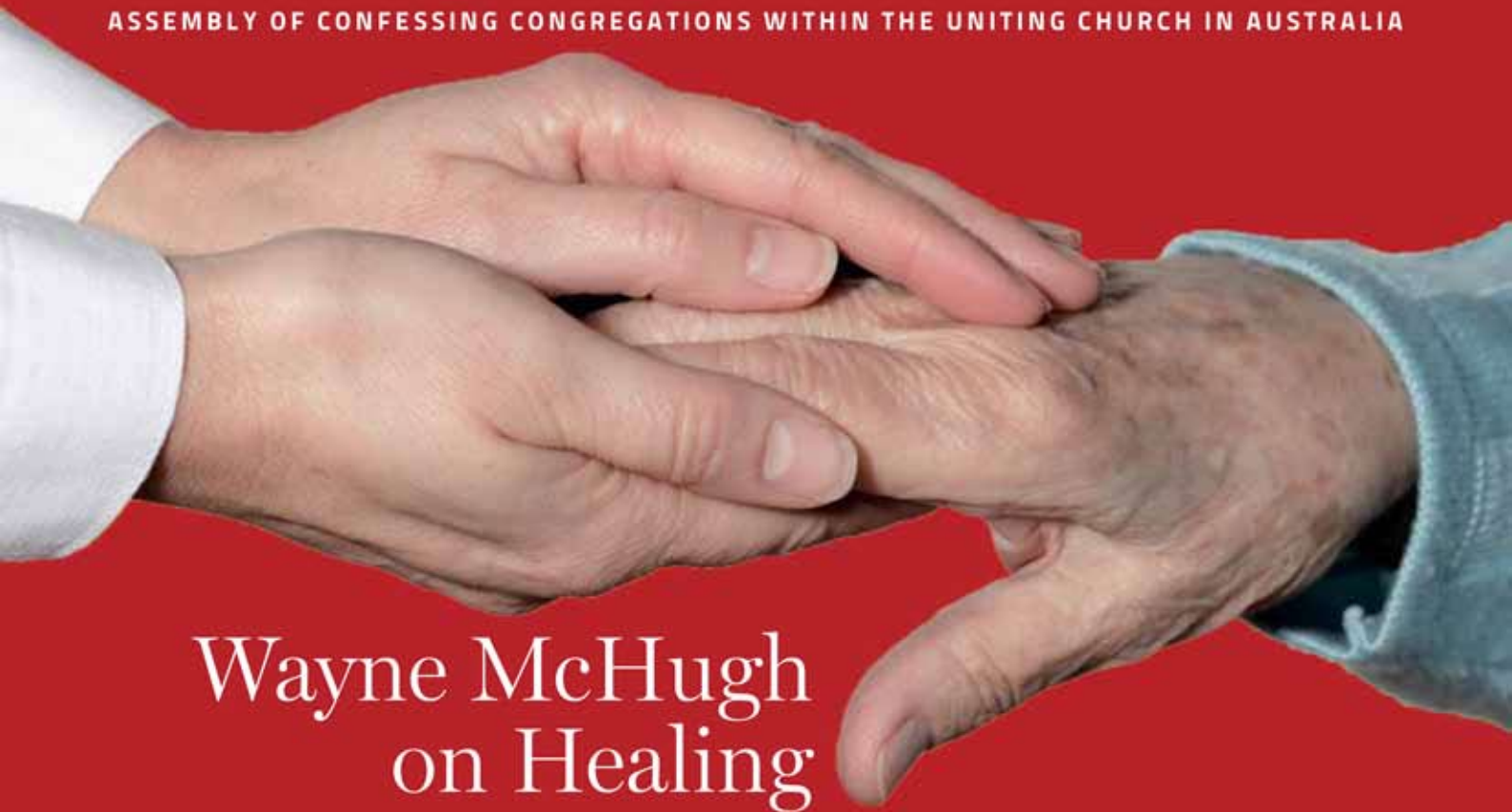


# ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Wayne McHugh  
on Healing

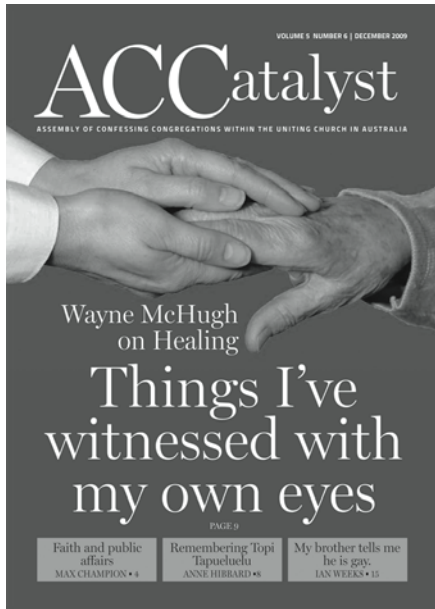
## Things I've witnessed with my own eyes

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Cover illustration Fred Froese / iStockphoto.com

## EDITORIAL

# Summer Bliss

Sometimes it is good to be ignorant. For example I don't know how common it is for UCA people to think about the ministry of healing. So in running a main feature on the subject in *ACCatalyst*, I don't know whether it will offend or encourage. I'll take refuge in that.

Wayne McHugh's account of his experiences with healing seems to me to be a painfully truthful story.

A story which tells me about the stuff-ups of life as well as when God breaks through is appealing to me.

It appeals because it resembles my

life. God has had to work very hard to keep me from wandering off, either bedazzled or despairing.

It appeals because it is a story of hope. God will work, even through us.

And it appeals because it is a story of love. God will help us love the people around us and even be useful to them.

Now God works with us all in very different ways, with gifts and talents to use or spurn. May we seek out his will.

*John Sandeman*

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Executive Editor: Max Champion  
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley  
 Editor: John Sandeman  
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW  
 02 9550 5358  
 Website: [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com)  
[accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Email for *ACCatalyst*:  
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# How God can change things around

The other day I was in a wicked grumpy mood. I was thinking about Christmas - not the good things about Christmas; I was thinking about all the stuff I had on and how busy I would be and all the things I needed to do and hadn't done yet, and about buying Christmas presents and how I didn't know what to get anybody and writing Christmas cards and so on and so forth.

I thought so much about all of this that I was feeling stressed and grumpy. Then I felt as though everything was too hard. Ever have times like that?

Anyway, I knew what I had to do. I needed to sit down and pray and tell God everything I was feeling and give him my worries and let him give me his perspective on things. But I had an argument with myself about this because for some reason I find it hard to sit down and pray when I'm grumpy.

But despite this, I did pray, and



shared everything I was feeling with God, just like the Bible says in Philippians 4:6-7

"Don't worry about anything;

instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus."

Did it make a difference? Yes it did!! God reminded me that with his strength I could do anything. He took my stress and reminded me of all the great things about Christmas!!

My attitude has changed! I am excited about this season and I am praying that the people of Peterborough will discover the joy of celebrating Jesus, without which Christmas is not nearly so exciting.

1 Peter 5:7 says:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you".

Nothing is too difficult for God!  
*Robyn*

# ACC's Dr Max goes west (and east)

From 30 September to 9 October our National Director, Dr Max Champion visited ACC groups in WA.

Lake Yealering, 250 kms SE of Perth, was the venue for Camp-FIRE 2011. The annual gathering of PNEUMA (Pastoral Network of Evangelicals Uniting in Mission Action) was attended by about 100 people. It was a time of great encouragement. Enthusiastic worship and serious learning combined with relaxation and fun. Max Champion led studies on "Singing the Lord's song in a strange land: Christian living in a neo-pagan society". Harry Potter was the inspiration for a splendid children's program. Local people joined us for Sunday worship.

After enjoying the hospitality of Brian and Margaret Hill in Perth, and meetings with the Moderator and General Secretary and ACC members, an engaging weekend was spent in Geraldton with Trevor Waters and leaders in discussions at Lighthouse Church. On Sunday Champion preached on Mk 8:29: 'But who do you say that I am?'

From 21-23 October he visited northern Victoria. At Nyah West, about 40 people gathered to consider what it meant to be a confessing movement, and at Kyabram he preached on the text "Sir, we want to see Jesus" (Jn 12:21).

The leadership, enthusiasm and generosity of folk like the Illing-



Yealering campsite from a PNEUMA video

worths, Fawcetts, Hills and Waters (W.A.) and Suzanna Gorman, Alan Lockwood and others (Nthn Victoria) is a source of hope for many who are dismayed by powerful forces in the Australian community.

*Suzanna Gorman - Facilitator Victorian Regional ACC reports:* Champion's first address in Nyah West, "Changing Landscape of Post Christendom" was based on the story of "the unknown God" in Acts 17:16-34. What is useful for us today is that changing landscape for Christians and the worship of other Gods' is not new. Even for Paul, there were those who didn't want to hear, those who

wanted to hear more but only a few who chose Jesus. Max highlighted from Paul's experience that we should have realistic expectations of the numbers who will turn to Christ as a result of our work for the Lord.

Max spoke again to the gathering and addressed some of the key issues arising in the UCA including marriage and in particular the sacred union ceremony that was put together by the UCA Working Group. During an open forum time other issues discussed were the new faith movements, the challenges to marriage, family and need to uphold the gospel to be hope in the changing church.

## The Future of Marriage in the Uniting Church

The Waverley Cluster held a seminar on 'The Future of Marriage in the Uniting Church' on November 5 at St John's Mt Waverley Uniting Church, Melbourne. As ACC National Director and Chair rev. Dr Max Champion outlined, "Controversy over attempts to redefine marriage has intensified in the current political climate.

"Same-sex 'marriage' is a key policy of the Greens. The Labor Party will debate the issue at its conference in December. . In 2003 and 2006 the National Assembly of the UCA resolved to make it possible for people in same-sex relationships to

exercise leadership in the church. On 12 June 2010 a 'sacred union ceremony' was held in Brunswick UC at which same-sex relationships were blessed and earlier this year a liturgy for such unions was posted at [www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au](http://www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au). It is highly likely that various proposals on this matter will be brought to the 13th UCA National Assembly in July 2012."

Speakers were:

● Peter Bentley who considered the topic of Marriage: More than a Right (the increasing tendency to individual rights and changes within

Christian denominations.

