


# NewView

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Because this issue of *NewView* appears as we approach Easter, we have spent some time thinking about the significance of **endings**. It is a topic which has generated a number of useful ideas for us to consider. One of my favourite quotations comes from Tom Stoppard's play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: **'Every exit is an entry somewhere else'**. Each of us has faced periods of difficult endings in our lives - separation from loved ones, the ending of relationships dear to us, a removal from familiar surroundings, the cessation of known and loved jobs or activities etc. Those words remind us that although we may not see it immediately, we are facing not simply an ending, but also a beginning, and we must learn, over time, to embrace that change in order to move forward. Neil's words about ending a Ministry Placement contain all those endings, I realised, and he shares with us the difficulties this entails. Margaret Frecker reflects on the loss of Glenis Dunn's wonderful talents arranging flowers (p.4), and Lynn Peters (p.4) similarly recalls the effects of Lois Hosking's death, finding solace in words which strengthen her faith. Heather Hon reminds us that in the turmoil of unexpected endings and change, that 'we are loved by the one constant, unchanging God' (p. 3).

Many people have contributed to this issue. Ken Coutts writes about the trial of a new 'sacred space', a place away from the rush and busyness of our lives where we can sit in quietness (p.5). Pamela Longmuir shares her artistic reflection on the creation story (p.5). Reports are provided by Jan Clear - on the many activities of the Inclusive Community missional group (pp.8-9) - and Sue Morgan with a summary of our successful book sale. Jit Tan and Vida Foo contribute photos for the visual report on GWUC's participation in the Chinese New Year celebrations in Kingsway (pp.12-13), while Ross Mackinnon tells us about the recent challenging Outreach Lunchtime Forum (pp.14-15).

Additionally, we 'get to know' a little more about Evan Laidlaw (pp. 6-7), and Bill Norquay contributes some of his discoveries in reading the Koran (pp. 10-11) in his quest to understand more about Islam. There is a book review of a book about eternal life (more endings and beginnings) and suggestions for further reading for those who are interested in following up the topic (pp.16-18). The JIM Unit's article on the Rohingya Slave Trade is reproduced (p.19) and we conclude with notes about the joys and losses of those in our community.

Many thanks to all our contributors. If you would like to make suggestions about material which might interest our community, or if you would like to contribute a report or notes about issues of concern to us, please contact Robin Pope ([popesr@aapt.net.au](mailto:popesr@aapt.net.au)) or leave a note in the letter rack with your name and contact details.

# Neil's Musings

## ENDINGS – ONE HARD ASPECT OF MINISTRY

One of the very difficult times in ministry is concluding a Ministry Placement. I have concluded three Ministry Placements now with different congregations. In each of my Placements at Quambatook, Mildura and Chelsea I have come to love the people. This is not surprising as ministry is about people - journeying with people through life and faith.

I have laughed with people; I have celebrated with people; I have cried with people; I have mourned with people; I have heard of their hopes and fears and we have worshipped, prayed, sung and shared in ministry and mission together. As I have supported them, they have also supported me and my family: for instance, when our children were born, when Lynn's parents passed away and generally during stressful times in ministry.

At the same time I have always been aware that I am a minister of Christ's Church and I am there to offer ministry. Members of the congregation and the community look to me and expect me to offer ministry. So I freely give myself to a congregation and I will always try to give of my best. There is also a sense where I am a little removed in order to be able to serve and offer ministry. I am a little removed because in my role I hold so much in confidence that I cannot share with others. I see myself being in a privileged position because people trust me because of who I am and due to the role I have as a minister.

So it is hard when I discern before God that it is time to move to a new Placement. It is hard for me and my family to say good bye. It is hard for the congregation members to say farewell. Over a long ministry there have been families where I have celebrated a baptism, a wedding and a funeral with them. No wonder it is hard to leave. However, moving on to a new challenge is also a part of ministry. I give what I can to a congregation and then I move on to embrace a new congregation and new challenges and new people. I have come to love and respect the people in each congregation where I have ministered. But I have always tried to make a clean break to make it as easy as possible for a new minister. I get on and busy myself meeting and serving a new group of people in the way that I have here at Glen Waverley.

In ministry, the endings are hard, and the new beginnings are exciting.

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The Editor gave me the opportunity to read the review of John Spong's book in this edition of *NewView*. This has prompted a couple of thoughts.

Spong says (p.18) findings of science make it clear that 'each specimen of life is...an accident'. I found myself strongly resisting the notion that life is an accident. Now I do not read Genesis chapters 1 and 2 literally. I see these chapters as making theological statements rather than scientific statements. I am not a scientist. But I do affirm that in some mysterious way God was intimately involved in creation. This is not to dispute the work of science.

I spoke with my brother-in-law who is a physicist. I need to keep this simple for myself. We talked about how the air we breathe is finely balanced in its make up in order to sustain life. The earth is the right size and the right distance from the sun to sustain life. When we get down to the tiny things like atoms and smaller there does seem to be random activity. When it comes to something like gravity there does seem to be order and rules. There is the right strength of gravity on earth to

## Neil's Musings cont.

sustain life. Within our complex universe there does seem to be both random activity (accident) and order.

I cannot see how the world in which we live, and the wonder of life, is all down to chance, an accident. Being present at the birth of our children was an amazing experience. This was the birth of a wonderful and complex new life. I know science looks for reason, cause and effect. I know science looks for an explanation. I am comfortable in affirming the important learning that science brings and I strongly affirm my faith that in some way God was intimately involved with creation. I can't explain this easily which is why it comes down to belief. I am very comfortable sitting with both belief and science.

Spong noted that John's gospel affirms that eternal life involves knowing Christ. At the heart of the Christian faith is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Because eternal life - life in all its fullness - is linked to knowing Christ, it begins now and is not just a future hope. We are invited into a life-giving relationship with Jesus. I am most alive when I am relating with people and with God.

