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Editorial

Welcome to the May 2012 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue is likely to have something for everyone. Two articles focus on marriage and family. Today, what constitutes family is being re-defined by our welfare agencies, financial institutions and government. How should Christians respond? In our *Food for Thought* section, Peter Searson from Brisbane shares a candid look at the realities of counselling individuals who no longer find themselves within traditional notions of family. In our *Book Review* section, David Payne, minister for the Belmore Road congregation in Melbourne, reviews *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper. The book promises a refreshingly different read in that it explores God's purpose for marriage and how marriage can be viewed as a reflection of God's character and glory.

On a separate but related note, our editor Benny Tabalujan considers the role of doctrine and examines its place in Christian circles today. *Does Doctrine Matter?* invites you to grapple with what constitutes sound doctrine and how this can be demonstrated in daily Christian living.

Our *ChurchScope* section shines the spotlight on the Hunter Valley Christians in East Maitland, NSW. It's written by David Carr who has been a full-time minister there for 22 years. Our *Interview* features Marilyn Paull from Sydney. A doctor working in paediatric medicine, Marilyn shares her experiences of growing up in a Christian family and tells of her medical mission trip last year to a rural community in Ethiopia.

This issue also carries a *Letter from New Zealand* written by Steve Raine, an elder with the church in Otumoetai and principal of the South Pacific Bible College. Finally, our *News* section provides an update on a new congregation meeting in Darwin and highlights a unique website created by Brad Johnson in Brisbane to assist small congregations with useful resources.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *InterSections* and, as always, look forward to hearing any feedback.

The editorial team

ChurchScope:

Hunter Valley Christians in East Maitland, NSW

Beginnings, division and reconciliation

This article focuses on two groups of Christians in the Hunter Valley of NSW: one meeting in Warners Bay and the other in East Maitland in Newcastle. The Warners Bay Church of Christ first emerged in 1948-49 through the work of American evangelist Charles Tinius. Throughout the 1950s, the congregation grew and a small meeting place was built on Lake Street. This structure is still there, behind the larger hall built in 1957. Preachers who helped the work in those days included Les Burgin and US preachers Rodney Wald, Tom Tarbet, Bill Stanley and Robert Page.

By the mid-1960s, the church had grown to 75 members. But, unfortunately, a division which occurred around 1966 led to a group of 28 people purchasing a property

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The key to the stability of the work ... has been the unity and love of the church, the faithfulness of several committed families and regular evangelism.

and starting a congregation in the Newcastle suburb of Lambton – about 10kms away. By 1983, the Lambton congregation had grown to about 40 members.

Since the early 1980s the Lambton congregation has had good fellowship with the Warners Bay congregation, where Merv Squires has done the bulk of the teaching after Harry Wire left in 1978. Reconciliation between the two congregations – estranged for more than ten years – was begun by Geoff Pollard in the late 1970s when he was at Lambton. It was accelerated by Merv Squires at Warners Bay and David Carr at Lambton.

Today the two congregations function as autonomous but co-operating assemblies of God's people. For the past decade David has preached once a month at Warners Bay, which has allowed different preachers from sister congregations in Sydney and Gosford to assist with the preaching at East Maitland. The remainder of this account will focus on the Lambton Church of Christ, which now meets as the Hunter Valley Christians at East Maitland.



The East Maitland church today

David Carr today ministers with the congregation which meets in East Maitland. He was baptised in 1974 and within eight months his father, mother, brother, and two sisters all became Christians. David later studied at MSOBS (Macquarie School of Biblical Studies) in Sydney and graduated in 1980. He has preached for the congregation wherever it has met – once or twice in 1977 at Lambton before attending MSOBS, from 1981-1983 full-time at North Lambton, and then continuously from 1989 till today, mostly at East Maitland. Sometimes he was supported full-time, and sometimes employed as a technical officer at the TAFE Newcastle Campus, Tighe's Hill.

