



# ***In Touch***

Newsletter of Sydney Lutheran Parish September 2010

## Being Lutheran in Sydney

Australia is a country of migrants, and Sydney has had its fair share of attracting people from overseas and interstate. Though we have become an expensive city in which to live, we have been able to provide a high standard of living, a quality of life, and employment for those ready, willing and able to work.

Into this mix has come the Lutheran Church — from Germany initially, but also from other European countries, especially after WW II. There have also been people from America, Asia and Africa who have lived and worked in Sydney and have found a spiritual home in the Lutheran Church.

To be a Lutheran does not mean that there are no Christians in other denominations, or that we are better than them. To be “Lutheran” means to accept the principles by which Martin Luther taught and lived, fought and died.

It means to emphasise CHRIST ALONE as the only way of salvation, and not some other founder of religion; it means the WORD ALONE as our authority, not the church or the world; it means GRACE ALONE, not my feelings or experiences or decision; it means FAITH ALONE, not my good works and service and sacrifices. These “alones” are an important summary for us who belong to St. Paul’s.

The danger for Christians in general and for us in particular is to be influenced by the world in which we live. The world of politics publicised by the media presses in on us. It can become a tool for the forces of evil to influence us more

than the Word of God.

Then there is also the danger that we work with a “success mentality” and keep looking for results when our task is to be “sowers of the seed of the Word”, and not reapers. Harvesting is God’s business, not ours. And if we work with a “success mentality” we tend to suffer from “delusions of grandeur”, looking for results too early, or at the wrong time, or in the wrong place.

God has promised that his Word “shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11). All this means that it doesn’t depend on us as much as we think. The church is his creation and his cause and he will not let it fail.



*Pastor Dennis Obst was St. Paul's visiting pastor during the two weeks of Easter. Here members carried in palm fronds to decorate the sanctuary area before the start of Palm Sunday service.*

# St. Paul's Chairman's Report

There has been a hole in this newspaper for a year now — the hole which the pastor's report used to occupy. So who gives the pastor's report when there is no pastor? Or more fundamentally, who does the pastor's job when there's no pastor?

I commend you all to the current issue of *The Lutheran*, which features a series of articles about parishes without pastors. To the insights offered in those articles, let me add three thoughts of my own, as informed by our congregation's experiences of the past year.

First, the fundamental issue is that we have more pulpits than pastors: a recent count had 55 vacant pulpits (56 if the number is to reflect Narrabeen Redeemer's preference to call its own). So either we train or import more pastors, or we leave pulpits empty. The obvious answer is to open up our pulpits to the half of our population that receives just as many calls from the Holy Spirit as the other half. (Let me qualify this by saying that *in my opinion* the obvious answer is ... That said, I've been told by a national church leader that we don't REALLY have a shortage of pastors. Instead, part of the current stock of pastors merely has been redeployed from "word and sacrament ministries" to chaplaincies and the like. So maybe I should also say *in my opinion* we have more pulpits than pastors.) But in the meantime, the makeshift solution is to leave pulpits empty. I cannot think of a more self-defeating strategy, but unfortunately this isn't a problem that St. Paul's can solve on its own.

Second, we've all been drilled in the idea that we're not just congregants, but disciples. (Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary tells us that a disciple "(1) believes Christ's doctrine, (2) rests on His sacrifice, (3) imbibes His Spirit, and (4) imitates His example".) One of the articles in *The Lutheran* talks about a pastoral vacancy as an opportunity for spiritual growth as "members take on more responsibilities ... and discover gifts" — in other words, act as disciples. The same concept is repeated in many of the pastor's call statements we have reviewed over the past year. One noted that he didn't want to be a "professional pastor" as much as he wanted to "empower" his congregation. But if we take this to the logical conclusion, why would we ever need a pastor at all? I don't subscribe to that conclusion. There is a reason why we have pastors, regardless of how strong the discipleship, and that's why our flock needs a shepherd.

The third thought is a direct consequence of last Sunday's call meeting. For those of you who haven't heard, Pastors Geoff Havelberg and Andrew Vanderwal each were named on the exact same number of ballots — a perfect deadlock. *The Lutheran* wrote of congregations who have called but had no reply. Has anyone ever heard of a congregation that wouldn't call in the first place?

Yet Pastor Rob Bartholomaeus, who officiated at the meeting, remarked that the congregational mood after the meeting was more buoyant than after the last meeting. We are taking the responsibility of issuing a Holy Spirit-inspired call very seriously, even if it means we have to spend a bit more time discerning exactly what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to us. And notwithstanding the fact that our pulpit is empty, we can all be confident that the Holy Spirit has something to say to us, specifically the disciples of St. Paul's.

