



the pulse

PRESBYTERIAN

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COVER: Anna and Luca Grocott enjoy the bright colours of spring with their Bunica (grandmother) in the Timisoara city centre. Read about the Grocott family's ministry.

Editorial

KAREN FORMAN



COVID-19 has certainly changed how we do things at the PCNSW/ACT. From churches running services online, to coming up with creative ministries to reach people in lockdown, to our General Office staff working from home rather than Surry Hills, the past six months have seen big changes.

But as we have seen and have reported upon in the past seven online editions of The Pulse, change is not necessarily negative. Remember the story from Coffs Harbour about numbers of people tuning into online services quadrupling the regular attendances? The incredible online ministries out of Dubbo which connected a lot of non Christians with the Church?

Even our decision to publish The Pulse online monthly rather than as a printed magazine bimonthly (due to the fact churches were not open for people to collect their copies) has had its advantages. Publishing monthly has allowed us to run up to the minute news stories and to be able to use more material without being limited by publishing costs. Publishing online has given us time to accept later contributions at a time when most people are stressed and struggling to get by.

As my 14 year old daughter, Gabriella, who has grown up alongside the magazine I became founding editor of when she was two, said just last week, "Good things are coming

out of this pandemic, Mum. God does His best work in the dark." Something she picked up from the late Rev John Thompson, a close family friend.

Here in the Snowy Mountains, we have during the pandemic seen the formation of a Hub of Christian people of all denominations, including tucked away Presbyterians who do not have a church here, which has been hugely popular. Using Facebook and Instagram and a weekly newspaper column, people have been connecting and meeting other Christians or even learning for the first time that people they knew, were Christians. It would not have happened without COVID-19. God's hand was also seen when Gabi was baptised "as an adult" in the Alpine Church at Perisher and once it was known that numbers were limited due to COVID-19, RSVPs came in thick and fast - including from many non Christians who were blessed during the service and say they want to keep attending!

While we are all looking forward to a return to "normality", especially singing, as our Moderator Andrew Campbell discusses in his column this edition and as remarked upon in our report on a meeting involving PCNSW and the Premier, I am encouraged by Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." and Exodus 14:14, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still".

Premier addresses churches on COVID-19



NSW Moderator, Rev Andrew Campbell and General Manager, Jeof Falls, took part in a NSW Government Religious Communities Forum on October 1, at which the NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, spoke and took questions.

The Forum comprised representatives from all religious faiths in NSW and has been regularly convened and chaired by Multicultural NSW during the past seven months.

Mr Falls said the Premier was open and informal in her comments and explanations, and thanked all religious communities for assisting her in reducing infection rates through abiding by NSW Health restrictions for the sake of the health of friends and neighbours.

“She also expressed her thanks for those who uphold her in prayer, which she affirmed she needs at all times,” he said.

During the Zoom meeting, the Premier and NSW Health explained:

1. For the next few weeks, with many metropolitan families holidaying in rural and regional areas, NSW Health is waiting to assess whether any infections spread to regional communities before considering further lifting of restrictions;

2. While the Premier is thankful that the infection rate is so low, she and NSW Health are not prepared to reduce the current 4 sqm rule for the time being. However, they explained that they are constantly monitoring the easing of restrictions based on health evidence;

3. The Premier explained that the reason

for apparent inconsistencies between large venues allowed up to 50 per cent capacity and places of worship limited to 100 subject to the 4sqm rule (150 for weddings) is due to relationships between congregants in a church being naturally much closer than complete strangers in a public venue or park. She explained that she deeply understands why religious communities are sensitive to apparent inconsistencies like this, but reinforced her and NSW Health’s concern for members of religious gatherings tending to mix far more closely than strangers in a public venue;

4. In response to questions about singing and musical instruments, NSW Health agreed that they were still needing to ensure rules for schools were applied consistently in places of worship, with further advices expected in coming weeks. The rules relating to singing remain up to five singers at the front, distanced 1.5m apart and all singers facing towards the congregation not towards each other and at least five metres from the congregation. No communal singing or choirs are allowed, even with masks, and wind instruments should not to be used.

