

# the presbyterian banner

February 2018



*How many are your works, O LORD!  
In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.  
Psalm 104:24*

## CONTENTS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Editorial   | 2        |
| Aren't Christians Meant To Get On?<br><i>Considering Acts 15:36-41</i>                  | 3        |
| Life Under The Banner<br><i>The Church in Exile</i>                                     | 6        |
| The World in the Banner<br><i>News and Views</i>  | 8        |
| Oh, Really?<br><i>Straight to the Cabinet!</i>  | 11       |
| Society in the Banner<br><i>A Message for my Christian Friends</i>                      | 12       |
| Prescribed Search Work  | 13       |
| Books in the Banner<br><i>Ideal young children's books</i>                              | 14       |
| Churches in the Banner<br><i>Farewell from the Editor<br/>Brisbane &amp; Ulverstone</i> | 15<br>16 |

ISSN 0729-3542

## Editorial

At a recent wedding reception we attended we were seated next to some elderly Christian couples. And Christian they certainly were. As the wife conveyed to me the years they had given to serve on the mission field for a well-known and respected Christian mission, together with some years of serving in a major local church, you could not be but thankful for their spirit of sacrifice. These folk belonged to the 'golden' era of missionary service. They had gone through the old Melbourne Bible Institute – later known as the Bible College of Victoria and now the Melbourne School of Theology – and were enjoying their twilight years in a country town. They were part of a local evangelical church with a pastor who had been there for twelve years and had helped stabilise the congregation, which had previously been through some years of difficulty.

As someone who likes to have a look at what is happening in other churches, I took the opportunity to ask some questions. "What is the position of your pastor on the present same-sex marriage postal ballot?" I asked the wife. "Well, our pastor hasn't advised us to vote either way," she replied, rather crestfallen.

Then I inquired further: "When was the last time you had sermons on the Ten Commandments preached in your church?" She thought for a moment. Then she answered, "Well, actually we haven't had any sermons on the Ten Commandments for quite a while. We haven't had any sermons on the fundamentals, like tithing, for some time."

I went on: "So what kind of sermons do you have now? Are they more generally topical and lifestyle oriented?" She responded by saying that was the general direction of the teaching.

It is sad, isn't it? Men who have been called to preach God's Word actually deal with very little of it. But they very happily 'christianize' the things that catch the ear in the community around them.

They are those who turn away from sound doctrine to tell what the itching ears want to hear, as Paul writes in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:3. But they don't declare what those itching ears desperately need to hear! While Joel Osteen, the popular American televangelist, may speak of having your best life now, how does that connect with what matters for the rest of eternity?

*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*  
2 Timothy 4:2

Cover Photo: Australian Botanical Gardens, Cranbourne, Victoria

Please note your subscription is due for 2018

*It is \$35 per year for bulk subscriptions  
and \$40 for Australian individual subscriptions.  
Your continued support is vital. Donations are warmly appreciated.*

**The Presbyterian Banner** is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was established in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as its doctrinal standard. Literary contributions are welcome. Submission by email is preferred. The opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors - not necessarily of the editor or the PCEA and may not be reproduced without permission. Articles written by the Editor may be reproduced without asking for permission, although with appropriate acknowledgement. This magazine is available as a pdf file on the Church Website: [www.pcea.org.au](http://www.pcea.org.au)

Editor (pro tem):  
Rev. Dr Rowland Ward  
2 Hadlow Drive  
Wantirna, VIC  
AUSTRALIA 3152  
Ph. (03) 9720 4871  
Email: [rowland.ward@gmail.com](mailto:rowland.ward@gmail.com)

Subscriptions for 2018  
11 Issues per year  
*Within Australia:* \$40 [Bulk \$35]  
*Overseas:* AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :  
NAB (BSB) 083-802  
A/C No. 98 473 8955

## Aren't Christians Meant To Get On?

### Considering Acts 15:36-41

In my previous denomination, we didn't have Synods every year like we do in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. Instead, we had them every three years. At that triennial Synod the regular matters would be dealt with – subjects like overseas mission, our relations with other denominations, the theological colleges we supported, and of course the various financial aspects.

But sometimes an issue would occur in between these Synods which could not wait until the next regular Synod. So then, with the agreement of a number of churches, the moderamen from the previous Synod would call for a special Synod.

During my time serving in Mangere, South Auckland, one of these special Synods was held. It was a special Synod that was dealing with an issue none of our Synods had dealt with before.

This Synod only dealt with this one particular matter. It was a matter that was an extremely divisive situation in one of our churches. It had caused a division between the members in that church and neither the Session nor the Presbytery had been able to resolve it. The issue at the heart of it was a rift that had occurred because of perceived difficulties with the minister.

The Lord blessed that Synod. There was reconciliation between the various individuals and groups involved. It was a reconciliation that still had a way to go – but we could see that it was now on the way.

One of our young adults came up to me a week or so after that Synod. She asked a very good question about the result of the Synod. She said, "Why can't he – that is, the minister involved – go back to being the minister there?"

She asked this because the Synod decided that this minister should be released from being the minister in that church. It was believed best for him not to go back.

That's why she asked the question. She was puzzled. She was wondering, 'Aren't Christians meant to get on?'

This would seem logical. It is a whole new start – surely! Isn't that what the Lord does with us, every time we have shown our repentance for our sin?

#### Acts 15:36-41

<sup>36</sup>Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup>Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup>but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup>They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup>He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

This is where this almost incidental side-story in the book of Acts can help us. So let's take a look at this, and see what we can learn. Let's realise also how much we can learn from this passage, even though Luke leaves no great details with us about this very sharp disagreement.

#### 1 – Why Paul was in the Right

John Mark was definitely in the wrong. On the first missionary journey of Paul, where he accompanied the apostles Paul and Barnabas, who was his cousin, he

### Sjirk Bajema

let the team down very badly. While he did not reject the faith, which would have been the worst sin, he had deserted and left his call from the Lord.

He had broken a special promise – a promise to serve the Lord and not himself. It was a promise so serious it would be like breaking the bond of marriage, or a son rejecting his father.

Now, John Mark was very sorry about it. He had confessed it to the Lord and to the church. Luke would have told us if it had been otherwise.

We understand that also from Paul's actions. He certainly didn't reject him as a brother in the Lord. We know that from later references he made to John Mark, and also by the fact that he didn't oppose him going on a separate journey with Barnabas.

