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essentials

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EFAC AUSTRALIA



Essentials is the journal of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion
Promoting Christ-centred biblical ministry

Summer smells. Sometimes, depending on where you are, it really stinks. The smell of a Christmas tree has strong connotations for me of late night worship, preparation for holidays, and a new year of opportunity coming up. Even the stench of rotting seaweed and dead fish has positive reminders of spiritual conversations with my grandfather as we spent hot summers on the beach. The best smells are the ones that indicate there is fresh life and a fresh start.

I'm not sure what *Essentials* smells like for you when you open it, maybe a bit of a plastic and ink combination, but I hope the connotations you have is that there is something helpful and encouraging waiting for you inside as you read. This edition has a fresh new look and a trial of some new features so we'd love to hear your feedback on what works and what doesn't work so well.

It would be great to see our membership base grow and have an even larger readership so that gospel ministry stays strong in the Anglican church of Australia. EFAC can go places and support ministry in ways that other groups can't so if you like

Essentials then once you've finished reading this please find someone who's not a subscriber and give it to them. If you're in a position to make a donation or sponsor EFAC in an ongoing way then please give generously at efac.org.au.

Inside we find out about some fascinating innovation happening in Tasmania to overcome some of the difficulties of small and remote locations. We also have some discussion around the impact and opportunity of church planting, we have an all new ideas page, and we get to know some Anglicans we have probably never heard of. And there's more!

We hope you enjoy this issue and may we continue to spread the pleasing aroma of the knowledge of Christ everywhere we go.

Mark Juers

EFAC Australia membership (incl. *Essentials*)
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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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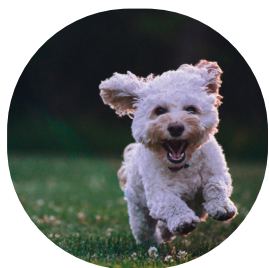
Ideas Page

If you're stuck in a rut and looking for ways to keep evangelical ministry fresh and engaged then look no further than some of these thought provoking options. User discretion recommended and please see your bishop if symptoms persist. Creative results may vary from person to person.
If you've got a good idea to share, send it through to essentialised@gmail.com



PODCAST

With amazing titles like “Teddy Bears and Penalty Shootouts” and “Tetris and the Seed Potatoes of Leningrad” you’re sure to come across a good sermon illustration or two. This podcast is full of cultural factoids to empower your lateral thinking



DOGGOS FOR THE GOSPEL

Needing an excuse to meet new people and build relationships? Buy a dog and hang out at an off-lead park. It’s instant friendliness, a whole lot of regular time chatting and has the bonus of being good for your physical and mental health. The tricky part is getting to know the humans and not just the dogs... and the financial cost of a pet!



COFFEE IS KEY

Expectations are high these days for quality coffee but it’s not easy producing a fair amount of reliable brew, especially if you need something transportable like Inner West Church in Kensington, Melbourne. You can get the Behmor Brazen, a grinder and a pump pot for under \$400 and it means no pods, low waste, and it’s set and forget so it doesn’t require any skill.



ARTS & LETTERS DAILY

Arts & Letters Daily is like drinking from a cultural and philosophical firehose. If you want to see how the rest of the world is being pushed in its thinking then this is the place to go. I’m sure this is where Paul sourced his Titus 1:12 quote from. It’s a website but you can also subscribe to a weekly email update.



Remote Innovation

Watch out mega-churches, video sermons have a new frontier! Essentials speaks with Joel Kettleton about pioneering something new in a digital era.

WHAT IS YOUR MINISTRY SETTING?

I'm the rector of the Anglican Parish of Sorell, Richmond & Tasman in the south-east of Tasmania. I've been here for eight years, initially as a curate then a locum and now the Senior Minister for the last five years. My context is a combined parish that has been joined together in some form for 130 years and we have a mixture of small congregations as well as larger ones. We meet in convict built buildings with small isolated congregations as well as a growing new church plant in a satellite suburb of Hobart. From top to bottom I have to cover 120 kilometres. A typical Sunday is that I'll be at one service in the morning and one service in the afternoon but we have concurrent services happening in other places at the same time.

WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THAT GENERATE?

There is a big challenge of having good preaching that is consistent at each service every week. We have people who are able to help run services but they are not able or willing to preach.

I have the challenge of juggling many things at the same time. None of the congregations are the same but each has a unique identity and rhythm to their worship life. This makes it hard to manage the whole parish and use our limited time well. The question we have to keep asking is how do we grow a healthy church in each place, whether it's a congregation of 5 or 50.

We really want to identify people's gifts and mobilise them for ministry so that they are confident disciples. We want them to be sharing their faith and making disciples themselves. This is really difficult when there's 5 and you don't live in the area and you're not even there each week.

WHY DID YOU EXPLORE USING VIDEOS FOR SERMONS?

I wanted to be able to multiply the delivery of messages. Having seen large churches like City on a Hill do this across large congregations made me think this made sense to do this in smaller remote congregations as well. In places where I could train people to run church services but I couldn't train preachers I'd rather have our local content that we were working on together delivered by video than just buying sermons off the shelf. When you buy or use someone else's videos it's not personal so when we're talking about pastoring and preaching to your congregation that's a big problem. Many videos are made for another cultural context so it can be hard for people to connect, they are like "yes, we're just watching a video". But there's a real pastoral connection when we can



Joel Kettleton and his wife Kristina

pictured

make videos and preach to our congregation when we've got their feedback, when we've incorporated their story into the content. When we use b-roll from their location, it makes them feel like they're part of the sermon.

WHAT MADE YOU THINK YOU COULD DO IT?

I watched a lot of youtube! Even the simplicity and effectiveness of video calling supports this. If such a simple thing could be done in a way that it is presented well, the technology is there now to be able to do that easily. I made my own youtube channel making music and car related videos and this helped me learn about the equipment and the craft of basic videography and content creation. I then spent a lot of time learning how to produce videos and once I'd done that it was a simple thing to combine video creation with preaching.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ALONG THE WAY?

I have a high threshold for failure. I didn't know anything about lighting since I didn't come from a photography background, so just used gear that I had. I learnt that it has to be short, no more than 10 mins unless it's excellent and has different sections in it since our attention span on screen is very different to being in person. I learnt a lot about looking into the camera to engage with people, simple things that people who make videos know but takes some effort to turn it into a habit when you're starting out.

I wanted to include the words of scripture on the screen so I spent a lot of time listening to feedback about how it didn't quite work out, it was either too short or too long. It was interesting to find out about how people listen and read in different ways.

I wasn't coached through any of this by an experienced content creator and if I had other people around me and been able to do a course this would have changed how quickly it was improved. However, it gave us a big opportunity to pastorally

connect with the people I was making this for over the idea and work on it together. If they didn't like the colour of the background they'd tell me, they said that it hurt their eyes. If they didn't like the quality of the sound then I needed to change the sound setup and use a lapel mic. In a way, each of these failures was a win because we could collaborate on it and work together. In my context and especially with the tiny remote corners of the parish this was really important because they had never experienced anything digital like this before. They had only experienced a person and a prayer book so this was an enormous change.