In recent years the church has benefitted from the work of Joshua Turner – formerly as a HIM (Helpers in Mission) worker and later as a youth/family minister working with the church – as well as Sam and Karyn White and their family with seven children. This meant that the church's youth group has varied from something large and active to almost non-existent as these families left. The church has also had good relationships with the Bankstown and Coffs Harbour congregations through various Christian camps.

This leads us to the present when increasing rent has forced the congregation to relocate to another facility – the Bruce Street community hall in a Department of Housing residential area in East Maitland. In all its time in the East Maitland area the church has called itself Hunter

Valley Christians to stress the undenominational nature of the church and also to avoid confusion with the conference Churches of Christ. The name "Undenominational Church of Christ" is included in Yellow Pages advertising.

Since its beginnings in Lambton in the late 1960s, the congregation (at times known as the Lambton, North Lambton and Newcastle church, and now the Hunter Valley Christians, East Maitland) has relied on a few committed families: initially the Gills and Hectors, then the Hunters and Pollards. Since then the nucleus consists of the Carrs, Grays, Wilsons and Dines. The membership, with various comings and goings, including a substantial number of conversions, has typically been in the range of 25-50 individuals. Currently there are around 40 people regularly assembling on Sundays.

Always meeting in working-class suburbs, with members drawn from such, the church has had to operate on a very limited budget. Yet it has consistently been able to

support its preacher, MSOBS students, and occasionally helped other congregations in India and Africa.



Evangelistic methods used by the congregation over the years include: owning a building, renting a facility,

letterboxing, public debates, doorknocking campaigns – at times involving HIM workers and Christians from other congregations. The church also had Gospel meetings with preachers such as Jim Waldron, Paul Southern, James Baird and Hugo McCord. The church has also conducted home Bible studies, shopping centre/coffee shop evangelism, shopping centre promotions, newspaper, radio and television advertising, and the FriendSpeak conversational English ministry with international students – mostly at the University of Newcastle.

The key to the stability of the work in the Newcastle/East Maitland area since the late 1960s has been the unity and love of the church, the faithfulness of several committed families and regular evangelism.

In more recent years David Carr has tried to interest several young men in preparing for leadership. However, each attempt has evaporated as these young men left the congregation for one reason or another. This is a common challenge facing churches in Australian regional towns and cities as people relocate to the larger urban centres for jobs and other reasons. For this reason, II Timothy 2:2 (entrusting the Gospel to faithful men who will be able to teach others) is not always easy to carry out. But if churches are to survive long-term they must find men willing to continue in the work of preaching, teaching and leadership! ■

David Carr ministers with the Hunter Valley Christians in East Maitland. In preparing this article he acknowledges help from a paper written by Terry Gill in 1971, David Roper's book, Voices Crying in the Wilderness, and also Merv Squires from the Warners Bay congregation.
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Letter from New Zealand

A View from "Across the Ditch" 



On a light-hearted note, I know Kiwis and Aussies love to take the mickey out of each other – all in good fun. On a more serious note, our respective cultures have traditionally displayed some stronger parochial tendencies. It's one thing to witness this in sport, business or politics, but what about as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Paul writes in Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Greek but we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). It's much easier to look back 2000 years and theorise about the radical ramifications of such a statement as it applied to Greek and Jewish cultures than to actually think about the application of this in the here and now. The first time this somewhat impacted me was at a missions conference when there was a Greek Christian on the same speaking platform as a Jewish Christian. I later learned that in their respective congregations they have very different (cultural) practices or expressions of their Christian faith but that did not stop them from fellowshiping and participating in joint camps, seminars and the like.

But I think there is an impact much closer to home that we should consider. Although Churches of Christ in New Zealand and Australia historically trace our roots back to the United Kingdom, since the mid 20th century our ties have been closer to congregations in USA. About 15 years ago it began to dawn on me that as churches in our region we sit so close to each other regionally but our ties span half a globe away.