The Forum thanked the Premier for attending the meeting and for her open responses to questions.

Mr Falls said the comments related only to churches in NSW, and churches in the ACT would need to continue to refer to ACT Government Public Health directions.

“Please do not hesitate to contact us in Church Offices should you have any questions or require assistance in interpreting the restrictions to your local circumstances,” he said.



Why serve in Romania?

Whilst Romania is considered a very religious nation, with more than 90 per cent of the population of 20 million classifying themselves as Christian, to many this may mean little more than a cultural identity or simply attending a church, rather than an active relationship with the living Jesus Christ.

Jennifer and Adi saw that while Protestant Christians were keen to have children as a part of their church, many lacked the training and resources needed to effectively reach children in their communities with the Gospel. They also saw that in many places children were only taught a moral gospel of being ‘good boys and girls’, and so we were struck with the need to encourage and equip local Christians to teach children how to become followers of the Lord Jesus and grow in their faith.

It is their desire to encourage and equip local Christians to share the gospel of Jesus with the children of Romania, so that all children through every part of Romania get to hear and respond to Jesus. While we are based in the western part of Romania in Timisoara, we pray that our ministry will extend to other parts of Romania, especially rural and village communities where access to training and resources for children’s ministry can be very limited. We are seeking to partner with existing children’s workers and ministries using our gifts, skills and training to equip local Christians to share the gospel with unreached children.



Jennifer and Adi: Brought together to serve God

Jennifer and Adi Grocott grew up on opposite sides of the earth, but God brought them together while serving in a ministry team in Timisoara, Romania in 2003. Adi (Romanian) was ministering to street kids, while Jennifer (Australian) was serving disabled children and adults. After getting married in 2008, God gave the pair a heart to see local Romanian Christians encouraged and equipped to reach children in their communities with the lifesaving gospel of Jesus. They were encouraged to pursue theological training and have both graduated from Sydney Missionary and Bible College, with Jennifer completing an Associate degree of Theology and Adi completed his Bachelor of Theology and a Masters of Arts (Theology). During their time in Australia, they were blessed with two precious children of their own – Anna and Luca. JENNIFER writes for the Pulse on their mission to Romania.

“Martha, Martha, you’re all in a flap. You are worried about this, and those and that”. My five year old daughter has these lines memorised, as “The Best Thing To Do” by Steph Williams has become a firm favourite of hers. The account of Jesus visiting Mary and Martha’s home from Luke 10:38-42, has been particularly apt for me at the moment where I find myself ‘worried and upset about many things’.

And I get the feeling that I am not alone in this, with every corner of the globe affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that it brings.

My corner of the globe is Timisoara, Romania. I first arrived in 2003 to serve disabled children in government institutions and swiftly fell in love with Romania and one particular Romanian, Adi and it has become my new home. After



spending several years in Australia studying at Sydney Missionary and Bible college, our newly enlarged family returned to Romania in 2018 with European Christian Mission and APWM to encourage and equip children's leaders in local churches.

Returning to Romania, not just as a 'missionary', but a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, friend, church member and team member, certainly took its toll. I anticipated change, I knew things would not be the same, but I could not fully comprehend it till I experienced it. The biggest change of all has been how I use my time. Gone are the days of definable work hours and clear boundaries. Life now feels like an avalanche of demands from every side and at the end of every day you look back and think "what did I do today?". Did I use my time well? Did I labour in vain? And if it wasn't already hard enough, throw COVID into the mix and you have a recipe for disaster. Or so I thought...

Initially we were overwhelmed with the demands of online schooling, helping out with streaming Sunday services for our local church and resourcing parents with Sunday school material each week. Then we became disappointed and discouraged that all the children's camps, programs, outreaches over summer were all cancelled. It was a constant struggle to not become disheartened and frustrated when yet another plan, program or idea had to be abandoned. What were we meant to do with our summer? All the things we thought we were here to DO, we couldn't do anymore. What were the good works prepared in advance for us to do during this time of lockdown and social distancing?