Not only did I have to learn how to produce the content at my end, I had to learn how to display the content at their end. I wasn't streaming it because our areas don't have internet connections. Their buildings are not set up with wiring and some only have a single power point. I started with DVDs but didn't like the way the editing program produced the DVDs, it was just too difficult. So I kept it to mp4 files stored on a USB and sent to the location. It was a challenge getting physical USB before their sermon time on a Sunday and making sure it is all set up and ready to work. I would mail it to them or I'd get someone to pick it up on their way back into the country. Several times I had to drive it out myself which is worth the three hour return trip except when they forget to turn the power box on and it doesn't end up working! Thankfully they are resilient congregations and they have leaders to take the initiative and make the most of the time.

DOES IT NEED A LOT OF TECH GEAR?

No! Initially I just had my laptop with the webcam, that was it. My mobile phone with a microphone input actually works well enough to record something wherever I am and doesn't require me to carry loads of gear around. However, using a DSLR or two with a Zoom audio recorder increases the quality a lot. For editing I started on Windows Movie Maker and then shifted to Powerdirector when I needed to synch audio and do other more complicated things.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU THINK THIS HAS HAD?

It has meant that I can help my congregations as a pastor and teacher and they don't feel like they've been abandoned. They really appreciate the energy and time put into it and it has kept our pastoral bond between semi-regular visiting.

It has also meant I've had to learn how to preach differently. I don't have a teleprompter or something to read from so that has changed how I deliver the sermon and I've had to condense big sermons down into smaller versions.

This also has seeded a whole bunch of ideas for content creation in rural churches. It has led us in our parish to think creatively about how we can use pre-recorded content in places where they don't have access to preachers. Beyond this we have joined in a bigger project picked up by the Tasmanian diocese who have partnered with Bush Church Aid. There is now a

much larger scale project to produce digital content that can be released across the rural parts of the diocese.

ANY OTHER THOUGHTS FOR THOSE CONSIDERING SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

It can be daunting starting out but like any new skill, if you repeat a thousand times it becomes second nature. We've found that our whole staff team have become a lot more confident making videos. We're more natural and capable, we do better editing, and we're much more comfortable in front of a camera and watching ourselves on screen.

There is a danger with all this if we think every person should be doing video content all the time. It really is the context that needs to drive what you're doing with video. If you want to take this on yourself, you need to have the creative knack or someone talented in your parish because the editing takes the longest. For me it was a way of presenting the gospel as well as I could in multiple places at the same time. If I was the pastor of a single congregation I wouldn't have had that need, so don't make video sermons unless you have a very good reason. Video is never as good as being in person, being physically present is always the ideal.



Joel Kettleton

pictured



Anglicans You've Never Heard Of - USA Edition

RACHAEL LOPEZ

Following on from EFAC's video series at the Anglican Future Conference in Melbourne 2018, we now meet Anglicans from around the world. When you think of an Evangelical Anglican in the USA, you might think of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). However, as well as having Evangelicals scattered through The Episcopal Church (TEC), there are also several other breakaway groups. First to be interviewed is Ryan Flanigan, who is part of the Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA) which operates as a mission society, not a denomination. Following his interview is Amanda from The Reformed Episcopal Church (REC), which split in 1873. Her church was led into Anglicanism when its pastor began exploring Church History.



NAME //

Ryan Flanigan, Dallas, Texas

CHURCH //

All Saints Dallas

BELONGING TO //

Anglican Mission in the Americas (AmiA)

YOU'VE HAD A RANGE OF EXPERIENCES IN CHARISMATIC, EVANGELICAL AND SACRAMENTAL SETTINGS. WITH THAT BACKGROUND, IT IS AMAZING YOU WERE ABLE TO STUDY UNDER ROBERT E WEBBER. TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT HIM AND WHAT YOU LEARNED FROM HIM?

I had the privilege of studying with Robert Webber in 2005-2006 before he passed away in 2007. I was enrolled in other classes at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS), but a friend of mine, the Chaplain of Trinity, and probably the only other person at TEDS who had previously attended Christ For the Nations Institute (CFNI), pulled me aside and told me to drop all my classes and to go study with Bob Webber for a year. Somehow he knew what I needed, and that Bob Webber would be taking a sabbatical the following year, and that I would miss my opportunity to study with him if I didn't do it now. So,

trusting my friend, I did as he said, and I have never looked back. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made. What did I learn from Bob? In a nutshell, Bob gave me the vision for bringing the best of all Christian traditions together into one cohesive worship life. He was the first person to tell me that I didn't have to choose between being charismatic, evangelical, or catholic. At first he called it "Convergence Christianity," but later it came to be known as Ancient-Future worship: the way forward for the church in the West is to rediscover the ancient practices of worship that we find in the historic liturgy, which have been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years. Bob himself was an Episcopalian, in part because Anglicanism had enough space theologically and in form and expression for him to be a charismatic, evangelical catholic. He passed this vision on to me. That year and for the years to follow I oozed Bob's vision from my pores. I immediately put his vision into practice at the Vineyard church where I was leading worship, and have continued evangelizing to all my friends in the charismatic and evangelical worlds for the recovery of the ancient practices of worship. One thing I will never forget about Bob is how available he made himself to his students. He offered to take us to Starbucks after every class, just to shoot the breeze or to ask him crazier questions. He was full of so much joy and was such a non-anxious presence.

I LOVE THAT ALL THIS HASN'T BEEN JUST THEORETICAL FOR YOU, YOU'VE FOUND WAYS OF LIVING THAT OUT. TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK AS MUSIC DIRECTOR OF ALL SAINTS CHURCH DALLAS AND FOUNDER OF LITURGICAL FOLK?

After a very intense three-year season of vocational wilderness in 2011-2013 (the non-denominational church I was serving got tired of my vision for ancient-future worship, and my identity was wrapped up in my work, and so I suffered from some extreme discontentment and took the church's rejection of my vision very personally), and after a friend pastored me back to health in 2014 and helped me discern the Lord's calling into a tradition to which my worship convictions aligned, in 2015 I joined the staff of All Saints Dallas, a three-stream Anglican church in the heart of Dallas and part of the Anglican Mission in America, a mission society for church planting and new apostolic works. By 2015 I had been leading worship in churches for 17 years. I had come to know my strengths and weaknesses and was able to articulate them to All Saints during the interview process. Together we crafted a job description that would enable me to thrive in my strengths. Basically, I spend half of my time planning and performing music for our church services, and the other half of my time on music projects and artist development outside of our church. It is no exaggeration to say that I moved from a culture, 2011-2013, in which I spent 90% of my time trying to convince people we needed to be worshiping differently, to a culture here in Dallas where I spend 90% of my time freely working in my calling. I am now four and a half years in, and it's still dreamy. As far as Sunday worship and other special services, I love how the songs serve the liturgy. I love how the liturgy speaks for itself and doesn't demand that I add words between songs to create

a seamless worship set. I love the spiritual formation my family is receiving through immersion in a liturgical community that is serious about the transformational power of the historic practices. And I love that this vision has been around for hundreds of years, and that I don't have to convince anyone that we need to be doing it this way. The joy I have found leading music in the church has freed me to spend the rest of my time writing songs, developing songwriters, and pouring into the lives of other artists outside our church. I'll talk about two special organizations in particular: Art House Dallas and Liturgical Folk.

Art House Dallas exists to cultivate creativity for the common good. The founding director is a parishioner at All Saints, so when I was hired I was expected to jump right in with their community of songwriters, and I have loved every minute of it. I have also helped them develop a spiritual formation program in which we help local artists connect their faith with their art.



