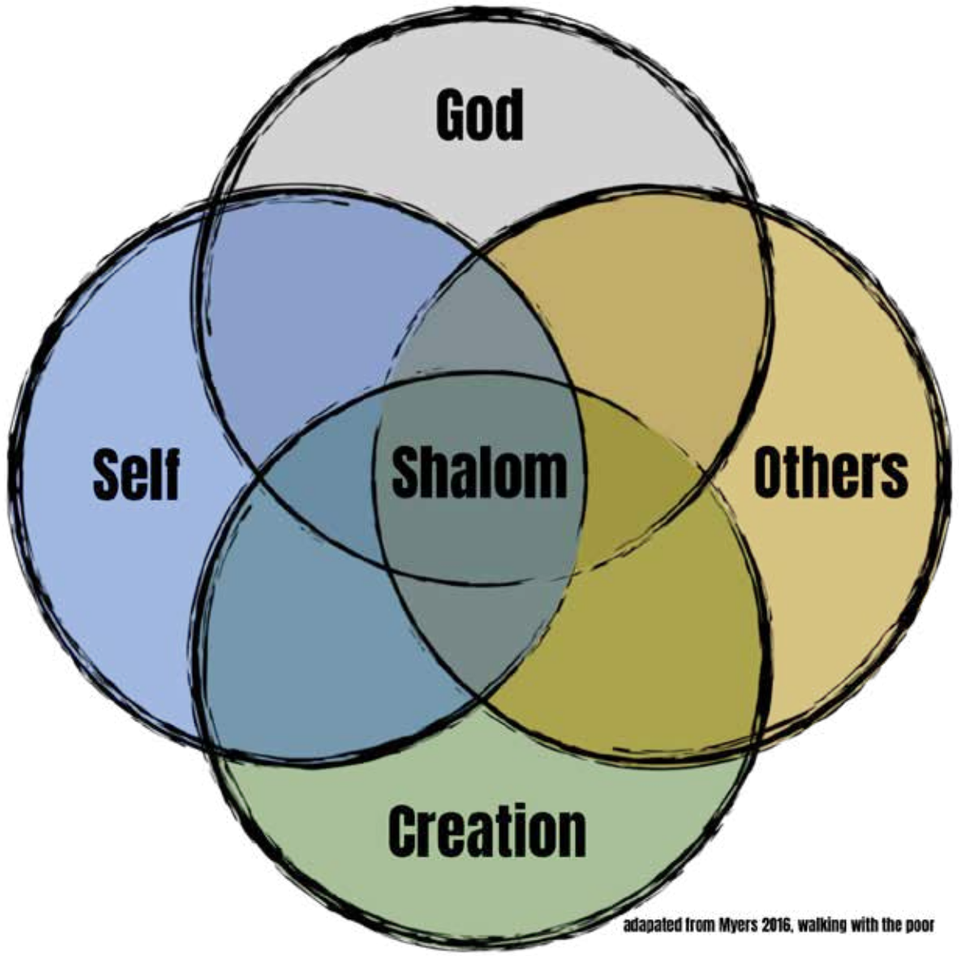
AMOS

ISSUE 6

Amos Australia

Amos Australia is a small community development organisation. We understand poverty to be a break-down of relationships in four interlinked spheres: relationship with God, with others, with the environment and with ourselves. This understanding goes beyond seeing poverty as purely economic, and means that we see ourselves as needing restoring even as we attempt to participate in God's restoration of these relationships.



And so we work overseas, partnering with locally-run, like-minded Christian organisations who seek to address poverty in their regions through various means: advocacy, agricultural and water projects, or enhancing traditional forms of income and farming methods.

But we also see our work extending locally – we believe that addressing the poverty of the economically poor requires addressing the poverty of the economically rich. And so we also work locally to encourage Australian Christians to whole-of-life responses to issues of poverty and injustice.

If you would like to support our work financially or otherwise, if you'd like more information or are interested in getting involved with one of our events, head to www.amosaustralia.org or get in touch with us via Facebook, email (aimee@amosaustralia.org) or give us a call on 0422063208.

Editorial

I'm currently undertaking some study that involves a research project looking at how faith shapes the way that organisations like Amos Australia engage with their supporters. What is becoming clear is that the majority of large Australian Christian aid organisations primarily use what's called a 'donor-centric' approach that involves placing the supporter at the centre of the narrative. You've probably been on the receiving end of some of those comms: your generous $5 donation has transformed Wanita's life or for just $20 you can turn Zamelda's life around. You are the saviour of this poor person (almost always a woman or child), and you did it through a $5 donation. The story centres on you. You're the hero, the saviour, the change-maker, the source of hope and transformational change for this poor person. You're ending poverty for the price of a coffee from the comfort of an armchair.

