



National Women's Conference participants from around Australia celebrated "Life Together" on the Gold Coast, in May. Tammy Tkach (top right) was the special guest speaker.

PHOTOS: SARAH JORDISON

Together in Life ...

The articles in this issue highlight a central feature of our Christian lives: we're in this life together! And that gives us continuing cause for gratitude and celebration. From the national women's conference to the congregational outreach activities in Mooroolbark, Invercargill, Brisbane, Gold Coast and Toowoomba that are highlighted in this issue, there's a clear message that we "live and breathe and have our being" (Acts 17:28) in the God who has given us Life – Life to be lived and shared. Life shared together in our churches and in our communities.

Inside

Freed for fellowship
Youth ministry
Bags of care
European conference





JOHN MCLEAN

National Director (Australia)

The Holy Spirit
is the spirit of
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relational

Freed for fellowship

By John McLean

Tasmania is a spectacular part of our nation. Phil Hopwood pastors a group of wonderful people in our fellowship there. (And yes, they would like you to visit them at their festival later this year.) Tasmania is not only rich in natural beauty, it is rich in history too.

If you have ever visited the prison remains at Port Arthur, it's an experience you're not likely to forget. And while some of the early convicts left the place with a trade and went on to make something of their lives, for many it was a place of dread, suffering and pain. (Even recent history has echoed the melancholy side of the site's story.)

The Separate Prison there is a place of infinite sadness. While solitary confinement has always been a form of punishment, here the idea was refined further. Re-offenders were separated out from the rest of the prison population, and placed in cells where their identity was ruthlessly stripped away. They were not allowed to talk to anyone. Their names were replaced with numbers. They were not allowed to see another human face – not one another, not even their jailers – except for church on Sunday morning when they were placed in specially designed stalls where they could only see the face of the preacher. (No wonder some Australians associate church with punishment!)

Deprived not only of any sensual stimulation, they were also deprived of any form of normal human contact. They were, quite intentionally, separated from other people, left in their isolation, entirely alone. They were denied companionship, conversation, connection. They were denied relationship. Locked up in the prison of their own solitude. The outcome of this treatment was consistent – the convicts often simply went insane. Few lasted very long.

Human beings were designed for relationships. We need one another. Yet relationships can be difficult.

The Australian federal government, concerned with the alarming rate of youth suicide, commissioned a national research study into the causes and possible solutions to such a devastating problem. After all, we live in a free, relatively prosperous and productive country. What is going on?

The professor heading the study concluded that, although this was a complex and multi-layered issue, the biggest single factor for us to face as a nation was social exclusion. Loneliness. Disconnection. Isolation. It's still a painful prison today.

The gospel is the good news of freedom from the prison of isolation and separation, and inclusion in the life and love of God. It is a message from start to finish of relationship – flowing from the very communion of God himself, including all of creation in the redemption, reconciliation and adoption made reality in Jesus Christ. It is the good news of love.

Lots of things contribute to separation. Fear. Guilt. Self-righteousness. Legalism. Judgmentalism. Pride. Anger. A negative and critical spirit.

More positively, many things contribute to fellowship, communion, and healthy relationships. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of fellowship, and the fruit of the spirit is relational – love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, patience, faithfulness, self-control. A spirit of compassion, forgiveness, encouragement and gratitude. A gracious spirit that is easily entreated.

The Spirit of the Risen Christ was made visibly present at the formation of the New Testament church, the communion of the New Covenant, on the day of Pentecost. May his presence be visible in us as we participate together in the life and love of God, and share his mission and the work of the Spirit in the world.

Please continue to pray for one another, and give thanks for one another, as we share the good news of God's love, and their inclusion in relationship with the source of life and love, with all peoples.



WORLDWIDE
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Living and Sharing the Gospel

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5,000 bagfuls of care – and growing strong

By Jan Adamson, John and Jenne Herrmann, Margaret Fenwick, Bob Regazzoli

For more than a decade a small band of volunteers have been sharing “bagfuls” of care with homeless and distressed people in Queensland.

It began in June 1998 when the Gold Coast congregation took up the project as outreach ministry. We often wonder how such a small congregation of 12-15 regular members has been able to do what we have done, but then we know that we have our great God’s blessing and support or this just would not have been possible.

To the end of April 2010 the congregation has given away 3,166 toiletry bags to women in crisis, homeless youth and also those suffering addictions in our own community. During these years it has been great to get to know many of the counsellors who are directly involved in supporting the homeless. There are young people who are on the street because home is just not a safe place to be any more, or the woman fleeing in the night because of an abusive partner, or the man who just cannot cope any more without the drink or the drug to see him through his day.