Liturgical Folk is a new apostolic work of the AMiA, which I started when a retired priest and I began writing new hymns together. We are seeking to reimagine the hymnal for a new generation of worshippers. We attempt to make beautiful and believable sacred folk music for the Church and the world. We believe that the Church can once again become a credible artistic presence in the world. Our music is multi-generational, multi-racial, and ecumenical. Our goal from the beginning in 2016 was to release six volumes of new liturgical music in three years; to throw a critical mass of this (new?) kind of music at the wall of the church and to see if it sticks. We have identified a problem in the church's imagination of the reduction of appropriate music to either "traditional" (choir, organ, hymns) or the "contemporary" (stage lights, fog, arena rock). We believe there is a third way that is grounded in the sounds already resident in a place, and whose words are historically-rooted and socially-informed. Half of our music is service music (liturgical settings, simple choruses, etc.) and the other half is new hymnody, written by Father Nelson Koscheski and tuned by myself and other skilled melodists. We have already released four volumes of music (Table Settings, Edenland, Crumbs, and Lent), and we have just recorded and are about to release Advent and Psalm Settings. We have also been

touring the projects for a couple years, spreading the word and casting a vision for the appropriateness of liturgical folk music in the church. We have seen a decent amount of success with hundreds of thousands of streams and stories of hundreds of churches around the world using our songs.

HOW WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE A MINISTRY TEAM TO MOVE THEIR CHURCH BEYOND THE 'WORSHIP WARS'?

My friend Brian Hehn points out the helpful fact that “traditional” and “contemporary” are misnomers; they don’t describe anything about the music itself, except that it “happened a long time ago” or that it is “happening now.” Both sides of the war have a reduced imagination for what music can be in the church. On the one hand you have churches that think organs, choirs, hymns, and the like are the only appropriate musical elements for worship. And on the other extreme you have arena rock, stage lights, and celebrities that project the ideal for what church music should be. In my estimation when a church reduces its musical imagination to one of these two sides it can too easily become a monolithic institution represented mainly by a narrow segment of the kingdom, especially in age and race. Not to mention how difficult and expensive it can be for the average church to pull off really good “traditional” or “contemporary” music. I am finding that a folk approach to liturgical music in the Western church is able to bridge the divides (or blow up the walls) of traditional and contemporary, allowing parishioners to experience the breadth of Christ’s kingdom, especially its intergenerational and multi-ethnic nature. I’m talking about the music that bubbles up from the ground of a place. I would encourage ministry teams to put their ear to the ground and to listen for that sound. Tap into the music that effortlessly engages the soul. God put it there for us to find. And the best musicians are able to capture it and reflect it back to the people. The metric I use is whether the children and the old folks are engaged. They are the ones living the most down-to-earth lives in our congregations, so they will often be the first to access and engage with the music in the bones of a place.



NAME //

Amanda McGill, Dayton, Ohio

CHURCH //

Christ the King Anglican Church

BELONGING TO//

Reformed Episcopal Church

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY?

I’m married to Jon and have two daughters who are 4 and 2. My husband and I grew up Baptist, were both Bible majors at a Baptist college and went to a Southern Baptist seminary — where we became Anglican. From early on in college, we were consumed with questions about the Church and troubled by the reality, “We want to give our lives to the Church, why do we hate Sunday morning so much?” While in seminary, we were able to connect with Ken Myers of Mars Hill Audio. We were his summer interns in 2012, and going to his Anglican church really sealed the deal that we were Anglicans. We moved back to the Dayton, Ohio area (where I’m from) where we are members of Christ the King Anglican Church. I’m the music director and my husband, now a web developer with an M.Div, is senior warden.



WHAT MADE YOU START THE BLOG THE HOMELY HOURS? WHAT DOES THE TITLE MEAN?

My friend Bley and I followed a lot of wonderful Catholic liturgical living blogs, but couldn't find similar resources in the Anglican tradition. Bley is an artist and had already made a lot of liturgical living printables (such as her Jesus Tree Advent printables) so starting a blog together seemed to make sense, mostly as a service for our own parish. We decided to call it "The Homely Hours" because we were talking about the fixed prayer system of the "Divine Hours," and the word "homely" just seemed very fitting as a description of our "hours" — cozy, but also fairly dishevelled.

YOUR CHURCH BECAME ANGLICAN THROUGH EXPLORING CHURCH HISTORY, TELL US ABOUT THAT SHIFT?

The church started as a non-denominational charismatic college ministry. Six years after officially becoming a church, Fr. Wayne unexpectedly became the pastor. He found himself overwhelmed, but felt led to read church history for wisdom. Over many years, he led the church toward Anglicanism. It was quite a dramatic shift — we actually use the 1928 Prayer Book, so you can imagine. But Fr. Wayne has always had the long vision and promised that after 10 years or so, it would get into everyone's bones. That was in the 90s. My husband and I became part of the church around 6 years ago. It's beautiful to see how much more at home everyone is in the liturgy even since we became members.

SO, WHAT ARE YOUR SUNDAY SERVICES LIKE?

Our church is quite traditional, using the 1928 Prayer Book (i.e. we all have to learn what "succor" and "vouchsafe" mean) and the new Reformed Episcopal Hymnal (which is inspired by the 1940 Hymnal). However, we probably look different than what someone would imagine when they hear that. We're located in a depressed area in our city. Homeless people come in and out. We have a ministry to a group home, and our members from there faithfully attend and add so much to our service — sometimes, at the wrong times, but that's part of it. We also have a ridiculous amount of young children for a small church and we're committed to having them mostly in the service with us, though sometimes that makes things crazy. So, our liturgy provides a welcome structure when people are coming in and out and all the littles are disgruntled. With all this, we maintain a very real sense of Christ's presence among us, which is highlighted by the presence of the "least of these" in our pews.

HOW HAVE YOU INCORPORATED "ANGLICAN-NESS" INTO YOUR FAMILY LIFE?

It's always changing. In terms of daily worship, we do the shorter form of morning prayer every day, after we sing our hymn of the month; then we try to do evening prayer at night and sing the Nunc Dimittis. This year, it was our first time really doing something for Michaelmas — I bought a dragon pinata from Amazon. We "slayed" the dragon, and processed around the house with his head, singing A Mighty Fortress is our God. My kids loved it, though my 2 year old keeps coming

downstairs in the morning and reassuring herself that there is no dragon. Generally, I'm just trying to do what we have on the site, buy the children's books, etc.

YOUR CHURCH IS A PART OF THE REFORMED EPISCOPAL CHURCH. HOW DID REC COME TO BE?

Early in the 1870's a substantial number of clergy sought to reform aspects of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Their efforts met with firm resistance resulting in a separation in 1873. One significant issue was a commitment to open communion with other Christian denominations. In our liturgy, we have this introduction to Holy Communion: "Our fellow Christians of other branches of Christ's Church, and all who love our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in sincerity, are affectionately invited to the Lord's Table." I really appreciate this emphasis. One thing I love about Anglicanism is that I can still embrace all the very good things I received from growing up Baptist, and that we believe in sharing the Table with Christians from other traditions.

