

T^{GCI}Today

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA
WINTER 2014

WELLBEING

FOCUS ON

INDIA'S CHILDREN



*Sharing
The good life*

Mission team visits
PHILIPPINES

WELCOME



John McLean

A FLOURISHING LIFE

"It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich," wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

GRATITUDE IS A key to wellbeing – to human flourishing and enjoying the good life. It's more than good manners, and more than good for the person who is grateful. Gratitude is vital to healthy relationships and to healthy communities, and promotes the common good.

Contemporary research confirms and affirms the ancient wisdom that thankfulness and gratitude are fundamental spiritual dimensions for a happy and productive life. In this issue, we begin a series of articles looking at the whole issue of wellbeing. And we continue to look at mission, locally and internationally, as an expression of God's love and grace shared with others.

Grace, of course, and gratitude are from the same word. In God's lavish grace ("grace upon grace" as John puts it in John 1:16) we can flourish; in God's grace we share and help those in need.

Bonhoeffer wrote that we enter common life together, the life of God's children (1 John 3:1), not as demanders and complainers, but as thankful recipients of God's grace. We are thankful to God every day. Because God is love, and includes us in the circle of life of Father, Son and Spirit, the key characteristic of our Christian response is gratitude, says theologian Elmer Colyer. So we can say with the Psalmist, "Thank you! Everything in me says 'Thank you!' ... Thank you for your love, thank you for your faithfulness" (Psalm 138:1-2, *The Message*).

This is not a matter of saying thank you for every circumstance, but we are able to thank God in every circumstance, because he never leaves or forsakes us. We thank God for his grace to us expressed in Jesus, and for one another, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and our fellow human beings, created in God's image. We thank God not only for the big things, but for the little things every day that make life worth living.

Why not take the time to say thank you to someone who is close to you today. Or make an effort to track down someone who has helped you. Why not write a note – okay, it's now ancient technology, but all the more powerful for it – to someone who has made a positive impact in your life, or a positive contribution to the community. Many people have found it profoundly helpful to keep a Gratitude Journal – each day write down several things you experienced gratitude for. Try it – and change your life for the better.

Gratitude is integral to human flourishing. It's a reflection of participating in the grace of God. With gratitude, life indeed becomes rich.

John McLean is Mission and National Director, Australia

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Articles on pages 10 and 12 are reproduced courtesy of *Christian Odyssey*.

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GCI Today is published quarterly by Grace Communion International ABN 53096 517 190. Level 1, Building 2, 175 Varsity Parade, Varsity Lakes, Queensland 4227, Australia. © 2014 Grace Communion International. All rights reserved.

Printed by Fairfax Media Print and Distribution – Beaudesert

MISSION STATEMENT

GCI Today is published by Grace Communion International to celebrate and share the good news of God's love in ways that express practical **help, hope and encouragement**



Often, when we meet someone we ask instinctively how they are. We might ask, "Are you doing well?" Or we might respond to an inquiry about how we are by saying we are "well". It's common to ask after friends and family by inquiring as to whether everyone is "well".

WE WANT WELLNESS for ourselves and for those we love. And that wellness encompasses more than just the absence of illness.

Wellness or wellbeing is about being a "well being".

GCI Today's mission is to celebrate and share the good news of God's love in ways that express practical help, hope and encouragement. You might say it's an attempt to encourage and contribute to the wellbeing of our readers as they contribute to the wellbeing of others.

"Wellbeing" is a term that has emerged to describe the result of a well-lived life. While much of psychology and medicine has traditionally been focused on mental, emotional and physical un-wellness, well-

being puts the emphasis on the healthy aspects of our physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health.

One of the pioneers of this field of study, Martin Seligman, explains that no one thing defines wellbeing, but several things contribute to it.

"These are the *elements* of wellbeing, and each of the elements is a measurable thing," he writes in *Flourish* (2011, William Heinemann, Australia). Seligman's research has identified five elements and says the "five elements comprise what free people will choose for their own sake." The five elements (creating a simple PERMA mnemonic) are:

Positive emotion

Feeling good is important to how we experience life because our mood affects our outlook, our confidence and our performance. When we feel positive we are able to not only celebrate the moment but look to the future with hope. And, because emotions are contagious, our positive emotions have a positive effect on others.

This does not mean it's wrong or unhealthy to experience feelings of sadness or anxiety – that's a normal part of life. But focusing only on things like sadness, fear or pain isn't healthy. Even in the midst of those experiences, it is healthy

to find other things to appreciate and celebrate.

One simple but powerful exercise to reinforce positive emotions is to devote time each day to "write down three things that went well today and why they went well" Seligman suggests. This exercise, sometimes called a gratitude journal or "three blessings", has been shown to increase our happiness. Thankfulness is a key to wellness.

Engagement

Engagement is about "flow: being one with the music, time stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity," Seligman explains. "I refer to a life lived with these aims as the 'engaged life'."

We typically experience flow when we are working in our areas of strength and focusing on what we are doing (rather than attempting to "multi-task"). This is why identifying and developing our talents and gifts is an important part of a flourishing life.

