

GCI Today

Vol 6, No. 4 September-November 2010



Festival 2010 brought together members of our fellowship for worship and fellowship in a spirit of “celebrating life together in Christ”. Joseph and Tammy Tkach’s visit to Rotorua, New Zealand and Caloundra, Qld., was a highlight this year. Summary page 5, more photos on back page.

GCI Today ...

This newsletter is a transitional publication between *WCG Today*, which has been published as the church’s newsletter in Australia and surrounding nations since February 2005, and a new regional publication, *GCI Today*. *GCI Today* will be published along similar lines to the former *Christian Odyssey*, published by the church in the USA. *GCI Today* will be a quarterly 16-page colour magazine with news and articles of relevance not only to GCI church members but also to visitors and friends. And of course *Christian Odyssey* will continue to be accessible online at www.gci.org

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PHOTOS: DAVID AND SARAH JORDISON, PETER MILLS, ROD MATTHEWS, HELEN HUMPHREYS, BOB LONGHURST, GRAEME RICHARDS



JOHN MCLEAN

National Director (Australia)

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Renewed in Christ

In the early days of his ministry, John Wesley (the 18th Century minister and theologian who was a founder of the Methodist movement) found himself caught up in a constant flurry of busyness and activity. To do a better job of being closer to God, he decided to add an "exactor diary" in his life, in which he evaluated, measured and rated his daily devotions. His intention was that in so doing he might improve his devotion to God, and please God more.

He found that, not only did he not experience a greater closeness to God, but the opposite happened – he experienced a deepening despair. Slowly, over time, he began to see that his approach was back-to-front. He was working hard trying to please God – thinking if his devotions were good enough, if he tried hard enough, if he did more, God would be pleased and accept him. But God had already accepted him in Christ. When he began with God, rather than himself, he saw that the fundamental starting place was God's love, God's eternal "yes" to him in Christ. This was the first step on the journey, not the end of the journey.

He came to see that the chief characteristic of the Christian life is gratitude – for what God has already done in Christ – rather than duty and devotion, as he had thought, trying harder and harder to appease and please a perfect but distant Being.

Many of us have shared a similar Christian experience. Indeed, this seems to be a fairly common Christian journey. It's a journey simply described as one from legalism to grace.

Spiritual renewal is not found in forcing ourselves to try harder, to work more at our devotions, to judge ourselves (and others) more harshly. It is found in encountering Christ. Renewal is always in Christ. Hence our international conference this year was entitled "Renewed in Christ".

Renewal starts with God, as he has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, not with ourselves. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). As one conference speaker put it, renewal is always found as a "grace reunion". That is, it is in discovering or rediscovering the joy of God's kindness and love, expressed to us in Christ. All grace is the love of God in our lives through Christ by the Spirit.

In grace, God comes to us in Christ and invites us to share in that wonderful, happy, creative, loving communion of Father, Son and Spirit. Renewal in Christ is therefore always about communion, too. God is love, and has his Being-in-Communion. This is not just some obscure theological sounding point. It is the starting place, the foundational principle, the divinely energising system of the universe. As C. S. Lewis wrote, God is not a "managerial" God, a Being whose function is to "run" the universe as a manager might run a company, or a headmaster might run a school.

In God there is no loneliness, no need, no hunger that needs to be filled. Father, Son and Spirit have always existed in perfect harmony and fellowship. God, in his divine freedom and love, has chosen not to live without us. He has created, redeemed and adopted us that we might share in his close, loving fellowship. Understanding the fact of our salvation enables us to both live into and out of it. In faith, as adopted children, we are free to act like a child of God, loving others as the Father loves the Son. (Rather than thinking that we will become a child of God if we first act enough like one.) This is only possible because our lives are "in Christ", as his transforming presence lives in us through the Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

We have grown in a deeper understanding of the nature of God, his triune Being as a God of love and communion. And so we have changed our name to give expression to this transformation. Thank you for your shared fellowship in our journey together.

May we continue to live into and out of all our new name describes. May we grow in loving God, one another, and all mankind the way the Father, Son and Spirit love one another. Renewal starts with God, not with us. May we continue to be renewed in Christ, as he dwells in us and we dwell in him through the Spirit. May we rejoice in gratitude together, remembering that renewal in Christ is grace and communion.

