



NOVEMBER 2015

# Experienced in MINISTRY

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

## **“YOU JUST NEVER KNOW!”**

*By Harley Kitchen*

I wake up with that exclamation on my lips nearly every morning these days as I put on the coffee - "What will happen today? You just never know!"

I might hear on the News about some traumatic event in a workplace or hospital or supermarket, and wonder "Will I be contacted for counselling there soon?" It's not often, approximately twice a month, that a phone call comes and I need to hotfoot it to meet the traumatized people there and try to be of some help.

Since 2003 when I felt God say "you've been on that mountain long enough" after 26 years of a variety of pastoral leadership in five suburban Baptist Churches and at 56 years old, I felt it was right to apply for Workplace Chaplaincy with ITIM (now Converge International). I had to think through "reputation among my ministry colleagues" issues, which took about 3 minutes...as the old saying goes "we would worry less about what others think about us if we knew how little they do!" I realized afresh that it's only what God thinks about our decisions and actions that matters - and I was originally called more to "outsiders" than "insiders" anyway... So, given some training, I joined the team of Workplace Chaplains and was now available as a minister to the world of the workplace.

I still remember my first experience of suddenly being confronted with a roomful of workers who had been traumatized by the accidental death of a colleague on the factory floor. The manager assembled them in the board room and introduced me to speak to them all. The important thing ringing in my ears was "get them talking out their feelings" and that became my goal in the next hour.

You walk out of a room like that, with people saying thanks for your help, and even if the closest you've come to "direct Christian ministry" is an encouragement to them to "seek out your spiritual resources", you feel you have been used of God in touching lives in a time of great need.

On average, as I've said, there have been close to two experiences like this each month, including injuries and deaths through accidents, fires, or violent assaults over these last 12 years. Quite a spike in the total was the traumatic experience of 2009's Black Saturday, in my duties as one of the 20 CFA Chaplains across the State including our own Peter Clark, John Wilson, David Poole, Geoff Pegler and most recently Geoff Leslie.

In between these "Critical Incidents", the ordinary plodding work of visiting workplaces, building relationships gradually until the toughest or most "important" people begin to warm to your presence and confide in you.

You also meet keen Christians who are trying to live for Christ in a harsh environment - and they love your encouragement. (A joy to me recently was finding that a previous very-troubled counselee of mine had been subsequently led to faith by one of those Christians at work - whom I had suggested she "talk to, maybe?".....!)

I have no hesitation in saying that God prepared me for such ministry through my years as a Baptist pastor. Over those years I found there were SO many times I got in my car and headed toward some new aspect of ministry to my people that I had never struck before - "flying by the seat of my pants" - and God's amazing grace.

Well, these last 12 years have been that "writ large", and I'm still excited about it. I find my personal emotional and spiritual resources are rebuilt through singing my heart out in worship, family love, caravan holidays...oh, and golf...except that stress can creep in there at times...

As this Chaplaincy work is not full-time for me, I've found Funeral Celebrancy a good ministry opportunity as well, each week spending time with grieving families, creating services which reflect and celebrate the life of their loved one. I find myself ministering to people who are quite unused to being ministered to and they think it's unusual and wonderful!

Ah, yes! Now, back to that coffee making. Where was I now....

*Harley, left, at a funeral for a fire fighter*



## **EXPERIENCED IN MINISTRY ANNUAL LUNCH**

**For Retired & over 65 Pastors and their Spouses, Widows and Widowers of Pastors**

**27 November, 2015, 11.30 am to 2.45 pm, at NewHope Baptist Church,  
3 Springfield Road, North Blackburn. There is plenty of parking available.**

**RSVP by Monday 23 November to Melissa Rule, 9880 6153,  
Melissa.rule@buv.com.au.**

(Advise of any dietary requirements, or if you need transport.)

This is a great opportunity to meet with friends you have known in the past, and with people who have shared similar experiences to your own.

*An offering will be received to support the work of St Albans community church plant.*

# A FEW THOUGHTS ON RETIREMENT

*By Chris Herbert*

It was 5 ½ years ago – on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 that I fully retired, aged 68. So I've had plenty of time to reflect on what retirement means for me and to gradually come to terms with it. In some ways the period is typified by the events of this year: a year which has gone incredibly quickly. It's also inextricably mixed up with aging.



Our 12<sup>th</sup> grandchild arrived in January. But even with a family of 4 boys, their wives and 12 grandchildren, we have been able to spend regular time with them. In May Carole and I headed off on a fantastic 8 week holiday. During which time we cycled in Spain, toured Turkey and met old friends from the 1970's in England. On arriving home in early July I was forced to come to terms with a major health issue which has consumed much of my time till mid-October.