(Positive) Relationships

The effects of positive relationships not only flow both ways, they also compound our wellbeing. Human beings are social beings and we are sustained not in isolation but in community. Positive relationships enable



Human beings are social beings and we are sustained not in isolation but in community

us to share the highs and lows, easing the burdens and heightening the joys. Others can provide perspective, encouragement and understanding. And so can we. Positive relationships aren't simply things we draw upon but connections we contribute to. They are at the heart of community.

"Other people are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up," says Seligman. And, again, this is not simply about what we get from others, but very much about what we give. "We scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well being of any exercise we have tested," he notes.

Opportunities for supporting positive relationships can be found at work, at school, at home, and in our various other social communities like clubs, church, and service organisations.

Meaning

Seligman describes "meaning" as "belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self".

We often find meaning by identifying the things we value and then devoting ourselves to pursuing and supporting those things. For example, family, community, education, an organisation that supports a particular need, political organisations, and communities of faith. Working for and contributing to things that matter deeply to us provides a sense of purpose in life and depth to our experiences. We are able

to see ourselves – again, in community – as part of a larger world and purpose.

An ongoing (since 2001) Australian Unity / Deakin University study into wellbeing in Australia reported that "People who volunteer generally report higher levels of happiness" (www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/auwbi, Survey 18.2).

Dr Peter Kaldor, principal author of a National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research report "Spirituality and Wellbeing in Australia" (2004), said that the research suggested having a spiritual orientation contributed to higher levels of wellbeing.

"Those with a spiritual orientation tend to score higher on many of the wellbeing measures included in the study," he said. "They tend to have a greater sense of purpose in life, a greater openness to personal growth, and more optimism about life. Of significance, the research also suggests that those with a spiritual orientation are more likely to contribute to others, whether informally in daily life, giving money to charities or doing voluntary service with community groups. These results suggest that exploration of spirituality and wellbeing may be important to a healthy society" (NCLS Occasional Paper 6 – Spirituality and Wellbeing, Nov. 2004).

Accomplishment

This is about experiencing success by setting, pursuing and achieving goals. It's

about doing things well and experiencing satisfaction and pride in what we do. Succeeding and achieving provides us with a valuable source of self-confidence that, in turn, encourages us to pursue further challenges. Accomplishment also supports and is often a part of other aspects of wellbeing such as positive emotions, meaning and engagement.

It's not about wealth

You've probably noticed that nothing in Seligman's research suggests that money makes us happy. That does not mean it makes us less happy or that poverty is a necessary prerequisite for wellbeing.

The Victorian State Government's Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au), reflecting wide understanding about the distinction between wealth and wellbeing notes that "Wealth is not the key ... Money is linked to wellbeing, because having enough money improves living conditions and increases social status. However, happiness may increase with income but only to a point ... Various international studies have shown that it is the quality of our personal relationships, not the size of our bank balance, which has the greatest effect on our state of wellbeing. Believing that money is the key to happiness can also harm a person's wellbeing. For example, a person who chooses to work a lot of overtime misses out on time with family, friends and leisure pursuit ... Research shows that people who pursue



People who volunteer generally report higher levels of happiness

'extrinsic' goals like money and fame are more anxious, depressed and dissatisfied than people who value 'intrinsic' goals like close relationships with loved ones."

The Australian Unity / Deakin University study into wellbeing in Australia reported that "Happiness generally increases proportionately with income, but only up to a household income of around \$100,000 where it begins to plateau".

Living and sharing wellbeing

A flourishing life is one in which we are actively engaged in using our gifts and strengths in the service of others as part of a community. And whatever our life circumstances, we have opportunities to experience and share thankfulness, joy and prayer.

As the Philippines mission article in this issue highlights, even in environments of

desolation people find ways to serve others, contribute apparently small efforts or resources. Bringing smiles to others who are experiencing loss and sadness creates moments of wellbeing; letting people know they are not forgotten sustains relationships; and remembering others in prayer connects us in spiritual community. ☺

LIVING YOUR EULOGY OR YOUR RESUMÉ?

IN SEPTEMBER 2013 *Huffington Post* founder Arianna Huffington wrote an article that posed a powerful question: "Are you living your eulogy or your resume" (www.huffingtonpost.com).

"Have you noticed that when people die, their eulogies celebrate life very differently from the way we define success in our everyday existence?" she wrote. "It's easy to let ourselves get consumed by our work. It's easy to use work to let ourselves forget the things and the people that truly sustain us. It's easy to let technology wrap us in a perpetually harried, stressed-out existence. It's easy, in effect, to miss our lives even while we're living them. Until we're no longer living them ...

"And it is very telling what you don't hear in eulogies. You almost never hear things like:

'Of course his crowning achievement was when he made senior vice president'; or: 'What everybody loved most about her was how she ate lunch at her desk. Every day'; or: 'He was proud that he never made it to one of his kid's Little League games because he always wanted to go over those figures one more time'; or: 'She didn't have any real friends, but she had 600 Facebook friends, and she dealt with every email in her inbox every night'; or: 'But he will live on, not in our hearts or memories, because we barely knew him, but in his PowerPoint slides, which were always meticulously prepared.'

