

Samaritan's Purse Emergency Response To Vanuatu Tragedy



A MULTINATIONAL team from Samaritan's Purse is on the ground in Vanuatu to bring relief after the terrible storm that wrought havoc across the nation. Tropical Cyclone Pam, a massive storm with winds up to 297 kph and torrential rain, battered the nation on Friday 13 March, causing 'complete devastation' to the island chain. Samaritan's Purse responded by sending a multinational team of disaster response experts from its international headquarters in the United States and offices in Australia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Over 70 tons of supplies and relief items are on the way, including shelter materials, clean water supplies and cooking kits to meet emergency needs for thousands of storm victims.

The organisation is also sending a medical team of two doctors and four nurses with medical supplies. The hospital in Port Vila was overwhelmed with patients, and some beds were moved outside due to fears the building is no longer safe. The medical team will be meeting critical needs by doing mobile medical care. 'What we're seeing is a major disaster,' said Patrick Seger, leader of the response team in Vanuatu. 'Food crops have been destroyed, fruit trees have been stripped off, pigs and chickens were swept away. They're saying people will be without food for months.'

'The electricity is out, the communications are down, the buildings are flattened, and people are in dire need,' said Ken Isaacs, Vice President of Programs and Government Relations for Samaritan's Purse.

For further information and to make donations go to: communications.samaritanpurse.org.au

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FOUNDER:
Eric J. Daley
(1910-1992)

EDITOR:
Rev Bob Thomas
Phone: 0417 592 646
Email: editor@nlife.com.au

BUSINESS MANAGER:
Mignon Goswell
Phone: 0434 313 646
Email: office@nlife.com.au

POSTAL ADDRESS:
PO Box 457
Mitcham VIC 3132

WEB-SITE:
www.nlife.com.au

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'And All The Trumpets Were Sounding ...'

YES they were – and all the cornets, trombones, tubas as well – when the Salvation Army farewelled its greatest daughter, General Eva Burrows, at a grand Thanksgiving Service in Melbourne Town Hall on 31 March. General Eva had been promoted to Glory on 20 March (see Obituary, p.10) and now the present General André Cox, his wife, Commissioner Silvia Cox, General Eva's family and the Commissioners of both the Eastern and Southern Territories of Australia had gathered with a large congregation to express their thanks to God for such a good and faithful servant and His grace so abundantly given to her.

Among the glowing tributes paid were those of the Rt Hon Robert Doyle, Lord Mayor of Melbourne ('General Eva was a "pocket rocket" who "fought the good fight and ran the straight race" – and what a fight, what a race it was!'); Commissioner Brian Morgan ('She was obsessed with Jesus, and said to me: "May Jesus Christ be praised"!'); Major Brendan Nottle ('The touch of Eva's hand on your arm made you feel like you were the only person in the room as she gave you her full attention; she saw everyone, high or low, as someone made in the image of God'); brother-in-law Dr Bram Southwell ('Eva was a Spirit-filled, soul-saving, people-serving person with a presence and spiritual authority').

General André Cox said that General Eva's had been an extraordinary life well lived. She had amazing grace, and whether she mixed with the high and mighty or the lowly, she simply saw them all as sheep for whom the Good Shepherd had died. Eva never lost a sense of wonder that God who is so powerful could condescend to meet with fallen humanity. Nevertheless, he reminded the congregation, we are 'in the world but not of the world' and this world is not our home. Heaven is our Home and we yearn to see our Saviour face to face, as Eva has now.

In *General Eva Burrows – A Commemorative Tribute*, distributed as the congregation dispersed, Eva herself has the last word: 'My life's conviction, my life's theme, has become in everything, Christ has the supremacy ... I have said that I do not preach Christianity, I preach Christ ... I have a dream of an Army that is spiritually vibrant, Biblically strong, culturally sensitive, evangelistically passionate, community concerned and Holy Spirit empowered.'

Surely all Christians would say 'Amen and amen!'

– Bob Thomas

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IRAN: Repression Escalates

A BALANCE of power existed in Mesopotamia (the 'Fertile Crescent' of Iraq-Syria) from 1918 to 2003, when the US-led coalition invaded Iraq and overthrew the minority Sunni-led regime. Since then, Shi'ite majority Iraq has essentially become an Iranian vassal, and Iran has become the ascendant regional hegemonic power. Today, as Islamic State pursues gains in Iraq, the only regional power fighting against IS with 'boots on the ground' is Iran.

After the mostly Shi'ite Iraqi army collapse in June 2014, Iraq's Shi'ite political and religious leaders called for Shi'ite volunteers to rise up and defend Baghdad and the Shi'ite holy places. Numerous Shi'ite militias emerged, backed by Iran and controlled by the Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps. Ultimately these Shi'ite militias will do Iran's bidding in Iraq, just as Hezbollah does in Lebanon. The West will not challenge the Iranian ascent as the West could not cope with Iranian retaliation.

As Iran's power has risen, its human rights record has deteriorated – from horrendous, to worse than horrendous – primarily due to the impunity it now enjoys. Virtually nobody is talking about human rights now that Iran is fighting IS and enriching uranium. Consequently the threat to political and religious dissidents is greater than ever and increasing all the time. This comes at a time when urban Iranians are rebelling: for example, by posting photos to social media of themselves dancing or without headscarves and so on. Iranians are also rejecting Islam in unprecedented numbers, with many coming to faith in Christ. Today the Iranian Church is one of the fastest growing Churches in the world.

