



MAY 2016

Experienced in MINISTRY

Baptist Union of Victoria
Newsletter for mature pastors, missionaries, partners, retirees

MOVING ON, NOT RETIRING

By Frank Rees

I am so grateful for the 25 years that I have had been on the staff of Whitley College. In three different roles, I have been privileged to work with a truly wonderful group of people—who ought to be appreciated and honoured far more than they are. But now it is time for me to move on. It is vital to say that I am not retiring. I have decided not to seek another term at Whitley, but I am moving into other expressions of ministry. What that means for me is a number of things.



The first part is about letting go. It is crucial to say that I was called to this ministry and now it is equally crucial to hand this ministry back to the one who called me to it and the people who entrusted it into my care. One day some years ago the great Ken Lyall took me by the arm, looked me in the eye and simply said, 'Keep going'. That was such a help. For many years I have been sustained by a prayer written by Sir Francis Drake:

Lord God, when you call your servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yields the true glory ...

Having coming to my decision to move on, however, I have been given another prayer of encouragement. This is an anonymous prayer acknowledging that God may indeed call someone else to finish what I have started and that I can leave it in God's hands.

If indeed it be necessary, O Lord, to bury the workman that my work may be finished by other hands, help me never to think of myself as indispensable. May I be content to die with my work undone, knowing that my task is to work at the fulfilment of they purposes, not to work them out.

These are the spiritual dynamics of letting go. Too many of us think of the ministry as *our* ministry. It is not our church, our ministry, or my college. It is entirely God's, and so I leave to God whatever is to become of the things I have initiated and developed. That means I have no concern for what is sometimes called 'my legacy'—at least, not in institutional terms. I do have a passionate interest in the continuing life of the people I have taught, and their ministries. In fact, that is one of the things to which I am moving on, to a more active engagement with mentoring and encouraging such people.

It is very difficult to let go or to move from a familiar and much loved place, if you don't know what you are going to do. I am not (at this point) going to another job. I am open to that, but whatever I do it will be a matter of choice. I am going to do what really matters to me. That, too, is an extraordinary privilege.

My Spiritual Director has encouraged me to work on the question, 'Who is the person I want to be?' rather than 'What do I want to do?' The first question taps into that fundamental sense of my calling, the calling to be a pastor and teacher, not just to have a specific job or role. It's a question that asks me to know my gifts, to know who I am, and to name my first loves, those things that bring me deep fulfilment and joy. That is not a hard question to answer. One day I happened to walk through the college library and noticed at a table that someone, not there just at that moment, was clearly preparing a sermon: the Bible text, commentaries and notes were spread out there. Something within me leapt for joy. How I loved being that person, working on bringing the word of God to my people. I love to preach and teach, and care for people as they discover God's presence with them. Whatever I go to, this will be a part of who I am. I want to continue a ministry of support, both formally and informally, for individuals and for some groups or agencies.

It's also true that in letting go there are some things I'm looking forward to leaving behind, things I will no longer have to do. And there will be things I leave behind that I will miss a lot. Grief will be a part of this transition, I know.

The final thing I want to say is that there has been a great freedom in 'going public' with this decision. It is a relief that it is decided and known. It had to happen some time. Naturally, I have some fears and worries. I am concerned for the future of the college. There are uncertainties of health and finance, for all of us but especially as we get older. But our generations have been given what someone called 'the bonus years', to live active and fulfilling lives much beyond 'retirement age' and indeed the times when our parents went to their rest. I am so grateful for the years at Whitley, for the colleagues and students and the deeply rewarding joy of seeing them grow in faith and hope and love. Now I am moving on.

For all people, retirement can be exciting, but also challenging. It certainly can be for retiring pastors.

"For perhaps the first time, you have the leisure and freedom to pursue travel or other interests freely, to slow down and 'smell the roses.' However, for many men, retirement can be challenging...."

"In order to adjust successfully to retirement, men have to start redefining the bases of their sense of self. Without the role of breadwinner to rely on, you may start to ask, who am I? Self-esteem can start to fall and depression can set in...."

"Retirement brings new challenges to a relationship. ..."

<https://www.mensline.org.au/emotions-and-mental-wellbeing/adjusting-to-retirement>

RETIRED OR RETREADED

By Darrell McKerlie

Six and a half years ago I was asked, “What are you going to do when you retire?” I said, “In two years I will be 65 and twenty years at my present church. I think that will be a good time to retire.” Pam and I had already talked about making ourselves available for interims in the outback when this time came. I thought that was the end of the conversation.



