

THE Melbourne Anglican

MARCH 2025, No 643

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and life's
deepest
questions

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The Shed Door
is open

The Reverend Victoria Bakerov. Picture: Sunny Kim



A time of transition, and of hope

■ Bishop Genieve Blackwell

As a diocese we are in a time of transition as we give thanks for the ministry of our former Archbishop Philip and Joy Freier and look to the election of the next Archbishop of Melbourne.

Globally, our world is experiencing great change and disruption which can lead to much uncertainty, even fear.

In the week leading up to his retirement, Archbishop Philip was a signatory to a public statement from a majority of Anglican bishops on antisemitism affirming a vision of Australia free from hostility and violence and calling on *all Australians to work to enhance the peace, justice and harmony that Jewish Australians, like all Australians, are entitled to expect.*

In times such as these, the rhythm of the church year has much to offer us. We are moving from focusing on the light

manifest in Epiphany to the season of Lent which knows the experience of opposition of darkness to the light. Lent teaches us both how to resist darkness and the cost of responding to the Light – an opportunity for prayerful reflection before God.

“Lent teaches us both how to resist darkness and the cost of responding to the Light – an opportunity for prayerful reflection before God.”

Lent is often thought of in terms of giving up something but it can also be the opportunity to focus on developing the practices, the habits of our faith.

Martha C Nussbaum, an American Jewish philosopher, talks about hope as a choice, a practical habit. A choice to focus on a vision for good and embrace it. As Christians we embrace that vision through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I commend to you the Hope25 Lenten studies book, with each reflection prepared by a bishop from around Australia, and edited by our Bishop Paul Barker. They can be for personal use or as part of a regular group meeting. Our hope is the reflections on Scripture will help you focus on the vision of God’s kingdom revealed in Jesus and explore it more deeply. That you will be inspired to reflect on what it can look like to practically help make that vision a reality: in the immediate, as part of the Hope25 initiative between Easter Day and Pentecost, and beyond.

Vacant Appointments as of 17 February 2025:

St Silas and St Anselm, Albert Park; All Saints, Ascot Vale; St Alfred, Blackburn North; St Paul, Caulfield North; St Matthew, Cheltenham; St Mark, Emerald; St Oswald, Glen Iris; St Alban, Hamlyn Heights; St John, Healesville with St Paul Yarra Glen; St George, East Ivanhoe; St Paul, Kew East; St Mary, North Melbourne; St Thomas, Moonee Ponds; St Aidan, Parkdale; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; St George, Red Hill; St John, Sorrento with St Andrew’s, Rye [from September 2025]; St Luke, Vermont; St John, Wantirna South; St Thomas, Winchelsea; Parish of Croydon Hills & Wonga Park

Ordination as Deacon

BAKEROV, The Revd Victoria, Assistant Curate, Hospital Chaplain, Royal Melbourne Hospital, effective 8 February 2025

CHISWELL, The Revd Graeme, Assistant Curate, City on a Hill, effective 8 February 2025

HOSKEN, The Revd Kyle Andrew, Assistant Curate, Parish of Ferntree Gully and Rowville, effective 8 February 2025

MCGRICE, The Revd Alison Margaret, Assistant Curate, St Jude, Carlton, effective 8 February 2025

NJOTO, The Revd Ricky Febrin, Assistant Curate, Holy Trinity, Doncaster, effective 8 February 2025

WEATHERLAKE, The Revd Lauren, Assistant Curate, St Alfred, Blackburn North, effective 8 February 2025

ZHANG, The Revd Haixian (Chuck), Assistant Curate, Holy Trinity, Doncaster, effective 8 February 2025

ZHU, The Revd Xiping (Victor), Assistant Curate, St James, Ivanhoe, effective 8 February 2025

Appointments:

ARMSTRONG, The Revd Rosalyn, appointed Vicar, St Michael, North Carlton, effective 8 April 2025

CONNOLLY, The Revd Matthew, appointed Area Dean, Deanery of Croydon, effective 13 February 2025

GRAVOLIN, The Revd Wendy, appointed extension as Vicar, Bellarine Gateway Anglican Parish, effective 2 April 2025

PHILLIPS, The Revd Michael George, appointed Vicar, Parish of Ormond, effective 31 March 2025

PORTER, The Revd Dr Christopher Alan, appointed Adjunct Lecturer, Trinity College Theological School University of Divinity, effective 13 February 2025

WELIWATTE, The Revd Weliwattage (Isuru), appointed Vicar, Christ Church Brunswick, effective 1 May 2025

WONG, The Revd Greg Xiong Wei, appointed extension, All Saints, Mitcham, effective 10 March 2025

Permission to Officiate:

COOTE, The Revd Leroy Benjamin, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 26 May 2025

SANDERSON, The Revd John Frank, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 21 March 2025

Resignations:

COOTE, The Revd Leroy Benjamin, Vicar, Parish of Croydon Hills & Wonga Park, effective 25 May 2025

DUNCAN, The Revd Ross Lachlan, Priest-in-Charge, Parish of Wandin Seville & Mt Evelyn and Area Dean, Area Deanery of the Hills, effective 4 July 2025

SANDERSON, The Revd John Frank, Vicar, St Georges, East Ivanhoe, effective 20 March 2025



Clergy Moves

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Head of Communications: Penny Mulvey
pmulvey@melbourneanglican.org.au

Publication editor and senior journalist:
Jenan Taylor
jtaylor@melbourneanglican.org.au

Journalist: Hannah Felsbourg
hfelsbourg@melbourneanglican.org.au

Journalist: Lesa Scholl
lscholl@melbourneanglican.org.au

Administration Officer: Alisha Vujevic
avujevic@melbourneanglican.org.au

Digital Media Specialist: Sybil Zeng
szeng@melbourneanglican.org.au

Advertising: WildHive
ads@melbourneanglican.org.au

Design & Layout: Ivan Smith
ads@melbourneanglican.org.au

Subscription Enquiries
(Annual Subscription \$40):
tma@melbourneanglican.org.au
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Anglican Media Melbourne,
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tma.melbourneanglican.org.au

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Sister Brigid Arthur has been visiting refugees since mandatory detention began in the early 2000s.

Picture: Lesa Scholl

Increased cruelty fears for refugees amid harsh new migration laws

■ Lesa Scholl

Refugee advocates fear for the safety and human rights of refugees in Australia's onshore detention centres under harsh new migration laws.

Faith-based and community advocates warned that new federal laws introduced in December 2024 enabled greater ministerial powers to deport people and restrict their communications.

They also believe the appointment of new detention centre operator Management and Training Corporation put detainees at risk of being treated like criminals.

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project co-founder Sister Brigid Arthur said the effects of the migration amendments haven't been seen yet, but detainees were scared.

"It scares everybody that people could be deported. They can be sent to any other country," she said. "It could be used in really awful ways, very cruel ways, and it's against international law."

Sister Arthur said it was sheer cruelty to have people locked up indefinitely, not knowing if they would ever be let out.

One young man Sister Arthur visited was in detention because the transit police had been called when he fell asleep on a tram.

"Most people would have no idea that this happens in our city," she said.

Sister Arthur began visiting the Maribyrnong centre in the early 2000s when it was more open and visitors could bring home-baked goods.

"Gradually things started to get tougher to get in," she said.

When Sister Arthur took a packet of Tim Tams for the young man, it was logged by security and could only be given to him after she had left.

"It's unacceptable to entrust the welfare of people who have faced significant hardship to a company with a long history of abuses."

Jana Favero

Refugee Council of Australia advocacy coordinator Dr Graham Thom said more people with criminal histories were in detention centres than 15 years ago, and raised concerns for individuals being held for non-criminal reasons.

Dr Thom said refugees who claimed asylum at border security were vulnerable because Australian law required mandatory detention.

"[They] rip up your tourist visa because you're not a tourist. Now you're undocu-

mented," he said.

"It's a pretty frightening experience for those individuals who thought they were doing the right thing by seeking asylum at the border," he said.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said in December MTC was linked to a pattern of serious abuses including the alleged neglect of detainee medical care, excessive use of solitary confinement and violent incidents.

Deputy chief executive Jana Favero said putting people with protection claims in the same environment as convicted criminals was a troubling trend.

"We very firmly oppose mandatory detention," she said.

Ms Favero said there needed to be greater oversight and transparency regarding immigration detention.

She said the recent Ombudsman's report detailed the harm and abuse of people in detention, including solitary confinement and stopping visitations.

Ms Favero said the government's contract with MTC was a significant departure from their 2023 platform promise that detention would be government-run.

"It's unacceptable to entrust the welfare of people who have faced significant hardship to a company with a long history of abuses," she said.

Immigration minister Tony Burke's office was contacted for comment.

Anglican bishops urge Australians to stand against antisemitism

■ **Jenan Taylor**

Anglican bishops have called on Australians to reject antisemitism and stand against vilification in a joint statement this week.

Seventeen bishops signed the statement condemning antisemitic words and actions and supporting the Jewish community against hostility and violence.

Australian Primate Geoffrey Smith and Archbishop of Melbourne Philip Freier were among the bishops who were concerned about the growing increase in antisemitic

acts and words directed towards Jewish people.

“Such behaviour is abhorrent and completely unacceptable,” they said in the statement.

“No individual or group in Australia should be subjected to intimidation, hatred or violence.”

Bishops’ statement

“No individual or group in Australia should be subjected to intimidation, hatred or violence.

“Australia is a proudly multicultural and multifaith community. Antisemitism, even when the expression of a small minority, injures us all and must be rejected by all.