A donor-centric approach will raise the most money – the research shows this. What the research doesn't highlight is some of the darker aspects of this approach: that we are more likely to respond when our ego is stroked; that it perpetuates old narratives of the supremacy of those with money and women as needy and helpless, it overlooks the role of donors in perpetuating poverty and ignores that fundamental biblical truth that we are all broken and in need of redemption.

We aspire to a gospel-centric approach at Amos Australia. One that invites, encourages, convicts or challenges, perpetuates self-reflection and other-orientedness. One that seeks to narrow the gaps between the gospel and our daily life choices. An approach that highlights the poverty and wealth of not just people like Zamelda or Wanita, but the likes of you and me.

By all means grab a coffee, find a comfy armchair and have a read. This publication doesn't centre on you beyond our hope that you will read it with a heart that echos the prayer that underpins our work:
'...Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'

Many thanks to the contributors and Arlene Ward for her generosity and giftedness in putting this publication together.

Clinton Bergsma

Executive Officer
Amos Australia
clinton@amosaustralia.org

Amos International update

Clinton Bergsma

The big news floating around the two-cubicle (albeit virtual) Amos office is that we're in the early stages of developing three new partnerships in the international program.

Whether jumping from five to eight partnerships is wise is yet to be determined (and discussions with the board were helpful in tempering my enthusiasm), but it's been a good opportunity to reflect on our approach to developing partnerships because it raises all sorts of questions: why these guys? Why three? What kind of local organisations do we seek out? How do we go about finding them? How will we fund these new partnerships?

Most folks would find it reassuring if at this point I was able to point to a tidy suite of regularly updated policies – and we do have some policies that guide the international program, albeit probably fewer and less crisp or water tight than some would prefer. My hesitancy with policies is that they tend to be risk-averse and can readily take the role of the Spirit and prayer in the life of an organisation. I think I've said it before that there should be a policy about writing policies because they aren't benign things. Like almost everything designed to help us, they bring a mix of benefits and losses that need to be carefully weighed.

Over the last few years we've slowly been firming up what Amos Australia is (and isn't) seeking to be, working out what our niche and role is in the global faith-based development sector. This hasn't so much been a neat and tidy exercise as much as a mix of reflection, prayer and conversation with staff of our partner organisations and friends who work in the sector, including folks who work for much larger organisations. It's good to learn from both the big guns and those who will be impacted by our work. So – assuming that you're interested - here's a few things that we're aiming to be and a few things we've decided to steer clear of:

What we don't want to be:

- Making the top ten largest faith-based development orgs in Australia

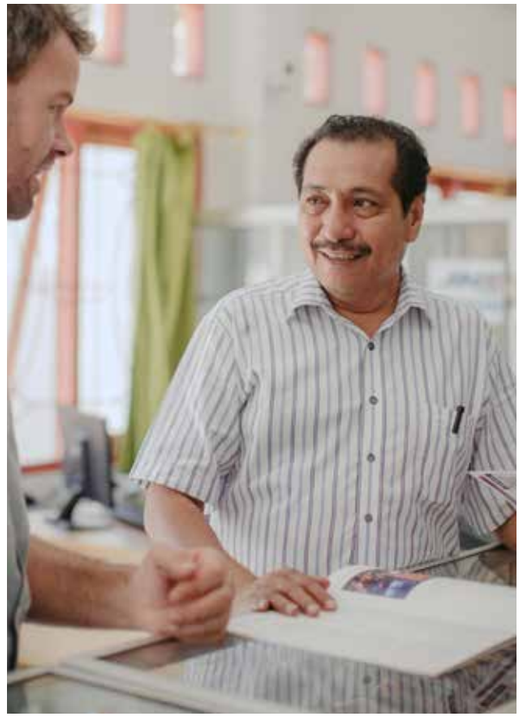
In a context that values perpetual growth and assumes that is a key goal, we are seeing significant value in staying comparatively small. We acknowledge that we'll never have the reach or breadth of impact that the big orgs have, and we tip our hat to the great work they're doing. Global poverty does need the reach and scale that those guys have, but it also needs the nimbleness and openness to risk that smaller orgs like us can offer. It's not an either-or scenario, but a both-and; they're big and can do stuff we can't; we're small, and we can do stuff they can't. It means we can work with other small orgs who are doing excellent work but might not be great at meeting deadlines or reporting or achieving the regulatory requirements that larger orgs need. We can also fund programs and projects that are outside the box, trials of new ideas or issues that need urgent support – and that's the stuff that excites us. Just this past week we funded an extension of a program for malnourished mothers – the turnaround from receiving the proposal to sending the funds was less than a week (and yes, that included a careful deliberation of the proposal!).