(And a final qualification: For an "empty pulpit", the pulpit at St. Paul's has been amply filled by the generous initiative of Pastor Sam Sempendorfer. I'm sure he understands what I'm trying to say.)

Bruce Arnold  
Congregational Chairman  
19/8/10

## Lutheran Fundamentals

If a survey is conducted as to what married couples did on their first date, you may hear some interesting things. However, going through each other's family history may not be the first thing that comes to your mind. Well, that's what we did, or rather, Colin gave Sylvie a vivid information session on his genealogy up to six generations before him. That certainly impressed Sylvie - they got married!

Colin's great grandfather's grandfather was one of the first Christians in Southern China around 1850s. He was converted under the ministry of Rev August Hanspach from the Berlin Missionary Society, a Lutheran missionary in China. Colin's great-great grandfather and great grandfather were both ministers under the Basel Mission formed by the Swiss Lutheran and Reformed churches. This may be the reason why Colin is familiar with both the teachings of the Lutherans and the Reformed.

There are many things that can be classified as Lutheran fundamentals. But we have to start with this — the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. An absolutely enlightening concept brought to the attention of the Christian Church by Martin Luther and also affirmed by the traditions of many reformed Protestants. What is it? It is not about the Old Testament and the New Testament. Rather, it is the concept that the entire Scripture may be divided into two principle parts or kinds — the Law and the Gospel — **both are essential** for an accurate understanding our spiritual state, our desperate

need for Christ's righteousness and the true comfort that the good news impart.

The Law is written by God in our hearts. It tells us what is right and what is wrong. However, the Law does not enable us to comply with its demands, rather it causes us, if without the work of the Holy Spirit, to be more unwilling to keep the Law (Romans 5:20). Most importantly, the Law uncovers our sins and conjures up the terror of the wrath of God (Romans 3:20, 7:7). There is no comfort offered by the Law and the sinner will only despair. However, that is the very purpose of the Law — it completely destroys our self-righteousness so that we run to Christ and plead for his righteousness to cover our failings.

The Gospel, however, is not self-evident, but is revealed to us through the Word of God. The Gospel contains no threats, but only words of consolation. The Gospel, while demanding faith, offers and gives us faith in that very demand. It takes all terror, fear and anguish from the sinner and fills him with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In addition, the Gospel does not require anything good that man must furnish: not a good heart, no godliness and no love either of God or men. It changes men and plants love into his heart which makes him capable of good works.

In our day, sadly, many churches soften the Law or even leave it out all together. Many only teach the primacy of God's love (over other attributes). The result is that many Christians do not have a full and accurate understanding of an almighty God who is merciful, but also holy. Ignorance of the Law leads them into a false security and deludes

them to think that they are "alright" because they attended church, prayed a prayer or signed a card. In fact, they have never realized their true spiritual desperateness and tasted the full sweetness of the Gospel.

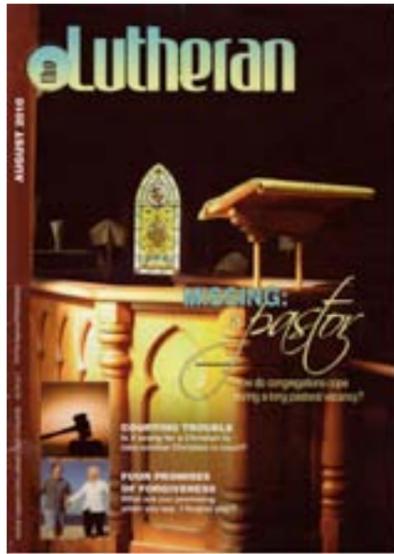
When Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:7) — but that did not enable them to stand before God. Rather, God provided them with garments of skin for clothing (Genesis 3:21). The skin signifies covering from the atoning blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. Without the sternness of the Law being preached and taught, many people are comfortable in their own fig leaves! They need to be stripped of their fig leaves in order to be clothed with the skins of the Lamb of God.

Let us therefore, strive to recover the Law and the Gospel so that the full message of the Scripture is once again being understood accurately. A message comprising both the Law and the Gospel is the only message that will lead to deep reverence, grave repentance, true humility, a spirit of worship and unspeakable joy.

Colin and Sylvie Tso\*

Colin is a cardiologist and plays the organ at St Paul's, whilst Sylvie is a lawyer and loves to sing. They have a one-year-old son, Nathan.