So we haven't been idle, and God has been exceedingly good to us. Also I'm particularly grateful to the BUV who during the 80s not only employed me but helped prepare me for ministry in Australia and coincidentally for eventual retirement. Where would I have been without an adequate salary and superannuation?

But since retirement there has been an itch that would not go away. I missed the pastoral contact with people and the discipline and enjoyment of preaching – they both stretched and fulfilled me. This was not something that early on in my life I had deliberately sought but I realised when they were gone, a calling is not something that is easily relinquished. It had become part of who I was, and my own sense of self-worth was rightly or wrongly bound up with it. Basically, I'm a hands on person and a pragmatist. I always find the 'being' aspect of faith more difficult than the 'doing'. Which might explain this nagging sense of loss and lack of fulfilment on retirement.

Before I retired, I had observed that ministers handled their retirement in different ways depending on their experience in ministry and their own spiritual journey. They also related in different ways to their local church. So I thought quite a lot about how it might be best for me to retire, especially as I had lived in various places in Indonesia and Victoria. There was no longer a specific place I called home, however, I believed that I owed it to Carole, my four boys and their families to put family first: to live close to them and stay put for a while so that we could spend time together and help them where possible.

So, for the first time in our married life we actually chose where to live. Ocean Grove is a beautiful place and we really enjoy living here. It was a natural choice after eleven years in Warrnambool and was close to Melbourne and our 4 boys. With free weekends we have been able to spend quality time with our boys and their families. Interestingly, a number of issues, some painful, have come up but we've had the time to deal with them. Consequently, I feel comfortable with our choice as far as it concerns the family.

But at 68 I was still reasonably fit and able, and still had a sense of call to ministry, so I thought about what I might continue to do. I wanted to be involved in the ministry side but not the administration of a Church – to be a junior member of a team not a senior pastor. Perhaps, paid for one day a week but work more time pastorally and preaching where appropriate. However, I was disappointed that

nothing eventuated. There always seemed to be something that blocked anything from developing. Either the ministry opportunity was a long way away, the church was going through transition, I was not comfortable with the style of worship, or the job would have been all consuming and cut out family time.

I'm not sure what the answer is. But at present I'm happy with life and I've long since come to terms with it my choices and my current situation – I worship at the local Anglican Church. Going through my archives has engendered a deep gratitude to God and the multitude of people with whom I've worked. I'm in awe at their acceptance and long patience. Modern medicine has probably given me a chance at a few more years and I'm looking forward to the joys and challenges that they will bring. And if you've read this far and are ever in Ocean Grove do drop in – I'd love a coffee and chat.

## **We remember them**

### **Ron Ham, 20 April 1929-16 Sept 2015.**

Growing up in Depression years, Ron's initial education was abbreviated, but he went on to complete his Master's degree at a prestigious seminary in USA. More significant were his gifts in pastoral leadership, expressed in various churches in Victoria and NSW, and through the BUV and Whitley College. No one who came into his presence left feeling anything but valued.

We extend sympathy to Jan and the family.

### **Keith Wilson, died 10 October 2015**

Keith is remembered for being a person of great faith, gift and character, with a lively sense of humour, a loving heart, a deep passion for Jesus and care for people. Serving alongside June, his wife, he was the pastor of several churches in NSW and Victoria, and as a leader in international mission through Global Interaction (ABMS) and the Bible Medical and Mission Fellowship.

We offer our sympathy to the family.

## LIFE IN USA

By Tony Cupit

From 1991 until 2005, Margaret and I worshipped at the McLean Baptist Church in Virginia, USA. McLean is across the Potomac River and close to Washington D.C. I was then serving on staff at the Baptist World Alliance in Virginia. I retired in September 2005 from the BWA and we returned to Melbourne. While living in Glen Iris I was conducting international conferences for the BWA and involved in the editing of *From Five Barley Loaves*, the history of Global Interaction.



In 2012 I received an invitation from the McLean Baptist Church to serve as interim senior pastor. We moved to the States in 2013 for what was to be a 12 month assignment.

The church conducted a search for a new senior pastor and Brad Herridge, a young pastor from Texas, commenced in March 2014. In what my ministerial colleagues will understand is an unusual situation, Brad asked me to remain for six months to help him settle in. Six months extended to 12, then another extension, and as I write this, we are still here. I have indicated my intention to retire in October 2015 (truly!). We will be returning to Melbourne sometime in the New Year.