The regime's response is to ramp up repression, and its power enables it to do so with impunity. One of Iran's most cruelly-treated Christian prisoners is Pastor Behnam Irani (42). Married with two children, Irani was close to death through 2013 before finally receiving surgery for internal injuries and bleeding intestinal ulcers. He has spent a lengthy time in solitary confinement, endured many beatings and recently had his prison term extended yet again. After completing his current sentence in Karaj, Irani will have to serve a further six years in Zabool (in the remote far eastern Iranian badlands on the Afghan border). He is now not due for release until 2023.

On Christmas Day 2014, the regime arrested nine believers worshipping in a house church in the city of Roudehen in Tehran Province. Their whereabouts remains unknown. At dawn that day the regime hanged seven prisoners in Shiraz. By the end of December 2014 an estimated 92 Christians were in jail in Iran, with only 13 serving court-issued sentences. On 16 February Iranian Intelligence agents raided the homes of house-church Christians, Saheb Fadaie, Yasser Mosayebzadeh and Mehdi Reza Omidi. Omidi has been arrested before, spending time in detention in 2012 and receiving 80 lashes in late 2013 for drinking communion wine and owning a satellite dish. After confiscating Bibles, laptops and other materials, the security agents ordered the believers to report for questioning. When they did, officials advised them to leave Iran.

In the early hours of 4 March Iran hanged six Sunni Kurds at Rajai Shahr Prison for the crime of 'enmity of God'. The hangings have shaken those who had come to know the men at Rajai Shahr Prison, including Pastor Saeed Abedini (36, a US citizen). Arrested in July 2012, Abedini has been in Rajai Shahr Prison since November 2013. Abedini's family in Iran visited him in prison on the day of the hangings. His wife Naghmeh (in the US) reports that her husband was deeply shaken, very emotional and missing his children greatly. Doubtless his emotional fragility is also aggravated due to the routine violence in Rajai Shahr (a super-maximum prison housing Iran's most violent criminals) which has left Abedini with internal injuries.

Also imprisoned in Rajai Shahr is Pastor Farshid Fathi (35). Arrested in December 2010, Fathi was transferred to Rajai Shahr in August 2014. *Mohabat News* reports that on 5 March the imam of the ward in which Fathi is detained ordered his Bible to be confiscated. When Fathi protested the imam filed a complaint, accusing Fathi of insulting him. If Fathi is found guilty of insulting the imam, he could have two years added to his sentence. He has already had one year added to his six-year sentence, a decision he is appealing. His wife and two children fled to Canada in 2011. During his fourth Christmas in prison (2014) Fathi wrote to his family and supporters: 'Although the beauty of Christmas or the signs of Christmas cannot be found in this prison, with the ears of faith I can hear the everlasting and beautiful truth: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him "Immanuel".' The letter is signed, 'Your captive brother, who is free in Christ.'

– Elizabeth Kendal, author of

Turn Back The Battle: Isaiah Speaks To Christians Today.

Please Pray That Almighty God Will:

- Continue building His Church in Iran. As Jesus promised: 'I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'
- Impart great wisdom and grace to the Iranian Church so that believers will navigate the risks, endure through persecution and continue to 'shine as lights in the world'.
- Reveal Himself inside Iran's prisons as He surrounds, comforts, strengthens and lifts up, as if on eagle's wings, all who put their faith in Him; may Iran's Christian prisoners be profoundly aware of God's eternal presence and everlasting love and may they radiate His glory as they prove that nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. (from Romans 8.38,39 ESV).

Haemorrhaging Faith Conference, Melbourne

THE *Haemorrhaging Faith Conference* ran in Melbourne in early March, hosted by the Baptist Union of Victoria. It was held with the purpose of 'revealing important research into why youth and young adults are leaving the church and what we can do to arrest that trend'. *Haemorrhaging Faith* started as a sociological study in Canada which investigated why young people raised in the church decide to either continue in their faith, or leave the church, but James Young, reporter for Press Service International, found that it raised challenging issues for the Church in Australia too ...

Four Kinds Of Spiritual Orientation Among The Young

The *Haemorrhaging Faith* research interviewed 2,049 young people and identified four kinds of spiritual orientations in students and young adults:

- 1. Engagers (23%),** who are active in the church and open to God. They had overwhelmingly experienced answered prayers, the love of God and emotional healing in the church.
- 2. Fence Sitters (36%),** who tend to have religious affiliation but have not claimed it as their own. Many had experienced God, but for some reason have not committed to Christianity.
- 3. Wanderers (26%),** who have Christian heritage through being involved with the church as a child, but would not describe themselves as Christian. They generally have a positive view of Christianity.
- 4. Rejecters (15%),** while wanderers have a positive view of Christianity despite not being Christians, rejecters have a strongly negative view of the church and have completely rejected it.

In response to the research outlined above, Rowan Lewis of Whitley College asked the question: Is Australia haemorrhaging faith as well? Lewis thinks that we are. Although there are significant gaps in the research in Australia, two major Australian research projects have pointed to similar findings: *The Australian Youth Spirituality Survey* undertaken by Phillip Hughes and *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow* by John Bodycomb. Throughout this research, statistics pointed to haemorrhaging faith in the Australian church, such as increasing statistical under-representation of individuals aged 15-39 in the Australian church and 50,000 youth and young adults drifting away from the Christian faith annually. So how do we move forward in a landscape where teenagers and young adults are leaving the church in landmark numbers?