“We call on all Australians to stand against the vilification which we have seen recently and work to enhance the peace, justice and harmony that Jewish Australians, like all Australians, are entitled to expect.”

If life is in danger, call Triple Zero (000).

Neurodiverse clergy fear exclusion from ministry

■ **Lesla Scholl**

Neurodiverse clergy are often reluctant to disclose their diagnosis because they worry about being overlooked for ordained ministry, a church leader says.

They often struggle to gain acceptance in their leadership roles, but believe they bring unique gifts of creativity, inventiveness and insight into their work.

Deputy Warden of Wollaston Theological College Reverend Dr Christy Capper warned that some people were worried about talking

with their diocese about their neurodiversity out of fear they wouldn’t be given a parish.

Dr Capper was diagnosed with ADHD in the last 12 months and is building a community to support neurodiverse clergy.

She said having a diagnosis meant she could identify areas where she needed support.

She said even people who had been ministering successfully for a while were reluctant to share their diagnoses with people in authority.

Dr Capper said she met people in many

dioceses who were neurodiverse but not comfortable sharing it.

She also heard accounts of people’s suitability for ordination being questioned after they disclosed that they were neurodiverse.

Reverend Canon Professor Dorothy Lee was 71 when she was diagnosed with ADHD. She said it was a shock but it helped explain behaviours for which she had previously judged herself.

Professor Lee said her ADHD diagnosis helped her to understand it in a different framework, and to be more aware of neurodivergence in other people.

She believed the church has also become more inclusive.

“Neurodivergent people bring other gifts, and perhaps more intense forms of other gifts to the table that the church actually needs,” she said.

“We need to have a real understanding of people, of the diversity that lies within,” she said.

Mental health social worker Dr Katherine Thompson said it wasn’t the diagnostic label that mattered but learning how to use a diagnosis to help people live in a healthy way and thrive in their ministry.

She said it raised interesting questions about how society saw neurodiversity in general.

“You could have ADHD or autism, and you could actually have a great, flourishing, thriving life,” she said.

“I think this is a deeper problem in the church that we’ve been silenced,” she said. “All the tricky issues...They’re uncomfortable, but they’re part of our human experience.”



Reverend Dr Christy Capper (right) with Reverend Professor Dorothy Lee and the Very Reverend Dr Andreas Loewe.

Picture: supplied

'Father of the House': Dr Freier retires

■ Jenan Taylor

Christians from across Melbourne, the nation and the globe, have given thanks for an archbishop who put the safety of vulnerable people, reconciliation, women's ministry, ecumenism and peace at the centre of his service, and the Australian Anglican Church.

More than 1000 people, including leaders from other denominations, filled St Paul's Cathedral to pay tribute to Archbishop of Melbourne Philip Freier, and his wife Joy on Sunday 9 February.

Dr Freier laid up his staff in an Evensong service honouring his 18 years as archbishop, and his 70th birthday, amid a sea of priests, and bishops attired in red, black and white.

Clergy from Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne and the world-wide Anglican community thanked Dr Freier for his service, an important resource they said would be missed.

Archbishop of Perth Kay Goldsworthy told of how Dr Freier's measured tone and skills, borne out of long experience in episcopal ministry across different Australian regions, enriched the Church.

She said among leaders at bishops' meetings he was known as "Father of the House", and that to his Episcopal colleagues he was perceived as being a wise peacemaker.

Some of their phrases often included, 'Philip is eirenic,' 'He hasn't dominated the space,' 'Philip doesn't suck the air out of meetings,' 'He doesn't need to be the centre of attention,' 'Philip is gentle reverence. He is kindhearted, respectful, gracious,' 'Philip has been a non-anxious presence in an anxious church,' 'He wears his considerable intellect lightly.'

Archbishop Goldsworthy gave thanks too for Dr Freier's commitment to the full recognition of women's ministry, and particularly for his leadership in consecrating Bishop Barbara Darling in 2008.

Primate of Australia and Archbishop of Adelaide Geoffrey Smith said Dr Freier's commitment to connecting the Anglican Church of Australia with other parts of the Church in the region, especially, was substantial.

Dr Freier's leadership through the latter part of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and influence in redress recommendations, were particularly weighty.

"This was very important work," Archbishop Smith said. "Very significant legislation was passed with remarkable unanimity in response to those recommendations, which helped develop a safer



Archbishop Philip and Joy Freier at the Evensong service at St Paul's Cathedral. Picture: James Grant

"Philip has been a non-anxious presence in an anxious church."

Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy

church with significantly clearer and better responses to people who have suffered on behalf of the Anglican Church of Australia."

Family friend the Reverend Dr Joy Sandefur said despite the many demands Dr and Mrs Freier had on their time they always made time for their family and their many Indigenous friends.

They were strong supporters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander churches and church leaders, and had a lifelong interest in encouraging them, Dr Sandefur said.

In their time in Melbourne, they also brought comfort and care to neighbours and others around them.

Bishop Anthony Poggo Secretary General of the Anglican Communion said Dr Freier was a leader who had welcomed and built strong relationships with multicultural and Anglican communities from different parts of the world.

He had also kept people together as one, and through his wisdom had helped the Anglican Commission sharpen its work and address the needs of churches.

Mrs Freier, Bishop Poggo said, was involved in including bishop's spouses in the global conversations that led to the Lambeth Conference in 2022, and had helped organise many of those virtual gatherings.

Dr Freier was a leader who would be greatly missed, Bishop Poggo said.

Christ Church South Yarra parishioner

Judy Anderson had spent the day around the Melbourne CBD as she awaited the start of the service, and said she was very sorry to see Dr Freier's time in office come to an end.

She characterised his leadership as especially marked by his deep respect for Indigenous people and efforts towards reconciliation.

Ms Anderson said she had taken many school tours through Bishops Court and was moved by the generosity with which Dr and Mrs Freier received visitors, even being prepared to let some sit and reflect in the healing calm of the private chapel.

In his last sermon as archbishop, Dr Freier gave clues as to what had sustained him during his 18 years.

He preached of the significance of placing faith and trust in God, particularly for Christian leaders faced with many challenges.

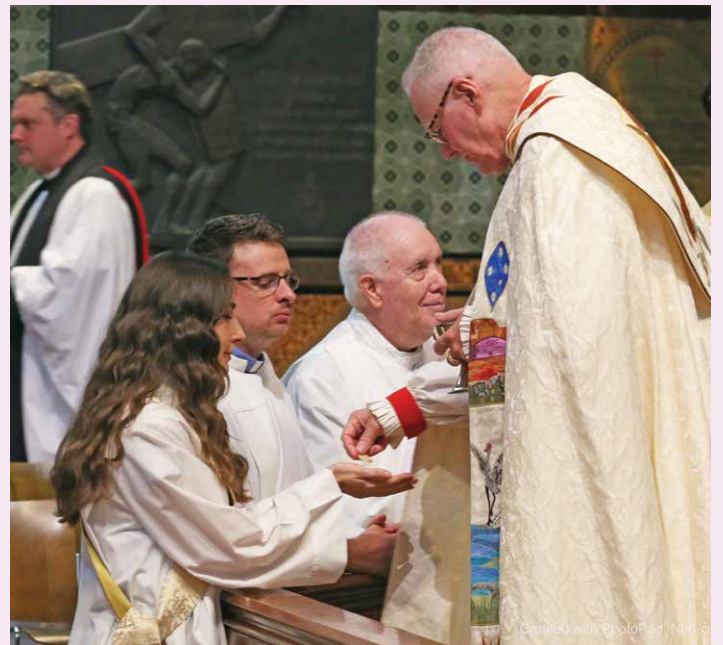
He used the narrative of Peter walking on water to illustrate the struggle between faith and doubt especially in times of chaos.

"I know that my colleagues amongst the bishops often struggle with things that could not have been foreseen, or if foreseen, could not be avoided.

"The grounded-ness of the promise of God present for us in all of our circumstances is something I know I've had to continually rely on, and the example of Peter has been important for me in such situations," Archbishop Freier said.



Melbourne Anglicans celebrate new deacons and a bishop
Pictures: Janine Eastgate





Ordinands at St Paul's Cathedral.

Picture: Janine Eastgate

'May God make us worthy of His calling': New deacons, bishop

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Melbourne's new Anglican deacons and a new bishop were urged to embrace a ministry of quiet service as they were ordained.

Eight men and women were ordained as deacons on Saturday, 8 February, 2025, at St Paul's Cathedral.

Those ordained were the Reverends Victoria Bakerov, Ricky Njoto, Graeme Chiswell, Lauren Weatherlake, Kyle Hosken, Chuck Zhang, Alison McGrice and Victor Zhu.

The Venerable Scott Lowrey was also consecrated Assistant Bishop of Ballarat at the service, which was presided over by Archbishop Philip Freier.

In his sermon, Bishop of Ballarat Garry Weatherill emphasised that the most important ministry often happened quietly and without fanfare.

He shared a story from his youth in the opal fields, where an older miner helped him overcome a moment of fear without ever speaking of it to others.

"Sometimes the most important ministry you will do will not be known by anybody

other than yourself," Bishop Weatherill told the ordinands.

He urged them to cultivate their capacity to imitate Christ through regular prayer, serious scriptural study, and maintaining trusted friendships for spiritual support.

"See the world through sacramental eyes ... develop the ability to hear the word of God addressing you from unexpected places and unexpected people."

Garry Weatherill

Bishop Weatherill encouraged the new clergy to be open to those with whom they disagreed and to listen carefully to different perspectives.

"Try and develop the capacity to look for the good in the people you don't like, or the people you disapprove of, or the ideas that drive you crazy," he said.