The hope that I hold to very strongly is that my relationship with God through Christ is not broken in death. The Uniting Church liturgy declares '...while death is the end of mortal life, it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God'. Romans chapter 8: 37 - 39 affirms very powerfully that 'nothing in all creation, nothing in life or in death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. This is what I believe, live by, and sometimes affirm in funeral services and what I often affirm at the bedside of someone approaching death.

It is good to read and hear different opinions and engage in respectful conversation and discussion.

*Rev Neil Peters*

### ENDINGS

With recent events I've been thinking a bit about 'endings'. Sometimes they are planned for, sometimes even longed for, and sometimes we seem to want something to finish just so the next new adventure can begin.

At other times endings come abruptly and we aren't prepared. We feel cheated and can't quite believe that we have had no control over what has happened. It can take us a while to deal with this and get the 'closure' that is often talked about - if closure is possible.

Some words of the song 'Closing Time' by Semisonic come to mind. 'Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end'... quite profound I think. To quote another song, it is part of the 'Circle of Life'.

With the turmoil, heartache and uncertainty that endings can bring, it is good to remember that things happen for a season. While we may transition easily into a different season, it's not always that simple. We need to believe that we can move forward and be courageous ... whatever that might bring.

It also helps to know that we are loved by a God who is constant. With all the changes that happens, God never changes. We are loved by the one constant, unchanging God and for that we are blessed.

*Heather Hon*

# Endings

## TRIBUTE

On Friday each week you may see one of our flower arrangers emptying out the spent flowers from last Sunday, the ending of once beautiful flowers that have died in their service to God. That is the story of life, and we too in time come to the end. I want to pay tribute to Glenis Dunn who died on December 4th 2014. Glenis's love of God and her faith sustained her through her illness and she inspired us all.

Glenis served on the Flower Roster of the Glen Waverley Methodist Church and then the Uniting Church for 47 years. What a remarkable record! She loved her garden, flowers and flower arranging, and was always so ready to share her amazing skills with those of us wanting to learn. Many of the ladies on our roster have become talented flower arrangers because Glenis has been friend, teacher and encourager to them. Thank God for her great talent and each week as you look at the flowers think of her.

I am stepping down as flower roster co-ordinator after 15 years and want to thank Lesley Lambie for taking over. Another ending, but also a new beginning.

*Margaret Frecker*



This beautiful modern creation was arranged by Glenis Dunn for the wedding of Bec and Neil Skilton last year, and we were in awe of her talent.

## A FEW THOUGHTS FROM LYNN PETERS

Many of us attended the memorial service for Lois Hosking. In recent months Lois gave me a lift to and from Free Spirit rehearsal most Wednesday nights - mainly for the company, and to reduce the number of cars parked in Kennedy Street. I was shocked when I heard what had happened to her very soon after she dropped me home. When I was a child my grandmother died of the same thing, at the same age, as Lois.

At Lois's memorial service I was pleased to sing with Free Spirit one of the songs she most loved to sing, '10,000 reasons', by Jonas Myrin and Matt Redman. I want to use some of their words: 'Now that Lois's 'time has come, still [her] soul will sing [God's] praise unending, ten thousand years and then forever more!'

My Grandmother used to say that as she had no singing voice she wouldn't have to be in the heavenly choir; but maybe even she is singing 'like never before' and enjoying it - she certainly loved Jesus.

For a long time one of my favourite Christian verses has been the verse of 'Amazing Grace' that's not in TIS: 'When we've been there ten thousand years,...we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun.'

*Lynn Peters*

## Our New Sacred Space

Have you a need for a Sacred Space where you can reflect peacefully at GWUC?

Our church with its wonderful array of facilities remains a very busy place with a whole range of varied activities. We engage with a broad range of people from within and outside our immediate church congregation. This means that many of the venues and activities within the church configuration also bring a level of noise and bustle, which can be a challenge for others seeking a quiet moment of reflection to think, to pray and to slow down and appreciate uninterrupted quiet time.

With this in mind Church Council has approved a period of 6 months, where our vestry becomes 'the Sacred Space' within GWUC. You have listened to our Ministers explain this approach and trial and the vestry has been dressed for the purpose. Signage has been added to the door advising and explaining its purpose.

So how and what is the purpose?

Simply to provide a private venue for all members of the congregation to use in a private and shared space where they can:

- spend uninterrupted private, peaceful time in reflection or prayer;
- be still, quiet and purposeful ;
- be aware of the Church surroundings and divine presence;
- come to a safe place, where a range of personal emotions from thinking, crying, grieving, praying and laughing can be expressed in a peaceful and relaxed environment;
- breathe and listen in a place of silence and importantly, where the need for silence is respected by others within our community;
- nurture the soul, relax, feel God's surrounding love and be happy and thankful.

There may also be a variety of other uses, consistent with the above thoughts and concepts. Importantly, we are not prescribing specific use, other than in the context of a Sacred Space and the need for calmness and quietness, which will be consistent with having a private quiet space for personal engagement and reflection.

As Psalm 46:10 says, 'Be still, and know that I am God'.

A detailed review will be undertaken after this initial period. But our purpose is to ensure people are familiar with the available space and the concept of use as a Sacred Space. We hope it makes a difference and that you enjoy the use and respect the privacy.

*Ken M Coutts*

On Sunday January 11 the first reflection was from Genesis 1  
*'Firstly there is darkness [Is darkness rest, or scary?] then light comes into the darkness.*

We were invited to draw or write a response to what we heard.

This was my impression.

What do you see in this?

*Pamela Longmuir*



## Getting to Know You: Evan Laidlaw



*Stereotype*: *n. & v.* an image or idea of a particular person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held.

