

# The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2024 MAY/JUNE

## Mission Minded

BEARDY WATERS

*En route to Tenterfield Mission 2024. PHOTO: Angelina Sheely, 4th year Moore College student*

## Moving forward in mission

**The Reverend Jonathan Earnshaw**

Christ Church, Tenterfield

**WHEN I ARRIVED IN TENTERFIELD IN JANUARY 2022, CHRIST Church** was reeling from various challenges and the effects of COVID lockdowns in a parish that was vacant throughout that difficult period. The parish was in 'survival' mode and the people were worn out. With the appointment of a vicar, the 'flat-line' began to show flickers of revival. Attendances started picking up. People showed interest in ministries which hadn't functioned for some time with a youth group restarting. Younger families began to gather (with a little baby boom). Major work was done to repair the 'tired' building. And God's people began to express feelings of encouragement.

But as important as these 'baby steps' were, to continue moving forward we needed to have an outward vision. We began with a focus on mission. We selected a number of mission agencies who we supported in prayer. And we introduced regular 'mission spots' in our services. A focus on overseas mission feels 'safe' because it's happening over there. But the test of gospel vision comes with sharing the gospel among your family and friends. So, the climax of our outward vision was the decision of Parish Council to invite a team from Moore College to partner with us in an outreach to the Tenterfield community.

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The parish hosted a Moore College Mission from the 7th to the 14th of April when a team of 18 came to share with us. It was a time of mutual encouragement and learning as members of Christ Church, Tenterfield were encouraged and trained while the members of the Moore College team were given valuable insights into ministry in a rural context. And the people of Tenterfield were blessed with the faithful preaching of the gospel.

It was hard work. And not just for the week of Mission. Amanda Davidson (one of our organising committee members) writes:

*In April 2023 Christ Church, Tenterfield applied to Moore Theological College to hold a mission in Tenterfield. We formed a committee of three and the mission timetable started to form. Our hope was for each ministry group to organise their own event to entice members of the Tenterfield community to come and hear the gospel. The theme for our week of mission was "Really Alive" (a continuation of our Easter message). Invitations started to appear and the extensive email trail between Christ Church and Moore College began.*

*The mission week was covered in prayer from the very beginning as the congregation were encouraged to pray for the people they would like to invite to our evangelistic events and a fortnightly prayer meeting was held in preparation.*

So, this was not just a week of mission. The planning, preparation, and prayer began almost a year before the team arrived. One of the great benefits of the mission was the ministry of hospitality that was afforded to the team. Our caterers (Val Davidson, Jessie Morrow, and Sandy King) laid on lavish lunches for the team's daily get-together for planning and debriefing. In addition, many people opened their homes to billet team members. Allan and Heather Williams write:

*It was a privilege and a delight for us to have four of the Moore College mission team stay with us during their eight days in Tenterfield. It is our experience that in all service to the Lord, one receives far more than one gives, and this was no exception. We hosted:*

*Ted Brush, (one of the chaplains), a qualified electrical engineer who has also ventured into the corporate world, becoming a senior manager with McDonalds, and could have accepted international postings with them if he so desired. He continues to serve with Bush Church Aid despite being 'semi-retired', alongside locum duties and support of his own parish in the Blue Mountains, as well as his commitments to Moore College.*

*Simon and Angelina Sheely, a qualified physiotherapist and speech therapist respectively. They are a newly married couple and showed great interest in the dynamics of our almost 57 years of marriage.*

*Jenny Tait, who drew the 'short straw' as she got the short single bed, although she is a very tall international volleyball 'star'. (She would be too modest to make that claim.) With some imaginative rearrangement of mattresses this situation was improved, and Jenny graciously accepted it without complaint.*

*Our guests were appreciative, polite, considerate, and helpful, and a pleasure to have around. On the Saturday when the men were at Bolivia Hall, the three 'Girls' had a fun-filled time playing Liverpool Canasta, a card game introduced to us by Reverend Keith Doe. For us, billeting equals blessing.*

How has the mission been a success? Well, the community of Tenterfield has heard the gospel faithfully proclaimed.

Vicar's warden Hughie McCowen writes:

*On Sunday the 7th of April, 18 students and two chaplains arrived in Tenterfield from Moore College to partner with Christ Church Anglican in a week of Christian activity.*

*Our mission was a much-anticipated event with many months of preparation taking place. Firstly, a regular prayer group was established, and all of our church encouraged to make a list of people we could invite to mission activities and pray in advance for those people.*

*Our mission week included four church services, a mentoring evening with local ministry leaders, Christian SRE seminars and assemblies at our local public schools, ministry within our aged-care facilities, two men's dinners, a women's coffee and dessert night, a women's morning tea, lunch with Bishop Rod, a youth group wood-fired pizza event, and door-knock evangelism throughout Tenterfield.*