● Rev Ron Brookman spoke about his own journey within his address on 'Marriage at the Crossroads: Same-sex seeker to Hetero-wholeness.' Ron is a UCA minister who has come out of homosexuality and also works for Living Waters and ministers to Christians who struggle in different areas of sexuality and relationships.

● Max Champion outlined the difficulties in the promotion of same-sex blessing liturgies with a substantial critique 'Sacred Union Ceremonies: How Gnostics mimic marriage.'



## PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

### Faith and politics

*Max Champion explores the relationship between faith and public affairs in a recent sermon based on Matthew 22:15-22.*

Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Jesus infuriated people who questioned him only in order to discredit him. He refused to get embroiled in their religious and political squabbles. He so unnerved conservatives and progressives alike that, at the end of this series of disputes, we learn that from that time “no one was able to answer him a word and no one dared to ask him any more questions”(22:46).

Jesus saw through the slyness, insincerity and malice of people who, to protect their self-interest, pretended to be interested in him. That is why he accused them of hypocrisy. They are not sincere.

As we know, religion and politics are touchy subjects. Jesus’ interrogators understood this very well. So they formed a coalition of self-interest, chose a controversial issue and devised a clever strategy.

● The Pharisees and Herodians are ‘strange bedfellows’. They are political enemies. The former were staunch defenders of Jewish faith against pagan Roman rule; the latter were Jewish supporters of stable Roman rule. Though they hated each other, they forge an ‘unholy alliance’ against this troublemaker. A painting by Masaccio in 1427 depicts members of each party shaking hands in the background to the dispute. It is a case of

‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’.

● This ‘odd couple’ set out to trap Jesus. They try to ‘butter him up’ by praising his integrity for acting ‘without fear or favour’ of what others may think. They flatter him for being a person who does not take notice of flattery! What a brilliant tactic!

● Then they choose a hotly-debated issue that is certain to land Jesus in trouble. Payment of the annual poll-tax was unpopular with both God-fearing, law-abiding Jews and freedom fighters. They regarded it as an unconscionable compromise with pagan culture. It was supported though by Jews grateful for the relative peace under Roman rule.

In this highly charged atmosphere they try to put Jesus in a ‘no-win’ situation. If he says, “Pay the tax,” then he will be disowned by devout Jews as a supporter of pagan religion and God’s enemy. He will lose credibility as the prophetic Son of God. If he says, “Don’t pay the tax,” he will be disowned by civic-minded Jews as an enemy of the State. He will be arrested for inciting rebellion. Either way, he is in deep trouble!

Jesus foils their attempt to outsmart him. Before answering, he poses a question of his own. He questions their integrity. Why are you interested in this? He accuses them of “hypocrisy” (v18) because they do not really want to know whether he is ‘conservative’ or ‘progressive’ in his views.

These sworn enemies simply want to discredit him.

His answer is more brilliant than their strategy. “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” Pay the tax and obey

God. There is a place for fulfilling civic duties and for obeying God.

At first glance though this looks cowardly -- a clever way of wriggling out of a tight situation while ‘sitting on the fence’. But on closer inspection his profound answer is precisely what we need to hear to enable us to live responsibly in the world before God.

Jesus’ enigmatic reply has shaped the history of relations between Church and State in countries where Christianity has been widely accepted. It has often been interpreted to mean that there should be a sharp separation between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘temporal’. It is often said that ‘politics and religion do not mix’. Unseemly clashes between Emperors and Popes are thought to prove that the Church should not meddle in politics and the State should not meddle in the Church. Keep them separate!

This is not what Jesus meant by his puzzling answer. He assumes that the

State has an important but limited role in shaping human society. Money is needed, even by pagan rulers, to see that people are well governed. But this does not mean the State can act with impunity.

Despite many attempts in history to do so, this text and the one in Romans cannot be used to justify tyranny. Rulers are to be given their due when they recognise the proper limits of their authority. However, there is no joy for rulers and citizens who think they have a Divine Right to do whatever they like and whose inhuman policies show contempt for the fact that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24).

But neither is there joy for freedom fighters (Zealots) or religious purists

(Pharisees) who oppose the State in principle. They are rightly aghast at the blasphemy of the Emperor. The coin that Jesus used was not only engraved with the head of Tiberius Caesar, but with words in praise of his divinity.

So the Pharisees were right to challenge idolatry! Indeed Jesus agrees with them in rejecting the attribution of divinity to the Caesars of this world. Giving them their due means not ascribing to them divine authority. That belongs to God alone. However, as God has appointed rulers to a specific task, they were wrong to think that those who govern us should be opposed in everything.

Throughout history this text has caused debate and led to terrible conflicts as Church and State have battled to establish their proper authority.

It is clear from the text that Jesus does not support the establishment of a theocratic State where God's law is supreme. He does not provide a basis for creating a 'Christian Empire', a 'Religious State of Israel' or a 'Holy Islamic State'.

But neither does he set down a 'Christian Manifesto' or 'Universal Principles of Social Justice' that should be enshrined in every society. We are not given guidance about who to vote for in an election or which particular policies we should support.

In fact, his instruction to "give to God what belongs to God" is very short on detail. This is so much so that Jesus' clever reply does not seem to be much use in helping us to make complex political decisions.

But Jesus is most helpful precisely because he does not lay out a grand program of political and religious action.

Instead, he urges us to take responsibility in the world—without being deceived by unrealistic political or religious hopes—knowing that 'the earth is the Lord's'. It belongs to the One whose costly love has triumphed over evil in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

It is a pity that, on one hand, Church leaders often seem to think that political action is the most important kind of action and, on the other, that Christians often take no interest in politics. It is just as serious to ignore what secular rulers are doing as to try to impose on them a Christian program.

It is enough to be a strong 'Christian presence': to refuse to let politicians and Church leaders 'play God', to encourage them to govern well in their own spheres of authority and

to testify to the incomparable grace-and-goodness of God for all—Jew and pagan alike—in Jesus Christ.

In pointing to him, we should not forget that he is not the 'Jesus' who fulfils our religious and political preferences but the 'Christ' who infuriates and bewilders us in the way he answers our questions—by questioning us! Where we want clear answers to complex questions about religion and politics, he gives us a challenging vocation. Where we want him to endorse our conservative or progressive values, he unsettles us all.

However, in the process of shaking our religious and political certainties and exposing our self-interest, he frees us to participate in our worldly tasks without having illusions about ourselves or our leaders. We are free to "pay taxes" to the State and to "worship God alone". We are free to work out what this means in every concrete situation.

No wonder that, despite themselves, the scheming Herodians and Pharisees "marvelled" at Jesus'

brilliant and cutting answer to their question. But what a pity that, instead of becoming his disciples, they "left him and went away" (v22). Unnerved by his exposure of their "hypocrisy" and "malice" (v18) and astonished by his clever reply, they do what so many others do. They walk away.

It is the natural human thing to do! But it is not the way to serve the "Lord of the earth" with gladness, as we are privileged and duty-bound to do as members of the Body of Christ. For the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Jesus is the Lord of all nations and the Head of the Church.

That being so, it is imperative today that we ask whether dramatic social changes, such as the redefinition of marriage, belong to Caesar or to God.

Neither the State nor the Church has the authority to enact laws that clearly are contrary to God's good purposes for our lives, as affirmed by Christ. May we not walk away from the "Lord of the earth" on this or any other matter that demeans our God-given dignity!

## IAN CLARKSON

### Harvest Time

The Gospel teaches that loving those who love us doesn't add anything, it just keeps us on the level of neither going back, nor going forward. But giving the deeds of Love to those who won't give the same back to us, is doing something else, it's new life, it's eternal life—living now. An unending harvest!

The God of justice and Love has pledged to bestow upon us in the new heaven and earth all that Love that he worked through us on earth with spades of dividends. Loving even enemies is another way of saying, "Give away deeds of love, property of love, time of love, regardless of return here and now!" Love un-returned now, will be super returned then!

Jesus began the process when He poured out forgiveness on the whole human race in His great working of Love in the Cross. He did that on earth, in time, in history, a spiritual deed in the time realm, in the passing, secular realm of time. It is here where the love of Jesus' disciples must germinate, it is here where the harvest that grows to eternal life must begin.

This is the meaning of living on the earth. Every man and woman,

every boy and girl, should make their life-long career, vocation, this perfecting in love. All things must become the servants of love, turned into deeds of love. Banks, businesses, home-making, mining, agriculture, medicine, education, must be all re-designed and re-shaped, to serve the end and the purpose of love.

The purpose of our birth is this—We should watch every moment every day, every response, in our relationship with others, so that we can sow the seeds of love.

The enemy rages and lies. His goal is to prevent this great purpose of God from coming to anything. To staunch the return of loving thanksgiving. The liar hates the Love of God and wants nothing to come from the greatest demonstration and action of Love ever known, the Cross of Christ. He tries to neutralise this Love by distracting us from reflecting upon it and living in it.

Does not the Spirit remind us and bring new insights about the nature of this Love? Step by step, insight by insight, the brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, are perceiving this Truth in their earthly life. Our heavenly life has started now. It will be celebrated forever at harvest time in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

# Our Father in heaven

ROSS CARTER continues an ACCatalyst series on the Lord's Prayer

(a) Our Father:

**A**t the outset of our reflection on the Lord's Prayer we confront a question. Why call God 'Father'? Why not call God 'Mother' or, if we want to avoid those two words because they might offend people who have had bad fathers or mothers, why not "Lord" or just plain old "God"?

The obvious answer to the question is because Jesus told his disciples to pray in this way.

But why should anyone other than those first disciples take any notice of Jesus? The only reason is because of the confession of those same disciples that Jesus, who was crucified, is resurrected.

The astounded post crucifixion community asked themselves who it was that had raised Jesus and the only logical candidate is the one to whom Jesus had prayed using the name "Father".

Christians pray to the Father, then, because this is the name that Jesus used to speak to the divine Person with whom he shares a relationship of perfect reciprocal and perfectly cooperative love. We use the name 'Father' as Jesus did because Jesus is

raised as the first fruit of all people who will participate in the Father's future which has drawn near in Christ.

As those who participate in this future in Christ we also are able to pray as Jesus prayed.

(b) In heaven:

**W**e normally think that God is wherever heaven is and, having started with this assumption, speculate as where this place called

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**We pray to the personal God whose future has drawn near to us, and will be fulfilled for us, in Jesus Christ.**

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heaven might be located. Wherever it is located it must be away from this world because that is what heaven has come to mean – a place where

we can go to escape the hurts of this world. But this not the way the scriptures understand heaven.