Solomon Islands elder ordained

July 25 was a significant day in the life of the church in the Solomon Islands. During a visit to Honiara by Doug and Marg Lewis, pastoral supervisors for the Islands, Henry Kuper was ordained an elder. Henry is one of the senior members in the Solomons, and is well-known and esteemed in Honiara. He has had a respected career in the police force. Henry comes from the remote island of Santa Ana in the southeast of the archipelago and with his wife, Elizabeth, has returned to live there in his retirement.

Henry was baptised in 1977 and ordained a deacon in 2001.

“As a result of his standing in the community and the church, his faith and spiritual leadership, managerial skills, and flexibility to travel when needed, he was appointed the national coordinator for the WCG/GCI in the Solomon Islands,” said Rod Matthews, Mission Director for Southern Asia and the South Pacific.

Mr Kuper liaises with Doug Lewis and provides support for Derek Jiru, our pastor of the Qiloe congregation on the island of Ranongga in the Western Province area.

Response in Pakistan

By Rod Matthews

Record-breaking rains have caused disastrous flooding affecting most parts of Pakistan. The government has been overburdened trying to organise relief efforts across the country while engaged in a military offensive against insurgents and dealing with other political issues. It took some time before the magnitude of the disaster was appreciated inside Pakistan, let alone overseas. Major relief and humanitarian organisations mobilised in an urgent effort to get food and water to tens of thousands of stranded people, and to provide temporary shelter until the flood waters subsided. Countless thousands of people have nothing to return to. Crops have been destroyed as winter approaches.

In the midst of this, the government has been overstretched by the magnitude of the disaster and what aid has reached the village level is distributed by local officials who generally tend to give first priority to Muslims. The Christian minority is often significantly disadvantaged in such crises in spite of having protection under the constitution and mandated representatives in the provincial assemblies.

Dr Muqaddam Zia, director of the Alpha Bible Church in Faisalabad with whom we have a working relationship,

immediately mobilised the manpower and resources at his disposal from his network of congregations and set out to provide a practical example of the love of God by taking relief supplies of food, water, tents, clothing and blankets to displaced people in a number of different locations across Pakistan. He provides humanitarian assistance under the name Pak Care, which gives him much easier access to areas and all the people in need than would be possible using the name of a Christian church. While his goal is to help anyone in need, he pays special attention to those who have missed out, been disadvantaged or neglected in the general distribution of aid.

In response to this crisis, we have sent him two amounts totalling \$5,700 to go towards the purchase of supplies to help the most needy, to be distributed through his relief teams. Muqaddam has sent many photographs showing what his team is doing. Your prayers and concern are deeply appreciated by the recipients and the aid workers.

Building continues in Vanuatu

By Les Evans

The team of Les and Kaye Evans and Liz Bradshaw set off with the help of the New Zealand churches to establish a furniture making workshop in Vanuatu. The short-term mission was also to finish the church community room in the village of Navili, Rory, Malekula.

Distance and communication are the most frustrating challenges that we encounter and no amount of preparation from far away will ever overcome this completely. The concrete mixer was sent early but never arrived. This was one of the two machines (the chainsaw being the other) that we needed to make the foundations and the block work to start the construction of the workshop. During the last day of work on the island, after many calls during the final week, we finally found that the ship that had the concrete mixer on board had been “arrested” by the Maritime Authority for safety breaches! It would only arrive in the village after our departure! All the concrete work and block making had to be done by hand.

The village has waited years for a piped water supply and this has been promised (by government authorities) every time we visited. The church built a concrete tank, mainly for drinking and cooking water, but this year the water supply arrived in the village the day we did! Running water is

now potentially available to every house in the district of Rory. The water tank will still be used for drinking and reserve supply. The pipeline has been funded by the New Zealand Government.

The village people thanked the New Zealand churches very much for the contribution made toward the construction of the new building. The building team would like to also express our thanks and appreciation for the assistance and prayer support.

Orphanage cares for Indian children

Dr Piria Suntharam and his wife, Banu Priya, run a home and orphanage for disadvantaged children in the rural village of Kalthanipadi in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. The home and orphanage cares for 40 boys and girls who cannot be supported by their parents for various reasons.