The August edition of The Lutheran focused on coping with pastoral vacancies and much more

When *The Lutheran* was first published in January 1967 there were 16,000 subscribers, and forty years later in 2007 there were 8,400. The numbers don't tell the full story; today many church members access information about what's happening in the Australian Lutheran church (and beyond) from the Internet and radio. In earlier times this publication was the only source of LCA news from around the country. The number of subscribers from St. Paul's is also down, but they appear higher when boosted by several from outside our congregation — 4 out of 14, in fact. It would be great if we could get more subscribers from within.

The magazine has undergone many changes in recent years; a new editorial style by editor Linda McQueen has tackled subjects that are very relevant to us today, the style and appearance invite us to check out up-to-date articles, and many new features have been included. *The Lutheran* offers various incentives to boost subscriptions. For example every member of St. Paul's who does not subscribe can receive three complimentary issues

## Our The Lutheran Magazine

over three months, individually addressed to them. If you haven't read *The Lutheran* for a while, why don't you take up this offer. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Some major topics covered over the past year include

- § *The Sunday Drive* – the long drive to church for some of our fellow Lutherans in more remote parts of Australia.
- § *Hearts on Fire* – the significance of Pentecost for us today.
- § *Hidden Treasures* - loving and caring for people with intellectual disability here in Australia and overseas.
- § *Fear @ Home* – the private hell of domestic violence, and how we can support people in those situations.
- § *Light in Dark Places* – where is God when your world crashes and burns?
- § *The Ultimate Love Story* – Christmas: God's love meeting human love to raise a helpless child.
- § *Summer Synod Edition* – an opportunity to catch up with what's happening across the LCA.
- § *The Porn Pandemic* – the Internet virus that corrupts human lives attacks LCA members too.
- § *Fear, Faith and the Future* – the challenges and opportunities of living in a multi-religious world.
- § *The Long Goodbye* – the impact of dementia on relationships.
- § *Every Drop Counts* – the work of the Australian Lutheran World Service over 60 years.

Often the topics are presented in a way that would allow easy adaptation for a discussion group. In addition there are regular features, some of which might surprise you. *The Radical Luther* series shone a light on some of Luther's more challenging teachings for us today. This series has now morphed into *The Radical Pastor* – a series on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings.

There are regular movie and book reviews. One recent eye-catching review was on David Bentley Hart's book *The Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*. Other interesting discussions have centred on *The Matrix* and the *Harry Potter* films. Another feature to enjoy is Lyall Kupke's *Stepping Stones*. Lyall is the LCA archivist, and he regularly digs up fascinating bits of our LCA past.

Young families can find useful hints on child rearing in *Heart and Home*. A recent article deals with Taming Tantrums. Even grandparents can get some useful hints for managing today's children here! And then there is a useful digest of world news with particular relevance to Christians, complete with internet links for those of us who like to browse the web.

To find out more about the new look *Lutheran*, check out some of the latest editions on the web at [www.thelutheran.com.au](http://www.thelutheran.com.au). There is a wealth of information there! Or, if you prefer, take up the offer of three introductory copies. All you need to do is give your name and address to Annemarie Vu and she will arrange to get the copies from LCA Subscriptions, as free copies are not sent directly to members. So, why not give it a go!

## A View from ..... Up the Front

Have you ever wondered what it is like up the front? Last time I wrote something for our newsletter it was a contribution to "A View from the Pew" and I wrote about my worship experience from one of the back rows where I usually sat. This time I am going to share with you my experience from the other end.

Over the last couple of years there has been the opportunity for members of the congregation to open services and lead worship; at least until the Pastor arrived to deliver the sermon and communion.

The first time I found my self thinking that the last time I was this nervous at Church was when I was about to get married. There was anxiety about if I could carry the moment or if I would be lost for words. What right did I have to lead worship? What about if I froze or stood up when I should have sat down, good grief!! Prayer seemed the only sensible thing to do. So as I sat in the front pew I asked God to be with me.

The next thought that entered into my head was that it was God's words that I would be speaking and not my own. He would give me the words I did not have to find them. With this realisation calm descended on me like a soft blanket or the warmth of the sun on your back on a spring morning. I let go, put my trust in the Lord and he was there.

The other thing that had been bothering me was the



absolution of sins. This is where the leader of the worship declares that our sins are forgiven. How could I do this?

I was not without sin or even the least sinful by a long shot. Again I realised that I was merely a conduit for Christ and that he had already died and won our salvation. It was His authority that I was citing; nothing to do with me. All I was doing was announcing to those present that all who believe in Him and accepted Him as Lord would be forgiven.

One of the really inspiring parts of being "out front" is being able to hear the congregation sing. It is one part of the worship where we openly express ourselves. Part of it is the words, part of it is the music. The special thing for me is the emotion that you can feel being expressed by the congregation as they sing praises to the Lord. It is like a wave at your back.