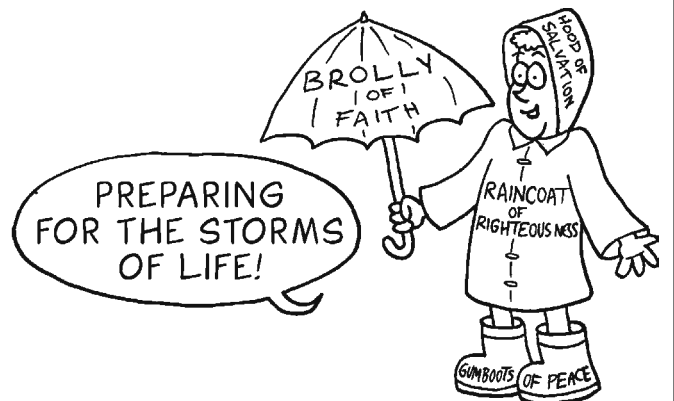
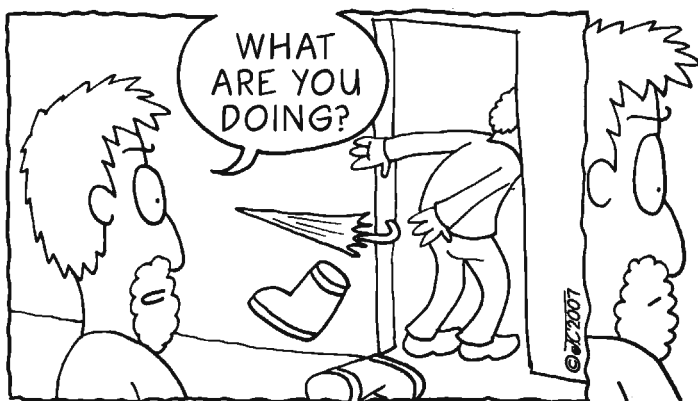
According to the scriptures God is not where heaven is, rather heaven is where God is.

So where is God? Jesus began his public ministry with the exhortation "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His teaching in parables, his healing activity, and his crucifixion, will embody and define the nature of heaven's kingdom which is the future of God for human beings and the creation already dawning and coming in the solidarity of the Father with humanity in Jesus Christ.

Far from being removed from the painful history of humanity, the Father is transforming that history by the promised new order embodied in Christ.

So when we pray "our Father in heaven" we are not praying to a father figure who resides in some edenic place to which we may hopefully escape some day from this vale of tears.

Instead we pray to the personal God whose future has drawn near to us, and will be fulfilled for us, in Jesus Christ with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to pray "our Father in heaven."



# Personal Relationships in Disciple Making

John Mallison was asked to address a gathering of the NSW ACC members in October on the subject of *Evangelism & Disciple-Making*. Those present were very appreciative of the session. The following is an abbreviation of one aspect of the comprehensive subject given to him. For the full outline of John's address "Christianity & Relationships" go to his Website [www.johnmallison.com](http://www.johnmallison.com) Ed.

God created us as relational beings with the capacity to relate to Him and each other. His beautiful plan for us human beings is that we not be independent but rather interdependent beings – in a loving relationship with God and each other. (Matt. 22:37-40).

Personal relationships play a major role in making disciples. Initially mature followers of Christ are needed as 'undershepherds' who can teach, pastor, model and encourage newcomers.

They need to be skilled in revising from Scripture the basic steps to faith in Christ in order to develop Christian certainty (assurance).

Ongoing nurture will include developing spiritual growth through balanced regular personal prayer. Help will also be needed in how to regularly develop and put into practice a knowledge and understanding of Scripture.

Another essential area is how to sensitively and openly share their faith with family, friends and others in their networks by what they say, are and do.

Those fulfilling these roles as initial and ongoing 'mentors' must be able to actively listen, 'cheer on', lovingly support and sensitively exhort—but most of all model Christ-likeness.

Not just beginners but all followers

of Christ also need spiritual mates. We all need those on the same Christian faith journey with whom we can meet informally to share openly and honestly our highs and lows – successes and failures, joys and sorrows and doubts and firm convictions.

I thank God for the major pastoral role played in my own spiritual life by a number with whom I meet face to face individually and in a small cluster. They are my real spiritual mates!

"Friends Ain't Friends" is the title of an article by Philip Jenkinson in the October issue of *Connections*, the Newsletter of Young Life Australia. Philip says, "Social media has changed the way young people form friendships and in this hyper-connected world there is a growing inability in young people to develop real-world friendships and relate to people off screen."

Through them being emersed in technology such as Facebook far too many young people in particular have abandoned the traditional notion of what constitutes replenishing relationships.

Later in that issue their CEO, Glyn Henman tells how Young Life's youth ministry seeks to encounter this, "It is grounded on two-way connections built on respect and acceptance.

"This relational approach is all about earning the right to firm relationships in the first place .. by walking the talk and being there for young people, where and when they need a shoulder to lean on or a willing ear to listen without judgement.

"The trust we generate enables them to realise that we believe in them and are able to encourage them to value themselves, realise their potential, push boundaries, face challenges, and grow stronger as a result."

To a large extent what Philip and Glyn says here applies to all ages in making disciples of Christ. Christlike personal relationships are foundational

## US Presbyterians consider options

Whether to stay within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and, if so, under what conditions dominated the first gathering of the Fellowship of Presbyterians (FOP), which drew more than 1,900 disaffected Presbyterians.

The seven large church pastors who form the FOP's core leadership readily acknowledged that PC(USA) congregations dissatisfied with decisions and perceived trends in the denomination "are all over the map" about how to respond. Much of the gathering was spent exploring four "tiers" or options that are being developed from trying to reform the denomination from within to the creation of "a new Reformed body."

One leader the Rev. Jim Singleton, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, repeatedly referred to the FOP's next gathering Jan. 12-14 in Orlando, Fla., as a "constitutional convention" that will formally inaugurate both the FOP and the new Reformed body."

But where the 852 congregations represented here wind up along the four-tier spectrum is anybody's guess. "Repeat after me," Singleton told the gathering: "It will be messy."

The four tiers, in brief:

1. Remaining in the PC(USA) and seeking to transform congregations and presbyteries to be more mission-al and theologically orthodox.
2. Dividing existing presbyteries into theologically distinct presbyteries.
3. Establishing as commissions (with power to act) two separate Committees on Ministry and Committees on Preparation for Ministry in presbyteries based on support for or opposition to gay and lesbian ordination and other "essential tenets."
4. Creation of a "new Reformed body" that may or may not be in full communion with the PC(USA).

The Rev. Mike McClenahan, pastor of Solana Beach Presbyterian Church in San Diego Presbytery, said his congregation is opting for Tier One. "Staying or leaving is a red herring because we can serve faithfully in San Diego Presbytery," he said.

*continued page 8*

# Rev Penisimani Siukitu'atonga Topi Tapueluelu

*Rev Penisimani Siukitu'atonga  
22ND May 1942 - 5th December  
2010*

Every year since the ACC was first conceived in Brisbane July 2006 there was one member who attended the annual ACC conference no matter how sick or difficult it was for him to attend. This faithful person of distinction was Rev Penisimani Sikitu'atonga Topi Tapueluelu. It is with great sadness that we recognise his absence from us at the 2011 conference. Topi went to be with the Lord on the 5th December last year, aged 58 years, leaving behind his 11 children and 7 grandchildren.

Topi was an ordained minister of a Tongan Wesleyan Church of New Zealand.

His family moved to Australia and during this time he ministered in a local church, became members of the Uniting Church, and also formed a congregation in his own home with his wife and eleven children.

On the death of his wife in January 2006, his family returned to the Uniting Church at Liverpool where they have remained ever since.

Topi served as chair of the church council at Liverpool and helped in oversight of the Tongan Congregation. Topi was very passionate and committed to the ACC from its very



**Topi Tapueluelu**

beginning and will be sadly missed. Not only did he attend all the ACC conferences, he also helped in the formation of ACC Tonga, and the early days of the formation of the ACC prayer network.

He had a strength of character and integrity that pursued the truth of the gospel. He challenged other Tongan clergy to do the same.

He passed on his passion for the ACC to his children and grandchildren, and one of his daughters Fatai Tapueluelu was elected onto the UCA Assembly, and then Assembly Standing Committee. His other daughter Lupe has also been involved in the formation of ACC Youth.

Topi grew in Christ likeness, humility, grace and peace in the latter part of his life. He knew the deep joy of being saved not by his works but by faith in what Christ did upon the cross. He grew in trusting the Lord for all his children even when they were in much trouble.

It was during the leading of worship that Topi died. He was leading the Tongan worship at Liverpool Uniting Church on the 5th December 2010, when he collapsed after reading Romans 15. He didn't get to preach that day but on finding his notes the key verse was Romans 15:13, the message he was going to preach was about Hope.

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit".  
(Romans 15:13)*

*Rev Anne Hibbard.*

*ACC National Council Member and  
Liverpool UC Minister.*

## Presbyterians

*From page 7* Opting for Tier Two is the Rev. Peter Barnes, pastor of Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas. "We want to remain within the PC(USA) but differentiate ourselves from it to a certain extent," he said.

Context is all important, Barnes said. "It's okay to be an evangelical in the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, but not in the Synod of the Northeast." His presbytery, Mission Presbytery, "is divided," he said, "so we came up with the idea of an 'overlay presbytery.'"

Tentatively titled the Presbytery of Central and South Texas, the new presbytery would share boundaries with Mission Presbytery and remain in the PC(USA). "We would join where we can but differentiate ourselves where we must," Barnes said. Congregations would be allowed to self-select which presbytery to belong to.

Singleton spoke on behalf of Tier Three, calling it an "intra-presbytery" option. "You are going to stay in your same presbytery, but are creating two different elements or 'orders' within the presbytery ...