The issue is not his faith, nor even if he had the ability to preach, teach and serve. The issue was his suitability to be with Paul at that time. This is the same issue that Synod saw in its decision on the minister being unable to go back to his old congregation.

That was not a comment on his gifting. It wasn't a judgment about his future as a minister somewhere else. It was an acknowledgement, however, that in this place and time, it wasn't wise.

Paul was quite sure about this. There had been what had happened in the past and he couldn't see anything which had happened since to make him change his mind. He couldn't have John Mark come along this time.

This was quite consistent with what's found elsewhere in the Bible. In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3, verse 10,

there is a comment about being tested. In connection with the elders and the deacons, it was noted that they must first be tested. If that test showed there was nothing against them, they could serve in office.

John Mark had been tested – and found lacking! In the crucible of the mission to the Gentiles, he had not been able to bear the strain. On the anvil of Gospel ministry, he was found to have the wrong mettle. He was judged to be less than able. And that was a judgment not by Paul, but through Mark's own actions.

What had been shown up was a blemish, or crack, in John Mark's character. This was a particular flaw which meant he wasn't the right instrument to serve the Lord's purpose in that way, at that time.

It was something which others saw too. We see that in the support the church gave to Paul when he set off with Silas. It is clear as to why Paul was in the right.

## 2 – How Paul was Wrong to make it a Fight

Still, this is not all we glean from this text. We must note that Paul was also wrong in this matter.

We realise this when we consider the case. This was not a vitally important matter. If Paul took John Mark along it was not something which was going to change the face of the church. Paul wouldn't have lost anything by giving in here and could have given him another go.

John Calvin says, "Paul was correct, and duly acting in accordance with disciplinary authority in being unwilling to accept the companion, whose unreliability he had once experienced; but when he saw Barnabas insisting more stubbornly he could have given into his request."

And he goes on to say, "after freely expressing his view, no religious scruple prevented Paul

from nevertheless allowing himself to be the loser in that matter, which was not carrying with itself the loss of either sound doctrine or the salvation of men."

We read, however, in verse 39, "they had such a sharp disagreement...they parted company!" Paul and Barnabas, down to this! These were the two apostles who had worked so well to-

wise in being impatient with Barnabas and Mark. He didn't show his glory by overlooking an offence.

The servants of the Lord don't do the Master any credit here. There is no record of an attempt to work it through. Instead of unity, there's disunity. That meant they weren't being humble.



*'Paul & Barnabas at Lystra on the First Missionary Journey',  
By Jacob Jordaens, 1593-1678*

gether and had gone through all kinds of hardship. And now this?

The word for "sharp disagreement" tells us about a provocation. A provocation is when something really upsets you. This was what Paul experienced later in Acts 17 verse 16, when he was upset by what he saw in pagan Athens. It was a feeling which meant, that at that moment, he wouldn't have been thinking about preaching or converting anyone.

Paul himself uses the word in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 verse 5, when he says that love doesn't let itself be easily angered. But Paul is definitely angry here. He reacts so strongly there is a serious fall-out between him and Barnabas.

In the words of Solomon, in Proverbs 19 verse 11, Paul may well have thought it wise not to take Mark, but he himself wasn't

It is a sad story, repeated ad infinitum in church history. How many of us haven't experienced the same, as Christian friends have been torn apart by what seems to have been something quite insignificant! And after that, things are never quite the same. The devil is the only one who comes out happy after all this!

When the Church of Jesus Christ can be torn apart by something such as whether or not you have flowers in church, then the old devil's having a field day. That's what happened in one church. They had not had flowers in church before. Some suggested they should do it. "It would add some aesthetic beauty," they said.

There were objections because it was seen to be adding something of the world to public

worship. “There’s no direct Biblical mandate to have flowers in church,” they said.

Maybe they were right about that. Yet the Westminster Confession of Faith does speak about what can be drawn out not only directly from God’s Word but also by what “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced by Scripture...” (I:7.) The Bible doesn’t tell us to have pews in church and so on.

Then there is the attitude of those pushing for change. Is having flowers in church a beach worth dying on? Or are we seeing that those who push for change often lack concern for the feelings of others? We have to ask ourselves, ‘What does really matter here?’

It is a similar thing to what we read about from Mark 9, the verses 38 till 41. The disciples weren’t happy that there were “unlicensed” disciples driving out demons in Jesus’ name. With his reply to them, though, Jesus turned the table right around! He told them to have a good hard look at themselves! They could be stopping **his** work!

Well, Paul may have been happy that those not appropriately qualified were yet preaching the Gospel, in Philippians chapter 1, but he certainly doesn’t come across that way in our text. He could not even come to an arrangement whereby Barnabas could mentor John Mark, in a separate ministry. That’s what ended up happening – but not because Paul and Barnabas had worked it through that way.

### 3 – Where God gives them both his Light

To use a contemporary expression about this situation, we could say, “there was a lot of heat in this dispute, but not much light.” And this is where the Lord himself stepped in. Here we are reminded about whose Acts this book is really about. While we have tradi-

tionally titled this book ‘The Acts of the Apostles,’ it is more accurate to call it ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit.’

It is God whom we see constantly at work in and through his people, and particularly through the apostles. It was God’s Spirit who blessed Paul and Barnabas so richly together upon that first journey. And it was God’s Spirit who used what was in his servants, to turn something bad into good. He carried on the desire of verse 36, about the spread of the Gospel, through into verse 41, where it happened. “He used a crooked stick to drive a straight path.”



*Paul on right; Barnabas with Mark behind him*

This is when we use the ‘crooked stick’ principle. It is a situation we find sometimes in the Bible, where the Lord uses our sin for his good.

This is not a principle for us to follow, though. We know from the Bible that us doing evil so that God may work his good, is completely wrong.

Romans 6 verse 1 raises this same question. It says, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” To which comes the most definitive answer, “By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” As Jesus also said in John 14 verse 15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

Later on Paul acknowledges John Mark’s abilities. In his second letter to Timothy, chapter 4

verse 11, he writes, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” And already before then he commended Mark warmly to the Colossian church, in chapter 4 verse 16 of that letter (cf. also Philemon 23)

We don’t receive a clear apology from Paul regarding John Mark. Some understand that when he later recognises Mark’s good work, it’s a kind of regret for his action. They say that his meeting up with Barnabas at one of the churches shows that, too. But that’s an assumption.