THIS INTEREST YOU HAVE IN LITURGY AND THE SAINTS, IS IT UNIQUELY "YOU" OR SOMETHING YOUR CHURCH AND DENOMINATION ARE INTERESTED IN ALSO?

Our church community definitely has a strong interest in liturgy and the saints. I'm so thankful. In the past 5 years, two of my friends that have also been part of the Homely Hours, established our Godly Play program for young children. It's such a beautiful program— this past week, the kids learned about baptism by going through the actual service, standing in the places of the parents and godparents. We try to plan our church gatherings around feast days, etc. We have big house blessings when anyone moves. Starting the Homely Hours was much less about our individual families, but integrating church and home — bringing what is already happening at Christ the King into our personal and family devotions

Rachael Lopez is a writer exploring both ancient and future practices of discipleship and worship. Full versions of these interviews may be found at www.alivetradition.com





Marriage in the New Testament

NATALIE ROSNER

This article is adapted from a talk given at The New Marriage Era Conference on 28 August 2019. The Conference was a collaboration of EFAC Australia, St Hilary's Anglican Church, and the Peter Corney Training Centre. Natalie is an Associate Minister at St Hilary's, Kew and the Director of the Peter Corney Training Centre.

I want to begin by indicating that the scope of this article is around who marriage is for, how sexual relationships are viewed in the New Testament and how therefore we should think as Christians about marriage and sex in our current cultural context. That context is one where the attitudes of Australians to marriage have been shifting significantly for some time. To take one small example. Prior to 1999, more weddings were conducted in churches than by civil celebrants. But since 1999, the majority of weddings have been conducted by celebrants rather than by churches. And in 2015, 75% of marriages were conducted by civil celebrants. Australians are increasingly rejecting the church's involvement in their marriages. The change in the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage also reflects a gradual change in attitudes to marriage that's taken place over some time, but obviously only had a legal impact after the postal survey in 2017. Certainly that legal change in the definition of marriage has precipitated much conversation among Christians about how we should now think about marriage. Clearly the traditional Christian view that marriage is between a man and a woman is no longer shared by a majority of Australians. So does this change in popular attitudes and in the legal definition of marriage mean that our Christian view of marriage must change too?

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

So first, let's take a closer look at what we learn about marriage in the New Testament. We're going to look at a number of key texts to help us here: one key text on marriage and then two others dealing with same-sex sexual activity. First, on marriage. Matthew 19, reading from verse 3.

"Some Pharisees came to him [Jesus] to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'"

Here we see that Jesus goes back to Genesis 1 and 2, to the original nature and purpose of marriage in order to deal with

the Pharisees' question about divorce. Verse 8 makes it clear that divorce is a concession that came after sin entered the world in Genesis 3. Divorce was not part of God's original design for marriage.

Rather, we see that God's original design for marriage involved male and female in a monogamous, one flesh, life-long relationship.

Interestingly, Jesus quotes first from Genesis 1:27 to remind his listeners that God made humanity 'male and female'. He then quotes from Genesis 2 and creates a logical consequence – God made humanity male and female and 'for this reason' a man and a woman are joined in marriage. The way Jesus puts these quotes from Genesis 1 and 2 together seems to indicate that the nature of marriage has a creational logic to it. The marriage relationship flows out of the nature of humanity as male and female. Because Jesus uses these creation texts from Genesis 1 and 2, it seems that they give a normative picture of what marriage is intended by God to be, rather than a descriptive picture that might then be open to variation. That is, one male and one female is an essential ingredient for a marriage. It's helpful to notice that the 'one flesh' nature of marriage provides the only context for God-ordained sexual relationships in the Bible. The only positive context in the Bible for sexual relationships is within a male-female marriage relationship.

To test this statement, we'll now look at the key texts in the New Testament that refer to same sex-sexual activity. First, Romans 1 and in particular verses 24-27. As well as looking at these verses in detail, I'll also paint the flow of the passage from Romans 1:18 to 2:1. It's an incredibly weighty passage. It begins with the assessment that all people have failed to give God the glory and thanks due to him as their creator. All have become fools and have worshipped idols rather than the immortal God. So God's wrath is being made known to all people. The important point here is that everyone is in the same boat.

"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen."

Because all of us have failed to honour God appropriately, God lets us suffer the consequences of our choice. We serve created things rather than God – our lives are driven by love for money, power, ambition, and sex, among other things. Sexual impurity is part of our world because we have individually and collectively dishonoured God.

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men

committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

So we see that a particular example of the sexual impurity that is part of our world as a result of humanity dishonouring God is that both women and men have exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. This description certainly refers to some kind of same-sex sexual activity and we’ll come back to this more fully in a moment.

But note that whatever the same-sex sins are understood to be here, Romans 1 gives no basis for singling these out as a special category of sin. Verses 28-32 go on to describe a wide range of sinful behaviour. This includes disobedience to parents, greed, envy and gossip as examples of humanity’s wickedness. When my husband Brian lived in Aberdeen for a number of years, he had a Christian friend who piloted helicopters for the North Sea oil rigs. This friend told Brian that if he had a co-pilot who was gay he would refuse to fly with him. This kind of homophobic attitude is completely ruled out by Romans 1 and 2. Romans 2:1 in particular makes it clear that there is no one among us who is in a position to judge others.

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”

It’s important to be very clear that no matter who we are, we’re all in the very same boat in terms of our situation before God without Christ. We are all sinners who deserve God’s judgment.

This may seem like a long introduction. But the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans 1 and into Romans 2 is a helpful starting point as we think about marriage and sexual relationships. With this flow of thought in mind, let’s go back now to verses 26 and 27 of Romans 1. The key question is: what does the text mean when it talks about exchanging natural sexual relations for unnatural ones in both verses 26 and 27? Furthermore, what does verse 27 mean when it talks about men committing shameful acts with other men? Some argue that unnatural sexual relations are those that have no potential for procreation. Some argue that these verses are about heterosexuals who act against their own natural sexual orientation by engaging in homosexual acts. Some say the problem here is just excessive passion. But through this passage in Romans 1, there are clear thematic echoes of Genesis 1 (See Claire Smith in *Marriage, Same-Sex Marriage and the Anglican Church of Australia, Essays from the Doctrine Commission*, 145-146). Because of the links in Romans 1 to the creation account in Genesis 1, it seems most likely that when Paul writes about nature here, what he has in mind is the natural created order – the way God designed his world to work. Claire Smith’s conclusion here is a good summary:

“Accordingly, the sexual relations that are ‘contrary to nature’ are those that are contrary to the created order and God’s purposes for it as revealed in Scripture. It is men and women doing with their own sex what God intended only to be done with the opposite sex – and

that within marriage, as the rest of Scripture makes clear.’
(*Essays from the Doctrine Commission*, 145-6)

With this initial conclusion in mind, let’s look next at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. This is one of the passages to which Israel Folau alluded in his infamous Instagram post.

“Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

There are two words that Paul uses here that refer to same-sex sexual activity. Both of these words translate the phrase ‘men who have sex with men’ in the NIV translation. The first is the Greek word ‘*malakoi*’ which referred to a ‘soft’ or ‘effeminate person’. Used in this way it referred to the passive male partner in a same-sex sexual act. The second word Paul uses is one that he coined – it had never been used before. It’s made up of two words used in the Greek Old Testament in Leviticus 20:13, where God prohibits same-sex sexual activity. Paul puts these two words together in 1 Corinthians 6:9 in a term that refers to the active partner in male same-sex consensual acts. This includes consensual acts between adults and can’t be limited to cultic settings or pederasty. A number of translations translate these two words that Paul uses separately while others are like the NIV and put them together into one phrase. Paul uses this new term again in 1 Timothy 1:10, where it is translated (in the NIV) as ‘those practicing homosexuality’. Both 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 therefore include consensual same-sex sexual activity as being one of a number of different behaviours that are wrong according to God.

We’ve seen so far that Matthew 19 gives us a normative picture of marriage as a relationship between one male and one female. This relationship is the only positive context in which the Bible refers to sexual activity. When it comes to same-sex sexual activity, there is no positive affirmation of such activity in the Bible or in the New Testament and this section has covered the main verses that touch on this theme.

MIND THE GAP

Now that we’ve had an initial look at what the New Testament says about marriage, let’s Mind the Gap. I want to think for a short time about similarities and differences between the cultural context of the first century and our own world, with the implications those might have for our Christian understanding of marriage now.

Some argue that first century culture didn’t have the same experience that our culture now has of long term, consensual, loving and committed same-sex relationships. Hence Paul could not have been referring to such people in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1. This reasoning then proposes that Paul was writing about same-sex sexual activity that was

either pederast, or otherwise non-consensual as with a master and a slave, or else referred to uncontrolled promiscuity and licentiousness or to same-sex prostitution. However the historical evidence doesn't seem to support these assertions. NT Wright refers in a podcast to the poet Juvenal and to Plato's *Symposium* which is a discussion of love. Juvenal was a poet in the late first and early second centuries and he describes the gay scene in Rome. There was certainly evidence of powerful men exploiting boy slaves and other non-consensual same-sex sexual activity. But Juvenal's descriptions are also very much a matter of some long term same-sex partnerships and also a description of men who take the female role in homosexual behaviour. Wright's summary is that 'there's nothing that we know about actual behaviour that they didn't know'. Plato's *Symposium* was written a few hundred years before Paul and it also encompasses a range of same-sex relationships including long-term stable faithful partnerships. So the suggestion that same-sex sexual relationships in the first century were all exploitative and that now we have something different simply doesn't work historically.

There are other writers who agree with NT Wright on the historical evidence that the ancient world was well aware of long term and faithful same-sex relationships, notions of same-sex marriage and same-sex sexual orientation. Both Claire Smith and Michael Stead refer to some of these writers in their chapters in the *Essays from the Doctrine Commission*. In this case, the cultural gap between the first century and ours seems to be less than we might first imagine. Paul was writing in a very similar context to our own when it comes to same-sex relationships. So it cannot then be argued that Paul wasn't referring to long term stable same-sex relationships because first century culture was unaware of them.

Others argue that the Christian church has shifted since the first century on a number of other moral issues, and that we should follow suit on same-sex relationships and marriage. Classic examples of this argument are around slavery and roles of women in both marriage and ministry. Interestingly though, it's not just cultural change between the first century and now that has provided the context for change in the church's position on these two issues, but rather exegetical factors.

Slavery is never advocated in the New Testament, but rather described as an existing social institution in which both Christian slaves and masters are urged to behave in a godly manner so as to bring glory to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 7:21, slaves are urged: 'Don't let it trouble you – although if you can gain your freedom, do so.' So in the case of slavery, there is justification in the New Testament to support slaves becoming free. As many of us know, it was William Wilberforce and other Christians who drove this cultural change, rather than the church responding to surrounding cultural change.

In the case of women, cultural change certainly seems to have been a catalyst for Christians to re-think their understanding of the Bible's view of women's roles in both marriage and ministry. Of course, there is no Christian consensus on these

issues today however there is arguably biblical support for some shift from first century cultural attitudes when it comes to women. Let me give a quick example. In the first century, women were married at a very young age while they were virgins – in their early teens, and mostly married to much older and more experienced (including sexually experienced) men. In this context, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:2-4

“But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.”

This is clearly an equal view of sexual relations between a wife and her husband that was completely at odds with the patriarchal culture of the first century. This is then a good exegetical reason for a shift in how the church views the marriage relationship between men and women. And this is just one example among other exegetical issues that have led to conversations among Christians about women's roles in marriage and ministry and some changes from first century norms. This is in contrast to same sex-sexual relations, where there is no Biblical warrant or any indication of support for same-sex sexual relations or same-sex marriage.

Michael Stead in his concluding essay in the *Essays from the Doctrine Commission* refers to Professor William Loader, who is a world-recognised expert on homosexuality in the New Testament and ancient world.

“Loader is convinced that Paul condemns homosexual practice, but notwithstanding this, he believes that the modern church should now embrace homosexual practice, because Paul simply got it wrong at this point. His understanding of scriptural authority allows him to do this...” (Essays, 320-303).

Referring to those who support same-sex marriage but hold to a high view of Scriptural authority, Loader says this: 'we can only stand and wonder at the extraordinary manoeuvres which have been undertaken to re-read Paul as not condemning homosexual relations at all.' (*Essays*, 303). If we accept Loader's comment, that puts any shift the Anglican Church might make on same-sex marriage in a completely different category to shifts that have happened on slavery and women's roles in marriage and ministry. A change on same-sex marriage would be a shift driven by a different view of biblical authority and hermeneutics rather than by biblical exegesis. While I don't agree with all his conclusions, William Webb's book *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals. Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* is a helpful resource in this respect on these three issues.

JOIN THE DOTS

Now I'd like to briefly join the dots, thinking about a few related themes in the New Testament that have some bearing on how we think about marriage. Each of these themes

indicates that our secular culture, as well as our Christian culture put too much emphasis on marriage relationships. That is because, in the case of Christians, we neglect other important biblical themes.

The first is the New Testament's affirmation of celibate singleness. Marriage is not the only life choice available to us. Clearly Jesus was single and Paul was too. This should be ample validation and confirmation of the single Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul also reflects on singleness in a number of ways. In verses 8 and 9, Paul says to the unmarried and widows:

'It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.'

Paul clearly recommends celibate singleness here, with the concession that if a person isn't able to remain celibate, then they should marry. Later in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul recommends that those who are single should stay single 'because the time is short' (v29) and because 'this world in its present form is passing away' (v31). Paul urges an eternal perspective when we think about singleness and marriage, rather than a temporal one. Finally in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul makes it clear that those who are single have a greater opportunity to live 'in undivided devotion to the Lord' (v35) than do those who are married.

So the New Testament offers a high view of the single life and I want to encourage us to have this same view. I also want to recognise very clearly that there are some real challenges that face those who are single. Many single people would say that they haven't chosen singleness deliberately but would rather be married. For same-sex attracted believers who have chosen to remain single out of obedience to Christ, there can be a sense of rejection by other Christians. There can be challenges around loneliness for single people. There can also be practical challenges such as finances, aging, holidays and more. Given the Bible's high view of singleness, and simply out of brotherly and sisterly love, our churches should be working to better support single people.

Secondly, the New Testament is clear that marriage does not last into the new creation (Mark 12). Marriage is a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the church, so it becomes redundant once Christ and the church are fully united after Jesus' return. Our greatest human allegiance is to Christ

himself. And unlike marriage roles, other relationships between believers do last into the new creation. Perhaps one of the weaknesses of the church is that we put too much pressure and emphasis on marriage because we minimise our brotherly and sisterly bonds.