"See the world through sacramental eyes

... develop the ability to hear the word of God addressing you from unexpected places and unexpected people."

Bishop Weatherill concluded by highlighting the traditional words of commissioning: "May God, who has called you to His service, make you worthy of His calling."

He emphasised that while all were unworthy on their own, through Christ, God saw them as the beautifully immortal diamonds He had made them to be.

The bishop noted this truth extended beyond clergy to all Christians.

"True for dentists and lawyers, for truck drivers, for drovers, even for Opal miners, all of us who are called by God depend on His grace that we might be worthy to respond to that call," he said.

The newly ordained deacons will serve across Melbourne, including at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, City on a Hill, and churches in Doncaster, Carlton, Blackburn North, Ferntree Gully and Ivanhoe.

This was Archbishop Freier's final time presiding over an ordination service as Archbishop of Melbourne before his retirement on Sunday, 9 February, 2025.

Farewell Leunig: poet, painter, prophet

■ Jenan Taylor

Hundreds came to farewell Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig in a service at St Paul's Cathedral late January.

Flanked by two Leunig paintings, and beneath the quiet gaze of a yellow duck resting among the greenery of a bouquet, family, friends and former colleagues shared stories, poems, readings, prayers and music in memory of him.

Leunig was variously described as a poet, philosopher, painter and modern prophet.

To Sunny Leunig and the many members of his family, and to friends, Leunig was also dad, granddad, best friend, confidante, and partner.

Guests heard how important religion had been to Leunig; how he believed that enchantment was available to those who knelt in wonder; that disagreements ought to be solved in nature rather than in offices; and why spirituality for him was represented by a small, yellow duck.

“He sought to revive the public’s interest in prayer ... and reverse the values of secular society,” Leunig’s friend David Tacey recalled.

They heard too how anguished Leunig had been when some of the public derided his work as an editorial cartoonist – and when they derided his using the word ‘God’.

They were mesmerised by the songs Leunig had written with Katie Noonan who sang them accompanied by Cameron Deyell and the String Quartet. These included the wrenching *Peace (Is my Drug)*.

And the guests were stirred by the voice and traditional Tibetan music of Tenzin Choegyal, and performances of Joseph Tawadros, that seemed to rise up to the uppermost corners of the cathedral.

There was also a reading by actor Bryan Brown, a homily by retired Bishop of Wangaratta the Right Reverend David Farrer, and a prayer from Monash University academic Susan Carland.

Bishop Farrer described Leunig’s sharp

outlook, including what troubled him about modern society.

Leunig still possessed this sharpness as recently as three months ago when he was Archbishop Philip Freier’s final breakfast conversation guest, even if physically he was not so well, Bishop Farrer said.

Dr Carland, like many of the others, recalled the effect of Leunig’s words and drawings. Her late mother’s love for one of Leunig’s prayers was such that she had taped it to her fridge and would read it up until she succumbed to cancer, she said.

“Lou”, a long-time admirer of Leunig, told *The Melbourne Anglican* she had decided to attend the service in person rather than view it online.

She met the cartoonist about 25 years ago, she said, and he’d encouraged and inspired her through much of her life since then.

“I held on to some of his drawings, and even took them with me when I walked the Camino,” Lou said.

A beloved leader, man of God, farewellled

■ Penny Mulvey

A former Archbishop of Melbourne, Bishop Keith Rayner, was laid to rest on 1 February following a packed funeral service at St Peter's Cathedral, Adelaide.

His only son and third child, Professor Chris Rayner, spoke for the family, telling mourners of his father’s remarkable life of service, which was “almost entirely devoted to being a servant of Christ”.

Professor Rayner painted a visual picture of a man on a mission:

The young Keith had a clear sense of vocation from his early teens, which he apparently described as “not a comfortable feeling”.

His leadership was evident at an early age, and at 19 he represented Australia in a world youth forum in England. In 1952, Keith attended the World Congress of Christian youth in India, with an Australian party that included Bob Hawke.

His overseas experiences continued when he spent a year at Harvard in 1958 as a Rotary Foundation Fellow, enabling him to complete a PhD.

Just five years after marrying Audrey Fletcher in 1963 Keith was appointed Bishop of Wangaratta.

Gathered family and friends were told



Archbishop Keith Rayner.

about a list of truths that Bishop Rayner had learned along his journey that came to be published in the paper. Potentially, truths we might all want to adopt.

- Look to what is good in people even if they differ from you; recognise that they will have a positive contribution to make.
- There is never enough time to do all the things you ought to do. Simply do what you can, and don’t spend time worrying about what you can’t.
- The person who goes through life looking for happiness will not find it. Real contentment is a by-product of a life lived in harmony with God and in service to others.

“I only ever knew a father who wore a lot of fancy dress,” Professor Rayner told the

gathering with a smile on his face.

The Reverend Dr Bruce Kaye, general secretary of the national church during Bishop Rayner’s primateship spoke of the bishop’s extraordinary contribution to the life of the Anglican Church both in Australia and internationally.

Dr Kaye said a deep personal friendship grew through that time. He also shared an extraordinary tidbit. According to Dr Kaye, Bishop Rayner had attended every day of every synod since 1962!

He spoke of the synod’s deep gratitude “for the outstanding service, commitment, energy and leadership of the Primate that he had provided to the Anglican Church and the General Synod”.

And then Dr Kaye paused ... “but that is not the whole story.”

“There is more I believe that must be said.”

Dr Kaye found the bishop to be a man of prayer. “The daily Eucharist and prayer were to be the framework of this devotion and his life. It showed in the way he carried himself.”

This man of God was a churchman and a priest, a bishop, an archbishop and the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia.

At his retirement, Dr Kaye said, Bishop Rayner had been an Archbishop for 25 years of ministry, an extraordinary record.

Aged care chaplain Kirsty celebrated

■ **Lesa Scholl**

Aged care chaplain Reverend Kirsty Brown was recently named as the recipient of Uniting AgeWell's 2024 Excellence Award for Residential Care in Victoria.

The awards celebrate staff members who demonstrate leadership and commitment in their roles.

Ms Brown's citation noted that her approachable manner instilled trust and confidence, which made people feel valued.

For Ms Brown, the award meant recognition not just of her work, but of the value of holistic care and chaplaincy in general.

Ms Brown's ministry is a part of her family heritage. Her great-grandmother was a part of the Presbyterian church in Melbourne that established one of the earliest Uniting AgeWell facilities.

Her mother was also a strong influence, taking Ms Brown and her brother to visit their elderly neighbour Mrs Kirkland when they were children.

Through this experience, she learned how important it was to care for the elderly and build relationships with them.

It was very special that her mother was able to attend the award ceremony, Ms Brown said.

Director of Mission Reverend Clare Brockett described Ms Brown as innovative and inclusive. "She draws people in," she said.

Ms Brown said that it was really meaningful that her community felt that their own spirituality and belief systems were honoured and respected.

"It's about being someone who listens and hears their stories and respects and honours them," she said.



Reverend Kirsty Brown.

Picture: supplied

INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Melbourne Anglican Foundation

Join us in making a difference in the lives of young people.

The **Melbourne Anglican Foundation Youth Fund** supports youth programs across Melbourne that provide safe and supportive environments where Melbourne's youth can develop essential life skills, build friendships, and discover their full potential.

Your donation helps us continue to support these vital resources.

*Donations to the Melbourne Anglican Foundation Youth Fund are tax deductible. You should always seek your own tax advice.

High-stress carers need support

■ **Lesa Scholl**

Chaplains working on the frontline of life and death experience trauma and burnout that can affect their capacity to care for sick, elderly and vulnerable people, researchers say.

Melbourne School of Theology, Ridley College and the University of Melbourne researchers believe programs and training that better support ministry workers need to be developed.

Mental health social worker Dr Katherine Thompson said ministers who worked in contexts like the mission field or hospitals experienced a higher rate of depression and anxiety because they were exposed to more stress at a higher level than general society.

She said it was unrealistic to think people in ministry were not going to struggle with things like anxiety and depression and organisations needed to develop their mental health literacy.

Hospital chaplain Reverend Dawn Treloar said it was important to realise that chaplains tended not to work full-time roles because they needed additional time in their lives away from work so they could work effectively.

She said when she began working as a chaplain vicarious trauma wasn't spoken about, but the sector was beginning to accept it was something chaplains faced.

As an experienced chaplain Mrs Treloar has learned to be aware of what causes vicarious trauma and how to manage it.

"I retreat to a safe space regularly on my days off," she said. "I retreat to my garden and the bird life and that nurtures my soul so that I can be present in a trauma ward or palliative care or wherever I'm called to and deal with what's there."

She said chaplains were trained to deal with trauma and had continued professional supervision.

"It doesn't mean you don't experience anxiety, but you know what to do with it," Mrs Treloar said.

She said chaplains who experience burnout needed to be loved through it.

Police chaplain Reverend Dr Andrew Mellor said police chaplains needed to be careful in planning their wellbeing, both how they looked after themselves and allowed others to look after them.

"We approach what we do with a strong appreciation that the reality of those we are caring for is their reality and our reality

is different," he said.

"As a part of that, [chaplains need to] celebrate their reality, celebrate who they are and who's around them, so that they can live into that when they are confronted by significant things," he said.

Dr Mellor said his approach came directly from his personal faith and having a genuine daily discipline of being thankful.

"My reality is who I am in Christ ... I celebrate the people around me. I see them as a gift from God," he said.

Aged care chaplain Reverend Kirsty Brown said a part of her process was to recognise the limits of what she can do.

"I can't heal the trauma, but I can sit alongside," she said. "Before I have a conversation, I always give that conversation to God. And then as I leave, I also give it back to God."