*The whole week was an enormous encouragement to our church and the Tenterfield community. Our mission provided so many opportunities to invite people to mission events, and we saw many people attend a Christian event for the first time, or for the first time in many years. We had many very positive responses and a number of people would like to be followed up with a phone call or to attend a Christianity Explained course.*

The greatest measure of success though, has been in the movement in the parish of Christ Church itself during the past two and a half years, growing from a church in 'COVID survival' mode to a church reaching out with the gospel from Tenterfield to the ends of the earth. It has been God's gentle hand that has guided the parish to its current position and continues to move us forward in the maturity spoken of in Ephesians 4:14-16, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

## From the Moore College Mission Team:



We had an amazing week at Christ Church, Tenterfield meeting our Christian brothers and sisters and making connections with locals who don't yet know Jesus. The team has been incredibly encouraged by all that God has been doing through the saints in Tenterfield and we look forward to hearing about what he will continue to do.

Please thank God:

- For the faithful saints of Tenterfield and for how God has worked through them over the years

Please pray:

- For the ongoing work of God's family in Tenterfield
- For those who heard the gospel during the mission week to come to know God personally

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*Emily Wilmshurst, Dave Park, David Spragg, Tadiwanashe Munetsi and Ruth Alexander at All Saints', Moree.*

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## Ruth Alexander

I AM BLESSED TO HAVE GROWN UP IN A CHRISTIAN HOME, attending a small but nurturing church called The Oaks Anglican, mostly comprised of retirees and young families. I can't remember a time when I didn't consider myself a Christian, but there have been several times where I have seen God at work in my life and the lives of people around me that have really encouraged me in my faith.

One of these was seeing the response of the church family when my dad had a severe stroke in 2015. Witnessing the congregation's care and dedication to praying for our family, including helping my dad with his rehab for a whole year so that my mum could keep caring for my sisters and me, was incredible. The doctors told us it was a miracle my dad learnt to walk, talk and do many other things again, but everyone who knows dad can see how God was working through his church to care for my dad and give him new opportunities to evangelise to people such as his speech therapist and many strangers.

After finishing Year 12 I applied for all sorts of degrees, eventually deciding to do a Bachelor of Zoology in Armidale where I've been fortunate to live with my grandma. My mum had recommended St Mark's UNEchurch to me and very early on I could see that it was a theologically sound, welcoming and vibrant church full of young adults as well as many older, more mature Christians who have been a great encouragement to my faith.

Each year the St Mark's and UNE Christians United (CU) group send students to the National Training Event (NTE) in Canberra, which is a conference for Uni students to be trained and sent back to their

campuses and broader community to share the gospel. As part of this conference, Uni groups run missions to churches across Australia, and for the last few years St Mark's has been running missions to Moree and Glen Innes. My first mission was to Moree in 2022, and I returned as a part of last year's mission team.

Prior to the mission, the five of us on the team met a few times to talk about the events we would be part of, with the main preparation involving praying that God would use us to help his church in whatever serving opportunities arose.

We drove to Moree on Thursday, November 23rd, arriving for dinner with the Thompsons (the assistant minister of All Saints' Anglican and his family), before heading off to meet our host families. On the Friday morning we had a working bee at the church, then some of us joined a Bible study and others went to help with Special Religious Education (SRE) in one of the local schools, before later meeting with The Reverend Geoff Hearne. After dinner with our billets, we returned to the church for youth group and had a great time getting to know the kids, running games and teaching them from God's word.

On Saturday we joined a second working bee, shared in a meeting and devotion with the ministry team of the church, helped set up for the evening, visited some parishioners and had free time to explore before we joined the women's wreath making and dessert night where the boys served in the kitchen.

On the final day, we attended the 7:30am service where Tadi gave his testimony, before we joined the parishioners for breakfast at a

# Evangelising at home



*The ten Glen Innes mission team members.*

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## Luke Mephram

I GREW UP ON A PROPERTY IN GLEN Innes and attended various youth camps as well as church with my family, and I would have always called myself a Christian. But it wasn't until I was 15 that I started taking Christianity seriously with the help of a leader who was challenging me to do just that.

I have a passion for the agriculture industry and want to work in it, and it's this love that has opened a pathway to furthering my studies through attending university. With the University of New England (UNE) being so close and being a great place to study agriculture, it was a clear choice for me. Moving to Armidale, I knew it would be important to get involved with a church and I made St Mark's UNE church my home because it is a loving and welcoming church with good biblical teaching and many other Christians my age.

Every year the Christians United group at UNE puts out a form so that people can express their interest in doing a mission at a smaller church in a different town. With Glen Innes being my home town I thought it would be a good way to return and encourage my old church, and help out where I could.

Preparation for this involved contacting the

other students who have expressed interest in being a part of the mission and contacting the minister of the local church, as well as meeting together as a team to catch up, to organise roles, to pray and to talk about the opportunities that we have to serve and spread the gospel to the people in Glen Innes, not just minister in the church.

