulburn, Newcastle and Southern Queensland. I have been a choir member; organist; Liturgical Assistant; Parish Council member, treasurer (never again!), secretary and Warden; and, Diocesan Council member.

What are your current roles, including any voluntary roles, and what do your roles involve?

I have just started working as a non-stipendiary Deacon in Goodna (although I still sing in the Cathedral and play the organ at St Paul’s). Ultimately, I would like to serve rural areas and areas of need as a non-stipendiary priest while continuing to work part time as a doctor.
What projects are you currently working on?

I am working with small groups within the Diocese, which is looking at diversity in the Church, and how collaborative leadership can be worked into the Formation programme.

What have been the highlights of your ACSQ service so far?

Presenting a Synod motion which aimed at supporting transgender children in Anglican schools, and having that motion passed. Being ordained!

What have been the key challenges of your roles so far and how have you worked through these?

Working through differences in opinions when it comes to various topics. The best outcomes have been when everyone has had a say and everyone has listened to each other. Coming to an agreement to disagree while remaining at peace with each other is the ultimate goal.

What are your plans and goals for the next 12 months?

Completing my Deacon’s year, finishing Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and aiming towards being priested. Oh, and passing my final ICU Specialist exams.

Can you tell us a little about your call to ordination?

I had not long moved to Queensland and was worshiping in a small semi-rural parish where I became Warden. As I became more involved in the running of the Parish, I felt that this was something that I would like to invest more of my time in. The ‘lightning bolt’ moment was when I read an ad (in FOCUS Magazine actually), from a parish in the far West begging for someone to celebrate a Christmas Eucharist with them. It was then I felt that I was being called to serve those people who otherwise wouldn’t have a priest to work with them.

What advice do you have for people who may feel a call to ordained ministry?

Don’t expect the road to always be smooth and straight. Be prepared to continually re-evaluate what God has in mind for you. Always try and keep a sense of joy in what you are doing.

How does your work as an intensive care doctor and your faith intersect?

When dealing with people who are critically ill (and their families), healthcare workers are in a very privileged position as they walk with the patients through some of their darkest moments. I draw strength from my faith to allow me to do that, and regardless of the patient’s background, I hope that I can provide a sense of peace and comfort.

Can you tell us a little about your personal faith journey?

I am an only child and was brought up to be an independent thinker. My Mother is a cradle Anglican whereas my Father is a self-proclaimed atheist. I was allowed to develop my own beliefs, and from a very young age decided for myself to go to church with Mum. It all grew from there.
How does your faith inspire you and shape your outlook, life choices and character?

My faith gives me strength, and it allows me to acknowledge God’s power and love. I hope that the choices I make in my life can then reflect the love of God so that others may understand the gift we are all offered.

What is your favourite scripture and why?

“By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” (Psalm 42.8)

During the day (or at night if on night shift!) in the ICU, I work in a world of noise and busyness with the love of God as my silent guide. But when the work is done and I am alone at home and offering up the challenges of the day, that love becomes my song which I sing back to God.

What person of faith inspires you the most and why?

I have been a Tertiary Franciscan for many years so I would have to say St Francis of Assisi. His approach towards God’s creation (including animals), and passion for peace resonate strongly with me. Julian of Norwich and Hilda of Whitby follow closely.
What are the primary strengths of the Church and what is the best way to make the most of these for the benefit of our communities?

I think the Church is at its best when it reaches out to people – people who are poor, oppressed, experiencing homelessness or otherwise living on the margins. There is no point keeping the glory of God’s love to ourselves – we need to share it in order for others to benefit.

What are the primary challenges currently encountered by the Church and what is the best way to overcome these for the benefit of our communities?

Disagreements over the approach towards some fundamental beliefs can be distressing for everyone. Learning to live with respect towards difference will be key.

How did you come to be a medal-winning Olympian?

Well, I started swimming for therapy as a child after hip surgery following septic arthritis which destroyed the bone and joint. I couldn’t walk, but I could swim. I got a bit carried away…

What is the kindest gesture you have ever received or witnessed?

A few years ago, I was upset and so I went to a mid-morning Communion service at St Paul’s, Ipswich to get some quiet time and space. At the time of Communion, the priest (The Rev’d Selina McMahon), who had met me all but twice over the prior two years, called me by my name as she gave me the host. I have been a member of that church ever since, and that parish has become my second family. Isaiah 43:1 resonates strongly with me: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name.”

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received and who gave you this advice?

"Whatever you do, do it for a reason" (The Rev’d Selina McMahon). This works equally well for liturgy, as well as for life. If there is purpose in your steps, people are less likely to doubt you. And you are less likely to doubt yourself.

What do you do in your free time to recharge and relax?

