Love your global neighbour

Baptist World Aid Australia, in conjunction with A Just Cause, has launched a new report: The Global Neighbour Index. The report examines: Is Australia a good global neighbour?, taking seriously Jesus’ call to “love your neighbour as yourself”.

Against its most-developed peers, Australia was ranked 11th out of 20 overall in a report that graded each country’s contribution to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and outlined their strengths and areas requiring improvement.

Baptist World Aid CEO John Hickey believes that Australia can do more to become a better global neighbour.

“As a nation of significant capacity and long-standing wealth, Australia should act as a leading role model addressing global poverty through policy and practice,” John said.

The index is a part of Baptist World Aid’s strategy to influence government and the broader community to participate responsibly in seeking change. Rather than considering the way SDGs are being implemented in Australia, the report evaluates how well Australia is helping its less wealthy neighbouring countries.

In September, Baptist leaders from around Australia, including seven from Western Australia, gathered in Canberra at Parliament House to present the united voices of 140,000 Baptists on issues of social justice. They presented a copy of the The Global Neighbour Index to each of the senators and Members of Parliament they visited.

“It is not often that we get to influence the policymakers of our nation in such a specific and personal way,” Perth delegate Karen Wilson said.

“As we sat with Members of Parliament and had significant conversations, it was a proud moment for me to be able to represent the collective view of Baptists across Australia in standing for justice both in our nation and globally.”

Advocacy-focused Catalyst groups are growing across Western Australia through new and existing church partnerships with Baptist World Aid. Church groups will use the The Global Neighbour Index in advocacy efforts leading up to the next Federal Election, where Baptists around the country will organise electorate forums using the report as a guide to converse with candidates.

The index uses ten indicators to consider complex issues such as inequality, poverty, climate change and conflict. It highlights that Australia is good at trading with developing nations (6th) and ranks highly in welcoming immigrants from least developed nations (5th). However, urgently needing improvement are carbon dioxide emission per capita (18th), foreign aid (19th) and global refugee share as a proportion of Australia’s population (14th).

Author – Susy Lee

Committed to being honest, transparent and above reproach.

BAPTIST CHURCHES WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Who’s the nincompoop?

I was riding my pushbike along the cycle path in Nightcliff the other day, when to my surprise I saw a guy on a motorbike riding on the same path towards me. “What a nincompoop,” I said to myself (or words that expressed a similar meaning).

I thought, “Self, you should do something!” And so, I did. I waved my hands in a very animated fashion, indicating that he should be on the road and not the path! After all, evil proppers when good men do nothing. However, as I got closer I realised that I was the nincompoop. Why? Because he was a police officer!

This incident reminded me that we can get things so wrong when we make judgement calls from a distance. As I thought about this, my mind drifted towards the current social climate the Church finds itself in. Are we really who they say we are? Are our churches really institutions stuck in an archaic, patriarchal time warp, irrelevant if not damaging to the rest of the 21st century?

If only they would not make their judgment calls from a distance. If only they would take the time to get to know us, then they would realise that we are not that bad. In fact, there are so many good news stories that we could show them. Yes, God is at work in the 21st century. He is still transforming lives and the outpost has a home. It only would come and see!

But then I thought back to my encounter with the police officer and I realised something. It was me who made the judgment call from a distance. It was me who got it wrong.

The invitation to come

I have three children – two girls and a boy, Finlay. He is two years old. He is at the stage now where he loves to talk, and as with most two-year-olds, some of his words are difficult to understand, even for me.

However, there are quite a few things he says with ease that everyone can understand, and one of those words is ‘coming’. He usually says coming in response to our beckoning. “Finny come and choose a story” or “Finny come brush your teeth.” He responds, ‘coming’, so eagerly, but usually he responds from the exact same place he was when we called, and he has very little intention of actually coming.

Finlay’s standard response to the invitation, or even the command ‘come’ made me think of the way I respond to God’s command, or invitation to come. I think of Matthew 11:28 and Jesus’ invitation to all who are weary to come, but usually I am not taking any steps to actually get closer to the One who is calling. In Matthew 14, Peter shows that he understood the significance of being beckoned by Jesus, he stood on the boat and told Jesus to invite him onto the water. He made the steps to come to Jesus, but before reaching Him, he was overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation.

So now every time my son calls out coming, I remind myself of the guests who were invited to the wedding banquet in Luke 14, but made excuses not to come. I think of all they missed out on because perhaps they were scared, or perhaps they loved their own plans too much. Then I think of all that God has invited me to come and be a part of.

Sometimes coming requires courage, discipline or leaving behind other things, but I am reminded that when God invites us to come, it is always worth it. We know that we can trust the One who calls us to come, because come is exactly what He did for us.

Unexpected changes ...

I’d been looking forward to my flight from Perth to Sydney. Booked on a lovely large A330, my check of the seating plan showed a lightly occupied plane with me comfortably seated in an aisle seat towards the front. Making a final check on arriving at the airport, I discovered the plane had been downsized to a grubby little 737 and was now completely full, though I still had an aisle seat towards the front. My mood dropped a notch.

By the time I got to check in, I was informed my seat had been changed – I was now at the back. My mood dropped further. Then I got a text from the person I was meeting upon arrival. We were scheduled to travel together to a conference, but their plane was cancelled and they’d be arriving on a substitute an hour later. My mood plunged again.