The second thing I came to realise and appreciate more was that our worship services are possible because of the contribution of many people. Worship bulletins, music, technicians, stewards, prayer, communion preparation, cleaning, book keeping, parking attendants, flowers, rosters, Sunday school, children's ministry, morning tea and lectors. All these things make up our worship experience and fellowship.

Leading worship has made me review my own relationship with God. To understand that when we are doing things in His name that He is with us and that He will give us what we need at that moment. It has also been personally enriching and enlightening. Whilst leading is not for everyone, I would encourage anyone to get more involved in worship and be active in serving the Lord with joy and gladness.

Peter Hong Ning

## 6.30 am Ladies Coffee Group

During the winter months this group has continued to meet each Thursday morning in the “crying room” at the back of the church. Our time is used to study, to support each other when there is a need, and to pray and share the Christian experience in the Sydney of 2010.

We have read and discussed a contemporary book called **“Drawing Near – A Life of Intimacy with God”** by American author John Bevere. His introduction posed a call from God — “Why are you satisfied without my presence? Why do you remain distant when you could have intimacy with me?”

His book has taken us through the many times this call has been made. The great prophets of the Old Testament shared this intimacy and “walked with God.” God clearly stated His desire for us to be intimate with him. (Ex. 34:14) Over and over again we are urged not to settle for living a Christian life that *knows about* God without really *knowing* God.

The words of James 4:8 are stressed. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” God called on the children of Israel to come back to Him (Jer. 7:13) instead they made false idols and strayed far from being close to God. John Bevere selectively uses the description of the children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Ex.20:21) as an example of their lack of intimacy with God. “...so the people stood

afar off...” However, in the previous chapter (Ex. 19:12), God explicitly tells Moses to *keep the people afar off*, under threat of death, for they lacked the fear of the Lord.

The author compares present times, where so many are “afar off,” valuing their worth by a mercenary yardstick. There is a lack of fear of the Lord. Why don’t more people respond to His invitation to draw near? An indifferent church? An excess of worldly comforts? Our recent study of Paul’s letters to the fledgling early Christian churches showed many had become lukewarm. Sounds familiar.

He points out that the Christian message is often preached intentionally incomplete to generate a greater church following — a feel good tactic — but by leaving out the fear of the Lord, in essence His presence is shut out. The fear of the Lord begins in the heart, and reveals the truth of our “worth-ship.”

Speaking “in tongues” is addressed in some detail with definitions of several categories of tongues, explaining the difference between speaking “in tongues” for public ministry and for fellowship with God. The first category is basically speaking in foreign languages in a way that our normal abilities are not capable of; a sign to unbelievers for public ministry. The second category of tongues is a heavenly language, which must have interpretation (not translation)



as they are not known in the natural world.

John Bevere gives several instances of having witnessed the gift of speaking in tongues, and states that tongues when interpreted are similar to prophecy (1 Cor. 14:4) Much is written by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians about speaking in tongues, and he mentions their use for personal prayer and for intercession on behalf of another person.

Our group had many thoughts and comments on the subject of speaking in tongues. People who don’t possess this gift of the Holy Spirit may feel left out in some way, however we are told others are given different gifts of the Spirit. Many times in this book the author mentions himself boldly speaking in tongues when he needed a direction from God. He exhorts readers to “build your inner man through prayer in tongues ... and ask for interpretation in the Holy Spirit.”

Nearing the end of the book we have come to a discussion on the full assurance of faith. The author’s opening words

in this section are “God does not respond to our need, He responds to our faith.” He continues with the question “How do we get faith?”

His answer comes directly from the Bible. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing the Word of God.” (Rom.10:17) “There is a famine in the land, not of bread and water, but of the Word of God.” (Amos 8:11) John Bevere comments that our ability to have intimacy with God is directly proportional to our faith, and our faith is proportional to our obedience to Him.

This book has aroused much discussion, and diverse opinions, yet it reflects the author’s depth of faith and his concern for the spiritual well-being of all Christians. It has also served to remind us that we need to refer Bible references to the full context in which they were originally written.

During the months of this latest study we have learned more about ourselves, and a greater understanding of living the full Christian life; a life of closer intimacy with God. The words of the popular song “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” echo the theme of John Bevere’s book

*Just a closer walk with thee,  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

What a wonderful way to **BE.**

Barbara Watson



Brightly coloured balloons helped to emphasise 'He is risen' on Easter Sunday

### The Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all.”

One is Evil – It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is Good – It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather “Which wolf wins?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

### Thoughts to Ponder

- \$ God so loved the world that he did not send a committee
- \$ Children are natural mimics who act like their parents, despite every effort to teach them otherwise.
- \$ Did Noah keep his bees in archives?
- \$ People are like teabags — you have to put them in hot water to see how strong they are.
- \$ The secret of success is to discover at an early age that you are not God.
- \$ It takes years to build up trust, yet it only takes suspicion, not proof, to destroy it.