The mission team was in Glen Innes for four days (Thursday to Sunday). We went throughout town handing out flyers for the church fete held that weekend, as well as helping to set up the fete and run various activities for children. On Thursday and Saturday nights the team split up and went to church Bible studies and events for men/women. Team members would either write and run a Bible study, or do a personal testimony. On Friday night, the team ran youth group with various games, cooked dinner, did a short Bible talk and encouraged the youth in their journey with Christ. On Sunday, members of the team did the music for the family service, ran Sunday school and gave a testimony.

It was amazing to see how the group grew as a team and encouraged each other over this time. Witnessing how many people from the

community were willing to talk about faith and the Bible encouraged the team that people are out there and wanting to talk about God, and opened doors to evangelism.

Some of the biggest challenges that I faced and saw others in the team also face involved being pushed out of our comfort zones, including times where we were going out to share our faith and the Bible knowing that it was for God and the benefit of others. I grew in my confidence to be able to this as it's something I never thought I would be able to do. A blessing has been seeing how the team members have grown in their faith and their confidence to step out of their comfort zones to spread the gospel, as well as in their relationships with other Christians.

If you are thinking about joining a mission team, I'd say jump in and give it a go with the mindset that it's for God and that he is the one who is actually doing all the work. Lean on him for understanding, strength, wisdom and confidence. It might seem scary at first, but with the support from God and our Christian brothers and sisters we are able to fulfill the mission that Jesus has sent us out to do — just as he sent out the first disciples.

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*from page 3*

café, returning for the 9:30am service to help with music and the kids' programs. After church, we had morning tea with the congregation before heading back to Armidale.

All Saints' Church was amazing at providing us with food and accommodation. Meeting with the ministry team and parishioners was very encouraging, and gave us opportunities to listen and learn from their wisdom and life experience. It was awesome to lead at youth group and kids' church and see the understanding and biblical knowledge that many of the kids have. Another blessing involved witnessing the gospel opportunities created for women, with around 60 women, (many of whom were not regular church goers), able to meet Christians in their community and hear a gospel talk that was relevant and helpful.

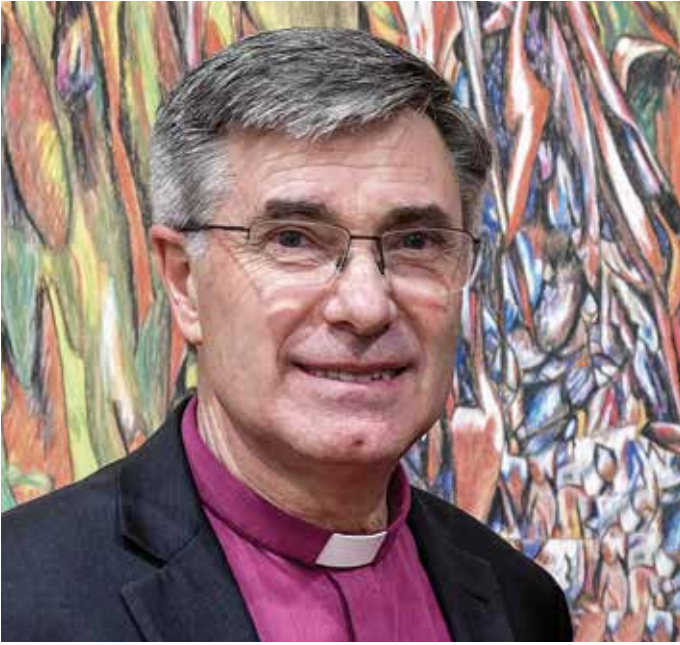
One longer-term benefit of going on mission has been the way it has made me consider how I can better serve in my own church. Having the opportunity to try out different roles has helped me realise that God can use me to serve him in areas where I hadn't thought I was particularly well equipped, so I have been encouraged to say yes to

more opportunities.

I also have a greater appreciation for the varied ways churches run, prompting thought about the possibilities for faithful worship and evangelism in different places, and greater reflection on evangelism in the context of CU and St Mark's on the UNE campus and the broader Armidale community. Going out to serve as a team has also helped me appreciate the blessing of brothers and sisters in Christ that help train and equip us to serve God.

Mission can sound daunting, especially to an introverted person like myself! But it provides a chance to step outside your comfort zone and spend time focused on serving others for God's glory. It's not about what we feel we can do for the community, but what we're willing to let God do through us. If we truly trust that God can use us despite all our weaknesses, he can give us the words to speak and use any mistakes we make along the way for his glory.

It's a wonderful blessing that we live in a country where we can freely preach Christ, so why not give it a go?



## Our logical service

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### Bishop Rod Chiswell

**GREETINGS FROM ARMIDALE AS WE BRACE OURSELVES TO** head into winter. May and June are the prime time for conferences in our diocese. Next Phase 2024, the Armidale Preaching Conference, Clergy Wives Conference, the Coledale Gospel Rally, the Lay Preacher Training Day, and the Keepit Dam Clergy Conference all happen in these two months. We are greatly blessed through them all as they present valuable opportunities to gather for refreshment and refuel to live lives of service for God's glory.