Various things – exercise, play an instrument, listen to music, walk the dogs.

If you found yourself on a deserted island, what three things would you choose to have with you?

Music, Pepsi-Max and a clear mind.

If you could have a billboard with any text on it, what would it say and why?

“Believe it or not, you are loved.”

What book have you given away most as a gift and why?

Sarah Bachelard’s book Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis. It is open, honest and extremely meaningful. It can be read in a single sitting if necessary.

Where do you do your best thinking?

On the train.
What’s your best childhood memory?

Going to the beach at Christmas time.

If you are having a bad day, what do you do to cheer yourself up?

Go home to my dogs and their unconditional love.

What day would you like to re-live and why?

The day I got my first puppy dog. That’s when I understood unconditional love.

What’s your unanswerable question – the question you are always asking yourself?

Now what?

News • Monday 21 December 2020 • By Julanne Clarke-Morris

Tonga’s noble solution for worship

Girls from Saint Andrew’s High School perform an action song during the Gloria at the consecration of Bishop Afa Vaka in September 2018. Worshippers in Tonga now have a revised Eucharist using a translation assisted by members of the country’s royal family

The new version of the Tongan Eucharistic liturgy in ‘A New Zealand Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa’ published in 2020 has taken a journey from rewriting to revising to double checking with royalty on its way to finding its current form.
The Tongan liturgy in this year’s new Prayer Book was translated through the efforts of eight translators: the Diocese of Polynesia’s translations coordinator Rev Sione Ululakepa, along with Viliami Folau, Kensington Fifita and retired priest Rev Epalahame Vea, with help from the late Rev Viliami Tohi, Archdeacon Pau Likiliki, Daniel Koloamatangi and Lionel Tu’inukuafe.

The new Tongan liturgy also drew in support from the Tongan royal family, through Hon Frederica Tuita Felipe who attends All Saints’ Anglican Church in Fasi and shared the translators’ work with The Princess Royal Salote Mafile’o Pilolevu Tuita.

The reason why the royal family was asked to consider the new texts was due to the question of what register the language for God should take in the Tongan language. Rev Sione explained that the first translations of the Prayer Book liturgy in Tongan – and those used by Tonga’s Wesleyan Church today – use the highest form of speech to address God, a language form usually reserved for royalty.

The Tongan language for royalty elevates the register of speech, and in doing so, the amount of words that must be used.

“So where in English the liturgy might say, “Come to us, be present Lord.” In Tongan it might say something more figurative or metaphorical, perhaps approaching “May you enter into our company with the majestic presence of your royal highness and radiant divinity,” said Fr Sione.

Rev Sione said that kind of language not only lengthened the liturgy, but also affected the theology of the Tongan version, by always placing God at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy.

“In parts of the Prayer Book, the Tongan priests wanted to use only the highest form of address for Jesus, but that meant the text lost sight of the humanity of Christ as a common person.”

“Jesus’ common humanity was denied by prayers only using the royal form of address – for example in the prayer of consecration.”

It didn’t help the Tongan translators that the most recent Bible Society translations of scripture have consistently stuck with only regal forms of address for the Trinity.

This is not a new conversation for Tongan Anglicans either. Back in the late 1980s under Archbishop Jabez Bryce’s oversight, a group of Tongan translators began the work on a new form of words for the Eucharist, and back then a new edition of the liturgy was authorised by Polynesia’s Diocesan Synod.

However, many priests found the new version didn’t sit well with them or their communities, and by 2017, at least seven different versions of the Page 404 Eucharistic liturgy were in regular use in Tongan.

Meanwhile, quite a few Tongan churches and schools began to skip the Tongan version altogether, instead defaulting to the English liturgy on page 404.

But Rev Sione says that approach failed to recognise the value of worshipping in Tongan – a problem the new translators set out to solve by finding a ‘middle way’.

“In the end we mixed the language between the two poles and ended up with the language for nobility. Through Hon Frederica Tuita Felipe we were able to consult the royal family, who agreed with the forms of address we had chosen in the new texts.”
Rev Sione says that with the new edition in 2020, the revised Prayer Book is a true gift for Polynesia, and it is a blessing they can share, too.

Rev Sione reports that on various occasions leaders from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga (Tonga’s de facto state church) love to use our Prayer Book. One recent example was when the Wesleyan President prayed from the Prayer Book at the 2020 birthday celebrations for the King of Tonga.

Fr Sione says Tongan Anglicans couldn’t be prouder that others recognise the value of the hard work that’s gone into the nuances of language and theology in this new book.

“It shows us what a treasure we have.”

First published on *anglican taonga* on 7 December 2020.
Sunday Devotion: 3 January 2021, Second Sunday after Christmas

For what can we praise God?