Dr Thompson said churches needed to reframe the way they thought about mental illness and how they invested in ministers' wellbeing.

"For me, it's looking forward and having a preventative, caring and protective sort of framework for people going into ministry," she said.

Stress and poor mental health affect displaced aid workers

■ **Lesa Scholl**

Aid workers face an increased risk of threats and incidents of violence, as well as exposure to trauma and chronic stress that can affect their ability to save lives, according to recent research.

They spend their lives saving others, but it's easy to forget that aid workers themselves are among the constantly rising number of vulnerable and displaced people.

Research in the *Christian Journal for Global Health* examines moral injury and post-traumatic stress disorder in aid workers in an attempt to develop strategies, training and support systems for international aid and missionary teams.

Moral injury can occur when a person witnesses an event or is compelled to act in a way that conflicts with their moral beliefs. It can have long-lasting emotional and psychological impact on mental well-being.

An earlier study from Harvard Medical School, Columbia University and the United Nations reported an increase in

the emotional burden on aid workers since the beginning of the 21st century.

The research found that organisational aspects of humanitarian work – such as the logistics of receiving and distributing aid – created more stress and poor mental health than incidence of trauma.

In protracted crises, where resources were diminished, this risk was found to be more prevalent.

Caritas Emergency Lead Sally Thomas said that in Gaza 100 per cent of the aid workers had been displaced multiple times and experience trauma every day, but they continue to turn up however they can.

Similarly in Ukraine, she noted the drive and motivation of the people on the ground. "The staff is still really, really dedicated in doing as much as they can because it's for their own communities," she said.

Agencies agreed that local partnerships were critical in maintaining momentum in protracted crises because the workers had shared experience with the communities they were trying to help.

Churches of Christ Overseas Aid International Partnerships Manager Colin Scott said that many of COCOA's partners in African nations have been refugees themselves, which gave them compassion toward new refugees.

"They are very ready to share what little they have with people from other places," he said.

A sense of God's presence and purpose enabled many aid workers to keep going in situations where the flow of broken bodies and lives seems never ending.

World Vision chief executive Daniel Wordsworth said that one of the hardest things to realise from the outside is that God lives in those places and He visits us here.

"God's home is in the prison cell. God's home is in a village being burned down in Burma. God's home is in the refugee camp in Papua New Guinea," he said.

"There's no promise that we'll see the finish line ... but there is a promise that we'll at least be accompanying God on that journey."

‘Thank you for speaking what people don’t want to hear’

■ Lesa Scholl

An Albert Park parish has thanked Washington Bishop Marian Budde for speaking in support of the marginalised during the recent inauguration prayer service for President Donald Trump.

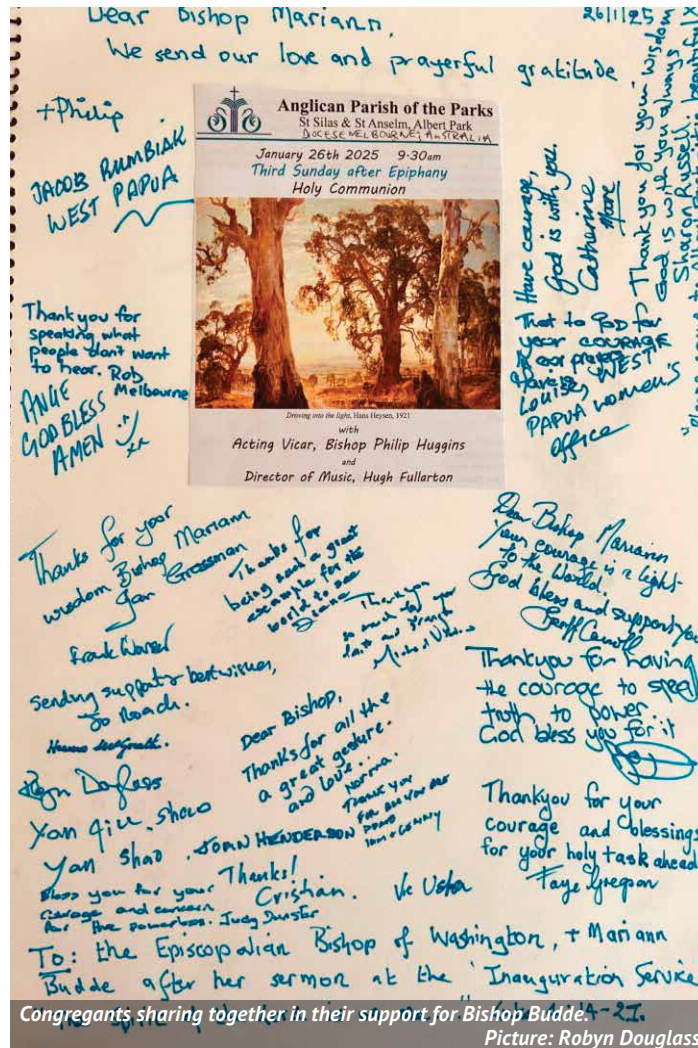
Members of St Silas’ Albert Park together with locum vicar Bishop Philip Huggins prepared a poster with messages of support and forwarded it to Bishop Budde.

“Grant us the strength and courage to honour the dignity of every human being.”

Marian Budde

Bishop Budde’s sermon, in which she urged the president to have mercy on immigrants and the LGBTQI community, has sent ripples across the globe.

Her appeal for God to “grant us the strength and courage to honour the dignity of every human being” has been vilified



by Trump supporters but celebrated by many Christians and advocates around the world.

St Silas’ parishioner Catherine Moore said she was angry at the negative responses

to Bishop Budde’s humble request for the president to have mercy.

“The most upsetting thing was that he called her a ‘so-called bishop’...This woman was being attacked for following her calling,” she said.

Ms Moore wrote on the poster, “Have courage, God is with you.” Other congregants wrote: “Thank you for having the courage to speak truth to power” and “Thank you for speaking what people don’t want to hear.”

Bishop Huggins said he imagined Bishop Budde having a few sleepless nights as she prepared for the sermon. “She probably wished she’d taken a job as chaplain at Disneyland!” he said.

Bishop Huggins noted that Bishop Budde was calm and quiet as she encouraged the president to be kind to people feeling anxious. He said this was the uncomfortable responsibility of the church.

On a lighter note, he wrote to Bishop Budde that the St Silas’ parish was currently vacant and said, “If you want a bit of respite from what you’re in the middle of, come on over!”



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St James' Dandenong celebrates Gwynne's 100th birthday

■ Doreen Lilly and Lin Richards

There was a large congregation at St James' Dandenong on January 26th to celebrate the 100th birthday of parishioner Gwynne Kett.

During the service Mrs Kett received a blessing from the vicar Reverend Graeme Peters and a bouquet of flowers followed by a special morning tea after the service.

Mrs Kett was born in Brighton on 1 February 1925, and as a child attended St Peter's Brighton Beach and, later, St John's Toorak when the family moved. Her involvement with the scouting movement as both leader and trainer lasting 35 years, started during this time.

She married Bob Kett in 1948 and, when they bought a house in Chadstone, began worshipping at Holy Trinity.



Gwynne Kett celebrates her 100th birthday. Picture: supplied

This connection to Holy Trinity lasted for 67 years during which time Mrs Kett participated in the life of the church in numerous ways. This included serving as parish secretary, teaching in Sunday school, singing in the choir,

youth work and Marriage Guidance.

During this time Mr and Mrs Kett had four children, three girls and one boy.

Following the couple's move to a retirement village in Dandenong, Mrs Kett has

worshipped at St. James' church from 2015 and regularly attends parish services and activities including weekly bible studies.

She is always very alert, and until a couple of years ago was still driving herself to church.

Mrs Kett radiates kindness and love to everyone she meets, and her invariable reply when asked how she is, is always "joyful"!

She has a deep love for her Lord Jesus, and it shows.

Having lived at Valley Village Mews for more than 30 years, Mrs Kett is probably its longest term resident, and is much loved there.

Birthday celebrations in her honour continued with an afternoon tea at the retirement village, and the added surprise of dressing in leathers for a ride through Dandenong on a Harley Davidson.



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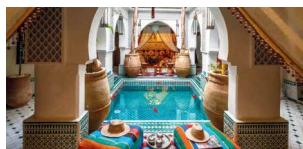
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Picture: iStock

Trump's politics promise death: White South African faith leaders

■ Jenan Taylor

White Christian leaders in South Africa have rejected recent claims of victimisation, violence and rhetoric against white people in South Africa made by the United States President Donald Trump and his government.

Based on these and claims about the expropriation of land without compensation, Mr Trump ordered the immediate withdrawal of all US government aid to South Africa in early February, while the US secretary of state has refused to attend the G20 Summit there.

More than 300 white leaders from Anglican, Catholic, Dutch Reformed and other churches and theological schools around the country warned in a statement the sudden aid withdrawal, particularly health support, promised devastation for South African communities.

They warned the USA was weaponising for cheap political points the tensions resulting from many white South Africans' sustained resistance to efforts to meaningfully address the consequences of apartheid.

"As white South Africans in active leadership within the Christian community, representing diverse political and theological perspectives, we unanimously reject these claims," the signatories said.

"We make this statement as white South Africans because these claims are being made about us and our experience in this place.

"The narrative presented by the US government is founded on fabrications, distortions, and outright lies. It does not reflect the reality of our country and, if anything, serves to heighten existing tensions in South Africa.

"It also detracts from the important work of building safer, healthier communities and addressing the complex history of land dispossession by white Europeans from the black African majority."