*Stereotyping*: something we all do. It is probably an innate human activity, a coping mechanism that we have developed. We learn from experience; when a particular situation or person is encountered we file that away to be recalled when that person or situation is faced again. Generalising that experience results in stereotyping.

And so my stereotyping kicked in when I met *Reverend* Evan Laidlaw. I overlooked the person and made assumptions and generalisations based on my experience of what the title 'reverend' implied. I soon had my expectations overturned.

Evan was born in Korumburra in July 1937 in to a family that was not associated with the church at all. His father's family had been dairy farmers, but his mother's family had taken up sheep farming in the 1800s on land between Euroa and Avenel. Evan's father, a bricklayer, his nursing aide mother, Evan and a younger brother born in 1939 moved to Seymour in 1941. Evan remembers his childhood home as fairly volatile, and his father's experience of service in World War Two seemed to increase his dad's aggression; hence Evan labels his childhood life as taking place in a 'samurai' environment. After his dad's demobilisation in 1945 the family moved to Yea, and his father set up his bricklaying business there. Evan's childhood was spent engaged in the country pursuits common to boys then: school, hunting rabbits, riding bikes, and rowing on the Goulburn River.

A significant figure in his early life was his paternal grandmother, a governess, who taught Evan to read long before he commenced his schooling; she was instrumental in engaging Evan's interest in reading, books and language. He remembers once asking, after seeing her wedding photo, whether she was Indian by birth, as she was dark-skinned. His query met with a wall of silence, and it was not for many years that he discovered her dark skin came from her aboriginality. Evan's heritage also includes early white settlers (Scottish and English) and convicts.

His reading skills gave him a head start at school and he completed the Intermediate Certificate at age 14, when he was sent out to work. He headed for Melbourne and enrolled in the PMG (Post-Master General) course for training technicians. Here he was thoroughly instructed in telegraphy, radio, long line and telephony, subsequently choosing telephony as his preferred field. In 1957, with others from his PMG course, he was called up to do the 14 weeks of basic training in National Service at Puckapunyal, followed by 2 years of training through the CMF (Citizen Military Forces). His PMG training and his country childhood of hunting and handling weapons guaranteed success - so much so, that after returning to his work with the PMG he was privately approached and asked if he was interested in going to IndoChina to assist in training the Montagnards. These inhabitants of the central highlands in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were being assisted in defending their lands in Vietnam against the incursions of the Viet Minh, or 'river people', who typically regarded these mountain inhabitants as inferior savages.

What would cause a 20 year old Australian to give up a secure job to accept an offer of dangerous work in a distant country with a vastly different culture? Evan thinks it was the challenge of using his skills, the excitement of real danger and the sense of invulnerability that the young so often have. It was not illegal, in those days, to fight for a foreign nation, and so for a raft of reasons he accepted, and in 1958 was flown to Darwin. There he was kitted out and then island-hopped to Saigon in a DC3.

## Getting to Know You: Evan Laidlaw

He completed three tours of duty, during which the sense of invulnerability was soon dispelled. His role as an NCO entailed direct combat ('fire fights') and on two particular occasions he faced the possibility of his own imminent death. In one, he became isolated from his squad and was hidden from the enemy only by metres and a liana curtain; in the other he was again separated from his troops and found he had entered a minefield in a small clearing to rescue a small child. He survived both, but these experiences were pivotal to his future path. He made a bargain with God along the lines of: 'Get me out of here alive and I promise I'll be a good boy'.

On his return to Australia he rejoined the PMG, and in 1959 was working on the installation of the telephone exchange in Wangaratta when he saw a TV broadcast of the Billy Graham crusade. 'You've got to be joking', was more or less the response from this young man who had never been to church. But remembering his bargain with this God he had never met, he began shopping around the churches. What was he seeking? Maybe it was forgiveness, Evan ponders. Finally he encountered a retired Presbyterian minister, Rev. Robertson, whose words struck a chord. His follow-up discussions with the local Home Missioner Wally Stratford identified his desire for further knowledge and resulted in him taking up residence in 1960 in a Presbyterian hostel while he completed adult university entrance requirements and applied for future ministry studies at Ormond College in 1961.

Free of any experience of church, Evan must have been like a clean slate waiting to be written on when he began university studies. He carried none of the old concepts which those of us with a church background were reared on, and he describes his years at theological college as being like a rebirth. He especially revelled in the challenges of Biblical studies in Greek and Hebrew. His arrival at theological college coincided with the departure of staff teaching in the evangelical/salvation tradition, and the progressive theology being taught made eminent sense to him. He regards his study program at Ormond and Queens Colleges as of a high standard which has provided a continuing basis for his continuing faith journey. Consequently his Christian faith has always been of the Galilean rather than of the traditional sacramental kind (i.e. Jesus recognised as 'a Son of Man' rather than '*the* Son of God').

He was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in 1968, and his first official appointment from 1969 to 75 was to a cluster parish at Pakenham. The work there clarified for him the future direction of his ministry. Drawn to chaplaincy as the field of his endeavours, from 1975 - 77 he worked as chaplain at Sandringham Technical School, nurturing both students and staff. Recognising a need for further training, in 1978 he returned to study part time to do the course at Pentridge Prison in Clinical Pastoral Education, which required one day a week at Pentridge Prison for two years, followed by an intensive counselling course in the third year. He simultaneously worked as chaplain at Dandenong High where he stayed until 1981. It was here that he met his wife Barbara (who is currently Principal of Mullana Secondary College in Mitcham).