The time at McLean has been a wonderful ministerial experience and opportunity. Church life is so different here to Victoria, and the church at McLean has as many differences to churches in Victoria as it has similarities. The average attendance is from 180 to 200 and the congregation is drawn from all walks of life. Some interesting personalities include a former Democratic congressman who was mentioned as a possible Vice-President before Joe Biden was appointed, a judge of the District Court of Washington D.C., two US ambassadors, one to Qatar and the other to Kazakhstan, other high ranking people in government and the armed forces and many members of the US intelligence agencies. There are about 15 PH.Ds. The strength of the church lies in the faith and commitment of these, and also of a host of humble, self-effacing Christian believers as one would find in most churches.

Among the major features at McLean is wonderful worship with a pipe organ and an absolutely fabulous organist. It has a strong preaching tradition and would regard itself as a 'moderate' Baptist Church. It is a very strong missionary church, both local and cross-cultural. It is host to a significant social ministry called SHARE which provides food, clothing and other necessities to needy people, especially the many Hispanic folk who work in this area. It also provides food daily for deprived school children in a socio-economic area near McLean. As well, it has a strong ministry to overseas mission partners in countries like Nicaragua, Zambia and Ukraine and has been among the strongest supporting churches of Serve Trust in India and its key worker, Leena Lavanya, for many years.

I had overall responsibility for all the church ministries as senior pastor and, since Brad Herridge arrived, I have served as Minister for Pastoral Care and Outreach, two areas of ministry that I believe to be vital to effective church life. Margaret has been very involved in many ways at McLean including conducting seminars on 'finding God through religious art' and studies in spirituality. Needless to say, Margaret is greatly loved by the congregation.

We are a "BWA Church" and the new BWA President, Paul Msiza from Sth Africa preached here last Sunday.

We love the fact that our family is close. Natalie, David and their four beautiful children live quite close to us here in Virginia. The boys and families are living in the UK but we were all together here last week for Scott's 50th birthday.

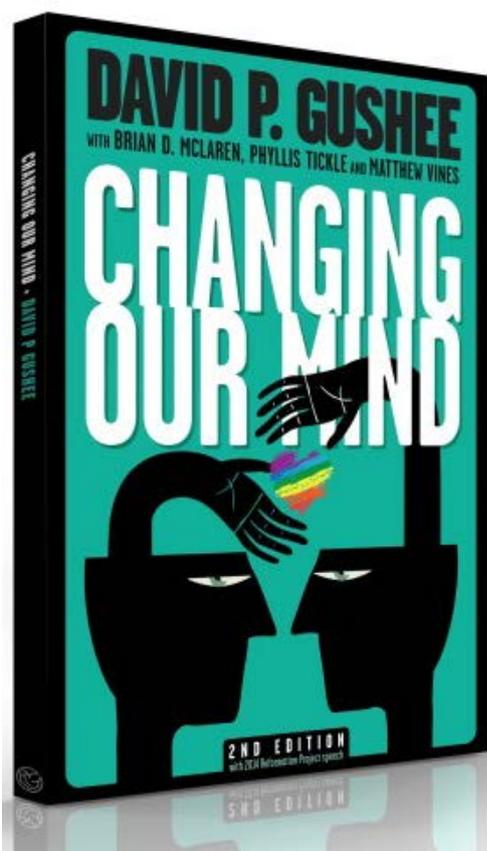
Warm greetings to all our friends. Go Hawks ... See you soon!

## CHURCHES CHANGING THEIR MINDS

By Rowland Croucher (Australian Chaplain to 'Freedom to Be', an LGBTI support ministry)

We Victorian Baptist clergy seniors-and-spouses have witnessed some interesting changes in the way we've 'done Church' in the last half-century. A pot-pourri of some of them: House of the Gentle Bunyip; Charismatic Renewal; more women in pastoral/ denominational leadership; megachurches; the proliferation of ethnic (Chinese, Burmese etc.) churches; greater acceptance of divorced pastors ... the list goes on.