The leaders said the immediate and sudden withdrawal of aid, in particular of health support systems would disproportionately affect the large HIV population whose members' reliance on antiretroviral medication was a life or death matter.

"... we know them as members of our congregations and communities," they said.

"As followers of the God of life, and of Jesus Christ whose ministry of healing has guided the work of the church over centuries, we must protest in the strongest possible terms where we see racial politics being weaponized in ways that will contribute to the early death for the poor and vulnerable, while serving the political agendas of the powerful."

The leaders said they recognised their role in the country's failures to effectively address the racial injustices of Apartheid and Colonialism. As white Christian South Africans they were recommitting to working for redress, restitution and healing.

They recalled South Africa's history where the Christian faith was used to justify the oppressive colonial and apartheid regimes tacitly and explicitly.

The leaders paralleled this with current political rhetoric in the US that drew on Christianity in ways which dismissed the Christian call to care for the vulnerable, love neighbours, and work for a good society for all.

The leaders said such distortions of Christianity produced innumerable violences, and the justifying of these in the name of Christianity was something they condemned and rejected as faith leaders.

"While all South Africans have been personally touched by violence, the narrative of 'disproportionate violence' aimed at white South Africans that President Trump is attempting to push negates the indisputable reality, for anyone living in South Africa, that black South Africans continue to be subject to the worst excesses of violence and oppression," they said.

The Anglican network that is ‘Helping G

■ Murray Harvey

The spectacular and vibrant city of Hong Kong was the setting for a three-day meeting of the steering committee of the Anglican Communion’s Health and Community Network hosted by the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui – the Anglican Province of Hong Kong, recently.

There was no active health network in the Anglican Communion when COVID-19 broke out in 2020, but in response to this global health crisis the network was quickly formed to connect, prepare and equip Anglicans to provide health care, accompany the sick, and advocate for equitable healthcare.

Early in the pandemic it facilitated World Health Organisation briefings on COVID-19 for Anglican primates and health leaders, and advocated with the WHO and the World Council of Churches Health Committee for global vaccine equity.

During that time and in the years since, the network has brought together clergy and lay leaders to explore how churches can respond to wider health issues, including mental health and clergy wellbeing.

One of the dangers for any global network is becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. In our case, we are confronted by enormous global health needs, yet we have very limited resources. How can we even begin to make a difference, and on what issues? To this end, the network has, since its inception in 2020, organised numerous regional consultations in different time zones, asking Anglicans from different provinces about the health priorities in their regions. *See table below.*

While in Hong Kong I was heartened to hear we have many gifted and skilled representatives from different provinces

on the steering committee.

Additionally, there is a vast amount of health-related technical expertise and experience across the Anglican Communion.

Provinces, dioceses, organisations and networks manage health facilities, and undertake health care in local communities through health projects, networks such as the Mothers’ Union, Mission Agencies, local congregations, and volunteers. Churches also serve to facilitate greater access to health care provided by the state.

“Together we can improve the health and wellbeing of everyone.”

This wealth of knowledge and experience is an asset of the Communion that needs to be shared, to enable mutual flourishing. And to be effective in a health crisis, technical expertise and experience needs to be well connected, easily accessible and activated quickly.

Our host, Archbishop of Hong Kong the Most Reverend Andrew Chan challenged us to reflect on Ephesians chapter 4 verses 12 to 13, *to equip God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.* The work of the network seeks to bring glory to God through helping God’s people to flourish.

Improving health is a global effort and we are proud to work with a network of collaborators in over eighty countries. We work closely with the WHO’s Faith Network



Listening to Anglicans from around the world led us to create six priority areas:

- To seek to provide a **coordinated Anglican voice on key health issues** globally, regionally, nationally and across districts, informed by health professionals and church leaders working together, using the best scientific evidence.
- To **advocate for health** by keeping health on the Anglican agenda world-wide.
- To **build trust and hope within local communities** about health messages, because many were led astray during the pandemic by misinformation about COVID-19 and about vaccines. Faith communities play an important role not only in offering health services in communities around the world but also in **promoting positive messages** about public health, promoting health and wellbeing, emergency response, preparedness and resilience.
- To **equip the network** by bringing together practitioners, church leaders and academics from across the Communion to inform practice and advocacy. The inclusion of both academics and active practitioners in the network brings a greater legitimacy to the work and voice of the Communion and provides a mechanism for cross Communion learning and skills building on health.

od's people flourish'



Members of Anglican Communion's Health and Community Network. Picture: supplied

- To **support, accompany and encourage Anglican health agencies and partners** by providing technical support as well as connection with colleagues across the Communion to develop and share practical information and examples of what works.
- To **prepare for the next health emergency** by documenting lessons learned and examples of good practice across the Anglican Communion. These are realistic and achievable priorities.

and Emergency Preparedness Program, the WCC Health and Healing Program, and Christian Connections for International Health. Together we can improve the health and wellbeing of everyone.

Looking back, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that it is possible to draw on Anglican health expertise in a specific health crisis and for our interventions to have a real impact. We are exploring ways to make the health expertise that we have more accessible, available, and communicated and coordinated in other situations too, including in malaria and mental health. The C in AHCN is "community" in recognition of the fact that Anglican mission in

health takes place in communities as well as in hospitals and clinics. Anglican mission in health is therefore a complex social, community and health system, which underpins health in many different ways.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the AHCN can visit ahcn.anglicancommunion.org. If you feel you can contribute to the work of their network, the steering committee or one of the communities of practice, please contact bishop@graftondiocese.org.au.

Dr Murray Harvey is Bishop of Grafton NSW. He represents the Anglican Church of Australia on the steering committee of the Anglican Health and Community Network.

Picture: iStock

‘We are church outside church buildings’:

■ Hannah Felsbourg

The Reverend Victoria Bakerov is an Anglican Chaplain at Royal Melbourne Hospital. She was recently ordained as a deacon. Here, she shares about her work.

What drew you to this work?

I had a calling to work in the medical area when I was a young girl. I love medicine and wanted to be a doctor. All my life I worked in medical areas, and when I heard the call to ordained ministry, although I was ready to work anywhere, I always had a soft spot for chaplaincy in healthcare settings.

How did you receive your calling to ordained ministry?

It was the last Sunday before COVID. During worship, I distinctly heard, “Feed my sheep, feed my lambs.” I was trying to finish the verse differently in my head, and I realised I was fighting with someone else’s voice. I said in my heart, “If the finishing of the verse is correct the way the voice wanted to say it, it’s God – He knows the Bible better.” When I came home and read the scripture, I realised God was correct.

Every time I’d heard this verse before, I had this burning sensation that it was a calling to ordained ministry. I would fight it, saying, “No, it’s someone else being called by this, it’s just a verse coming up in my memory.” But this time, because I had promised that if God’s voice was correct about the verse, I would take it seriously as God’s calling and not just my imagination.

When I realised it was true, I cried. I wrote a huge list – almost 30 points of why I wasn’t good enough. I said to God, “You have to look closer at who you’re calling. I can’t do this, I can’t do that...”

How do you see your work fitting into God’s work in the world?

Chaplaincy is ministry that takes place outside the walls of the church. We encounter people who may never have crossed the threshold of a church building before. We meet them in the most difficult times of their lives – during suffering, pain, grief, loss, or uncertainty. We are there. We are present, doing what we can. In many cases, our presence reminds them of God’s loving kindness, His faithfulness, and His steadfast love for all of us.

We are church outside of church buildings. I don’t see us as separate.

Daily I see deep suffering. What happens in hospitals is often a pivotal point in

people’s lives. That’s when they start looking for deeper answers to life questions.

Many patients are from rural Victoria. Their relatives would love to be next to them, but they live four and a half hours away, and accommodation around hospitals isn’t cheap. So, they visit occasionally, but the majority, especially older people, are very lonely.

I’m mainly running around to do last rites, or visit someone in ICU, or something big. But so many people just really need to be listened to. I would really love to see more people involved in this ministry. It’s huge area and I can’t stress its importance enough.

“We meet [people] in the most difficult times of their lives – during suffering, pain, grief, loss, or uncertainty. We are there. We are present, doing what we can. In many cases, our presence reminds them of God’s loving kindness, His faithfulness, and His steadfast love for all of us.”

Victoria Bakerov

How do you see God at work through your work?

I see God at work every day. I witness miracles of healing through the medical staff, miracles of family reconciliation, and the wonder of someone departing this world to be with God.

I was called to administer the last rites to a young woman who had been brain-dead for some time, and whose family had finally decided to withdraw life support. Some of her family members hadn’t spoken to each other for over 20 years. When I arrived, I introduced myself to everyone, including the young woman, explaining who I was and what I was going to do.

“What I’ve learned is to do what I preach – I give my burdens to Jesus.”

Victoria Bakerov



Hospital chaplain



The Reverend Victoria Bakerov.
Picture: Sunny Kim

I touched her hand and began reading from *A Prayer Book for Australia*. When I asked the family to join me in saying the Lord's Prayer, I realised they were all holding hands. It brought tears to my eyes, but I held them back and continued leading the service. That moment was a miracle of reconciliation.

The nurse was also crying. She said, "You remind me of my childhood. All these prayers." It called her back to the church as well. Sometimes I see, it's almost like a reminder for people that God is a loving God, and He is with them in good and bad, and in hospital as well.

It's not simple when people depart. It stays with us. That's a huge wonder. Being with them in this time, sometimes I use words, but sometimes it's just being there, listening to what they want to say.

What encourages you in your work?

Sometimes it's heavy lifting, spiritually. What I've learned is to do what I preach – I give my burdens to Jesus. At the end of each day, I think about every encounter I've had and give it to the Lord. I pray that God will take care of each situation.