Identifying Barriers To Church Attendance

The *Haemorrhaging Faith* research discovered four common barriers to church attendance and the factors that motivated engagers to grow in their faith:

- 1. Parents: engaged or disengaged?** The faith commitment of parents has an enormous impact on the faith and church participation of their children. If parents prayed more than just at meals, talked freely about their faith and the Bible, served together at church, worshipped openly and could wrestle with tough questions, the children were more likely to live their faith out and attend church in their adult years.
- 2. God: experienced or unexperienced?** This generation recognizes truth from their experiences. If they don't experience God, then for them, He does not exist. For many, God did not exist because He did not answer their prayers as expected. This was particularly true when the young adult had experienced relatives dying or friends who had committed suicide.
- 3. Church community: alive or dead?** For many teenagers, God is not the problem, it's the Church. They have grown up valuing friendship and intimacy and if their church falls short in these areas, they leave. Young adults see hypocrisy and being inauthentic as a sign of a dead or dying community. They know we are not perfect, but if we make a mistake, we need to admit it and apologize.
- 4. Teaching: empowering or restrictive?** Many young adults leave the Church because they believe that what the Church preaches is behind the times. There are several topics that young adults feel the church is

being left behind on including: sex, porn, marriage, homosexuality, gender roles. They see the Church as having shied away from confronting these topics head-on. Young adults want the Church to say what it means, and mean what it says. — *Jimmy Young is a writer and youth pastor from Melbourne who loves the church and youth ministry. Republished from Christian Today.*

Christian Writer's Comp

SparkLit.org ('igniting Christian writers') invites entries for this year's Australian Christian Literature Awards from under-30's for Young Australian Writer and under 18's for Australian Christian Teen Writer. Entries close 31 May. For more info contact Michael Collie 0423 244 481 or go to: awards@SparkLit.org

FROM ALL QUARTERS ...

High School SRE Goes Hi-Tech At Hay

SEVERAL months ago, Bush Church Aid, in conjunction with Generate Ministries, appointed two field staff to work with local churches to implement Special Religious Education classes in

more NSW secondary schools. At their request, the NSW Department of Education has now approved a pilot program to deliver SRE by distance education into some Central Schools and small high schools.

Hay High School has been selected as part of the pilot group, with the Principal being very supportive. Cheryl Hallinan is the BCA person organising this for Hay and she is hoping that Year 7 and 8 can have one SRE lesson per week from the start of 2016.

The idea is for the SRE teacher to deliver the lesson over the internet. She will see and hear the class and the class will see and hear her and the material she presents. Small schools are already used to this method for other lessons. The plan also requires a local Christian volunteer to be in the classroom during the lesson.

BCA asks for prayer for the implementation and continuation of this whole process in your prayers as they are very excited by this development which will provide continued Christian education for the children in Hay Public School. Please also thank God for the leadership of the Rev Wayne Sheean from Deniliquin, the visiting Priest in Charge, as he and Bishop Rob Gillion explore options for on-going oversight of the parish. Pray for the Rev Wayne Sheean, who has just been diagnosed with diabetes, for wisdom regarding his work load.

– Peter and Lee Caspersonn



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FREE ONLINE EASY-TO-READ BIBLE COMPLETED

AN easy-to-read version of the Bible, which uses a vocabulary of just 1,200 words, has now been completed. The culmination of 20 years' work, it is freely available online. The project began in the early 1990's at the request of an overseas mission worker wanting Bible commentaries, which most people with rudimentary English in her region could read. The result is the *EasyEnglish Bible* and commentaries, which has been compiled by a team of volunteers, all members of MissionAssist.

Formerly known as Wycliffe Associates UK, MissionAssist helps overseas Christian mission workers advance the Gospel and make Scripture accessible wherever they are in the world. Working in their own homes, its volunteers provide many practical, academic, and administrative services, at no cost to the mission worker.

To compile the new Bible and commentaries, it was realised that a new subset of English, which follows forms of grammar to help express complex ideas in simpler words and sentences, was needed. The rules followed included the use of one topic per paragraph, no passive verbs, split infinitives, idioms, rhetorical questions, or ambiguous pronouns. 'A trial with Psalm 100 proved a success, so the work was extended, not just to the rest of Psalms but to the whole Bible,' recalls John Williams, who has worked on the project from the beginning. A team of translators, writers, linguistic, and theological checkers was recruited and, as each book and commentary was completed, it was put online at www.easyenglish.info. The website is now getting more than five million visits a year and includes that first psalm as translated!' he adds.



John Williams, right, with EE Bible team co-ordinators Chris and Lynn Holt

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Two DVD covers are shown. The left one is 'Worms & Germs' with a red and black cover. The right one is 'Debate Christians Should Reject Evolution!' with a red and white cover. Below the covers is a photo of John Mackay, the director of the debate.