What we do know is that there was a sharp disagreement. And we know later, that, through the help of Barnabas, John Mark did become useful to Paul.

But what must stand out is the way the Lord continued the work of bringing his Gospel through Paul and Barnabas. There are now two new missionary journeys, instead of one.

The apostles bringing the Gospel have their high points, and their low points. This is one of the latter. The Bible doesn’t hide it.

Still, in spite of sinfulness, the Lord is pleased to use us, and even to improve us. This is what happened to Mark and it can happen to us, too. In fact, perhaps we should be like Barnabas, whose name meant ‘son of encouragement’, and expect it to happen!

But there can also be situations where we cannot continue on working with a fellow Christian. That happens. We are still individually different. And maybe we’re not suited to work in a particular situation at that particular time. We should accept that. Which is what happened at that special Synod.

Let’s also be sensitive, though. If another wise voice speaks, let’s listen.

And let’s not lose it. After all – who has found you?

# Life under the Banner

## *The Church in Exile*

Carl R. Trueman

The Christian church on earth is always, in a sense, in exile. Whatever the incidental identities of her members may be—whether of nationality, race, class, or gender—their ultimate identity is that they are in Christ and belong to him. Compared to the ephemeral categories that human cultures have created for distinguishing one from another, this foundation in Christ is absolute and final. As a result, the church never belongs to this world, but always looks to another.

Yet there are times in history when it is more dramatically obvious, and perhaps more painfully experienced, than at other times, that the church is in exile. In America, given the past cultural dominance of a form of civic Protestantism that is now vanishing rapidly, the sense of being an exile community is likely to be sharpened in the imminent future.

### **Same-Sex Marriage**

At the heart of this unravelling lies the politics of sexual identity. While many Christians rightly see the advent of legalized abortion as a very significant step in the legal redefinition of what it means to be a person, the coming of so-called same-sex marriage is set to have far more immediate impact upon the everyday lives of Christians.

On one level, we should note that abortion—the killing of innocents—is a more dramatic crime than two men marrying each other. The former involves evil inflicted on a victim. The second, wicked as it is, involves mutual consent and no necessary violation of an innocent third party. Thus, *Roe v. Wade* is without

doubt a devastating blow to notions of legally protected personhood.

Yet the way in which the gay marriage debate is developing may well have a far greater impact upon the way we all live our lives than does the legalization of abortion. Most significantly, gay marriage has become the issue on which the First Amendment is now coming under incredible pressure.

First, we need to understand that the gay marriage issue is not simply about the legitimate bounds of sexual activity. Many Christians respond to accusations of singling homosexuals out for excoriation by pointing to the fact that we also object to sex between unmarried heterosexuals. That is a good argument, but it misses the full significance of the gay issue. To object to heterosexuals having sex outside of marriage is to object to an illegitimate expression of a legitimate identity. To object to gay sex, or gay marriage, is to deny the legitimacy of an identity.

This is why parallels are so easily drawn by gay activists between their demands and those of the earlier Civil Rights movement. They see their struggle as one for a fundamental identity, not one for an incidental lifestyle choice. And this is why the church is about to feel the reality of her exile.

It is one thing to believe something that the world regards as nonsense. There are plenty of Christian doctrines that fall into that category. The doctrine of the Incarnation is an obvious one. The idea that the transcendent God, who created and sustains all things, should conde-

scend to take human flesh and dwell in space and time as a particular man is foolishness to the world. That he should die on a cross for the crimes of others is morally offensive to the natural man. That he should be resurrected and will return again is nonsense to the unbeliever. Yet Christians can hold each of these beliefs and still be considered decent and polite members of civil society.

Attitudes to gay marriage are different. The way in which society has developed on this matter has made the traditional view not simply something that looks silly to the world, but something that looks positively evil. To many, opposition to homosexuality and gay marriage is not akin to belief in the resurrection; it is akin to belief in white supremacy—a moral stance that speaks of hatred and a basically antisocial, if not criminal, mind-set.

This is why the church is beginning to feel even now the reality of her exile status. As the public square becomes more and more intolerant of any dissent or deviation on this issue, ordinary church members are already beginning to feel the pressure. For example, a Christian nurse might well be able to object to assisting at abortions and still seem to be taking an ethically principled stand, but one who refuses to participate in a gender reassignment operation might well be stigmatized as promoting hate. That is the world in which we live. And while pastors and intellectual leaders are often those who speak out and thus seem most likely to be persecuted, the most immedi-

ate and extensive discomfort will be experienced by ordinary church members who are not protected from the secular world by pulpit or library.

At times such as this, it behooves the church to think very carefully about what discipleship should look like. Exile communities living within a wider alien and even hostile culture need means by which to preserve their identity, and to keep hope alive for an ultimate return to their homeland. If they are not self-conscious about this, then the values and patterns of the host culture will over time penetrate their community and lead to their assimilation. So how are we to maintain our identity?

### Maintaining Our Identity

I would suggest that the answer, at least at a foundational level, is very simple: maintain the Word, the sacraments, and discipline—the three great marks of the Reformed church. If a strong sense of identity is what provides the foundation for the passionate activism of the LGBTQ lobby, then we should learn from that: we too need to instill a strong sense of identity in ourselves and in our churches in order to stand firm in the coming years. And there is no better way to do this than to focus on the three marks.

First, there is the Word. The weekly proclamation of the Word of God is the regular declaration of the identity of God, of the identity of us as his people, and of the home to which we are destined. There is a reason why the early North American Pilgrims would hear regular sermons on providence. It was to remind them of their place in God's scheme. We too need to make sure that the preaching from our pulpits is faithful, focused on important truths, and supported by good

catechetical and pedagogical practice.

We should also remember that preaching is not simply the transmission of information from one mind to another through the medium of speech. Preaching is the mediation of God's presence to his people. In the Word pro-



*'By the Waters of Babylon', by Gebhard Fugel c. 1920*

claimed, God presses his gospel upon our hearts by his Spirit. Luther put it dramatically when he declared that God, by his Word, kills us, resurrects us, and constitutes us once again as his risen people. We should not underestimate the power of the preached word to strengthen our identity and give us the power to stand firm. Society and the civil magistrate may have power over the body, but God has power over the soul.