## What Do our Banners Mean?



The Banner for the 'Green period' of the church year

### TIME AFTER PENTECOST BANNER

The time after Pentecost is the longest period of the church year, a time when we learn how we should live and grow as Christians, receive the Sacraments and hear the message of Jesus ministry during his time on earth. The seasonal colour is green, for growth and new life

This banner reflects these aspects of our life in Christ. At the very bottom of the banner flames reflect the very beginning of the creation of God's earth, reminding us

of Alpha and Omega, that He is in control from the beginning of time until the end.

There are times in our lives when we feel abandoned and at the mercy of Satan, and these times are reflected in the swirling patterns of desert sands and wind. Contrasted alongside this are scenes of growth, trees, water, farmland and greenery, evidence of God-given rain and the abundance of His blessings.

The Holy Bible is God's word, and in it we find the history of the children of God and the prophets in the Old Testament, while the New Testament gives us a blueprint for living out lives in Him. We read the commands Christ gave during his time among man, including what we now call the Sacraments.

Baptism is often symbolised by a shell, first used in ancient times to hold water, with drops of water denoting the washing away of the original sin of Adam that we all inherit. The command of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper to "do this in remembrance of me" is featured in the top section of this banner. Here the traditional symbols of Holy Communion, the bread and the wine, are imposed over strong diagonal lines that symbolise the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The area of tiny blue "tiles" at the top denotes God's time into the future, the "Omega".

I really enjoyed putting this area together. As this section grew and I found more suitable fabrics and colours to complete it, it seemed to develop a life of its own.

This banner completed the series, and comprised many smaller sections done in hand applique, then put together to make a whole message. I do a lot of sewing, and found the opportunity to do these banners quite special, and trust the messages depicted will benefit all who worship in St. Paul's.

Barbara Watson



The Holy Spirit at Pentecost Banner

## And our Green Altar Paraments?

St Paul's set of green paraments are used for the longest period in the church year, the time after Pentecost, from Trinity Sunday through to the beginning of Advent. The design, to reflect St. Paul's in Sydney as the gateway to Australia, has a uniquely Australian feel to it. The exuberant nature of Australia's wildflowers reflect a feeling of life and growth. The shape of the cross is a powerful image; it is filled with the vibrant shapes and colours of Australian wildflowers. They symbolise the promise of life eternal when we put our faith in the risen Lord.



The largest piece of this set is the altar frontal itself. Down each side is a narrow border or "braid" of eucalyptus leaves. These borders are a present day interpretation of the handmade braids used from early times to decorate the edges of worship garments and hangings. The design shows leaves and gumnuts of the Yellow Box eucalyptus gum.

A search of the internet and

local library found the meanings of the names of our native wildflowers and grasses, and came up with interesting facts. I decided to use the Waratah as the motif on the pulpit frontal by default, mainly because it's large bright red flower tended to overwhelm other smaller flowers in the collection in the cross design on the altar frontal.

Curiosity about the meaning of the name Waratah led to the fact that it was already being used by native Australians when white men first came to these shores. British botanists gave it the name *Telopea Speciosissima*, derived from the Greek "telepos" meaning "seen from afar", as a beacon, because of the great distance from which it's crimson flowers could be seen. It provides a good symbol to have on the pulpit, where we focus on the spoken word of God as a beacon on which to base our lives.



The parament for the Baptism table is decorated with the giant native water lily. The lily is a symbol of purity and immortality. These native water lilies on the baptism frontal remind us of new life in the family of Christ, bestowed on us with baptism. The wavy lines signify water used in baptism to wash away original sin



The preaching stole continued the theme of using native flowers and grasses. Earlier research on Waratahs gleaned the fact they regenerate after bushfires, causing woody seedpods to burst into new life. How appropriate to use as a reminder of the tongues of flame at Pentecost, and to symbolise the work of the Holy Spirit.

One side of the stole depicts a woody seed pod of the Waratah consumed within flames, and a new plant springing up from a seed.

The other side of the stole shows the rain needed for growth, weeping grass and its seeds, and grapes. There is a native grass species which stays green all year round, commonly known as weeping grass or native rice. Seeds of this grass, similar in size to long grain rice, are collected and ground up to make bread by the aboriginals. This grass is used to remind us of the bread used in communion.