I'm blessed to have my supervisor, the Reverend Dawn Treloar, who responds with kindness whenever I need a 'little talk through.'

"Please pray for all of us at the hospital, and especially for our staff, and even their families."

Victoria Bakerov

What would you like Christians in Melbourne to know about your work?

I would love Christians in Melbourne to consider people who are in hospital. You're only one call away, one message away, one card away, one bunch of flowers away. Small words or gestures in times of deep distress can mean so much.

When people pray for hospitals, they pray for patients and families, but they hardly ever remember staff. I know exactly what a huge burden it is – knowing that what you do affects life and death. Please pray for all of us at the hospital, and especially for our staff, and even their families.

Please consider volunteering. Or consider financially supporting someone who can. I would love Melbournians to consider this ministry, to keep this ministry at the Royal Melbourne hospital because it's for the people of all Victoria.

I truly believe that the person who prays, gives financially, encourages a patient or family with a card, or visits a patient is equally important. I would like to invite them into partnership. We all work together – one person sows, another waters, and someone else reaps, but it is God who works through us all.

How does an election for a new archbishop work?

■ Penny Mulvey

Current lay and clergy members of the Diocese of Melbourne's synod will gather at St Paul's Cathedral on 23 and 24 May to elect a new archbishop. The meeting will be closed to the public.

The last time the two houses of synod (the House of Laity and the House of Clergy) came together to elect an archbishop was in 2006. It was a protracted and rancorous process requiring two separate meetings. The diocese is currently without an archbishop, with Archbishop Freier retiring on his 70th birthday, as per the synod regulations, earlier this month.

Bishop Genieve Blackwell, as the administrator of the diocese will, according to the *Synod Election Act*, meet with the Board of Nominators chair to determine who will be nominated to chair the election synod.

As specified in the Act, the most senior archdeacon (in order of most recent collation) who is not a candidate is to take the chair and put the motion that the person nominated as chair under subsection

(1) be appointed to chair the election synod. The person appointed under subsection (2) becomes the chair of the meeting.

Before finalising the list of candidates, the Board of Nominators is required to consult with the bishops of the province. The board must settle the list not sooner than six weeks after the date of its first meeting and not later than the day before the day on which an election synod commences.

The Board of Nominators will introduce each candidate to the two Houses. It is unknown at this stage how many candidates will be on the list. Following the introduction of a candidate, election synod members (not including members of the Board of Nominators) may address the meeting regarding that candidate. However, the conversation about each candidate cannot extend beyond one hour.

Once all the candidates have been introduced, there is opportunity for election synod members to debate the merits of the names before them. However, this debate is to go no longer than 30 minutes. This debate can be extended, or further

extended, by majority resolution for a period, or further period, not exceeding 30 minutes but the total time must not exceed 90 minutes. At the end of this discussion, the meeting must proceed to an election.

In determining the proportion of votes received by a candidate the number of members present is:

- in a meeting that is solely in person, the number of members physically present at the time of the ballot; or
- in a meeting that is solely by videoconference, the number of members who are participants in the videoconference at the time of the ballot; or
- in a meeting that is both in person and by videoconference, the number of members physically present and who are participants in the videoconference at the time of the ballot.

If you want to know more about the Synod Election Act, you can find it via www.melbourneanglican.org.au.



*Election synod members will gather to elect a new archbishop.
Picture: file*



Picture: iStock

Reflecting on a 'living', anchoring hope

■ Paul Barker

I hope that Richmond wins the premiership this year, but I suspect that is a vain hope, indeed a hopeless hope. I hope that there is lasting peace and freedom in Myanmar, but I fear that may also be a vain hope. So often, "hope" is a weak word.

Yet Christian hope is "sure and certain" in the *Book of Common Prayer*, because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Christian hope is robust, confident and unyielding, because God is both powerful and faithful, keeping all his promises and anchoring them in Jesus' resurrection. I sense we need to recapture confidence in this sure and certain hope.

My favourite Bible verse is 1 Peter 1:3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he

has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." As a teenager I still recall our minister preaching on this passage and my eyes being opened and heart being stirred by this glorious and certain hope.

It is a living hope, not a vain or uncertain hope, because Jesus truly rose. Death conquered, life triumphant, and the living Jesus is the first fruit for many to follow. So those who trust in him are born again to a new life, through a new birth, to this living and certain hope.

In Hebrews 6:19, the writer uses the striking image of an anchor for Christian hope, that through Jesus' resurrection, Jesus has anchored us in heaven. The robustness and security of Christian hope is clear.

There have been times in my life when I have doubted Christian faith and been tempted to abandon it. Can this really be true? Why bother being Christian? And each time I have come back to the bedrock of the resurrection of Jesus, and found myself happily anchored in this sure hope.

If Hope25 is to be successful in our parishes, and be a catalyst for regular mission and evangelism, then our confidence in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection must be strong. I hope (with confidence) that Hope25 will recapture confidence in Jesus and thus embolden us in proclaiming him and his resurrection.

Bishop Paul Barker is Chair of the Melbourne Diocese Hope25 committee.

Hope25 is a national evangelism initiative that equips Anglicans to share their hope in Jesus.

Sixteen parishes awarded MAF youth grants

■ Penny Mulvey

The Melbourne Anglican Foundation has approved more than \$104,000 in funding across 16 parishes in the Melbourne diocese after its inaugural Youth Grants Round drew countless applications.

MAF launched the Round in July 2024, and the response from parishes eager to launch and develop innovative youth programs exceeded its expectations.

Development Manager Nathan Oliver said, the team was greatly encouraged by how inventive parishes had been as they reflected on the kind of programs they wanted to offer their youth.

He said the Round had presented an opportunity for MAF to meet new parishes, and see the work they were doing to support young people.

MAF chair, Carolyn Clark said this first Youth Grants Round highlighted how

strategic, focused initiatives could deepen relationships and unlock new potential for impact across the diocese.

"We're excited to see these youth-driven projects come to life and are looking forward to fostering the connections and collaborations that have begun," she said.

See Melbourne Anglican Foundation advertisement on page 9.

When church feels daunting, The Shed

■ **Hannah Felsbourg**

In an industrial building in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, race car parts and motorcycles line the walls of the main space – a thoroughly blokey environment.

But near the entrance, a blackboard displays a welcome prayer, and upstairs, a small room offers a quiet space for reflection.

Its walls are covered with handwritten prayers, Bible verses, and words of encouragement scrawled on sticky notes.

This is The Shed Door – a place that defies easy categorisation. It's not quite a church, not quite a man cave, but somewhere intentionally in between.

Here, people who might never step foot in a traditional church find community over coffee, car talk, and occasionally, conversations about faith.

Behind The Shed Door is Phil Simpson, a barrister by trade who divides his time between court appearances and community ministry.

The idea emerged 13 years ago during his tenure as chaplain at Blackburn Primary School, where a pattern caught his attention.

"I kept meeting people, dads in particular, who were sort of disconnected and not super engaged," Mr Simpson recalled.

"We thought, what can we do about that?"

The answer started small: about 15 men around a campfire for a monthly gathering called Shednite.

The next month there were 25, then 30, and within a few months, up to 100 men were showing up.

They met in a garage for several years before eventually finding their current home in Mitcham.

From those early fireside gatherings, The Shed Door has evolved into a bustling hub of activity throughout the week.

Wednesday nights bring 30 to 50 young people for Shed Youth, mixing pizza and casual conversation with gospel messages or sometimes "don't-do-what-I-did messages."

The original men's events continue monthly, drawing crowds to hear speakers ranging from AFL footballers to Supreme Court judges.

"I would love to see people think creatively about what outreach looks like."

Phil Simpson

Past speakers have included Supreme Court Justice Michael Croucher, St Kilda ruckman Rowan Marshall, and V8 Supercar driver Cam Waters.

The space hosts Food4Thought, where people explore faith and life's big questions over shared meals, and there are monthly 24-hour prayer sessions where people drift in and out of the prayer room around the clock.

"The barriers to entry here are deliberately very low," Mr Simpson explained, leaning back in the informal space that reflected this philosophy.

Traditional churches could feel as foreign to outsiders as stepping into an unfamiliar religious order to a believer, but The Shed Door was intentionally different.

"That's why it feels sort of ad hoc and disorganised – because that's something people can relate to," he said.

"We're high on relationship, low on control. If someone comes with an idea, we say 'Well, that's free Tuesday, knock yourself out.'"

It wasn't about running programs, Mr Simpson clarified, but about creating genuine connections.

Twice a year, The Shed Door hosts "Coffee, Cars and Bikes" events, filling the street with custom vehicles while neighbours gather over free coffee and barbecue.

These events routinely draw hundreds from the community.

The Shed Door's approach emphasises belonging, creating space for authentic relationships without pressure.

"Whether someone chooses to explore faith is of absolutely no consequence," he said. "They're greeted here as a brother or sister. We don't have those hidden agendas."

The initiative receives no church funding, instead supported by a small group of committed individuals.

"We've always seemed to meet the budget through the generosity of others," Mr Simpson said.

"We never ask for money. We don't go on fundraising drives. But no one has turned the lights off on us yet."

The space attracts people from all walks of life – from privileged backgrounds to challenging ones, from those dealing with addiction to young people from broken families.

As an alcohol-free environment, it offers a rare social space where those battling addiction can find connection while avoiding temptation.

Mr Simpson is continually surprised by who walks through the doors and says some of the most committed volunteers are non-Christians.

"Everyone wants to be useful. Everyone wants to be involved," he said.