We have learned not to be judgmental and that everyone has a right to feel wanted, loved and to feel safe and secure when they go to sleep at night. Perhaps our toiletry bag can at least make them feel fresh and clean while they wait for a better day and give them the hope that they are cared for by strangers who care and who want the very best for them.

The Gold Coast congregation also supplies the Gold Coast Youth Services with ten “emergency food care packs” per month. They are targeted at the homeless youth between the ages of 16 to 25. Each pack contains 14 different food items and costs \$22-\$25. Since the program started in February 2005 we have supplied the GCYS with 618 packs in God’s service. GCYS staff have told us the packs free them from the worry of where the food is coming from, allowing them to focus more time on

their other needs and accommodation.

The Brisbane East congregation has also been involved in a similar Carebag ministry since 2004, under the coordination of Margaret and Ron Fenwick. The first 20 bags were sent to the Gold Coast, and since then, 2240 bags (at a cost of \$10-15 each) have been distributed to QUIHN (Qld Injectors Health Network), the Roma House homeless shelter and Brisbane Youth Service. Bags have also been supplied to Drug Arm, various other agencies and the demands keep on increasing. More than 100 children’s bags, filled with toys, books, trauma teddies and other goodies, have also been distributed.

A former homeless person who now works for one of the agencies spoke at a Brisbane East service and shared his feelings when he received one of these Carebags in his time of need.

Our members in Toowoomba have also been supporting this ministry in their area for three years, with toiletry bags being supplied to Drug Arm and Fresh Hope (a half-way house for mothers and children who are victims of domestic violence). Friends and family of members have joined in supporting this service, along with sewing groups and a local service club.

The Carebag ministry has proven to be a well-received ministry by our congregations in these communities. It doesn’t depend on the size of the congregation as whatever is given is fulfilling a need and providing an act of love and care to someone in their time of need or crisis.

Church supports growing community festival

By Randall Bouchier

Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship (MCF) in Victoria has been involved in Mooroolbark’s annual family festival, Celebrate Mooroolbark, from its inception seven years ago.

I well remember being part of the advisory committee and listening to MCF pastoral team colleague Doug Lewis quietly insist that the festival provide as many family activities as possible that were either free or were low cost.

MCF members continue to be represented in the Celebrate Mooroolbark executive and organising committee in partnership with many others from the community.

A letter of gratitude from a festival-goer this year encapsulates what has been accomplished for the Mooroolbark community through years of active

community partnership, encouragement and hard work. It reads in part:

“I just want to tell you how much my family enjoy your festival each year. We have been attending for three years now, and each time, we have enjoyed it immensely. I find the people to be extremely friendly, we love the stalls that are on display with local information and produce, and for a family with three children (aged 6-9) there is plenty to keep them occupied – and if it’s not free, it’s affordable!

“The local entertainment you display on the stage is of high quality, with great variety. The parade is great. The best part is how many local people are involved in the day – young and old – and every single one of them appears to be having a great time.

“Well done, congratulations and thank you for running such a brilliant, local, community-minded event!”

We’re grateful to God for the way he has led the congregation in response to the opportunities he reveals for continued service within the Mooroolbark community.

We’ve also enjoyed the process whereby Celebrate Mooroolbark has grown from originally operating on a \$3,000-\$4000 budget to this year attracting corporate sponsorship of over \$20,000. This year the organising committee also employed a part-time administrator – Yolande Pickett.

Yolande made these observations in a recent *Living Today in Mooroolbark* article:

“Seeing Celebrate Mooroolbark unfold, I was thrilled! Just watching everybody arrive and start setting up, and things just happening everywhere. It was great. I was really happy about the way it all came together.

“It was really something interactive. People from anywhere could get involved in it, and you could see that. The variety of things going on – all the different ways that people could share – in the marketplace, at the community stage, inside the centre, on rides and activities. And, it was great to see the parade come together so well!

“Celebrate Mooroolbark was very RELAXED! Really lovely atmosphere, and that’s not something that can be forced, but emerges as the festival naturally evolves. It shows that the festival appeals to so many because it has been produced by the people for the people who are coming to it.”

This started as a simple prayerful desire to respond to any doors God opened to connect with and serve the local community, and has developed into a simply wonderful way for other-centred people to share the life and love of God with others.

Small towns in Germany

By John McLean

Ostophen is a quiet, small town in Germany with a thousand year history. Vines have been growing on the rolling hills since the early 1500s. It is where European Mission Developer Santiago Lange and his wife Elke live, kindly accommodating us in their house for the European pastoral leaders' conference in Germany.