As I began to visit churches in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, and SA it quickly became apparent that we share very similar situations in terms of church growth, church struggles, church leadership, etc. It was almost uncanny to discover that in almost every respect the growth, development and decline of congregations was an apparent repeatable pattern regardless of which state in Australia or which island of New Zealand you care to nominate.

More importantly it was abundantly obvious that our first port of call for help, if you want to call it that, was often to look half a globe away to USA and not to each other. It seemed ironic that while we sit here, just across the ditch from each other, sharing so many commonalities, we didn't acknowledge that we could perhaps be the best resource for helping each other out.

A good friend of mine says it is always easier to see the problems but not so easy to find solutions. Therefore let me suggest a few for consideration. Firstly, I suspect that deeply embedded in us is the natural inclination of our cultures to hold varying degrees of parochial tendencies. We must therefore take a strong stand against culture and work hard to change this (perhaps we can still have light-hearted fun though).

Secondly, we should give due diligence to joint participation of various kinds. One thing we have done is encourage our youth to go to camps in Australia. Some men in Australia have come to our Annual Leadership Forum and Men's Challenge. These are merely two of many ways to get to know each other better.

A third suggestion is to recognise the strengths and various gifts that are available. Just as one individual body is made of many members that combine to strengthen the whole, so too we can recognise that regionally we have different strengths and gifts that can be used to help any individual congregation or particular need. No doubt we already do this within our respective countries and I also know we utilise special gifts from far abroad. What I'm suggesting is there are times, places and events where we should consider utilising each other's gifts more.

New Zealand may not become a state of Australia, nor Australia the west island of New Zealand in our lifetimes. However, I can see us working closer together to strengthen, grow, train, encourage and build up the church in our region. ■

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InterSections

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Feature *Does doctrine matter?*

Recently I read a blog which featured the statement, “Don’t give me doctrine, I just want to follow Jesus.” In a similar vein, a few years ago there was a book with the provocative title, *They Like Jesus but not the Church*.¹

Part of this negativity towards doctrine and the church is understandable. Truth be said, Christians and churches sometimes make doctrine look bad. There are Christians who – contrary to Scripture – seem to relish “foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law” (Titus 3:9). There are churches which spend a disproportionate amount of energy and resources on maintaining bureaucratic structures or an interest in petty teachings instead of preaching the Gospel or looking after the disadvantaged, orphans and widows (James 1:27). In view of this, it’s not surprising that there are people who think that Jesus matters but doctrine doesn’t.

Yet, if we reflect more deeply about it, the idea that doctrine doesn’t matter to the Christian faith holds little water. In the Bible, doctrine simply means teaching. Sound doctrine thus means healthy teaching (I Timothy 1:10, II Timothy 4:3). This refers to God’s truth communicated in words which prompt godly remorse, acceptance of his grace and consequent righteous behaviour. Thus Jesus said that those who love him will keep his word; this is the word which God the Father entrusted to the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles and which we now treasure as Scripture (John 14:23-26). Elsewhere we’re warned not to go beyond the teaching of Christ (II John 9).

In fact, to know Jesus we have to know Scripture. The more we understand and know God the Father, Jesus the Son and God the Spirit, the more we enjoy eternal life (John 17:3). Meanwhile, constantly swirling in our midst there are many unhelpful teachings, also called ‘strange’ or ‘false’ or ‘different’ doctrines (I Timothy 1:3, 6:3). In contrast, sound doctrine is the teaching which will ensure growth towards maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:14-16). Sifting truth from erroneous doctrines is a huge responsibility of church leaders. As G K Chesterton observed: “There are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands.”²

Let me give one example of the importance of sound doctrine. Scripture tells us that God loves humans: he gave up his son so that everyone who believes in Jesus can have eternal life (John 3:16). God loves the wicked as well as the good, the faithful spouse as well as the adulterous spouse, the homosexual as well as the heterosexual, the dysfunctional family as well as the godly family. In this sense, his love for mankind is unconditional – he loves us whatever condition we’re in.