'TAKING IT TO THE STREETS'

Palm Sunday Procession Takes Easter Message To The Heart Of Harbour-Side City

TOURISTS and diners may have come to Sydney's Circular Quay to savour fine food and weather but it was Wesley Mission's re-enactment of Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday that had thousands of harbour-side patrons downing their forks and grabbing their cameras.

Dressed in impressive period costume, Jesus, played by 23 year-old drama student Brendan Paul, rode a donkey around the Circular Quay foreshore followed by hundreds of palm-waving followers who praised their King of Kings in song and music as they made their way through lively lunch-time crowds.

All About Jesus

'It's about Jesus ... it's Palm Sunday,' one father explained to his young son. Others viewed from a distance, perplexed but engaged in a modern-day sequel that began the 2015 Holy Week activities for Wesley Mission.

After heading along the eastern foreshore the procession then moved west across the Quay to end at First Fleet Park where people enjoyed an outdoor celebration, including drama and musical performances from various artists as well as Wesley Mission's Chinese and Samoan choirs.

'The reality of Palm Sunday is that it is the way of the cross,' Wesley Mission Superintendent the Rev Dr Keith Garner said. 'Today is not just a time for donkeys, grasping palm branches, or even celebratory music; it is a day to recognise that what lies ahead is for the salvation of the world! The truth that God so loved the world and gave His only son remains meaningful for us today. We have to find ways of communicating this wonderful news to a whole new generation of people. We can reflect with great thankfulness that Jesus has given us His great love, laid down His life, and opened up a whole new world through His resurrection.'

The occasion began a week of powerful Easter events, re-enactments and more than 25 worship services at Wesley Mission.

— Graeme Cole, Wesley Mission, www.wesleymission.org.au via Worldwide Photos



The Rev Dr Keith Garner (left) with Carol Garner and 'Jesus' played by Brendan Paul. Photo: Murray Harris

Read: *God's Way Of Saving Sinners* by David Holden
www.defenceofthefaith.org

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DAY 1

Abp Responds To The Issue Of Churches And Domestic Violence

'THERE is no biblical justification, in any circumstance, for domestic violence,' declares Dr Glenn Davies, Archbishop of Sydney. 'The classic Christian understanding of a husband's loving, sacrificial, servant-like leadership leaves absolutely no room for violence or fear.'

'We would be very open to participating in a cross-denominational survey of domestic violence issues, benchmarked with society in general. Whether or not such a survey is conducted, we will continue to speak out against domestic violence through education, training and advocacy. I also encourage our ministers to explore this issue further with their congregations, making them more aware of the problem and the necessity of properly dealing with specific cases wherever they may be found.'

– Russell Powell, Anglican Media

Homelessness Bodies Welcome Extension Of NPAH Funding

BRISBANE-based community organisation Micah Projects has welcomed the announcement of a two-year extension in funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. Karyn Walsh, CEO of Micah Projects, said 'It is a relief to know that we will not have to cease services to very vulnerable people in Brisbane, and that we can continue to build the partnerships that have been so successful in ensuring that people living on the streets can access housing and services in a more timely model.' Ms Walsh said that Micah Projects would welcome the opportunity to show both Commonwealth and State representatives the benefits and achievements of their programs over the past four years.

Ms Walsh pointed to the resounding success of the *500 Lives, 500 Homes Campaign*, which involves a collaboration of more than 30 community groups, NFP organisations and Government Departments. 'In March 2014, the campaign identified 961 people in Brisbane who were homeless or vulnerably housed,' said Ms Walsh. 'Over the course of the partnership, a total of 150 new households have been established, including 107 individuals and 43 families with 92 children, as a direct result of this campaign, and we are on target to house 500 people over the three years of the campaign.'

The results of the partnership agreement in Brisbane are: *50 Lives, 50 Homes* campaign began in 2010 with a base-line register of 701 people homeless or vulnerably housed. By 2013, the campaign had housed 238 people; annual onsite support of 146 tenants at Brisbane Common Ground; 675 households prevented from becoming homeless through support and assistance over five years.

Ms Walsh said that these results can be replicated in multiple programs across the state.

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Claim The Date: Gary Miller To Lead Preaching Seminar

THE Fellowship Of Congregational Churches will hold a Preaching Seminar with Rev Dr Gary Millar from 7-9.30pm on Thursday 3 September in Bexley Congregational Church, 626 Forest Rd, Bexley South. Rev Dr Gary Millar has been Principal of Queensland Theological College since the start of 2012. After studying chemistry in his home city of Belfast, Gary moved to Aberdeen in Scotland to study theology, before completing a DPhil at Oxford on Deuteronomy (published as *Now Choose Life* in the series *New Studies In Biblical Theology*). Gary worked as a pastor for the next 17 years in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and was involved in both church revitalization and church planting, before moving to Brisbane to lead the team at QTC. Gary teaches Old Testament, Biblical Theology and Preaching, and preaches most weeks in college chapel. In 2013, along with Phil Campbell, Gary wrote *Saving Eutychus*, a highly acclaimed book on preaching. His most recent publication is *Jesus Betrayed And Crucified In His Mission: Jesus In The Gospel Of Luke* (ed D.A. Carson and K. Nielsen), the published addresses from the 2013 Gospel Coalition Conference in Orlando, Florida. Phone (02) 9588 5128 for further details.