Pam and Darrell McKerlie

Soon after, I received a subtle phone call that went something like this. “How would you like to go to Broome now?” I was so shocked that it took me a week to tell my wife about the phone call. When I did I was amazed that she was more open to the idea than I was. We prayed about it and God gave us both different Scriptural confirmations that this was His doing.

We decided to go for two years, and stayed a little over five. After 44 years of pastoral ministry these five years have turned out to be the icing on the cake.

I had recently preached about Peter getting out of the boat and attempting to walk on water, encouraging my listeners to take risks and do something bold for God. When I announced that we would be leaving Mooroolbark it was put in the context of practicing what I had preached three weeks before. We were getting out of the boat (the security and comfort of Mooroolbark Baptist church) and following God’s call to become the pastor of the Broome Baptist Church.

The most common reaction to this announcement was, “Why Broome!?” It was like; “You must have done something terribly wrong to be sentenced to that place.” At the time we were not sure ourselves why we were going to Broome, but we did have a very strong call from God and we knew He had a good reason. We knew it was to pastor the Broome Baptist Church, but God also had another reason which did not become apparent at first. However, a few months after we started in Broome the government opened the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre, near Derby, 200 kilometres from Broome.

When the government opened the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre in 2010, Immigration officers came to Broome because it was the closest big town. They asked the Broome Ministers’ Fraternal if they would visit the centre, with the proviso of “no proselytizing”. I have always believed they invited us because they wanted some social workers they did not have to pay! As things turned out, apart from one other pastor who visited for a few months, I was the only minister from Broome who attended regularly until the centre was closed in July 2014.

For me this has been a story of how God brought the mission field to Australia. To have a captivated audience every week hungry for the Gospel is simply mind-boggling. Jesus said in John 4: 35, “*Look at the fields they are ready for harvest*” and they were!

When I started visiting Curtin I soon discovered that many of those seeking asylum were looking for more than just freedom. Okay, maybe that is not true of all of them, but amongst those who were seeking a new life in Australia are those that Jesus described in Matthew 11:28, “*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life*” (The Message).

I met many refugees who are ‘burnt out on religion’ and attracted to Jesus’ love. The Bible says in Romans 10: 17, “*No one can have faith without hearing the message about Christ*” (TEV). Curtin for me has been about being in the right place at the right time to share the Good News with those who want to hear it – and with amazing results!

It wasn't long before some asylum seekers asked if I would teach them from the Bible. As those requesting the Bible Studies were from a Muslim background, this was something I felt ill equipped to handle. I sought help from someone who has experience in this area and before long the Bible studies became a weekly attraction with anywhere between 30 and 60 men attending each week. This would not have been possible if it was not for the fact God sent along refugees who could interpret for me. And as one interpreter left God always seemed to have another one ready – not always Christians, but people who were sympathetic to my cause.

A significant number of Iranians who have come to Australia on boats have done so because they want to convert to Christianity. This is their main reason for coming. They are so keen to make the switch that they have no hesitation in going to the authorities and formally requesting, 'I would like to convert to Christianity,' or 'I would like to be baptised'. The people who operated the Detention Centre did not quite know what to do with such requests and so they passed them to me, saying, 'You deal with it'.

You will recall that the invitation to visit Curtin included a no proselytizing clause and now the centre started asking me to deal with people who wanted to be become Christians and be baptised. Do you see any irony in that?

As a result of this dilemma I sat down with the management over lunch one day, and it was agreed that if a person requested baptism they would attend at least five sessions with me and then undergo a rather meticulous interview that in most cases required an official government interpreter to be present. Those who wanted to be baptised were required to attend five baptismal classes as well as the general Bible Studies. Over a period of about three years I baptised 85 men and facilitated well over 125 referrals to churches of various denominations in every state in Australia.



THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

By Margaret Perrin

After reluctantly deciding to give up driving, I became a taxi passenger. This was one of those "letting go" decisions that "Seniors" rarely welcome. To me, it felt like a loss of freedom! Then one day I met a taxi driver whose story taught me a wonderful lesson. Melbourne had become a city with a strong international presence, and often taxi drivers were newcomers to Australia. Sometimes, I found that a polite inquiry: *"What country are you from?"* was met with a warm, friendly response – most drivers seemed glad to be asked that question.