Throughout history the three major branches of the Christian Church - Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant - have disagreed on many things, but they have shared a rare point of unity in their antipathy towards the 'Christ-killing' Jews. For two millennia this anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism was fuelled mainly by three New Testament passages: Matthew 27:25 ('his blood be on us and on our children'), John 8:44 ('you are from your father, the devil'), and Acts 7 ('you stiff-necked people... you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit'). Even Martin Luther was not 'reformed' on this issue: he said the Jews' synagogues should be burned down and even that 'we are at fault in not slaying them.' *But in the last half-century this has all changed; the whole Church has now repudiated this 'teaching of contempt'.*



One current paradigm-shift which may dwarf all the others is our inclination or otherwise to **welcome** LGBTIs into our churches and other communities. (*LGBTI : Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual and Intersexed*)

Dr. David Gushee (*Changing Our Mind*), regarded by many as America's leading Evangelical ethicist, writes: 'The Church has [also] inflicted... a "teaching of contempt" against sexual minorities - lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons... Grounded in a small number of biblical texts... knowledge sources at the very center of Christianity: scripture, tradition, and the leaders of the church, generation after generation [have also affirmed that these people] were worthy of the church's rejection and disdain.'

'LGBT Christians' he said, often 'still love a church that has not loved them... It says something really terrible when the least safe place to deal with sexual orientation and identity is the Christian family and church.' US LGBTs comprise 3.4 to 5 % of the population. Surveys tell us Millennials (31% of them) are leaving the Church over this issue. They are tired of hearing sermons about 'the homosexual lifestyle' and 'the gay lobby'. ('One wonders whether those preachers inveighing against gays and

lesbians would do so if they constituted 40 percent of their congregations, as with divorce today').

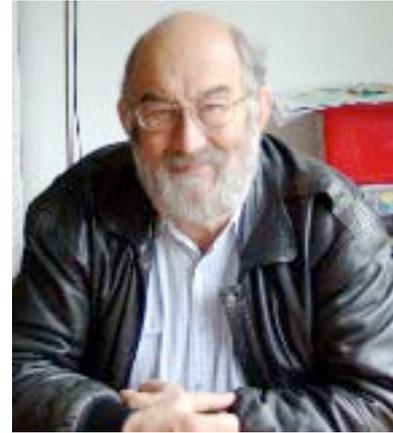
Gushee 'connects the biblical dots' – especially Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, and 1 Corinthians 6:9/1 Timothy 1:10. 'Never again outside of Leviticus are same-sex acts mentioned in OT law, leaving at least 111 of 117 uses of the term "abomination" to describe other issues.' 'Offences punishable by death in the OT include... cursing a parent...' 'Do Christians quoting Leviticus 20:13 support the death penalty for those committing same-sex acts? If not why not?' (As public theologian Martin Marty tellingly asked: 'Was that part of the text not "inspired"?').

More: [www.jmm.org.au/articles/35319.htm](http://www.jmm.org.au/articles/35319.htm)

## FINDING A NEW ROLE IN RETIREMENT

*By John Sampson*

The more I think about retirement the more difficult it is to sharpen the focus, especially for an audience of ministers. Can a person called to ministry ever retire? For a person like Geoff Blackburn the roles changed over the years but he was still fully engaged right to the end. Others have a similar experience. Ken Manley for example now plays midwife for 'Our Yesterdays', and has published several major works since his 'retirement'. Others like Barry Watson change careers and serve as treasurers etc.



So what makes for a successful retirement? Is it a question of fulfilment? Does it mean that you continue to preach or publish or does it mean that you spend time watching cricket or playing with the grandkids? I recently heard a speaker argue that most of us are addicted to work. The behaviours of dependency and withdrawal, so obvious in an addiction to chemicals, alcohol, etc. are also seen in the way many people relate to work. Consequently the loss of work or the shock of retirement evokes strong withdrawal symptoms. For me giving up cigarettes was bad enough but breaking the work habit has proven even more difficult.

### **So what is my story?**

In good 12-step fashion let me introduce myself; "My name is John. I am a work addict and have been trying to give it up for 25 years."

It started when the institution at which I had a permanent full time job amalgamated with the University of Melbourne. The University made it quite plain that under the terms of the amalgamation they might be required to employ us but they were not keen to have us on the payroll. The writing was on the wall and I took the hint.

My wife, Ruth, then a voluntary part time pastor at Box Hill for nearly 20 years, was offered a post as 'Parish Minister' at First Baptist Church in Washington D.C. We prayed and sought advice from our friends and decided to accept. She became the family breadwinner, and **I took an early retirement.**

One condition was that she be ordained once we settled in Washington. I had been divorced, so ordination in Victoria was not an option then. As First Baptist is a member of the American Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, her ordination was recognised by both, even though Southern Baptists normally cancelled the membership of any church that ordained a woman.

Washington was a very wild ride.