"I think sometimes we think that Christians have a monopoly on building community and making people feel welcome, and it's really clear in a place like this that's not the case."

For many young people who have not experienced the warmth and affirmation

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Door is open



Phil Simpson at The Shed Door.

Picture: Hannah Felsbourg

of a stable family environment, The Shed Door becomes a crucial point of connection.

While not every interaction goes perfectly to plan, Mr Simpson said that was part of working with youth.

What mattered was that people were finding community, purpose, and sometimes, healing.

"I want to see people being restored, people being made whole, people discovering what they were made for," Mr Simpson said.

"Because I speak to a lot of people who actually don't seem to have any purpose, as a result of things that were often beyond their control."

"I want to see people being restored, people being made whole, people discovering what they were made for,"

Phil Simpson

While careful not to criticise traditional churches, Mr Simpson suggests they consider the barriers that keep people from entering their buildings.

"I would love to see people think

creatively about what outreach looks like," he said.

He also advocates for what he calls a parallel career – the model that allows him to practice law while contributing to The Shed Door.

Mr Simpson encourages other professionals to consider scaling back their main careers to pursue their calling.

"I would like to see more of it – professionals, tradies, whatever. Dialling back their bread-and-butter job and leaning into what God called them to do."

More information about The Shed Door can be found on their Facebook page.

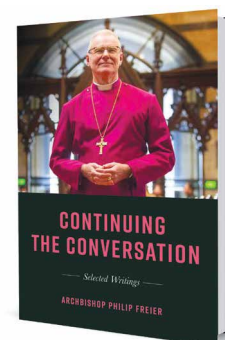
Celebrate the ministry of Archbishop Philip Freier

**CONTINUING
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— Selected Writings —

Since 2007, the Archbishop has contributed a regular column in *The Melbourne Anglican*, focusing on issues in church and society with informed comment, wise counsel and deep engagement.

Continuing the Conversations is a record of some of those columns and reminds us that the conversations surrounding those topics is unfinished; as well as a timely reminder and celebration of his pastoral ministry in the archdiocese.

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Finding our Christian identity

■ Jenny George

Andrew Laird. I am what I do. Reshaping our understanding of self and work. Matthias Media, 2023.

I am what I do is a short and readable entry into a very important topic: where we as Christians locate our identity and how this intersects with the work we do.

On first picking up the book, I expected it to be primarily focused on work, the workplace, career success and ambition. But it is aimed more at the concept of Christian identity and uses work as an example of an alternative identity structure to test this against.

The opening story of Lauren Jackson's retirement from basketball invites the reader to notice how Jackson equates her identity with her work. Laird asks us to think about how we might do the same. Do we say "I work as a lawyer" or "I am a lawyer", for example? This is good stuff and helpful. In the first chapters, Laird examines the ideas of hyper-individualism, collective identity and the burden of feeling responsible for success (our own success in individualist societies and corporate or family success in collectivist ones).

Because it's such a short book, there isn't much chance to delve into some truly interesting questions. Laird often assumes that the challenges he's outlining are

modern – a particular burden for our own time. But having an identity rooted in what we do ("I am what I do") was surely just as strong in a time when a blacksmith knew he was going to be a blacksmith from the time he was born, expected his son to be one as well, and the whole family ended up with the surname "Smith".

"...we all experience the burden of needing to create our own identity and, often, seeking to do that through our work. And that is both burdensome and exhausting."

Andrew Laird

So what's different about the modern world?

I think Laird is right about our society facing new and special challenges. But my suspicion is that these turn on the unprecedented *choices* we have about our own identities – not the mere fact of our identity being bound up in work. These fascinating ideas are not entirely absent from the book. For example Laird writes: "Young or old, we all experience the burden of needing to create our own identity and, often, seeking

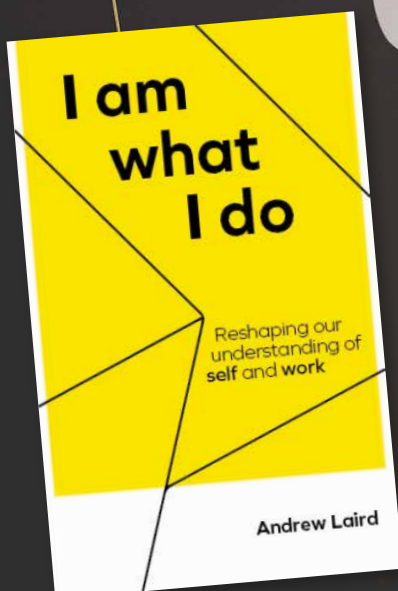
to do that through our work. And that is both burdensome and exhausting." These were rich insights that I would have liked to see fleshed out more fully.

The book is easy and enjoyable to read. The stories and case studies are welcome and relevant. Laird quotes many other authors and particularly draws from Alan Noble and Brian Rosner. The pointers to other material are a good idea but the quotes themselves can feel a bit intrusive in the text at times. I wanted to hear more in Laird's own words.

The impact of the book is strongest in the sections where the author tells his own story. Laird relates instances where his actions and attitudes were challenged and tells us about a long period of time he spent recovering from burnout. The transparency and stark honesty of his writing invite the reader to similarly examine their own lives and motivations. The chapter in which Laird guides readers through a set of diagnostic questions is particularly helpful.

This is a good read if you're looking for a book to help you think about how to cling to a Christian identity against the lure of locating your identity in work. I'd especially recommend it for younger Christians starting out in a career.

Dr Jenny George is Dean of Melbourne Business School and Co-Dean of the University of Melbourne Faculty of Business and Economics.





Hugh Grant stars as a manipulative sceptic who lures Mormon missionaries into a psychological horror in *Heretic*.

Picture: www.imdb.com

Heretic explores the cult of scepticism

■ Hannah Felsbourg

Scott Beck and Brian Woods' *Heretic* transforms the age-old quest for religious truth into psychological horror by exploring how extreme scepticism can birth its own dangerous orthodoxy. What begins as an intellectual debate between Mormon missionaries and their would-be convert becomes a disturbing exploration of how rational inquiry, when taken to extremes, can calcify into the very kind of dogmatic thinking it claims to oppose.

Mormon missionaries Sisters Barnes (Sophie Thatcher) and Paxton (Chloe East) arrive at the home of Mr Reed (Hugh Grant), initially declining to enter without another woman present. When Reed assures them his wife is busy in the kitchen baking pie, they accept his invitation. What begins as a theological discussion takes a dark turn when they discover the blueberry pie smell comes from a scented candle, the doors are locked, and their phone has no signal. Following Reed deeper into his home, they reach a chapel-like study where he presents them with two potential exits theatrically labelled "belief" and "unbelief".

The film's greatest strength lies in its exploration of how scepticism can evolve into its own form of zealotry. Reed presents himself as someone who has studied all religions and discovered absolute truth

through comparative analysis and rational inquiry. Yet his unwavering devotion to his own conclusions reveals him as a kind of anti-prophet, gathering followers not through promises of salvation but through the seductive certainty of doubt. When faced with challenges to his own beliefs, he deflects or dismisses them, displaying the same rigid thinking he condemns in organised religion.

Heretic is relatively dialogue-heavy, particularly in its early scenes. Yet rather than dragging, these extended conversations prove more compelling than much of the action that follows. The film builds tension through intellectual sparring and psychological manipulation before transitioning into more conventional horror elements. The production design cleverly mirrors Reed's transformation from enlightened sceptic to fanatic leader. The deceptively cosy domesticity of "Bless this mess" embroidery and picture of a younger Reed with a dog giving way to the claustrophobic oppression of the study – a secular sanctuary where Reed performs his own dark rituals of conversion.

Hugh Grant delivers a masterfully disturbing performance as Reed, balancing menace with an almost charming dad-like humour that makes his character even more terrifying. His studied assurance and theatrical presentation feel instantly recognisable to anyone who's encountered zealot

ideologues of any stripe, whether religious or atheist. Both lead actresses, former Mormons themselves, bring compelling authenticity to their roles as they navigate this clash of worldviews, particularly in their evolution from defending their beliefs to recognising the dangers of absolute certainty in any form.

While the film's theological arguments often feel shallow – drawing heavily from popular scepticism rather than deep philosophical enquiry – the broader narrative offers more substance. The subtext explores how the tools of rational inquiry can be weaponised to create new forms of control and manipulation. The sisters' journey suggests that true scepticism requires humility and openness rather than the rigid certainty Reed embodies, while his unshakeable faith in his own conclusions becomes a dark mirror of religious fundamentalism.

Heretic works best as a psychological thriller about the perils of certainty in any form – whether it wears the clothes of faith or reason. While its philosophical ambitions may exceed its reach, the film succeeds in creating an unsettling exploration of how easily the quest for truth can become its own cult of personality, and how intellectual humility might be our best defence against manipulation.

Heretic was released in November 2024.

When theology was ‘The Queen of the

The study of theology once reigned supreme, even more so than science as we know it today. Here’s why we should rethink our understanding of how science and theology shape our worldviews.

■ Paul Clark

Like me, you are probably a product of the Enlightenment and modernity. That is, you have been shaped by a worldview that – to put it starkly – champions reason over religion, science over superstition, and technology over tradition.

In 2025, modernity has given way to postmodernity, which is quickly being re-wired to the “I’ve got a smart phone in my pocket” era. But if you are reading this article, there’s a good chance your educational foundations are deeply rooted in modernity.

What does that mean? If you are like me, it’s hard to not evaluate any truth claims by appealing to reason and science.

This is not necessarily bad. It represents a huge step forward for humanity that has led to amazing discoveries in medicine, physics, biology, almost all facets of life.

