

# essentials

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With the last edition of Essentials having a focus on retirement, we considered it highly appropriate that this edition should turn the focus onto youth ministry! Graham Stanton writes on how to find a good youth minister, while Tim Stevens and Matt Jacobs reflect on youth ministry in country and regional areas respectively. As I read over those articles it occurred to me that perhaps youth ministry and the opportunities of retirement are not so far apart after all, especially in country areas.

In a time of unsettledness and challenge for evangelical Anglicans in Australia it is vital to be reminded of the ever-present task before us of reaching, discipling, and training the next generation of servants of Christ in our churches.

It is no easy task to boil down the key insights and applications of a PhD dissertation into a feature length article, but that is precisely what Dani Treweek has done for us in this edition. She masterfully leads us in clear thinking about singleness as well as showing powerfully the pastoral challenge and mission opportunity that singleness represents in our churches and communities. While Dani's work is a vital contribution to many ongoing

debates, I read her article as a profound challenge to do better in our church at loving and reaching the single within our church and in our town.

With the current debates concerning sexuality and gender swirling around us, Ralph Bowles does us a great service by drawing our thinking back to something which ought to be obvious but is often missed: two utterly incompatible views on what constitutes human nature.

With these contributions and others besides, I commend to you this Spring edition of Essentials.

In Christian Fellowship

**GAVIN PERKINS, BOWRAL, NSW**

**EDITOR**

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#### **What is EFAC?**

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate: a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.

7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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essentials



# State of the Nation

STEPHEN HALE

What is the current state of play in the Anglican Church in Australia? That's a big question and the following are a few perspectives.\*

## 1. ENCOURAGEMENTS

It used to be that there were three evangelical Dioceses in Australia – Sydney, Armidale and North West Australia. It was that way for a long time. Today we can be encouraged by a big shift. Many Dioceses have changed or are changing! It is a fundamental realignment. Even in Dioceses where evangelicals are in a minority, there are great signs of change and growth. This showed up more fully at General Synod in both the range of speakers from right across the country and also in the election results.

This growth and change can be attributed to many factors (in no particular order):

- Two strong theological Colleges in Moore and Ridley (are they the two strongest Anglican Theological Colleges in the western world?)
- Healthy and encouraging episcopal ministry in many places
- The work of BCA/CMS
- EFAC's role in being a fellowship and a place of encouragement for gospel ministry and biblical preaching. People know each other across our country because of the many Conferences held over many decades
- Healthy models of good parish ministry and good quality clergy and high calibre lay leadership
- An ongoing commitment to ministry with children and families and young people
- Strong student ministry
- Church planting and evangelism
- People's willingness to participate in Synods both nationally and in their own Dioceses
- Community care expressed in all sorts of ways in all sorts of places
- Work in schools
- Cross cultural ministry and the growing number of language specific (non-English) churches
- Indigenous ministry and partnerships

## 2. CHALLENGES

There is much one could say here as well, but here are five major challenges.



Stephen Hale

pictured

### i. *The future of the parish*

In many parts of the country the parish system is struggling to survive. This is particularly the case in remote rural Australia, as well as in parts of our major cities where the demographic realities (ageing congregations) are now pushing many churches into precarious places. The first step is often moving to part time ministry and then the cobbling together of unviable churches as a way of continuing on. Most people go to the church of their choosing and this has big implications as to the shape and relevance of the so-called local church. How many micro churches can a Diocese sustain and how do we manage decline while responding to new opportunities for growth?

### ii. *Rebuilding during an ongoing health crisis*

Generally speaking, many churches are 20% to 30% smaller in mid-2022 than in mid-2019. This has been very tough as people are having to manage two things simultaneously: maintaining ministry in a context where the impact of illness is a week in and week out reality and having less people overall. At the same time, many people are seeking to rebuild ministries that may have fallen away during these past two years. The overall sense is that many people are both exhausted and somewhat disheartened.

### iii. *Children, Families and Youth*

There has been a general decline in the number of children, families, and young people with whom churches are connecting with. While there has been a necessary focus on being child-safe, this has made the task of raising volunteers much more complex and challenging. New innovative ideas are needed for connecting with non-church children and families as well as young people.

Helping young people (and their parents) to navigate the complex sexual and identity issues of our day is incredibly demanding and pastorally challenging.

*iii. Ordained Ministry*

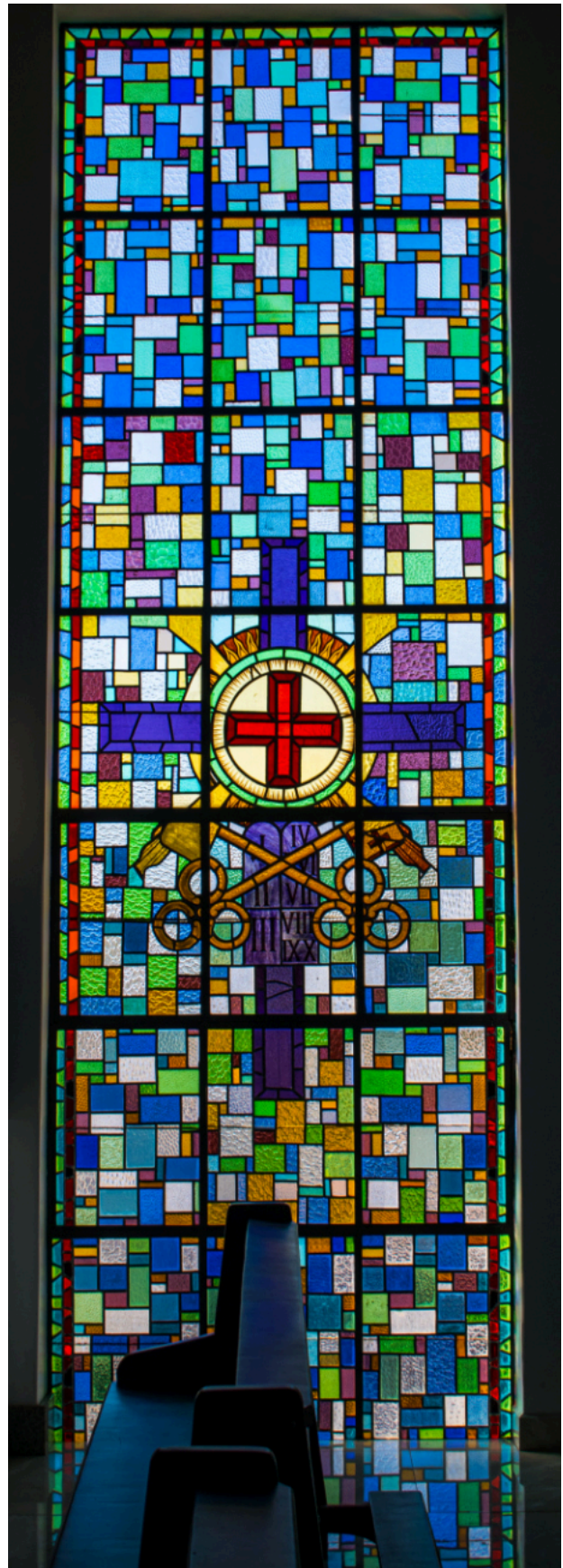
At present there is an increasing concern that the number of people offering for ordination is not sufficient to meet the ongoing needs into the future. Whether this is a temporary blip, or an on-going trend is unclear. Many (one could even suggest, far too many) clergy are being asked to go into unhealthy churches in the hope of pulling off a revival. While this is possible and does happen, in many cases it leads to people being crushed and often leaving ministry. In the main, most clergy would prefer to work in a team rather than on their own. It is easier to start a new church than to turn around an established church.

*iv. Evangelism*

For the last decade or more there has been a huge conversation going on about mission and how we enable our churches to become missionally effective. These conversations have been important. At the same time, it has become increasingly complex and to some extent overwhelming. There are so many ways forward being promoted that it can be confusing and disempowering for many people. In the midst of all of this discussion and ferment we seem to have lost sight of simply seeking to see people come to faith. In a context where the wider culture is seemingly running against us, this passion for the gospel and for reaching the lost needs to be recaptured and encouraged. In God's providence the language-specific (non-English) ministries set a shining example for us.

**Bishop Stephen Hale**  
**Chair, EFAC Australia and EFAC Global.**

\* Contention around orthodoxy and marriage were addressed in my report on General Synod in the last edition.







# Becoming Single Minded

DANI TREWEEK

In one sense, it's no more important that we Christians be more faithfully single-minded right now than at any other point in our history. The Body of Christ has always included single men and women. Biblical passages such as 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5 disclose the vital presence of unmarried, divorced, and widowed members within the first-century church. The Early Church Fathers demonstrated high regard and concern for those who remained unmarried (or, in their vernacular, virgins). There was also a prevalence of unmarried men and women throughout the Middle Ages. This included monks, nuns, priests, and ordinary, everyday "single" and "single-again" Christians. Indeed, unmarried individuals, particularly unmarried women, would go on to constitute a significant portion of the population of early modern Europe<sup>1</sup> as well as those nations that it would colonise. That is to say, there has never been a time in the church's history when singles have not formed a recognisable and substantial part of its membership. As a result, there has also never been a time in the church's life together when it hasn't been necessary for the church to be genuinely and earnestly mindful of its unmarried members. And yet, there is a genuine sense in which our current moment seems especially imbued with a call towards a renewed and re-energised sense of faithful, Christian single-mindedness. The reasons for this are theological, pastoral and also, missional.