The conference itself is held ten minutes away in an unpretentious room in another small town with quite a history, the town of Worms. It was here



Southern Light Centre turns 3! The WCG-run Southern Light Community Centre in Invercargill, New Zealand celebrated its third anniversary of operation with a sausage sizzle on Friday, May 14. The Centre is staffed by volunteers and sells donated second-hand goods to support people in need in the community, along with several other initiatives including Riding for the Disabled, a women's refuge, Prison Fellowship and overseas mission outreach. As well as providing a meeting place and Christian resources, the Centre is also used by the Invercargill congregation for its weekly services.



from the different countries can only be experienced rather than described. I was able to pass on the love of the Australian brethren to those present, and now pass their love and prayers on to you. It is truly encouraging and a privilege to see the family ties of love and fellowship so alive and well, here in small towns in Germany.

Martin Luther was placed on trial for his outspoken theological teachings. It was here he is reported to have said when it was demanded of him to recant his views, "here I stand, I can do no other". This small town had an important role in the history of the Reformation.

So it seems a very appropriate location for our conference, where 30 people have gathered from six different countries of Europe. Together, we share prayer, worship, learning and warm, enthusiastic fellowship. The language barriers are real, but somehow they seem less an impediment and more another dimension that adds to the humour, diversity, acceptance and concern for one another so evident. This is largely a result of the patience and tolerance of the Europeans for those of us without second languages!

We are here at the invitation of Pastor General Joseph Tkach and Santiago Lange to contribute to the conference. I have been asked to spend a day covering aspects of leadership from a Trinitarian Theological perspective. Klaus Domes did the translating, and we somehow managed to make the sessions interactive in

spite of the potential language barriers. Even the humour seems to "translate". Other conference sessions were taken by David Stirk from the UK, Randy Bloom from the US, and Joseph Tkach. In addition to leadership, we talked about mission, and strengthening and valuing our international ties.

Spanish National Director Pedro Rufian Mesa said, "The conference in Germany was very inspiring and clarifying in the sense that it focused on the wonderful and transformational reality that every human being is included in Christ. And on Incarnational theology. It challenged us to take the implications of this theological reality into our personal, pastoral, and national contexts to allow God to work in and through us as he accomplishes his mission.

"It expanded my thinking and challenged me to start to make the proper changes at the personal and congregational and national level. It is exciting to participate more deeply in the new life we have in and through Christ, sharing his love and mission."

The wonderful fellowship and sense of community among pastoral leaders



Urdu Discipleship

Rod Matthews, Mission Developer for Southern Asia and South Pacific, reported that an Urdu translation of the church's Discipleship 101 resource has now been published in Pakistan in association with Dr Muqaddam Zia and Pakistan Outreach. Other WCG/GCI sponsored translations include: Nepali (Nepal) and Sinhala (Sri Lanka), with Tamil (India) and Burmese versions currently in progress.



“There was a lovely atmosphere of openness, love and acceptance”

“Tammy’s down to earth talks were refreshing and very encouraging”

“The invaluable spiritual messages and presentations are so helpful in our daily walk with Christ”

WOMEN’S CONFERENCE

Celebrates life together in Christ

By Margaret Cohen and Heather McLean

A wonderfully encouraging and inspiring weekend was enjoyed by 101 women from all over Australia and New Zealand on the beautiful Gold Coast. The fourth National Women’s Conference certainly lived out the theme, “Life Together in Christ” with an outpouring of love, joy, encouragement and support. This and the unity and oneness in Christ made this a very special women’s conference.

After a rainy Friday, the Gold Coast turned on a spectacular weekend making the surrounding beaches an inspiring place to start and finish each day. Friday evening included inspiring worship, dinner and an opening address by Heather McLean.

We were delighted to again welcome Tammy Tkach as guest speaker. Tammy’s good humour and down-to-earth candour as she speaks of her own experiences of life give her messages an immediate warmth and relevance. She gave three very insightful and thought-provoking presentations: “The Trinity – What Difference Does it Make?”, “Prodigal Sons and Daughters All” and “But He’s Invisible!”. Through many examples Tammy reminded us of God’s unconditional and supportive love: Jesus prays with us and for us. He gives us his faith. All are included and accepted in the love and fellowship of the triune God. All of our relationships find their home and foundation in him. We are never alone.

Daphne Sidney gave an encouraging presentation on “Fostering Strengths and Resilience through Adversity”. Ruth Matthews and Laonie Stokman gave helpful messages on journaling – “taking time to observe life’s experiences through the lens of our relationship with God” and recording our prayers, readings, observations and lessons for reflection and encouragement. Janiece Harper and Emma Willmann gave

an entertaining session on “The Five Love Languages”, and conference organiser Heather McLean spoke on “Life Together in Christ”.