A cramped flight and a long wait at the airport lay ahead. I reminded myself to reduce my fluid intake. Toilets on crowded tiny planes are in high demand. When I boarded, I discovered it was even worse. A young couple with a child occupied the two seats next to me. “Great!”, I thought. “So now we have four people in three seats.” I consoled myself that at least I’d get to play peekaboo with the toddler, but he burst into tears at my first attempt. The mother glared at me.

I reminded myself that God often breaks through at unexpected times. “Is this one of them?” I asked. “Hardly likely!” My mind moved to another unexpected journey. From Nazareth to Bethlehem, there was no cramped flight for that couple. The nine-month pregnant woman got the donkey, and the man walked. Labour came at an inconvenient time, and with no prearranged accommodation, the child was born in a stable. I guess they also muttered, “Don’t you hate it when things don’t go plan?”

But they were wrong. Turns out, that was the plan. It makes you think ...

letters to the editor

The Advocate welcomes your letters to the editor on topics of concern to you and the community. Send your letters of no more than 100 words to editor@theadvocate.tv by the 10th of each month.

Mal Good
Mal Good is the Lead Pastor at Cassatura Baptist Church, located in the northern suburbs of Darwin.

Samantha Good
Samantha Good is a cross-cultural worker with Global Interaction in Mozambique with her husband Ben and three children.

Dr Brian Harris
Dr Brian Harris is the Principal of Vose Seminary and Pastor at Large for the Carey Group.
**Holy secularism**

Christmas is not what it used to be. The Christmas in the Bible was less a season and more an occasion.

We spend a lot of money; Christ was born into poverty. We consider Christmas ‘family time’. Mary and Joseph were internally displaced people (and later refugees). We hang lights, ornaments and decorations; the manger was, at best, lined with clean straw. We give lifeless objects that shine, taste good, or use batteries; God gave a person – the Living Jesus Christ. Everything about the coming of Christ contrasts the ways in which we ‘celebrate the season’. We embrace the culture of consumption with little more than a sideways glance at the claims of Christ. I’m no saint in this regard. My own inconsistencies shine like a spotlight amidst the tiny flashlights of other people. But I desire to be different. The first step towards change is acknowledgment. We need to diagnose and name the disease before prescribing surgery. My disease is holy secularism. The symptoms include an honourable mention for Christ, but He is mostly excluded. Look around and you’ll see this in pandemic proportions. Many of us have unintentionally become infectious carriers. The disease drives us to catalogue more than to Christ; it draws us to shopping centres and distracts us with sales. We want presents with a bow, not the presence of God. Give me the latest gadget, not the gospel truth. Sing about Santa, not the Saviour. Open the wallet, but not the home. Of course, we’ll join in the carols, listen to the talks, and even add angels to the tree. However, the Christ-event which calls us to simple gratitude and humility morphs into a season of impulse-spending, binge-buying and excess. We use sacred terms to justify ourselves – generosity, thoughtfulness, love and family. But sometimes we let the marketplace, not the Master, define those terms. I suspect the waiting list for this spiritual surgery might be long, but somewhere deep within us an authentic light pierces the darkness and compels us to consider why Christ came in the first place. Search ‘Luke 2 Message Bible’ in your browser for a boost.

We embrace the culture of consumption with little more than a sideways glance at the claims of Christ.

Author – Mark Wilson

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**Christian Book of the Year**

*The Bible in Australia: A Cultural History* was awarded the Sparklit 2018 Christian Book of the Year.

With over 70 books submitted, Awards Coordinator Michael Collie said that this year’s award drew strong entries from accomplished writers. Many are leaders in their professions and fields of endeavour. “The Bible in Australia is a timely and revealing contribution to our debate about the role of faith in Australian life and public conversation,” Michael said. The judges found *The Bible in Australia* to be a history of national importance and a unique insight into Australian culture. “In *The Bible in Australia*, Meredith Lake gives an arresting and comprehensive account of how preachers, suffragists, unionists, politicians, writers, painters, musicians, immigrants and Indigenous peoples have used the Bible to shape Australian history and culture. Scripture arrived tattooed on the bodies of convicts aboard the First Fleet and, in the hands of Indigenous Christians, has nourished movements for justice, for land rights, and for recognition and reconciliation,” the judges said.

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In a unanimous vote, Baptist Churches Western Australia (BCWA) decided to participate in the National Redress Scheme. The scheme exists to help those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse receive the support they need to redress their wounds in a way that is easiest for that person.

BCWA Church Health Pastor Jackie Smoker said that while redress may help address the past, there is much that can be done in the future.

Since its establishment in 2012, the Commission received almost 17,000 enquiries and held 97 public hearings. Its six commissioners sat with 8,013 people in private sessions, listening to their personal experiences. They heard accounts of their childhood abuses and the ongoing impact these had on their life.

“For many, this wasn’t the first time they had told their story, but it may have been the first time they were believed,” Jackie said.

Those who spoke were given the opportunity to share a message with the Australian community about their experience on the Commission’s website.

“Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story. You cannot know what it meant to be listened to with such respect and made to feel that what happened to me really mattered. I hope my experience will help to promote the change needed to prevent this ever happening to another child,” one person wrote.

The Commission report highlighted the inability of institutions to listen or act to protect vulnerable people, particularly children. It noted that institutions responded from a position of power and self-preservation.

“Within religious institutions there was often an inability to conceive that a person in religious ministry was capable of sexually abusing a child. This resulted in a failure by adults to listen to children who tried to disclose sexual abuse … and a willingness of religious leaders to accept denials from alleged perpetrators,” the report stated.

Jackie said there are many things to learn from the Commission.