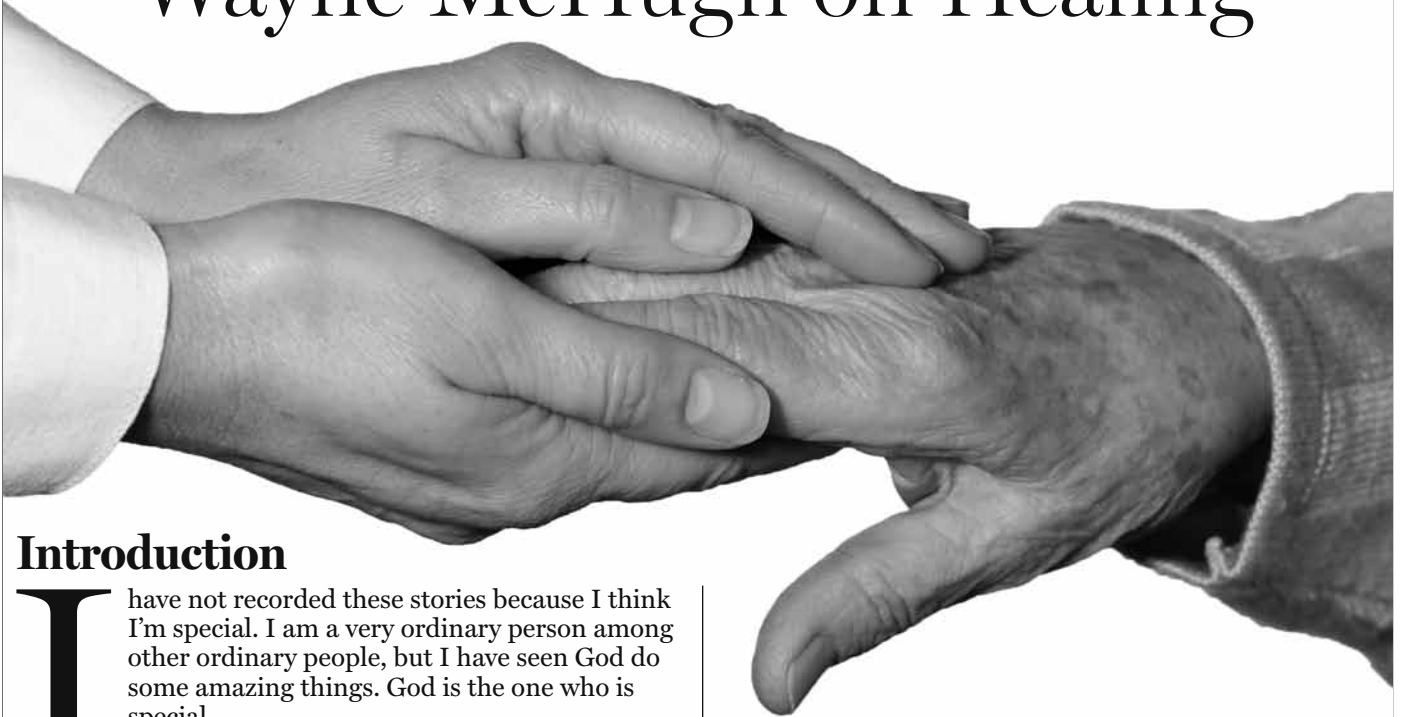
based on your support or opposition to 10-A (the recently adopted constitutional amendment that replaces the requirement of "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" with the requirement to "submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life."

Tier Four is the option being pursued by the Rev. David Swanson and First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, Fla. That congregation has already begun the formal "discernment" process with the Presbytery of Central Florida for disaffiliation.



# Things I've witnessed with my own eyes

## Wayne McHugh on Healing



### Introduction

I have not recorded these stories because I think I'm special. I am a very ordinary person among other ordinary people, but I have seen God do some amazing things. God is the one who is special.

I offer no thesis on miraculous healing. I don't claim to understand these things in which I've had the privilege to be involved.

As you will read, I have suffered fear and insecurity in the face of some of these events. While I finally accept that God has chosen to give me the "gift of healing" in some measure, the only control I exercise is whether I pray for people or not. Not everyone is healed, and when they are it is most often when I least expect it.

My reason for writing these stories is that I am beginning to realise that these events are quite rare, especially in my own church, the Uniting Church in Australia.

Because of the relative rarity of the things I'm describing, I caution against too much comparison. It would be easy to ask "Why doesn't it happen for me? Is there something wrong with my faith or my prayers?" I can't explain why or why not. I think it has a lot to do with

God's choice; gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

I just want you to know that the healing Jesus described in the bible is still out there. I want you to know that the Holy Spirit is still poured out – upon normal human beings who want to follow Jesus and live God-honouring lives.

Let me mention a few things that have been written and said, which turn many of our minds and hearts away from miraculous healing.

*1. Don't go to the doctor, just have faith. This is so wrong!* Going to the doctor is not the opposite of faith. Many miracles have occurred during or after medical treatment. There is nothing to support the idea that you should avoid doctors. If you believe you have been healed by God, I recommend going to the doctor to confirm it.

*2. If you aren't healed, you don't have enough faith.*

The only people Jesus accused of having too little faith were his disciples – the ones in training for ministry (the ones praying). Those who came for healing were shown to have enough faith just by coming and asking. In my own experience, some people have been healed even when they had no expectation at all, yet others have not been healed when they had high expectations. Suggesting that someone who asks doesn't receive because their faith is too little is, in my opinion, spiritual abuse.

3. *What does it mean if someone isn't healed?* I don't know. I'm certain God loves them just the same. The day will come for each of us when we are not healed; we will all eventually die. It is simply unsupportable that God wants to physically heal everyone. Yet some people feel let down – God has chosen not to help them in their need. I have no answer for this, even for myself. I discern no pattern. God is God, and it seems to be God's choice. That anyone is healed miraculously by God is a sign that God is still there and willing to be involved.

4. *If you falter in your faith or devotion to God you will lose your healing.* Some people feel a need to explain everything, and this explanation is one of the worst. I don't know why some healing is temporary. But if faltering faith was the cause, all healing would be temporary. No, all healing is in the hands of God, whether full, partial, temporary or not at all.

One final note: Where a person involved has read their story and given their permission, their real first name is used. Where this has not been possible, the name "Sam" is used.

## Background

I have always been in the church. I was born in 1965 into Nudgee Methodist Church in Brisbane, which became Nudgee Uniting Church in 1977. It was a conservative, simple but honest church, and I learned many things through 20 years there.

I have always accepted that God is real, although I've pondered most of the God questions that seem to be around. I am naturally an introverted, intellectual sort, who has discovered people and leadership and many other things along the way.

Late one night at the age of 18 I had a very real, life-changing experience of God. God had already been working on a new side to my personality for some years, but somehow that night I came alive in a new way. These days I would probably call it "being filled with the Holy Spirit", but in those days I described it as "God saying 'Hi.'"

Through the next few years I had my first experiences of "Charismatic". My experience of it was all negative, and a large part of it was to do with healing. It took another decade before God grabbed a hold of me and healed me from the hurt of those years.

I don't write these things to accuse or condemn anyone, but simply to explain that when it comes to healing and matters of the Holy Spirit, I carry baggage.

Surely I would be the last person God would choose to use in a ministry that involved miraculous healing.

## First Healing – Sam

I was a church youth leader for upper high school students, maybe 30 years of age by this time. We had gone away, at the request of the youth, on a discipleship camp. Normally it would have been a recreational camp, but they were getting serious about their faith.

I remember we had a session on healing and a guest speaker who was there for that reason. The only person to be prayed for (somewhat reluctantly) was someone with a head cold. You probably already guessed it—they still had the head cold when we were done praying.

This was the average score of all the prayers for healing I had ever witnessed—big fat zero. So when Sam approached me after another session (the guest speaker had left) and asked for prayer, my silent prayer was "Help." You know ... Sam was serious. She wanted God to touch her, but I knew the score. And I didn't want Sam to get hurt by another failed prayer. "Help, God. Help!"

Sam had a floating knee cap and needed an operation to repair it. Sam's reason for asking was that she desperately wanted to kneel to pray, but couldn't.

I will never forget the prayer I prayed. I put my hand on her knee (the room was full of people) and simply prayed "In the name of Jesus, be healed."

I felt nothing. To my knowledge, she felt nothing. But after the next session Sam came back to me and said, "I just knelt through that whole session and my knee is completely healed."

I take things pretty deeply, and I was shocked to the core. I couldn't get out of there fast enough. I went outside to the darkest corner I could find and cried. Healing—after all those years. I still remember the irrational fear it brought up inside me (I still hadn't been healed from earlier years of hurt), and it was years before I prayed for another person.

But, about 5 years later I met Sam by chance at a regional youth event, and her knee had been fine all that time. I think Sam had more faith than I did. It was the shortest prayer I had ever heard, and it was the first demonstration of God's healing power I had ever seen.

## Second Healing – Sam

Sam was a teen in another church, and she was an achiever outside the usual mould. One of her unusual undertakings in this year was to join the "Bike for Bibles" event. A team of people trained for ages so they could do a monumental bicycle ride, raising money to supply Bibles to poorer parts of the world.

This particular Sunday evening Sam came into church on crutches—not something you ever want to see, but certainly not what you expect to see for someone in training.

Sam had come off her bike. From memory they had been doing a downhill descent (down a mountain?) and Sam had somehow failed to take a bend.

She had gone off the road and she and the bike had come down on her knee. The knee had been inspected by a doctor in emergency at the hospital, who had bound it, but declared it to be a mess. She was to report the next day to her doctor, and get admitted to hospital for a knee reconstruction.

Sam and her mum had come to church. Not something I would have done in her situation, but then I would have missed out badly. I had not prayed for anyone since the other Sam. But I offered, before church, to pray for her knee after church. I then spent the next while wondering why I had such a big mouth. Of course she had agreed.

So after church, with everyone gathered around, we set to praying. I remember clearly sitting with my back to everyone, just silently praying "Help." Not because it worked last time, but because for some reason this business of healing matters to me—a lot.

When I finally did turn around, I put my hand on her

knee and prayed the same prayer as last time (because it worked last time). We finished up and we all went home.

Next Sunday we heard the story. They had gone to the doctor the next morning as directed. The doctor tested the knee (you know how they do it—I swear they must injure some perfectly good knees!), and declared that there was nothing wrong with it. But the muscles around the knee had deteriorated overnight as though the knee had been in a cast for 6 months.

Not only that, but rather than intense pain when I had touched her knee (what kind of fool touches a shattered knee) my hand had felt hot and there was no pain.

Again, I can't claim any great amount of faith. I hadn't expected her to be healed, yet she was.