## MISSIONALLY SINGLE-MINDED

While the Australian divorce rate has, happily, remained reasonably stable for some years now (in 2020, there were 1.9 divorces per 1000 people<sup>2</sup>), the same cannot be said for our nation's marriage rate. In 1989, Australia had a crude marriage rate of 7.0 per 1000 people.<sup>3</sup> By 2010, this had decreased to 5.4 and then to just 4.5 in 2019.<sup>4</sup> (In 2020, it plummeted to only 3.1. However, this very steep decline was largely reflective of pandemic-related gathering regulations.<sup>5</sup>)

Of course, such statistics do not allow us to extrapolate that there has been any directly correspondingly sharp increase in the number of Australians who are remaining single. After all, the prevalence of de-facto relationships provides some vital context to our nation's decreasing marriage rate. But perhaps even more significantly, the term "single" itself is rather challenging to define in our modern missional context. In a society with countless relational in-betweens, what does it mean for someone to be single? Adding yet another layer of complexity is the



Dani Trewick

pictured

fact that society's apparent classification of whether an individual is single or not may stand at odds with that individual's self-perception of their own status. Because what it is to be single is a very complex matter, so too is an accurate understanding of what proportion of the population we seek to evangelise are, in fact, single. And yet, there are some data points that *do* elucidate the growing significance of singleness as a life situation for Australians, and so also the ever-increasing significance of singleness for the gospel mission of our 21st Century evangelical churches. One of these key data points is the number of Australians who live alone. According to the results of the 2021 census, 26% of all Australian households were solo occupied, while another 11% were occupied by a single parent.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, more than one in every three dwellings surrounding our churches will, on average, be occupied by an adult who is (at least, functionally) not married. Indeed, it is projected that by 2041 up to 3.5 million Australians will be living alone. This would represent an increase of up to 53% from 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this statistic (and other related ones) will look somewhat different depending on the suburb, region, or city in which any given church is located. And yet it is surely incumbent on each of our churches to understand the demographic constitution of its local community as it considers how to best undertake its mission amongst that community.

The location and ministry of my own Anglican church in Sydney is an excellent example. The 2021 census data of the local area surrounding our church reveals that 35.5% of local households are solo occupied (compared to the national average of 26%). There are almost as many solo-occupied households as there are dual-occupied households. Even more significantly, only 20% of local households are usually occupied by three or more people who are part of the same family unit. That is, only one in five households in our local area would fit the bill of



housing a typical “nuclear family”. Furthermore, there are *more than three times as many* never married, divorced, separated or widowed people (over the age of 19) in our local community as there are those in a registered marriage.<sup>8</sup>

While such demographic realities bring great missional opportunities, they also present our church with significant challenges. For instance, the membership of our church community—and especially our morning church congregation, which is significantly constituted by mothers, fathers, children, and youth—is not a proportional reflection of the community surrounding us. Investing heavily in children and youth ministry will continue to be necessary for the discipleship of those who are already members of our Christian family, and some others who are yet to join us. And yet, such a ministry focus is likely to have a more limited proportional missional impact in our local area because of our unique demographic factors at work. Good as they continue to be, the more “traditional ways” of approaching ministry and church growth (e.g., “family services”, mothers’ and toddlers’ groups, child-focused Easter and Christmas events etc.) are, in our context, becoming significantly more niche in terms of their potential missional impacts. Wonderfully, my church leaders are pro-actively committed to helping our wider church family grapple with these (and other!) complex realities. As a result, one of the things we are praying for and working towards is that we would be a church in which ‘being single is honoured and celebrated as a life-path full of opportunities and distinctive goodness’. Yes, my church is somewhat of a unique geographical and demographic situation. Yes, churches in more suburban settings will be missioning to and amongst quite different communities than ours. Nonetheless, I strongly suspect that if more church leaders were to rigorously analyse the data for their local communities, many would be surprised at how many unmarried people—be they never-married, divorced, or widowed—sit on the other side of their church doors. Faithful single-mindedness should be a critical missional priority for evangelical churches in the early 21st Century.

### THEOLOGICALLY SINGLE-MINDED

There is also a strong theological impetus for why the evangelical church (in Australia and beyond) ought to be more intentionally single-minded right here and now. If we are truly honest, we will admit that contemporary evangelicalism doesn’t have so much a theology of singleness as we do a theology of not-singleness. For decades—even centuries—the evangelical church has been rather myopically focused on marriage’s theological,

pastoral, and societal significance. It is not simply that we have rightly sought to uphold the biblical command that ‘Marriage is to be honoured by everyone’ (Hebrews 13:4, NIV), especially in the face of a seemingly ever intransigent broader culture. Rather, evangelicalism has increasingly held that, as Andreas Köstenberger has put it, ‘for most Western Christians it appears self-evident that marriage is *the normal state*’.<sup>9</sup>

Where marriage is “normal”, singleness can only be abnormal, perhaps even aberrant. So it is that prominent contemporary US evangelical leaders such as Douglas Wilson insist that ‘singleness is an affliction, not a gift’,<sup>10</sup> while key theological and pastoral figures such as Albert Mohler have repeatedly contended that ‘deliberate singleness on the part of those who know they have not been given the gift of celibacy is, at best, a neglect of Christian responsibility’.<sup>11</sup> For his part, John MacArthur has asserted that ‘the most devastating attack on marriage is coming today from singleness’.<sup>12</sup> While to those ministering within an evangelical Australian context, such American preachers and teachers may appear to be somewhat distant, even enigmatic figures, the reality is that the theological discourse on marriage (and so also singleness) of the last half-century or so has been very heavily influenced by such imported evangelical discourse. This has only become more the case in an ever more globalised, technologically driven and media-saturated society.

And yet such an impoverished depiction of Christian singleness is far from the honourable state spoken about in God’s word. The Bible honours godly singleness as a truly good state for the disciple of Jesus (Mt 19:10-12). It calls us to understand singleness to be a gift from our gracious heavenly father (1 Cor 7:7). It celebrates the



unmarried Christian person's ability to be undivided in their devotion to him (1 Cor 7:31-35). It suggests that the one who remains unmarried not only does "better" but is perhaps also "happier" (1 Cor 7: 38, 40). It reveals to us that we have a saviour who was himself, fully human, truly fulfilled, and wonderfully single. God's word highly commends singleness within the Christian life and community.

It also imbues the life of one who is not married with unique eschatological dignity. Isaiah calls the barren woman to anticipate the day when she will 'burst into song, shout for joy [...] because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband' (Isaiah 54:1). He announces that to the eunuch, the Lord will give 'a name better than sons and daughters' (Is 56:4). Jesus himself asserts that the new creation will be one in which none of us will be married to another (Mt 22:30). In Revelation it is the 144,000 virgins who, having the Lamb's 'name and his Father's name written on their foreheads [...] sing] a new song before the Throne [...] and follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (Revelation 14:1-4). Given the high significance, value and dignity with which Scripture regards the single Christian life, surely we 21st Century evangelical Christians should no longer be satisfied with a quasi-theology of singleness constructed by way of lacuna? And yet it will not be sufficient for us to pay lip service to such dignified singleness. We must understand anew why the unmarried life is theologically significant. We must grapple afresh with the purpose of singleness in this creation, as that which also foreshadows the next. We must seek to understand God's purposes for singleness in the lives of our unmarried brothers and sisters and his purpose for them in our life together as the body of Christ. It is for both the unmarried and married Christian's sake, that the time is indeed ripe for us to become theologically single-minded

#### PASTORALLY SINGLE-MINDED

In May 2022, I moved a motion at the 18th session of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia that it affirm that "singleness is, like marriage, an honourable state for God's people, in which the fullness of God's blessings may be enjoyed". It was eventually passed, though not without some objection (primarily to do with other elements of the motion which spoke about the godliness of chastity in singleness). In preparation for my moving the motion, I asked a range of never-married, divorced and widowed Anglican men and women why they thought it was so crucial that their national church affirmed singleness as a genuinely honourable state for God's people. Here are just some short comments from the replies I received.

*"I just want to be seen as whole. As complete just as I am."  
"I just want to be considered a person of value in the church."  
"I just want to feel normal."*

Our slowness in fostering pastoral communities in which single Christians not only feel like they are "normal" but where they also feel like they truly belong is the outworking of a long-standing, underlying and often unspoken suspicion that singleness is an undesirable and even unliveable state.