Second, there are the sacraments. As human beings, we are more than just brains on sticks. We have bodies that also affect how we think and interact with others. And that is one reason why the Lord has provided us with more than his Word as a means of strengthening our identity. He has also given us the covenant signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is particularly important in this regard. To share a meal with someone involves an intimacy that is not found in a mere conversation. To eat together,

and to be invited to eat, as it were, with the Lord himself, is to enjoy a special privilege and indeed to find our identity as Christians strengthened and reinforced. Again, society and the civil magistrate may have power over the body, but God can use the simple elements of bread and wine, attached to his Word, to seal the gospel on our hearts and strengthen our hands for the spiritual fight, wherever it may be conducted. Third, there is discipline. When one looks at the gay lobby, one might be forgiven for wondering how on earth it has come to exert such power over everyone's lives. The answer is complicated, but at its heart is this: despite being only a tiny minority, it has been highly disciplined and or-

ganized. The church has sadly not been so.

I should qualify that statement. I certainly do not mean that the church should have organized itself politically in order to use worldly avenues of power and influence to impose her will. What I do mean is that discipline is necessary to cultivate a strong sense of identity. Indeed, such a sense of identity is vital to the survival and flourishing of exile communities. Part of that comes through the Word, part through the sacraments, and a vital part also through discipline. A community is defined by the beliefs and behaviors it finds tolerable and those it finds intolerable.

This in turn demands structure. Presbyterianism is well placed in this matter, given that it has a clearly laid out system of governance. Of course, systems are one thing; practical implementation is quite another. For our exile community to survive as distinctive, those in leadership must lead, make the

tough decisions, and implement unpopular policies when the Word of God demands it. Leadership in a time of obvious exile is likely far more taxing than at any other point.

To these three points one can add a fourth: the cultivation of the communal language of exile in song. Whatever ways exile populations find to survive and at times even thrive in an alien host culture, their identity as exiles will be reinforced by the common language they share. For Christians, this is above all the language that we sing. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs really do set the expectations of many believers and shape our theology in profound ways.

Singing is a powerful and universal human phenomenon. When one thinks of the blues as they developed in the American South, or of the Scottish Gaelic songs that speak of lament and sorrow for lost loved ones, we are reminded of how such things set before us a vision of loss and of longing. In a time such as the present, surely it is the moment for us all to be looking to the

Psalter for more of our corporate worship. The Psalms present life as it really is, blessed by God's presence here and now, but looking forward to that time when he will call us all home.

Further, the Psalms often capture an important note: if we are set for a time of open exile even within our own worldly nation, we should remember that the exile of the people of God in Scripture was always in part a judgment upon them. As we look forward to the great future triumph that will be the marriage feast of the Lamb, we should not forget that our current difficulties are the result of human sin and, indeed, of our own sin. We should lament not simply our exile, but also the sin that has caused it. Again, the Psalms are an ideal medium for this.

No doubt there are those reading this article who find my own position to be one of cultural surrender. Should we not be taking to the streets and the ballot boxes in order to take back what is ours? It might well be that thoughtful political engagement by individual Christians will slow

the tide of moral collapse in the civic sphere, or perhaps even reverse it. Our faith should indeed shape how we think and behave in the civic sphere. But I would suggest that whatever one's eschatology or understanding of the relationship between church and state may be, the practical reality is that we must prepare at least in the short term for the social marginalization of the church and a form of cultural exile. We may disagree on long-term public strategy, but we should surely all agree on the basic practical foundations of Christian identity: Word, sacrament, discipline, and worship. These and these alone will allow us to face whatever the future may hold with resolute confidence.

*The author is pastor of Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, Pa., USA, and a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary. This originally appeared in New Horizons, the denominational magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of North America, June 2015.*

## The World in the Banner

### **A time to celebrate!**

There is so much that people celebrate in life. Recently, on my way to the Far East, as the UK celebrated Guy Fawkes night, from the plane I watched fireworks going off all over London. In December I will be celebrating the wedding of my eldest daughter. Soon, many will also celebrate Christmas, a time to remember God's faithfulness in sending his promised Messiah. Now, CWI celebrates God's sustenance for 175 years. What a reason to rejoice! For 175 years the Lord has provided all we need to act on his command to bring the gospel back to the Jew-

ish people. As we continue to take this single focus on Jewish evangelism seriously, all of us in CWI are so encouraged by the number of Jewish people the Lord has been bringing to himself. In the past two years over 50 Jewish people have professed faith, been disciplined and many have already gone on to be baptised. Now, that is a true reason for celebration – eternal life! The challenge for us remains very real. The Church mostly continues to neglect the priority God's Word places on proclaiming the gospel to the Jew first. Anti-Semitism continues to rise and that affects many attitudes to our

work and concern for Jewish salvation. Finding those called and equipped to do the work of Jewish evangelism – and the funds needed to support them – continues to be a great challenge too. I am thankful for you and your standing with us in prayer and support. Please do pray and consider a special gift to us in this season of celebration to help us end the year well. And please accept our invitation to join us for our 175th celebration event in Oxford on 27th January. Yours in our Messiah Jesus, Joseph Steinberg, CEO + *CWI Herald*, November 2017

## Pakistan: Church Targeted in Terror Attack

On Sunday morning 17 December, four Islamic terrorists attacked the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Baluchistan Province. Some 400 Christians were participating in the 'Sunday School Christmas Program' when gunfire erupted outside. Two gunmen had shot dead church gatekeeper George Masih, paving the way for two bombers to invade. Security guards stationed around the perimeter and on the church roof returned fire, killing one bomber, wounding the other and forcing the two gunmen to flee. Unable to make it inside the church, the wounded bomber detonated his explosive vest outside. At least nine Christians were killed in the blast and more than 50 suffered wounds either from bullets or from shards of wood and glass propelled by the explosion. Pastor Samuel told Morning Star-News that, had either of the two bombers managed to enter the church, the death toll 'would have been colossal'. Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack. While we lament and 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15), weep' we thank God that the full extent of evil was not realized.

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' (John 1:5 ESV.)  
+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 437 | Tue 19 Dec 2017

## Died: R. C. Sproul, Reformed Theologian Who Founded Ligonier Ministries

Late PCA leader influenced generations of Christians by filling the gap "between Sunday school and seminary."