“Whilst one volume specifically addresses religious institutions, there are 15 other volumes that are worth consideration,” she said.

“This is an opportunity for the church to listen, learn, respond and be all that Jesus calls us to be – people of good news, in word and action.”

In December 2018, the BCWA Church Health Pastor Jackie Smoker said the church had made the decision to participate in the National Redress Scheme, helping those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse receive the support they need to redress their wounds.

“BCWA has decided to participate in the National Redress Scheme, helping those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse receive the support they need to redress their wounds.”

In October, delegates from Western Australian Baptist churches gathered at the Annual Assembly to welcome churches into membership, recognise newly accredited pastors, hear what God has done in the past year, and consider the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

“For the second year as part of the Winter Shelter program, seven churches in Melbourne’s east welcomed Glenn and several other homeless men to sleep on their premises. Their volunteers – 200 in total – also served a homemade dinner for their guests.

Michael, 32, has suffered from mental illness and drug addiction. After spending last year homeless in Melbourne’s CBD and later robbed in a boarding house, he turned to the church sleeping program.

“I’ve been warm. I’ve been in a safe environment where I can take my medication and not have to worry about somebody robbing me in my sleep on the street,” Michael said.

Heathmont Baptist Church Assistant Pastor Mark Nidenko commended the program and encouraged more churches to get involved.

“I think it’s part of what Jesus would want us to do. Caring for the poor has always been part of the mandate of the Church,” he explained.

“These guys are in pretty rough straits, and if we can help them, we’ve got a responsibility to do that.”

Author – Gilbert Siahaan

For the past two winters, homeless men escaped the 3°C nights and found shelter in Melbourne’s churches.

“BCWA to support victims

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Baptists encourage change

Over two days in September, 40 Converge delegates, representing leadership of the Australian Baptist Movement, took part in 58 meetings with politicians from across the political spectrum at Parliament House in Canberra.

Converge started in 2016 as an initiative of Australian Baptist Ministries, with three clear purposes: to build the wider Baptist presence in the eyes of politicians, to influence them on particular issues of shared Baptist concerns and to build capacity for advocacy within the Baptist movement.

In each of their meetings, delegates thanked Members of Parliament and senators for the progress made since the 2017 Converge, noting both requests had almost progressed to law amendments to the Family Law Act to stop violent offenders from cross-examining their victims, and the creation of a Modern Slavery Act that ensures companies are accountable for ensuring workers in their supply chain are treated fairly.

Delegates presented two new Baptist reports to the politicians: No Room, A report on domestic violence services in Australian communities and The Global Neighbour Index. The No Room report included three practical recommendations that were highlighted in meetings. These were the building of a comprehensive national database of family and domestic violence support services; increased investment in safe, secure, and affordable housing; and immediate increase in funding from State and Federal governments to address shortfalls in crisis and short-term accommodation.

Baptist World Aid Australia Advocacy Coordinator Susy Lee said asking politicians to help with domestic violence issues was very well received throughout the meetings and their efforts were appreciated.

The Global Neighbour Index, produced by Baptist World Aid Australia, assesses Australia’s progress against Sustainable Development Goals – with special attention to developing nation neighbours.

“We praised efforts in trade and immigration, but made urgent recommendations around carbon dioxide emissions, aid and refugees,” Susy said.

“These recommendations received varied reception across the political spectrum, but the amount of work and care involved was acknowledged and praised.”

Susy said the experience was daunting for newcomers to Converge, especially in light of recent political events, including the installation of a new Prime Minister.

At the event’s final debrief, delegates agreed that their consistent engagement with politicians created a positive message – that the Australian Baptist Movement is a movement that cares about vulnerable people, is willing to play a role in the solutions, and expects the government to be part of these solutions.

“With every Converge event held our success at achieving these goals is increasing,” Susy said.

Lifelong friends make retirement move together

What do you do when your best friend and her husband decide to make the move to retirement living? For one couple, the answer was simple, join them.

Lifelong friends, Helen Kingsbury and Suzette Box have always been close – they were part of each other’s wedding parties and their husbands became firm friends. So when it came time to think about retirement living, it wasn’t surprising that Helen and her husband, Brian, would join Suzette and husband Cyril at the same retirement village.

Helen and Suzette had visited a number of villages in their search for the perfect retirement living complex, but once they found Baptistcare Riverside Village in Salter Point, the search was over and the decision was soon made.

“Riverside was chosen because it offered the lifestyle we all were searching for,” Helen said.

“We feel part of a community and can participate in as much or as little of the activities on offer with complete privacy and no intrusion.”

Five years later, they all agree that the move was the best decision they have ever made and could not be happier.

“There is so much to do here, it’s like being on a cruise,” Suzette said.

No worries, no responsibilities and there is always help at hand if we need it.

For more information, visit www.baptistcare.com.au
Solar puts college on the map

Atlantic Beach Baptist College (ABBC) has made history by being the first school in Australia to become 100 percent sustainable while being completely off-grid with a fully functional solar power/storage system.

The college recently engaged the services of Sydney-based Upstream Energy, which specialises in delivering sustainable energy solutions for the commercial sector. According to Upstream Energy Managing Director Nathan Begley, ABBC is the first school in Australia to have zero carbon emissions, while also being independent of the electricity grid.

“Upstream’s clean energy solution for Atlantis Beach Baptist College will deliver solar electricity during daylight hours, backed up by battery storage overnight, at a fixed rate for the term.”