When the goal of the Christian life is seemingly presented to be marriage and parenthood; when our services are frequently denoted to be either "family services" or "youth services"; when our ministry programs (and the frequent calls to fill rosters for said programs) are persistently dominated by children's, youth and parenting activities; when it is usual for our sermons to be populated with illustrations of marriage and family life; when we speak of sex as being at the heart of authentic human experience, and sexual temptation as being all but irresistible; when we idealise romantic love as the ultimate form of intimacy, while leaving little significance for the role of friendship; when the only life events we regularly celebrate from the front of church are engagements, marriages and births; when ministry to singles so expediently becomes matchmaking ministry; when unmarried Christians are rarely encouraged into positions of leadership; when week after week families sit together in church instead of looking out for those sitting alone; when we regularly run pre-marriage and post-marriage equipping courses, but have nothing similar for those who are never-married, divorced or widowed; when we consistently have many more married people in our churches than in the population around us, and many less unmarried people in our churches than in the population around us; when only 4% of all senior leaders of Australian Protestant churches have never been married;<sup>13</sup> when all—or even just some—of these things consistently characterise our church life, what else is the single Christian left to think other than that their life situation is undesirable, unliveable, and unwelcome? Of course, some of these things are not bad in and of themselves. However, their cumulative result—particularly when not offset by positive, proactive, and participatory alternatives for single Christians—leaves the never-married, divorced and widowed members of our congregations feeling like they are merely tolerated (and typically, "quirky") guests, rather than equally legitimate members of the one family. Such an outcome is rarely, if ever, intentional. And yet, many single Christians will tell you that it is usually inescapable for them. Even for the most optimistic and resilient amongst them, there usually comes the point at which they struggle to any longer



convince themselves that this community really is theirs, just as much as it is their married siblings in Christ. Of course, the most devastating outcome of such an impoverished pastoral approach to singleness is not ultimately its impact on the single Christian themselves—though this is indeed a matter of grave concern. Most significant are its implications for how we understand ourselves to be a body, made up of many members, each diverse, each unique and each indispensable. That is to say, the single Christian doesn't simply need the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ needs the single Christian. Pastoral single-mindedness is crucial for the church's understanding of its own identity, life and future.

#### HOW TO BECOME MORE SINGLE-MINDED?

It is all well and good to recognise the importance of *being* single-minded. But how will we do that—or perhaps more pertinently, how will we become that? There is no simple, easy or straightforward answer to such a question. However, this should neither surprise nor alarm us. Given that our present single-mindedness has been decades—even centuries—in the making, we should not expect or desire a quick-fix solution.

Instead, a renewed commitment to missional, theological, and pastoral single-mindedness will require us to be consistent, proactive, and intentional over the long term. It will need to be enacted through incremental but fundamental change in how we think, speak, teach, and approach singleness in the Christian life and community. It will need to be demonstrated by a willingness to return again and again to Scripture and allow its view of singleness to slowly but surely challenge and reform our own. It will need to be evidenced by gradual but inexorable changing of pastoral attitudes towards the unmarried members of our congregations. It will need to involve us holding more loosely to our tried-and-true ministry structures and initiatives as we seek to share the gospel with the members of our surrounding communities where they are, rather than where it is more convenient for us to imagine them at.

Such a slow, consistent, long-term, and gradual endeavour will require all members of Christ's body—*single and married alike*—to exercise charity and patience in their expectations of each other. It will require them to be ready with generous forgiveness when those expectations go unmet. And yet, we can and should have boundless confidence in our ability, together, to become more single-minded. After all, the ultimate single-mindedness we seek is one we are called to undertake with a together-mindedness. It is concerned with an ever-increasing, ever-mature and ever-joyful focus on the one who has saved the single and married person into the same salvation, the

same family of God and the same living hope. In the end, all of our single-mindedness lies squarely in him.

**The Rev Dr Danielle Treweek is the founding director of the Single Minded Ministry and an adjunct teacher at Moore Theological College, Sydney. She also serves as both the Diocesan Research Officer and a member of the Archbishop's Doctrine Commission within the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Australia.**

- 1 - For example, unmarried women formed 27% of the English population between 1575-1700. Amy M Froide, *Never Married: Singewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.
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- 8 - Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2021 Census Community Profiles." [www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/POA2042](http://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/POA2042).
- 9 - Andreas J Köstenberger and David Wayne Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2004), 173. Emphasis original
- 10 - Douglas Wilson, "Singleness as Affliction," Blog & Mablog (November 25 2020). [www.dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/singleness-as-affliction.html](http://www.dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/singleness-as-affliction.html).
- 11 - Albert Mohler, *The Mystery of Marriage - Part 2, New Attitude Conference* (2004), Audio.
- 12 - John MacArthur, *Children in the Shade, CBMW Pre-Conference* (Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2016), Video. 1.54mins, 2.30mins
- 13 - Ruth Powell, Sam Sterland, and Miriam Pepper, "Demographics Paint a Picture of Local Church Leaders," *National Church Life Survey* (August 2018). [www.ncls.org.au/news/demographics-of-senior-church-leaders](http://www.ncls.org.au/news/demographics-of-senior-church-leaders).



# Finding a good youth minister

GRAHAM STANTON

## WHERE CAN I FIND A GOOD YOUTH MINISTER?

In over twenty years of youth ministry training there is one question I've been asked more than any other. The most frequently asked question comes from church leaders, be they rectors, vicars, or senior pastors who all want to know, 'Do you have anyone good who we could employ to be our youth minister?'

There's a lot to like about that question: 'These churches want to employ people to work with young people. These church leaders don't just want anyone, they want someone 'good'. And there's an assumption that training institutions (or at least those that I've been connected with) are the kinds of places where you'd go to find such a 'good' youth minister.

Unfortunately, going hand-in-hand with the most frequently asked question is my most frequently given answer: "Sorry, but no, we don't have anyone who's particularly looking for a new position right now. But if you send someone to start training, we could help you form them into a good youth minister over the next three to four years."

The reality is there isn't a pool of excellent youth ministers sitting around looking for work. Most students pursuing training in youth ministry take on theological education alongside an existing ministry with young people having been sent by their church to be trained. That reality leads to this enduring principle for finding a good youth minister: growing your own is quicker than waiting to buy one off the shelf.

I've had ministers ask me year after year if there's anyone good who's available to take up the youth ministry role at their church; and year after year my answer was the same, 'all the good ones already had a role when they turned up for training'. Recruiting someone who could be trained and equipped to become a good youth minister is hard and takes a long time; but it will likely take less time than waiting for someone good to turn up.

So, if your parish is looking for a good youth minister, here's my advice for how to grow your own:

### STEP 1: PRAY

So much of what is involved in initiating a new ministry among young people requires divine providence and wisdom from above. Any search for a youth minister must be bathed in the prayers of the parish leadership.



Graham Stanton

pictured

Pray for guidance in how to craft a position description; pray that the Lord would provide the right candidate for the role.

Alongside the personal prayers of church leaders and individual congregation members, looking for a youth minister should shape the public prayers of the whole congregation. Our prayers both express and shape what's important to us. The search for a new youth minister needs to capture the hearts and prayers of the congregation and leadership to promote the kind of church culture in which a new youth ministry will be able to flourish. Pray not just for a youth minister but pray for young people. Pray not just for young people to come to your church but pray for young people to find life in Christ. Lead the congregation in prayer for young people asking that they would be ready to take full ownership of a ministry among young people, whether or not the Lord provides a youth minister.

### STEP 2: ARTICULATE A VISION

UK youth ministry author Tim Gough talks about the magic of 'something': we want to do something for the young people.<sup>1</sup> The problem is that 'something' can easily become 'anything'; and 'anything' can be done by 'anyone'. This results in the unhelpful line of thinking that, 'provided there's someone doing something for the youth, the rest of us can get on with life and ministry'. Rather than looking for a Lone Ranger to 'take care of the young people', make this search the time to frame a holistic vision for a whole church commitment to sharing Jesus with young people.

What is the particular thing you are wanting for the young people in your parish? If you want weekly evangelistic events that attract hundreds of non-church youth you'll need a different plan than if your dream is to see the children of Christian families happy to stay in church with their parents as they move through senior high



school into young adulthood. You may not know what ‘something’ ought to be which is precisely why you want to employ a youth minister. In that case, make the vision that you would understand the needs and opportunities of ministry with young people in our parish.

My advice is to get advice. Seek out parishes that are like yours that have existing youth ministries and find out what they do. Talk to your Diocesan Youth Ministry Officer, or whoever provides youth ministry training in your part of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Pray for a vision, and then call on God to see that vision fulfilled.

### STEP 3: WRITE A POSITION DESCRIPTION

Writing a workable position description is often where the wheels come off. To be frank, many advertised youth ministry positions should never be filled:

We’re looking for a dynamic and energetic young leader, with significant years of experience in a large ministry, advanced theological training, and skills in youth discipleship, evangelism, first aid, mental health counselling, and a mini-bus licence, to organise youth group and youth bible study groups, plan and lead an annual youth camp and mission trip, recruit and train leaders, run outreach programs in local schools and community groups, and assist with the mid-week after-school children’s program. Position is 12 hours a week, must have own car, and find own accommodation within the parish. Anticipated outcome is the establishment of a thriving youth ministry of 50+ young people within twelve months.

Thanks, but no.