It is right and good that we frame our lives as servants of God living for his glory. In Romans 12:1 the Apostle Paul puts it like this. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship." God's mercy to us can be clearly seen in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us, that we might be made right with God and saved from his wrath (Romans 5:8-9). Therefore, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is our spiritual act of worship or, more literally, our logical/ reasonable service. In other words, in view of God's mercy, serving God with all we are, is logical: it makes perfect sense.

So, the question all of us must ask and answer in view of God's mercy is this, "How can I best serve God with the gifts he has entrusted to me?"

A good starting point for working out how we can best serve the Lord with our lives, is to have a right view of ourselves. Paul's advice is this, "For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3). We must all have a right view of ourselves to be useful in God's service. This verse is saying that as Christians we shouldn't have tickets on ourselves on the outside or the inside. We are to be humble rather than proud, not just in how we speak about ourselves to others, but in how we think about ourselves before God. There is no place for pride in the Christian life.

Everything we have has been given to us by God, our salvation, our

practical skills, our wealth, our word skills, every ability we have has been graciously given to us by God. In light of this we should be thankful and ask, "Lord, help me not to think more highly of myself than I ought. Help me to think of myself with sober judgment, and to remember that I'm a sinner saved by grace, made useful in your service only through faith in Jesus." Brothers and sisters, God hears and answers prayers like this one, and whether we are clergy or laity we need to ask God for his help lest we become proud.

Now while some may fall into the trap of thinking of themselves more highly than they ought, I think others fail to think of themselves realistically in the opposite sense as well. And so, you have Christian people who tend to feel inadequate when it comes to serving. They might say "O no, I could never do that." Sometimes it stems from a sense of guilt or unworthiness, other times it might be a simple lack of self-confidence. If we find ourselves there, we need to remember the truth of who we are through faith in Christ. The reality is that when we decide to trust in Jesus as Saviour and follow him as Lord, he forgives us from sin and makes us righteous before God. We become members of the body of Christ, his Spirit dwells within us, and he gives us gifts with which to serve.

Paul reminds us of this in Romans 12:4-6a, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us..." As Christians we are all members of one body. A Christian is never an island, Christian faith is not individualistic. We belong together and we serve together each member playing our part. Now the obvious question that arises from all of this is, "How might I best serve in the life of my church?" I'll say more on this in the next edition of *The Link*, but why not start by praying, "Lord, please give me eyes to see how I might best serve in my church with the gifts you've entrusted to me.?" May God strengthen us all in his service and for his glory.

With love in Christ, Rod.



# Healthy masculinity

Peter Smith, Ross Thompson and Al Stewart.

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## Stephen Bailey Narrabri Anglican Church

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN, IN particular, a God-honouring Christian man?** That is what over 300 men who attended Men@Glen 2024 were challenged to consider. The speaker, Al Stewart, went through many aspects of masculinity – how a man expresses being male, how it's something the world is trying to suppress, that it's something men have failed to understand and take seriously, and something that as Christian men we need to have a firm grasp of. The definition that Al gave for healthy masculinity is: 'A willingness to take responsibility and use the power you have, to care for and nurture those around you.'

### The key takeaways were:

Turn up with endurance and patience. Al drew on Colossians 1:9-11, a prayer Paul prayed for the church at Colossae, to point out that as men we need to tackle all life gives with endurance and patience. He pointed out life will not always be easy, in fact, it will often feel like Groundhog Day, going through the same old same old. But endure with patience and turn up for those you have committed to

as you seek to live a life worthy of the Lord.

Masculinity is not a bad thing. In fact, it's very good. Unfortunately, there are two problems with how men deal with masculinity – the abuse of power (toxic masculinity) and passiveness (not 'turning up'). Both problems have severe consequences, but both can be overcome with a greater understanding of healthy masculinity – taking responsibility and caring for those around you.

### My reflections post event:

I am so grateful for Jesus! I am grateful that despite my brokenness he has enabled me to endure through the heartaches of life. I am grateful that despite my selfishness he has enabled me to have patience through the boredom that comes with the repetitiveness of life. I am grateful that he is my identity, that I can be content in life knowing who my saviour is and what he has done for me.

Knowing all of this I can turn up! I can joyfully go through life with this contentment. I can see God's blessing in the little things each and every day, giving thanks joyfully.

I understand my role more clearly, that to

be truly masculine is to use the gifts, abilities and strengths that God has given me for the service of others.

How this looks for me as a husband, father of four (two boys, two girls) and member of my local church:

As Paul wrote in Ephesians, I will love my wife as Christ loved the church. Part of turning up for her involves sacrifice. It involves getting up and doing things to help rather than watching TV or playing computer games. It involves recognising my wife as a child of God and honouring her as such. It involves understanding who she is more deeply as an individual so I can always care for her needs. It involves pointing her to Jesus.