Yet there is one problem. In bringing reason and science to the front of human endeavour, we have pushed them onto pedestals that are too high. This has demoted other life pursuits – spirituality, community, the arts – we are beginning to discover we need in order to live a truly fulfilling life.

This is why we moved to postmodernism: it was a realisation that while science was a wonderful thing, it wasn’t everything. While reason can take you a long way, it can’t take you all the way. While technology can solve many problems, it can’t solve the problems of the soul.

As a child of modernity, I remember hitting university and being shocked to learn that university as an entity wasn’t

started (in the eleventh century!) to study the hard sciences; rather universities were started to study what was considered the highest science of all at the time: theology.

Then, theology – the study of God – was known as the “Queen of the Sciences”. Theology was considered the highest knowledge you could attain. It makes logical sense: God is the highest being; seeking to comprehend God must be the highest calling.

“In bringing reason and science to the front of human endeavour, we have pushed them onto pedestals that are too high. This has demoted other life pursuits – spirituality, community, the arts ...”

The term “science” was also used more generically back then to refer to knowledge. Most people who went to universities were going to become clergy, and so they studied theology.

This doesn’t mean they were against other forms of knowledge. Not at all. In the early centuries of universities, theology was one way of knowing God. Another way was through natural philosophy – what we would call today science, the study of the material world. Yes, there was very much

a sense that God had spoken to us in his Word, Scripture (theology), but God was also revealed through what God had made: nature, natural philosophy, or science.

So, most clergy were not only good theologians, but also became good biologists, mathematicians, astronomers, or physicists. It’s why so many early scientific discoveries were made by clergy.

In society at the time, few went on to such higher education. The clergy of a town were often the most highly educated people of the area, and their knowledge was broad. It was a good thing for a community.

However, through the Enlightenment (1685 to 1815), a certain shade was thrown on theology; it was caricatured as superstition (although ironically Christianity was the worldview that had tossed aside the superstition of earlier eras).

While the criticism was exaggerated, the Enlightenment was a corrective to elements that had been added to Christianity that were superstitious or irrational, leading to the Protestant Reformation. Yet it seems to have missed so many people at the time, that the *Enlightenment*, the coming of the light to reveal truth, is a thoroughly Christian idea. Jesus was the light who came to the world. Rather than being a rejection of Christianity, the Enlightenment was simply another version of Christianity in different words.

When you want to correct something, you often use extreme and polemic language to demonise the thing, going too far in the process. Advocates of the time, like Andrew Dickson White and John William Draper, literally created the myth that science and religion were incompatible and irreconcilable enemies. The myth persists, even to this day.

Yet the result was that the hard sciences grew in their influence and esteem. The

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Sciences'



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Queen of the Sciences was de-throned. The hard sciences, which had once been mere side-hustles to the theologians, gained prominence. Again, the benefits of this are wonderful and some elevation was needed. What has been lost is perspective.

Having believed the caricature, many now believe that science is King, and theology isn't even rational. Yet as C. S. Lewis famously said in his *Is Theology Poetry* essay:

Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that

“Science has been a timely foil for theology, to remove what was rotten and to sharpen its logic.”

the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.

Science has no room for theology, but it also has no room for art, morality, or the subliminal effect of music. Theology can contain all these things. Which worldview is larger? Large enough to contain the world?

Science is Good, but it's not God. Science has been a timely foil for theology, to remove what was rotten and to sharpen its logic. But when we put science above scholarship of the soul, we lose meaning, morality, mystery, beauty, agency, kindness, hope, and love. These are the things the world seems to need most of all right now.

I want science and God. Just not in that order.

Paul Clark is an associate of ISCAST—Christianity and Science in Conversation, an author and broadcaster, heard on radio across Australia as the At the Top guy, and currently the Acting Dean of Formation at Trinity College Brisbane.

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The spirit does matter

■ Fergus King

The idea that what is “spirit” is better than “matter” is frequently found in popular Christian writing. But, is it really biblical?

In *Surprised by Hope*, talking about Resurrection and the new life in Christ, Tom Wright suggested claims that it is the “spirit” alone which survives after death have much more in common with ancient Greek thinking. In contrast, the New Testament always stresses a material or physical dimension to the new life in Christ.

Furthermore, in later Christian history, heterodox groups like the Docetics (early Christians who believed that Jesus pretended to become human) used the superiority of the spirit as the basis for thinking that Jesus could never have become a real flesh and blood human being. Christian Gnostics (with their elaborate theories of esoteric secret knowledge, all rather redundant when the mystery is revealed in Christ [Colossians 1:25-2:3], and heavenly ascents) would follow.

There’s more. Particularly since the Reformation in Western Europe, some brands of Christianity have rejected the ancient understandings of sacraments-arguing that the material and the physical cannot deliver spiritual blessings. If we dip into the long commentaries on the Gospel of John, for example, we can find all sorts of elaborate theories about how the Gospel reached its present form because later editors added references to sacraments (for example, in John 6) into an earlier, pristine “spiritual” narrative. Sacraments, they argue, are a belated mistake contrary to some

first purely “spiritual” edition of the gospel; the product of later, feeble minds, not of Jesus, or of the Beloved Disciple. It is no coincidence, to the cynic, that the theories about additions mirror what the critics do not like. They have, to use an old image, looked into a deep well, seen their own reflection in the water at the bottom, and decided that this, indeed, is the face of early, uncorrupted Christianity.

“Some brands of Christianity have rejected the ancient understandings of sacraments-arguing that the material and the physical cannot deliver spiritual blessings.”

It never had to be this way. “Spirit” does not have to reject “matter”. Claims, with apologies to Tom Wright, that this was how the Greeks thought need to be examined. Its principal exponent is often claimed to be Plato, whose bumbling second-rate deity called the *Demiurge* in the *Timaeus* is taken to indicate a separation, with matter considered inferior. This popular summary does not hold up. Arguably, Plato viewed the material as subordinate to the spiritual, but not distinct from it.

Nor did other Greeks separate spirit and matter. The Epicureans held that the world arose from the random swerve of atoms: even a “spiritual” entity like the soul was

fabricated from lighter atoms. Stoics held that their deity, also known as both *Logos* (word) and *Pneuma* (spirit) was present in every element of the created order. Neither accepted the separation of spirit and matter. Both considered the soul material.

Nor was this part of Jewish thought, which had a strong material focus, was shy of speculation about “spiritual” dimension, and did not entertain a clumsy lesser creator. Ideas of life after death became more prominent as the likelihood of Israel’s political restoration diminished, and faithful, persecuted remnants (like the Maccabees) looked to some other kind of justification and liberation by God. Here, they drew on notions of resurrection which included a physical or material element: a Persian rather than a Greek idea.

So, there is no reason that a separation of spirit and matter must be the default setting for the first Christians, even if other dualistic modes (heaven/earth; God/ruler of this world; light/dark; above/below) still function.

With the false separation removed, the Gospel of John offers a picture in which the spiritual works with, through, and in, the material.

Let us consider our three topics:

Incarnation: the Prologue makes it clear that God becomes, and is born, flesh (John 1:14). There is no reason to say God and matter cannot meet.

Sacraments: Many Anglicans understand sacraments to be “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” which risks suggesting that only a spiritual dimension matters. This definition comes

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from later thinkers like Augustine of Hippo. But this is not so. Sacraments always have a material dimension. Nevertheless, John the evangelist knew, as one versed in Judaism, an understanding of sacramental materials and acts in which ordinary material items, blessed by God, impart spiritual blessings. The objection to material items, like bread and wine, being the means through which God may bless his people is not demanded by the gospel. Nor, actually, is it demanded by the widely held Anglican definition. To focus on the spiritual alone is erroneous. There still needs to be the “outward and visible”, that is, the material, component. Sacraments make no sense without it.

Baptism, being born from above, (John 3:3) indicates that spiritual blessing in a life aligned with God in the here and now, and maintained by abiding with Jesus, is a reality. Water, a material element, is still used at the point of birth from above. Christians believe in life before death, not just after it. Eternal life is entered at baptism, not death, but can, of course, always be frittered away through the failure to abide and remain.

“Christians cannot claim to be escaping to a pure supernatural realm, nor can they abrogate action in living well materially.”

Material bread and wine, now the flesh and blood of Christ, sustain the disciple who remains with Jesus. How one lives in this material realm, aligned with Jesus and the Father with the help of the Spirit, replaces subjection to the prince of this world, who is an upstart pretender. The gospel makes it clear: the material process of baptism, the material work of the Incarnation, and the material work of the sacraments all enable sharing in an eternal life, which also embraces a material dimension.

Resurrection: Jesus, raised from the dead, is not purely spiritual, but also physical. He is capable of being touched by the

questioning Thomas (John 20:24-26): the logic of the story demands it. He is able to prepare food for, and eat with his disciples (John 21:9-15). The physical is not left behind, but included within eternal life.

Objections only arise if one demands, as a foundational claim, or an *a priori* assumption, that spirit and matter do not mix. Set that aside, and elaborate theories demanding complex, and badly done, edits of the gospel are redundant, as are claims that sacraments are a corruption. The consequences are significant: Christians cannot claim to be escaping to a pure supernatural realm, nor can they abrogate action in living well materially. We are not, to close again with Tom Wright, members of some doomsday cult, waiting for the mothership to come and take us away. We are to make a difference in the here and now because the spirit *does* matter.

The Reverend Dr Fergus King is Farnham Maynard Associate Professor in Ministry Education and director of the Ministry Education Centre, Trinity College Theological School.



Anglicans and their friends thanked Archbishop Philip and Joy Freier for their 18 years of service.
Pictures: James Grant