Buoyed up by this second experience, I soon volunteered to pray for another person. Of course they were not healed, and it was again some time before I offered to pray for anyone else.

## Third Healing - Me

This is very personal, and I know some within the church will understand and perhaps even empathise, while others will not. We all need to understand that in matters of inner healing, it is only the perspective of the patient that matters—whether they are “right” or “wrong”.

I was attending my first ever “Men's Renewal Camp.” It was a charismatic/Pentecostal cross—denominational weekend gathering of men.

For most it was an annual get-together of like-minded people, wanting to get close to God in this particular way. I was an outsider.

Despite my earlier experiences with the charismatic, I was still interested. One bad experience doesn't invalidate anything, and I still believed the biblical claim that the Holy Spirit is poured out on all believers. The biblical description still led me to expect this outpouring to be noticeable to both the believer and observers. So I was there out of interest. I just didn't share their enthusiasm or comfort.

There was a point in the weekend when I decided that my inner and outer discomfort was too much in conflict with my desire to be honestly expressive towards God. I decided, when we were directed into group time, that I would spend that time with our camp teacher.

I seriously expected nothing.

He asked me if I knew what the block was. Not at all emotional, I suggested two things, but said I didn't think they would be it. I suggested a third and broke down in gut-wrenching tears before I even finished the sentence. I was mortified. I didn't do tears in public.

I still remember what he said. “I think we've found it.”

He was right. It was those years of my first bad experience of the charismatic. They had, without my knowledge, left a scar on the inside that was affecting me both spiritually and physically.

“You have to forgive them.”

I thought that having words stick in your throat was a figure of speech, but that is what I experienced. My throat physically closed on me as I tried to speak the words. It would have been so easy to give up, but when I finally got them out the effect was instantaneous. Something profound changed on the inside, and it was truly like a physical weight lifted off me – one I didn't even know was there.

My new friend said he would leave me with God, and I could come and join everyone for lunch when I was



## Following my own inner healing, I experienced a fire for God of an intensity that I had never known before.

ready. I'm sure he was just being sensitive to my emotional state.

I turned my attention to God, without anyone else present, and God dropped me to the floor like a rag doll. Here was another thing I had heard of but never experienced. I could not lift my shoulders off the floor. Don't get me wrong - I was not in a state of spiritual ecstasy, I just couldn't get up.

It was mid-Winter in Mapleton, Qld, and it was very cold. I had taken off my jacket earlier. I reached the point where I was shaking from the cold so badly

I could bare it no longer. I asked God, “Could I at least put my jacket back

on?” I was able to get up, and I quickly put my jacket on. The moment it was on I was dropped back on the floor, unable to get up.

Indeed, when lunch was over and 200 men were back in their seats ready for the next session, I was still lying on the floor. Did I fail to mention I was lying at the base of the speaking podium?

Guess who came in last? Yes, the man in charge. “What should we do about him?” some asked. “Just drag him over to a seat. He'll get over it.”

So in one dramatic event God dealt with the inner pain of unforgiveness from years past, and delivered a practicum in humility that is yet to be rivalled in my experience.

Thank you God (seriously)!

## Various Healings

Following my own inner healing, I experienced a fire for God of an intensity that I had never known before. During that time I recall that God did a number of surprising things. Some of them were relatively minor, but two of them relating to my wife still remain clear in my memory.

There was an occasion when my wife, Trish, was suffering from a migraine. This wasn't a bad headache; this was a lie-in-bed-and-wish-to-die migraine.

Feeling quite helpless I sat on the bed with her and prayed silently. Then I prayed for her aloud. I was, at the time, still highly conscious of how close God was, but she was no better, so I decided to leave her in peace.

What I did next is beyond explaining. I don't know why I did it. I have never done such a thing before, nor have I since.

As I was leaving the room I was gripped by a feeling of indignation (the best word I can find to describe it) that this migraine resisted the name of Jesus.

In a loud commanding voice I almost shouted “In the name of Jesus I command you to leave!”

Trish sat up suddenly and asked me what just happened. Being a little embarrassed that I had just shouted at someone with a migraine I innocently asked why.

“Because it was like a bolt of lightning just went through my head, and the migraine is completely gone.”

Some things are not easily forgotten.

For a couple of years Trish had suffered from a persistent abdominal pain. It couldn't be treated, nor even be confidently diagnosed.

One day we were talking, and we agreed I would pray for it. I put my hand over the pain and prayed. She described it like a small bubble that burst (in truth, “it was like a bubble that went ‘blip’”) and the pain disappeared.

I won't carry on disclosing any more of my wife's private history. She, like everyone, is not healed from every medical issue

## Less Dramatic

The stories of healing that I've told took place during our time in two churches – Logan Uniting Church and Beenleigh Uniting Church.

In the latter part of our time at Beenleigh I received my call from God to move into fulltime congregational ministry. And so began the process of candidating – the Period of Discernment, local and regional meetings and state selection, and the years of training.

The curious thing about those five years is that I don't believe there is a single miraculous story to tell. I have very high regard for learning, and for all that I learned during those five years. Yet the truth is that miraculous works of God were mostly ignored and occasionally maligned. I did wonder if I had seen the last of miracles.

After fulfilling training requirements I was placed in ministry with Proserpine Whitsunday Uniting Church. I hadn't seen the last of miracles.

Very early on in my time in the Whitsundays I offered to pray for people if they had a need, having shared a couple of my earlier experiences.

Rex came and asked me to pray for his knee, which I did. He reported back to me (and to other people ever since) that God healed his knee. Rex is not a young man, and likes his tennis. His knee had finally forced him off the court, but has been back playing these last five years.

I cautiously refer to this and some other healings as “less dramatic”, because they are not among the first and they lack the unusual features of some more recent events. Yet they were not less dramatic for the people involved. Every time God chooses to act in this way it is dramatic for the people involved, and I would never want to suggest otherwise.

One Sunday morning, greeting people at the door, I was asked if I would pray for a person who had been suffering headaches for most of the last two weeks. I prayed for her, and next Sunday she told me that the headaches had stopped immediately and not returned.

There have been other occasions like these, and from time to time people remind me because I'm starting to forget. There have been sore backs, legs, shoulders, and other body parts I've prayed for. There are periods of time when it seems God answers almost every prayer, and other times when it is less common. But it keeps happening.

There was one occasion when one of our brightest lights, an elderly saint who is no longer with us, came to our evening worship and asked us to pray for his shoul-

der. We did so, first as a group, then with just a few placing hands on his shoulder. After we prayed he raised his arm and tested it in different directions, then declared it cured. He had lost sleep for months because of the pain in that shoulder, and it was gone in a moment.

## Electric Current

According to the New Testament, healing is one of the gifts and activities of the Holy Spirit. There are many gifts, given by the Spirit of God for the building up of the body of Christ, and equipping the saints for the ministry of the Kingdom.

I believe this, and have prayed for many people to be filled with the Holy Spirit over the years. I have neither seen nor heard of any discernable difference as a result of these prayers, yet still believe God hears and answers all such prayers.

Yet in the years 2009-2010 two events occurred.

After one of our small evening worship services, Christine asked me to pray for her. I don't even remember the reason, but in addition to the requested prayer, I prayed that she be filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a short prayer and she left quickly. Christine told me later that when I prayed for the Holy Spirit, it felt like electricity running through her body. The reason she had left so quickly was because it was such a shock.

Quite some time later I was meeting with two of our congregation, preparing for their wedding. At the close of our meeting I asked if I could pray for them. I did so, for each of them in turn.

When I looked up after praying for Steve, he appeared to be looking for something. He was looking for the trick. He said that it felt like I had run a wire into him from a power point. He first assumed I was playing a trick.

We were all astonished, and kept talking for some time. Outside the room, some twenty minutes later as they left for their car (with some difficulty), Steve said it was still running through him.

I have no precedent for anything like this. Nicky Gumbel describes something similar in his Alpha talk, in his encounter with John Wimber. In neither case did I feel anything. In neither case was there any identifiable consequence or result. The experiences seem to have been for the moment, between these people and the Holy Spirit.

## Healed Before We Prayed

We had a home group of about ten people, and we were doing the Alpha Course at the same time as other groups in our church.

It was the week on healing, and in his talk Nicky Gumbel describes the way that the Holy Spirit sometimes helps us know how to pray for others. He describes how sometimes someone in the group might feel or see or hear something that relates to a person in the room. If such a thing happens, in Nicky's experience, it usually indicates God's intention to heal that person.

I have lost count of the number of times I have led the Alpha and Youth Alpha Courses. The count is somewhere near ten. This topic and technique are taught and tried each time. Yet I have not, myself, ever experienced anything in these group prayer situations ... until this time.

Back to our home group ... we decided to pray and ask God to show us how we could pray. To be honest my expectations were low.

The whole time we prayed I felt a pressure in my right side. It wasn't painful, nor even particularly unusual. But I knew I hadn't felt it before we prayed.

Just in case you are still under some delusion that I am "better" than anyone else, let me share with you my discomfort at this point. I hate being wrong, especially in public. I also don't ever want it to look like I'm trying to manufacture a spiritual experience.

So would I mention this pressure or not ... yes ... no ... yes ... no ... finally 'no', and then I shared it (you see the clarity I have on such things?).

To my astonishment, Rob, a doctor at our local hospital, said he was feeling the same thing in his other side. That was amazing enough.

Shelley said, "How did you know? I haven't told anyone." For a few weeks, Shelley had been suffering pain in her side, and just that day it had escalated and she had made an appointment to see a doctor.

"Well then," said I, "we had better pray for you."

"You don't understand. When you told us about the pressure in your side the pain completely disappeared." And Shelley's testimony is that the pain has never returned.

I have heard of God giving clues on how to pray, and obviously I've seen people healed, but being healed when someone took the risk of sharing what they felt ... that is a new one in my experience.

## Healed During Church

This is a story which is perhaps not quite mine to tell, but it happened without my knowledge in the second centre row, right in front of me.

It was Sunday morning church in Proserpine, which is a fairly laid back affair by many Uniting Church standards, yet still very conservative and predictable.

Kylie, to whom this story really belongs, had laryngitis, badly. She was fully expecting a slow recovery, which was already taking too long.

She came to church, as she and her family always do, but of course there wasn't a lot she could do to participate. I will let her tell you the story herself from this point.