David Cook, PCA Moderator General, Appeals For Vanuatu

NO doubt in coming days there will be many opportunities for Christians to donate for appeals for the people of Vanuatu as they feel led. The first to hand is from David Cook, Presbyterian Moderator General, who writes: The Presbyterian Church of Australia has a unique relationship with the Church in Vanuatu, we have a long history of Ni Vanuatuan students training for ministry in Australia, and have had a strong connection with the Bible Training College in Talua. At this stage we don't know about loss at Talua, the worst impact of the cyclone was in the south, whereas Talua is in the north, but please pray for Vanuatu, pray for relief to be provided, pray that there will be selfless rescue and generous love shown both from those on the ground in Vanuatu and neighbouring nations. There has been wide-spread damage and it is feared much loss of life.

I therefore urge all Ministers and Sessions to

Easter Service 05/04/15

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bring this need before your congregations both for prayer and financial gifts. Cheques should be made payable to: Moderator General's Disaster Relief Appeal, and remitted to: Presbyterian Church Office, PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012.

The Direct Deposit details for the Moderator General's Disaster Relief Appeal Fund are: BSB: 032-000. Account number: 003988 Account Name: Presbyterian Funds Please write the word 'Vanuatu' in the 'Description' box on the bank transfer page.

Geneva Push Invites You To ...

... meet Mikey and Amy Nhieu, planters of Chapel Hill Church, Rozelle, Sydney. It's been almost a month since they launched and you can check out the video to find out more about Chapel Hill and their story. Craig Tucker, Director of Geneva Push, says: 'Please continue to pray for this church as it seeks to glorify God and preach the Gospel to Rozelle. <https://vimeo.com/122613358>

For The Artistically Inclined ...

REVESBY Congregational Church, 82 The River Road, Revesby, holds CREATEART Group on Mondays 9.30-11.30am. Amanda Hunt will be on hand for any tips or advice. No formal class, just come along and have fun! For more information contact: Amanda Hunt: ahunt@oddsocks.net or phone (02) 9773 9028.



For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV

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'PROMOTED TO GLORY' ...

Eva Burrows, 'The People's General', Passes On

THE Salvation Army announces with sadness the passing of General Eva Burrows in Melbourne at 11.30pm on 20 March 2015, aged 85. 'General Eva' was world leader of The Salvation Army from 1986 to 1993 and the second woman in history to act as General. The current General, Andre Cox has stated, 'We give thanks to God for the life, inspiration and leadership of General Eva Burrows. Her life influenced the lives of countless people to shape The Salvation Army across the world. I salute a true servant of God!'



Eva Evelyn Burrows AC was born in Newcastle, NSW, on 15 September 1929 as one of nine children. She completed High School at Brisbane State High and went on to obtain a BA degree at The University of Qld, graduating in 1950. A year later she began training as a Salvation Army Officer, which she continued for the rest of her life with appointments all around the world including Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Great Britain and Australia.

General Eva was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia on Australia Day 1986 'In recognition of service to the temporal and spiritual welfare of the community and to social justice as the world leader of The Salvation Army'. In 1994 the AO was upgraded to Companion of the Order. On 1 January 2001 General Burrows received a Centenary Medal 'for service to the Australian community'.

Commissioner Floyd Tidd from Australia Southern Territory says, 'General Eva Burrows was an inspiring, respected and loved colleague with an exemplary record of international service for The Salvation Army. She was universally recognised as a very strong leader with a unique spiritual authority. She will be sorely missed.'

In retirement she was an active worker at The Salvation Army 614 Project in Bourke St Melbourne which caters specifically for homeless and marginalised people. Commanding Officer Major Brendan Nottle says 'General Eva Burrows was the absolute epitome of what it means to be a true Salvation Army Officer. She was deeply interested and passionate about every aspect of people's being, no matter what level of society they were from. Anyone who met her always felt valued, respected and deeply appreciated.'

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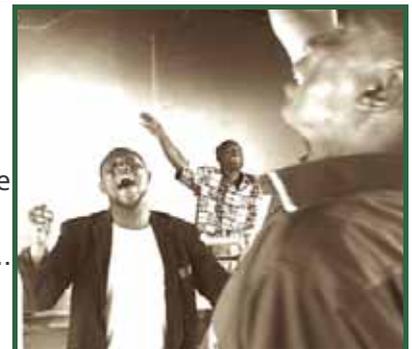
PERSECUTION WATCH

NIGER: Addressing Fear With Faith

PERSECUTED Christians in the West African country of Niger are reported to be 'very upbeat' despite recent attacks in their country. 'We've only lost things, they told International Mission Board strategy leader, Greg Dorsey. 'We've not lost the church, just some buildings.' Dorsey expressed gratitude that recent violence at the hands of angry Muslims was targeted at buildings, not people. 'There is a sense that this is the time for the church, that ... what was meant for evil, God intends for good,' he continued. 'Instead of seeking retaliation or revenge, even believers who lost their homes and possessions are confident that "God is good and Jesus is still Lord".'

'They're standing firm,' Dorsey said, and fellow strategy leader Brian Foshee echoed the sentiment. 'They see ... this is how we can demonstrate what it means to follow Christ and what we do if we're going to follow up what we believe with our actions.'

'It was also encouraging to see that at least one public statement has been made by a representative of the evangelical churches in Niamey, where they publicly stated on radio and television that they forgave those who did all the damage and the burnings. That was pretty powerful.'