Thirdly, we live in an age of sexual saturation. NT Wright describes it this way: 'Our culture is absolutely soaked to the bone in Aphrodite worship.' Aphrodite was the Ancient Greek goddess of erotic love. Wright continues:

'The idea that life without regular active sexual relationships is not worth living, that's a modern lie.'

The New Testament has an incredibly counter cultural attitude towards desire. Not just sexual desire, but other desires as well. The desires for money (greed) and honour (pride) spring to mind. Against our post-modern framework that urges the necessary satisfaction of desire, the New Testament doesn't just say no to these desires but calls us to satisfy our desires by redirecting them towards God and his Kingdom.

So as we've joined the dots, I urge us to conduct our conversations about same-sex marriage with the knowledge that God offers us more resources to think about marriage, and to manage singleness and desire than we are currently making the most of.

Let me conclude by acknowledging that there is real heartache and difficulty for many, many people around this issue of same-sex marriage.

This isn't a theoretical conversation but a conversation that impacts our own lives or the lives of people that many of us know and love. As we continue to have this conversation, my prayer is that, in the words of Ephesians 4:15, 'speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.'



The Soggy, Sweaty, Sulking Prophet

JONAH BIBLE STUDY CO-AUTHORED BY BRIAN ROSNER & MARK JUERS

The Book of Jonah is about Jonah. That might be stating the obvious but it is easy to over-emphasise the other parts of such a fascinating episode of Scripture. In Jonah we have a range of human characters as well as the wind, the whale, the plant, the worm and the sun.

If we focus on the sailors, the main message might be... desperate times call for desperate praying. If we focus on the Ninevites, the main message might be... the importance of prompt and thorough repentance, cattle included. If we focus on the fish, the main message might be... well, not sure ... maybe God's love for the animals of the world – animals as God's servants?! Putting the emphasis anywhere else means Jonah would be a supporting character illustrating the folly of disobeying God. With this in mind what is the big message of the Book of Jonah?

In both Jewish and Christian interpretation commentators agree that there is much to like about Jonah. Without a doubt he gets off to a bad start and running away from the call of God is not to be recommended, but he is still held up as a model in three vital respects.

SOLID DOCTRINE

One thing that's hard not to admire about Jonah is his doctrine. His knowledge of the Bible and theology seems pretty good. Look how he describes himself in 1:9, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." So he knows the covenant name of God, he knows God's abode and he knows that God made everything. Now look at his prayer from the belly of the fish in 2:8-9

*"Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God's love for them.
But I, with shouts of grateful praise
will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"*

So he hates idolatry and he sees salvation by grace as a gift! He knows the most cherished doctrine of the church.

And then look at his prayer to God in 4:2b with its allusion to Ex 34:6-7, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." He seems to have covered the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of the one true God, the doctrine

of salvation by grace, and the doctrine of God's love pretty well. What we believe matters and we don't want to be left to people's personal preferences or feelings when it comes to what we know about God.

SOLID PREACHING

A second thing to admire is his preaching. If you like his doctrine, check out his sermon in 3:4b. It has to be the most economical and effective evangelistic sermon in history – just 5 words in Hebrew, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Suddenly the whole city repents – from the king at the top to the beasts in the field at the bottom.

He even manages an allusion to another Old Testament reference when he uses the word "overthrown" which is the same as Deuteronomy 29:23 in describing what happened to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim.

SOLID REPENTANCE

The third thing to admire is the repentance we see in 3:1-3,

*"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.'
Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh."*

The Reformers mostly saw Jonah as an illustration of repentance. He fled in disobedience but then he turned around after being given a second chance and listened to God's voice. Even when we've run far away from God, and Jonah had, we can still return to him. Jonah encourages us when we've blown it big time.

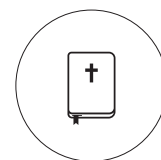
So, there is much to like about Jonah... or is there? Appearances can be deceiving and on closer inspection the book of Jonah contains some surprises that lead us to draw different conclusions about Jonah. If we are to go back over Jonah's supposed positives in greater detail we find some disappointing flaws.

SOLID DOCTRINE?

Firstly, is his doctrine sufficient?

The reality of his self description in 1:9 as a Hebrew who worships God who made the sea and the dry land is dripping with irony. How does he think he is going to run away from the creator of the stuff he stands on and then floats on? Where does he think he can hide? His own behaviour undermines his confession.

The fish swallowing Jonah and Jonah praying from its belly is a tad surprising. He prays in 2:8-9 with a certainty of salvation that sounds entirely presumptuous. He takes God's mercy to him entirely for granted. He doesn't pray a confession but instead he assumes he'll be saved and pre-emptively thanks



God for it. To top it off, he's not thankful that the pagan sailors did their best to save him but rather has a jab at those who cling to worthless idols.

Now look again at his prayer to God in 4:2b with the allusion to Ex 34:6-7. He admits to knowing how gracious, compassionate and abounding in love God is and yet he can't stand the fact that God might have mercy on Ninevah.

We rightly put a premium on Christians knowing what they believe. We can know our doctrine and quote the Bible at length but if we undermine this with our own words and actions we make a mockery of precious truths. Christian maturity is not about what you know, but using what you know.

"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil"
Heb 5:15

SOLID PREACHING?

Secondly, is his preaching something to emulate?

He might be efficient and effective in his preaching but his heart is not in it. He preaches pure judgement without any instruction for repentance nor any offer that God might relent.

Even if we assume that this opportunity for repentance is implied, there is no denying that Jonah is hoping and expecting that Ninevah is to be destroyed. After completing his task he sits safely outside the city but once he is aware that God's mercy has arrived he has no thought for the newly repentant city taking a further step of faith. There is no hint of any desire to follow through on caring for those who hear and obey the voice of God.

SOLID REPENTANCE?

Thirdly, can we really admire his repentance?

Perhaps the biggest surprise is in 4:1 when Jonah becomes irate over the deliverance of the Ninevites. The fire and brimstone that he is waiting and hoping for does not arrive. He is overcome with a righteous anger but God questions if this anger is in fact right. By the end of the book there is no sign that Jonah has allowed his mind to bend to the will of God. Jonah may have turned from his outward disobedience and eventually followed the command of God but clearly his heart is not at peace with the plans of God.

Jonah says, "I'm so angry I wish I were dead" (4:9). When it comes to repentance, it is the Ninevites, not Jonah, that are the ones to emulate!

Therefore, The Book of Jonah is a satirical debunking of the orthodox prophet who has no mercy. We must allow God to extend his mercy to whomever he wishes even when it violates our standards of justice, since absolute justice would mean destruction for all. We need to be careful not to exclude people who are different to us, especially those on the fringe. The whole book makes it clear that if you want to be in line with God's purposes then we need to be willing to bless those who curse us.

But the truth is that the Book of Jonah is not about Jonah but about God. We learn that God is sovereign. That he gets done what he wants to get done. He has providence over nature. He can handle a disobedient prophet. He is the king of the cosmos and his will is unstoppable when he wants something to happen.

We also learn that God has a view to care for those who have turned their backs on him. There is a message of mercy for entire nations. There is no escaping his voice of compassion for others.