"No matter how much a person spends his or her life burning the candle at both ends, chasing a toxic definition of success and generally missing out on life, the eulogy is always about the other stuff: what they gave, how they connected, how much they meant to the lives of the real people around them, small kindnesses, lifelong passions and what made them laugh.

"So the question is: **Why do we spend so much time on what our eulogy is not going to be?"**

Lives and shares in typhoon aftermath



From reports by Eugene Guzon and Mission Team

On Friday 8 November 2013, the Philippines was hit by a category 5, super-typhoon known as Haiyan to the world, and Yolanda in the Philippines.

SOME ESTIMATES ARE NOW at 10,000 lives lost, as well as mass devastation over an enormous area. Many aid agencies offered help in and around the most devastated areas and GCI congregations contributed funds which provided much needed generators and building materials to assist our brethren in the very affected areas.

As the months have gone by, our Filipino brothers and sisters, whilst severely affected themselves, have been instrumental in providing social, emotional and spiritual support to their communities. In Tacloban, a major city at the centre of the typhoon's destructive force, church members Mr and Mrs Gerardo Palanas own a place of business that was devastated by the typhoon. They have now transformed this building into an oasis of care and support for many children, youth and families. Two gas-powered generators in the centre provides standby power for lighting and a free mobile phone charging service for about 500 people daily.

The GCI banner is clearly visible on the street, including the mission statement "Living and Sharing the Gospel" – something which is indeed reflected at the centre, with a hive of activity in the small kitchen providing nutritious meals for children from the nearby areas on an almost daily basis.

GCI is among our major donors for the relief and rehabilitation efforts for our members and their immediate communities. As a part of

that support, Daphne, wife of Bill Sidney who pastors the Eagleby, Qld., congregation, and Robert and Christine Reeves from the Grafton, NSW, congregation participated in a church sponsored mission trip to provide personal, face-to-face care and support to our brethren who were severely affected by the super-typhoon and who are also providing support to their community.

The mission trip came about as a result of discussions between Australian National Director John McLean and his Philippines counterpart, Eugene Guzon.

"Eugene had said how much people needed spiritual help, as well as physical support. The generous donations of our congregations had enabled us to provide funds for food, especially feeding the children, emergency power, and accommodation for those affected by the massive typhoon there. Now we were able to support Daphne, Robert and Christine as they provided much needed contact and face-to-face care to the people on the ground. Daphne organised the trip in a very short space of time. As the wife of former Regional Director there, Bill, she was uniquely placed to lead the mission trip."

The Australian team arrived Friday evening, February 21. Philippines National Director Eugene Guzon and his team of support staff for construction and documentation accompanied them to Tacloban at dawn on Saturday. The team from Manila included engineer Loy Lotero and Willy Tinoyan from Baguio, representing GCI Baguio brethren and the city government of Baguio which contributed thousands of relief goods and has also helped in the medical mission for Yolanda victims in Eastern Samar.

Among the people the team worked with were:

GCI missionary Cecile Bangay, who had spent two months already in ministering to the people, supporting the feeding of the children and doing Bible studies in Tacloban, Borongan and

Motioning; Ms Virgie Galope, who is coordinating the arrival of TEAM BOHOL (12 additional carpenters and craftsmen) who are going to help in construction work in Tacloban; Mr Joseph Ouano, ministry in training from Dumaguete, who has also been helping in the relief and outreach, and leadership development in Tacloban soon after typhoon Yolanda.

From the airport, the team went to visit the brethren who were severely affected by the storm. Since many knew Daphne personally, it was a heart-warming time of reunion and the start of new friendships for Robert and Christine. Members shared some of their amazing experiences of surviving such strong winds and storm surges, and how God protected them and their families. We saw the damage to their homes first-hand, yet noticed how they were filled with hope and a generous spirit of extending help to others in their communities.

The team was blessed to participate in a special thanksgiving service at the centre, where Pastor Danny de Guia gave an inspirational message and members shared testimonies of survival and protection. In addition, 250 "Daily Bread" devotional books and some Bibles were distributed. This was the first service of this kind to be offered by the Tacloban church since typhoon Yolanda, as the hall had just been equipped with tables, chairs and a PA system.

About 100 of those who attended were children from the feeding program. A lunch was provided afterwards by the members where a table was laid, and children were again fed with a nutritious meal. God's blessings were evident everywhere, reminding us of his graciousness and goodness in the midst of hardships.

"Whilst the devastation is evident all around, there are so many signs of hope and regeneration," said Daphne. "The GCI fellowship in Tacloban is remarkable in their outreach. The centre also provides a haven for young people

to come and recharge their mobile phones and have a place to 'hang-out' together and share their experiences of survival and losses. In the process of dealing with trauma, having a safe place to talk about your story helps in the steps to recovery."

Later in the afternoon the party continued to visit with church members in their homes and then shared a get together and leaders meeting at the residence of Pastor Dario Cinco.

On Monday the Australian team proceeded to Borongan, Hernani, Catbalogan and Motioning to visit the brethren affected by the typhoon. They were accompanied by Assistant Area Superintendent Danny de Guia, his wife and son.