When it came to finding a native plant used to make wine, I was unsuccessful. There possibly is one, such as the native raisin, but it is eaten as a fruit, not made into wine. Instead, the memory of grape vines growing at my grandfather's farm on the Lachlan River was used to depict the grapes of communion wine.

Barbara Watson



## God versus Science

"Let me explain the problem science has with religion." The atheist professor paused before one of his new students and asked him to stand.

"You're a Christian, aren't you son?"

"Yes sir," the student said.

"So you believe in God?"

"Absolutely."

"Is God good?"

"Sure! God's good."

"Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?"

"Yes."

"Are you good or evil?"

"The Bible says I'm evil."

The professor grins knowingly. "Aha! The Bible!"

He considers for a moment. "Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him? Would you try?"

"Yes sir, I would."

"So you're good..?"

"I wouldn't say that."

"But why not say that? You'd help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn't."

The student does not answer, so the professor continues.

"He doesn't, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer, even though he prayed to God to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?"

The student remained silent.

"No, you can't, can you?" the professor said. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax.

"Let's start again, young fella. Is God good?"

"Er..yes," the student says.

"Is Satan good?"

The student didn't hesitate on this one. "No."

"Then where does Satan come from?"

The student faltered. "From God."

"That's right. God made Satan, didn't he? Tell me son, is there evil in this world?"

"Yes. Sir."

"Evil's everywhere, isn't it? And God made everything, correct?"

"Yes."

"If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principle that our works define who we are, then God is evil."

Again the student had no answer.

"Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?"

The student squirmed on his feet. "Yes."

"So who created them?"

The student did not answer again, so the professor repeated the question. "Who created them?"

There is still no answer. Suddenly the lecturer broke away to pace in front of the classroom. The class was mesmerised. "Tell me," he continues on to another student. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?"

The student's voice betrays him, and cracks. "Yes, professor, I do."

The old man stops pacing. "Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen Jesus?"

"No sir, I've never seen Him."

"Then tell us if you've ever heard Jesus?"

"No sir, I have not."

"Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus, or smelt your Jesus? Have you ever had any sensory perception of Jesus Christ, or God for that matter?"

"No sir, I'm afraid I haven't."

"Yet you still believe in Him?"

"Yes."

"According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn't exist. What do you say to that, son?"

"Nothing," the student replies. "I only have my faith."

"Yes, faith," the professor repeated. "And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith."

The student stood quietly for a moment before asking a question of his own. "Professor, is there such a thing as heat?"

"Yes."

"And is there such a thing as cold?"

"Yes, son, there's cold, too."

"No sir, there isn't."

The professor turned to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly became very quiet. The student began to explain.

"You can have lots of heat, even more heat, super-heat, mega-heat, unlimited heat, white heat, a little or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'. We can go down to 458 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we can't go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold, otherwise we would be able to go colder than the lowest absolute zero.

Every body or object is susceptible to study when it transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero is the total absence of heat. You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it."

There is silence across the room. The student continues.

"What about darkness, professor? Is there such a thing as darkness?"

"Yes," the professor replied without hesitation. "What is night if it isn't darkness?"

"You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something: it is the absence of something. You can have varying degrees of light, but if you constantly have no light it's called darkness, isn't it? In reality, darkness isn't. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?"

The professor began to smile at the student in front of him. "So what point are you trying to make young man?"

"My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, so your conclusion must also be flawed."

"Flawed? Can you explain how?"

"You are working on the premise of duality. You argue that there is life and then there is death, a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something we can measure. Sir, science can't even explain a thought. It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understands either one.

To view death as the opposite of life is to ignore that death does not exist as a *thing*. It is the absence of life. Professor, do you teach students that we evolved from a monkey?"

"If you refer to the natural evolution process, yes, young man, of course I do."

"Have you observed evolution with your own eyes, sir?"

The professor shook his head, smiled, and realises where this argument is going.  
 “Since no one has ever observed and proven the process of evolution at work, are you not teaching your opinion, sir? Are you now not a scientist, but a preacher?”  
 The class is in uproar. The student remains silent until the room settles.  
 “To continue the point you made earlier to the other student. Let me give you an example of what I mean.”  
 He looks around the room. “Is there anyone who has ever seen the professor’s brain?”  
 There is laughter across the room.  
 “Anyone heard, touched or smelt the professor’s brain? No one? According to your scientific criteria for proof of the existence of something, you have no brain, with all due respect, sir. So, if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir?”  
 There is silence in the room.  
 The professor stares at the student, finally, after what seems like an eternity, the professor answers. “I guess you’ll have to take them on faith.”  
 “Now, you accept there is faith, in fact, faith exists with life,” the student continues. “Now, is there such a thing as evil?”  
 “Of course there is. It is in the daily example of man’s inhumanity to man. It is nothing else but evil.”  
 The student replied, “Evil does not exist, sir, or at least it does not exist as a definable entity. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, evil is a word man created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil.  
 Evil is what happens when man does not have God’s love present in his heart. It is like the cold that comes when there is no heat, or the darkness that comes when there is no light.”  
 The professor sat down.  
 The student was Albert Einstein.