In the aftermath of Cyclone Seroja, I sat on a porch with an elderly man one evening and apologised that our level of support nowhere near matched the scale of the need. His immediate response: 'but your support was here before we asked for it, and weeks before anyone else's arrived – don't underestimate what that meant to us.'

- Receiving DFAT funding

We've spent some time looking into applying for funding from DFAT (the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). This is a major source of funding for a lot of orgs, and we fit the criteria for emerging organisations that DFAT wants to fund. But as we've explored it some more, attended a DFAT seminar on applying for funding and talked to friends in the sector who work in organisations receiving DFAT funding, we've come to the conclusion that it's not for us. Again, there's wins and losses by making this choice, and we're not denigrating those that do receive DFAT funding. We're thankful that the Australian government funds poverty alleviation efforts, and we will continue to advocate for Australia to fulfill its long-held promise of allocating 0.7% of GDP for foreign aid (we only came close – and for a brief time – in

'BUT YOUR SUPPORT WAS HERE BEFORE WE ASKED FOR IT, AND WEEKS BEFORE ANYONE ELSE'S ARRIVED – DON'T UNDERESTIMATE WHAT THAT MEANT TO US.



the 70's). But DFAT funding is not for us because we believe that on balance it would be more of a burden than a benefit to our partner organisations. Some could handle the increased regulatory requirements (one already receives DFAT funding through other partners it has), but most wouldn't. It would mean we'd have to dissolve a few partnerships because DFAT regs apply across all partner orgs even if they're not receiving DFAT funding. DFAT is also very risk averse and would baulk at some of the partners we work with or the type of work they're doing. DFAT funding is great for a whole range of locally-led organisations and the work they do, and again, we celebrate and appreciate it. But it's not suitable for the majority of the types of orgs that we believe we are good at working with, and we believe those partnerships, and the work they are doing is too important to let go.

- Specialists in one area of poverty alleviation

Some development organisations focus on one particular area of poverty – maybe disability work, strengthening justice systems or water projects and again, there's wins and losses in choosing to do that. We're often asked what our area of focus is, but that's not the way we operate. Instead, we find organisations that are Christian in identity and led by people who are passionate about addressing the key issues contributing to poverty in their local area. The types of projects or programs we're interested in funding: those that they determine are priorities for their community and within their capacity. This means that we fund a whole range of programs and projects – some classics like water projects, agriculture or education programs. Others are a little different and well outside our areas of knowledge, like community-based drug rehabilitation, maternal health or peace-building. The humbling reality is that while we might have experience and training in international development work, our expertise increasingly fades the further we get away from our laptops in Perth and the closer we get to the communities who our partners serve and where – at best – we've spent a few hours over a number of years. I'd wager that a few hours perspiring in an unfamiliar culture and context never made anyone an expert on anything. So our partner organisations are the experts on their context, and our role is to support them, give feedback on their ideas and proposals, encourage them and hold them accountable to the work they set themselves to do. The feedback from our partners on this approach is consistent across the board: they find it deeply refreshing to be trusted in this way, and they love the freedom it gives them to serve their community in the ways that they believe are most appropriate. We reckon the outcomes are better too.

What seem to be our areas of strength:

- Small scale partnerships

Our budget is fairly small compared to a lot of development organisations, which in turn limits the amount we can allocate to each partner organisation. The upside of this has meant that we've typically partnered with small organisations who also have small budgets. In hindsight this has been good for us because it means that we're often partnering with organisations that are relatively young and at that stage where they are driven by very passionate and committed people, full of life and bursting with ideas. That's not to say that larger organisations can't be driven by passionate and committed people – the best ones are – but there's very often a life or culture in new and emerging orgs that slowly erodes as the organisation gets larger and older. Larger orgs tend to be more bureaucratic, top-down and risk-averse with the office further away from the places where the poor live. Orgs can be like that and still do excellent work. But we feel our niche is working with the small ones. We love that they live among the people they serve, they're passionate, open to risk and trying new ideas, even if that means things are a bit messier and the paperwork isn't always complete, thorough or on-time. Someone once said, 'Give me someone with little training but good character over someone with the right credentials but poor character – it's much easier to provide training than to change someone's character'. There's something of that in the partner orgs we want to work with, and we think we work well in that space.