On one occasion when I phoned for a taxi, the driver who came was from an overseas country, but spoke in English very fluently. This middle-aged man really wanted to talk – and this is the story that he told:

"I was a lawyer in my own country, and spoke four languages. But then, my whole world fell apart". He was silent for a moment, remembering. Then with deep pain in his voice he went on:

"No-one could believe the horrors, the cruelty, the murders that my family and I witnessed! We have lived through the terrors of a cruel war, and the disintegration of our beloved country – it was terrible, just terrible!"

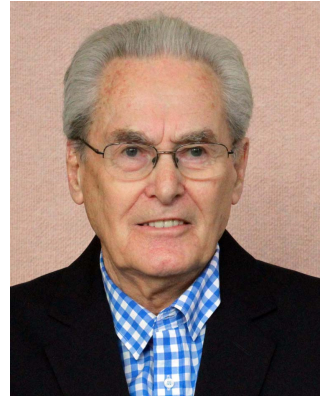
There was a long, deep silence. Then, grasping the wheel of the taxi, he began to smile, saying: *"I'm no longer a lawyer. I'm now a taxi driver. But my family and I are free – free from terrible fear! And these days in this country, I can decide when to work, and when to take time off. So now, I am a very happy man!"*

Arriving at my destination, I thanked my taxi driver for sharing his story. What superb courage had been his in such desperate times! And there was more – the powerful grace of gratitude.

STEPPING STONES ALONG THE WAY

Books that helped my Faith formation

By Peter Stockman



Like many of my age, I grew up in a fundamentalist environment. At the end of my first year in Theological College I was ready to resign. The first essay I was required to submit was entitled “Comment on the sources of the Books of Kings”. I grew up with the belief that the Holy Spirit was the author of the Bible. The title of the essay threw me into intellectual confusion. It was however the beginning of a fruitful intellectual journey of discovery which continues to this day.

“Beyond Fundamentalism” by Daniel B Stevick, published by John Knox Press, let me down gently by showing me what it might mean to love God with my mind as well as with my heart. That was an important stepping stone for my later development.

During one long vacation I took a job driving a truck for Mayne Nicholas. I always took a book with me to read at lunch time or when waiting for my truck to be loaded. I took a copy of *“Beyond Tragedy”* by Reinhold Niebuhr, and it was for me like an epiphany. Niebuhr addressed the pivotal stories of the Old Testament by expounding them as Trans historical Myths. They remain true in every age. Of the tower of Babel he wrote: “In every Tower of Babel the foundation is more honest than the pinnacle” and later “Every form of human culture, whether religious, rational or scientific, is subject to the same corruption, because all are products of the same human heart, which tries to deny its finite limitations”. From Niebuhr I learned that a myth is not a fairy story. A story can be true even when not necessarily factual. Jesus told stories that we call parables; stories that remain true in any time or place.

The Gifford Lecture Series have long been a source of enlightenment. They feature the great luminaries of the Church like William Temple and John Ballie. But one stands out in my memory: W. Macneile Dixon’s *‘The Human situation’*. It’s a book that is hard to put down. Dixon was not a professional Theologian. From 1904 until 1935 he was Regius Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Glasgow. The sheer beauty of the language and the clarity of his expression supported me in my search for meaning. I’ve returned to it again and again for the ‘sheer joy of its phrases’. If the test of inspiration is that something continues to inspire, *“The Human Situation”* passes with flying colours. From Dixon I discovered that Philosophy is no threat to Faith, but rather is Faith’s Handmaiden. That’s one pretty solid stepping stone.

I began life as an industrial chemist. I have always loved the logic of science as a method of acquiring knowledge. It was inevitable that the supposed conflict between science and religion would present me with a problem. Two books helped me pick my way through many a bog. They were for me giant stepping stones. *“Science and Religion”* edited by Ian G. Barbour was brought to my attention by the late Rev. David Jackson. I had always believed that if something is True it must arise from the source of all truth. But this was my first encounter with a scholarly discussion about science and religion. It was a book that allowed me to draw my own conclusions. Soon after, I discovered, *“Maker of Heaven and Earth”* by Langdon Gilkey. I heard Gilkey when he was the guest of Whitley College and was impressed by his clarity and passion, along with his charity towards those who disagreed with him.

My last stepping stone, is much shorter volume but no less challenging, was Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *“Prayers from prison”*. Knowing his story lends considerable poignancy to its content. His question, “Who am I?” is one that I never cease to ask .

“Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine”

IT'S A LONG WAY TO....