On Wednesday, Daphne was able to visit Manila and see the GCI "Young Ambassadors" school in Quezon City and meet some of the dedicated staff, teachers and long-time friends. Daphne then departed for Australia and was able to brief the Pastors' Conference about the trip. The Reeves stayed in Tacloban until Friday to continue their participation in the feeding program and activities for the children. They visited Crossway Church on Sunday, March 2, before returning to Australia.

"We praise God for the outpouring of his love for our brethren and the victims of Yolanda through the church worldwide," said Mr Guzon. "We are thankful to GCI Australia for their financial contribution, but we were blessed in a very special way with the visit of our Australian guests to spend time with us and who continue to pray with us for the long and yet grace-filled trip to recovery. The work in healing and rehabilitation is a long one, but God's love knows no limits."

The mission team found the members an inspiration and tears of joy were shared along the way whilst conveying the message in person of love, care, concern and prayers from our Australian members to our brothers and sisters in the Philippines. ●

"WHATEVER" HAPPENS ...

by Christine Reeves

WHILE WE HAD been praying for the people impacted by the devastation typhoon Yolanda created in the Visayas, the opportunity to accompany Daphne Sidney there left Robert and me wondering what we could contribute.

We had seen the images in the media and knew how catastrophic the damage and how traumatised the people had to be, but felt we had no great skills to offer. We saw many messages online indicating the people, who had to wait for eight days before any government help arrived, were now – 100 days later – feeling forgotten. Most have lost family members, their livelihood, their houses, but the world's attention had moved on. The Philippine people are showing their public and private faith in God, their fortitude, their resilience, their love and support for their community and their hope for the future, but the underlying theme of so many of the posts was "please don't forget us".

So we prayed the "whatever prayer": whatever God wants us to do he will have it happen so we just let him show us. My work graciously gave me time off and locals, as they learned what we were doing, contributed all sorts of amazing resources and money.

No amount of photos prepared us for the sheer magnitude of the damage. Flying in to a demolished airport we saw a sea of blue tarps, which are the roofs of the town, and white tents, buildings just gone, leaving only the bathroom tiles. Eight ocean-going ships are parked ignominiously inland in the city. Broken glass, twisted metal, concrete slabs, derelict vehicles, huge slabs of road and pylons all carried by the rushing tidal surges that had unimaginable force. The wind was over 350k per hour. Inconceivable!

Appalling as this all was, it is other images that we will always remember. Like the hope of people flying fluoro coloured kites in the drizzling rain surrounded by a sea of grey devastation. The joy and laughter of teenagers doing the traditional tininkling – bamboo stick dancing. The generosity of people who had lost everything. The ongoing kindness they showed each other. The beautiful hospitality extended to us everywhere. The acceptance of those so badly impacted. The inclusiveness of the congregations. The patience of people with little food, no electricity, no water, no jobs while living in inadequate temporary accommodation. The support of the GCI congregations worldwide for the people in their time of need. The ready smiles of everyone – grief and trauma reflected in their faces and body language, yet all had a greeting smile. The constancy of the people who attended the 6am Bible study with Pastor Dan because that's the only time he could do it. The faith of those who asked for nothing other than to detail what they would like us to pray about.

The people have achieved so much. While it will take so painfully long to restore the buildings and amenities of the city of Tacloban and even longer for the rural areas (the countryside is so beautiful despite Yolanda), progress is everywhere. The children are back at school – so important in establishing normal routines to aid their emotional recovery. Roadside vendors were the first to get back in action, petrol stations are starting up again, hotels are rising. There is scaffolding everywhere and a constant stream of building materials flooding in to supplement the ubiquitous coconut timber gleaned from the fallen palms. Replanted rice crops are growing. Green shoots of bananas and lush grass are covering the remains of international resorts and villages alike.

Above all it is the children we will always remember. They are so beautiful. We promised to remember them and took a photo of each child so we could. We gave them a photo of themselves – their losses in the typhoon included losing photos. We were blessed to locate the one machine in the city that printed photos, as our requests until then were met with the usual "Yolanda" shrug as an explanation for every unavailability. The children couldn't wait to go home "to show mama" their photo. They wrote their names for us and we taught them the song "I am not forgotten – God knows my name". To hear them singing that was truly wonderful.

Christine and Robert are members of the Grafton, NSW, congregation.

Committed to sharing the good life as a Gift to the community

by Randall Bouchier

Our small congregation's many years of serving our community has blessed us with many encouraging glimpses of the flourishing that God has in store for humanity and his creation. These blessings began with and have been sustained by a commitment to discerning often apparently small opportunities to serve our community and the people in it.

ALTHOUGH WE KNOW that God has accomplished his new creation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we also understand that the church lives in an "in-between" time, awaiting the full consummation of God's new creation. As we do live in this "in-between" time, thinking about the way God gave himself to us in Christ shapes the way we are to live as individuals and as congregations – including responding to his invitation to share in the work he is doing.

As a small congregation we sensed early on that the opportunities God was opening up for us called for an all-of-life, long-term responsiveness to God and to others as Jesus described. The opportunities that he presented us were never things that could be treated as short-term projects. They required our lives! Years on, as God leads, he is weaving the congregation into the community in richer, deeper and more substantial ways.

As an example, let me describe our relationship with a small, local primary school.