- South-east Asia

We've had repeated requests for partnerships from places in Africa and Central Asia, from folks doing good work in the very types of organisations that we love to partner with. But we believe it would be best for those orgs to be supported from countries closer to them for a range of reasons ecological, time-zonial and cost-of-travelial (newly minted words, you're welcome). So our focus is firmly on South-east Asia, where the time difference is minimal, cost of travel is as low as it can be, and the corresponding environmental footprint is as small as possible – and there's plenty in the region to keep us busy! In our heads it makes sense to work with our nearest neighbours and if all wealthy countries supported their nearest neighbours, it'd all pretty much be covered. Sometimes the question is posed to us: 'There's poverty here in Australia, why don't you work on that first?' and in fairness that aligns with our 'nearest neighbours first' principle. Our response: we do, in an area of poverty in Australia that we feel is woefully

over-looked, has a long history in this country and is very difficult to address: the poverty of the rich. Our entire Australian program is dedicated to addressing this most complex scourge.

- Funded primarily by folks who 'get' what we're about

As outlined earlier, we've decided we won't apply for DFAT funding. This means that we rely on private donations and grants to meet our annual budget. Grants can be fickle things, the space is typically quite competitive and while their requirements are often less onerous than DFAT's, there's a much smaller pool of grants for international development than what is open to Australian run programs. We've scored a few grants over the years, and we're still learning where to look and how to dance well between partner programs and grant criteria – but it's an area we have room to grow in; ideally we'd like to receive about 15-20% of our budget from grants. However, this means that the majority of our work needs to be funded by individuals, households or foundations who resonate with our approach and way of working. We don't attempt to compete with other orgs because we don't believe there needs to be competition in the kingdom of God – if you're already supporting an organisation doing similar work, great! We also refuse to use the manipulation, ego-boosting or marketing techniques to elicit funds that are prevalent in the faith-based development sector. This means – to use commercial terms – that we're going to have a much smaller market share than those orgs that use these techniques. Instead, we believe that we should share our approach openly and honestly – by all means tell it well –trusting that the Spirit will move people to give if and when its needed.

So three new orgs eh?

Ah, yes. One runs a community-based rehab on an absolute shoe-string budget in a slum area in Bangkok, alongside a social enterprise they set up as a transitional workplace. The second does peace-building work in Cambodia, training folks how to resolve conflict without violence and assisting people who are fighting to protect their land and forest to have a unified voice (risky work!). The third installs water filters and provides educational support to small schools in rural Myanmar (very risky work!). Spend some time with any of these folks and like us, you'll come away a passionate advocate for their work and wanting to do everything in your power to support them. How will we fund their work? Good question. We'll need an additional $15,000 each year for the first few years, and then (ideally) increase that to roughly $30,000 over the following years. We'll do what we can to raise that with increased grant funding, but we'll also likely need some additional funds to come from folks or foundations who have the capacity to contribute.

And if we can't raise that level of funding?

Well, let's wait and see. At this point in time, we're fairly confident that we're meant to partner with them. We'll do what we can and trust that if God wants this to happen, he'll provide through his people what is needed.

And so ora et labora: we work and we pray.

Copyright Tracy Councill.

The genius of the Jesus way

Andy Broadbent

I've been reading two things lately, the story of Jesus walking on water (Mtt 14:22-33) and Tell Me Why, the memoir of indigenous musician and stolen generation member Archie Roach. Archie's story made me cry. Tears for the parents he would never know, siblings lost, alcohol abused and probably a few for my own ignorance. Jesus' walking on the water didn't make me cry. I know that story. I know what it means, I've been going to church all my life. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus through the storms of life and have faith that he will pull you through. At least that's what I thought I would take from it but then something strange happened. Part of my morning routine is to read a passage of scripture every day for a week and then spend time in silent contemplation. Often, I use a religious painting as part of my reflection (the one pictured is the image I happened to be using.) First, I noticed Jesus' feet and how solid they were, even on the water and I was reminded that following Jesus is the firmest foundation for life. Then my attention turned to his face, and it was here that things got interesting. I know that face. He looks familiar, but from where? Then it hits me, he looks like guys I have encountered on the street. Rough sleepers. No shoes, hair pulled back in a matted ponytail, dark skinned. And the yellow halo (common in religious icons to reflect the divinity of Jesus) that's the centre of the Aboriginal flag! Then I remember Mother Teresa speaking of Jesus finding a "distressing disguise in the poor." Next it's Jesus from Matt 25; Whatever you do for the least of these .....Suddenly I'm encountering the mystery that is the "upside down kingdom." The mystery of the beatitudes. Jesus was drawn to the margins. He's still there today and so it's a place of "rescue." But rescue from what? Well, for me it's a few things. As a white, well-educated male I need to hear the stories of those on the margins to rescue me from my own sense of superiority and entitlement. I need to understand my privilege and the way it has set me up for success. I need to be challenged to share my wealth, so I can be rescued from being a slave to material prosperity and the selfishness that seems to come so naturally to me. These are not things I will learn on my own, surrounded by my own people. That's why Amos' model and understanding of mission is so compelling to me. Just as we are all broken, we all have a something to share when it comes to healing and wholeness. We need each other, that is the genius of the Jesus way!