There were lots of laughs at the Bible Challenge which followed the Black and White Banquet. Ladies entered into the spirit of the evening with some amazingly creative head pieces and contributed beautiful homemade crafts to the “Ye Olde Craft Shoppe” which proved to be an enjoyable way to raise money for women in need.

After a moving communion service, the weekend ended with an inspiring rendition of the song “You raise me up” with words written by John McLean to reflect our participation in the life and love of God.

“It was lovely being with my Australian sisters in Christ at the conference,” Tammy said. “Love and joy were in abundance. From the music and food, to the speakers and fellowship – the whole weekend was a huge delight. Women’s conferences are a wonderful way to connect with each other, as well as a time of sharing God’s love and growing in grace and knowledge of him. Thanks to everyone who helped with the conference, and thanks for inviting me to share this incredible weekend with you.”

The inspiring and moving worship, the great food, the fun and laughter and great fellowship all helped provide a memorable weekend. One lady summed it up with: “Fantastic, fun, inspirational and informative”. Another commented: “Very encouraging and affirming as we continue our learning and growing process. A great opportunity not to be missed!”

“Every aspect of the weekend was a delight to me. I feel filled up and overflowing with the love I have received”



AL KURZAWA

National Youth Ministries Team update

At the upcoming Christian Management Association conference there is an elective titled "Leading Gen-Y: A Gen-X Perspective". I went to Wikipedia on the web to check out the latest on all the generations. Apparently last year marked the cut-off for Generation Z. They are still waiting on what the name will be for the next generation which begins with those born in the year 2010. One term being used is Generation Alpha. Having had my fourth child born in March of this year, I now have kids born in two generations. And we have three generations living under one roof: Gen X, Gen Z, and Generation Alpha. What does this mean? I have no idea, but it's the situation our newly created National Youth Ministries Team (NYMT) finds itself diving into.

At the last SEP it was abundantly clear that the youth in our church have a passion for Christ, for the Bible, for Christian living, for the gospel, and making sense of it all in the over-wired 21st century. Our youth have energy, excitement, creativity, and lots of questions. They, like all of us, are trying to figure out what it means and how it looks to walk the Christian life in our current culture.

As the National Youth Coordinator I want to give them as many resources as I can to help them along their journey. However, with the logistics and geographical diversity of our teens throughout the country I am limited in my influence. Thankfully our church has recognised the strength of using teams for several years now. **Kwan Borden** helped me set up the team at the end of last year and we are getting our feet planted under us as we tackle the huge undertaking before us. The team members are spread out through three states and in both city and country congregations.

Like our youth themselves, the national youth ministries team brings with it all the same great strengths and qualities you find in young people: zeal, energy, passion, enthusiasm, fresh ideas, novelty, and openness to trying new things. The greatest attribute of this team though is their heart for service. All of them have served at SEP as staff over the years, and most of them are serving in their local congregations in some manner on a weekly basis. They have a heart for our youth and really have a great vision for where they can see our youth programs in the years to come.

Several members on the team have specific roles in which they'll be helping me directly. **Phil Gobbe** will help me in the coordination of youth events throughout the calendar year. This includes regional camps and our upcoming WEP next year. **Carissa Warren** will primarily focus on helping me with SEP. **Drew Garrett** will help keep an eye on the finances and keep the team informed regarding the Generations Fund. **Kristi Higgins** will be keeping us up to date with Risk Assessment and Child Safety protocols. **Luke Merriman, Alyce Verheijden, and Jodie Lorimer** will be working behind the internet curtain designing and updating the youth website. There are others on the team playing vital parts too.

As part of the next generation of servant leaders in our church, the NYMT has an important role to fill now and into the future. We have a lot of ambitious goals for the youth and children in our church throughout Australia. We need your prayers as we venture forth with new ideas while making sure to keep the high success rate we have had in the past with events like SEP. Thank you for your patience and support as we work through some of the inevitable hiccups the team will experience in performing our new duties. On behalf of the team, we look forward to serving you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Helen, Zachariah, Naomi, Levi and Zarah Alter

Birth Stephen and Helen Alter announce the arrival of **Zachariah William Alter**, Monday, May 17. Zach is now brother to Aaron, Samuel, Naomi, Levi and Zarah.

Baptisms

Guy Wood of Brisbane East on Mar 29
Paul Brewster of Sydney on May 22



Jack and Helen Flack

Anniversary The Adelaide, SA, congregation gave a surprise after services party for **Jack and Helen Flack's** 40th wedding anniversary in March.

Deaths

John Meharry of Coburg on Mar 28
Jim Laing of Gold Coast on Apr 7



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