After 4 years at Dandenong High he spent 1981 to 1989 at Lake Bolac, 1990-92 in a team ministry at Rosebud, and his final appointment from 1993 to 2002 was at Poowong: a vocation of more than forty years. During his long working life he has learned to go where the people are and not to make assumptions about their experiences. Helping them to look back and to recognise that we are each the sum of our past experiences helps people to review their past lives in order to cope with the present. He sees the pulpit as a logical place to explore ideas and different ways of expressing our faith. Although officially retired, he continues to put in long hours counselling those in need and he derives much enjoyment from leading the weekly 'Q' group in their discussions here at GWUC. Our community is enriched by his contributions and we are fortunate to be the recipients of his continuing involvement in our diverse communal life. Thank you for sharing your life with us, Evan!

*Robin Pope*

# Inclusive Community Report

*The following report was presented to the Congregational Meeting on Tuesday 10 March 2015 and is reproduced here to inform those who were not present at the meeting.*

I want to say a huge thank you to the committee members: Faye, Barbara, Alison, Marj, Laurel, Neil and Elwyn. They are always ready to make phone calls, contribute new ideas and help in any way.

What do you know about **supportive care link**? This is our care group organised by Laurel that supplies meals, transport and help in other ways. We are upset when people call for assistance and we don't have enough names of people who have offered to help. I know that our volunteers are stretched and we can't provide these services if we don't have volunteers. Our members are getting older. Some can't do as much as they could in the past so it is up to the people who don't have as many health issues and other problems to take on some extra jobs. Transport is becoming a huge problem as more members of our congregation find that they are unable to drive. We need help. We have a few ideas about how we could solve this problem but we would like to hear from you too. This will be something that we'll look at seriously this year.

Last year we had an **intergenerational evening**. This is another activity that fosters connectedness and genuine community. That was very successful and included people from 5 years of age to late 80s. They all had a wonderful time and encouraged us to do it again. I have emailed Alanee and we will hopefully start planning this very soon. Watch the monthly bulletin for further details.

Another activity that contributes to genuine community is a **combined service**. During the next twelve months, we will continue to make combined services special events as we did last Sunday. I won't promise that we'll have cupcakes and fairy bread every time.

**Pastoral Care** is a very, very important part of building genuine community and connectedness. We are committed to supporting the **Pastoral Partners program** and supporting our group pastoral carers. At this present time, we have 23 pastoral partners and over one hundred people being supported in this way. Our groups have pastoral carers and we need you, if this is your job. Early last year, we concluded the initial training for pastoral partners. In January this year we had a follow up workshop for those who had become pastoral partners and this was very successful and we had a good attendance. During the next twelve months, we will have two or three more follow up programs on various topics. Some of you visit older people and have been doing this for years, in some cases. You have built up a relationship and friendship with these people. These friendships and relationships are important and can be valuable as the pastoral partners program is not a visiting program. It is about keeping an eye on people and being the first point of call, if there are problems.

**Munch with a Bunch** continues to be very worthwhile and we are sending more invitations each time. We will continue to provide this activity and seek out those who should be included. We have been surprised at the number of people who attend **morning tea after 11am worship** and we will continue to have this every month as part of our fellowship program. We will also continue to support **Seniors' services and seminars** and advertise these in the wider community. We may help to start new groups if the need arises, but will certainly support our existing groups.



## Inclusive Community Report cont.

The next part of the Vision talks about nurturing faith development through sharing, questioning and exploration. It also talks about **welcoming new people** into our worshipping congregations. We want to make people feel welcome when they visit our church as newcomers. Neil invited comments from the 9.15 congregation on Sunday about what we should do for newcomers. I listened intently as people shared their ideas which were very practical. Neil, volunteers on the welcoming table and members of our committee are not the only people who should be part of the welcoming process. We are all involved. Sit with newcomers and talk to them. They may have been coming for a while but you haven't had the opportunity to meet them. Find out what they would like to join or know about. You may even be free to take them to a group's activity. We are trying to get newcomers involved in groups and in the next twelve months we want to tighten up our welcoming processes at all services so that people don't slip through the cracks. It is easy to talk to people whom we know and have known for a long time. It is harder to talk to new people-to discover who is new. We all need to try. A couple of years ago, a newcomer was brave enough to ask me to introduce her to a group convenor and I did this and have seen this person become more involved in the life of our church. What a thrill to see this. However, all newcomers won't be as brave as this. We need to help them.

I feel that our **English classes** probably fit into the Kingsway Ministry part of the vision. These classes have been running since August 2013 and we have a wonderful group of volunteer tutors who spend time preparing worthwhile and stimulating activities for our students. In the last two weeks there have been about twelve students and new people are coming all the time. During the next twelve months, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could start another class. That's what we are aiming for.

I hope that you will go home and think about what I have said. We need every person in this church family. There are big jobs and small jobs. **What can you do?**

*Jan Clear*

*We rejoice with the following members of our church family:*

*Lorraine Bartlett who celebrated her 85th birthday*

*Graeme and Margaret Frecker who each celebrated their 80th birthday*

*Graeme Schober who celebrated his 80th birthday*

*David Williams who celebrated his 80th birthday*

*Jan Roberts who celebrated her 80th birthday*

*Joyce and Geoff Fall who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary*

## Understanding Islam

Having listened to Muslim leaders say that Islam is a religion of peace it is hard to fathom just how such incredible atrocities and slaughter can be carried out in the name of God. Being inquisitive (but not wanting to be converted) I have downloaded a copy of the Koran in English translated by a Lebanese American Muslim named Talal Itani. It should be noted that the Grand Mufti of Dubai does not endorse this translation. In other reading I have found that one of the bases of Islam is that God sent Jesus as a prophet but because he was dissatisfied with the path the Christian Church took, he sent another prophet Muhammad to set things right. As a result Islam accepts Jesus as a prophet (but not the son of God) and he is named 25 times in the Koran and 9 times as the Messiah (Mary is mentioned 38 times). He is referred to as Jesus son of Mary, not Jesus of Nazareth. However while embracing Jesus they are somewhat derogatory about Christianity.

