



## **The New Church Newsletter**

**Hurstville Society February 2018**

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**Alexandra Headlands Camp/Retreat Review**

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

For only the second time this century, we had a church camp in Queensland. I was very much in favour of this plan, but on the day of arrival I was wondering if I was going to be one of the most hated people in the church. When we got there it was really hot and humid, and then I found out that there was no air conditioning on the premises! I thought, “Uh-oh, people are going to run me out of here with torches and pitch-forks!” I started wondering if we could have our family sessions in the pool... but it never came to that. That first day was the worst, and by the end of camp it was actually a lot cooler at Sunshine Coast than it was in Sydney.

On the instruction side of camp, we had **Rev Darren Brunne** of the Brisbane society leading the camp. He opened with a theme of “helping hands” that permeated throughout the rest of the week. We saw it clearly the very next morning when **David Moffat** gave a presentation about fractals. Essentially fractals are repeating patterns where a macro looks the same as a micro. The idea was to illustrate the Grand Man, and how this planet looks to the Lord like one person, all the while it is made up of lots of people. Then we were

given a task to build a fractal. We had to make these little cardboard boxes made out of business cards, and it wasn't a simple task for most of us. There were a lot of helping hands going around teaching others how to make these little boxes! It turned into a project that went on for a few days with everybody pitching in his or her bit.

The next day **Glenn Alden** led us through a presentation titled, "Spy Out the Land." We looked at the story of the Israelites sending spies into Canaan and reporting back to Moses on the land. While the land was there for the taking, the spies noted the challenges that would have to be overcome. Then we broke into groups to discuss some of the benefits and challenges that exist around camp. For example, some people having their food prepared by somebody else is a blessing, but for others not being in control of their food causes problems. It was an interesting process that opened up opportunities to be a helping hand to somebody else.

The third day was an outing day, and people scattered around the area. Some stayed put, but others went to the beach, to a ginger factory, did some shopping, or worked their way through some mazes. Personally I was in the group that did the mazes, but afterwards was the real treat of the trip when we stopped in to see the big pineapple! Cross that off the bucket list!

I had to pull myself together after all that excitement because I was the lead presenter the next day. My session was titled, "The Prisoner's Dilemma." It's a little game I came across years ago, and I used it to highlight the teaching that God doesn't punish us, only the hells do. It's an important concept to have, because without it we can fall into the belief that God actually wills bad things to happen. While He does allow them to happen, that is not to say that He wills it. This game also worked nicely to illustrate that where people cooperated fully with each other, i.e., gave each other a helping hand, they ended up with a better result.

**Julian** proudly declared that he was the only minister who was not using Powerpoint in his presentation! Instead he captivated us with a set of Russian nesting dolls to illustrate his topic: things inside things. We popped off some Christmas crackers, and discussed the internal beauty of a geode that is not present on the outside. For New Church people, the topic of things inside things is one that is all throughout the teachings: different layers of meaning within the Bible, the inner self that is inside our outer self, and even the different layers of the Lord Himself.

Darren brought the camp to a close by highlighting what a tremendous gift we have with the gift of communication. It allows us to give and receive a helping hand. However, we have to be careful with this gift, because while it can allow us to synchronize with others, it can also be used to alienate us from the people around us.

Presentations aside, camp had its usual dynamic of catching up with old friends and making new ones. Those of us not from the Brisbane society got the chance to meet the dynamic father and son duo of **Chris** and **Levi Atkinson**, who vanquished all comers in the table tennis tournament. Youth ultimately prevailed as Levi bested his father 2 games

to 1 and allowed Brisbane to capture the trophy in the year they hosted the camp. It was a great match!

There were a lot of other things happening at camp too... people playing one of the many board games **Sam Johnson** brought up (which are available for purchase at [www.rollersboardgames.com](http://www.rollersboardgames.com)), **Jenn** teaching Zentangle, **Julie** leading yoga, a tremendous talent show and **Julian Duckworth** being honoured for his years of service to the NCIA. It really is the highlight of the year. We hope you'll consider joining us for the next one!

There was a brainstorming session about what can be done to improve future camps. One decision that came out of this camp was to stop calling them “camps” and call them “retreats.” The reason being that it seems some people are getting the wrong idea when we call it camp as they envision tents, cooking over a fire, and general living without the conveniences of modern life. So now it's the annual summer retreat.

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### **Wanawong Retreat**

Another item that came up in the brainstorming session was the idea of having a weekend retreat during the year. We did this about 18 months ago and held a New Church Day themed weekend down in Loftus. It was a self catered event, so it kept the costs down (\$84 for adults, \$64 for kids last time). A couple of people expressed interest in having another one of these, either the weekend of June 15-17 or June 22-24. We'd run a similar format as last time, where we'd have a mix of things, including a campfire, campfire stories, games, and of course a theme that we'd base our learning on.

If YOU are interested, please let me know, and also if there's a weekend that you would prefer.

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### **Practicing Forgiveness**

The Writings tell us that forgiving should be without end and “eternal” which is what makes forgiveness “holy” (AC 433). While I expect that we have some experience of seeking and granting forgiveness, the ability to do this without end is probably beyond the means of most people. This is why we must hone our ability, focus on the principles of the teachings, so that we can extend our skills as a forgiver.