Main Readings: Jeremiah 31.7-14 or Sirach 24.1-12; Psalm 147.12-20; Ephesians 1.3-14; John 1.1-(9) 10-18

Supplementary Readings: Psalm 147.1-11; John 5.19-25; Isaiah 44.1-8, 21-23; Psalm 104.11-25;

“Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.” (Psalm 147.1)

When I first became a conscious believer in Jesus, I had great difficulty understanding how I could offer praise to God. I heard other Christians giving such praise; however, I was unable to do so.

Today’s reading from Psalm 147 ends with three words, “Praise the Lord!”, which also start the Psalm, as I have quoted above. The writer of the Psalm then lists the significant matters he encouraged Jews of his day to use as a guide for their praise of the Lord. I have learned from these sorts of lists to make my own list of items to enable me to give praise to the Lord, including strength to live, peaceful surrounds, nutritious and life-giving food, seasonal changes, sunshine and rain.

I have also added the great blessings every believer in Jesus receives because of his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Over the years I have kept such lists and added to them as I have read the Scriptures. When I read these lists, I can give praise to the Lord no matter what else may be going on around me or within me. The Apostles, Paul and John, help me a great deal to expand my list with what they have written in the two New Testament readings for today, Ephesians 1.3-14 and John 1.10-18.

You may struggle with some of the phrases used in these passages, but I want to encourage you to put into your own words the blessings Jesus brings you.
Sunday Devotions • Monday 21 December 2020 • By The Rev'd Canon Cheryl Selvage

Sunday Devotion: 10 January 2021, The Baptism of Our Lord

Belonging to and being loved by God

Main Readings: 
- Genesis 1.1-5
- Psalm 29
- Acts 19.1-7
- Mark 1.4-11

Supplementary Readings: 
- Psalm 111
- Romans 6.1-11
- Ezekiel 47.1-12
- Psalm 2
- John 1.19-34

“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” (Mark 1.11)

For as long as I can remember the sacrament of Baptism has always evoked in me a connection more spiritual than anything else. I guess for me, this started as a child while watching siblings and babies of local families I grew up with being baptised during the weekly St Jude’s, Everton Park service. The newly baptised infant was raised up for all the congregation to welcome into the family, and that enlivened in me a true sense of a loving, caring family.

Today’s Gospel reading reminds us that everyone has the call to baptism, even Jesus. It also reminds us that through baptism we are able to repent and claim forgiveness for sins. It reminds us that for those who have been baptised when young or who choose baptism when old enough to do so, the great joy that the heavens will proclaim is that we are children of God and loved by God.

I believe we all want to belong and know we are loved. This belief has seen me work in a wide variety of places and with a diverse range of people in the past 40 years. None have been more personally confronting than those with serious mental health and addiction challenges. To be able to smile in genuine love for a patient, who is skeletal, yellowing from drug addiction and toothless, and reassure them that they are indeed a child of God and so loved and precious is no less than a miracle.

Can you remind yourself today that you are a child of God? Can you also extend that grace to another you meet?
Sunday Devotions • Monday 21 December 2020 • By Pradeep Manickam

Sunday Devotion: 17 January 2021, Second Sunday after Epiphany

The first great preachers of the Gospel

Main Readings: 1 Samuel 3.1-10 (11-20); Psalm 139.1-5, 12-18; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20; John 1.43-51

Supplementary Readings: Psalm 119.129-136; John 4.1-14; Deuteronomy 10.12-11.1; Psalm 47; 1 John 2.3-11

"We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." (John 1.45)

Typically, whenever a position needs to be filled within an organisation, advertising is widely distributed so that the best person can be selected from as big a pool of possible candidates. This is obvious to all of us; however, in this week’s Gospel reading we get a sense of God’s unique providence as he selected the first great preachers and missionaries of the Gospel who started what is still being finished today before Jesus comes again.

This reading follows a simple account of Jesus collecting His first followers. We meet a small group of Jews who were true believers in the Old Testament as Jesus says of Nathaniel, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (John 1.47). We know Andrew, Philip, Peter, Nathaniel and John would have all been present. So, these five Galilean fishermen ultimately gave testimony on Jesus being the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour.

It’s an amazing reality, that the Lord chooses these insignificant people, and he doesn’t have to search through the whole country. He doesn’t have to find the best person in every city or every country. He can take four or five guys who know each other, that live in the same area, make their living the same way as fishermen and turn them into world changers.

Consider God’s divine nature in the selection of the disciples and the amazing fact that he can take anybody and use them for the purposes of advancing the kingdom, spreading the Gospel from one person to the next.
“Sing to Him a new song.” Or praise God through another instrument.