I will teach my kids the gospel, and not only teach it, but live it, like in Deuteronomy 6. For my boys in particular, I will model for them what it is to be a godly man, showing them the importance of God's word, showing them how to use our power as men for the good of others.

I will make the effort to come beside my brothers in Christ, to encourage and rebuke, and to point them to Jesus – the one who has saved us and given us our new identity.



## Book review

**The men we need: God's purpose for the manly man, the avid indoorsman, or any man willing to show up**

Brant Hansen

Baker Books, 2022

There is never a time that is wrong to consider who we are as men (or women). God's good creation design in our flesh, in our God-created biology and gender, is always with us. But, at a time like this, when we are confronted by the scourge of domestic violence, when manliness is contested, when who we are in the flesh is debated, Brant Hansen's book is a helpful read.

Hansen is not your 'typical' man (and the subtitle gives something of this away). And this self-deprecating humour is part of this book's appeal. Written clearly, with an obvious aim, and expressed in helpfully self-mocking (but not belittling) humour, this consideration of being a man is winsome, helpful, and thought-provoking.



Hansen starts at the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, with God's creative design and intent. Focusing on Genesis 2:15, Hansen helpfully describes God's design of men as 'keepers of the garden' (p.17). Manliness is defined by God. Manliness is created by God. Manliness – true and good manliness – is expressed when it tends to the garden that God has created, and the image-bearers he has placed there.

Hansen then unpacks this definition in six key decisions that every man must make, so that they express good and true manliness. The impetus for such a framework stems from the decision of Adam not to take on this responsibility, but to descend into 'passivity' when he was faced by the key gardening decision he had to make – the decision described in Genesis 3, and described in our culture as 'the Fall'. These six decisions enable, encourage and equip readers to make solid, biblical, decisions to take up their role as 'tenders of the garden', for the benefit of all those around them, and society at large.

I really enjoyed this read – clear, confrontational, and displaying an obvious honouring of God and Jesus. Hansen's writing is easy to understand, easy to digest, and difficult to avoid – he writes in an easy compelling way that does not miss the mark! I would recommend this book to any man.

That said, I did have three concerns.

First, I think Hansen does not delve deeply enough into the horror and reality and biblical description of 'sin'. In his exposition, 'sin' (as in the first sin, and the nature of sin thereafter) is the avoidance of responsibility. To put it simply, it is 'passivity' in the face of God's clear design. I think however, that sin is more serious, more deeply damaging, than this in God's word. It is not 'passivity' but an active rebellion against God, and a grasping at his throne for our own benefit. It is to act, and think, that 'God is not, and I am God' (just glance at Psalm 2). Sin is not passivity – it is rebellion.

Second, and this is the consequence of such a definition of sin, the antidote to sin is not to be passive, but to make an active decision to take up the responsibility embedded in God's design for men. And, yet, this underplays the deep and abiding damage of sin on the nature of humanity – just read Ephesians 2:1-3 to see how sin has damaged both our actions AND our ability to choose and think. My sinful nature as a man cannot be dealt with by my decision-making, because even my ability to decide has been damaged by sin! In this sense, when Hansen describes God's great love as being expressed in his desire for our freedom, and when Hansen describes God's great want as our loyalty, we have still to deal with the great issue that I cannot, by my nature, choose that!

Third, and this is the consequence, salvation from sin becomes an issue of my decision, rather than God's gracious intervention in the nature of the true man, Jesus Christ. For a clear biblical cold shower that describes this, have a look at Ephesians 2:4-10. Can you see how Hansen's description of sin actually leads to a grace-lite description of the gospel? In this sense, I think his book would have been strengthened by moving from the Garden to Jesus, and then the six decisions, rather than finishing with Jesus.

Those queries aside, I would still encourage fellas everywhere – and mothers, wives, and daughters – to read this book. It is easy. It is clear. It is honouring of God. And it speaks to an issue we deal with every day!

The Reverend Bernard Gabbott

Ross Thompson highlighted this last aspect particularly well in his testimony at Men@Glen. He identified two areas from his own life: The first being the older wiser men from his past who continued to regularly keep in contact with him, to encourage him and pray with him. The second was his small group at his local church. Ross talked about how encouraging it was to meet weekly with others to read God's word, to be open and vulnerable, and to pray together. I felt encouraged to make my time in one-to-one Bible reading as well as small group Bible study times more purposeful, and consider further how I can turn up for my brothers in Christ.

I know that I won't always be successful at these points above. I am not perfect. I am a sinful man! But I know that Christ has enabled me, and knowing the grace found in him will spur me on to turn up, joyfully giving thanks to the Father for what he has done. Will you turn to God for enabling and then turn up with him to sacrificially serve your families, your colleagues, your churches, and your wider communities?



# A diocesan treasure

*Interior of St Nicholas: Be not weary in well doing.*

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## Geoffrey Green

**ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED ON DONATED** land for the Saumarez Ponds / Dumaresq communities, with the building opened for worship on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1864. It remains the oldest church building in regular use in the Armidale diocese, with St Peter's Cathedral having been dedicated for worship in June 1875.