However, some have extrapolated the teaching that God’s love is unconditional to say that God’s salvation is also unconditional. My concern with this view is that it leans dangerously close to universalism (the teaching that everyone will be saved). In contrast to the universalist view, I believe the Scriptures teach that, whilst God’s love is unconditional, salvation is conditional. Only those who accept God’s conditions for salvation will enjoy eternal life. Few will do

so because narrow is the way to life and many won’t enter it (Matthew 7:13-14). That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Elsewhere, Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3). Peter also preached that there was only one name by which we are saved (Acts 4:12). To me, all these point to the conditional nature of salvation.

The nub of the issue is this: our understanding of the doctrine of God’s love and salvation will determine our response to the Gospel. One possible view leads to universalism. Another view leads to the understanding that salvation is only by grace through faith in Christ. It’s doctrine which sets them apart. So the impact of doctrine on our behaviour and destiny will be profound.

Now, whilst affirming that doctrine does matter, I’d like to mention three provisos. Firstly, doctrine without action is futile. Just because we memorise Scripture or understand theology, we shouldn’t be smug. Jesus taught the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27) precisely to teach his disciples that hearing his words isn’t enough. We have to act on them. That’s why faith without works is dead (James 2:26). If we claim that we have sound doctrine and are worshipping God on the right day in the right way but we aren’t demonstrating other actions which reflect God’s concern for the lost and the disadvantaged, then this raises doubts as to whether our doctrine is truly sound.

Secondly, not all doctrines are equally important. Jesus taught that there are “more important matters of the law” such as justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). On another occasion, he summarised the Great Commands as loving God and loving one’s neighbour (Matthew 22:36-40). Of course, it’s also true that a person who keeps the whole law but one can be said to be guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10). But this simply means that he can be called a lawbreaker, not that he has literally broken each law.³

If some doctrines are more important than others, this suggests that Christians ought to major on the majors and minor on the minors. This doesn’t mean that minor teachings can be neglected; after all, Jesus said that we’re to fulfill the weightier matters without neglecting the others (Matthew 23:23). It does mean, however, that the weightier teachings deserve greater emphasis and attention.

Lastly, whilst doctrine is important, we should be civil towards those who don’t see eye to eye with us (after all, we could be wrong too). This applies to our responses to politicians who have a view of marriage different from the Bible, as well as to neighbours who know little of Jesus. To everyone we ought to give a reason for our views with grace, humility, gentleness and respect (I Peter 3:15). ■

1 If you’re interested, the book’s by Dan Kimball and was published in 2007. It looks at the views of society’s younger, emerging generations on religion.

2 G K Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, volume 1 (1996) 306.

3 Similarly, we can refer to convicted thieves and convicted murderers as criminals while acknowledging the difference between theft and murder in terms of the nature and severity of the crimes.

For me, the lesson from this experience is that we Christians must be able to walk compassionately with sinners who are unaware that they are sinning.



Food for thought

Church and Family in the 21st Century

Families of the 21st century come in all shapes and sizes. Divorce, remarriage, single parenthood, step-families, gay and lesbian families, unmarried couples living together and a host of other variables have turned the traditional family into the exception rather than the norm. As little as a half-century ago, children were typically raised in homes with two married biological parents, male and female, with the two parents likely having the support of extended family members nearby. Now we find that the traditional family is on the endangered species list.

'Families have been assailed as never before. Factors that have contributed to this are the general decline in traditional moral standards, the sexual revolution, television, the prevailing weakness of the man in the home, breakdown in marriage, the increasing attack on children (abortion, abuse, divorce, smaller families, confusion in parenting, extreme forms of feminist movement, both parents working), the rise in homosexuality, false notions about love, unhealthy dependencies within the family and the relevance of compulsive / addictive behaviours (drugs, alcohol, pornography and work).