## Grace upon Grace—Spirituality for Today

This book **“Grace upon Grace. Spirituality for Today”** is written by retired professor John Kleinig, of Australian Lutheran College. The book can be purchased from Australian Church Resources at [www.acresources.com.au](http://www.acresources.com.au) or e-mail at [service@acresources.com.au](mailto:service@acresources.com.au).

Chapter 2 focuses on *The Mystery of Meditation*. Dr. Kleinig says “Meditation is waiting on the Lord to renew us with the Holy Spirit. By meditating on Him and His Word we wait on Him and listen to Him in order to receive Him and what He provides for us day by day...by having a daily time of rest and reception we borrow strength from Him.”

We receive STRENGTH from the Lord by becoming physically and mentally attentive to Him. It is important to settle down so that we become alert and mindful and receptive to Christ.

We receive GUIDANCE by reflecting on the scriptures and reading the Bible attentively and devotionally as the Word of God addressed personally to us for our encouragement.

We receive HELP by memorising his Word, e.g. a specific text. We receive a passage from the Bible, a word to us from the Lord, and we memorise it so that the Holy Spirit can use it to help us in some way as we go about our daily life.

We receive the gift of VISION and INSIGHT by contemplating His hidden presence. Using a crucifix or a work of art, like an icon, can become the focus of our meditation on His presence with us.

Further in this book John Kleinig quotes Dr. H. Sasse when he says “ The liturgy does not belong to any pastor or any worship committee or any congregation; it is the liturgy of the church. Since it belongs to the church only the church could change it. And then only for some good reason.”



## Farewell to Rene

Earlier this year congregational president Bruce Arnold presented a memory souvenir of the time spent as Pastoral Assistant for St Paul's congregation to Rene van den Tol

Rene spent seven years as an invaluable back up and stepped in to hold the fort during our first year without a pastor

Rene has moved on to a new career as a maths teacher and attends the Narraweena Lutheran church



## Criteria for Lutheran Hymns

A Lutheran hymn aims not to create the right atmosphere or mood for worship but serves as a vehicle for the Spirit filled Word of God

A Lutheran hymn is not entertainment but proclamation

A Lutheran hymn is shaped by the theology of the cross

A Lutheran hymn is not bound merely to paraphrase the biblical text rather it interprets the Scriptures in reference to Christ

A Lutheran hymn is bound to no culture save the culture of the church catholic

## Why go to Church?

A church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. “I’ve gone for thirty years now” he wrote, “and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can’t remember a single one of them. So, I think I’m wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all.”

This started a real controversy in the ‘Letters to the Editor’ column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

“I’ve been married for thirty years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this... They all nourished me and gave me strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!”

**C S Lewis** author of *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* has said:

‘There are two kinds of people: those who say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says ‘All right then have it your way’

‘In every church in every institution there is something which sooner or later works against the very purpose for which it came into existence’

# National Church Life Survey

Some interesting facts can be found in the results of the latest information gleaned from the National Church Life Survey. The Australian Lutheran church participates in the cycle of information gathered on questionnaires every five years. The last national survey was in 2006, and together with figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics a picture emerged to highlight the changes in church life, in church attendance, in who is attending, and differences between city and country churches.

Following a trend seen across the wider population in Australia, church-goers are tending to be better educated; more have university degrees (27%) and are more likely to be involved in a wide range of community groups. The church must be able to relate specifically to a highly educated congregation, yet still relate to an older generation that has gained knowledge and experience in a different way to how younger people have.

University graduates surveyed tended to not shy away from group participation, and can be keenly interested in spirituality. They like their church modern and relevant; they valued contemporary services and churches where issues of daily life are discussed. These preferences mostly reflect the younger age groups in church communities as well.

The survey results spotlighted the fact there is a gap in the demographics of the church, i.e. those who are *not* tertiary educated. Historically much of the church has struggled to reach blue-collar workers and those less well educated. This should be seen as an on-going challenge for churches. It is important that this section of the community is not forgotten.

There are more community volunteers from among the ranks of church-goers, and far from being inward-looking and focused only on their own church group, church-going volunteers are part of society's powerful, invisible safety net.