**The smart thing to do, of course,
is to trust and obey.**





Church Planting: Friend or Foe?

CHRIS SWANN

Claire sat across the table from her friend, the leader of an evangelical Anglican church near the rapidly-changing inner ring suburb that God had been laying on her heart. Gathering her thoughts, Claire began to speak. She excitedly laid out her vision for a new church that would engage with the highly diverse mix of people moving into the suburb. She shared about how God had begun drawing together a team who were eagerly praying with her about this new endeavour. To top it all off, she spoke about the affirmation she'd received when she communicated her vision to another church planter from a different denomination who had launched his own church in the same suburb several years before. Although his view of women's leadership differed from Claire's, he had greeted her overture with enthusiasm: "Terrific! There are heaps of people in this area who need to be reached for Jesus. I can even think of a few people currently involved in our church who would probably get on board with what you would do."

Claire paused to draw breath and hear from her friend. But rather than shared excitement, it was like a bucket of ice had been dumped on the conversation — and their relationship. What Claire had anticipated as a moment of collegiality and convergence around a new mission initiative turned out to be anything but. Far from an opportunity to be welcomed, her announcement was treated as a threat by her friend. Instead of joining her in dreaming and strategising, Claire's friend was worried about the families from his church who lived in the suburb Claire wanted to plant in. He didn't say it out loud, but she could tell what he was thinking: "Sheep stealer!"

Her heart sank. Well, it would have if this conversation — and Claire — was real. It's not. It's an amalgam. But the emotional trajectory of the conversation is only too real. The announcement of a intentions to church plant is greeted with fear and defensiveness at least as often as it is by joy and excitement. Church planting is regarded by many among the leadership of established churches as a foe — or at least as unwelcome competition in the already-challenging work of fishing for people in shrinking pond. This sense of competition or antagonism is not helped by the cheerleading of some who promote church planting. Much of the romance and rhetoric around planting overplays its superiority.

In his seminal article, "Why Plant Churches?", Tim Keller — the founder and key thought leader of City to City, the church planting network I work with — claims that "the only way to significantly increase the overall number of Christians in a city is by significantly increasing the number of new churches." The argument Keller makes in support of this is not without merit

and nuance, and the evidence for it is not wholly lacking. But it risks underestimating the effectiveness of and potential for spiritual renewal through healthy, established churches.

Most church planters are concerned to avoid the label of "sheep stealer," and church planting agencies like Geneva Push are rightly committed to "evangelising new churches into existence" rather than depending on transfer growth. But the stats tell a messier story. Transfer growth is involved with almost every new church plant in some way — whether in the original core/launch team, or as fringe members of other churches come to check out the new church on the block. And more than one church planter would be able to tell you about missteps they've made in recruiting such people — and even thrusting them into leadership — without adequately consulting the leaders of the churches they hail from.

What is more, well-intentioned as they often are, church planters sometimes speak and act in ways that undervalue the ministry of established churches. In fact, some church planting looks like the old-school Protestant tendency to fracture and divide, dressed up in glad rags. Tim Keller calls this "defiant church planting." His observation about the motivation for this kind of planting rings true in an uncomfortable number of situations I'm familiar with: "Some people in the church get frustrated and split away and form a new church — because there is alienation over doctrine, or vision, or philosophy of ministry."

Without a doubt, there can be a thin line between (i) someone whose burden for reaching new people combines with a resolution to give that a go by trying something new (resulting in a church plant), and (ii) a dissatisfied assistant pastor who feels that things aren't being "done right" by the leadership of their current church and who therefore starts something new in reaction to it.

Even the most noble and other-person centred church planters acknowledge the possibility of mixed motives – the human heart is mysterious and has depths that can conceal unrecognised ugliness!

It has been said that God frequently uses church planting to do at least as much work on and in the planter/s as through them (in this sense it's a lot like cross-cultural mission work). From my own experience walking alongside church planters, almost all of them sooner or later are led to face and, in God's kindness, repent of their tendency to fashion ministry around their own preferences.

An example: a planter can act on the assumption that their preferred style and shape of church experience is automatically what will resonate most with those they're trying to reach. Sadly, such "missiology by mirroring" is unlikely to be resoundingly successful (believe me — I've tried). Worse, it typically flows from a lack of personal maturity and

failure to lead as an equipper and empowerer of others in God's mission. Significantly, however, the simmering hostility between new and established churches is not reduced by treating church planting as an enemy rather than a partner in the work of reaching people.

On the planting side of the equation, the data about multiplying church movements tells us that good relationships with a sending church (or better yet a whole group of churches who partner in sending out a church plant) make a massive difference to the health and likely longevity of a new church. In a sense, this should hardly be surprising. The New Testament authors link Christian unity and partnership with mission effectiveness on more than one occasion — no doubt taking their cue from Jesus, who makes this connection in his “high priestly prayer” in John 17.

So planters beware! You trash talk the ministry of established churches at your own risk. Not only do you face the danger of alienating potential mission partners — or, more prosaically, preachers who could step into the pulpit when you need to take a vacation (and you'll need to take a vacation!). You also risk having to eat your words if and when in God's grace your church plant becomes an established church itself. Even more dangerously, you put your soul at risk. And that's not me being overdramatic. It was Jesus himself who said (Matthew 5.22):

“I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.”

Nursing contempt, dismissiveness, and superiority in your heart is spiritually a very, very bad idea.

Equally, however, those who lead existing churches need to grapple with the fact that church planting is demonstrably good for the established church. There are well-documented benefits of church planting for existing ministries as well as the wider mission in an area. It's not only church planters making this point (and believing their own hype). It's also strategists and those who research trends in church life — both here and abroad. For instance, NCLS Research, who conduct the National Church Life Survey in Australia, have consistently found that newer churches (up to ten years old) have a higher than average proportion of “newcomers” — who are defined as people with no active connection to a church in the previous five years (so include both unchurched and dechurched people). According to their 2016 survey data, the nation-wide average across all types of churches is 6% newcomers. A 2015 study into church planting in the Diocese of Sydney, suggests that in newer churches that number jumps up to 13% — although the study notes that these numbers vary depending on the model of church planting adopted.

This may still feel like a relatively modest proportion of a church. Yet what would constitute a healthy proportion of newcomers is an interesting question to consider. Presumably

not 100% (a church that was entirely “evangelised into existence” would have some very significant needs in terms of establishing and maturing all these new believers). It may not even be 50%. Those who study group psychology tell us that the dynamics of group cohesion mean that a fairly substantial majority who already “belong” is required in any group for it to be able to integrate new members well. As one church planter admits, “I don't want transfer growth (but I probably need it in order for evangelism to lead to discipleship).”

Of course, it's not the case that simply starting a new church is an ironclad guarantee of a solid showing of newcomers, let alone of fruitfulness in evangelism and disciple-making. The findings of a significant study undertaken by LifeWay in the US indicate that engagement in evangelistic activities — even simple and “old fashioned” activities like door-knocking — is strongly correlated with effective engagement with the unchurched. In other words, you've got to do something to engage and reach your community (and it may not matter so much what that something is).

Established and newer churches are on a level playing field here — with the odds possibly even slightly in favour of healthy, well-resources established churches. Activating our congregations and mobilising their members in evangelism is a crucial task. It is a matter of both faithful discipleship and fruitfulness in mission — whether we're in a new or an established church.