“The annual energy consumption of the campus is approximately 25,000kWh and the new solar and storage system will deliver up to 32,390kWh of sustainable energy at a substantially lower cost than what it would cost for the college to procure a grid connection.”

“The system will provide 101 percent of the school’s energy requirements throughout the year. ABBC will purchase electricity from Upstream, much like a typical retailer and will receive ownership of the asset at zero cost upon expiry of the power purchase agreement. Upstream will continue to work as ABBC’s sustainability partner, expanding the project in line with the growth of the campus,” Nathan said.

ABBC Principal Gary Harris said the school was delighted with the new off-grid solar power system.

“We initially saved $250,000 by deciding not to use grid power when we opened last year, and our new solar power system will replace the electricity previously generated by onsite diesel generators.”

“The new system is environmentally friendly and will deliver major cost savings for our college, which we can use to invest in additional educational facilities for our students over the coming years.”

“Caring for our environment is another way we can serve the community and honour God,” he said.

Project Director for Atlantis Beach Estate Jarrod Rendell, said he was delighted that ABBC had claimed this historic achievement.

“The college should be congratulated on this solar power initiative as renewable energy will increasingly become a key part of powering our society over the coming years, and in turn will create exciting new employment opportunities for a new generation of young people,” Jarrod said.

Author – Jack Gilleece

Child care achieves St John Safe

Canning Bridge Early Learning Centre, a not-for-profit mission of Como Baptist Church, has become the second organisation in Western Australia to be accredited by St John Ambulance WA, as St John Safe, for the second consecutive year.

St John awards the St John Safe accreditation to organisations who demonstrate outstanding preparedness and an ability to respond to medical emergencies, document and maintain all health and safety records and have highly trained staff. According to St John’s assessment, Carling Bridge Early Learning Centre is also the highest rated St John Safe child care facility in WA.

“We are proud to be afforded the opportunity to be a living example of God’s love and to be stewarding our resources in such a way that has enabled the receipt of such recognition,” Canning Bridge Early Learning Centre Director Kim Moore said.

“The staff work ever so diligently and care for all the children and their safety so deeply, it is great to see their hard work recognised.”

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Member for Butler Hon John Quigley, ABBC Chair Greg Holland, Principal Gary Harris and Upstream Energy Managing Director Nathan Begley are pleased with ABBC’s solar achievement.

St John’s assessor Glenn Willan presents Kim Moore with Canning Bridge Early Learning Centre’s St John Safe accreditation certificate.
Local Christmas events

Austin Cove Community Church
Christmas Carols by the Canals
Saturday 15 December
6pm for family fun and 7pm for Christmas carols
Lucie Hunter Park, South Yunderup Road, South Yunderup
Free bouncy castle, face painting, petting zoo and gift. Food, coffee van and ice cream truck onsite. Santa will arrive via boat. Enjoy your favourite carols.

Busselton Baptist Church
Community Carols by the Jetty
Saturday 15 December
6.30pm
2 Recreation Lane, Busselton

Dalkeith Baptist Church
Family Open Air Carols
Saturday 15 December
6pm to 7pm
Dalkeith Baptist Church, 123 Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith
A family friendly event – includes singing Christmas carols, hearing the Christmas story and a free sausage sizzle. All are welcome.

Golden Bay Baptist Church
Combined Community Christmas Carols
Saturday 15 December
6pm for family fun and 7pm for Christmas carols
Golden Bay Foreshore, Dampier Drive, Golden Bay
A combined group of local churches sharing God’s good news through carols, a play, games, food and candles.

Gnowangerup Community Church
Community Sausage Sizzle and Carols in the Park
Sunday 16 December
6pm for a 7pm start
Noborach Community Playground (in case of bad weather, Gnowangerup Town Hall)
Free event. Kids covid, sausage in a bun and a drink provided. Bring a picnic rug or chair.

Katanning Baptist Church
Christmas Carols by Candlelight
Sunday 16 December
6pm to 7pm
Katanning Town Square, Clive Street, Katanning
A fun family event starting with a free sausage sizzle and kids’ games, followed by carols service at 7.30pm. A celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Lakeside Baptist Church
The Star, Christmas Eve Service
Monday 24 December
6pm to 7pm
Lakeside Recreation Centre, corner of Farrington Road and Bibra Drive, North Lake
These are many opportunities vying for our attention, yet the star led the wise men to the most important birth in the history of mankind.

Leeming Baptist Church
Christmas Eve Festival
Monday 24 December
4.30pm to 6pm for entertainment and 6pm to 7pm for service
1 Valley Street, Leeming
Free children’s entertainment – face painting, craft activities, mobile zoo and more. Sausage sizzle, coffee and ice cream available for purchase. Followed by a family friendly carols service.

Margaret River Baptist Church
Carols by the Beach
Monday 24 December
6.30pm
White Elephant Café, Gnarabup Beach, Prevelly Park
The heart and soul of Christmas in Margaret River – singing carols by the beach, heralding the birth of the greatest gift of all time.

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church
Cooby Carols
Saturday 15 December
5.30pm to 7.30pm
Hargreaves Park, Counce Road, Coolbellup
Enjoy a free sausage sizzle and some great carols in the park. Bring a chair or a blanket and join the choir singing.

Narrogan Baptist Church
Christmas in the Park
Friday 7 December
7pm
Mackie Park, Fortune Street, Narrogin
Narrogan Baptist Church, in conjunction with the Christian Churches of Narrogin, are co-hosting Carols in the Park. All are welcome to come and celebrate the birth of Christ. Family friendly event with barbecue conducted by YouthCARE. Bring your own chair/blanket. No dogs please.