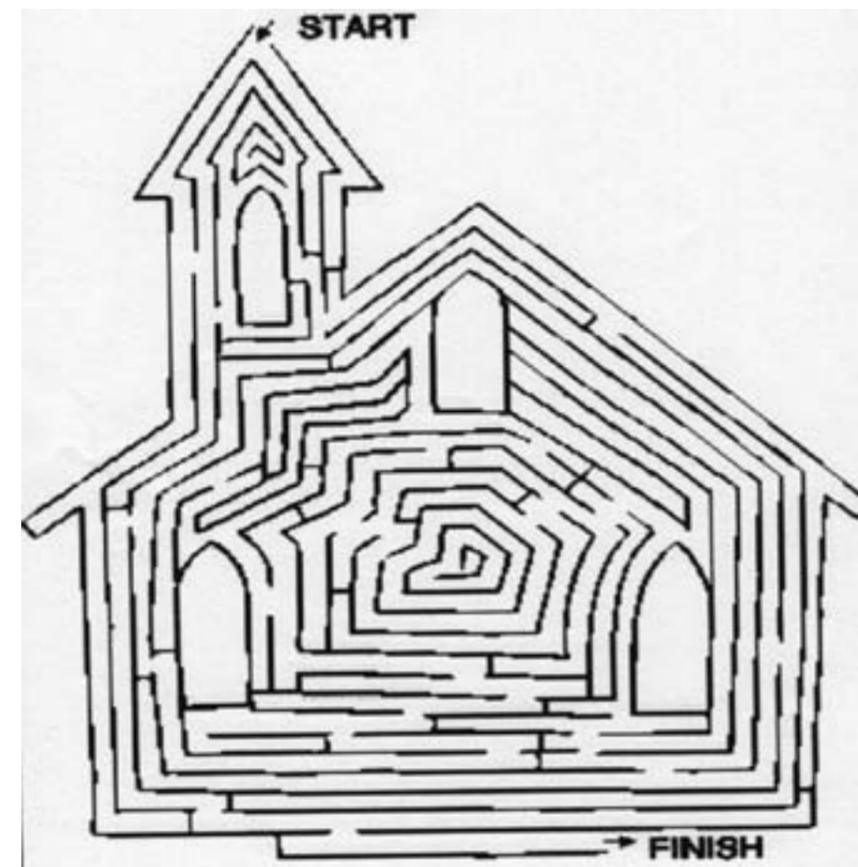
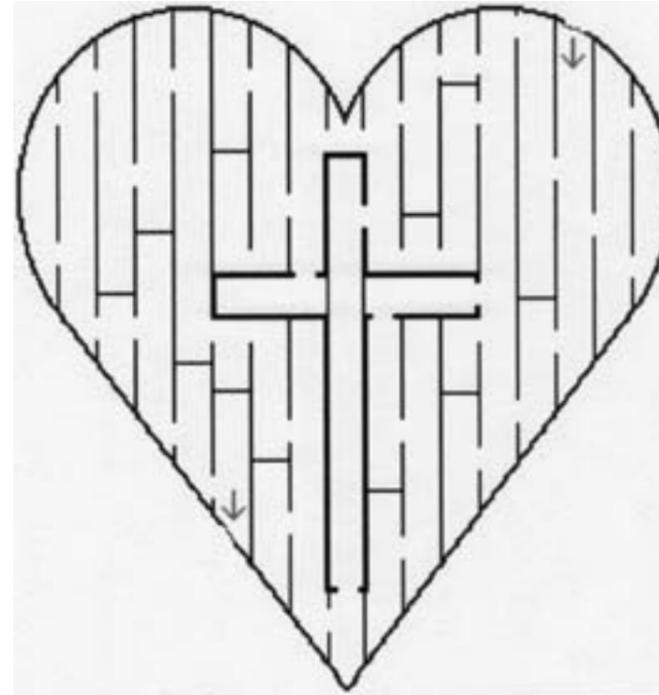
42% of churches participating in the 2006 survey were in rural areas, where outside influences such as drought, loss of government business and bank services had led to a decline in rural numbers. Nearly 40% of rural churches had between 1 and 25 attendees.

While the key issues facing churches in rural settings differ considerably from those in urban environments, it is interesting to note that across all measures of health and vitality in church life, there is little difference between the responses of rural attendees and the national average.

The clinical facts and figures of structured surveys tell us many things about the church, however, they don't touch on the close and personal relationships that bind our church "families" together. When the list of subjects that were dealt with in the survey zip past, the who why and where of church life today appears to be slotted into compartments. Life is not like that, church life less so. We live our lives (and "church" lives) in an ever-evolving, changing world. The one constant un-changing certainty is the Christian message.



## Kids Corner



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