Also go with Thee

David Benjamin Blower

Lord be with us when we hurt
As among us in our mirth
Lord be near our woundedness
In all we carry along with us

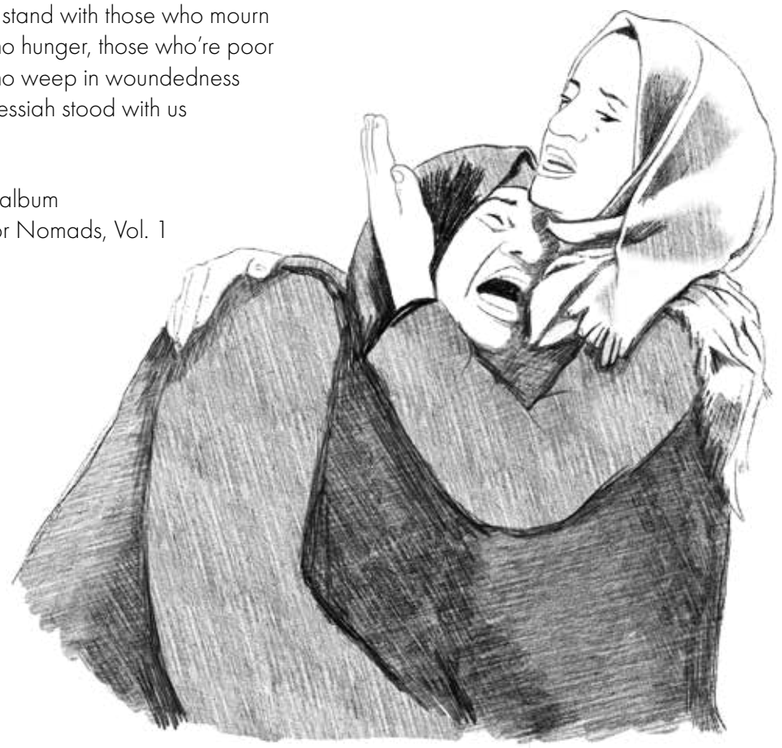
May we also go with thee
On the walk to Calvary
May we also be sharing
In thy wounded suffering

Jesus raised up from the grave
Carrying still our scars today
In our midst declaring peace
With thy wounded hands and feet

May we not draw back today
When we see the one in pain
May we rather, from our hurts
Give the comfort you gave us

May we stand with those who mourn
Those who hunger, those who're poor
Those who weep in woundedness
As our messiah stood with us

From the album
Hymns for Nomads, Vol. 1



Evaluating our work: when should we do it?

One of our earlier projects was a tiny hydram set-up to help a community in Eastern Sumba access clean water. When we left at the end of the project, everything was working – the pump ran 24/7, and the community had clean water. Job well done. When we visited a year later, it was all still running nicely. Great stuff.

We dropped by three years after the project, and while the pump was still working, the government had relocated more than 100 families into the area, and the tiny pump couldn't keep up. In hindsight we should have checked in with the local officials to learn their plans for the area and size the project accordingly. Failure? Not quite, but perhaps a significant oversight.

When we visited five years after the project, we found three large hydrams running in unison next to the tiny one we had supported. Was our handiwork the inspiration? Had we shown the government what was possible and encouraged them to use their resources well? Or was their plan a long time in the making and would have happened anyway? We don't know – perhaps we never will. But we learnt that in this line of work, we dip in and out of community life and our interactions and evaluations are only momentary glimpses of what's really going on. Evaluation work is important, but doing it at different points in time may well result in quite different reports.

Event Review

Mission in the Margins

Aimee Dehaan

Here's an idea – invite a bunch of people from all kinds of backgrounds, all with different stories and varieties of faith journeys – and put them all in a room to worship together, talk about a gospel shaped life and what it looks like to serve the least and the last in the God's Kingdom.

Well, that's what a bunch of people did do on a sweltering weekend in November last year.

What is MiM?

Previously called AMUC, Mission in the Margins is a camp that seeks to explore what it looks like to live out the suburban implications of the gospel. Campers are invited to consider what it means to respond to the Bible's call to "lift up the lowly" in our communities and be a part of God's restorative work in his kingdom.
As one camper put it, "we're going to the margins".