Regular services continued from 1864 until the late 1960s at which time St Nicholas was closed. This was a common occurrence throughout the country, with a decline in attendances and the general population becoming much more mobile.

In 1977 a dedicated group of new residents to the area (led by Ruth Sainsbury and Lionel Gilbert) were able to have St Nicholas re-opened with regular services on the first (usually Holy Communion led by one of the ministers from the Cathedral, and third Sunday (usually Morning Prayer led by lay preachers appointed to the Cathedral) of each month.

My wife Ellen and I purchased a home site in the Dumaresq area and built a house which we moved into in November 1975. We were the nearest neighbour to the north of the Church, and at that time were part of the St Mark's UNE church congregation, becoming regular attendees of St Nicholas' by 1978.

At the time of the re-opening St Nicholas' congregation included a number of families with small children and while the church group held Bible studies and playgroups, these were conducted in homes and did not utilise the church building. Congregation sizes ranged from mid-teens to a top of about 30 and remained quite consistent, although these days we rarely top 20.

With a decreasing number of lay preachers it was decided to reduce the services to a Communion Service on the first Sunday of each month. Some Morning Prayer services led by lay preachers still occurred until 2014 when Enid Isaacs (the last of our regular lay preachers) retired. Since then the services have been led by one of the Cathedral



*By 1900 St Nicholas' had an active congregation, a flourishing Sunday school and an enthusiastic choir photographed here in 1899.*

parish ministers and are generally Holy Communion. Most of the congregation live in the Saumarez Ponds, Dumaresq and Invergowrie areas with a few travelling from Armidale each month to enjoy the small friendly service in a beautiful setting.

Special community services are held each year at Christmas and sometimes at Easter. The Christmas services follow a carols and readings format and aim to involve the wider community, with invitations extended to the whole area and refreshments served afterwards. Other special services include christenings, weddings

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# Heritage of faith



Parishioners and clergy, past and present, join together to give thanks for the 100 years since St Mark's, Ashford was dedicated by Bishop Wentworth-Shields.

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## Tom and Kerry Julius

**THERE** IS A LONG LIST OF CLERGY WHO HAVE SERVED AT ST Mark's, Ashford during the past 100 years including the Reverends Ray Smith, Daryl Robinson, Peter Swane, Don Gowing, Steven Farrar, Ted Potter, and Christopher Pears and we had five of them join us for the centenary celebration on March 23rd: the Reverends Noel Boyce, Neville Heywood, David Weidemann, Adam Draycott, and Brian Kirk who preached. People who have been Sunday school teachers, Scripture teachers, lay ministers or had other roles and moved away also came back for the celebration because of their connection to the church and we had 70 at the service. Afterwards there was a lunch at the Bowling Club where David Wiedemann was emcee.

Pansy Jurd has been at our church her whole life but she's in her nineties now and not well enough to come to services so we go to visit her. She has played a very big part in St Mark's as lay leader and lay preacher for over 65 years and was invited to Parliament House to receive an award for teaching Scripture for more than 40 years. Her daughter brought her to the centenary celebration and Pansy cut the cake and then gave a little impromptu speech. It was so good that she was well enough to come and enjoy herself.

Initially after David Wiedemann left in 2014 there was a bit of a void but now The Reverend Peter Barber, who is the Presbyterian minister in Inverell, comes out and leads a daytime Bible study every second Wednesday. From the July 2022 St Mark's has been considered part of St Augustine's parish and they provide our services on the first and third Sundays. On the second and fourth Sundays we meet over at the Presbyterian church and are helped by the Presbyterian church in Inverell. When we're together we have between 10 and 15 people for a combined service but in the last few months we've had more people come to town and the numbers can shoot up to 30. We've been trying to have our combined service on fifth Sundays at the aged-care facility and last time there were 34 of us.



Prior to the amalgamation with Inverell under Bishop Rod Chiswell we had volunteers, mostly people who've retired, come and help us for a little bit. During the three plus decades we've been at the church there have been playgroups, Sunday schools, and Bible studies running on and off. Even when we were only young the Bible studies were always combined with the Presbyterians and some of the Anglican church members moved across to the Presbyterian church when we didn't have a minister. There's been a marriage of Presbyterians and Anglicans for at least 30 years — it's meant that we've all been able to continue with the Lord's work in Ashford.

The whole of the town was very damaged by a hailstorm in December 2021 and we only finished repairing the church roof in October last year. That's the second time it's happened. The previous time was in 1990. So the harder things we have to deal with in the future might be maintaining the church properties. It will be up to the Lord to work that out because it all costs money to maintain and insure assets. We can't expect other communities to keep supporting those things forever.

Recently we've been looking at photos that belong to some of the

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and funerals, with the largest service we have seen being a wedding with about 200 guests who somehow packed into the church on a miserably cold September evening.