Thankfully we were not alone in this struggle and we found support, encouragement and accountability through our ECM family and friends. This time has reminded us (yet again) to not find our value or success in how many

programs we run or conferences we attend. Once more we remember that our worth is in our God given identity as his redeemed children, made in his image, loved and precious. We have been prompted to open our eyes to see other ways we can love and serve our family, neighbours, friends and local church. So, if that's a colleague needing mothers and their kids taxied to the local zoo, or donated mattresses transported, groceries delivered, Sunday school material prepared, assisting with tech support, a neighbour's bike needs fixing or a friend needs help building a fence we are ready to help.

At the same time, we have also been challenged to prioritise the important over the urgent. The words of Colin Buchanan run around my head with his summation of Luke 10:38-42, "Leave the good, choose the best". This time has given us the room to reflect and remember what is best and to prioritise that over many other 'good' things we could be doing. Sometimes that looks like spending time in prayer, meditating on Scripture and 'wasting time with God', as Stuart Colton, the former principal of SMBC, encouraged us to do. Other times it means looking after my health and setting time aside to do my physio exercises to manage my chronic back pain. It may mean stopping and sitting down and having quality time with our kids building Lego or making cardboard crowns. Other times it is listening to a friend going through a rough time, or making time to speak to a counsellor to help resolve ongoing struggles. It is bringing it all before our Heavenly Father and asking him for the wisdom to know how to discern what the few things are that are needed for that day, remembering that there is really only one thing that matters, listening at the feet of Jesus. "We can listen to Jesus too. Because listening to Jesus is the best thing to do."

"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long." Psalm 25:4-5

Sing to the Lord (soon, we pray!)

BY ANDREW CAMPBELL



How I am looking forward to singing again!

Praise the LORD.

Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints.

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; Let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with tambourine and harp. (Psalm 149)

In 2008 St Andrew's Wagga Wagga celebrated the centenary of the installation of their pipe organ. I wasn't as enthusiastic as some!

But I did my research, and found this gem in the Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser. It reported that on Sunday August 16 1908 there were services dedicating the new pipe organ to *the worship of God* (emphasis mine).

The reporter got that right. It wasn't just the dedication of the organ; it was the dedication of the organ to *the worship of God*. That's a Presbyterian distinction that should not be lost.

Anyway, the Right Rev John Macaulay, State Moderator took the services that day. And he was reported by the Advertiser, to say:

'We ought to praise the Lord with the very best that is in our power and consecrate to His service the best that we possess, the best means at our command, the best instruments in our power to employ. Everything that is done with our whole heart is acceptable to God for His praise. May we realise more and



more that this is done for the glory of God and not for us. The aim really is that it may lead us more fervently and more heartily to join together in the praise of God, but you will defeat that aim if your voice is silent and your interest is only in listening to the organ. The aim is to lead you, and not to

entertain and mislead you, from giving to Him the best music of your own heart and soul. May such music as that be never made here.'

Three Amens for that! Preach it, brother!

The Moderator was right. Instruments like pipe organs can mislead when they are there only to entertain us. As (dare I say it) skilled bands and pretty lights and good-looking singers. And whizz bang technology and videos on PowerPoint. And gowns and form and traditions...

May such music never be made in our churches!

And when this virus thing is over, how we'll sing!

Use this quieter time to reflect on our music and singing in services. Are our bands and instruments (pipe organs included) facilitating worship or (honesty now) mostly entertaining? Are we singing (traditional hymns or modern songs) to worship God or to feel good? Are the words (whenever written) going deep into our hearts and lives, changing us, growing us to be more like Jesus?'

'Everything that is done with our whole heart is acceptable to God for His praise. May we realise more and more that this is done for the glory of God and not for us.'

Disability and the Impact of COVID-19

BY JASON FORBES

COVID-19 has seen disruptions to daily life unknown since World War II. While most of us have been able to adapt to new working conditions and social etiquettes, the impact on people with disabilities can be profound. When talking about people with disabilities, I am referring to those who require assistance with core daily tasks such as personal care and socialising.



In my conversations with parents of adolescent children with disabilities, it's situation normal. This is because these people experience social isolation as part of their daily reality.