When Reformed theologian and Ligonier Ministries founder R. C. Sproul was

once asked what he wanted written on his tombstone, he replied cheekily, "I told you I was sick." That was in 2015, after the esteemed teacher and author's health declined severely following a stroke. This December, the 78-year-old was hospitalized and was forced to rely on ventilator support to breathe during his 12-day stay, due to complications from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). He died on Thursday.

"His tombstone wouldn't be able to hold the words of what he's meant to so many," tweeted



Kansas pastor Gabriel Hughes. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Now great is your reward."

Sproul's legacy lives on in generations of laypeople and Reformed leaders whose theology was strengthened and shaped by Ligonier, the organization he founded in 1971 to fill the gap "between Sunday school and seminary."

Ordained in the United Presbyterian Church before transferring to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Sproul brought theological education to the masses through his radio show *Renewing Your Mind*, his ministry's *Tabletalk* magazine, over 300 lecture series, 90 books, and dozens of articles.

"Through his teaching ministry, many of us learned that God is bigger than we knew, our sin is more deeply rooted than we imagined, and the grace of God in Jesus Christ is overwhelming," wrote Ligonier in a tribute.

The global organization shares 2 million "biblical and theological resources" annually, with hundreds of thousands of students, readers, and subscribers in 105 countries.

Earlier this year, Sproul said, "There are only two ways of dying. We can die in faith or we can die in our sins." Now that he has died, his colleagues, students, and friends have spoken up to celebrate the faith he preached and passed on.

"It is hard to overestimate his influence on gospel-resurgent evangelicalism," wrote Russell Moore, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission president.

Reformed leaders such as Owen Strachan, Shai Linne, Tony Reinke, and Albert Mohler tweeted in tribute. Strachan called him, "A giant of the faith. A theologian of God's church. A man of wit, wisdom, and conviction."

Sproul, co-pastor at St. Andrews Chapel in Sanford, Florida, was an expert in apologetics and philosophy, having taught at Knox Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary.

The Pittsburgh native attended Westminster College for its football program—not its Presbyterian affiliation. But he ended up coming to faith early in his college career through the team's captain. He shared his testimony with CT in 2002, saying:

[The football captain] quoted Ecclesiastes 11:3: "Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie." I just feel certain I'm the only person in church history that was converted by that verse. God just took that verse and struck my soul with it. I saw myself as a log that was rotting in the woods. And I was going nowhere.

When I left that guy's table I went up to my room. And into my room by myself, in the dark, and got on my knees and cried out to God to forgive me.

He went on to attend Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, the Free University of Amsterdam, and Whitefield Theological Seminary.

Sproul founded Ligonier as a study center outside Pittsburgh in the early 1970s. By 1973, the ministry hosted its first conference, featuring John Gerstner, J. I. Packer, John Frame, and Clark Pinnock. The Gospel Coalition reports that out of that gathering came the Ligonier Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which grew into the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Ligonier moved to its Orlando headquarters in the mid-1980s, where its radio, magazine, and teaching outreach continued to grow, eventually adding online resources. Out of concern for biblical orthodoxy, Ligonier commissioned groundbreaking surveys in 2014 and 2016 on the theological beliefs (and misbeliefs) of American evangelicals.

CT reviewed Sproul's 1998 book *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, and featured *The Reformation Study Bible*, for which Sproul served as general editor.

The author of *Chosen By God*, *The Holiness of God*, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, and many other

books, Sproul wrote about passing away for *Tabletalk* magazine in 2011, exploring the gain for a believer to die and be with Christ.

"When we close our eyes in death, we do not cease to be alive; rather, we experience a continuation of personal consciousness. No person is more conscious, more aware, and more alert than when he passes through the veil from this world into the next," he wrote, six years before passing away in a suburban Orlando hospital. "Far from falling asleep, we are awakened to glory in all of its significance. For the believer, death does not have the last word. Death has surrendered to the conquering power of the One who was resurrected as the firstborn of many brethren."

+ *Kate Shellnutt*, 12 December, 2017, *Christianity Today*

### **Mexico: More Non-Catholics Forcibly Expelled**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports that, on 4 December, officials in Tuxpan de Bolanos, an indigenous Huichol community in the north of Jalisco State, forcibly expelled 64 non-Catholics. The group, comprising 22 Protestants (including 15 children) and 42 Jehovah's Witnesses, were dragged from their homes, loaded into trucks and driven into the mountains where they were dumped and abandoned. To deter them from returning, officials also destroyed their homes.

The Emanuel Regional Baptist Convention, which oversees Baptist churches in the area, rescued the victims. While the 42 Jehovah's Witnesses are currently in the municipal auditorium in Bolanos, the twenty-two Baptists are sheltering in Puente de Camotlan Church in neighbouring Nayarit State. This is not the first time Protestants have been forcibly exiled from Tuxpan de

Bolanos. In January 2016, 28 Baptists (including 10 children) were forcibly trucked into the mountains and abandoned.

May justice and righteousness roll down like a river in Mexico (see Amos 5:21-24).

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 437 | Tue 19 Dec 2017

### **India: Persecution Escalates As Darkness Sets In**

On 4 December, in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, seven Indian Christians (six men and a woman) accepted an invitation to pray over a seriously ill man whose relative had previously been healed through prayer. A Hindu relative heard of it and rallied a mob of some 20 RSS Hindutva militants to attack the family and the visiting believers violently. Police arrived, arrested the believers and charged them with 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings' under Section 295-A of the Indian Penal Code. The six Christian men were remanded in judicial custody for 14 days; bail was refused.

On Monday 11 December, also in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, seven Christians were arrested for handing out Bibles. Accused of insulting Hindu deities and procuring 'forced conversions', they were remanded in custody for 14 days.

Also on 11 December, this time in Madhya Pradesh, 30 Christians were arrested while singing Christmas carols; eight priests who came to help were also arrested. Accused of procuring 'forced conversions', seven believers were remanded in custody for 14 days. This is the tip of the iceberg!