Kids Hope Aus

In 2004 our congregation became part of the national piloting of Kids Hope Aus (KHA). We were one of a dozen congregations in our Shire who committed to a World Vision brokered relationship with a local primary school community. Our contribution was to provide World Vision trained mentors from the congregation who would visit a school-designated child each week. Each mentor was supported by a prayer partner from the congregation. The KHA slogan reads: One child, one hour, one church, one school.

Ten years later, the mentoring relationship continues. Over the years, as we've continued with what seems on the surface to be a very simple, unspectacular service to a few children, we've learned that there was far more going on than a superficial view might suggest.

As you might imagine, one immediate outcome was that our weekly visits led to wonderfully fulfilling relationships between child and mentor which over time often began to include the child's family. Teachers are unanimous in acknowledging the benefits of the mentoring relationship – both behaviourally and academically.

During the first year of mentoring the school planned a thank-you spit-roast lunch at the school so that the children, parents and the extended school community might have an opportunity to

meet not just the mentors, but the congregation. The school recognised that the benefit they were receiving was coming not only from the twenty or so mentors who turned up each week, but from the whole congregation of which the mentors were members.

And, so, during one beautifully sunny afternoon, we received the hospitality of the school and enjoyed watching networks grow and friendships develop.

Not long after I started mentoring in the school, a teacher explained to me that the way the mentors served the school community caused her to revise her views. "Randall," she said, "you know what I think about churches and Christians ... but you guys are the real deal!" On another occasion a prominent staff member explained to one of our mentors that she had believed that churches had no business in schools until she saw the benefit that our mentors brought to the entire school community. There have been many other similar comments over the years.

From face painting to a town vision

Quite some time before our involvement with Kids Hope, the congregation was prayerfully seeking to discern where God was at work in our community. One of the first opportunities that presented itself was to lend a hand with face-painting at the local community festival. Believe it or not, from that humble beginning a growing number of relationships and further opportunities to help emerged. Encouragingly, God's lead didn't zigzag erratically in different directions; rather greater richness and further opportunity emerged from what we were already involved with.

Our congregation meets for services in our local Community Centre, and very early on, when we were planning for a week-long celebration, the Centre approached us to help with their school holiday programme which coincided with our celebration. From that time the ongoing partnerships between Community Centre and church grew. One example is our partnership with the Centre in providing free movie nights for local families during school holiday periods. The church hires the movie, provides free ice-cream and some manpower; the Community Centre provides the venue, along with some staff assistance.

Not long after that initial partnership, the local Shire – realising that the congregation really was committed to an agenda-free desire to serve – asked if we'd help facilitate the town vision for the next decade or two.

I remember responding: "But don't you know we're a church?" And I remember the response: "But you are part of this community." And so we prayerfully pressed on.

Because it had become over-commercialised, the Shire closed down the Community Festival where we had helped with face painting. We were invited to help establish a small grassroots community festival to take its place. Years later, several of our members continue to serve as part of the executive of *Celebrate Mooroolbark* which has become the largest community festival within the 43 townships of the Shire.

From the start we were committed to providing a low cost family day as part of that festival. We wanted a festival whose core reason for being was to build, enhance and celebrate our sense of community together. We'll never forget the hundred or so people who attended the first festival! Now, over ten years later, around 10,000 people celebrate together in a beautifully relaxed atmosphere.

Serving the common good

Sometimes we might wonder what activities like these have to do with preaching the gospel. Unlike other parts of the world, Australia is a post-Christian – perhaps better – a neo-pagan culture. For many Australian churches, membership growth frequently occurs through membership transfer as consumer-Christians go church shopping for a congregation that suits them better.

In such a culture, traditional ways of preaching the gospel have little meaning or impact for a people who've forgotten, or never known the biblical narrative, or who may be hostile to the church in general.

As a consequence, new people are more likely to be attracted to the church as they recognise, and perhaps question, what prompts Christians to live for the benefit of others. In answering such questions, opportunities emerge to explain that God is bringing about human flourishing in Christ and that our care for others, in some small and imperfect way pictures what God has in store for humanity.

In addition to the activities outlined in this article, I could also describe the growth in influence of *Living Today* magazine, of the formation of the Umbrella Group – an organisation of organisations committed to benefitting all in our township. I could describe all of the associated and interconnected partnering opportunities that God has provided for us – the free fortnightly Community meal, the establishment of the town website, the annual Carols and Twilight picnic, Planting Day and Mayoral Breakfasts. Or I could explain the helping relationships with the Disabled People's Company, the Mooroolbark pastors' network, and many other ways the congregation has been able to share helpfully in the life of the community, along with things like Samaritan's Purse, World Day of Prayer, and Bibles for the Persecuted.

But let me return to the relationship with the primary school to illustrate further the amazing way God provides fresh opportunities that grow from the deepening of relationships cultivated over many years.

One of our mentors (a former school principal) started to help the school with some chaplaincy work. The school faces many challenges, and for a number of years our member assisted voluntarily. In time the school received a government grant to fund a chaplain for a day a week. The school said that if possible they'd like one of our congregation to take up the position. Today, as his guide and forerunner enjoys a well-earned retirement from chaplaincy, one of our younger members fulfils the role after completing a year of training and on-the-job mentoring.