However, COVID-19 has impacted the lives of people with disabilities who are dependent on institutionalised care and disability support services. These are the people who are most vulnerable in our communities, and COVID-19 has increased that vulnerability. The impact of COVID-19 on these people is both indirect and direct.

Indirect impacts of COVID-19 can include medical and disability support services.

Disability is often accompanied by other medical conditions requiring medication and ongoing treatments. People on medications may find themselves struggling to acquire medications and having to make special arrangements with their doctors and pharmacists to ensure their medicinal supplies. People may also experience de-prioritising as medical resources are diverted toward more urgent needs.

Disability service providers may decide to protect staff rather than provide people who have

disabilities with support services. Such measures would leave the person with the disability in need.

There are also concerns that people with disabilities aren't being provided with guidelines for how they can protect themselves against COVID-19.

Access to clear and concise information about COVID-19 and current restrictions can also be difficult. Along with this are circumstances such as the provision of personal care that can make social distancing requirements unworkable.

Direct impacts of COVID-19 can include the application of treatments for the virus itself and supported accommodation.

While in Australia, our political and community leaders ought to be applauded for the efforts in flattening the COVID-19 curve and avoiding excessive demands on our medical system, other parts of the world have not been so blessed.

A utilitarian mentality in the economic discourse can arise that perceives COVID-19 as a virus that only affects unhealthy people. Because of the shortage of medical supplies and equipment, a person with a disability may be denied medical assistance for the sake of someone else perceived as having a "better quality of life".

Supported accommodation can also be places of higher risk. This is due to residents living in close proximity to one another, different shifts, and a greater variety of support workers due to restrictions in the broader community.

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“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” 2 TIMOTHY 2:2

METRO applications open for 2021

METRO is a two-year ministry apprenticeship providing real-life ministry experience and access to quality training. Applications for METRO in 2021 are now open and METRO would love to hear from you.

A METRO sponsorship provides financial assistance to MTS Apprentices who are members of Presbyterian Churches in NSW/ACT, but also so much more!

As a denomination we believe it is vital for our apprentices to experience the benefits of being part of the wider Presbyterian denomination. Successful applicants to the METRO program will receive not just financial assistance, but ongoing support from the committee and access to opportunities unique to the Presbyterian denomination alongside their MTS training.

For example, we recently ran a Christ College ‘experience’, where our METRO apprentices were invited to come along and join in on two normal days at Christ College. The apprentices got an opportunity to sit in classes with Bible College students, learning about church history, ministry fundamentals, Greek and Hebrew. The apprentices got an opportunity to meet Christ College students, see what Bible College life

looks like, and spent time with the Principal and some of the teaching faculty. An apprentice wrote after: "If the aim of the two days is to give us insight to what college will look like, then it's achieved its purpose! I enjoyed it - it has been quite informative for me in particular as I think about what the ministry pathway can look like past these two years of ministry training."

This is an example of some of the unique opportunities we are aiming to provide for our METRO apprentices as they undertake their training.

We are currently planning more events and opportunities for next year in order to better train and equip our apprentices as they consider going on to bible college or take on other gospel-focused ministry, such as Youth Work, Women's Ministry or Scripture Teaching, amongst other options.

Do you know someone who would be interested? Please encourage them to contact us, as applications are now open. For more information and to fill out an application form, head over to our website: <http://www.metro.edu.au/>

CONTINUED FROM P.8

DISABILITY AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

We need to think carefully about how we are going to care for and minister to people with disabilities during this time.

We need to recognise that people with disabilities are typically at higher risk compared to the broader population, and that people with disabilities are experiencing higher levels of social isolation.

We also need to be committed to the idea that human life, no matter in what form, is sacred and no one is dispensable. We need to challenge notions in our conversations and attitudes that disabled lives don't matter. Human life has inherent value in bearing the image of God and is designed to honour him. Now more than ever does that message need to be heard.

A TRIBUTE TO THE SESSION CLERK

THE THIRD PART OF AN OCCASIONAL SERIES BY ROBERT BENN, REMINISCING AT 80 YEARS

So, I was settling into another pastoral charge. The Interim Moderator commenced the process by suggesting, “Robert, you’ve finished your apprenticeship, it’s about time you started work!” I was 45. And I hadn’t forgotten the counsel, “The most important relationship in the parish is that of the minister and the Session Clerk.”



in handling complicated meetings, and didn’t always get things right.