North Beach Baptist Church
Let There Be Joy!
Sunday 16 December
4.30pm to 7pm for funfair and 7pm for carols
Charles Riley Reserve, North Beach
Let there be joy this Christmas! Come along with the family and enjoy the free funfair and community carols. For more information, visit Facebook.

Waratah Christian Community Church
Port Bouvard Carols
Sunday 16 December
5pm and 7.30pm for main event
Crowsnest Terrace Park, Wannanup
Come along to the lawns located between Bataria Avenue and Crownwest Terrace and spend some fun-filled hours enjoying entertainment for the young and young at heart. With lots of community involvement and a dramatic retelling of the most history-shaping event of all – it will be a great night. For more information, visit facebook.com/PortBouvardCarols

Yokine Baptist Church and Nollamara Church of Christ
Carols by Candlelight
Sunday 9 December
5.30pm for free sausage sizzle and 6pm for community carols
Nollamara Church of Christ, corner of Carcoola Street and Apara Way, Nollamara
Traditional and new songs, fun and drama.
Asia Bibi freed from conviction

Christian mother Asia Bibi was released from Pakistan's death row on 31 October, after the nation's Supreme Court reversed her 2010 conviction of blasphemy.

"Religious liberty advocates globally expressed jubilation and pleas that Pakistan's military protect Bibi. Meanwhile, Muslim extremists reportedly began burning tyres in the streets. Pakistan issued a heightened security alert in advance of the announcement," Chief Counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, Jay Sekulow said.

"There are security precautions I'm sure being taken in Pakistan," Sekulow said in a Facebook video before daybreak.

"It's a complete victory. She's been in jail for almost nine years. But she now will be returned to her family."

Renewed death threats against the court, other leaders and Bibi should be taken seriously, advocates said. The entire Christian community is considered in danger in the nation that is more than 96 percent Muslim.

"The danger for this Christian mother of five is not over," the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLIJ) said in its press release.

"Rangers were deployed around the court and other parts of the capital."

Her current location has not been disclosed. At least two countries have offered her asylum, CNN reported. Government protection is critical to Bibi's safety, ACLIJ representative Shakeryar Gill told Baptist Press.

"She cannot be released openly," Gill said on 23 October. "If she's there, no doubt, no question about it, that her life will be in jeopardy. They feel proud of killing somebody like this."

"Two government leaders who advocated for Bibi's release during her eight-year ordeal were murdered in 2011, namely Cabinet Member, Shabbaz Bhatti, and Punjab Governor, Salmaan Taseer."

More than 50 people accused of blasphemy have been killed by angry crowds and others in Pakistan.

"Bibi's case illustrates the inhumanity of blasphemy laws, which allow the death penalty for convictions in Pakistan," Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Tenzin Dorjee said.

"The case of Asia Bibi illustrates the extent to which blasphemy laws can be exploited to target minority communities," Dorjee said in a press release.

"These laws seek to protect entire religions rather than the individual, as should be the case under international human rights standards."

Eugene Peterson dies at 85

Eugene Peterson, bestselling Christian author known for The Message paraphrase of the Bible, died 22 October. He was 85.

Pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland, for nearly 30 years, Peterson published more than 30 books on biblical spirituality, pastoral theology and Christian living, including his 2013 memoir The Pastor and A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.

Less than a week before Peterson's death, news broke he had been placed in hospice care amid struggles with dementia and compositive heart failure.

"It feels fitting that his death news came on a Monday, the day of the week he always honoured as a Sabbath during his years as a pastor. After a lifetime of faithful service to the church -- running the race with gusto -- it is reassuring to know that Eugene has now entered into the fullness of the Kingdom of God and has been embraced by eternal Sabbath," his family stated.

Among Baptists to react to Peterson's death, Southern Baptists President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission Russell Moore, tweeted, "Grateful for Eugene Peterson." When Peterson entered hospice care, author and speaker, Beth Moore, tweeted, "Don't you just sorta hope when Eugene Peterson finally sees the gorgeous, glorious face of the Saviour he has so long loved and served, that Jesus is the type that might greet him with something from The Message translation? Like, maybe John 21:12? Breakfast is ready."

Last year, Peterson told Religion News Service he didn't think death was "anything to be afraid of."

"I have no idea how it's going to work out," Peterson said of death. "But I'm not afraid, I'll tell you that. I've been with a lot of people who are dying. I think those conversations are some of the best I've ever had."

"These are people who have lived a good life and who have embraced their faith. They're not afraid."

Author – David Roach

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Sulawesi tsunami appeal

Baptist World Aid Australia’s disaster specialists have taken a leadership role on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, where more than 2,000 people have died after a tsunami and earthquake struck the island in September.

Baptist World Aid Australia has been coordinating emergency relief efforts in Sulawesi and field staff have been working in the disaster zone to determine the most urgent needs of affected families.

Search parties and rescue teams worked around the clock to rescue those that survived the disaster, but the organisation fears that without the provision of relief or emergency supplies, these efforts could be in vain.

The provision of food rations, clean drinking water, shelter and healthcare is needed to minimise the risk of disease outbreak.

Baptist World Aid Australia has set a target of $300,000 for its Sulawesi Tsunami Appeal to support this urgently needed life-saving work. At the time of printing, the organisation was very close to meeting the appeal target, thanks to the help of its generous supporters.