*One child, one hour,
one church, one school*



We have been privileged to share this journey together as God makes opportunities possible

The school has also introduced us to other school communities with whom we can also partner, inviting them to join in activities like the planting days, the annual community forums, the carols. In much the same way ... we share, so we're now enjoying the way these relationships invite other schools to do the same.

We have been so privileged to share this journey together as God makes opportunities possible. We are privileged to work in ways that benefit all, and that provide tiny glimpses of the neighbourliness and community God has in store for all.

In his book *A Public Faith: How followers of Christ should serve the common good*, Miroslav Volf says: "The way Christians work toward human flourishing is not by imposing on others their vision of human flourishing and the common good but by bearing witness to Christ, who embodies the good life." ☉

Randall Bouchier is pastor of the Mooroolbark Community Church in Victoria.



India's children the future in focus

by Rod Matthews

At this moment, one in six people on earth live in India. Its population is 1.27 billion with 50% of them under the age of 25. While living in and contributing greatly to this modern global world, the country struggles with many complex and ancient traditions. It's a challenging and often stressful world for children.

OUR CHURCH IN India consists of two pastorates – covering roughly the north and south of the country – with senior pastors Dan Zachariah and Joe D'Costa living respectively in Hyderabad and Bangalore. Recently I visited each area accompanied by Rick Shallenberger, a US regional pastor who represented Pastor General Joseph Tkach.

Both these GCI congregations in the Indian sub-continent have a common focus that we can only put down to the guidance of the Holy Spirit: outreach activities concentrating on underprivileged children.

Hyderabad-Secunderabad

The Hyderabad congregation (it's actually in the twin city of Secunderabad) provides spiritual and some material support for the Asha Kiran home for girls whose parents are unable to care

for them due to incarceration. The Sisters who run the home are always delighted to receive visitors and the children love to sing and dance. Perhaps it's the best way to deal with their personal circumstances.

Mary Zachariah directs the Faust School in Hyderabad and the children there also contribute in various ways to Asha Kiran. In addition, there is a growing relationship between the Hyderabad congregation and Shining Stars, a unique after-school-hours centre where children needing additional tuition in order to meet their normal academic requirements are given personalised attention all within a range of enjoyable activities designed to lift their standards and offer fun and education in a Christian environment.

Bangalore

Some years ago, as an unexpected gift, the Bangalore congregation was given a new member, Dr Piria Suntharam, who brought with him the Susanna Children's Home which he had founded in a rural area of the state of Tamil Nadu to care for children who had no parents or whose parents were unable to care for them. The home is named after his daughter who died, with his wife, in a vehicle accident many years ago.

Dr Suntharam grew up in an orphanage himself and knows what it is like. Since his retirement, he has dedicated his life to looking after disadvantaged children. He continues to face some



(Clockwise from previous page) Children at the Asha Kiran home for girls in Hyderabad-Secunderabad; students at the Susana Children's Home in rural Tamil Nadu; Dr Piria Suntharam; Dan and Mary Zachariah, Rick Shallenberger, Father Patrick (a Roman Catholic priest and long-time supporter of the Asha Kiran home), and Rod Matthews at the Asha Kiran Children's Home; Children at work in the Shining Stars after-school tuition program.



Both our congregations in India share a common focus: outreach concentrating on underprivileged children.

serious hurdles in trying to develop a facility that meets the local government regulations. He is required to build a dormitory for the boys so they don't have to sleep in the same building (not in the same room) as the girls, yet is unable to order sand for the foundation due to some long-standing disputes between suppliers and the authorities. And being in a rural area, he has problems finding staff to serve there. I know that Dr Suntharam would appreciate the prayers of his brothers and sisters in Christ across the seas.

While we were in Bangalore, we visited a remarkable facility focusing on the education and development of children with mental disabilities, named "Shristi Special Academy" and run by a very passionate, loving and highly educated lady. The school takes each

child and specifically tailors a program to best meet the development needs of that person. Many children suffer from forms of autism and some remarkable results have been achieved. One of their key platforms is that the parents must be intimately involved so that the twin environments at home and in care are entirely compatible and consistent.

Parents benefit immensely from having the support of Shristi in helping their "special" child become a fully integrated, accepted, valued and developing part of their family. Some of the children are now employed in various capacities at the school including a workshop making quality handicrafts for sale. The Bangalore congregation is exploring possibilities to become more involved in support of this remarkable facility. ☺

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROD MATTHEWS.

From balance To balance sheets

by Craig Kuhlman

In the second article in this series, Craig Kuhlman explains the difference between the budget and the bottom line.

DID YOU GIVE any thought to your personal financial philosophy from the last article: a) most toys wins; b) a penny saved/earned; c) make a lot/give a lot away? If you are like most, you probably inherited your philosophy from your parents.

I grew up with a “most toys wins” philosophy. When I was young I asked my dad how long a year was and he said, “Twelve payments.” This became very interesting when I married someone who was raised with a different philosophy.

Nan and I dated through our four years of college before we got married. Because I had a full-time job and lived at home while attending college part-time in the evenings, I had plenty of money for dates. Before we dated she never ate popcorn or candy at the movie theater. While we dated I took her out for steak dinners, bought her jewelry and perfume, paid her way to church conventions, etc. She loved it at the time. After we returned from our honeymoon and “blended” balance sheets, she fell into a minor state of shock.