But one thing was for sure, the Session Clerk wouldn’t hesitate to make suggestions for improvement, but privately. Indeed, such was the working relationship that practically every Saturday afternoon my half German Shepherd/Border Collie dog and I would set out for the 17 minute walk to the home of the Session Clerk. Coffee was the first thing we’d think about. And then sitting and lying around the lounge floor we’d do the ‘secret men’s business’ – discussing the announcements for tomorrow, and the best way to go about that, and of course the forthcoming Session meeting on Tuesday evening. Then home again, 22 minutes – uphill!

But I was pondering again, “Will I ever have the relationship again, that I have so much appreciated in the last Session Clerk with whom I partnered in ministry?”

I met John. I noted all his theological books. We dined at his home – a sumptuous and delectable meal. Beautiful hospitality. And it was obvious that my new Session Clerk was a consummate professional with notable standing in society. He also knew the congregation very well, and “while the ministers of the congregation preached the Word, the Session Clerk held the congregation together” (a testimony at his funeral).

John was, of course the elder who ‘did the intimations’ on Sunday morning. Note ‘intimations’, not the far less impacting ‘announcements’ of this present era. And he loved doing them in his inimitable way. Somehow, in his presentation he gripped the minds of the congregation and so often had them ‘eating out of his hand’.

I was nervous about being the called and inducted minister of this congregation – a congregation where professional men played a highly significant part in leadership and ministry. And the place of women’s ministry was highly respected, and played such an important role in the life and services of the church. A missionary minded and generous congregation. My cry, “Lord, you called. Your people confirmed this call. Help!”

John had had some deep, deep disappointments in life. Grievous. He rang me in respect to one of these to make an appointment to talk it through. In my study he wept, and sought counsel. This was forthcoming, and though I didn’t really expect him to follow my counsel to the letter, nevertheless he followed it. When his grief was dealt with, and with it a new spiritual experience, indeed very new to him, he was back at the lectern giving the ‘intimations’. But they came from a man transformed in the hands of the Spirit of God. The positive effect on the congregation was both ‘electric’ and sustained. I rejoiced.

Session meetings were large. Business was extensive. Debate was robust. The Session Clerk would always have spent much time with me, thinking through the business, and the directions that debate might take. Agendas were prepared, proposals made in respect to possible decisions.

I never said it, but was keenly of the mind that the Session Clerk would ‘watch my back’! I needed to grow in wisdom, knowledge and competence

So, was I going to build a relationship with this Session Clerk like has been the one with the last Session Clerk? O yes. Very different from the last, but a resounding YES! And for that I have profound praise to God.



Thank You: Lives will be Transformed!



The women in this photo rose up with their Bibles while singing a hymn in the Nuer language "We did not buy these gifts. It is Jehovah who gave them to us." Their hearts were moved by God's generosity through the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

In 2018 APWM ran an appeal for funds for Nuer-language Bibles and Nuer audio Bibles for the blind. Individuals and congregations gave very generously toward this life-changing project.

We praise God that 9,000 Nuer-language Bibles and 200 Nuer audio Bibles are now in the hands of believers in the refugee camps. This work was co-ordinated by our missionary in the camps, Motor Yat, together with his wife Julia.

The Bibles were received with joy! One pastor gathered his flock and said "The support given to the refugees by believers in the Australian Presbyterian Church will not be in vain. Our God is generous and He will bless all who support us in the refugee camps with the Bibles."

Motor Yat assembled another group and asked "How can we transform the lives of the people in the camps? The Bible is the only Word that speaks to human life and transforms the worst men and women. Reading it will make us a source of blessing in our families, in our churches, and in our communities, and a blessing to our nation. The Holy Spirit works through the Word."

These refugees have been displaced from South Sudan by the ongoing civil war. They receive their food from the United Nations. They have now received the Word of God, living, spiritual food, from us. The refugees pray for peace for South Sudan so they can return home.