The sad result is a marked rise in the numbers of very broken people – dysfunctional people in dysfunctional families in a dysfunctional society. Confusion reigns, with good being called bad and bad being called good.¹

In this context, the church is faced with many challenges as we seek to minister both to the world and to our own flock. How does the church deal with a gay couple who walk in the door wanting to be members? Is the church ready to help dysfunctional families? May I suggest that the answer can be seen in the following personal experience.

Once, when speaking with a church family member who was suffering from depression, our church leaders were challenged with the remark, 'What would you know? None of you are qualified in such things.' After discussion with my fellow leaders it was thought that it might be helpful for me to undertake a counselling course. So I set about completing a Diploma in Christian Counselling and Family Therapy. This was a Bible-based course which I thought would give me a better understanding of family and counselling issues.

After completing the course, my first real test walked in the door. This was a 28-year old male living with a 19-year old girl and a 20-month old baby. He was seeking help for his drug addiction. He said, 'It's not a big one, really only marijuana every day and the occasional ecstasy pill at a party.' He also sought help with the verbal and physical abuse he was dishing out to his partner.

As I sat down to talk with this young man I thought, 'Where am I going to start?' Somehow words like, 'Mate – you're a sinner and you need to repent now, and then things will turn around' weren't going to work. Instead, I shared with him the modalities I learnt in the counselling course: cognitive behaviour therapy and pastoral counselling.

But 'pastoral' was a word he was not familiar with. So I provided an explanation using words such as theological, spiritual and God – to which he replied, 'I don't want to talk about God.' I thought, 'This is just great – I've done a course in Christian counselling so I can help people. This guy needs help and I'm not allowed to talk about God! How will I ever have a chance to get the message of God across to him?'

After this unpromising first session, I reflected on the bottom line – *he is a sinner and so am I. We're no different on that score. However, I've come to understand the grace of God better and how to have a relationship with him.* With this in mind I persisted. After the ninth session he came out with a comment, 'Well, maybe God made me that way.' After all this time, here's an opening – we had a chance to talk about God!

For me, the lesson from this experience is that we Christians must be able to walk compassionately with sinners who are unaware that they are sinning. Their family relationships might be awry. They might be living in an ungodly relationship. They might be treating family members badly. Yes, we need to talk about sin, forgiveness, redemption and grace to help others ultimately become aware of their own spiritual state. However, in doing so, we need to be patient, welcoming and relational – just like God, our heavenly father.

After all, God is a relational being. He wants to relate to people so that they know how much he loves them. He wants to guide his people in accordance with his will and how to live. The problem was that, since Eden, mankind has defied God and sinned by disobeying him. That sin broke the relationship they had with God. In the same way it is sin that poisons our relationships – including our family relationships – today.

But in today's society sin is no longer given much thought. Karl Menninger, a 20th century psychiatrist, describes it this way: 'When I was a boy, sin was still a serious matter and the word was not a jocular term. But I saw this change; I saw it go. I am afraid I even joined in hailing its going.'² In losing track of sin, we lost the theological definition of our most basic human problem. Today the word 'sin' evokes images of angry fundamentalist preachers who seem intent on condemnation. Others think of sin lightly, as a topic of light-hearted joking or a name for a city where people can gamble and have fun. Only when we move beyond these distorted views of sin can we come to understand forgiveness, redemption and renew our relationships with God and others.

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Food for thought

Church and Family in the 21st Century

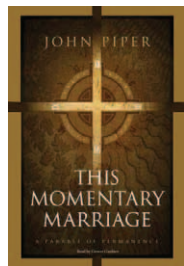
In John 4:1-40 we observe how Jesus didn't come out immediately to accuse the woman at the well of being a sinner and declare her need to repent. Instead, he led the discussion on living water to a point where she came to understand him. Further, in Luke 15:11-32 we see the father of the prodigal son patiently waiting for his son to repent

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of his sinful ways. When that happened he was prepared to run down the road, embrace him and welcome him home.