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 437 | Tue 19 Dec 2017

# Oh Really?

## Straight to the Cabinet!

*Herm Zandman*

Sally and her new husband Ross went on honeymoon to Hawaii. Coming back from Honolulu, the stories ranged far and wide regarding local culture. It was all so fascinating! Then, out came the presents. Sally's Dad Charles was totally smitten with the ornate letter opener he was given. He turned it over, turned it over, and turned it over again, totally absorbed in admiring his gift. "This goes straight to the cabinet!" The cabinet was the place where all his prized possessions went, like the trophies won at the greyhound races. This gift was worthy of such a place of honour. "No, you should use it, Dad!" was Sally's exclamation. "I won't even take it out of the wrapper," was the decisive reply.

The Bible sits on the shelf. It has been moved about three times since Charles got it given to him. Every time he shifted house, the Bible was packed and unpacked, placed back on the shelf. Inside the front of it, his Dad had lovingly written that it might serve as a guide on life's pathway to Charles. Oh yes, Charles dutifully went to church on Sunday with his wife and children. He ticked the boxes of congregational expectation. But the Bible was such a beautiful, ornamental gift that he would not even take it out of the wrapper.

In a culture where tall poppies are wont to be mown down, Charles was not going to be a tall poppy. The minister had preached from Nehemiah 9:5, where the priests exhort the people of God, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever!" But 'to stand up' equalled 'to stand out.' It meant to say 'No' to exciting life style choices, such as going to the pub after the footy

match with the mates to see who could hold it down best. It meant to be selective in watching television series and movies, to the point that Charles would not be able to have a natter with his mates about the rough-and-tumble of the latest box office giant. Charles fitted in, his Bible was resting on the shelf, his letter opener was in the cabinet.

1 John 4:17 declares, Love has been perfected among us in this:



that we may have boldness in the day of judgement; because as He is, so are we in this world." Let it be known for a certainty that in this world the Christian has to face daily 'days of judgement.' The committed Christian knows that all power has been given to Jesus Christ and that He will be with His people always (Matthew 28:18, 20). He knows this from the Bible, a Bible used on a regular basis to discern God's will and promises. It is the sword of the Spirit, it is the letter opener that has been taken out of the wrapper and is used to

open letters, open minds to the Word of God. He is the fearless tall poppy, living out his convictions under Him Who has 'all power.'

Charles is a member of good standing in the local congregation. His Bible sits prominently on the shelf. He engages in conversations after the church service and is finely attuned as to how he should engage, depending on the conversation partner. He is a fine man, saying the right things according to whichever company. A fine politician is Charles, but his hearers don't know it; they think he is for real, don't know that he puts his spiritual letter opener in the cabinet and leaves it there, unused but for all to see.

Charles has the devil grinning. Still today, as Charles may or may not admit, one of the devil's favourite occupations is to make God's permitted things look lame and His prohibited things attractive. He portrays God as an ogre Who is denying us what is good – and Charles is sold on it hook, line and sinker.

No, Charles is not a real person; Charles is a phenomenon, a spirit of laxity, of traditionalism, and of societal invisibility. He is succumbing to the same urge which beset Adam and Eve when they discovered their grievous error of judgement (a judgement which was outside their purview to make in the first place). No longer did they wish to be the crown of creation; no longer did they wish to stand tall for God. Suddenly they felt exposed and the only way they saw as an out was to dive in the bushes, effectively trying to blend in with the creatures surrounding them, trying to blend in

with that over which they had been set as vicegerents, as rulers under God. Oh, the humiliation! Instead of acknowledging themselves as having an exalted position, they now desperately strove to make themselves equal to Darwin's apes.

It is the Charles phenomenon, spending God-given time and energy to become invisible, blending in with the world, while paying lip service to the crowd into which he was born. There is a real problem here: there is no genuine hunger for God. Hungering for the Lord is a desire to know and draw closer

to Him. Sadly, this yearning lies dormant in many believers' lives. They're saved but have very little desire for more. One of the problems is that our society is filled with all sorts of things that grab and hold our interest and affections. These pleasures and pursuits compete with God for our attention, claiming our time and effort. Charles is trying to have his cake and eat it too. He will move wherever the wind blows, he is a wind vane, whereas God calls him to be wind-maker for the Lord, a Holy Spirit guided, pneumatic force for change In the name of Jesus.

Rev. Ian Wildeboer puts it very bluntly (Southern River Free Reformed Church, 19/03/2017), "If you are not leading others to the cross, you are not much of a man or a woman."

"You should use it, Dad!" was Sally's exclamation. "I won't even take it out of the wrapper. This goes straight to the cabinet!" was the decisive reply.

*The author is a Senior Christian High School Teacher at John Calvin Christian High School, Armadale, Western Australia.*

## Society in the Banner

### A Message for my Christian Friends

*Stewart Loudon*

I've recently been saddened that a small number of you have liked and shared articles on *Facebook* which encourage Christians to vote "yes" in the same-sex marriage plebiscite. These articles rely on the perceived authority of the writer – usually a pastor or an academic in the theological field – and their arguments primarily centre around the assertion that loving Christians shouldn't deny others a "right" which they demand. These articles are generally high on emotion-charged appeals to be loving and light on biblical references. And in the few instances where the Bible is referenced, the writer often employs very dubious interpretations of straightforward texts.

If you consider yourself a Christian, in addition to relying on Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you should also hold to the fact that the Bible is the inerrant, unchanging word of God. The Bible is clear on the subject of homosexuality. It is condemned several times in the Old and New Testaments as a sin (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 are a few). Not once does the Bible describe ho-

mosexuality as a good thing. Where he or she should stand in terms of same-sex marriage should therefore not be difficult for a true Christian. This is not to say that is right to ridicule or humiliate homosexual people, but nor is it right for Christians to validate a sinful lifestyle.

Despite what the pro same-sex marriage articles say (and some Christians seem to believe), love



should not make us turn a blind eye to sin. While love is at the heart of the Biblical message, it is also important to note that judgement for sin is repeatedly spoken of in the Bible (e.g. Hebrews 13:4, Romans 6:23). All sin is subject to

judgement, and it is not loving to encourage or stay silent while people practise a lifestyle for which they will ultimately be judged.

So as the plebiscite progresses, I hope that my Christian friends will be on their guard against wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15) purporting to be Christians. They are easily identifiable as what they say or write are clearly inconsistent with Biblical teachings. If you are a Christian but are in favour of same-sex marriage I urge you to read the Bible, prayerfully examine yourself before the Lord and repent (Galatians 6:1). If you call yourself a Christian but hold or publicly advocate views which are in direct defiance of God's holy Word, perhaps you should call yourself something else (Matthew 12:30).