Through your generosity, lives will be transformed because God's Word achieves His purpose. Thank you!

To watch a video about this please go to:
<https://vimeo.com/451097255>



The Rev James Kaujean, a blind pastor with his audio Bible in one hand and a Nuer Bible in the other. When he preaches he holds the Bible, so that people will see that the authority rests not with his words, but the Word of God.



COVID-19 and our Partner Churches



Pastors from Timor Leste

How have we been able to assist the pastors in our Partner Churches who don't have access to the blessings that we so easily take for granted?

India

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) has approximately 40 pastors and evangelists whose income has dropped. APWM recently sent some extra income to assist them.

Ethiopia

COVID-19 has meant that many of the congregations in the Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia have been unable to meet. This has led to a severe drop in income for pastors. APWM recently sent a few months' salary to the pastors to enable them to keep on serving.

Myanmar

Through dedicated gifts that APWM receives for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, APWM has been able to supplement the income of pastors to assist them during COVID-19.

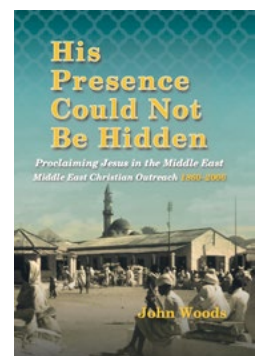
Timor Leste

The congregations in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Timor Leste have stopped meeting

and this has meant that the income of some pastors has plummeted to zero. Those who usually supplement their small stipend through small businesses have generally seen that supplementary income completely disappear. APWM had some dedicated funds for the support of needy pastors in Timor Leste and so we have sent funds to assist.

His Presence Could Not Be Hidden

His Presence Could Not Be Hidden traces the history of Middle Eastern Christian Outreach (MECO) commencing in Syria 1860 and in Egypt 1898, then through to 2006.



These were years of turbulent civil wars and international conflict.

How did God use MECO to give hope in those days? How was the Word of God shared? The dedication and faithfulness, the triumphs and tragedies, the successes and disappointments of God's servants are recounted.

The author, the Rev Dr John Woods, is a former MECO missionary to Eritrea, and a NSW Presbyterian minister.

The book is published by Eider Press and contains about 100 photographs and some maps. Cost is \$30 and postage \$10. For further details please contact John, bejow@hotmail.com

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PIM'S POSITIVE COVID VIBES

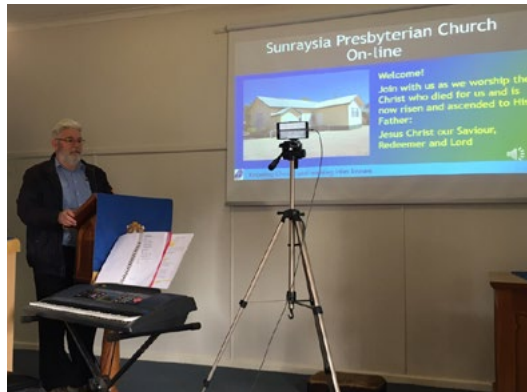
Colin and Alison Morrow have now been serving with PIM in the Mungo Patrol for over six and a half years.

In that time, they have visited many stations and farms to share of the hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

As the years have gone by, they have made a number of long-term acquaintances; people whom they visit regularly. These people have become like an outback parish. Before COVID-19 hit, Colin and Alison were trying to see them roughly once a month.

Some of the folk are older and alone, some are middle-aged and there are also young families with a number of children. There is a wide variety of people out there with many and various needs. The COVID-19 crisis has affected the patrol as, with travel restrictions and border closures, Colin and Alison haven't been able to see people as they normally would.

They are thankful for the age of technology which means they have been able to continue their



patrol work via phone, email and social media. While a phone call or an email is not the same as a face-to-face visit, Colin and Alison are certainly thankful for the Lord's provision in having a means to stay in contact with people during this crisis.

As with many other Churches, they have been putting their Church services and Bible studies online.

This is something positive that has come out of the COVID-19 pandemic as many of these people on remote properties would not normally be able to attend Church or Bible study. Being able to attend a church service or Bible study online has been a great blessing for many.