Baptist World Aid Australia CEO, John Hickey and Baptist World Aid Australia Manager of Disaster Operations, Dan Skehan, addressed the organisation’s followers in a video update on Facebook, explaining how 23 different Christian relief and development agencies are seeking to work together to provide the best possible emergency relief in this area.

“You can only imagine what trauma has gone through these communities, and we are all still trying to understand the scale and impact of this tsunami and earthquake. It is huge,” John said.

“This is a long-term response that we need to do and we are asking you to support this appeal. Thank you so much for the generosity so far.”

Dan Skehan explained that over 1.5 million people have been affected by the disaster.

“Looking forward, we are certainly going to be here for the next 12 months, maybe even longer, as we work with the community members on the island of Sulawesi to recover fully from this terrible event,” Dan said.

In late September, tidal waves over three metres high hit Sulawesi with little warning, causing widespread devastation. The tsunami was triggered by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake, which in itself generated heavy destruction on the island. In one particular area, the earthquake caused a housing estate, home to 900 people, to collapse and sink five metres into the ground.

More than 2,000 people have officially been declared dead, but rescue workers on the ground believe that many more might be buried beneath the mud.

According to The Guardian, a lack of heavy machinery made it difficult to retrieve corpses from the debris and rubble. The destruction of local roads, major seaports and airport runways further complicated relief and rescue efforts in the area.

In order to stave off the spread of disease, the Indonesian government gave instructions to prepare for up to 1,300 victims to be buried immediately. Volunteers were given the task to dig a 100-metre-long mass grave and fill it with hundreds of bodies in bags.

Author – Ramona Humphreys

California’s Camp Fire: ‘It never turned daylight’

Members of Paradise Ridge Southern Baptist Church have asked Pastor Bob Sorensen if they will continue to have a church, but not because their building is gone. They ask because the Camp Fire destroyed much of their community.

“We’ve had disasters before, and we thought we would be able to just go back,” Sorensen said. “But you can’t go back.”

While the church still stands, Sorensen’s home was destroyed by the fire – “an amazing thing,” he said.

“I still have people from the church who are missing that I can’t find. I spend hours a day trying to find them,” he added.

On the day the blaze overwhelmed Paradise, Sorensen and his wife Linda got the call that their granddaughter’s school was being evacuated. The typically 15 minute drive turned into an hour and a half. It required five hours of driving amid fire and smoke to make it down the ridge and into safety.

“It was wall-to-wall traffic trying to get out,” Sorensen said.

“There were flames and smoke. It never turned daylight that day.”

With 59 reported deaths and counting, the Camp Fire has officially become the most lethal in California’s history. More than 9,000 residential and commercial structures have been destroyed.

“The fire came on so fast, and it was just mass confusion,” Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Director for California Baptists Mike Bivins said.

“The roads into and out of the towns of Paradise and Magalia are limited.”

“The fire seems to have trapped more people than was originally figured,” he said.

Bivins has heard horror stories like Sorensen’s from survivors in shelters who had to run and drive for their lives to escape the fire.

First responders continue search and rescue efforts, using cadaver dogs to help find victims. Emergency utility crews are travelling into the area to ensure that electricity, propane and gas will not create hazards for residents when they are allowed to return.

For Paradise, residents are wondering what the next steps will be for their community, but when people ask Pastor Sorensen if he plans to stay, he said that decision is not his to make.

“As long as God keeps me here, I’m going to stay, because I know there are people who are going to need help,” he said.

Author – Brandon Elrod

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Unlikely duo finding faith

A pastor and a pop star – not exactly a likely duo? Well it is ... when you are finding faith. Finding Faith is comprised of Andrew Tierney and Tim Dunfield. From two opposite corners of the globe – Australia and Canada – Andrew and Tim found a great friendship, a unique creative connection and a deep passion for writing songs of worship together. John Iglesden caught up with the vocal and guitar duo to chat about their new project.

You have recently released an album called Finding Faith, but before we talk about that, please give us a background of your musical careers thus far.

Andrew: I would say I have always been a Christian, I have always been a believer. Jesus, I just never really got what it meant to live it. You define yourself as a Christian because of accepting Jesus as your saviour in that moment. I’ve always had those Christian values in my life, but it took me, I don’t know how many years to unpack the simplicity of the gospel. There was a real ‘I get it now’ moment.

I never struggled with ‘Is there a God?’ I always knew that I was saved by Jesus, but I didn’t know what it meant to live it. Looking back on how I have lived my life, I’ve never lived outside of my faith, but I have never really lived completely in it like I am now. I saw the gifts that God has given me in my voice and music and wondered how I can use that to give back to God.

Tim: I’m starting to write it already. As soon as he heard the lyric and we’ve got to write this song. As soon as he heard the lyric and I called Andrew. I said I’ve got this lyric and we’ve got to write this song. As soon as he heard the lyric, he said absolutely, I think I’m starting to write it already.

Andrew: We were writing a lot of songs and I heard this song, it’s an old Bill Withers song called ‘Grandma’s Hands’. I really loved it and I was thinking about our record and I thought about Jesus’ hands and God’s hands, so I was writing a song about being in ‘good hands’.

I had been writing that song which I thought would have a chorus, ‘I’ll never walk alone, I’m in good hands’ and so I thought, ‘Tim, your idea could be my verse because we were both writing a song about God’s hands’. We eventually finished the song and it sums up my life, Tim’s life and everybody’s life. It’s the simple thought to know that we are in good hands and those hands just happen to be amazing hands. I love that people are connecting to the song and I love it every time I sing the song. It’s been a blessing to both of us.