Praising the Lord in the face of persecution in Niger.

(Photo courtesy International Mission Board)

PAKISTAN: Two Churches Bombed In Lahore

INITIAL reports indicate that at least 14 people were killed and 68 wounded after two churches were bombed on 15 March in Youhanabad, a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore, Pakistan. Christian Solidarity Worldwide is calling for the perpetrators to be apprehended and held to account, and for the Pakistani government to learn the lessons from the 2013 twin suicide attacks on All Saints Church in Peshawar, that killed 180 people. The government has yet to fulfill its pledge to bring justice to the victims, including delivering on its pledge of compensation. These attacks draw attention to concerns about the security of churches and Christian institutions in the country. Religious minorities in Pakistan face pervasive societal and institutional discrimination and the threat of violence, fuelled in part by expressions of religious hatred, or hate speech.

A LARGE number of Christian youths in the Youhannabad area of Lahore are being arrested and according to some reports, possibly being maltreated in police custody. Please pray for these young men. Possibly more than 300 might have been detained. The arrests follow the death of two Muslims, suspected of being terrorists, at the hands of a mob incensed by the bombing of two churches in Youhannabad on 15 March 15. Please continue to pray for calm in the area and that the authorities would act with fairness and justice.

– *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* www.csw.org.uk

INDIA: God's Word Is Not Returning Void

EVEN though persecution, beatings, and threats to believers continue, the body of Christ is growing in India. A pastor was dragged outside his house by

Hindu militant nationalists who threatened to burn him alive if he did not stop preaching about Jesus. Despite these kinds of attacks, he continues to share the Gospel.

BANGLADESH: Dramatic Change Of Heart

BELIEVERS in Bangladesh were kicked out of their village a few months ago because they were sharing Christ with others. Bruce Allen of Forgotten Missionaries International recently got an update from Pastor Arjun. 'An amazing thing has happened: the village leader has reversed his decision. We are now free to stay.'

– *Mission Network News*

MEXICO: Protestants Imprisoned And Forcibly Displaced

TWO men in Hidalgo State, Mexico, were arbitrarily imprisoned and then expelled from their community, along with their families, after refusing to renounce their religious beliefs on 12 March. Casto Hernández Hernández and his cousin Juan Placido Hernández, both Protestant Christians, were imprisoned for approximately 30 hours by village officials in Chichiltepec village, Tlanchinol Municipality, the region in which the religious freedom violations took place. The efforts to expel the men were led by local leaders, including the village delegate, Jesús Domínguez Hernández.

A campaign targeting the Protestant minority began in April 2014 when the village authorities attempted to force them to sign a document prohibiting them from belonging to any non-Roman Catholic religion. The Protestants refused to do so, but the village leaders signed the document, which they claimed was binding on the community.

– *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*

A HISTORICAL FIRST

Nurse Makes History At Minlaton

A NURSE from the small Minlaton congregation on South Australia's Yorke Peninsula is the first person to complete the Distance Education version of the Lutheran church's *Introduction To Pastoral Care Nursing* course. Glenda Butler received her graduation certificate from the Lutheran Church of Australia's Parish Nursing Co-ordinator, Lynette Wiebusch, in a service at St Andrew's on 1 March. She was installed as the congregation's Pastoral Care Nurse in the same service by local pastor, the Rev Peter Fuhlbohm.

Pastoral Care Nursing is a role in which an experienced nurse, with some theological and other role-specific education, serves in a wholistic ministry. Minlaton is the 21st Lutheran congregation/parish or institution in Australia to appoint a Pastoral Care Nurse.

The main focus of Glenda's ministry will be members of the Minlaton church and community, but the parish has also made provision for her to make visits to members of the other congregation in the parish — St Paul's, Yorketown — as needed. The Distance Education course is a guided reading program, based on a book by the late Dr Granger Westberg, and a manual that guides the student through 16 modules. Interaction between student and course leaders is by phone or email. Topics covered include *Biblical Perspectives On Health And Healing*, *Models Of Pastoral Care Nursing*, *Care And Prayer*, *Resources For Pastoral Care Nursing* and *Partnering With The Pastor*. Information about Pastoral Care Nursing or the introductory course is available from: lynette.wiebusch@lca.org.au



(L-R) Lynette Wiebusch, Glenda Butler, the Rev Peter Fuhlbohm.



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Assyrian Christians Flee From Jihadists To Southeast Turkey

AN ISIS offensive begun in late February against Syria's dwindling Assyrian Christian population is accelerating a steady trickle of Christian refugees trying desperately to reach safety in Turkey, northern Iraq and Lebanon. But, according to World Watch Monitor (<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org>), their future is far from guaranteed as refugees in Muslim-majority Turkey, where according to Turkish press reports, the government recently dug a trench on the Turkish side of the border and sealed off the two border crossings with Syria on 9 March.

'Most Assyrian Christians escaping from IS and other jihadist groups now controlling huge swaths of northeast Syria over the past two years have made their way to Mardin and Midyat, two cities in south-eastern Turkey's historical homeland of Syriac Orthodox Christianity,' said World Watch Monitor. 'Although the Christian population has dwindled here to only 3,500, ancient monasteries and churches still dot the city skylines. The mother tongue of Syria's Assyrian Christians, who are known as Syriacs in Turkey, is closely related to Aramaic, the language of Jesus.'