At the time I was making payments on two sports cars. I had over \$6,000 in credit

card debt. I had borrowed money from my parents to update my business wardrobe, and to finance our honeymoon in Rio de Janeiro. Nan’s dad raised her with a penny-saved perspective and my approach to money wasn’t acceptable, notwithstanding the great spendthrift times we had while dating. Adding to her misfortune, shortly after we married I told her I’d like to apply to our church college, quit the great jobs we had, and move to Southern California.

The next year was quite a change. We worked together under a penny-saved austerity program to tighten our budget and prepare for the move. During those twelve months we considered it splurging to simply get an ice cream and designer coffee at the mall. By knuckling down on expenses, saving almost every discretionary dollar, and selling some assets before the move, we managed in twelve months to pay off all the debt and have \$10,000 in reserves for the move.

The bottom line

Most financial mistakes are made by simply focusing on the budget rather than its impact on the balance sheet. The budget is a financial statement that records expected income, expenses, and what is left over. When all income is not spent, it builds the balance sheet (building wealth). The balance sheet is a financial statement that records what is owned (assets), owed (liabilities) and the resulting net worth.

When more income is spent than earned, it detracts from the balance sheet by creating a liability (payments on two sports cars, credit card debt, notes to parents, etc.).

The financial mistake comes from thinking I can afford the payment (the impact on the budget) without considering the impact on the balance sheet (going in debt and reducing net

Most financial mistakes are made by simply focusing on the budget rather than its impact on the balance sheet.

worth). Wealth is what is reflected as the bottom line of the balance sheet (net worth).

Managing this dynamic, and the interaction between these two financial statements is a best practice for building wealth. As stewards of God’s wealth we need to manage both to be truly effective.

Regardless of the philosophy you were raised with, take heart: it can change over time to meet changing circumstances. ☺

Craig Kuhlman is an executive vice president and chief trust officer for a financial institution and has more than 30 years of financial counseling experience with bank and investment clients.

Festival 2014 Celebrate our life together ...



GCI will again host celebrations of our salvation in Jesus Christ and our life of grace together. Festivals typically incorporate a mixture of worship services and workshops, as well as fellowship activities for all ages and plenty of time for enjoying relaxation with family and friends.

Dates for these events vary from area to area depending upon local planning so check details with your pastor / pastoral team for local details.

Australia

Caloundra, Queensland (Sept 28 - Oct 4)

The Events Centre, 20 Minchinton Street, Caloundra QLD.

Contact: Bob Regazzoli. E: caloundra@gci.org.au T: 07 3216 8768

Echuca/Moama, Victoria (Sept 20 - Sept 26)

The Adelaide Room, Comfort Resort, Echuca-Moama, 54-56 Meninya Street, Moama (Cobb Hwy), VIC.

Contact: Alaric Kurzawa. E: al.kurzawa@gci.org.au T: 03 5126 3205

Mandurah, Western Australia (Oct 9 - Oct 16)

Mandurah Performing Arts Centre, The Boardwalk, Ormsby Terrace, Mandurah WA.

Contact: Mohan Jayasekera. PO Box 190 Willetton WA 6955, Australia. E: mohan.jayasekera@gci.org.au

Ulladulla, New South Wales (Oct 8 - Oct 16)

Highway Christian Church, 240 Princes Highway, Ulladulla NSW

Contact: Rod Dean. E: rod.dean@gci.org.au T: 02 9476 6398

Ulverstone Retreat, Tasmania (Oct 20 - 26)

Camp Clayton, 41 Bass Highway, Ulverstone, TAS (Just out of Ulverstone, right on the beach and the main highway to Devonport)

Contact: Geoff Miller. E: millergd@comcen.com.au T: 03 6424 7109

New Zealand

Rotorua (Oct 8 - Oct 12)

Willowhaven Holiday Park, 31 Beaumonts Road, Ngongotaha, Rotorua. www.willowhaven.co.nz

Contact: Dennis Richards. E: dennis@wgc.org.nz T: +64 6 3536224
www.wgc.org.nz/FestivalGathering.php

Other locations in Asia Pacific

Port Dickson, Malaysia (Oct 8 - 12)

Primaland Resort and Convention Centre, No. 1 PD Prima, Batu 13 Jalan Pantai, Pasir Panjang, 71250 Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus.

Contact: Wong Mein Kong. E: meinkong@gmail.com T: +60 341617333 or +60 123303378 www.gci-malaysia.org

Pacific Harbour, Fiji (Aug 22 - Aug 28)

Coral Coast Christian Centre Camp, Queens Road, Pacific Harbour

Contact: Isei Colati. E: colati@unwired.com.fj T: +67 9 3320 672

Hyderabad, India (Oct 2 - 5)

Venue is TBA.