In this vein, there's a strong case to be made that church plants contribute to the health and vitality of all the churches in an area.

On the one hand, the lessons new churches learn in seeking to reach and disciple people often find their way back to more established churches. Perhaps it's the community-service strategy they stumble into as they scramble to secure a community grant or qualify to rent their preferred venue — without quite realising it, the new church's credibility in the local community goes through the roof. Or maybe it's the excellent kids program they run because they happen to have some gifted people in their launch team — families with young kids love it because they're desperate for ways to break up their seemingly-endless weekend. Or maybe it's the carefully-tracked social media campaign and letterbox drop ahead of the launch service — a deliberate attempt to experiment and learn what sort of community contact is most effective that can directly inform the strategies of established churches in the area. In all these ways and more, church plants can function as missional R&D departments.

This mirrors a lot of what leaders in the business world have observed about the transferability of lessons learned in a startup context. A recent Harvard Business Review report, for instance, argues that the agility, learning stance, and growth mindset that startups need for survival can benefit every type of business — especially given the rapid pace of change all

companies are facing. In my view, little is different in the church. The incredibly rapid changes in the social position of the church in the wider culture provide potentially more disastrous if we fail to adapt, or adapt poorly.

On the other hand, churches that actively partner with new church plants frequently report significant benefits — even amidst the pain and grief of giving away people and resources. Whether it's by becoming a “parent,” sending out a new church plant, or by some other kind of partnership — e.g., sending some members to join or temporarily serve in the plant — it hurts to let go of core, motivated leaders (or potential leaders). Things never feel the same in an established church after commissioning and sending off people. But the space it creates can allow new leadership to emerge, new things to be tried, and new connections to be forged. Even if it can never compensate for it perfectly, the new opportunities created by releasing people can be meaningful — and are never lost in God's economy.

In conclusion, may I humbly suggest that those on both sides of the church planting vs existing ministry divide would find it worthwhile to meditate on the words of Nathan Campbell:

“The reason it's scary to hear about a schmick new church plant led by cool people with great ideas is because we're (and by we I mean me) often insecure about what we bring to the table, and to our city... focusing on the size of the mission field and trying to reach lost people, rather than the limited pool of

human resources around, is the best way to get a bit of perspective about this insecurity.”

All of us need to cultivate a bigger vision for mission to overcome our sense of competitiveness and insecurity — whether about the prospect of a new church plant in our “patch” or about the existing churches that don't seem to share our enthusiasm for what we're talking about starting (and, reality check, no-one shares your enthusiasm for it to the extent that you do). Many of us enthusiastically preach on Jesus's instruction to ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers. But if we're honest we probably prefer to see them raised up within our ministry, where (as God knows!) the need is real and the resources always feel scarce. Nevertheless, the Father who sends his Son in the power of the Spirit for the sake of the world in the overflow of love, is not threatened by scarcity. Indeed, Jesus endured the ultimate scarcity and deprivation, crying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” on our behalf on the cross. The perfectly rich and free Lord of creation became poor and subject to death in order to bear the deprivation and judgement due us for turning from our Creator. And it is only to the degree that this fills our hearts that we'll be able to lift our eyes from our apparent scarcity — as a planter or an established church leader — and see each other as collaborators rather than competitors.

You can check out a full interview with Chris here:
<https://youtu.be/HOcKBK1kVJE>



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The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Faith

BEN MYERS
LEXHAM PRESS, 2018

I have long enjoyed expositions of the Apostles' Creed, so when I saw Ben Myers' book on the shortlist for the Australian Christian Book of the Year, I was keen to read it. The book in the Christian Essentials series comes as a nicely designed small format hardback.

In his 130 page treatment of the creed Myers connects the creed to its roots as a confession of faith on the lips of those being baptised. Myers favours quotations from patristic writers, and sees the creed as both a 'summary of Christian teaching as well as a solemn pledge of allegiance' (p. 5). Breaking down the creed into 22 gobbets, this book is a series of gentle, 3-5 page meditations on the words from 'I' to 'Amen'. I especially enjoyed the chapters on Jesus' conception and birth, and his interesting last chapter on the sense in which we say 'Amen' to the creed. But whatever new and arresting thoughts a reader might discover in its pages (and there are many), the one thing that I imagine would be sure to raise the eyebrows of many *Essentials* readers, should they take up this book, is Myers' universalism.

Universal salvation is a recurring and growing theme of the book. It begins unobtrusively, for example in the chapter on Pilate: 'The salvation of the world can be dated. Certain people were there when it happened.' (p. 62) (not just 'salvation', or the salvation of the church or of God's people, but of the world). Later, we read that 'As Jesus rises, the whole of humanity rises with him' (p. 82). The Holy Spirit 'broods over each of Christ's followers, renewing the human race one at a time and drawing all into a common family' (p. 101). The church is a 'representative microcosm of what God intends for the whole human family.' (p. 105). Belief in the forgiveness of sins means that we believe that 'if we should ever turn away from grace, if ever our hearts grow cold and we forget our Lord and become unfaithful to his way, he will not forget us. His faithfulness is deeper than our faithlessness. His yes is stronger than our no.' (p. 116).

Evangelical readers will be unpersuaded that the suggestions of Isaac the Syrian, or Origen, can be our grounds for belief on these matters, and moreover, will be unpersuaded that the Apostles' Creed teaches universalism. But the questions 'Who will be saved?' and 'Will they be many?' will press itself upon us always. Myers mixes it into his exposition without comment. Perhaps the best response is to read our Bibles with those questions in mind. Can there be weightier questions?

// BEN UNDERWOOD, WA

The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father

WESLEY HILL
LEXHAM PRESS, 2019

The Lord's Prayer, or Our Father, has to be one of the most well-known pieces of Christian scripture, read as it is in public occasions, openings of parliament, and throughout our media. Its familiarity has brought great benefit to many praying it, and comfort in times of trial. But how often do we reflect on its meaning? This new book from Wesley Hill is part of a series from Lexham Press on the Christian Essentials and seeks to explore the Lord's Prayer for the seeker and saint alike. Dividing up the prayer into the basic clauses, Wesley reads and reflects on each in conversation with the long Christian tradition, highlighting how the prayer has been used in the past and reflecting on its significance for today. Wesley Hill's reflections are well written and draw the reader into a conversation from Augustine and Barth to Thielicke and Williams, and a host of the faithful in between. These reflections aren't just an academic exercise in information retrieval or knowledge building, but rather an engagement in robust Christian identity formation and discipleship. In the end one finds themselves praying the Prayer along with a community of the faithful as they work through the book. True to this direction the book is not merely a description of the Lord's Prayer, but also how Hill himself prays the Lord's Prayer. To this end a postscript is included that draws the reader into Wesley's own devotional practice with the Prayer and the Prodigal Son in order to model a pattern of prayer for believers and sceptics alike. The book is beautifully produced by Lexham and contains several pieces of art that are themselves worthy of reflection. While I wish this book could be longer than 103 pages, the reflections in it will sustain faithful meditation for a long time. Indeed, as Wesley Hill closes: 'To prayer the Our Father ... with Jesus' Father in view is to find yourself praying it in a way you hope never to stop.' (101) I highly recommend this book.

// CHRIS PORTER, VIC

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