Mission in the Margins is usually held over a whole week, but this year it was condensed to a weekend.
We arrived bright and early on Friday morning, eager, anticipating, and a little nervous. The room is large, festoon lights strung from the ceiling making it feel welcoming and calm. People introduce themselves as they make a brew and settle in around the long table. There's a few familiar faces, many unknown, and we're all about to become a lot closer.

Over three days we visit agencies, talk around the table, hear stories, sing together, laugh, eat amazing food, puzzle, play simulation games, ask questions, think, pray.

Our days are bookmarked by worship – voices, hands, eyes lifted. A uninhibited gesture of dependence and a call back to humility.

At the end of the camp we sit together and take turns sharing our highlight, the thing we enjoyed the most. For some it's the visit we made to Harry Hunter's, hearing the swell of voices from the Spirit of the Street's choir and sharing a meal around the table. For other's it's having lunch with the folk from Prison Fellowship, hearing painful stories and singing along with the ukelele. Still others love the way that Nikkie Curtis, our guest speaker, poked at our hearts and gave us time to think. One camper is thinking he'd like to get a job at one of the agencies he visited, and another is just grateful for a weekend of being accepted and loved.

We leave the camp with some new experiences under our belts, new friendships, and full hearts.

Reflections

It's a humbling experience to be invited in to listen to the stories of those who have travelled through dark valleys. Deep ravines of addiction, homelessness, substance abuse, incarceration, complete isolation. And from that, rescue. Hope in the shape of relationship, community and friendship borne through the embrace of Jesus.
Naturally we like boundaries, lines drawn where the 'other' is over 'there', and I am over here. Common Christian understandings of reaching out to the 'lost' involve just that – a reaching out, rather than a being with. Coming at, rather than alongside. MiM encourages considering what it looks like when we turn the narrative upside down. When sinners and sufferers, recovering addicts, the unfaithful, the weak, the unstable, the broken – in short, all of us, sit together, share a meal, share stories, lament the brokenness and yet see God's goodness.
If you're able to come along to the next Mission the Margins, I'd highly recommend it. You'll be left pondering for a long while after, you'll likely feel a bit uncomfortable at times, and I can't guarantee you'll leave with more answers than questions, but I can assure you you'll leave encouraged and enriched.

If you want to learn more, or are interested in coming along to any of our events, head to our website for more information.

Success: who should measure it?

We were involved with a well project and went back to see how the communities and the wells were faring through the peak of the dry season. Part of the deal of going ahead with a well was that whoever owned the land would benefit by having a clean water source nearby but must allow the surrounding community members to draw water from the well.

On our travels, we stopped at a well that we noticed had been fenced. When we asked the owner about it, we were told that people from neighbouring communities were coming and putting pressure on the well, so the fence had been built to protect the water for the local community. A plausible reason.

Later that day we wandered down to a nearby dam, where we met two people drawing water. We asked why they were getting water from the dam and not the well, and we were told that the well had been fenced, and the owner wouldn't allow anyone else to use the water.

Asking different community members gave us very different views about the success of the well program. And who was right? Was the owner lying? Or were the people by the dam attempting a smear campaign because they'd had a falling out with the owner? We'll never know. But we learnt that asking different people in a community - about any aspect of any project - will likely give us very different answers. If we're only hearing one version, and it's a 100% success story, we're probably stuck in an echo chamber we've unwittingly built for ourselves.

Reclaiming the Whole Gospel

Jonathan Cornford
jonathan@mannagum.org.au

Jonathan is the founder of Manna Gum, a ministry in good news economics https://www.mannagum.org.au/). He has a background in international development and inner-city mission and is gifted at bringing scholarly depth into the everyday. He lives the stuff he talks and writes about and communicates with grace. – CB

I have a bad habit with elephants in rooms. I don't seem unable to ignore them, and I can't quite keep from mentioning them. This can be socially inconvenient; nothing eases a social gathering quite like not mentioning the elephant we are all squeezing around. The church is a social gathering that keeps some quite large pet elephants, which it very fondly declines to talk about.

I have long held the view that, for many Australian Christians, the good news of Jesus doesn't really feel like good news. A quarter way through the 21st century, it feels like Christian faith in Australia is in some trouble. One reason for this is that the world feels like it is in trouble and people feel like their faith doesn't really make sense of it all. If that is how you feel, then both of these feelings are rooted in some factual basis. The world is in trouble and Christian faith in Australia is in some difficulty.

CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AUSTRALIA IS STRUGGLING..