Over the years the building has suffered its share of disasters and difficulties, including the invasion of termites while it was closed in the early 1970s. This caused quite a lot of damage to the pine lining boards, but resulted in very little damage to the local hardwood structural timbers and floors. Originally the site had a large number of pine trees along the southern and western boundaries with the ones on the southern boundary quite close to the church building. One very windy Sunday morning in 1977 or 1978, just after the service had started, the nearest tree blew down, narrowly missing the church building but completely demolishing the toilet located behind the church. The balance of the trees were then felled by the members of the congregation, with more appropriate trees subsequently being planted on the site.

Years later, the decorative structure built on the ridge of the roof was damaged in a storm and allowed considerable leakage to occur through the roof down into the aisle. This damaged structure was removed and the roof waterproofed by Bishop Peter Chiswell and myself – the only two members of the congregation prepared to work on that steep roof.

In another wild storm, almost all the northern side of the main roof was ripped off with parts blown into the neighbour's paddock. While insurance money funded the replacement of the damaged half of the roof, the congregation funded the replacement of the other half. The original shingles were removed from the main roof section but preserved on the front porch and remain on the roof over the sanctuary and vestry. While the original church bell remains in place, the wooden timbers supporting the bell failed in the early 1990s and have been replaced with steel supports with the original blacksmith crafted scroll work from which the bell is suspended, being retained.

St Nicholas' also still has a 'pedal organ' from the late 1800s (with 'mouse proof' pedals, patented in 1882) and a rotating lectern. This lectern languished in a dishevelled state in the vestry until lovingly restored by Enid Isaacs. Enid also designed and worked two magnificent tapestries, one for the front of the altar and the other as a kneeler for the prayer desk.

St Nicholas' is a much-loved church and this October will mark 160 years since it was first opened to bless those in its vicinity.

Geoff Green moved to Armidale in 1967 to attend University and was then employed by CSIRO. Ellen's mother grew up at Arding, and Ellen moved to Armidale in 1974 from South Australia to oversee the building of a home for her parent's retirement. Ellen and Geoff were married at St Mark's UNEchurch in 1975.

older ladies and noticing how the congregation has shrunk over the years. We used to have a fun day down at the town park to bring the whole community together. The church organised it under Brian Kirk. There were fun events, activities for the kids, a barbecue lunch and stalls. The SES and the fire brigade would also come and set up a stall and do a demonstration. All of the different parts of the community came and it made a day. Brian also organised bush dances at the Graman Hall and Harvest Thanksgiving services as outreach events that stemmed from the Ashford church and covered Delungra and Gramen. All of these events take a lot to organise though and when you don't have many to help it's hard.

Most of the people who were in the congregation with us have passed away. Pansy would be one of the few left who we've had that ongoing connection with. We've felt privileged that most families have asked Tom to be a pall bearer over the years for the elderly ladies at the church who have passed away. Their children come back and ask us to be a part of the service. It's hard but it's part of the whole cycle.



*Pansy Jurd cutting the cake at the Ashford centenary celebration.*

We do believe that we're blessed every time we have a minister. It's always been that we had someone for four years and then two years with no one. Each time we were presented with that we've thought, 'How are we going to cope?' We were reminded at the centenary celebration that the Belrose parish in Sydney supported us for most of one minister's time. We remember the money coming through each month. At other times St Mark's either saved some money or a parish somewhere supported us or the diocese paid for the stipend. The Lord has provided. They are some of the blessings and there have been lots of them.

You look at the umbrella created by the church in Ashford, and while we don't see them here in our community, those young Christians who were part of Scripture classes and the youth group now all belong to other churches in places like Sydney, Brisbane, Nambucca Heads. They're all sowing into God's work, serving other congregations and their families. Our congregation has shrunk but the seeds sown are growing elsewhere.

Tom and Kerry Julius became friends when they were very young and met at Ashford Central school after Kerry's family bought a farm in the district in the early 1970s.

# Welcoming country parishes



The Reverend Daniel Rowe  
Narrabri Anglican Church

Shonae, Molly (5), Brodie (turning 10), Albie (turning 8), and Dan Rowe.

**BOTH SHONAE AND I HAVE HAD WHAT** you could call very vanilla faith upbringings. We grew up in Christian homes where church was always a priority. And for both of us there wasn't a time where we didn't believe in God or that Jesus needed to be our saviour and Lord. As stock-standard as that sounds, we count it an incredible blessing to have been raised in the gospel by faithful parents – something we try and emulate with our own children. For each of us there have also been pointed times of gasping the gospel more fully and deepening our trust in Jesus.

After moving to Sydney, I started gathering with God's mob in Tregear Presbyterian in Western Sydney. Shonae's brother was working for the church and also had connections to Scripture Union Family Mission at the Old Bar Beach Mission. It was a fantastic time interacting with the campers and teaching kids about Jesus. Little did I know that Shonae

had already been to the same beach mission a few years before but was overseas when I joined the team. The following year Shonae came back to Australia and rejoined the team and that's where we met.