I exaggerate, but only slightly. From position descriptions I’ve seen over the years, many churches are either enormously optimistic about what a youth minister can accomplish in 12 hours a week, or hopelessly ignorant of what a youth ministry involves.

If you’re crafting a new youth ministry position, start by talking to colleagues nearby in similar sized parishes who are currently employing someone in youth ministry and look at their position description (provided that it accurately reflects the actual ministry being fulfilled).

Alternatively, get the advice of longer-term youth ministers nearby, whether at a parish with a more established youth ministry in your Diocese, or your



Diocesan Youth Ministry Officer or training provider.

Get the advice you need to craft a position description that can realistically move toward fulfilling your vision.

### STEP 4: DO WHATEVER YOU CAN TO MAKE THE POSITION FULL-TIME

I know that offering a full-time youth ministry role may sound completely out of the question for many parishes. But if we go back to the original request, there are two options for finding someone *good*: headhunting or growing. If someone’s already in a role, they’re likely to need the offer of a full-time position to convince them to move. If you’re going to grow someone into a role, they’re likely to need a full-time position to enable them to stick at it for the long-term. Youth ministry done well needs positions that enable people to stay in the role long enough to get good at it.

So how can a full-time role be possible without being a large church with an already large youth ministry, or a small church with a very large bequest? Let me offer four suggestions:

First suggestion: Make the position a training role that grows over time. Find someone who has some gifts and interest in ministering among young people, employ them for one day a week, and send them to theological college for the rest of the week. Keep the position description narrowly defined for that first year while they get their foundational ministry training under way. In year two you could increase their employment to two days a week, with four days a week of study, and a day of rest. By year three your trainee could continue with full time study and part time ministry (with a duly circumscribed position description), or shift their study load to part time (say three days a week), and increase their ministry days to three, with a day of rest.<sup>3</sup> After a third year of part-time study, year four will have a much lighter study load (perhaps completing a practicum ministry placement unit together with a capstone project), enabling the ministry load to step up to four or five days a week. Finally, after graduation, as the church has built the capacity to sustain a new staff member, you’ll have a home-grown youth minister—five years in the making, but quicker than waiting for one to turn up on the doorstep.

Second suggestion: Change the role from ministering to young people, to ministering with and on-behalf of young people. It’s true that not many youth ministries are large enough to justify employing someone full time. Yet rather than just ‘looking after the young people’, youth ministries will flourish when teenagers are energised and enabled to fully take their part in the life and mission of the whole church. An effective full-time youth minister won’t only minister to the youth, they’ll also advocate for the young people, teaching and equipping the whole



congregation to take on the shared privilege of handing on the good news of Jesus to future generations. A full-time youth minister can be part of the church leadership team with a special eye out for how young people can participate in and contribute to church life. A full-time youth minister with a congregation-wide focus of promoting and enabling ministry to, with, and by young people, is a vision for a long-term, specialist ministry, equipped and skilled to enable young people take their place as full members of the body of Christ.

Third suggestion: find complementary employment in a local youth-related field. Having to juggle two roles will come at a cost—the church-based ministry will remain part-time, and part-time ministry presents challenges to boundaries and puts limits on vision and innovation. But when a second job is needed to make ends meet, a well-chosen second job can provide effective bridges into the lives of young people. Common options in this space would be a local school or a para-church youth organisation. Other options would be working alongside teenagers at the local McDonalds. Entrepreneurial options include setting up a social enterprise business such as lawn mowing, or a laundromat, cafe, or home tutoring business.

Fourth suggestion: Make the adult ministries part time to free up the budget for a full-time youth minister. Change the vicar's position description so that they become the youth minister. Have the vicar run Friday night youth group and mentor the teenagers and find someone part time to organise Sunday services!

Now even I realise I'm entering fantasy land, but the thought experiment is worthwhile. What objections would come from the congregation (and clergy!) if the ministry roles focussed on adults became short-term, part-time, with no accommodation available, and training optional? Could those objections perhaps echo the kinds of objections we'd hear from young people if they were able to express them?

#### STEP 5: LOOK BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Youth ministers are often gregarious extraverts in their early 20s. Yet though this is often the case, it is not always so. In fact, almost all of the best youth ministers I know are nothing like the stereotype. One of the golden rules of effective youth ministry is this: young people don't need leaders who are like them; they need leaders who like them.

We simply must demolish the myth that effective youth ministry ends on someone's 25th birthday. We must demolish the myth that youth ministry is a transitional stage before moving on to 'proper' ministry with adults. That thinking has kept young people having to put up with a series of short-term inexperienced youth leaders.

Imagine if the local High School changed their staffing policy so that instead of employing trained and experienced teachers, they opted for untrained volunteers all on two- to three-year contracts. The fees would be low, the energy might be high, but the stability and outcomes are likely to suffer.

Once you start looking beyond the usual suspects it may be that there's a future youth minister already in the congregation. They'll be the one who knows the teenagers' names. The one who prays for young people at the prayer meeting. They may well be in their 50s or 60s, they may not have any tattoos, and are unlikely to be on TikTok, but if they love young people, and love Jesus, and would love to introduce them to each other, then they're great candidates.

#### STEP 6: ACTIVELY WAIT

Waiting in scripture is never a passive thing. To wait for the Lord doesn't mean just sitting around. Rather, we anticipate and prepare for his coming, expectant, and full of hope.

Wait for a youth minister to be raised up and keep looking for who the Lord may provide. That looking might involve actively going to the larger church nearby and asking for someone to come as a missionary to your parish. It might involve connecting with youth ministry networks in your Diocese so that you and your congregation might be equipped as youth ministry supporters.

Wait in hope, and as you wait, keep praying, keep loving and serving young people. Perhaps in time you'll become the answer to your own prayers.

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1 - Tim Gough, *Rebooted: Reclaiming youth ministry for the long-haul. A biblical framework* (London, UK: IVP, 2018).

2 - And if you're stuck, look at the early sessions in the online unit in the Ridley Certificate, Introduction to Youth Ministry where we cover the what, why, and who of youth ministry (and you can even stick around for the later lessons on the how). [certificate.ridley.edu.au/courses/introduction-to-youth-ministry](https://certificate.ridley.edu.au/courses/introduction-to-youth-ministry)

3 - For most training programs, three days a week of study equals a 75% equivalent full-time study load, which meets the requirement of being a 'full time student' for the purposes of accessing Centrelink benefits. With a combination of FEE-HELP, government support for genuine students, and a ministry allowance packaged with a non-taxable fringe benefit, it's possible to pull together a reasonably sustainable living for a trainee position.



## The Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Ministry in Rural Australia

TIM STEVENS

There is often a bit of a time lag as things from the city slowly make their way to country Australia. I work as a vicar and a youth encourager in the Armidale Anglican Diocese, and we have yet to see an UBER, a Krispy Kreme doughnut, and traffic lights in most of the towns in our region.

They're all trivial examples, but the same could be said more broadly of Gospel ministry in the bush, and specifically of youth ministry in country Australia. As I think about Youth Ministry in our part of the world, the teaching of Jesus that immediately comes to mind is His famous challenge, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Matt 9:37b).

This verse of scripture has taken on new meaning for our city friends in recent years. We've all learnt that a lack of human resources in agriculture can severely impact the dinner table. The same is true for ministry to youth in country Australia.

In this edition of Essentials, Graham Stanton has encouraged us to keep putting ministry to young people on the agenda; to resource it and to make it a priority. Just like the cities, this is something that country Australia needs to remember too. Though, just like taking a ride-share, eating sweet treats, and sitting in traffic, we in the country are often way behind when it comes to being able to resource ministry to young people.

Growing up, I had the blessing of having a steady stream of well-trained and well-resourced youth leaders in the church my family attended. Even during my ministry training, there was always capable, trained, and resourced Youth Ministry in the churches where I worked. This caused a shock because I realised how rare my experience was as soon as I left Sydney. Oh, the blessings I received while thinking my experience had been normal.

In my part of the world, at the time of writing this article, we do not have one theologically trained youth minister working in our Diocese. At various points in our recent history, we have had such ministers, but their appearance is often sporadic and only for a short time.



Tim Stevens

pictured

In reality, churches can often only support a youth minister part-time or for only a short time. This means that we rejoice at their arrival, then only a few years later, we often say goodbye as they head back to the big cities. In the bush, longevity is often crucial in becoming an accepted community member. Pushing through these early years is often challenging and isolating, and by the time the point of acceptance comes, the money has usually dried up, or something full-time has popped up somewhere else. Despite this, we rejoice in the many keen and committed lay people who keep the doors of our youth groups open so they can run each week.

Though the reality is that among the regional Anglican dioceses in Australia, Armidale seems to have more going on in terms of deliberate, proactive, & Gospel-driven ministry to young people. We currently have around 20 youth groups across our large geographical area, with about 350 young people. We run many events during the year that draw in most of our young people, who are trained and encouraged in their Christian walk. This shows us that there is a massive hunger for teaching and training opportunities.

Most regional Anglican Dioceses in Australia can only dream of such "huge" numbers. Across the board, youth ministry in the country is often a struggle.