"I was sitting there and thought to myself, 'I should ask Wayne to pray for me after church. Other people have been healed. Maybe I would be.'

"But a small voice asked me, 'Why wait until then. Pray for it now by yourself.' That was not something I was likely to think, so I'll blame God for the question.

"So I did. I prayed that God would heal my throat. And instantly the tightness left my throat. I thought I had been healed, but how do you find out? I couldn't just start talking out loud in the middle of other stuff, so I was impatient for the next song.

"When we sang the next song I got my chance, and my voice was back, strong and loud. The laryngitis was gone. And it stayed gone. I had been completely healed."

## Shoulder and Elbow

Numbers were so small at church this particular evening that we cancelled the organised meeting in favour of a group discussion. At the end of the evening, Shelley asked me to pray for Mick, her husband.

On the Friday evening two days earlier, Mick had been in a BMX race. He had spectacularly stacked, and damaged his shoulder. After medical attention his shoulder was strapped to avoid further damage.



In addition, Mick had suffered tennis elbow for the last eighteen months, and it was really bad at this time. Between the two injuries, both arms were useless.

Mick skips a yacht here in the Whitsundays (a hard life—you should see the endless photos of hard labour!), but he was facing a long period of time off work.

I asked Shelley and Keisha to put their hands on Mick's elbow, while I put mine on his shoulder. It was Winter and Mick was wearing a corduroy jacket, so we were a thick layer away from actually touching him.

I prayed, fairly short as usual, but noticed my hand on his shoulder feeling a bit warm. I commented on it, and Mick said, "That's nothing compared to the elbow."

Mick's shoulder and elbow were really hot. All four of us could feel it, three of us through the jacket. Mick testifies that it was only the shoulder and elbow that were hot; the rest of his body remained quite normal.

The next day Mick was back at the helm of his yacht in a four metre swell.

His elbow was, and is to this day, completely healed from tennis elbow. His shoulder had nothing but a slight twinge, but full rotation and strength, and it remains so to this day (including the twinge).

## Final Comments

I say again, I am no more special than anyone else, and I have no idea why God has chosen to do these things through and around me.

But I solemnly swear that the stories told here are as absolutely accurate as I can recall. They truly happened. I have not told you all of the God-things I've experienced. For example I've not written about the few times God has spoken directly to me. This is for a reason. I am testifying to those things I have seen which were clear and visible, not internal and hidden.

You may still say that the things described here are not miracles, or that they don't necessarily have to be God at work. Perhaps you think Wayne just has healing powers.

I have written because I am compelled to believe this is God at work, and I think I'm supposed to share it around. It is to God we have been praying, and these are stories of what God has done.

We try to deal with each other equally (ish). God does not. God takes us on our own journey. While some are healed, others are not. I feel deeply for those who are not healed, but I have no more power to change their story than I have for those who were healed.

I'm not telling you to get on with the healing business. It is, to me, one of the uncontrollable gifts of God. But if you even suspect God may want to heal people through you, don't hold it back. It is a marvellous gift to behold.

*Wayne McHugh is Minister of the Word at Whitsunday Poserpine Uniting Church, Queensland*

# ACC: a call to be God's voice

**A**fter leaving the conference in Melbourne where we were spiritually fed (as well as the kilos to the waist line) yes we did have the annual business of the ACC. The thing that was ringing in my ears as I left the conference was that God always has His hand on those who will speak out the truth, those who hold fast to Scriptural truth. Those who will walk hand in hand with Him through the mission fields of this nation.

It always amazes me that when we have our minds focused on the things of God and are led by His Spirit how He speaks to us. My wife Fran and I left the conference for a few weeks holiday and travelled through southern Victoria and along the Great Ocean Road. At Cape Otway we had a conversation with one of the staff members who asked which way we were travelling we said westward. It is interesting how God speaks, we said we were going to see the Apostles, he said, "The twelve apostles." We replied that we thought there were much less now, he said, "Yes there are only seven left." I replied, "Five have been martyred." This reply puzzled him somewhat and nodded his head.

After a few minutes he had thought about this and said, "We are told that by the time the last one has fallen new ones would be formed." I replied that was rather prophetic, that one went right over his head too, but he replied, "I suppose so."

God was saying to me that although many prophetic voices fall by the wayside God will raise up others to be the apostolic voice of our age and future ages.

I pondered on this for another 24 hours and we arrived at the London Bridge, God was saying to me, what you speak has power. For years children had sung the nursery rhyme, "London Bridge is falling down, falling down..." We, as the prophetic apostolic voice of today, can speak destruction and we can speak life. We have the power to speak both.

At the conference we were reminded of the sad state of the Uniting Church spiritually. It would be easy at this point to jump to the premise that we should be speaking life into the Church to some extent this is true, but the prophetic apostolic voice also needs to point out the demise of continually ignoring the words of Scripture and the word of God contained therein.

It comes down to hearing what God is saying to us in Australia, to us in the Uniting Church.

The original apostles are falling over, London Bridge has fallen down. God however will not leave us without a prophetic apostolic voice, new apostles and prophets will be formed in the image of Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

What else did God say to me as I drove along this jour-



**The Apostles: "Five have been martyred."**

ney? We watched the apostles being battered by the wind and waves; in the formation of new apostles is also by the same action. Is this what it means to take up our Cross and follow Jesus? Is this the cost of being the apostolic/prophetic voice of the twenty first century?

All along this battered coast line were sentinels, Light Houses warning many of the dangers: God wants us to be the apostles, the prophets, the beacons who will show the world the way forward and warn them of the dangers along the way.

In a week's journey nature was able to speak boldly to reinforce the call on each of us within the ACC. At times we will feel battered by the storms of political correctness, in other times the ocean around us will seem calm. In many ways the calm can lull the unwary into a false sense of security. In trying to maintain the calm the UCA National Assembly has created a sense of calm. Even many ACC members have become complacent, some have even ask do we need the ACC anymore? Like the Apostles in the Southern Ocean complacency means being caught in the next storm without a life line out of site of the beacon on the headland warning of danger.

*But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Pontius Pilate. 1 Timothy 6:11-13 (NKJV)*  
 Rev. Grahame Abrahams is Minister of the Word, Shellharbour Village Congregation, NSW

# My brother tells me he is gay. What happens next?

**Someone I love is gay** Anita Worthen & Bob Davies, IVP, 1996

I can remember the day in 2002 when my younger brother told me of his struggle with same-sex attraction; and the anguish he felt over the conflict raging in his heart and mind. He knew in his mind what the Scriptures taught about homosexuality, and was torn in his being about his sexual desires which he had sought to satisfy in homosexual intimacy.

Like me, he had become a Christian as a teenager in a small country town, ably disciplined by Godly people in an evangelical Methodist/Uniting Church congregation there; had been involved in an evangelical student Christian group at University, and post-Uni belonged to a conservative Anglican congregation in Sydney.

I recall my mixed emotions at this news. Feelings of shock and shame; the thoughts of guilt that somehow I had contributed to my brother's waywardness, gave way to love and compassion as I sat with him and we cried together, and I re-assured him of my love and support.

He was still my brother—biologically and spiritually. He had shared his situation with his Pastor and a few close friends in his congregation. I was greatly relieved to know that they too had been very supportive and caring.

It wasn't until sometime later that I found this book by Worthen & Davies. Written from the personal experience of the authors, one of whom has a homosexual son, and the other who writes of his own struggle with homosexuality, it is an authentic and practical guide for the families and friends of homosexuals.

With chapters dealing with issues of grief, guilt, shame and AIDS, its main focus however is on healing of relationships, and help for people to care for homosexual loved ones with unconditional love. I found it most helpful as I reflected on my reaction to my brother's confession, and as I continue to support and care for him in his ongoing and daily struggle.

There is no doubt that this book is written from a conservative Biblical viewpoint. It acknowledges the sinful brokenness of us all; a brokenness that is often demonstrated in sexual dysfunction—whether heterosexual or homosexual. In the midst of brokenness, the authors remind us of God's grace.

There is forgiveness for those who reject a homosexual loved one, for those who are homophobic, and for those who are homosexual. God's grace is powerful to change lives.

There is healing from homosexual behaviour and orientation, and there is strength to live a Godly lifestyle of

faithfulness in marriage or abstinence in singleness.

My brother has made that commitment. He has surrendered his sexuality to the Lordship of Christ. He continues to struggle with same-sex attraction, but seeks the power of the Holy Spirit to live a Godly life in singleness and abstinence.

He now lives in the UK where he has been involved in ministry in an evangelical congregation, and as a speaker for an organisation that ministers to those seeking healing from homosexual behaviour. He is currently undertaking ordination training for the Church of England (UK).

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## There is strength to live a Godly lifestyle of faithfulness in marriage or abstinence in singleness.

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I recall the great sense of joy I had when I invited my brother to preach in the congregation where I was the pastor on one of his recent visits back in Australia. My mother wept (with joy & pride) as she watched her eldest son lead the service and her youngest son preach the Gospel (while sitting next to her grandson who is in Gospel ministry on a university campus).

Homosexuality is a complex issue. While much of it remains a mystery, there is no justification for the irrational response of homophobia: that would contradict the concepts of grace and compassion.

Neither is there the justification for a theology that accepts homosexual behaviour as a God-given lifestyle: that would deny the Gospel and the Lordship of Christ over our bodies.

Both responses slap the faces of those many faithful Christian people, like my brother, who seek to live lives that honour Jesus as they struggle with their sexual orientation. I pray that this book by Worthen & Davies may provide us with the resources to avoid both of these responses.

*Rev. Ian Weeks is Convener of the ACC NSW Movement and Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church in northern Sydney.*

*His brother has given him permission to tell this story.*

# A good thriller and bad Porn

**The Confession** by John Grisham

I love a good legal thriller, and John Grisham has produced a variety of books that certainly fit this category. This one is a little different in that much of the situation has already happened, so it is more an opportunity to explore moral and ethical questions about the death penalty and the role of the state and in a minor way, faith.

In *The Confession* an innocent man, Donté Drumm is on death row, and the real killer Travis Boyette confesses the crime to a Lutheran minister, Reverend Keith Schroeder, who then becomes intimately involved in the attempts to free Donté.

Clearly the book is a link to Grisham's non-fiction work *The Innocent Man: Murder and Injustice in a Small Town*. This time he enables the reader to consider in a more popular way the American justice system, faith, politics and lawyers all within the context of the death penalty.