I won't say too much about the world situation, as most people are well aware of the headline issues. At the top of many people's concerns is the rapid onset of dangerous climate change and the seeming inability of world leaders to come to some agreement about what to do. Connected to this is the re-emergence of Great Power conflict, with Russia and China (literally) pushing the geopolitical boundaries, and the US—the world's greatest military power—looking worryingly unstable in its politics and society. Then there are economic concerns to do with disruptions in trade, shortage of key resources, inflation and the cost of housing. And lying in the background, the spectres of financial instability and pandemic seem to hover, waiting for some inopportune moment to return. There is good reason to not always talk about elephants in the room—often we really do need to just get on with things, squeezing our way around them.

But this is not one of those moments, so here's another elephant: Christian faith in Australia is struggling. Forget what the last census said (43% of Australian's identified as 'Christian')—it is quite clear that people are not answering that question as a one about religious conviction, but rather as a question about cultural heritage. A much more realistic picture comes from the social research company McCrindle who tell us that 15% of Australians attend a church at least once a month, while those who identify as "active practisers" of Christian faith

only number about 7%. Once you subtract the contribution of migration, most denominations are in trouble: many are declining in absolute terms and all declining as a proportion of the population. The Pentecostal churches are doing better, but not as well as you might think. Conversion to the faith is statistically non-existent; of course it happens, but it makes no contribution to overall numbers. Most worrying of all is what is happening to faith within Christian families. Studies of the transmission of faith from one generation to another show that in countries like Australia and the UK, families with two parents who are 'committed' Christians have a 50% probability of passing on that faith to their children, and if there is only one committed parent, that falls to 25%. Put another way, Christian faith in Australia has a half-life of one generation.

What is happening here? It is clear that for emerging generations Christianity is either seen as not credible, not attractive or not relevant. In the face of the worrying world-situation described above, and in the midst of an aggressively relativist and secular culture at home, Christian faith seems, to many young people, a very thin proposition.

This all sounds very negative, however, my hunch is that you are already aware of much of this at some level. If we are going to talk meaningfully about the gospel—literally the 'good news'—then we are going to have to pay attention to these elephants.

Some people when confronted with confusing and challenging times have come to the conclusion that we need a new formulation of Christian belief to fit with the new world. Such was the conclusion of people such as the Marcionites in Rome in the second century, and Bishop Shelby Spong in the 1990s. They each wanted to update Christianity to make it align more smoothly with their social and cultural worlds. I am not going to suggest such a thing. If Christianity in Australia is in trouble, if we are struggling to make sense of a threatening and confusing world, it is not because there is any problem with the good news about Jesus, but because we haven't really being paying attention to the New Testament witness about who Jesus was and what he was doing.

The thesis that I wish to put forward is that New Testament helps us make sense of, and understand, the scary and confusing world we are experiencing. More than that, it offers a way to live in hope while constructively engaging the hurt of the world. Even more than that, it offers the spiritual and personal transformation that is the only way to live well through the troubled times we are experiencing. In short, the gospel opens the path to life— it is really good news. But in order for it to be so, it must be the whole gospel.

THE NEW TESTAMENT... OFFERS A WAY TO LIVE IN HOPE WHILE CONSTRUCTIVELY ENGAGING THE HURT OF THE WORLD.

A divided gospel

The crisis of Christianity in Australia has a lot to do with the hollowed out understanding of the gospel that dominates. In particular, our separation of spiritual from material life has meant the abandonment of many of the gospels most critical insights. Moreover, we have also divided Christian faith into separate component parts that sit uneasily together: evangelism, justice, holiness, and experience of the Holy Spirit seem to make competing claims that few are able to comfortably reconcile. And so we split up into churches that seem to specialise in one or the other: sound teaching, social activism, upright living, or spiritual experience. (Here's another little elephant: I think there are hardly any churches these days 'specialising' in real evangelism, even amongst those that most firmly describe themselves as 'evangelical'.)

I will not attempt to give a history of how this hollowing and dividing of the gospel came about, suffice to say that it is a long and complex story with many turns. The key moments include the influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity all the way back in the second century; the effect of the church gaining power and wealth following the conversion of the Roman emperor in the fourth century; the many unintended effects of the Reformation; the impact of the European Enlightenment over the last three centuries; our formation in the economic cultures of capitalism and consumerism; and most recently, the influence of postmodern hyper-individualist relativism. It is not an even story; there have always been better and worse versions of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit has continually effected renewal in this place, then that, over the last 2000 years.