*The author is an elder in the Narre Warren PCEA congregation.*

# Prescribed Search Work

## JANUARY 2018

*Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under*

### SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 4 and 7)

ROMANS chapter 1

1. The gospel of God is concerning which person? (3 verses)
2. Why did Paul thank God for the Romans?
3. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel of Christ?
4. How does the creation leave men without excuse?

Chapter 2

5. Why does the one who judges another condemn himself?
6. What will happen to those who sin without law, and those who sin in the law?
7. Under what conditions is there profit in circumcision?
8. Who is a true Jew and what is true circumcision?

### JUNIOR

GENESIS chapter 1

1. In the beginning, what did God create?
2. What happened when God said, Let there be light?
3. What did God create on the fourth day?
4. In whose image did God create man, and what did he say when he blessed them? (2 verses)

## FEBRUARY 2018

### SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 2 and 7)

ROMANS chapter 3

1. What was the chief advantage that the Jew had?
2. Quote the verses from Psalm 14 (or Psalm 53) that Paul uses to prove that both Jew and Gentile are under sin.
3. Can anyone be justified by the deeds of the law?
4. By what means, do we conclude, is a man justified?

Chapter 4

5. What was counted to Abraham for righteousness?
6. Was the promise to Abraham through the law or through the righteousness of faith?
7. How strong was Abraham's faith? (2 verses)
8. On what condition shall righteousness be imputed to us also? (2 verses)

### JUNIOR

GENESIS chapter 2

1. Of what tree did God command the man not to eat? (2 verses)
2. How did God create the woman? (2 verses)

Chapter 3

3. What did Adam and Eve do when their eyes were opened?
4. What did the Lord God say to the serpent? (2 verses)

**Please send the answers to:**  
**Mrs I Steel**  
**PO Box 942**  
**Epping NSW 1710**  
**The questions for the whole year**  
**are available from the above postal**  
**address or by email at:**  
[iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

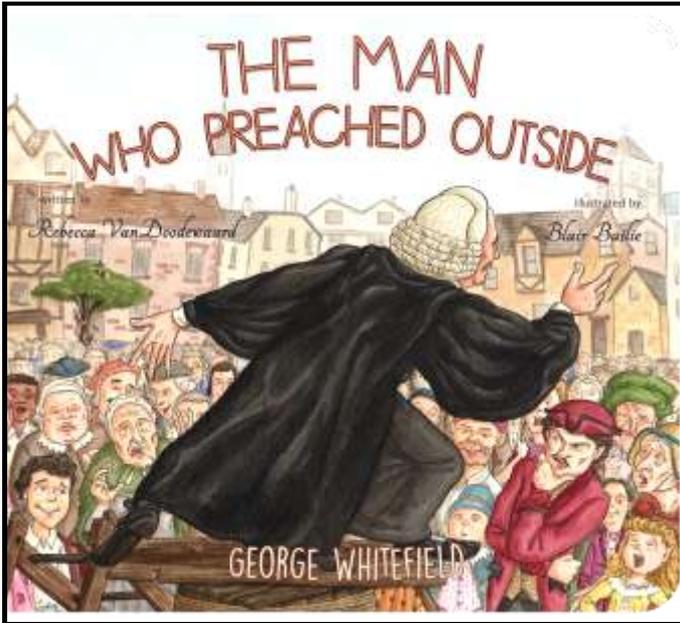
# Books in the Banner

*The Woman Who Helped A Reformer: Katharina Luther* (2017)  
*The Woman Who Loved To Give Books: Susannah Spurgeon* (2017)  
*The Man Who Preached Outside: George Whitefield* (2017)

**Author:** Rebecca Van Doodewaard

**Illustrator:** Blair Bailie

**Publisher:** The Banner of Truth Trust



to serve God; and *The Man Who Preached Outside* wonderfully tells how George Whitefield's enthusiasm to share God's Word sent him all the way to the new land of America. The books are all in board book format, perfect for little hands, and the illustrations are bright and simple. The text is easy to understand and also interactive, and could be happily read out to a group of



*The author*

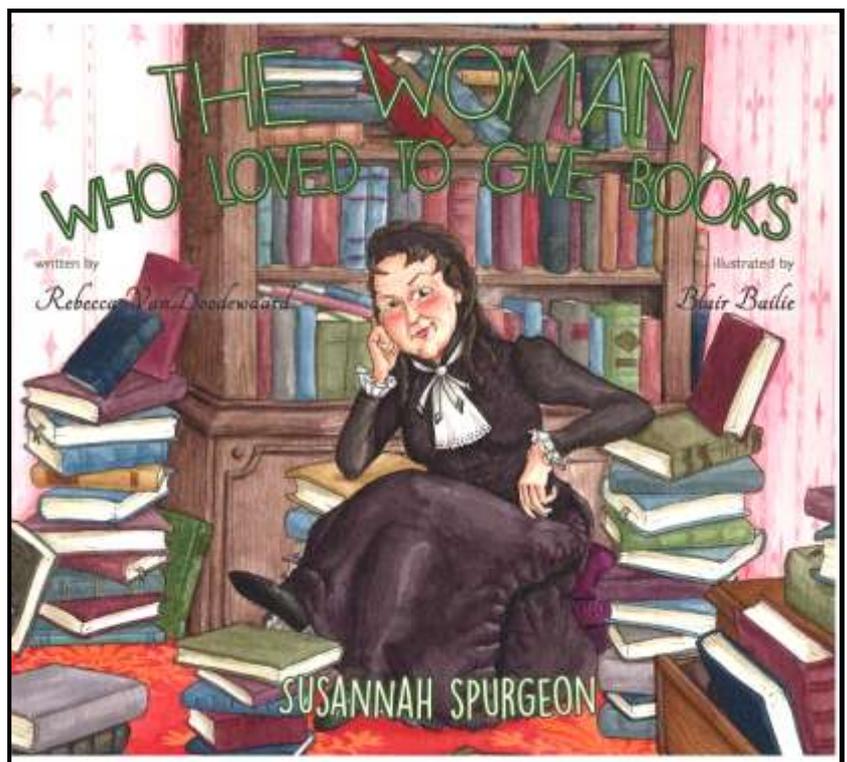
years, but being a board book, could be read to younger children and also used as a early reader for those just starting independent reading.