Now that the debut album has been released, what’s next for Finding Faith? Can we expect more music in the future, possibly a tour?

Andrew: We would love to tour. It’s been an amazing start with ‘Good Hands’. We started promoting it in the United States in November. Towards the end of the year, we are doing some more worship leading throughout Vegas and our plan is to do some shows in Australia too.

As it so happens the next song that we are bringing out, ‘There is Love’, is written out of the tragic shooting that happened in Vegas last October. I love every song on the record and the opportunity to play it and worship with churches is something we love to do.

Now I have to ask, is Johnny Farnham as awesome as I think he is?

Andrew: He is, I saw him the other day, we did a corporate event together and he’s such a generous soul. He’s so complimentary of us as a group and a really sweet guy, and still singing incredibly. He’s 70! He just blew my mind, hitting the big notes. He still has the voice.

Finding Faith is available to stream or purchase digitally on Spotify and iTunes or online at iamfindingfaith.com.
I grew up with a punctuality problem. In my Year 12 yearbook, under the ‘Famous for’ section of my profile, it read: “Famous for sauntering into Periods 1…2…3…4…5…6…7…five minutes late.” (So many ellipses in one sentence!)

It never felt that way. I wasn’t sauntering. I was rushing to fill the important (and unimportant) things that needed to happen between periods. Why let it wait if it could be squeezed between periods?

I still remember one awkward night in Year 12. The new Headmaster had invited our entire year group to his home for dinner throughout the term in batches of ten to 12. It was a salubrious affair; we dressed in our formal wear and used the cutlery imaginatively.

I was late. Not enormously, but the normal five minutes – my modus operandi, it seemed. When I walked in at 7.35pm, everyone was seated with one empty chair. Mine. I sat down and did my best to break the ice, saying, “I’ve heard it’s fashionable to be five minutes late.” There were polite sniggers but mainly heads down. As dinner resumed, my mate beside me subtly leaned over and whispered, “You’re 35 minutes late, not five.”

I felt the blood drain in my ear, “You’re 35 minutes late,” he remarked, “You’re one of the pastors and showed up on a busy life, it sounds more negative experiences. Real stuff.

Sometimes about un-deciding

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” (John 15:4, NKJV)

The one habit that changes everything for good

This passage is one of my most favourite scriptures. Verse 4 reflects the core teaching: abiding. The word ‘abide’ occurs seven times in these eight verses. It means, make yourself at home in Jesus. It’s a whole new way of living. Our fruitfulness depends on this abiding. About 40–50 percent of what we do everyday is instinctive, habits. Habit creates who we are. We live in a transient world. People used to stay in jobs longer, live in one location but now change keeps happening at ever faster rates. We can lose stability and consistency. These are the things that make character. Prayer is how we have friendship with Jesus.

We should all have a habit of prayer. A daily habit. The more we do it the more we’ll want to do it. That’s what experiencing Jesus is about. Prayer is communication with God. It’s how we have friendship with Jesus.

If we give Jesus time every morning in prayer we’ll have more time during our day. Make prayer a key daily habit in our lives. It makes for a much better world.

Author – Phil Pringle

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Our aim is to equip pastors, leaders, musicians, singers, and sound technicians to make music that builds our churches and exalts our great God and glorious Saviour," Exalt Committee Chairman Matt Harding said.

"One of the highlights was seeing a couple of churches decide to bring their music teams to Exalt Lite, and then arrange to have a meeting to debrief on what people had learned and to try some new songs. That is the very spirit we want to encourage," he added.

Matt explained that Exalt traditionally would run over a Friday night and Saturday, but this year the committee opted for a shorter format called Exalt Lite. However, the conference’s core principles of being biblical, practical, accessible, contemporary, inter-denominational, and constructive remain the same.

The morning began with a worship session and talk on Revelation 5 by St Matthew’s Anglican Church Uhrichsville Congregational Pastor, Jeff Hunt. He spoke about keeping Jesus the focus of singing. Attendees were also introduced to Music Pastor of EV Church Trevor Hodge, who discussed more practical ways to glorify God through congregational music and singing.

The group was then offered the choice of three music related electives led by Trevor, Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students Regional Director Tim Thorburn and Chrstian songwriter Liz Gordon.

Trevor’s elective focused on teaching worship, the practicalities and the rationale behind them. Tim discussed the biblical foundations of musical ministry and explained the basis for why God is glorified through music and singing. The final elective was led by Liz who talked through worship songwriting and shared her experiences from many years of being a songwriter in a Christian context. Worship sessions were held between each session of the conference to not only worship God, but to put into practice the teachings of the morning.

“I have left each Exalt conference I have attended encouraged and better equipped to serve at church,” Exalt Lite attendee Andrew said.

"Exalt Lite 2018 was an encouraging half-day of fellowship with Perth Christian musos, equipping us with the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of singing in church,” Exalt Lite attendee Hannah added.

“We gather together as the body of Christ, and the conference was an awesome and instructive reminder that we need to keep Him central in singing for.”

"It was terrific to bring together musicians from across Perth to meet and discuss the place of music in our services, how the Bible can encourage us to play music with words that reflect the gospel of Jesus, and to chat about what is happening musically in different churches," Exalt Lite attendee John described.

The Exalt Music Ministry Committee currently consists of Liz Gordon, Matt Harding, Adam Long, Verity McNamara, Sam Rae and Kath Thornhill, with Liz, Matt, Sam and Jeff being founding members.