**Big Porn Inc: Exposing the harms of the global pornography industry** by Melinda Tankard Reist and Abigail Bray (Eds), Spinifex Press, 2011. RRP: \$36.95 (310 pages)

I found it difficult to finish this book, not because it is boring, but because some of the chapters are very difficult to read.

I often went to a local coffee shop to read, so I would not be distracted by emails and the phone. This book needs your full attention and consideration.

It is a collection of articles and essays, some written for the volume, some revised from previous articles, and others edited from unpublished writings and material in order to bring together all the areas that encompass the tentacles of the reach of pornography.

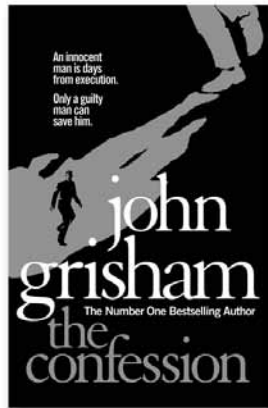
Together it presents a wealth of material showing the links between the different parts of our sexualised culture, highlighting the increasing abuse of women and children through exploitation and sex-trafficking.

The sections of the book focus on:

- The culture of pornography
- The industries which make up pornography
- Harm to children (these are extremely difficult chapters)
- Pornography and the state
- Movements and opposition to pornography.

It is sobering to see the various industries that are either helping or benefitting from the spread of pornography, including pharmaceutical groups and of course mobile phone and internet companies.

The chapters on the development of the pornography industries in South Africa and India are among many illuminating and fundamentally disturbing studies. There



is a helpful discussion through several pieces about the nature of 'free speech', the concept of fair speech and the reality of censorship in society.

I especially recommend the article by Helen Pringle "A Studied Indifference to Harm: Defending Pornography in The Porn Report."

This is very helpful, given the prominent coverage in October to The Porn Report and so-called popular pornography courtesy of the Fairfax media group through the publication

in *The Good Weekend* of an article that actually confirms the whole thesis of this book.

As well as academic material, the book is intertwined with personal story and real situations. *Big Porn Inc.* delivers a knock-out blow to those who trade on the idea that pornography is a harmless pastime.

It has substantial footnoting, and references, partly I believe to categorically place this book at the level it needs to be in terms of input into policy and government.

I realise that given the themes and the academic nature, this is not a book that everyone will read or want to. However, perhaps you should consider how you can be involved in helping to stop the development of a pornified world.

Many people say 'this issue', or 'that issue' is the great moral issue of our day, but I want to put this one on top, as it has growing implications for less-developed countries as well as the 'technically sophisticated'. The exploitation of women and children has no boundary in terms of country, or indeed in terms of what is done to them in the name of profit and gain.

I encourage churches to consider buying a copy for your minister, or lay leader, and asking them to present a summary at a meeting to raise awareness, especially for parents and grandparents who may not even be aware of current issues among teenagers such as 'sexting'.

I also suggest publication of a suitably revised edition that is aimed at a wider audience, especially school students, which could include perhaps a page from each chapter. Another thought was the revision and publication of the introduction as a small booklet. The fifteen pages here represent one of the most helpful introductions to an edited work I have read.

The final chapters in the book provide a helpful way forward for people to become involved in opposing pornography, and also help one not to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the information provided, and also the depths of depravity that need to be exposed.

You can find out more about the issues and order the book at: [www.melindatankardreist.com](http://www.melindatankardreist.com)

Peter Bentley



# Enchanted evenings

**Why not invite a few friends over to your home in January to watch a DVD and discuss the themes?**

**The Climb** (PG, 2002)

This mountaineering drama is actually a well-produced look at faith and family relationships, especially the influence of one's father. Ned Vaughan plays Michael Harris and Jason George Derrick Williams, two mountain climbers with different outlooks on faith and life who are teamed up for a one-off climb. There are some excellent mountain scenes – you may be inspired to do some rock-climbing at least. I liked the extended cameo role given to Dabney Coleman, who plays the head of the company that sponsors the men. Quite suitable for a broad group, though there are some distinct themes for men.

**The Encounter** (PG, 2010)

A group of strangers end up in a diner in an isolated area and are led to talk about meaning in their lives as they encounter a stranger who is revealed as Jesus. The film features Christian singer Jaci Velazquez as follower needing help, and professional wrestler Steve 'Sting' Borden, who is like the rich man in the parable in Luke 12. There is a strong focus on contemporary issues and matters, including some sensitive personal matters that are rarely discussed let alone in a Christian film. This is quite an intriguing way to raise consideration of what is important to people, highlighting peoples' needs, and not what they want. Jesus is the example of grace and openness, though there is a little bit of the genial restaurant host. Suitable for a quiet reflective group.

**Forgiven** (PG, 2011)

The title clearly plays against the Clint Eastwood Oscar Winner *Unforgiven*, and the contrast is certainly evident. The film is actually a re-edited version of *The Legend of Jake*

*Kincaid* (2002 TV movie), as director Alan Autry wanted to make it an even more positive Christian film.

Autry also stars as Jake Kincaid, a former soldier, wrongly imprisoned and now bent on revenge. The film is a bit of a nod to different western genres and there are many seeming references, from *True Grit* to other Eastwood films, including *Pale Rider* and *High Plains Drifter*, though.

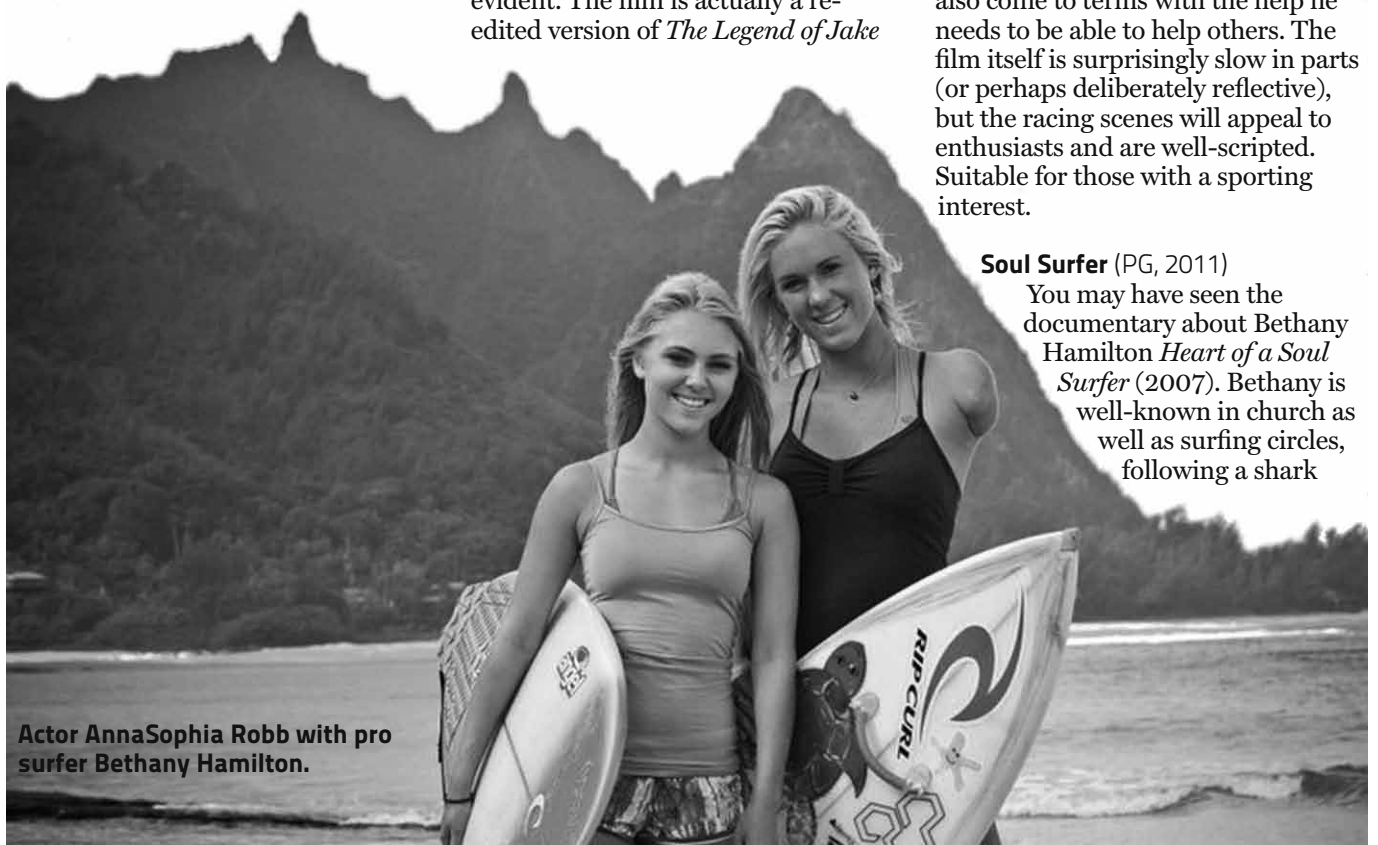
It is worth seeing for the depiction of ordinary people as Christians in a town, rather than simply the preacher, though needs a much more substantial edit, and also some attention to the use of music, which is often overdone. Suitable perhaps for a grandfather with teenage boys, but older boys may feel it is a little simplistic and slow.

**The Potential Inside** (PG, 2010)

There is certainly growing interest in cycling events in Australia. A common theme in these films is how do people (and people of faith) cope with a tragedy? Here a professional cyclist has to find his life again, and also come to terms with the help he needs to be able to help others. The film itself is surprisingly slow in parts (or perhaps deliberately reflective), but the racing scenes will appeal to enthusiasts and are well-scripted. Suitable for those with a sporting interest.

**Soul Surfer** (PG, 2011)

You may have seen the documentary about Bethany Hamilton *Heart of a Soul Surfer* (2007). Bethany is well-known in church as well as surfing circles, following a shark



Actor AnnaSophia Robb with pro surfer Bethany Hamilton.

# SUMMER EXTRA

attack in Hawaii in October 2003 which took her left arm. This film is the Hollywood production, and thus is not as overt in its Christian message, though it clearly outlines her faith, and the faith of her family and friends. One good aspect of the film is that their faith is presented as a natural part of their lives, and is not at all the preachy or judgemental style that is sometimes depicted in Hollywood films.