The Koran is broken down into 114 books or chapters each having a name and each book is broken into verses. It is not easy reading and it is obvious that the translator's grasp of the English language is typical of a second language. They do not see a need for sacrifice (such as the crucifixion) for redemption as God is 'Clement and Merciful to Believers' so the concept of Jesus dying for our sins is not accepted nor is the concept of 'Son of God'. In many places it states that 'God is God and does not have sons' and the concept of the Trinity is spurned.

Much is quoted from the Torah (Old Testament) and the fathers of Israel are revered: Abraham is mentioned 71 times and Moses 136 times. At this stage I have read about half of it but through the wonders of modern technology I have been able to pull out certain verses and paste them into this document so they are not modified or amended in any way. As such I have listed below certain verses that I found of interest. The book title is in bold and the verse number and text follow. In writing this I do not put myself as an expert on Islam, nor do I wish to criticise, but I hope it may give our congregation a better understanding of their sacred text.

The quotations below are from the early sections and are my choice of verses of interest to Christians. If there is sufficient interest I will put together sequels to this for future issues of *NewView*. For those interested, the version I have can be downloaded for free from Amazon to your Ipad or Kindle.

### **The heifer**

62. Those who believe, and those who are Jewish, and the Christians, and the Sabeans - any who believe in God and the Last Day, and act righteously - will have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.

87. We gave Moses the Scripture, and sent a succession of messengers after him. And We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear proofs, and We supported him with the Holy Spirit. Is it that whenever a messenger comes to you with anything your souls do not desire, you grew arrogant, calling some impostors, and killing others?

190. And fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression; God does not love the aggressors.

191. And kill them wherever you overtake them, and expel them from where they had expelled you. Oppression is more serious than murder. But do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there. If they fight you, then kill them. Such is the retribution of the disbelievers.

# Understanding Islam

223. Your women are cultivation for you; so approach your cultivation whenever you like, and send ahead for yourselves. And fear God, and know that you will meet Him. And give good news to the believers.

263. Kind words and forgiveness are better than charity followed by insults. God is Rich and Clement.

## The family of imran

45. The Angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, well-esteemed in this world and the next, and one of the nearest.'

55. God said, 'O Jesus, I am terminating your life, and raising you to Me, and clearing you of those who disbelieve. And I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve, until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return; then I will judge between you regarding what you were disputing.'

144. Muhammad is no more than a messenger. Messengers have passed on before him. If he dies or gets killed, will you turn on your heels? He who turns on his heels will not harm God in any way. And God will reward the appreciative.

## Women

19. O you who believe! It is not permitted for you to inherit women against their will. And do not coerce them in order to take away some of what you had given them, unless they commit a proven adultery. And live with them in kindness. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something in which God has placed much good.

71. You will find others who want security from you, and security from their own people. But whenever they are tempted into civil discord, they plunge into it. So if they do not withdraw from you, nor offer you peace, nor restrain their hands, seize them and execute them wherever you find them. Against these, We have given you clear authorization.

171. O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, and do not say about God except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Messenger of God, and His Word that He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and do not say, 'Three.' Refrain - it is better for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him - that He should have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and the earth, and God is a sufficient Protector.

## The Table

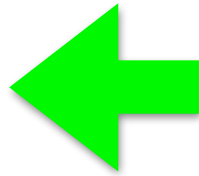
51. O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies; some of them are allies of one another. Whoever of you allies himself with them is one of them. God does not guide the wrongdoing people.

*Bill Norquay*

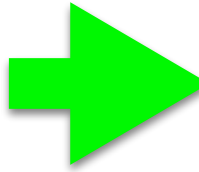
# Book Sale Thanks

It takes many people to make a book sale a success - and thanks to many people, it was! We raised over \$5000 dollars because people took time to donate books, collect books, sort books, sell books, buy books and (sadly) dispose of unsold books - not to mention those who delivered leaflets, told their friends, set up then cleared away tables, baked scones, and sold morning tea. This year, with the Asian New Year celebrations occurring on Kingsway on the Sunday, we also opened our doors for a second day. This added a few extra dollars to our tally and gave passers-by an excuse to step inside our church complex.

*Sue Morgan*



From this



# Celebrating Chinese New Year



# GWUC at Chinese New Year in Kingsway



# OUTREACH FORUM – Sunday 22 March 2015

Just over 30 people gathered in the church hall for lunch on Sunday 22 March 2015 to hear Dr Maithri (pronounced My Three) Goonetilleke speak on behalf of Possible Dreams International which has received support from our congregation via money raised at our church fete. This organisation has a particular interest in helping the poor and needy in the Kingdom of Swaziland which is a tiny, land-locked country in southern Africa with a population in 2013 of 1.25 million people.



Maithri is a medical doctor and the son of retired Uniting Church Minister Rev Ojitha Goonetilleke who was minister at High Street Road and Burwood Heights Uniting Churches. Maithri was born in Sri Lanka, but came to Australia with his parents at an early age. His connection with Swaziland began during his 5<sup>th</sup> year medical studies when he took a field placement at the Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki, Swaziland. He had never been to Swaziland before and did not know what to expect. He found a very beautiful country with beautiful people. He also found a country of extreme poverty, malnutrition and endemic disease. Swaziland has the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world; 10% of the population are orphaned children and there are over 15,000 orphan-led households; 75% of the people live on less than \$1.00 per day.