In all this, God shows us how far he will go to restore his relationship with humanity. The key is that as we Christians teach about the biblical model for the family, we need to be patient, welcoming and relational – just like God, our heavenly father. ■

1. Dr B & N Litchfield, *Standing up Straight*, 1998, p 2.
2. Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, 1973, p 24.



Book Review

This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence John Piper (Crossway Books, 2009)

One of the largest sections in religious bookshops is the marriage section. My personal library also contains quite a few titles on the subject of marriage. However, my observation is that the majority of these books are 'how to' books. What I mean is that these books contain good advice on *how* to improve your marriage. Rarely are there titles on the *why* of marriage.

John Piper's book, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* is an exception. It's one of the best books I've read on the subject of the purpose of marriage. It's written by a man who has been married for 40 years and he refers to the Bible constantly throughout the book.

Piper's main point throughout the book is that:

*"the most foundational thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is **God's doing**. And the ultimate thing to see from the Bible about marriage is that it is **for God's glory**. Those are the two points I have to make. Most foundationally, marriage is the doing of God. And ultimately, marriage is the display of God."*

He then expands on these two points throughout the book and provides noteworthy exegeses of Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:21-33. With Ephesians 5:32 as his starting place, Piper looks at a whole list of topics related to marriage: nakedness without shame; love and romance; forgiveness and forbearing; conformity to Christ; headship and submission; singleness; sex; procreation; evangelism and divorce. Piper continually returns to the point that if God created marriage then the purpose of marriage is to point towards God.

There are three particularly good chapters on headship and submission. Two of the chapters are devoted to men. He borrows the wonderful description of Christ in Revelation 5:6 as being *lionhearted* and *lamblike*. In other words, the husband can be regarded as servant-leader. He then reflects on Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 as his source for the definitions of headship and submission. Piper says:

"Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership, protection and provision in the home. Submission is the divine calling of the wife to honour and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts."

Our marriages are a display of God. This is a far greater purpose for marriage than falling and staying in love. It's about keeping a covenant and reflecting a covenant made with Christ and his church. Piper says that '*Christ will never leave His wife. Ever.*' Marriage is about putting the glory of Christ's covenant-keeping love on display.

One of the serendipities of the book is the quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters and papers from prison at each chapter heading. Bonhoeffer was arrested and killed by the Nazis in Germany during the Second World War. His writings about God, love and marriage in the face of suffering are very moving. Piper has used Bonhoeffer's quotes as a meditative backdrop to each chapter. The quotes contribute to his main idea that marriage is a momentary gift in this realm that points toward God's glory.

In a world that wants to change, alter and demean the definition and meaning of marriage, this book stands out by elevating marriage back to its rightful place as God intended. It's not a book that will give you seven steps to a happy marriage. But it will point you toward the very purpose of your marriage – a covenant relationship here on earth representing something far greater. Marriage is a parable of permanence.

I commend this book to all who are married or contemplating marriage. Read it with your Bibles open. Meditate upon the Scriptures quoted. My prayer is that the church of Christ in Australia will be full of marriages that point toward the glory of God and represent a parable of the greater gifts to come when we cross over to the next realm. ■

David Payne ministers with the Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. paynedt@bigpond.com

A new congregation has formed in Darwin. It began September 2011 with three couples in attendance: Allen and Nona Petree as well as two other American couples (who are no longer there). An Australian family, the Jones, had recently moved from Brisbane to Palmerston which is near Darwin. They were looking to find other believers to meet with. A friend of the Petrees who worship in Brisbane gave them the Petree's contact information. This resulted in Keven & Carmen Jones and their children Tenisha (14) and Shania (13) along with Carmen's brother, Leighton Bestmann, joining the Petrees. They now meet on Sundays in the Petree's home.