The church in Australia funded the construction of a septic tank at the school but work has been delayed due to unseasonal rain. Just below the soil level, there is rock from which a pit had to be chipped out to allow for the tank. But ground water seeps from the bottom and sides of the pit when it rains. So when it is completed the tank has to keep some water in and other water out. The toilets are completed but cannot be used until the septic tank is completed.

Our congregation in Bangalore, pastored by Joe D’Costa, along with some of the teachers at the school where Joanna D’Costa teaches have donated money, books, stationery, clothes, stainless steel plates, toys, mosquito nets and other materials to the orphanage. Joe also gave Dr Suntharam an old but functioning computer which his son, Mark, set up. Dr Suntharam and the children were thrilled as it offers them new educational opportunities beyond what is available at the nearby school that the young people attend.

In early May this year, the Suntharams were riding a motor cycle in a remote village when another cycle hit them, injuring them severely. They both suffered head and leg injuries but had to look after themselves because there was no transport or hospital nearby. Both spent time in hospital and have recovered from their head injuries, but Mrs. Suntharam’s severe leg and foot injury is still giving her problems. She may yet need skin grafts. Unfortunately, the healing is complicated by diabetes. Mrs Suntharam

would be encouraged to know that others are praying for her complete healing.

ACCM celebrates first graduate

Ada Wilson, of Norfolk, Virginia, USA, has become the first Ambassador College of Christian Ministry (ACCM) student to work through the complete program. She completed the diploma with an elective Supervised Research Project.

Ada was presented with her Diploma by Pastor General Joseph Tkach during the international conference in Florida.

“Joe did the presentation in front of a plenary session and Ada responded with a very articulate endorsement of the program,” said ACCM Director John McLean. “Ada has a bachelor’s degree, is a trained counsellor and mediator, and she’s also an associate pastor in Norfolk. She was very happy.”

On July 26-27, immediately before the international conference, John McLean conducted an ACCM intensive course in Christian Leadership. Grace Communion International Vice President Mike Fezell also contributed to the course.

Forty-nine pastors and ministry leaders from around the world participated in the workshop, with many positive comments and requests for resources to make the course available in other countries and languages.

Singapore and Malaysia women celebrate “Relationships in Christ”

By Wong Chew Yeng

On May 28-30, 38 ladies from congregations in Malaysia and Singapore gathered at The Legends Golf and Country Resort in Kulai, Johore for a Women’s Retreat.

Presentations from the two visiting speakers centered around the theme “Relationships in Christ.” Tammy Tkach spoke on “Trinitarian Theology – What Difference Does It Make?”, “Prodigal Sons and Daughters All” and “But He’s Invisible!” Ruth Matthews spoke on “A Heart Relationship” and “Kinfolk of His”.

The retreat’s relaxed program and a Fun Nite provided an enjoyable break and was likened to having a date with God.

Donna Kan, from Kota Kinabalu said, “I came away feeling filled.”

National boards meet

The Australian and New Zealand church boards met in June and July.

The New Zealand National Pastoral Team (NPT) and board met June 12-13. The NPT met at the Wongs’ home on Friday. Topics of discussion included the upcoming festival in Rotorua, strategic planning, ministerial training and various pastoral and congregational matters.

There was a buzz of excitement at Auckland on Saturday afternoon, as the board members and the Vanuatu building team, who had flown in from Port Vila that morning, joined the service. The board held its AGM on Sunday, followed by a regular meeting. The NPT paper on vision, mission, strategies and goals was presented to the board. It will be distributed to all members along with an upcoming letter, and will be used by the board as a working document to measure progress. The board also considered reports on the finances, investments, pastoral care, the Southern

Light outreach in Invercargill, *Inside Life* magazine, and Vanuatu.

Australian National Director John McLean presented a national church update to the Australian board on July 11 in which he said: “Around the country our churches and small groups continue to seek to live and share the gospel. They often do an amazing job, especially considering their size and usually their demographic. We are very grateful for them, for their fellowship and commitment, for their genuine desire to serve God, one another and their communities. Every congregation has its story; many are doing outstanding jobs of reaching out to others in love and service.”

John also reported on the actions that had been taken to bring the budget back into balance (the board agreed to the 2009-10 budget running in deficit following the impact



Kerry Gubb

After serving in pastoral ministry for 25 years and then in the national office since 2000. Kerry Gubb’s employment with the church has unfortunately come to a close due to financial constraints.