So, the work continues, although in a very different way to anything Colin and Alison could have imagined when they began their work with PIM. The Gospel continues to go out to those in remote and isolated places. While things may be different for a time, we pray that Colin and Alison will be able to get back to face-to-face meetings with all their patrol people very soon.

CONTINUED FROM P.16

SIN IS NO LIGHT MATTER

God cannot just let by-gones be by-gones. That was not possible; there was no other way (Matt.26:39).

Those who reject the Son of God's death on the cross for sinners are believing peace, peace, when there is no peace. They think they have a little cold when they really have cancer. They take refuge in

a few fig leaves when what is needed is the sinless one dying on behalf of sinners.

Edward Henry Bickersteth asked and answered:
Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Beware the false peace, the counterfeit peace - the power of positive thinking, eastern meditation, adherence to a cult. The Lord's peace is offered far and wide, and is full of wonderful promises, but not all receive it (Isa.57:19-21).

SIN IS NO LIGHT MATTER

JEREMIAH 6:14

N

othing chills any attempt to make Christ known more than a complacent belief that there really is nothing major wrong with humanity. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the majority of modern education theory, childhood development theory, psychology, and the legal system is based on this false premise. The Bible will not make sense unless people realise that God is unutterably holy, and we are steeped in sin. If we see God as some vague being who is slightly bigger than us, then what Jeremiah says here will simply be grossly offensive.

1. False prophets make the wrong diagnosis.

The false prophets and priests are full of a bland optimism. They look out on the people of Judah and see only a superficial wound, and so they proclaim peace when there is no peace (Jer.6:13-14). Sometimes those who are supposed to heal actually spread the disease.

Before the time of Joseph Lister, surgeons often used to take pride in how much blood was splattered over their coats. Without realising it, they were actually spreading disease and death. It was Lister who encouraged cleansing in carbolic acid, and this led to a remarkable reduction in the number of dangerous infections. Get the diagnosis wrong, and there are terrible consequences.

My grandmother used to say when we fell over: 'Rub it and laugh.' That is good advice if the injury is nothing serious. The nineteenth century American poet, Walt Whitman, wrote in his *Leaves of Grass*: 'I celebrate myself, and sing to myself.' His philosophy of life was as complacent as it gets: 'I have never had any particular religious experiences - never felt that I needed to be saved - never felt the need of spiritual regeneration - never had any fear of hell or distrust of the scheme of the universe. I always felt that it was perfectly right and for the best.' No wonder he was a pantheist, not a Christian.



2. False prophets give a misplaced assurance.

The prophets and priests promise peace, but there is no peace. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, returned from Munich in September 1938 and announced that his discussions with Hitler would mean 'peace for our time' - just as Benjamin Disraeli promised after the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Where did Chamberlain go wrong? He underestimated evil. He did not believe that people could be evil, so he trusted Hitler. Beware the one who comes to you with soothing words (Jer. 30:12-15).

The Word of God tells us what we need to hear, not what we want to hear. It wounds us before it heals us. Beware of one who only aims to heal. It may turn out to be no healing at all. We are not at peace with God just because some complacent prophet or priest pronounces us at peace (note Rom.5:1; 2 Cor.5:20-21). It is the blood of the cross which brings peace, the announcement that Christ has paid the death penalty for sinners. The one who announces that everyone who dies goes to be with the Lord and is at peace is a false prophet, and is especially dangerous. The ancient path is not some nostalgia for the 1950s but a return to the law of God (Jer.6:16). There are two ways to live - or perhaps one way to live and a million ways to die.

3. God takes sin so seriously that His Son died for sinners.

God takes sin very seriously. Hence He sent a world-wide flood (Gen.6:5-8), and the Old Testament sacrificial system (e.g. Lev.6:1-7). This leads us to the sacrifice of Christ. What is the meaning of it? The Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, declared: 'if thou wouldst see what sin is, go to mount Calvary'. What was the purpose of Christ's going deliberately to die such an excruciating death? (Matt.26:53) He could have stopped it all but He did not! Why not? He came to give His life as a ransom for sinners (Mark 10:45).

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