As mentioned in last months' “News & Notes,” we're starting the newest of the General Church's spiritual growth programs titled, “Practicing Forgiveness” starting February 4<sup>th</sup>. As per usual, the Sunday worship services will be co-ordinated with a Monday evening (7:30pm) discussion group. Workbooks will be provided for free this time and there's likely to be some cinnamon scrolls if that helps entice you to join.

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## Church Outings - review & preview

We had a lovely excursion to Manly Beach after church on Jan 21, in lieu of hiking to Karloo Pools while the Royal National Park bushfire was active. Some enjoyed bobbing in the waves, others enjoyed a leisurely lunch at a local café, and I think it's safe to say that everyone enjoyed the gorgeous weather that afternoon! It was a nice way to spend time together, in a social setting, away from Dudley Street.

We'll have another opportunity for this in a couple of weeks' time, too. Mark your calendars for **Sunday Feb 18**, when we'll have an excursion after church over to Oatley Park for a picnic, play and swim - weather permitting, of course! *Please let Jenn know ([jenn@beiswenger.net](mailto:jenn@beiswenger.net), 0411 719 754) if you're interested in going, so that we may coordinate transportation (maybe some of us will bike or hike?) and food (maybe we'll do a shared potluck picnic, this time?).* We look forward to another fun afternoon!

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## Perth Trip

I'll be heading out to Perth February 16-18, doing the standard routine of running a couple of classes, holding a worship service with holy supper on Sunday, and some visiting with the locals. You may notice that this will be happening during our "Practicing Forgiveness" program, so we're just going to pause that week I'm away and resume the program upon my return. It's probably providential that it is happening this way, because it will allow participants to spend two weeks on the week 2 task which is "Forgiving Others"

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## Fill-in-the-blank News

You've probably heard of "fake news" by now, but here's a term I'm going to start using: fill-in-the-blank news. We all know that doom and gloom sells, the media loves to peddle fear and outrage because for whatever reason we seem to be suckers for it. Doom and gloom isn't just for political news anymore though. It seems to be infecting other areas too. In the cricket world I read doom and gloom stories about how the sport is going to die because not enough kids are interested in it. In the business world there's doom and gloom for some age old products such as fabric softener, bar soap and diamonds. Apparently millennials don't buy them like older generations do.

Millennials don't buy cars either, but it's more than just that. Due to changing technology, the auto industry is looking at a very uncertain future which has allowed the infection of doom and gloom to spread to some of my favourite reading: car magazines! But what has amazed me is that all these doom and gloom stories, no matter whether they're talking about the death of fabric softener or the death of people driving cars follow the same basic format as those predicting the end of Christianity. In fact, I read an article recently and thought that with just a few word changes that it could be used to describe a number of present day concerns, including those of conservative Christian churches. Take a look and you'll see what I mean. The column on the left is straight out of "Wheels" magazine, while the column on the right has been modified by a conservative Christian pastor, i.e. me.

<p>Do you feel it? That twinge of worry, that pinch of concern deep in your gut, the slow realization that if you're one of the diminishing few that care about cars and driving, our future is bleak. Feeling this way is justifiable when you consider the facts. Righteous, environmentally conscious governments the world over are judiciously banning internal combustion.</p>	<p>Do you feel it? That twinge of worry, that pinch of concern deep in your gut, that slow realization that if you're one of the diminishing few that care about the church, our future is bleak. Feeling this way is justifiable when you consider the facts. Righteous, religiously intolerant governments the world over are judiciously taking away the right to practice religion.</p>
<p>Naturally aspirated engines and manual gearboxes are nosediving into extinction. Electrification and autonomy are the new altars of devotion as car companies desert the pursuit of analogue pleasures and instead plunge unreservedly into a tech-infused future that asks not how the driver can be more involved but how they can be removed altogether.</p>	<p>Churches, religious schools and the services they provide are being pushed into extinction. Identity and autonomy are the new altars of devotion as more people desert the pursuit of spiritual growth and instead plunge unreservedly into a tech-infused future that asks not how a person can make improvement, but how they can remove any barrier to any desire they have.</p>
<p>It mightn't have the drama of violence of a mutiny, but whether you realize it or not, we're in the midst of a transport revolution.</p>	<p>It mightn't have the drama of violence of a mutiny, but whether you realize it or not, we're in the midst of a cultural revolution.</p>

The world is changing, and changing rapidly. What if I distributed this basic story around, but left blanks in it so each person could make the doom and gloom about the worry of their choice? All the anxiety is preformatted for you!

My point in bringing this up though is that the church is not the only institution in the world that is facing an uncertain future. The difference with the auto industry and the church is that the Lord tells us that the church will survive. It may be in a different form that we'd expect, (Consider how the Most Ancients would have regarded the worship practices that Moses and the Jews did. The Most Ancients probably would have been horrified.) but it will survive. The Jews did what they were told to do, and as a result the

church continued to serve its purpose as a connection between heaven and earth. Next time you hear a doom and gloom story, just ask yourself, “Is this fill-in-the-blank news?”

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## **Welcome Back**

One of our long term members, **Margaret Ward**, left us a couple of years ago and headed off to Sweden to live with her son and two grandchildren. That adventure has run its course and she has decided to return to Australia, which was part of the original plan. However, now she needs any leads you may have on a place to live. At this point she's not looking for anything fancy, but just something simple to rent. If you can help, let her know at [marg.gpl@gmail.com](mailto:marg.gpl@gmail.com)

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## **Birthdays**

Happy Birthday to **John Hicks** (9<sup>th</sup>) and **Mike Lockhart** (11<sup>thz</sup>)

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