Maithri decided that help was needed on a systematic basis, so he founded Possible Dreams International, a non-profit organisation which aims to help the people in rural and remote areas to better their lives. Possible Dreams International provides food, water, medical care, housing, and assistance with small business projects. Maithri became the Chief Executive Director of Possible Dreams International and has been to Swaziland 22 times in the past 10 years. His time given is voluntary. He has recently relinquished the Executive Directorship to pursue further studies and teaching.

We were treated to a compelling speaker and presentation. Maithri illustrated his talk with slides, mostly of people he had met over the past 10 years, and he chose to tell the stories of individuals who had been helped by Possible Dreams International. Here are just three of his stories.

One day, Maithri noticed a small boy about 10 years of age scrounging for food in a maize garden with his two younger siblings. They were poorly dressed, clearly in great need. It transpired that the three children were orphans. Their father had been seriously ill in a distant hospital with AIDS. Their mother received an urgent message to come to the hospital to say her goodbyes to her husband as he was dying. She set off, promising to return the next morning. She did not return. Unbeknown to her children, their mother was hit by a car on the way to the hospital and was killed. They were left to fend for themselves, not knowing what had happened. Possible Dreams International stepped in, found a grandmother who was willing to take the children in and supported her in that endeavour.

The second story concerned a young boy aged about 2 years. Maithri showed us a picture of him. The side of his face looked as if he had been badly burnt. Closer inspection revealed that he was not burnt, but was suffering from vitamin A deficiency and his face was badly infected, so badly, that he had lost the sight of one eye. His mother lived in a poor area with no proper access to water and was not able to maintain a garden. Possible Dreams International provided medical care for the boy, and helped the mother to relocate to another area where she was able to develop a successful garden. Ten years, later, that very sick little toddler is now a bundle of energy and muscle.



## Outreach Forum Lunch cont.

The third story concerned an elderly woman who was unable to walk. In our country, she would have had a wheelchair, but the only way for her to get around her house was to crawl. She was afflicted with mice in her house because of holes in the floor and ceiling. At night, the mice would nibble her feet. She was in constant pain. Possible Dreams International arrived with rat poison and a cat! They blocked the holes in the floor and ceiling and provided her with new bedding. Overnight, her life changed. She was comfortable and no longer in pain.

These are just a few of the many inspiring stories Maithri brought to us. So much can be done in simple ways. Maithri said that working there surrounded by so much misery can be depressing. However, he said that he is kept buoyant because the people are such beautiful people who press on, regardless. They are a musical people. They love singing. If someone builds a new house, the neighbours come to sing for the housewarming. If someone is ill, friends come to the bedside to sing. Maithri, himself, is a gifted singer, and has become known as the singing doctor. Possible Dreams International has formed a choir comprising young people from the most remote and rural areas of Swaziland. Some of them are orphans, some of them HIV positive, some amputees: all of them are united by a single purpose – compassion. They have toured internationally and Maithri brought them to Australia in 2013. They sing from the bottom of their hearts with great joy, rhythm and musical skill. Their CD *Voices for the Voiceless* is available from iTunes and Amazon MP3.



Maithri finished his presentation by singing 'Bridge over troubled waters' for us. He sings magnificently. It was a great finale to a most impressive and moving presentation.

Maithri has also written a book of his experiences in Swaziland. It is entitled *Vula Bevalile: Letters from a Young Doctor* and can be purchased on-line at [www.ilurapress.com](http://www.ilurapress.com)

Thanks go to Maithri for his enlightenment and inspiration and to those wonderful people who prepared lunch for us.

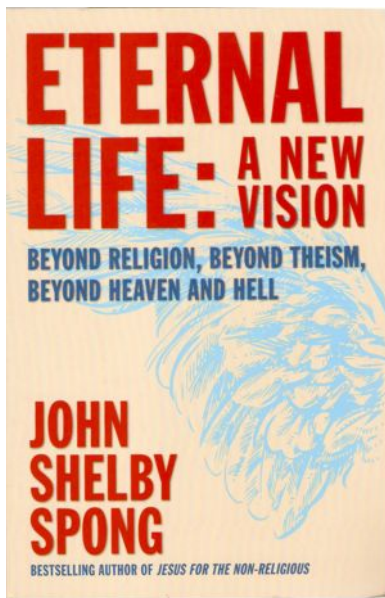
Ross Mackinnon



## Book Review

*Book reviews are included in our GWUC newsletter to introduce books which might sound interesting enough for some folk to want to read. A book review does not replace your own reading of the book; but it might inspire you to get hold of the book to read it for yourself, to draw your own conclusions. Generally the books that are reviewed have something to do with our spiritual life, or perhaps they concern a social justice issue.*

**John Shelby Spong *Eternal Life: A New Vision. Beyond Religion, Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell*  
HarperCollins, New York, 2009.**



For those who have read other, earlier books by John Shelby Spong, this book seems a natural progression from his previous work. For those coming to his writing for the first time it will perhaps offer many challenges and new ideas. Now addressing the topic of eternal life in his later years he decides the only authentic approach is to offer a 'spiritual autobiography' which traces the journey he has taken in answer to the question 'Is death a doorway to something more?'. In the end, his pursuit of answers leads him to reread the Gospel of John as the work of a mystical writer 'seeing life united with the divine and sharing in eternity...' (Preface).

In his customarily thorough manner, Spong reviews what material is already available to him, beginning with Biblical references to eternal life, and he traces the emergence of beliefs that link reward and punishment with divine justice. He notes that 'heaven' is not defined by Paul, and there is no 'hell' in his writings. The idea of a 'hell' comes mostly from Matthew and the book of Revelation. Accounts of the resurrection as an actual physical event do not appear in Mark, the first of the gospels written. John's gospel equates eternal life with 'knowing Christ' or 'believing in Christ', which he expands later in the book.