Another aspect of country Australia is that people on the land are often reluctant to accept help. So let me, a still not-local, give you some ways that you could help the Gospel go out to young people in the regions.

Firstly, please pray for the country areas in our nation. Pray that the God of the harvest will send out workers for the harvest. Pray that God will equip churches financially and with Godly people so the Gospel can continue to go out among our future generations.



Secondly, encourage the young Christians in your sphere to consider moving to a country area to make a difference for the Gospel in regional Australia. One of the significant challenges we have in our Diocese is that almost all of our High School graduates leave to study at a university in a big city. The reality is that almost none of them come back home. If you have godly and capable young people in your ministry, we'd love you to give them the vision to come, or come back.

Thirdly, could you consider bringing a group of teenagers on a holiday trip to a small country town with faithful ministry? You might be the difference that will mean a small church could run a holiday kid's club for the first time. The church would get the benefit, and your young people will be exposed to a whole new world and have their eyes opened to God's blessings on them while gaining a Gospel vision for other places.

Fourthly, could your church partner with a rural church to help them employ a part-time youth minister? You could also help a rural church with the material resources so that they can take their part-time youth worker to a full-time workload. Working part-time, a youth minister is probably struggling to connect with their local high school in a meaningful way. Getting some help to move to full-time could help their town's ministry in ways you might not imagine.

Finally, you might be a youth minister in the city reading this. I hope this short article might have got you thinking about whether you could come and help what God is doing in the bush. Just like a box of Krispy Kremes being carried off a freshly arrived plane from the city, we'd love to have you join us!

**Tim Stevens is Vicar of St James' Guyra and the Youth Encourager for the Armidale Diocese.**

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## Youth leadership training

MATT JACOBS

One of the challenges of youth ministry in a semi-regional community like the Southern Highlands is that — similar to rural youth ministry — lots of our school leavers move away. We're close enough to Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra for those uni's to be good options, but far enough away that a daily commute won't work. The impact of this on youth ministry is that the crowd of usual suspects for youth leadership (school leavers, young adults, young workers) aren't quite there; we have about 15 Year 12 students this year, and almost all of them are moving away next year.

In Bowral, we've been working on two approaches to this; both come with strengths and weaknesses.

### 1. ENCOURAGING THE PART-TIMERS

This year, we've been blessed to have some of our keen Christian uni students choose a part-time option: from Sunday night through to Friday morning, they live and study in Sydney. Then on Friday they make the journey back to the Highlands; they live with their families on the weekend, they come to church here, and they serve in youth ministry on Friday nights.

It's a great expression of young people graduating from youth ministry, and wanting to give back to the ministry as they move into the young adult years. They come with experience in the ministry, enthusiasm for the ministry,

and relational connection with the young people they're leading. But the cost is time to connect with their uni friends, and deeper involvement in uni ministries. So while the ideal is to have youth leaders stick around for the long-haul, and lead a bunch of kids from Year 7 through to Year 12, we can realistically expect a couple of years before we encourage them to make the move full time. A big part of my leadership of the part-timers is acknowledging the sacrifice they're making, and encouraging them continually.

### 2. TRAINING YOUNG PEOPLE TO SERVE

The other approach we're working on is to train up Year 10-12 students and encourage them to serve on Friday nights.



Matt Jacobs

pictured

Ruth Lukabyo has written a brilliant study of youth ministry in Sydney from 1930-1959<sup>1</sup>, and notices two trends: youth ministries that are run by the church *for* young people, and youth ministries that are run *by* young people themselves. A big strength of the first model is quality control, but the cost can be a drop in youth engagement. A big strength of the second model is high engagement (and often dynamic growth), but the cost can be a lack of quality control that can lead to the introduction of heterodox teaching.

The ideal then, is a healthy partnership between church leadership and young people, where young people are given space and opportunities to run ministry, in the context of a happy partnership with church leadership to maintain the quality. So we're doing two things towards this:

Opportunities — we've started inviting Year 10-12's along to our planning meetings to give them a glimpse behind the scenes. We schedule a handful of nights each term where they can run the activities, MC the night, lead a prayer spot, teach us the memory verse. Jimmy is one of our young guys who shows a lot of initiative, and has great people skills; this term I've offered him a project of finding 5 people to interview in our Friday night program to share their testimonies. The bonus of this is that our young adult leaders have a lighter load on these parts of the program, and can give their time and attention to discipling their youth in discussion groups.

The main part of our program I keep to the 'for youth' model is our discussion groups. I want our senior youth to still have this part of the program *for* them, with no pressure to lead, but time to discuss God's word, be encouraged together, and pray for each other.

Training — for this to work well involves lots of training! Which we're working at in three ways: on-the-job; with other local churches; and at Youthworks' Leaders in Training (LIT) camp. As our youth sign up to have a go at things, we do some on-the-job training. They'll get a 1-page outline of the job they've signed up for, and some ideas to get them started; then freedom to have fun with it. After they've had a go, we invite them to our debrief meeting to sit with the team and reflect on how the night went - this is great for self-reflection and feedback, and helps them to feel like part of the team.

For more formal training, we've just started to run a training afternoon in partnership with another local church in the school holidays. We include a short Bible talk and 2 training workshops to teach some youth ministry skills, and we finish with a load of takeaway and laughs. Our big goal is to build the sense of partnership and friendliness between our churches as we all serve Jesus in our places. And our big set-piece training event each year is sending all our Year 10-12 youth off to LIT; a camp run by Youthworks to train young people for youth

and kids ministry. This is an excellent week away with stacks of other youth and leaders from all over NSW that does a far better job at training than we could alone. The biggest win for us here is the great culture that LIT sets, of young people serving in their schools and churches, for the glory of Jesus.

While it's not quite my ideal of a team of adult leaders discipling a group of teenagers all the way through their high school journey, I'm starting to see that a happy partnership between a sacrificial, servant-hearted team of young adults, and an eager group of Christian teenagers having a go can be just as effective.

**Rev Matt Jacobs is youth minister at St Jude's Bowral in the Southern Highlands of NSW.**

**1** - Ruth Lukabyo, *From a Ministry For Youth to a Ministry of Youth: Aspects of Protestant Youth Ministry in Sydney 1930-1959*, Australian College of Theology Monograph Series.





# Missing the Obvious

RALPH G. BOWLES

*Hidden in the current revisionist approach to gender, sexuality and marriage is a view of human nature that is deeply problematic for society and for the Church.*

The issue of blessing same-sex unions is on the agenda of the Anglican Church of Australia. This step has been approaching us in the Anglican Church of Australia for years, and we know that it will not be the final point on the forward march of normalising active homosexuality in our church. Australian society generally has moved on and younger generations wonder why the church is still arguing about this matter. We look like bigots if we are against blessing these relationships.

Arguments about the meaning and application of Biblical texts have dominated in these discussions about sexuality, and have not decided the matter, particularly for those Anglicans who believe that the biblical views on these issues have been relativised by modern understandings of gender and sexuality. A new ground for endorsing homosexual partnerships has now come to the fore with the application of 'gender fluidity'. Traditional and biblical concepts of maleness and femaleness are regarded as outmoded by new views of the nature of gender and sexuality. Archbishop Phillip Aspinall of Brisbane Diocese expressed this position recently: "today . . . there appears to be significant evidence that a small proportion of people are not unambiguously and exclusively either male or female. And there appears to be evidence that a small proportion of people is innately same-sex attracted. In other words, advancing knowledge and discovery seem to indicate that creation, as we observe it today, is more diverse and nuanced than the biblical authors allowed: 'Everyone is either male or female' and 'everyone is heterosexual' doesn't do justice to the world as we know it today."<sup>1</sup>

I question whether the biblical texts about male and female have been shown up as out of date and simplistic. Alongside the texts that assert that God made them male and female (Gen. 1:27), there was also awareness of those few individuals not born able to marry, without adequate sexual organs. Jesus is quoted in Matt. 19:12 as stating that *there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb*, which is likely to be a reference to the small number of people who were unable physically to enter into the one flesh union of marriage. It would be reasonable to assume that the biblical writers were aware, like modern people, of that small number of people who are born with 'Disorders of Sexual Development'.<sup>2</sup> These anomalies from the natural order do not nullify that order. They are the exceptions that prove the rule. In the same section of Matthew 19 where Jesus refers to



Ralph G. Bowles

pictured

those by birth unable to enter into the marital union, he also cites the fundamental principle that God made them male and female (Mt. 19:4-6). Both the general truth and the rare exceptions are acknowledged.

The other ground for normalising same-sex unions is based on the innate same-sex attraction of some men and women. Biblical writers, it is alleged, did not acknowledge this 'nature' of homosexuals, but instead simplistically regarded all people as heterosexual.

I am not convinced that writers like St Paul were unaware of this reality of same-sex attracted people when he maintained that they were acting unnaturally in engaging in sexual acts (Rom. 1:26-27).<sup>3</sup> It is at this point that the proponents of same-sex blessings make an undeclared move from defining male and female according to their physical embodiment for reproduction, and shifting into definitions of maleness and femaleness according to inner psychological states.