– Dan Wooding, Founder of ASSIST News Service

A Day To Remember

WILLIAM Wilberforce Foundation reminds us that on 25 March 1807 the *Slave Trade Act* passed, abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire. It was a major victory for abolitionists and for William Wilberforce who led the campaign, having joined the cause of abolition two decades earlier. 'We hope this victory continues to inspire every modern-day abolitionist', reports the Foundation.

– Shared by Dr Rhys Bezzant on Facebook



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'...We...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.' (Galatians 2.16)

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Are You Ready For 'The Day'? Romans 14.1-12

EVERY church fellowship is made up of people from different backgrounds; ours is a unity in diversity. The Church in Rome was a good example of such diversity, and if it were not handled sensitively it could become disruptive of Christian unity.

In this church there were believers from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. The Jewish believers were bound by a law-influenced conscience to observe food regulations (v2) and special days (v5). The Gentiles had no such scruples. Paul urged each to accept one another, to warmly take each other as companions, just as God had accepted them into His fellowship (v3; cf 15.17).

Each person is specifically warned in v3. The Gentile (the stronger) must not be superior and look down on the tradition-bound Jewish believer (the weaker), and the Jew must not condemn the uninhibited Gentile by slandering him as worldly. Rather, there is to be warm acceptance. Paul calls the issues which have a tendency to divide 'disputable matters' (v1).

What Are These Matters?

First, they are the matters listed here: food (v2), days (v5) and drink (v21). 'Days' includes Sabbath observance, for if Paul saw the Fourth Commandment as still applicable he would not have included it among the disputable matters.

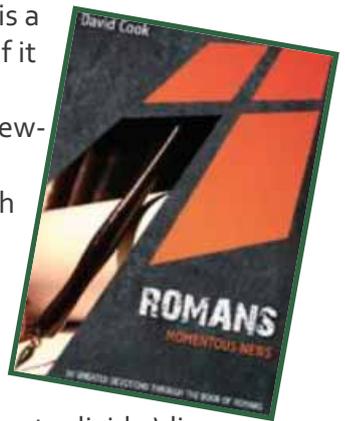
Second, they are those matters on which the Bible does not speak, or speaks in an open way, so as to allow believers to have differing views and yet still be attached to Christ.

These may include differing views of parenting, schooling, politics, church government, sacraments or music. We must be careful to recognise disputable matters and not make every issue a Gospel issue, or indisputable. Making disputable matters indisputable is easy to do and doesn't require a lot of thought, yet it is disruptive of fellowship and energy-sapping to spend time arguing over non-essential matters. We must also be careful not to turn indisputable matters into disputable ones. The confessing church in Nazi Germany did this when it asked Jewish believers not to attend church, respecting the conscience of the weaker brothers, in this case non-Jewish believers who were Nazis. Such a request turned an indisputable matter, that all believers whatever background, are welcome into the fellowship, into a disputable one.

We must be sure that in the local fellowship we work hard to maintain unity and at the same time respect our diversity by recognising that we can be different in so many ways and yet still be one in Christ. The foundation of our fellowship is not found in any cultural, political or denominational expression, but in the fact that Christ died and rose for us and that we are in Him (v9).

FOR REFLECTION:

How can you work to maintain unity in your local church and at the same time respect the diversity of those within the fellowship? Is your church known for its warm acceptance of all believers?



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Better Late Than Never

These guys ask for prayer for a court case held on 21 March for witnessing for Christ.



Thanks for your prayers and help, please pray for our Court Hearing (on 21st March 15)
 We were arrested during distributing Bible tracts to Muslims in Delhi by the Delhi Police on 5th September 14, spent four and half months in jail and were released on bail in January 2015.
 We need your prayers and support for the closure of our case on 21st March 2015.

BOOKS WORTH READING

BONHOEFFER AS YOUTH WORKER: A Theological Vision For Discipleship And Life Together, Andrew Root, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8010-4905-7.

THE German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a youth worker, claims Andrew Root, having several significant ministries to youth during the key period of his life (1925-1939) when Bonhoeffer made work with youth a ministry priority. In taking up this work, he was a world away from the stereotypical method-orientated youth leader. He remained a theologian even as he ministered to youth, seeking to find God's revelation of Himself in the concrete experiences of young lives. This is why youth ministry is both challenging and rewarding: young people demand a theology connected to life and are only interested in the God in Christ who is part and parcel of their daily lives.

Andrew Root also argues that Bonhoeffer's work as a theologian was impacted by his work with youth, and he views previous biographies of Bonhoeffer as underrating this connection. He explores Bonhoeffer's place in his family as one of the younger siblings and how that caused him to emphasise relationships and community. His doctoral studies concerned the church as a social reality, and in 1925 he started the time-consuming ministry of teaching a Sunday school class, discovering that theology that could not be explained to children was not worth anything! On the same basis, for the 11 years I taught Old Testament to theological students in Melbourne, I also took a weekly SRI class at a local primary school.