The Hamilton family and Bethany clearly had the ability to control the content and image, and since the target audience is family and church based, the film is no standard surfing film. There are however, some excellent surfing scenes and parts that for me, actually showed the wonder of the creation that God has worked in the sea. The Hollywood budget clearly shows in the surfing scenes, and are necessary as Bethany was (and is) involved in the professional surfing arena.

The actors are professionals, including Oscar winner Helen Hunt as Bethany's mother Cheri, and Dennis Quaid as her father Tom. Teenage and family film actor AnnaSophia Robb plays Bethany and manages to garner sympathy without appealing to sentimentalism. Kevin Sorbo from 'What if ...' plays a family friend who was in the water when Bethany was attacked.

There are some good, if somewhat brief scenes that consider questions about suffering and faith, especially related to her moves to go back to surfing and competition.

The film also connects with other real-life events, notably the recovery and re-establishing efforts of many individuals and groups following the 2004 Asian Tsunami. The film captures the spirit of Bethany's first visit to the tourist area of Phuket in Thailand which helped to develop her own ministry.

I loved the closing line in the film: "I have the ability to embrace more people than I ever could with two arms." One way she has done this is through Friends of Bethany, a non-profit organisation dedicated to sharing the hope and love of Jesus Christ worldwide by providing support to shark attack survivors and amputees, and seeking to tell inspiring stories like her own life, but also of others.

Bethany has spoken of people she admires like Nick Vujicic and Joni Eareckson Tada, but it is her faith in

her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that stands out. I could see this being a popular and helpful film for teens and groups (perhaps a blanket screening arrangement for beach missions?).

And to be extended

## **The Adjustment Bureau** (M, 2011)

The Universal Pictures media release asked "Do we control our destiny, or do unseen forces manipulate us? A man glimpses the future Fate has planned for him and realizes he wants something else. To get it, he must pursue across, under and through the streets of modern-day New York the only woman he's ever loved."

Science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick provided Hollywood with a large body of material for some incredibly lateral scripts, from *Blade Runner* (1982) to what I believe to be the most intriguing, the recent film *The Adjustment Bureau*. Matt Damon is US Senate candidate David Norris, a man with a clear future and a seeming natural ability to serve his nation, who has a 'chance' meeting with contemporary dancer Elise Sellas played by Emily Blunt.

While trying to meet up with Elise again, David finds out that the 'bureau' are working to prevent this, as Elise is not part of the plan they have for his life. David learns that people have caseworkers (at times likened to that of being a secular angel) who help to keep order and maintain the plan for life when events cause disruptions and changes.

The film is well-paced and has some dynamic footage, meaning it is best watched on a larger screen. As usual, the city of New York becomes another character to highlight the complex developments.

This film fits in well with my 'pre-evangelism' film list. It can be used to initiate discussion about life, fate and faith. Even the symbolism of doors being opened, closed, and leading to new possibilities is a significant link. I am sure we can all testify to this after the event.

## **The Beaver** (M, 2011)

Many critics did not know what to do with *The Beaver*, a film starring Mel Gibson, and directed by another Oscar winner Jodie Foster. Given Mel Gibson's rather provocative life of late, I perceive that some were hoping this would be a good chance to put the

boot in. However, his performance and the theme were too significant to ignore or dismiss. The film opens with the narrative voice we will come to know and understand. "This is a picture of Walter Black, a hopelessly depressed individual. Somewhere inside him is a man who fell in love. Who started a family. Who ran a successful company. That man has gone missing. No matter what he's tried, and he's tried everything, Walter can't seem to bring him back. It's as if he's died, but hasn't had the good sense to take his body with him."

This is a challenging and mostly sensitive consideration of the growing and tragic difficulties associated with depression and the effects on a family. Gibson's character is so consumed by depression that he can barely get out of bed.

His sudden connection with a hand puppet he has found, provides him with a way to relate again with the world and re-new his career and life. He gives people a card with the words: "Hello. The person who handed you this card is under the care of a prescription puppet, designed to help create a psychological distance between himself and the negative aspects of his personality. Please treat him as you normally would, but address yourself to the puppet. Thank you."

Now, many viewers will find some aspects a little odd, perhaps downright crazy, but that is partly the idea. Sometime it takes a different way of presenting a mental health issue like Russel Crowe as John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*, to cause people to reflect again.

A separate story within the film considers the depression within Walter's son Porter, and his growing difficulties. The film is also a parody on the USA and modern consumer life, reminding me a little of the film *Being There*, in which a simple man is set on the path to become the President because people see only what they want to see.

Some people believe there are some aspects which could not happen, but considering some reality TV shows in the USA, many scenes are not that outlandish at all, even though the directing and style of the film is itself actually more than conventional. Not for joyful watching, but for reflecting on our fallen world.

*Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant for the ACC.*

# THIS IS THE ACC

## Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

*Our goals include*

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACC Catalyst* and local newsletters.

## What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

## What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
  - upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
  - calling the Uniting Church to

determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

- calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

- providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

- developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

- establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

## How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com) mail:

PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

# ACC DIARY

## What happens next

- March 5-6, 2012: National Council and Commissions Combined Meeting – Sydney.
- September 13-15, 2012: ACC National Conference and AGM - Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide.
- 2012 is an Assembly meeting year. The 13th National Uniting Church Assembly will be held in Adelaide 15-22 July. The President-elect Rev. Dr Andrew Dutney will be installed as President for the term 2012-2015.

## Ways to support ACC

Some congregations have developed excellent ways of raising their membership contribution or providing an extra donation to the establishment and foundation of the ACC. Some of these are included below.

- A special Sunday offering: where an offering is taken for the work of the ACC
- A donation box: one congregation has a donation box in their church for the ACC. In less than a year they raised over \$1200, as well as giving a \$1000 membership contribution
- Purchasing Individual Supporting Memberships: some individuals and one congregation purchase supporting memberships on behalf of other members who cannot afford membership themselves. This increases the involvement of local members and provides a different way of encouraging members to support the ACC individually as well.
- Fundraising events: several regional groups have organised events to encourage and network and have also had a voluntary or retiring offering for the work of the ACC.

## Consider making a Bequest to the ACC

It has been wonderful to see the support and hope evidenced for the ACC appeal, and in particularly the enthusiasm for a National Director. Some members have indicated that they would like to make a larger contribution to the future work of the ACC, but are not presently able to do this, and thought one way was to provide for the ACC in their wills.

This is a very helpful suggestion, as people can contribute to the on-going and long-term work of the confessing movement. All you need to do is specify in your will the name of the organisation, and the amount to be provided:

For example, "I give ... to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. for the general purposes thereof".

## FILM



Alex Kendrick and Kevin Downes search a home for criminals.

# Fathers who are heroes

**Courageous** (M, 2011)

Integrity, Strength, Love, Forgiveness, Faith. All the elements of previous Sherwood movies like *Fireproof* and *Facing the Giants* come to the fore in *Courageous*. Previously the characters were primarily concerned with their own occupations and lives, the characters in *Courageous* are often dominated by the lives of others; that is, until a tragedy impacts on them. Co-Writer and Director Alex Kendrick stars in the film as Sheriff Adam Mitchell.

He and three other officers are continually confronted by questions arising from their public service, and increasingly see the connections arising from a broken world in which teenagers move into gang-related and petty crime, with the gang leader often seemingly taking the role of the father they never had.

This will be a helpful and challenging movie for many people, and encouraging for men (who are fathers) to consider what it is to be a father, especially to their sons.

How do you bring up boys today? How do we address a society in which many fathers have abnegated their responsibilities?

*Courageous* is having a commercial release in Australia from November 10 (though it may have finished by the time this review is published), following the American release in late September, where it performed well at the US box office, being the highest grossing new film release and fourth overall on its opening weekend.

The film has had substantial media contact, including help from the now well-known Duggar family, some of

whom were extras in the 5km race.

I have mentioned before that the acting in Sherwood films is mainly non-professional, and there are some parts in *Courageous* which illustrate the limitations of this approach. A tighter script and editing down to about 100 minutes (approximately 130) would help this to reach a broader audience (especially if it appears on cable or TV).

## **Courageous wants to call men to take their part in the raising of children**

The Christian theology presented by Sherwood Pictures is conservative, and no doubt there will be questions over the occasional male headship reference.

It does not centre on this, and is similar to the first film *Flywheel*, which is referenced in *Courageous* in a minor way, as Adam Mitchell's pickup truck carries a Jay Austin Motors license plate. Alex Kendrick played Jay Austin, the Zacchaeus like used-car dealer.

The theme of fatherhood, and the questions that this often raises can be challenging. There are some scenes and comments which for some people may be emotionally confronting.

If you have a group see the film, it would be worth ensuring there are some members available for counselling. A related group of resources has been produced, based around the resolution that the men in *Coura-*

*geous* agree to jointly take and hold themselves accountable to.

Overall, *Courageous* wants to call men to take their part in the raising of children, and hopefully to raise a new generation which respects women, and themselves.

## **Christmas with a capital C: Putting Christ back into Christmas** (PG, 2011)

Member of the Baldwin acting family and identifying Christian, Daniel Baldwin plays Mitch Bright, a 'high-flyer' returning to the small town in Alaska where he grew up. Most people are not sure why he is back, let alone his former high school rival and now town mayor Dan Reed, played by Ted McGinley.

Mitch uses his business background to try to bring some of the locals to his side, and begins to raise issues in the town regarding the use of Christmas images and signs in public places, especially the long-established nativity scene display on city hall property at Christmas time.

While the film considers certain American-oriented legal matters, the question of the content and display of religious greetings and the place of religious symbols (especially Christian) in public places has also become a common issue of debate in Australia.

The title of the film is linked to the Go Fish song *Christmas with a capital C*, which has a much more forceful message.

This film is a mostly reasonable and at times quite graceful debate and illustrative comment about Christian responses to these issues. Overall there is a critique of the consumer focus that Christmas has become, and a highlighting of love for all, peace and serving others. I especially liked the role of, and focus on the gifts and love that a child can offer at Christmas.

This film certainly helps to raise questions about the meaning and purpose of Christmas and the cultural traditions that have developed and may be a good conversation starter for your local church. I have already noted the wider potential use of the idea behind using "Merry ..... Mas. What's Missing?"

*Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant for the ACC.*