"Mr Whitefield is preaching, but not in a church. Why is he outside?"

It is always a challenge to introduce church history to young children and to find the right books to do the same. Rebecca Van Doodewaard, author of *Reformation Women: Sixteenth-Century Figures Who Shaped Christianity's Rebirth* (2017) has written three children's books that nicely begin to give our younger Christians a sense of God's plan throughout history.

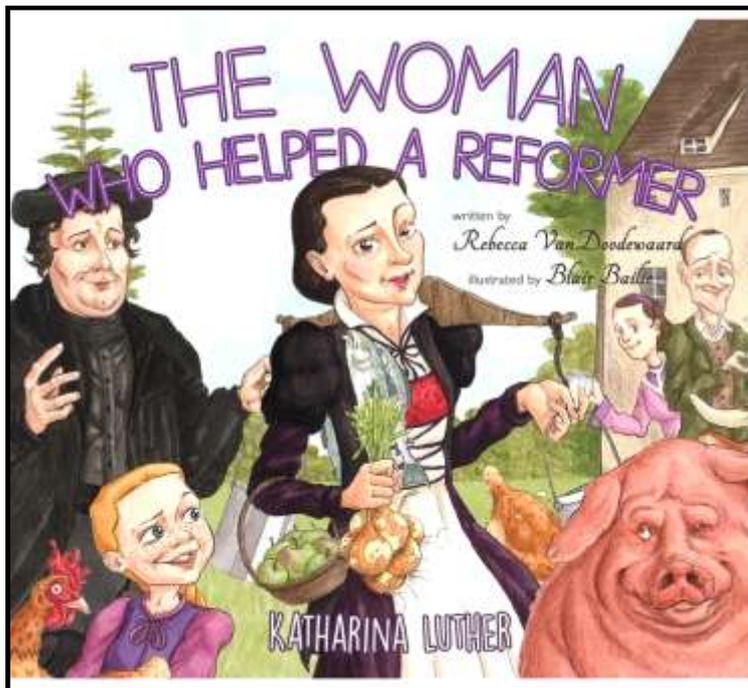
*The Woman Who Helped A Reformer*, on Katharina Luther, tells the story of how Katharina's work in the huge family home complimented Martin Luther's studies. *The Woman Who Loved To Give Books*, on Susannah Spurgeon, describes how despite illness, Susannah was still able

children. The age of the audience would ideally be from 3-7



I was impressed by the quality of the writing (it is not as easy to write for children as some think!) and by the subjects, especially with the books on the Katharina Luther and Susannah Spurgeon. Influential women in church history can tend to be neglected, and it is important for children to know that there have been good Christian women outside of the women of the Bible that have played a part in bringing God's Word to others. I look forward to seeing more books in this series!

*Reviewed by Eileen Loudon,  
Sunday School Teacher in Narre  
Warren PCEA & Youth Services  
Librarian*



# Churches in the Banner

## Farewell from the Editor

This issue of *The Presbyterian Banner* is the 89<sup>th</sup> which I have been privileged to be able to edit. It will also be my last. This is because I have accepted a call to return to the denomination I came from just over nine years ago, our closest sister denomination – the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

While previously we had served in Mangere, South Auckland, near the top of the North Island, this time we will be serving in the south of the South Island in a Reformed Church located in Oamaru, a town between Christchurch and Dunedin. Dunedin and much of the province of Otago, within which Oamaru is found, has a Free Church background, having originally been founded by Free Church settlers in the late 1840's.

I warmly thank the team here in Narre Warren that helped in the printing, mailing and administra-

tion essential for this magazine. The late John Holmes helped out for a number of years with being our Treasurer and mailing man, Barry & Pat Cochrane with picking up and sealing the magazines for the mailing, Glenys Jackson as



my faithful proof-reader (who also served in this capacity when I was Editor of the RCNZ magazine, *Faith in Focus*, for eight years), and latterly Stewart Loudon as our Treasurer. May the Lord bless the

interim editor who takes over this magazine – the Rev Dr Rowland Ward.

We are very thankful for our time in the PCEA. Betty-Ann and I have made many new friends and look forward to keeping up contact with them and, Lord willing, meeting them again. Our son, Andrew, is also hoping to move back to New Zealand with us, while our daughter, Eileen, and her husband, Stewart Loudon, remain in Melbourne, where they continue to be part of the Narre Warren congregation.

May our gracious God guide and keep you all as you seek to worship and serve him.

# Churches in the Banner

## Brisbane

On Saturday 18th November a number of the ladies in the Brisbane congregation met for lunch at the Moreton Bay Boat Club to join with Beth Anderson to celebrate her 80th Birthday. It was a lovely spot and, although it was pouring with rain outside, we enjoyed a great view of the water and lots of boats. Beth's birthday is actually on 1<sup>st</sup> December but it was celebrated early, as most of us will be going to the congregation's camp at Lennox Head on the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Beth, originally from the Clarence area, is one of the older members of the congregation but,



in old age: They shall be fresh and flourishing' which was very applicable for Beth. We all enjoyed a happy time of fellowship together.

## Ulverstone

On this page you will see a happy photo of Robert and Loretta Hingston taken November 26<sup>th</sup>. We celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There was some special history to the occasion as they were the first



as a stranger who was also lunching there commented, it's hard to believe she's 80 as she certainly doesn't look her age. We gave Beth a card, depicting a kitten, beautifully drawn by Irene Klazinga, and inside the card was quoted Psalm 92 v. 14 'They (the righteous) shall still bear fruit

marriage in the early years of the congregation.

Our Ladies craft group held the end of year luncheon at the Rhododendron Gardens on Tues. 12<sup>th</sup> December. We were pleased to have 16 people attend and look forward to lots more crafty things in the new year.

Please note your subscription renewal for 2018 is due  
*The subscription prices are presently \$35 per annum within a bulk order (5 or more), \$40 per annum for an individual subscription within Australia, and \$AU50 for individual overseas subscriptions.*  
 Donations are also gladly received to enable mailing to theological colleges and libraries.

Please send your subs in as soon as possible to ensure continued reception  
 If you send it via our Bank Account please put your name with the deposit