When Genesis states that God made them male and female, the next verse gives the contextual meaning: *Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth* (Gen. 1:28). It is completely correct of the Scriptures to assert that all human beings are heterosexual, since this is how we are by nature – by our embodied nature.<sup>4</sup> When St Paul views same-sex sexual activity as unnatural, he is simply stating the obvious. It is a use of the body that is contrary to the design of the body – the 'nuptial' meaning of the body to use Pope John Paul's description. The male body sexually for reproduction is shaped for the female body and the female likewise to the male. The two together are designed for creating community through reproduction and family.<sup>5</sup> John Kleinig describes the sexual polarity embodiment of humans in similar terms: ". . . the bodies of all men and women are essentially spousal".<sup>6</sup> It is in this sexual complementarity that we understand our own selves, as the foundation narrative in Genesis 2 shows: "The man sees the woman as both same and other: as she



stands before him, he also sees himself for the first time.”<sup>7</sup>

It is a curious fact about recent discussions of sexuality and gender, that this whole discussion ignores the most obvious aspect of the issue, that we are *embodied selves ordered to reproduction as male and female*. Secular society seems to have completely lost this tethering of male and female in embodied sexual nature oriented for reproduction.<sup>8</sup> Having lost sight of the obvious sexual complementarity, many cannot understand the withholding of agreement to same-sex activity as anything other than nasty bigotry. It is sad that many in the Church appear to have lost sight of this creaturely reality as well. Owen Barfield’s observation comes to mind: “The obvious is the hardest thing of all to point out to anyone who has genuinely lost sight of it.”<sup>9</sup>

#### SEXUAL IDENTITY AS INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGY

What happens if we disconnect the definition of maleness and femaleness from the heterosexual embodiment of our created state? What happens if we decide that maleness and femaleness can be decided by inner states of mind and feelings? The door is opened to a revolution in gender identity perceptions that is now surging in full strength in our contemporary culture. Western societies have increasingly decided to preference the inner feeling states of the person over their physical sexual embodiment as the key definer of gender. The phenomenon of gender dysphoria has become a key issue in this current revisioning of gender identity. A small percentage of people have a genuine dissonance between their mind and their sexual body, just as a small percentage of people have disorders of their sexual development (inter-sex).<sup>10</sup> We can sympathize with how difficult this must be for the person with a deep inner conflict between their sexual body and their mind’s perception.

There is an ideology of transgenderism pushing our society to disconnect gendered identity from physical sexual embodiment. This transgender ideology has gone way past genuine cases of gender dysphoria and has become a social phenomenon, recasting human identity. The numbers of young people now reporting confusion about their gender identity is much larger than the usual rates of gender dysphoria.<sup>11</sup> A new idea of human sexuality is spreading contagiously and with active promotion.

If our bodies do not tell us who we really are, but our mind does, then it is very possible that a person can somehow be born into the wrong body. In a short cultural timeframe we now find that defining a ‘woman’ and a ‘man’ has become problematic for many. Once the definition of being a male and being a female was



untethered from biological sexual complementarity and sexual physiological embodiment, the foundations for a transgendered identity were set in place.

#### ENDORISING SAME-SEX UNIONS AND THE BODY/MIND SPLIT

This new understanding of gender and self-hood did not come from nowhere, although it seems to have burst forth fully grown. This new self-concept has been long in gestation within the West. Carl Trueman has chronicled the history of how this view of personhood has emerged.<sup>12</sup> “Expressive individualism” is the new self. The true self now is regarded as the inner thinking and feeling self. With expressive individualism as the reigning concept of the self in the West, it is not surprising that the same-sex movement succeeded. The obvious corollary involved in endorsing same-sex unions has been missed by most observers. It entailed a split in sexual embodiment and the mind or feeling self. When it was accepted as good, normal, and acceptable for a person to act sexually contrary to the design of their body, even being considered as marriage, the new self was institutionalised in law. Marriage was no longer earthed in sexual complementarity ordered for reproduction. It was now about romance and relationship. The embodied self was sidelined by the feeling, thinking self.

Before the Commonwealth Parliament voted on the bill to change the Marriage Act to include same-sex couples, I made a personal submission in which I warned the legislators that it would open the door to a wider



confusion about gender and sexuality. This has now come to pass.

Thus, we face a social imaginary in which the real self is fundamentally separate from the material body. For example, recently the Senior Medical Officer of the Commonwealth would not define in public what is a woman and took the question on notice, later submitting a long, qualified answer that includes the transgender concept of sexuality. In one area of life after another, from sport to relationships, there is a new blurring of the embodied sexual binary.

Sexual identity is now a personal choice, and the options are multiplying. We now speak of ‘pregnant people’ and ‘women can have penises’, ‘men can have babies’. Young teenagers in school are asking themselves: ‘am I really a boy inside? Was I born in the wrong body?’ What if I am really a girl, though I have the body of a boy? I understand from local school chaplains that there is a real phenomenon of gender uncertainty among many school children.

This transgender phenomenon is increasing as more young people identify as a gender different to their sexual body. Responsible adults, including the church, are no help. They have capitulated to the new ideology or are promoting it themselves. Now this new view of the self is set to be blessed in our Church.

### AN OLD HERESY IN A NEW GUISE

This new ideology of gender fluidity carries a much bigger theological and spiritual problem than the application of the Bible, or understanding marriage, sexuality, or gender. Hidden in the current revisionist approach to sexuality and marriage is a view of human nature that is deeply problematic for society and for the Church.



Implicit in this new approach to sexuality and gender is a false view of human nature. It is the re-emergence, from a different direction (expressive individualism combined with the sexual revolution), of the old Gnostic heresy of body/mind dualism.<sup>13</sup> Robert Jenson noted its perennial re-emergence of this body/mind split:

“The gnostic temptation, to see persons as of one order and bodies as another, is constant in human history and by no accident afflicts especially our sexual lives. For sexuality is the point where God has made our persons and our bodies one.”<sup>14</sup>

In this new version of the Gnostic heresy, the true self is the inner feeling and thinking mind, and the body is a secondary and essentially irrelevant indicator of identity. It is easy to see the evidence of this shift away from the body to the inner self. If someone is confused by their feelings, any counselling to help them think differently is censured, even outlawed, while radical surgery and chemical interventions to alter the body are endorsed and promoted. This shows where the true self is thought to be located.

This is a profound philosophical shift about the nature of human identity, with deep historical roots but accelerating in cultural takeover. It is an essentially gnostic view of how the mind and body should be related.

I am not aware that our Church has abandoned the Biblical and traditional theology of the human being as a union of body and soul, an embodied self. E.L. Mascall summed up the theological understanding of human nature:

*“Christian theology has consistently maintained that a human being is not a pure spirit, temporarily enclosed in a physical structure with which he has no real affinity, but is a psychophysical unity of an extremely complicated and mysterious type, and that on the physical side of his twofold nature he is organically integrated with the world of matter and in particular with that part of it which is the concern of biological science, including molecular biology and genetics.”*<sup>15</sup>

Jesus said about marriage: “*what God has joined together, let no one separate*” (Mt. 19:6). This saying could apply also to the nature of our humanity as embodied selves. God has joined our bodies and souls (minds) together. Our bodies, as well as our minds, tells us who we are.

Each person is a composite of body and mind. We have a twofold nature that is a “psychophysical unity” of a mysterious type. (Mascall). We are not souls inhabiting a body. We are a hypostatic union of body and soul (mind).<sup>16</sup> When the sexual body of the person is sidelined for the thinking, feeling self, the unity of the person as an embodied self is split.

There is no doubt that the Biblical concept of humanity as created in God’s image is clear on the fact that “their



creation as male and female is not secondary to their humanity; it is essential to their nature and vocation as human beings”, notes John Kleinig. “We Christians cannot separate the sexual mind from the sexual body, nor can we separate our gender identity from the actual sexual construction of our bodies.”<sup>17</sup> Our bodies have a sexual design that defines our identity physically. The male sexual body and its functions are for the female and the female for the male. “A Christian ethic respects the teleology of nature and the body.”<sup>18</sup>

The Incarnation and Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ reinforce the nature of our humanity as body-mind/soul unities. Christ came in the flesh to redeem our human natures. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in Christ also reinforces this abiding identity that God has given us as embodied selves. We will not leave our bodies behind in the new creation.

The biblical view of human beings is based on a created essentialism which is directly opposed to the current trend of extreme gender nominalism.<sup>19</sup> “Grace co-operates with nature and builds upon it; the Church’s task is to sanctify the natural order, not to repudiate it.”<sup>20</sup> On this issue, it is the secular culture that has become more ‘spiritual’ (ethereal, ungrounded) than the Church. The body has become separated from the person. There are inner conflicts, certainly, but the mind does not overthrow objective embodied reality. In the quest of personal identity and fulfilment we are not free to ignore or dismiss our given, embodied nature.