After several months of worshipping together, another brother in Christ who had recently moved to Darwin obtained the Jones' contact number from Christians in Melbourne. This led to Bopelo Boitshwarelo meeting the church meeting in the Petree's home from 8 April 2012. Bopelo is from Botswana and wife, Itabo, daughter, Kagiso (6) and son, BJ (2 years), joined the group after they joined Bopelo in Darwin several weeks later.

Today, our house church has a worship assembly at 11.00am every Sunday morning until about noon. We then enjoy

a meal together before breaking for the day. We are currently meeting in the Petree's home at apartment 273, 8 Gardiner Drive (called the Evolution apartment complex), Darwin. All are welcome. If you are just visiting the area or looking for a church home to worship with, please give one of us a call.

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Leighton Bestmann 0458 439 144
Bopelo and Itabo Boitshwarelo 0478 771 700

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Christian resources website

http://www.clevelandchurch.org.au/Clevelandchurch/Resources_List.html

Many Churches of Christ around Australia are small and the limited number of men in these congregations often find it difficult to share the load of preaching and teaching. With this in mind, Brad Johnson from the Cleveland Church of Christ in Brisbane has prepared a website containing a listing of web-based resources from around the world.

"My goal was to gather a list of clear, usable resources for groups of Christians who do not have the benefit of trained personnel," says Brad. "Fast internet connections, such as those available via the NBN in Australia, represent opportunities for material to be freely exchanged between people in distant locations. Jesus was greatly aided in spreading the news of his kingdom by the Roman system of roads. In God's great unfolding plan, the right means was available at the right time. The internet represent a similar opportunity."

The listings on the website are helpfully broken down based on their potential uses: Bible reading, preaching & teaching, music, devotional, kids, teens and personal & group Bible study. Resources include sermons in video and audio, study materials, reference works, teaching aids and *acapella* singing.

Anyone with recommendations for listings is welcome to suggest them by contacting Brad at: bradjohnson@tpg.com.au

Interview cont.

tips from when I was being parented. I see now the good sense and love with which the structure and discipline was given.

One of the other challenges is probably experienced by many who have been part of the church for a long period of time. This is seeing other members cause division and strife or abandon their faith. I think having parents who allow themselves to be strengthened by the testing of their faith, while difficult at the time, produces endurance not only in them but also in their children.

Are there any mentors who have significantly influenced your life?

I see elements of both my parents in my character, so I guess I have learned different things from both of them. I admire my Mum for her tenacity, her sense of justice, her kindness, her hospitable nature and her love of family. I admire my Dad for his patience, his thoughtfulness, his wisdom and his ability to stand firm in the face of adversity.

At Macquarie Church of Christ, we have had the joy of associating with many faithful members. Some have moved away, some have departed this world. I have had grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, sisters and brothers, who have all taught me something about being a Christian family and about the love of God.

The ones who spring to mind for me are Don and Maxine Klingenberg, Reg and Sally Evans, Ron and Marie Hall, and Heather Cox. Heather, particularly, has a special place in my heart as the one who took time to help me foster my early faith and who continues to show concern for me even though we don't get to see each other as much as we used to.

I'm sure I could keep going, because there are so many others who continue to love and encourage me. Probably there are more who are doing it through prayer and without my knowledge. I guess that's why God knows we need a big family – the church – because we all have a lot to learn and no one person can teach us everything. ■

Marilyn Paull is a member of the Macquarie Church of Christ, North Ryde, NSW. She was interviewed by Jenny Ancell. jenancell@optusnet.com.au

Interview

with Marilyn Paull

In this issue, we interview Marilyn Paull. Marilyn grew up in Sydney, daughter of Ted and Pam Paull, longtime members with the Macquarie Church of Christ in North Ryde. She has a brother, Timothy, who's married and has a family. Marilyn, who wanted to be a medical doctor from her pre-school years, now works in a major children's hospital in Sydney.

Tell us about your position at the Children's Hospital.