In his investigation of the topic Spong also considers the findings of science, which he says make it clear that 'each specimen of life is...an accident' (p.18), challenging ideas of a pre-ordained destiny. In a following chapter he traces the evolution of living organisms and the development of self-consciousness. He makes a questionable claim here that 'self-conscious people recognised that life was transitory, a fact that animals do not recognise' (p. 31). 'If a living thing has no knowledge that it is alive it is a safe bet that it also does not know that it will die', he claims (p. 16).

In recounting his personal encounters with death he reveals how his concept of both death and God grew. When Spong was age 12 his father died and he was puzzled by contradictions in the explanations offered. Why did a God of Love take the father of three kids? If death is such a great thing why do doctors work so hard to keep us alive? Why was everyone so sad if death was a good thing (p. 42)? He was simultaneously taught by the church that God kept records of how well we keep God's laws. These conflicts caused him to reassess his personal concept of what God was like.



## Book Review cont.

In his observations and reading Spong notes that 'death casts its shadow over human life', and cites the cosmetics industry as one example of our anxiety about ageing, through its attempted denial of loss of youthful appearance. He returns to the idea that self-consciousness and awareness that life is transitory has brought chronic anxiety to humans, and asks (p. 58), 'Is the desire for an after-life just another manifestation of our survival instinct?' He concludes that religion is 'the chief and most powerful coping device' we have, and wonders if it merely enables us to hide from reality (p. 70). He reviews the history of mankind's development from animistic beliefs and concludes that 'religion is...a human creation that serves a human need', and that *truth* is not religion's ultimate agenda, security is' (p. 75, my emphasis). In Chapter 9 he examines what he sees as the 'tools of religious manipulation', through religions claiming to have revealed truth, which makes them difficult to contest and also encourages conformity to the prevailing culture. A religion usually sets rules for behaviour, and has a sacred text in which God's truth is revealed, again encouraging conformity. By prayers or offerings or sacrifices a religion seeks to manipulate and domesticate its external theistic deity, and thus provides another coping device for our problems and anxieties. He sees religious belief and hope in 'life beyond the grave' as a logical progression from the idea that there is an external deity who watches over us and at our death 'calls us home' (p. 94).

Spong turns again to modern science for its findings on the end of life, and concludes that there is 'no hint that...anything in the universe shares in eternity' and that 'the universe itself is finite' and 'nothing is eternal' (p. 95). He points to the many religious systems and civilisations that have lived and died over the centuries, remarking that these old gods and their promises have not been eternal despite their creedal claims. However, he sees a deep need for our belief in heaven and the after-life to be true; but while refuting the concept of God as an external being who has supernatural powers and is capable of coming to our aid (a theistic belief), he claims that this does not mean that God has died and there is no God. He then traces the development over the last two centuries of theological and philosophical positions which have contested theistic thinking, from Nietzsche and David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century to writing by Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Bishop Robinson in the twentieth century. If an external deity is not where God is, he concludes, we must look within, to 'walk into God' (pp. 126-7).

Quantum physics indicates 'our essential oneness with the universe', he tells us, and further, 'there is a source of life that flows through all living things'. Then, accepting the thrust of the writings of the named theologians, he suggests we 'need to embrace a new possibility...that God is part of who and what we are, and we are part of God' (pp. 141-2). His next claim, though, departs from his sourcing from history, science, philosophy and theology to state that 'the power of *love* flows through all forms of life' (p. 142, my emphasis). This slippage into a belief claim which is neither explained nor supported in any way is, for me, a significant weakness in his argument.

He finds his answers in a mystical reading of the Gospel of John, seeing Jesus not as supernatural but as fully human and one with God and all that God is, as the 'I am'. He reads the crucifixion as a metaphor for a transforming gift. 'Wholeness comes to the world when one's life is given away freely to others'. He then probes what it means to be human: 'one in whom the life of God lives, the love of God loves, and the being of God is made manifest' (p. 150).

His concluding chapters culminate in a decision to move beyond religion to 'what it means to be human', by examining the gospel narratives of the resurrection. No two accounts are alike, but

## Book Review cont.

they tell of profoundly mystical experiences. All of the encounters with Jesus after the crucifixion are private encounters, perhaps indicating an experience of insight rather than physical sight. He sees 'what it means to be human' as having been experienced in Jesus: the truly human is what we mean by 'divine' and 'the pathway into eternity is to accept death as natural and to go so deeply into life that all limits are transcended and both timelessness and God are entered. The human quest for life after death is thus not based in any sense on the claim that my life or anyone else's is immortal; it is based on a new awareness that self-conscious human life shares in the eternity of God, and that, to the degree that I am in communion with that ever-expanding life force, that life-enhancing power of love and that inexhaustible Ground of Being, I will live, love and be a part of who God is, bound not by my mortality but by God's eternity' (p. 162).

In recalling his own spiritual journey from simple acceptance of dogma through various critical stages of doubt and questing, he discovers 'that beyond thinking there is being'. He maintains, then, that the task of the church is not to turn us into 'proper believers' of a God conceived in the 'time-bound thought forms of the fourth century' (as in the creeds), but to encounter the timelessness of God by entering the 'Jesus-consciousness', and thus to become fully human and whole. 'Jesus...was so whole, so free and so loving that he transcended all human limits and [we found]...we had met God in him. That is what the story of the resurrection was all about'. He concludes that the Christ-path is a human path, a doorway into God. 'For God is ultimately one, and that means that each of us is part of that oneness...I am finite, but I share in infinity. I am mortal, but I share in immortality. I am a being but I share in being itself.' (p. 183).