Starting in 2010 in the Hale School auditorium, Exalt Music Ministry Conferences run every two years and are a part of Christian Conventions of Western Australia (CCOWA). CCOWA is also responsible for Perth Children’s Ministry Convention, Perth Men’s Convention, Perth Women’s Convention, and CREDO.

For more information, visit exalt.org.au

Author – John Igglesden
watch

The Star of Christmas
VeggieTales

It is a noble desire to want to show people how to love each other more and this is at the heart of The Star of Christmas. However, it is important not to get lost in seeking glory along the way and truly seek the best for others. In The Star of Christmas, follow two different stories where things get a little lost in the middle of best intentions. Then watch how God brings about the revelation of the real Star of Christmas with the wonderful VeggieTales characters. The DVD also comes with extra features including interactive storybook The Toy That Saved Christmas and sing-alongs to give a variety of enjoyment.

listen

Peace on Earth
Casting Crowns

Peace on Earth has traditional style Christmas carols with Casting Crowns' amazing blend of vocals. Casting Crowns have done justice to the tradition of songs such as 'Joy to the World', 'God is With Us' and 'O Come All Ye Faithful'. A great album to have playing in the background on and around Christmas Day to bring the true meaning of Christmas into focus.

read

A Very Different Christmas
Rico Tice and Nate Morgan Locke

For most of my life I have loved Christmas but there have been seasons where I just wanted to cancel Christmas due to lack of interest. Rico Tice and Nate Morgan Locke put it like this, "For some, though, Christmas Day isn’t about panicked shopping or tricky diplomacy. It’s about quiet disappointment, or even desperation. To quote Charles Dickens, Christmas is both the best of times and the worst of times. It’s a time of joy and loneliness, of excitement and despair, often within the same family and even in the same heart." This pertinent paragraph from chapter one is so very true and I challenge The Advocate readers to read this small but impacting book and see Christmas differently this year. What is in a present? So much more than ever thought possible.

New Hillsong Young and Free album

On 2 November, Hillsong’s Young and Free released the live version of their third album, III (Live at Hillsong Conference).

The album was recorded live at Hillsong Conference 2018 and includes live versions of songs like ‘Love Won’t Let Me Down’, ‘Let Go’ and ‘Every Little Thing’. III (Live at Hillsong Conference) is the first live arena recording for Young and Free, featuring all the tracks from the studio album version, as well as two bonus live versions of past Young and Free hits, ‘Wake’ and ‘Sinking Deep’.

The album also features Hillsong UNITED’s frontman Joel Houston and Hillsong Worship singer Brooke Ligertwood. Singer, songwriter and worship leader Chris Tomlin also joined Young and Free on stage for a special live version of their song, ‘Heart of God’.

III (Live at Hillsong Conference) is available for purchase and digital download at hillsongstore.com.au

Author – John Igglesden
Successful SportsFest changes

Baptist Churches Western Australia’s SportsFest undertook a change in 2018, kicking off the year with a revamped look that included a new website. Participants went back in time to the 90s as they welcomed five new church teams: 1Church, Paradox, Mount Pleasant Baptist, The Salvation Army and Westminster Presbyterian.

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Young Adults Pastor Jonathan Anthony attended for his first time. He described it as an amazing weekend, even though he was only two hours into his first sport before he ended up in the emergency department with a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

“It was all worth it to see our young adults having such an incredible time,” Jonathan said.

Baptist Churches Western Australia Events Coordinator Jess Ford said it is always a joy to walk through the various venues, hearing staff members say that this is their favourite event of the year and they love having all the teams come and use their facilities.

“They love the atmosphere and the attitude of our teams – what a great testament to our churches,” Jess said.

Jess also said that it was a blessing to be able to put on this incredible event with the help of so many generous volunteers.

“Through their untricking support, we can provide a ministry event for youth and young adults from various churches,” she said.

“They can come together to compete, learn more about Jesus, try new sports and activities and meet other fellow Baptists along the way.”

Another change that took place at the 2018 event was the move of the evening service from Sunday to Saturday. This enabled a larger number of participants to take part in the service. It also allowed church coordinators and pastors to follow up participants’ life-changing commitments made that evening on the Sunday and Monday.

“We had over 70 new commitments over the weekend and I’m sure the weekend has promoted and set people in motion for future commitments to come,” Jess said.

“SportsFest 2019 is not to be missed.”

“If you’re too old to compete, you’re always welcome to sign up as a volunteer with your church team – volunteers are a huge part of this event being such a success.”

For more information, visit www.sportsfest.org.au

Pastor helps bring disc golf to Tom Price

A brand new disc golf course has opened in Tom Price, due in large part to Tom Price Baptist Church Pastor and disc golf enthusiast, Gavin Douglas.

Gavin spent a number of years lobbying the local council to install the course in the township of 4,000, and in late September, courses were opened in Tom Price and Paraburdoo, making the Shire of Ashburton the first remote mining town to embrace the sport.

The nine-hole Tom Price course is located at Minna Oval and is set amongst eucalypts and has a subtle elevation change, creating a challenging course for beginners.

“I didn’t want to create another club – I wanted to create something that anyone can go to at any time during the day,” Gavin said.

“It’s free to use and free to play. Just rock up to the park and throw a disc.”

“What I love about disc golf and my faith is that both support community engagement.”

“It’s a way of connecting with people. You stroll along and talk about life together.”

Author – Matt Chapman

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Jer 29:11