I'm in my final year of training as a paediatrician. I've been appointed as the 'Chief Resident' of my hospital. This position is one which involves supervision and mentoring of the junior staff, fellows, registrars and residents, which is a total of about 300 doctors. I'm involved in clinical governance, policy writing, recruitment, development of educational programmes and performance management of doctors who are struggling in their employment.

At the same time I'm still involved in clinical work as a paediatrician delivering both an inpatient and outpatient medical service to the hospital. It's a very challenging job which requires hard work and a lot of patience. It also requires making decisions which aren't always popular and often difficult.

As a Christian doctor, what aspects of your work or life are rewarding and what aspects are spiritually challenging?

Working with families rather than just children – which is what a paediatrician does – can be very satisfying. Treating illness and maintaining health helps not only the child, but also their family and the community in which they grow up. For children and young people with chronic disease, the care provided is as much about improving mental health, understanding and emotional support as it is about physical health. Even in Australia, there are often additional burdens in these families like poverty, homelessness, drugs or alcohol abuse and intellectual or physical disability.

The main challenge, I think, is never being able to provide enough support or care for families who are truly struggling. The needs of some of these children are so great that society is unable or sometimes unwilling to affect true and lasting assistance for them. Accepting mediocrity in care and treatment is very frustrating. There are many times when you're left with a sense of futility about the world. Having said that, there are many stories of courage and bravery – even in very small children or very disadvantaged families – that can leave you feeling full of hope and very humbled.

Tell us about your medical mission trip to Ethiopia last year.

My trip to Ethiopia for the first three months of 2011 was eye-opening. I worked in a remote rural village in northern Ethiopia, accessible through the mountains on unsealed roads, with limited electricity and little effective plumbing or sanitation. I worked in a hospital that was under-resourced and pretty neglected.

It's a society that has no expectations of good health or a long life. The main contributors to poor health are lack of clean water and appropriate waste disposal, lack of



immunisation and poor nutrition. The perinatal mortality rate is between 10-20%. That means between 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 children don't survive the birth or immediate post-birth period. Another 1 in 10 will die (usually of infectious causes) before their fifth birthday.

It's a part of the world that still sees polio – a disease not seen in Australia for almost 30 years – because of low immunisation rates. The incidence of congenital HIV, contracted by infected mothers, is as high as 10% in some areas. 85% of Ethiopia is rural and the average person makes around AUD\$50 per month from selling whatever produce they can grow. It's truly like living on a different planet.

The country has been ravaged by war. It's the only Orthodox Christian country and is surrounded by Muslim countries. Their conflicts over religion, land and resources have reinforced poverty. Nonetheless, the faith of the local people gives them a sense of hope about their situation despite their adverse conditions. Many there believe God looks after them and that the things that happen in life are part of his will.

The locals are very attentive to religious tradition, since most of the rural people are illiterate and are unable to decipher for themselves what the Bible says. So they rely on Orthodox priests to interpret what God's will is. For those who are literate, most can't afford a Bible anyway (it costs about 3 months' pay). In general they're a kind people with a spirit of generosity, despite them often being without physical blessings and being poor of spirit.

Can you describe some of the blessings and challenges of growing up in a Christian family?

I think the main blessing from my Mum and Dad is that they provide a faithful anchor. I would say in general we're a pretty close family. We spend time together often and share our lives with each other. There are times when life gets difficult, or you feel sad or discouraged, but that's where family can help re-centre you and remind you of what's important. Hopefully we all do that for each other at various times. We've faced many challenges both together and as individuals, and I guess for a faithful, loving family there truly is safety in numbers.

I think there were two main challenges in having Christian parents. The first was in adolescence. This was when curfews, restrictions and supervision weren't cool. Having parents who held you up to a higher pattern of behaviour than that of your peers, at a time where it's really hard to be different, was pretty challenging. I'm sure it produced a lot of tears and disagreements and probably a fair bit of heartache for Mum and Dad.

As an adult though, I can see the benefit of what they did. I find myself as a doctor giving parents of difficult teenagers

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