First Baptist is an enormous cathedral with walls of stained glass two stories high and a new pipe organ worth \$4,000,000. At the time it had up to a dozen homeless people sheltering in the doorways and employed four permanent security staff. Safety was a big issue. You held your keys in your hand as you left the building so you could open the car door quickly, for fear of being mugged. One security guard was hit in the arm by a stray bullet while we were there.

The congregation reflected a cross section of the city, with everyone from Presidents to janitors represented. It took a while to adapt. To live in Washington is to be immersed in American history. For example Abraham Lincoln sits at the end of the Mall and looks down on George Washington's legacy of the Congress and Senate buildings. But he has a darker side. His back is turned on Robert E Lee's plantation just over the river in Virginia. When Lee was defeated the Union army used his property as a burial ground. It is now the Arlington military cemetery and every American soldier has the right to be buried there. This arose when President Truman wanted to honour distinguished Negro veterans who had been denied appropriate burials in some southern states. Truman was a member of First Baptist and there is a large photo of him in the foyer. I would often wait there for Ruth and wonder about the man who decided to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We spent a good twelve months getting used to it and by the end of that time I was getting restless. I eventually landed a job with the American Chemical Society, developing a new junior high science curriculum. My attempt to retire had failed and I was greatly relieved to throw myself into the new venture. After a few years the grant supporting the project ran out and I moved to edit a magazine for Industrial Chemists. I was a world away from training biology teachers in Melbourne.

But there was a downside. The church was deeply conflicted and the strain was enormous. The best conflict resolution agencies were engaged but to no avail. After some years of turmoil the Senior Pastor resigned and started a new church nearby, taking a significant number of members with him. The diaconate arranged for a renowned preacher to fly down from Canada to fill the pulpit each week, and asked Ruth to look after the rest. What had been a very difficult position now became an intolerable overload and her health began to fail. She woke one morning to find that her feet were numb and by the time we reached a doctor that afternoon she could feel nothing below the waist. It was thought she had some strange side effects from a severe fever she had suffered while in Africa.

About this time she was invited to consider the position of Senior Pastor at Kew Baptist. She visited the church on the way to a Baptist World Alliance meeting and an invitation arrived soon after. They took me on 'sight unseen'. **So I retired again.**

Kew was a new sort of challenge. It was a historic suburban church recovering from an earlier conflict and had a thriving Youth Hostel. Restoring unity, enriching the worship, strengthening the links with the hostel and providing pastoral care for the students were some of the major challenges. For example nursing fifty grieving students through their final exams after one of them had committed suicide was particularly difficult. Ruth's health steadily deteriorated and it became clear that she had a rare form of Multiple Sclerosis. This is a degenerative disease that waxes and wanes but overall leads to steady degeneration of the nervous system.

What started out as a little extra assistance on my part led inexorably to full time care. The church at Kew was incredibly supportive, with several deacons' meetings being held in Royal Talbot hospital for example. After five years she was wheelchair-bound and was forced to resign when she started having periods of blindness. She died twelve months after her resignation.

By this time I was exhausted and thought that finally **I could retire again.** I took up golf.

But one day Ken Manley asked me to help him in the BUV archives. I got hooked again. After a few years I noticed that he was no longer coming in. So I formally signed a three-page contract and became the honorary BUV archivist.

In this role I liken myself to a Safeway manager. I have many rows of display shelves packed with goods. In addition we have a large storeroom out the back and need regular deliveries to keep up to date. I 'hire' volunteers to keep the shelves in order and to maintain the inventory. (If you could all send an up to date copy of your CV to me it would be greatly appreciated!) We are now creating a detailed digital inventory so people can check the stock easily. In addition I am trying to develop an online service for the tech savvy generation. For them a shelf of paper records is about as attractive as a shelf full toilet paper.

So when I break my work habit or get sacked I will try this retirement gig again. Maybe I will move to the coast and buy myself a boat. I could then get hooked on fishing and really retire. But didn't I retire 25 years ago?

**It would appear that retirement is a bit like heaven, here now but still to come.**

## PLEASE CONTACT US

The Pastoral Care team for the over-65s, led by Alan Marr, will meet again on 19 November, and the next *Experienced in Ministry* is planned for early February 2016.

Contact [alan.marr@myinbox.net.au](mailto:alan.marr@myinbox.net.au), Ministry Leader, or [gracemunro8@gmail.com](mailto:gracemunro8@gmail.com) (Editor) or by mail C/- BUV PO Box 377, Hawthorn, VIC, 3122