The cultural shift in the West towards the expressive individual self has contributed to the acceptance and endorsement of the body-mind split inherent in same-sex sexual activity. Once same-sex relationships were officially accepted, it was inevitable that the transgender moment would follow. You could say that according to the progressive viewpoint, we are all transgender now. Gender is fluid and has been untethered from our bodies. What faces us now is more than an error about sexuality and marriage; it is a philosophical and theological error about what constitutes a human being. If each age has its favourite heresy (false ideology), then our own era is making a mistake currently about the nature of human nature. There is a new Gnosticism in the ascendant. Our task as a Church is to confront the confusions of our culture about human nature, not to bring confusion into the Church and thus join the confusion of the world. We need to speak to our culture from a coherent and wholistic vision of human nature and flourishing. For Biblical, theological, philosophical, pastoral, and missional reasons, it is crucial that our Church not cross this Rubicon of baptising this new body/mind dualism by endorsing same-sex unions, and the other confusions that come along with it. Gender fluidity is built on a bad theology of human nature and identity.



Bad theology will lead to bad pastoral effects, beginning with sexual and gender confusion but not likely ending there. It will compel church members and clergy who disagree with the new Gnosticism to argue against its corrupting influence within our Church. It will strain church unity. It will gain some popularity with the world that endorses the expressive individualism of the inner self, but we will not be able to lead people back to wholeness of body and soul.

“The obvious is the hardest thing of all to point out to anyone who has genuinely lost sight of it” observed Owen Barfield. Let us therefore call attention to the most obvious thing of all about our human identity: our specific embodied selves as created by God. Let us invite people back to earth and reality. The path to truth about life cannot be found elsewhere. We must be able to care for people who struggle with their sense of identity by pointing them to the truth about human nature and the healing grace of God.

**Ralph G. Bowles is Priest-in-charge at Nambour Anglican Parish on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland.**

1 - Address by The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall AC Archbishop of Brisbane to the Second Session of the 80th Synod of the Diocese of Brisbane, Saturday 25th June 2022, (pp.24-25).

2 - This group has also been called 'Intersex'.

3 - I am aware of the revisionist interpretations that Paul was censuring pederastic relationships and other ways of viewing his words, but they fail to deal with the most obvious problem of this activity – the wrong use of our bodies sexually.

4 - There is of course no *homosexual* body. We are all heterosexually embodied, with the exceptions noted above.

5 - The Book of Common Prayer and later Anglican Marriage Services such as the First Form AAPB (1977) correctly list the first purpose of marriage as “the procreation of children and that they might be brought up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord . . .”. *An Australian Prayer Book, A Service for Marriage, First Form*, (A.I.O. Press, 1978), 548.

6 - John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body*, (Lexham Press, WA, 2021), 182.

7 - Leon Kass, “Man and Woman: An Old Story”, *First Things*, November 1991.

8 - This is part of the shift to a new sexual morality which assumes that sexual acts do not relate to an intrinsic natural order but are the vehicles for subjective self-identity, as long as free consent is involved.

9 - Owen Barfield, *Worlds Apart*, (1963).

10 - There are other forms of body-mind dysphoria, but our society presently regards gender dysphoria as an identity issue, and people tend to respond differently to those whose inner conflict focusses on their weight or other issues.

11 - “It is no secret that there has been a staggering increase in gender dysphoria among young people (especially girls) that has experts questioning the role of social media in what appears to be, at least in part, a social fad. . . This is borne out by a study conducted by the Gender Service at Westmead Children’s Hospital in Sydney (accessed at [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/26344041211010777](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/26344041211010777)).

The study’s authors conclude that ‘the children and families who came to the clinic had clear, preformed expectations: most often, children and families wanted a diagnosis of gender dysphoria to be provided or confirmed, together with referral to endocrinology services to pursue medical treatment of gender dysphoria . . . It was our impression that these expectations had been shaped by the dominant socio-political discourse’ ”.

Harriet Connor, *Should parents object to school rainbow days*, 12 August 2022, [www.spectator.com.au/2022/08/should-parents-object-to-school-rainbow-days/](https://www.spectator.com.au/2022/08/should-parents-object-to-school-rainbow-days/).

12 - See Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, (Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2020) and its shorter version, *Strange New World* (Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2022).

13 - I owe this insight to an article by Professor Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism”, in *First Things*, December 2016, [www.firstthings.com/2016/12/gnosticliberalism](https://www.firstthings.com/2016/12/gnosticliberalism).

14 - Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press), 62.

15 - E.L. Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?*, (London, SPCK, 1980), 133.

16 - A hypostatic being is the specific nature of that being. In this case, our human hypostasis is our specific bodily, psychological and spiritual identity. While men and women share a general human nature, we are specifically (hypostatically) either male or female as embodied selves.

17 - John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body*, (Lexham Press, WA, 198).

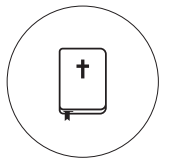
18 - Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, (Baker Books, Michigan, 2018), 23.

19 - Gender essentialism asserts that there are real physical givens in our biological sexuality that tell us who we are. Gender nominalism denies these givens and asserts that the person can choose their sexual gender apart from their biology.

20 - E.L. Mascall, 143.







## Fishing with the Words of Jesus - Luke 5:1-11

ADRIAN LANE

Jesus is standing by the Sea of Galilee, otherwise known as the Lake of Gennesaret, and he's teaching the crowd the word of God. But the people are so eager to hear the word of God that they are crowding around him, pressing in upon him and pushing him into the water!

So Jesus comes up with a wonderfully creative solution, which is going to help him in more ways than one. There are two fishing boats moored at the water's edge, one owned by Peter and Andrew, and the other by James and John. They've been fishing all night. And now they're cleaning their nets, which are laid out neatly on the beach – cleaning them of all the bothersome bits of reed and shell that's got caught up in them. Depressingly, they haven't caught a thing.

Jesus gets into Peter's boat and asks him to put out a little from the shore. Then Jesus arranges himself in the boat and teaches the crowd from the boat! And now he's protected from the eager crowd by the lake's moat of water between them!

And so the first thing I'd like us to notice from the passage is how this crowd was *hungry for the word of God*. They were pressing in on Jesus, eager to hear his every word. And I want to ask us this, "Has our attitude to the word of God become ho-hum, has it been blunted?"

I'm so grateful that when I first became a Christian I was taught to get into the habit of reading the Bible every day. And I'm so glad to say that God has helped me to do that. And it nourishes me. If I miss a few days, I find I'm missing something, just like not eating the right food. It doesn't matter how you do it – whether you listen to it on your phone, or read it together with your spouse or a friend, or whether you read *The Big Picture Story Bible* with the kids in your life or, like me, just read a chapter a day in a Study Bible. Just make sure you're being nourished regularly by the word of God.

After Jesus has finished teaching the crowd, he turns to Peter and says, "Put out into deep water and let

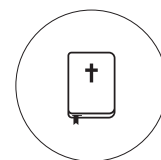
down your nets for a catch." "You've got to be joking!" thinks Peter, "We've been up all night and haven't caught a thing! We've just cleaned the nets and tidied up the boat! (Those of you who've been boating know how long that all takes!) We're tired and smelly and hungry...OK! Because you say so, and only because you say so, we'll do it."

And we all know what happens! They catch such a large number of fish that their nets begin to break and they have to signal to James and John to come out in the other boat to help them. And they fill both boats so full of fish that both boats begin to sink! There are fish everywhere!

And when Peter sees all this he realises that Jesus is like no other man. Only the Messiah could have known all this. Only the Messiah could have prepared, timed and organised all this. And Peter realises that Jesus has done this as a lesson for him. And when Peter remembers his hesitation and grumpiness he falls at Jesus' knees, amongst all those fish, and says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Just like Moses in the desert with the burning bush he realises he's in the presence of God! And he's not worthy to be. Indeed, he's so unworthy that he fears for his very life. Jesus' holiness is about to consume him. And so he begs Jesus to get away from him!

What a turnaround! Just a few moments before he's been keeping the boat steady as Jesus taught the crowds. My hunch is that he was feeling rather pleased with himself, rather smug, in that up-front pole position. This wasn't the first time he'd met Jesus. We learn from John 1:35-42 that Andrew had introduced Peter, his brother, to Jesus a short time ago. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and one day John the Baptist had pointed out Jesus as he was passing by and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" And the first thing Andrew had done after discovering Jesus was to find his brother Peter, telling him, "You won't believe who I've found! We've found the Messiah!" (that is, the Christ). And now this massive catch of fish after an empty night has lifted the veil on Peter's eyes and he's believed. He's realised he's in the presence of the long-looked-forward-to Messiah, the very Lamb of God.

And I can't help asking you, "*Has your life been turned around by Jesus?*" Sure, he's a great teacher, a great healer, which is what the crowds saw. But he's so



much more than that! And are we game to pray that God would open our eyes to who Jesus really is?

You may have a sudden realisation, like Peter, or you may be more like Andrew, who was obviously a seeker. But in Jesus' presence we too should fall at his feet. Indeed, all the time, every day, we too should fall at Jesus' feet.

But then Jesus says to Peter, "Don't be afraid; from now on, you will catch people." And Luke tells us that those first disciples of Jesus pulled up their boats high upon the shore, just like at the end of the season, left everything, and followed him.