A year later we were finalising plans for our wedding in three weeks' time. After finishing Uni in Wollongong we tried to move to the country but ended up in Western Sydney for my first nursing placement. When it came time for midwifery training, we aimed for the country again and were placed in Dubbo.

To cut a long story short, we came to train for parish ministry by trying to solve a disagreement we were having! I had been working as a nurse/midwife for a few years but wanted to go overseas to Africa to do missionary work as a health professional. Shonae was less keen.

After getting advice from friends, we ended up applying for a one year diploma at Sydney

Missionary & Bible College (SMBC). Four years later we finished at SMBC with a revised plan for how we could serve God. One thing led to another and here we are in the Armidale Diocese.

Our time in Dubbo helped us to know that we really want to live in the country. We love its pace and feel. Having not done much formal ministry, joining the Armidale team and getting some training seemed like a perfect fit. We already had a connection with Narrabri, had heard great things about the diocese, and Bishop Rod was very convincing!

We are looking forward to getting stuck into parish ministry. It was great having the time at college but this period of training as a curate will help bridge the gap between the study and training we received at SMBC and having experience in pastoral ministry in a rural setting. I have already also really enjoyed the collegiality within the diocese.

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one of those. I have a standing invitation to dinner at their house after youth group on Friday night, and then other families often invite me over for lunch on Sunday.

I've been reflecting on how while I've been at Holy Trinity and have served in various ways, there has also been blessing in serving. It's not perfect. There have been hard parts and challenges to it but it's almost in the challenges that there are blessings. When I think about the challenges, particularly around not having people of similar age in Manilla, I also recognise that I've been blessed by making friends from many different stages of life and across the spectrum of ages. It's been encouraging to watch those at youth group grow into young adults and hear they are making decisions and choosing to live out their faith for themselves. I also have a few friends that are ten plus years older than me and it's helped me realise that we all have struggles, though our

struggles might look different right now. Then there are families and some lovely older ladies at church and I really enjoy that. To have older people in your life is wonderful because they have so much wisdom.

I've not been someone who has a ten year plan and followed it. I've wound up in places where I never expected myself to be but, as I look back, I can see how God has used the hard things to grow me. And it's amazing how people come back into your life. I'm now helping to lead the Scripture Union Ag camp and it has given me a chance to reconnect and serve with a girl that I knew a little bit through UNEchurch. There's also a lovely fellow who'd be well into his seventies whose been involved with Ag camp for years and each time I visit the church in Bega he tells me he prays for me every Sunday morning. Sometimes when I feel that I don't know what to pray, I know someone else is praying for me, and that's of great comfort.



# Abundant blessings



*Elly Fisher, Sarah Baker and Claire Fisher.*

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## Sarah Baker

I GREW UP IN A LITTLE PLACE CALLED ROCKY HALL AND went to high school in Bega. I became a Christian at a Scripture Union Ag camp but it probably wasn't until I started Uni that I really started to live out my faith. I moved to Armidale in 2013 to study livestock production and on my first Sunday I went to UNEchurch. Suddenly I found all of these Christians of a similar age and stage of life to me who were really keen to be involved and I became part of a mission team to Bingara.

It was at the end of my third year at Uni that we went on a mission to Manilla and I first met Dave and Steph Fisher. I was struck by their hearts for the parish of Holy Trinity and their desire to get to know the community of Manilla, to be a part of it and to be sharing the gospel.

The purpose of the mission was to get a feel for and an idea of what rural ministry can be like. I remember noticing in smaller rural churches that there was a real lack of people in their twenties and thirties because they'd left to study or work elsewhere. It got me thinking about how I could support smaller churches when I finished Uni because I was in the age range that was missing in their congregations.

My first job as a graduate was based in the Central West and provided a chance to be part of small town. I wanted to be committed and stay but it was actually a really hard couple of years. I struggled to fit into the church and the town because there wasn't the social support for me.

I then applied for two jobs in Tamworth and it's interesting how God works. I didn't get the job I really wanted but looking back I can see I have the job God knew I needed with flexible working hours.

Before I moved to Tamworth I knew that I already had the connection with the church at Manilla and with Dave, Steph and their four children, and that there would be plenty of opportunities to serve in various ways.

Initially I went to church in Manilla in the mornings and then St Peter's, South Tamworth at night, but over time I realised it's a lot to try to belong to two churches. I settled on being committed to Holy Trinity but staying connected to a Bible study at St Peter's where I've made friends who've been a real support to me in my faith and what I've been trying to do for the church in Manilla.

A feature of St Peter's is that Bible study groups are rostered once a term to prepare and serve food for the Frontyard church ministry in Coledale. I like that it feels doable. There are so many ways we can support ministries and I think sometimes the little things get undervalued but they can have a big impact.

During my time in the Central West struggling to connect at church I'd started praying for a family that I could be a part of because I was quite lonely. Whilst it didn't happen there God has really answered that prayer through a couple of families in Manilla — the Fishers being

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