Contact: Danny Zachariah. E: danzachariah@gmail.com / www.gcind.org T: +91 40 2711 2950

Mysore, India (Sept 28 - Oct 4)

Aashirwad Revival Center, Besides Amblee Holiday Resorts, Srirangapatna, Mysore Outskirts 571 438. T: +91 08236-292444

Contact: Joe D’Costa. E: wcgjdcban@gmail.com / www.wgc.org.in T: +91 80 2853 2565 or 09 916 308 962

FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
EVENTS VISIT **WWW.GCI.ORG/EVENTS**

The story of God's relationship with his people in the books of History: Joshua to Esther



We may experience pain and sorrow as the result of bad choices, but we don't ever need to be afraid that God will stop loving us. He is always faithful.

THE BRIGHT SPOT in Israel's history is the faithfulness of God. This gives us great confidence today. Since God did not reject his people back then, he will not reject us either, even when we have times of failure. We may experience pain and sorrow as the result of bad choices, but we don't ever need to be afraid that God will stop loving us. He is always faithful.

Promise #1: a leader

During the period of the judges, Israel saw the cycle of disobedience—oppression—repentance—deliverance. After each leader died, a new cycle would begin. After several of these cycles, the people asked the prophet Samuel to give them a king, a royal family, so one of his descendants would always be available to lead the next generation. God told Samuel: "They have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you" (1 Samuel 8:7-8). God had been their unseen leader, but the people did not trust him. God therefore provided a person to be a mediator, a representative, who could rule the people on God's behalf.

Saul, the first king, was a failure, because he did not trust God. Samuel then anointed David as king. Although he had significant failures in his life, David's overall desire was to worship God. After he had achieved some peace and prosperity, he offered to build a great temple for God in Jerusalem. It would be a symbol of permanence not only for the nation, but also for their worship of the true God.

In a Hebrew play on words, God said, "David, you will not build me a house. It will be the other way around: I will build you a house, the house of David. It will be a royal dynasty that will last forever, and one of your descendants will build the temple for me" (2 Samuel 7:11-16, my paraphrase). God used the covenant formula: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (verse 14). He promised that David's dynasty and kingdom would last forever (verse 16).

But not even the temple lasted forever. The dynasty of David fell—religiously and militarily. What had happened to God's prom-

ise? The promises given to Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus. He is the focal point of God's relationship with his people. The security the people wanted is found only in a person who is permanent, and permanently faithful. The history of Israel points us to something greater than Israel, yet is also part of Israel's history.

Promise #2: God's presence

While Israel traveled through the wilderness, God had lived in the tabernacle: "I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling" (2 Samuel 7:6). Solomon's temple was built as a new dwelling place for God, and "the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God" (2 Chronicles 5:14; 6:2). This was symbolism, because the people knew that even the heavens were not large enough to contain God (2 Chronicles 6:18).

God promised to live among the Israelites forever, if they obeyed him (1 Kings 6:12-13). But since they did not obey, he decided "to remove them from his presence" (2 Kings 24:3)—that is, to send them into captivity in another land.

But again God was faithful and had not abandoned his people. He promised he would not let their name disappear (2 Kings 14:27). They were able to repent and draw near to him even in a foreign land. God had given them the promise that if they returned to him, he would return them to their land, symbolizing a restoration of the relationship (Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Nehemiah 1:8-9).

Promise #3: a homeland forever

God promised to David, "I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning" (1 Chronicles 17:9).

The promise is surprising, because it comes in a book that was written after Israel had been taken into exile. The history of Israel points beyond itself—it is a promise awaiting fulfillment. The nation needed a leader who was descended from David, and yet greater than David. They needed the presence of God not just symbolized in a temple, but made real to each person. They needed a land not just with temporary peace and prosperity, but a transformation of the entire world, so there would be no oppression at all.

Israel's history points to a future reality. But there was a reality in ancient Israel, too. God had a covenant with Israel, and he was faithful to it. They were his people, even when they were disobedient. Although many of the people went astray, many others did not. Although they died without seeing the promises fulfilled, they will live again to see the leader, the land, and best of all, eternal life in the presence of their Savior. ☺

Dr Michael Morrison teaches classes in the New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary. More information about the seminary can be found at: www.gcs.edu


Israel's history can be summarized by the word failure. In the books of Moses, God's relationship with the Israelites is described as a covenant, a relationship in which promises of loyalty are given. However, the Bible describes numerous failures on the part of the people. They did not trust God, and they grumbled about what he was doing. Their pattern of distrust and disobedience is found throughout Israel's history.



ACCM continues to provide training and equipping for our brothers and sisters around the world. Recently forty-seven people from the Caribbean attended the ACCM class on Christian Leadership in Martinique. Those present commented that the class was a rich blessing, very encouraging, and most profitable for all who were there. Kernani Cheny and Betty Brunet did the local organising for the event, and provided a French translation. Caribbean Mission Developer Charles Fleming and Greg Williams, the Assistant Director of

CAD in America, were present and helped teach the class. They both said how blessed was the time together, and how positive and worthwhile was the whole experience. ACCM was able to accredit some local teachers to take the class to others around the region.

This is another significant milestone in the unfolding journey of ACCM as it continues to be a gift to the fellowship.



*Summing it all up, friends,
I'd say you'll do best by
filling your minds and
meditating on things true,
noble, reputable, authentic,
compelling, gracious - the
best, not the worst; the
beautiful, not the ugly;
things to praise, not things
to curse.*

– Philippians 4:8 (The Message)