Wow! Luke wastes not a word. He is crisp and straightforward. And he is obviously challenging his listeners and readers to do exactly the same thing. If it is good enough for Peter, Andrew, James and John, those first disciples and apostles, it's good enough for us.

When Jesus finished teaching the crowd, he hadn't really finished his sermon, had he? He may have dismissed the crowd, and they probably went off to get something to eat, thinking that that was the end of their day, but he wasn't finished with those four men. For them, the most powerful, the most memorable, the most important part of the sermon was yet to come. You see, when Jesus said to Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch," he was giving them one massive illustration of what the rest of their lives were going to be. This was to be the end of their fishing career – fishing for fish, that is. And this was to be the beginning of a whole new life when they'd be fishing for people.

And they were going to catch plenty! You only have to think of that crowd at Pentecost, with people gathered from nations right across the world, when

about 3,000 people became Christians after hearing Peter's first sermon. Peter the fisherman!

But first they had to be trained. And that training was going to be hard work and dangerous. And it was going to be focused, because they had left everything – their families, their businesses, to learn how to be fishers for people. Indeed, they spent the next three years with Jesus learning how to fish for people, as he taught them with his word.

I don't know if you've thought about this or not, but when you catch fish, they die. And these first disciples also died, when they themselves were caught by Jesus. They died to their old life, their old values. But then they went into training for a whole new way of living, instructed by Jesus' words. And when Jesus gave them his Spirit, they were given a whole new eternal life, so much more wonderful than their old life.

*What are you fishing for?* A nice home and family? Financial security? A quiet life? These are often gifts of God, but are they our Number 1 priority? If we give our lives to Jesus, like those first disciples, he will catch us up as well in his great rescue plan and make us, like them, fishers for people.

Now the great thing about a fishing boat is that there are all sorts of jobs! And there's a job for everyone! You need people to maintain the hull, and the sails or the engine. You need people who can navigate, steer and keep watch. You need people who can cook. You need people who can sort, clean and store fish. And, of course, you need people who can actually catch fish! All those jobs, every job, works towards catching fish. Indeed, there's no space on a fishing boat for anything else. It's not like a cruise ship, where you can just relax and let others do the work!

And it's exactly the same with God's church. Even our church buildings remind us of this. They are upturned boats – we're all sitting here in the nave, the Latin word for boat, and the planking on the ceiling reminds us that we're all in the same boat. And we're in the business of fishing, whether it be in Banyule or Regional Australia, with Bush Church Aid. We're in the business of fishing for people, of making followers of Jesus, through the words of Jesus.



► Now, being a disciple is costly. It's expensive and it's dangerous – we will get persecuted. Those first disciples left everything to follow Jesus. They saw their Lord crucified and they were persecuted themselves as they took the news of eternal salvation through Christ to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. But Jesus tells us that those who lose their life for his sake and the gospel's will save it.

Are you, like the crowds listening to Jesus by the Sea of Galilee *hungry for God's word*? Has your life, like those first disciples, *been turned around by God's word*?

Have you become, like those first disciples, *a fisher for people*? Let's pray that God would work in us, as individuals, as congregations, as a parish, to make us hungry for his word, to turn us around by his word, and to train us to be fishers for people through sharing God's word.

**Adrian Lane serves as the Victorian Regional Officer for the Bush Church Aid Society and has previously served as the Warden for the Mathew Hale Public Library in Brisbane.**

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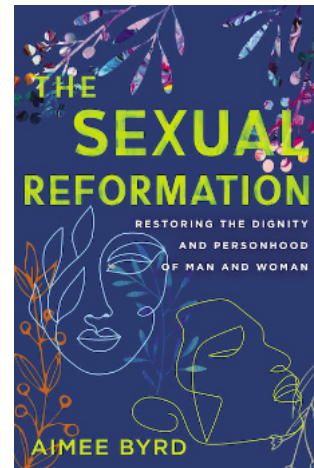
## The Sexual Reformation

AIMEE BYRD  
REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH WEBSTER

Byrd, Aimee. *The Sexual Reformation: Restoring the Dignity and Personhood of Man and Woman*. Zondervan Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2022.

Aimee Byrd's take on Song of Songs is a lot less risqué than it may seem, or is it? Byrd ventures through this oft ignored - because we don't know what to do with it - part of Scripture to try to give us a new way to look at the relationships between genders. Her aim is to show the intertwined nature of male and female voices in the story of God and call the church to reconsider the way it has limited the voice of women over the centuries. She does so without being heavy-handed, though sharing some of her own personal struggles in using her voice in the church sphere. Byrd is calling us to go beyond the mechanics of the egalitarian vs. complementarian debate and get to the heart of the matter, the love of God for all his people and his desire to see them flourish.

She does a fantastic job of relating each of her posits to the whole story of Scripture tying her ideas through Genesis to Revelation, wanting to explore a renewed understanding of the dignity and personhood of each gender. She wants to get away from defining genders based upon roles and move towards a new, or reformed, understanding of what it means to be men and women. For someone who already subscribes to the idea of mutuality between genders, Byrd's take was refreshing. She's not trying to tell us what we can or can't do, but rather, encouraging us to find value in our biological sex,



something that the world around us is currently breaking down.

Overall, the book gave me a fresh understanding of the Song of Songs, showing the different ways to read it, and encouraging a broader look at the beauty of the language held within, without getting caught on the erotic nature of some of the text. The book seems to say, it's time for the church to stop feeling uncomfortable in these conversations, and try to step forward and encourage healthy conversation around gender and sex.

While anyone with a good biblical knowledge can probably get around it, I would recommend a read through the Song before you venture into this book.

**Elizabeth Webster is an Assistant Minister in the St Hilary's Network, Melbourne.**



# Be Thou My Vision

JONATHAN GIBSON

REVIEWED BY HILTON JORDAN

Gibson, Jonathan. *Be Thou My Vision: a liturgy for Daily Worship*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois. 2021.

If you, like me, have struggled with focus, freshness, and a framework in your private time of prayer and Bible-reading (or quiet time) then *Be Thou My Vision - A Liturgy For Daily Worship* by Jonathan Gibson may be just the tool you are looking for.

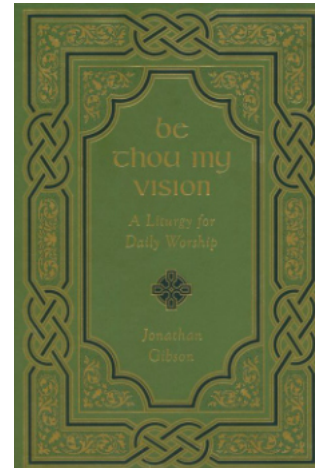
*Be Thou My Vision* is essentially 31 days of gospel-shaped liturgy borrowing heavily from the gospel structure of the services in the Book of Common Prayer 1552 ... but with a wonderful variation. The variation is that most of the prayers don't come from BCP but from a great variety of writers from church history.

The 'contributors' to *Be Thou My Vision* include saints the likes of: à Kempis, Ambrose, Anselm, Augustine, Baxter, Bucer, Calvin, Chrysostom, Edwards, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great, Luther, and Patrick; as well as Church of England saints, such as: Cranmer, Herbert, Johnson, Taylor, Toplady, Wesley, and Wilberforce.

The author, Gibson, a Presbyterian pastor and Cambridge PhD, was struggling with his private worship during the COVID-19 lockdowns. An Anglican Australian friend recommended he apply himself to compiling a resource that others could use, and the product of that is *Be Thou My Vision*.

The basic structure of each daily liturgy is: call to worship, adoration, reading of the law, confession of sin, assurance of pardon, creed, praise, catechism, prayer for illumination, Scripture reading, prayer of intercession, petitions, the Lord's Prayer.

There are also a treasure trove of appendices which provide: musical tunes for the doxology and Gloria Patri; the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism; the M'Cheyne Bible reading plan; the collects from BCP 1552 (many of which date back to the early church); and an author and liturgy index.



*Be Thou My Vision* is a feast of spiritual feeding as the different contributions are not only theologically profound but they are also thoughtfully, creatively, and sensitively combined. It is considerably prepared so that each daily liturgy is able to be completed in approximately 20 minutes (even the Athanasian Creed is wisely broken up across three consecutive days). In addition it is beautifully presented in a box with a cloth-bound hard cover and three differently coloured bookmarks.

*Be Thou My Vision* does, however, have a few 'weaknesses'. For example, the language used is the original English or English translation, which can be hard going for some, yet with American spelling. The variety of authors from different church ages means that the expression is quite a mix of quaint and sophisticated, of dense and pithy. I also occasionally find myself distracted by a minor theological quibble, such as the beatitudes being presented as law or encountering descended "into hell" - rather than "to the dead" - in the Apostles' Creed.

*Be Thou My Vision* is an enormously helpful resource for private worship which could well revolutionise your quiet time or, at least, breathe new life into your time alone with God. Although the book is presented as a resource for personal or family worship, I would only recommend it to adults and especially to theologically mature readers.

**Hilton Jordan is Senior Pastor of RAFT Anglican Church in Rowville, Victoria.**

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