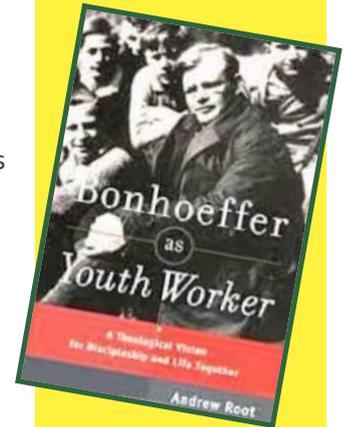
Bonhoeffer saw it as theologically illegitimate to isolate children's ministry from the mainstream life of the church. During his year in the German Evangelical Church in Barcelona, he started a youth group, and we see and learn from Bonhoeffer as he ministers to a ten year old boy whose beloved dog has just died. Following Jesus, Bonhoeffer makes the child the form and pattern of Christian discipleship.

Next, he spent a year in America and worshipped in an African-American church in Harlem, New York. He discovered a love for the music of Spirituals, which express an experience of God in the face of exclusion and unjust suffering. Then, he started lecturing and also taking a confirmation class for 50 boys in a working class district of Berlin, telling stories from the Bible and his own life of faith. This youth ministry was the catalyst for the underground Confessing Church Seminary at Finkenwalde, of which Bonhoeffer was Principal. Bonhoeffer opposed Hitler's control of the Church and exploitation of Germany's youth movements.

Then, a pastorate at the German-speaking church in London provided opportunity for wider church contacts that helped spread the news about the church struggle in Germany. Bonhoeffer did not see youth culture as a way to rejuvenate church life, but believed that the Word of God must always be the focus. This means that having lots of young people is not an infallible sign of a vibrant church. As well, the youth worker is not to exacerbate the generation gap but instead bring youth and adults together in prayer and under the Word. The danger of a Christian youth culture, warns Andrew Root, is that, on entering adulthood, youth will throw off their 'Christianity' as a juvenile stage they have left. Sadly, that is something we see far too often.

Bonhoeffer's illegal seminary in Finkenwalde was part monastic (meditation, confession) and part youth work (sports), and through both means he sought to foster a rich community life from 1935 to 1937. It was closed by the Gestapo. Drawing on his Finkenwalde experiences, Bonhoeffer wrote his immensely popular book *Life Together* (1938). Again he prepared some young people for confirmation, not viewing this as a celebration of youthful enthusiasm for Christ, but emphasising the weakness of our faith that means that we must continually learn of the real Jesus Christ who will be found in struggle and persecution. Bonhoeffer in his Tegel prison writings and letters makes use of the child and youth in his theological explorations. In the final chapters, Root draws lessons for youth workers from Bonhoeffer's books, *Discipleship* and *Life Together*, warning against cheap grace, and replacing it with the costly call to follow Jesus in a lifelong discovery of what that means in concrete situations. True community will not be free of discord, and a false idealism is to be rejected, for it only leads pastors to complain about their all-too-imperfect church members.

– Greg Goswell



'This is why youth ministry is both challenging and rewarding: young people demand a theology connected to life, and are only interested in the God in Christ who is part and parcel of their daily lives.'

BOOKS WORTH READING

JESUS AT WORK – A Call To The People Of God, Peter J. Blackburn, Xlibris.com.au, 2014.

PETER Blackburn, a retired evangelical Minister of the Uniting Church, developed a series of sermons into this book of four sections: *Building His Church; Growing His Body; Gathering His Harvest; Coming Again*. The main theme is that Jesus Christ is at work in the world through His Word – believed, lived and witnessed to by His people in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a challenge to Christians to realise that Jesus always has been at work carrying out the eternal purpose of God the Father through the gift of the Holy Spirit, freely given to all who receive the Good News, trust Jesus as Saviour and serve Him as Lord. They are His body, the Church, which Jesus is building. Christians are reminded of their calling to obey Jesus' new commandment to love their fellow believers and thus to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel to others around them. But there is no ecumenical agenda here, for 'there are new challenges in the early 21st Century that force us to reconsider our assumptions' (p.63).

We are urged to consider how we think of the Church: 'By defining the church in organisational terms ... we may be missing the point of what Jesus said and what He is doing' (p.166). At the same time Christian churches need structures and pastoral leadership, yet Christians will need always to guard against structures becoming an end to be preserved, while the real work to which Christ calls them is sidelined.

Sincere Christians from the broad spectrum of churches will not find much to disagree with here. The overall message and challenge of this book is one that all Christians and churches need to hear again.

The final section urges us on in the sure hope of a glorious fulfilment to the work of Jesus Christ, and thus to faithfulness in our present service of the Lord in the here and now. 'The Lord is faithful! May we all know His grace, His presence, His enabling, His work in and through us – till He returns' (p.173).

– Rev David Secomb

Clean Comedy Hub – A Clean Little Corner At Melbourne Comedy Festival

THERE will be no swearing, no racism, no vilification at the *Clean Comedy Hub*, at the Arrow On Swanston Venue, 488 Swanston St, Carlton, from 25 March to 19 April. The program includes: *47 Minutes In Heaven* (contact: John Leung, 0410 603 856 for details); *Phi And Me* (contact: Diana Nguyen, 0422 205 481); *Jonestown* (contact: Hannah Watkins 0411 362 727); *Kids' Party Confidential* (contact: Sean Murphy 0424 066 662); *A Hard Day's Night Of Beatles Parodies* (contact: Stew Walker 0419 889 675); *Live And Let Spy* (contact: Ed Dolista 0419 322 581).

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