“Kerry has been a long-time employee, serving the church in various pastoral assignments before working in the national office,” said National Director John McLean in a message to church employees. “He is highly regarded within the fellowship as pastor, preacher, teacher, writer, humourist, friend. So this has

been a very hard and difficult time for everyone.”

John explained that bringing the national budget back into balance required a number of actions and that, in addition to reducing the number of part-time hours worked by office staff, Kerry’s role was unavoidably made redundant. (The board agreed to the 2009-10 budget running in temporary deficit following the sudden impact of the global financial crisis.) Kerry’s last day in the office was August 2.

“While necessary and unavoidable, as a colleague, long-term employee and former church pastor, this is traumatic at the personal and collective level,” John said.

Kerry and his wife, Anne, served members and congregations in Australia and New Zealand, including Hastings, New Plymouth, Palmerston, New Zealand; Launceston and Devonport, Tas.; Morwell, Vic.; Adelaide, SA and Darwin, NT; Melbourne East and South, Vic.; Bendigo and Ballarat, Vic.; and Perth, WA. In 1999 Kerry asked to leave pastoral ministry and move into an administrative role. His work in the national office focused on developing and supporting Ambassador College of Christian Ministry (ACCM) classes and online delivery. He developed the Small Group Leadership and Pastoral Care classes and was the online lecturer for those classes and Survey of the Bible. Kerry has also been a regular contributor to church publications, including *Christian Odyssey*.

Kerry will continue to serve in ministry, continuing to speak regularly in southeast Queensland congregations.

“We are very grateful for Kerry and Anne’s long years of dedicated service, often through stressful experiences,” said John McLean. “Kerry’s heart for developing people has been evident in his pastoral and administrative work. His work in developing risk management policies, managing the fleet, and his contribution to the development of ACCM, including the website for delivery of online learning, are just some recent examples of the contributions he has made. I know you all join with us in wishing them well, and praying for them as they navigate the complexities and challenge of this difficult circumstance.”

Festival 2010 – celebrating life together in Christ

Church members, family and friends gathered around Australia, Asia and the Pacific Islands for Festival 2010 celebrations that included worship, fellowship, learning and service.

Among the highlights this year were:

- * Grace Communion International (GCI) Pastor General Joseph Tkach and his wife, Tammy, visiting Rotorua, New Zealand and Caloundra, Qld.
- * The announcement of our denominational name change in Australia by National Director John McLean.
- * Southern Asia and South Pacific Mission Director Rod Matthews and his wife, Ruth, visiting Fiji to celebrate with 75 people on the Coral Coast.
- * Cincinatti, Ohio pastor Rick Shallenberger and his wife, Cheryl, participating in the festival in Mandurah, WA.
- * Sydney, NSW member and Papua New Guinea Pastoral Coordinator Mark Latham's visit to church members in Papua New Guinea.
- * New Zealand office manager Rex Morgan visiting the brethren in Vanuatu.
- * Malaysia, Singapore and Myanmar pastor Wong Mein Kong spending the festival in Hyderabad, India as the guest speaker.

In addition to the locations mentioned above, celebrations were also held in Echuca, Vic.; Ulladulla, NSW; Ulverstone, Tas.; and Port Dickson, Malaysia. The Solomon Islands brethren will hold a festival in December and Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship pastor Randall Bouchier and his wife, Mary, will be guests.

John McLean wrote shortly before the start of the festivals about the focus of our church's celebrations: "In Christ' we find our true identity, our true humanity, our true being – in communion with God, and with one another. 'In Christ' we fulfil our mission, the Son's mission from the Father, of building communion and sharing other-centred love, generosity and service. This is truly something wonderful for us to celebrate – life together in Christ, now and forever, made available for all mankind through Jesus."

Dates and locations for next year's Festival celebrations will be published on the church's website www.gci.org.au



of the global financial crisis). In addition to reducing the number of part-time hours worked by office staff, Kerry Gubb's role was unavoidably made redundant. "While necessary and unavoidable, as a colleague, long-term employee and former church pastor, this is traumatic at the personal and collective level," John said.