*Robin Pope*

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*Spong's book reviewed in this issue was lent to me by a friend, but Monash library might be prepared to buy in a copy - I have had requests there dealt with happily. However, we are fortunate enough to have in the foyer a small library whose facilities are largely underused. There are a number of other books in our library related to the topic of the ending of mortal life, from a variety of perspectives. You might like to borrow them (the call numbers are provided). Or would **you** like to review one for the next issue? They are listed below:*

- Asbury, Carl and Linda. *When They Say You are Going to Die. A Powerful Miracle Healing Testimony Bringing Hope to the Terminally Ill.* Harrison House, Tulsa Oklahoma, 1995. (Call no. 814 ASB)
- Graham, Billy. *Facing Death and the Life After.* Word Publishing/STL Books, Bromley, Kent, England, 1987. (Call no. 875 GRA)
- Gressor, Megan in association with Dr. Geoffrey Glassock. *Loss and Grief. How to Cope with Bereavement, Divorce, Losing your Job.* Australian Women's Weekly Health Series. (Call no. 875 GRE)
- Griffin, Graeme M. (ed). *Bereavement.* Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, 1981.
- Kopp, Ruth. *Where Has Grandpa Gone? Helping Children Cope with Grief and Loss.* Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1983. (Call no. 875 KOP)
- Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth. *On Death and Dying,* Tavistock Publications, London, 1977. (Call no. 875 KUE)
- Larkins, Robert. *Funeral Rights. What the Australian Death-Care Industry Doesn't Want You to Know.* Viking/Penguin, Camberwell Victoria, 2007. (Call no. 875 LAR)
- Nuland, Sherwin B. *How We Die.* Chatto & Windus, London, 1994. (Call no. 875 NUL)

*Would you like to review one of the books listed above? Have you read a book you think others might enjoy, or find useful for consideration? Why don't you write a review for future issues of **NewView**? Or suggest a book for review! All contributions welcome! Please chat to Robin Pope if you would like to review a book, or see a particular book reviewed.*

# Rohingya Slave Trade Update

The February issue of *Just Focus* from the Justice and International Mission of the Uniting Church provided the following article:

## UN Reports on Rohingya Slave Trade

Thanks to everyone who has written letters to the Thai and Australian Government urging the end to the slave trade of Rohingya refugees who have been fleeing Burma. The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority that have been targeted in Burma for violence and discrimination by Buddhist extremists. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released a report at the start of December, which reported that in October and November 21,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis had set sail from the Bay of Bengal towards Thailand and Malaysia using people smugglers, which was a 37% increase over the same time last year. There were isolated reports of some people, including abducted children, being forced onto boats, sometimes at gunpoint.

Conditions on smugglers' boats were dire. Survivors consistently described overcrowded conditions and daily rations of one sparse meal and one or two cups of water. People who asked for more or tried to use the toilet out of turn were beaten or kicked down ladders by the armed crew on the deck above. An estimated 540 people have reportedly died this year at sea from such beatings, starvation or dehydration, and their bodies thrown overboard.

Reuters reported that Mohamed Nobir Noor, aged 27, said he was living in an impoverished settlement in Bangladesh, near the border with Burma, when he was abducted. One September evening in 2014, men with knives and sticks forced him onto a small boat that sailed all night to reach a larger vessel moored at sea. The vessel was eventually filled with over 500 people.

Once, Noor tried to escape by jumping overboard during a trip to the toilet. The guards dragged him back in and gave him electric shocks with wires attached to the ship's generator, he said.

In Thailand, survivors told UNHCR staff rather than being taken on to Malaysia they were ferried from the big boat on smaller boats to the mainland by the smugglers/slavers to be held for ransom. There they were held in camps and made to call relatives to pay between \$1,600 and \$2,400 for their release. When payment was not immediate, they were beaten or subjected to other acts of torture. Some have been sold into slavery on Thai fishing boats. There are reports of women being pack raped in the camps.

Hundreds of people are alleged to have died in the camps from illness, starvation, dehydration and murder at the hands of the slavers when they tried to escape or could not pay the ransom.

In slightly good news, survivors reported that raids by law enforcement in Thailand since the beginning of 2014 seem to have led to a marked reduction in the number and size of slavers' camps in the country. The action by Thai law enforcement seems to have been in response to international attention and concern about the slave trade in Rohingya.

Rohingya and Bangladeshis who arrived in Thailand in recent months have been systematically screened by government teams to assess the potential for human trafficking. If found to be victims of trafficking, they are transferred to shelters to facilitate their rehabilitation and investigations of suspected slavers.

Thanks again to everyone who has written [to politicians] on the issue.

### Anti-Slavery Prayer

Voice 1: On this holy ground of worship  
In this sacred place of prayer  
We have heard the voice of freedom  
Crying 'Let my people go.'

**All: Father of freedom,  
Who leads us into life,  
Deliver us from every evil:  
And make of us  
Deliverers of others.**

Voice 2: Where chains restrain God's  
chosen children  
Where humans trade in kin and skin  
May our words pass on your promise  
Of a land where liberty is sweet.

**All: Father of freedom,  
Who leads us into life,  
Deliver us from every evil:  
And make of us etc**

Voice 3: Give us faith to face the  
Pharaohs  
Who line their pockets from this  
plague  
Send us as salvation's sponsors  
Willing servants; slaves to love.

**All: Father of freedom  
Who leads us into life etc**

Taken from *STOP THE TRAFFIK Australia website*

for everything there is a season  
and a time for every matter under heaven

*We record with sadness the deaths in the past months of members of our church family and we extend our support and sympathy to their families*

*Alan Walker Collins*

*Frederick Arthur Wardell*

*Marjorie Isobel Lee*

*Lois Dorothea Hosking*

*We celebrate the marriage of*

*David Nicholas Wheeler and Abbey Elizabeth Hogan Willcox*

*Yoke Khian Lim and Pheng Ting Ch'ng*

*We record with joy the baptism of*

*Benjamin Samuel Leister*

*Charlotte May Cornall*

*Giselle Notman*