By Harry Monro

In November 2014 we set out to travel the length of the Murray River on our Paddleboat Tooraloora. From Echuca to the sea was 1700 river kms - 60 days of travel at 7 kms per hour, a long way, but we never tired of observing God's wonderful creation around us. We enjoyed the amazing variety of bird life and the changing scenery - the narrow river through the red gum forests in Victoria to the magnificent orange cliffs in S.A. where the river is usually 3 times as wide.



One of the main reasons we enjoyed the experience so much was that we travelled with other boats, including 8 paddleboats. At the end of each day we sat on the bank and relaxed together.

However, it was not all "smooth sailing". There were many hazards to be negotiated - strong currents, protruding and submerged snags, overhanging branches, high winds, rock reefs, sand bars and clay bars. We went through 13 locks, and seven historic bridges were raised for us to pass through. Townspeople welcomed 'the fleet' along the way. We had barbecues with them and visited their museums at places such as Cobdogla, Swan Reach and Morgan. We spent time at Kulkurana Homestead/Station, Overland Corner Hotel and checked out places and people with links to our Paddleboat history.

Politicians addressed us and ministers blessed us (Catholic at Echuca, Uniting at Mildura, Anglican at Renmark). Also there were TV, radio and newspaper interviews and photos.

Without books of charts it would be impossible to take a large boat such as Tooraloora (19.5mtrs long with an upper deck) along the Murray. We were privileged to spend time with Barry and Maureen Wright who had compiled and revised charts many times over the years, making a safe trip possible.

Near Swan Hill we had a major issue. Tooraloora developed gear box problems and a new gearbox was needed. God provided a replacement and a first class mechanic so we were on our way again within a couple of days. We were given valuable information by the lock keepers on the safest channel to take, changes in river levels, hazards etc. Just once we managed to get stuck on a sand bar but were pulled by another paddle boat.

Crossing Lake Alexandrina to get to Goolwa is a real challenge. The lake can be a dangerous crossing as it is very shallow and strong winds, sometimes unexpected, can cause sudden high waves. As we made preparation and discussed the options and weather, a Marine Safety boat turned up out of the blue and gave good advice. We, even if no one else in the fleet did, thought they were a 'Godsend'. It took eight hours to make the crossing.

Altogether it was an unforgettable, unique and bucket list experience.

P.S. Tooraloora is now for sale in S.A. and we would like to purchase a smaller paddleboat to continue life on the great Murray River, God willing. For a 10 min video of part of the trip go to You tube: *Jackson wickham Tooraloora.*



WE REMEMBER GEORGE MURRAY

George Murry passed away on 13 February, as a result of his illness with cancer.

George's ministry was varied from full time pastoral work in Queensland and Victoria to mission service overseas in Thailand. After a period with World Vision as Victorian State Coordinator, George joined the BUV Missionary Department. George was ordained in 1989 and continued his ministry at Blackburn Baptist Church/Crossway. He remained a member at Crossway.

George was a warm, enthusiastic and faithful servant of Jesus.

George is survived by his wife Jo and their two daughters, Jane and Kelcie.

BIRTHDAYS

We include these dates so that you have the opportunity to make contact with the people on the day of their birthday. If you would like your birthday included, please contact us and give us the date.

If there is someone you would like to contact whose birthday is not listed, then why not contact them anyway!

May: 3 Margaret Cupit, 14 Judith Simpson, 15 Jessie Blackburn, 28 John Woolley, 30 Jill Westlake.

June: 2 June Wilson, 3 Jan Croucher, 6 Alan Wright & Allison Langmead, 10 Ray Sprigg, 13 Norm Pell, 19 Elaine Paxton, 20 Frances Steer, 21 Jo Westlake

July: 3 John Wright, John Sampson & Margaret Manley, 7 Ellen White, 8 Kathy Lewis & Gwen Farmilo, 14 Isabel Neilson, 15 Joyce Wilson, 16 John Evans

August: 2 Bev Simmonds, 4 Sue Dangerfield & John Strugnell, 9 Dorothy Kellem, 10 Marion Watson, 11 Lindsay & Meryl Smith & Ekkehart Friesen, 16 Tom Malone, 17 John Simpson, 19 Barrie Sutton & Marion Himbury, 21 Marie McKelvie, 23 Gladys Seawright

(If your name has been listed here, and you did not want it published, please accept our apologies, and let us know so we don't include it again.)

PLEASE CONTACT US

The Pastoral Care team for the over-65s, led by Alan Marr, will meet again on in May, and the next *Experienced in Ministry* is planned for August 2016.

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