"Alongside the many positive realities of our denominational life together, we also have the continuing realities that we are a small organisation, and in some ways quite fragile. While some church areas are doing quite well financially, other are experiencing continuing decline. Taken nationally, this has represented around about a ten percent decline each year for the past two years. Added to that we have had the major impact of the global financial crisis. This significantly reduced our asset base and consequently the income that comes from that base, which supports national administration. While there is a slow recovery, our income nationally remains significantly reduced, and responsible projections suggest a patchy recovery at best."

John noted in his comments to the board and in a letter to church staff and pastors that "the financial support we have – and have tracked now for many years – is

commensurate with our membership numbers, our demographics, our investments and the economic times we are in. Part of our stewardship as a national church is to ensure that we are delivering the best and most appropriate support we can with the financial and human resources we have been given. And of course we must always be thankful for what we do have and not simply focused on what we don't have."

The board also received a financial report and a report from the investment committee. It also approved the budget for 2010-11.

International Adoption Day

The Little Treasures group, run by Rosey and James Martin, has been meeting in the WCG Brisbane Northside Community Church hall fortnightly for more than four years. The primary objective of the group is for children under school age, who are adopted from Taiwan and China, to learn Mandarin language and be exposed to their birth culture through creative crafts, music, food and fun activities.

This year the group has been blessed to have an excellent teacher, Xiaoli, who prepares and lovingly teaches the lessons each time. Two angels from our

congregation, Nancy and Bonnie, have always supported the group by being there almost every time to help with the morning tea, to be "adopted grandmas" to the children and assist parents.

There have been more than 30 children who have attended; some of these parents have regularly driven long distances from Toowoomba and the Gold Coast regions to ensure their children could be a part of the group.

On Sunday, July 25, the Little Treasures group performed for the third year running at the annual International Adoption Day event at Logan Entertainment Centre. The day is very special for families with adopted children. The children, aged from under one up to four years sang three songs and introduced themselves in Mandarin, with help from their parents. They did a wonderful job in front of an audience exceeding 800 people. Among the audience were the majority of our Brisbane North Church congregation. Each adoptee's country is represented in a parade of nations, where the children dress in their country of origin's national costume and are presented on stage.



50 SKI AND COOK IN VIC

Community was the result of a great day of skiing, a cooking challenge, 50 people and some portable pergolas in a blocked-off car park!

After a day of snowboarding and skiing with two busloads of youth from Victoria and Junee, NSW, ten teams were given the ultimate cooking challenge: to cook for five people, for less than \$50 and to impress three judges. The gourmet menus, which ranged from traditional spaghetti to unpronounceable desserts, were definitely designed to please the palate.

When it came to the award ceremony, the judges could not say enough about the cuisine, and it was even harder to find enough words to describe the teamwork. Teams were sharing ingredients, team mates were being encouraged and even judges' requests were met by including Jubes as a side dish.

The day was concluded by the owner of Mansfield Travellers Lodge (our accommodation for the weekend) saying "you are a pleasure to have and are welcome anytime". And that after we stayed well past the checkout time and blocked off the car park! Thanks to all those who came to be part of such a fantastic weekend.



HEROES GATHER IN QUEENSLAND

POW! At the start of August a league of extraordinarily costumed people descended upon south Brisbane. The Queensland youth combined for a "Heroes" weekend - complete with ultra-lightweight super-suits (spandex), identity-concealment devices (plastic masks) and (fake) stun guns. We were lucky enough to have youth not just from Brisbane but also the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, and even some intrepid travellers from New South Wales.

The weekend included a "Thirst" youth service on Friday night, where we enjoyed noisy worship, games and discussion. Many thanks to all those involved with organising, running and attending the weekend - it was a wonderful chance to catch up (and a great excuse to wear a cape...). SHAZAM!

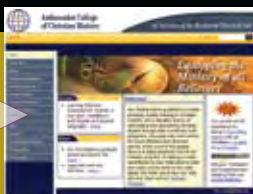
IT'S COMING...
A.E.P 2011
Yellingbo, VIC
 Friday April 22nd - Tuesday April 26th

WHAT ARE YOU PLUGGED INTO!
 REGISTER your interest
 e - mail: youthinfo@wcg.org.au

celebrating life together in Christ



Festival 2010



visit us online at www.ambascol.org