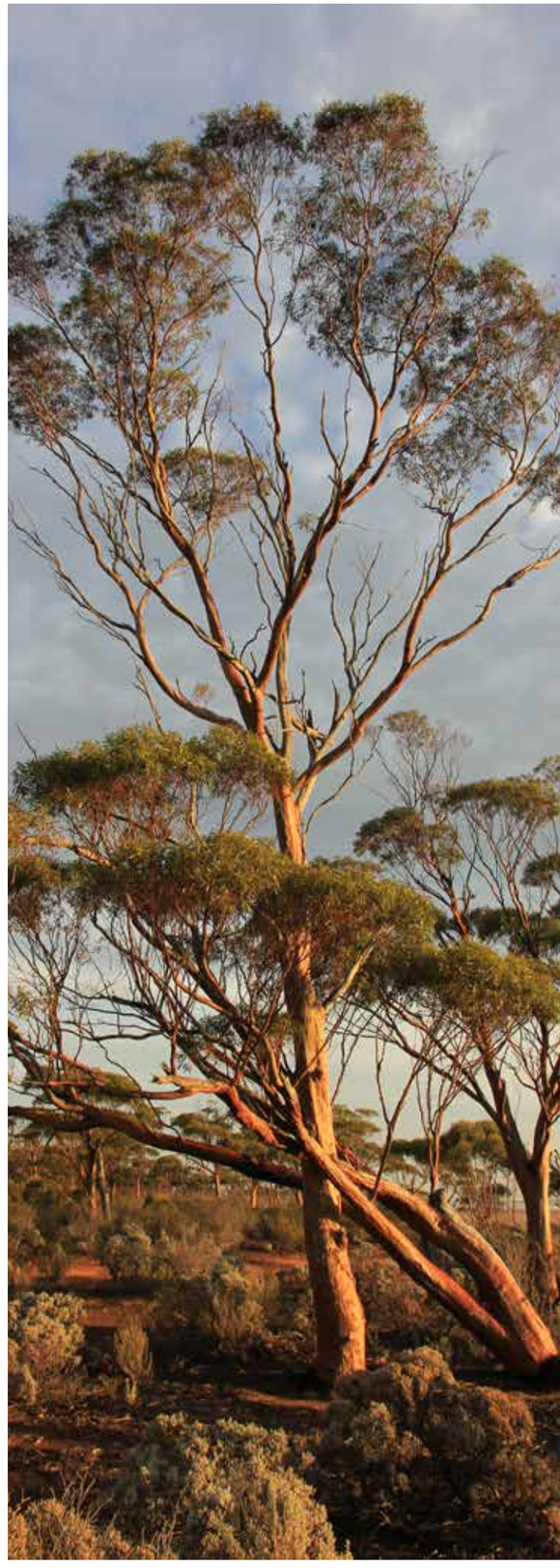
Yet, in Australia in the present moment, we find that we are inheritors of a version of the gospel that has been accommodated to a culture that is fixated on forever growing its wealth; a gospel that is kept clear of dangerous areas of politics and economics, and that has been spiritualised and privatised to the extent that faith is confined to the private recesses of our hearts, finding little expression in our work, our daily economic lives, and having little to say about the existential threats of climate change and an epidemic of mental ill-health. It is a thin and flimsy gospel, ill-equipped to deal with the storms of a trouble century. It is a house built on sand.

WE ARE INHERITORS OF A VERSION OF THE GOSPEL THAT HAS BEEN ACCOMMODATED TO A CULTURE FIXATED ON FOREVER GROWING ITS WEALTH; A GOSPEL THAT IS KEPT CLEAR OF DANGEROUS AREAS OF POLITICS AND ECONOMICS...

In response to our stormy times, I will suggest three movements that will help us to reclaim the fullness of the good news, which is what Jesus meant when he talked of a house that is built on rock. These movements are:

1. Overcoming the separation of spiritual and material life
2. Reclaiming the place of creation within our hope and calling
3. Renewing the fundamental link between salvation and evangelism, and seeking justice.

There is more that could be said, but these will suffice for now.



Rejoining spiritual life and material life

Early Christianity had a remarkably dynamic engagement with the world of Greek philosophy, which produced many positive results. However, one damaging and lasting effect of this engagement was the taking on of the Greek idea that the realm of the perfect and the pure is the realm of the spiritual, and that the material world is characterised by corruption and impurity. This division between the spiritual and the material cut right through the centre of human life. The life of the mind and spirit was where purity and perfection were attained, and the life of the body was something that had to be escaped. In Christianity, this idea developed into the notion that after death, the soul leaves the body and travels to an eternal spiritual realm, either heaven or hell. Thus, the quest for salvation, the very definition of salvation, came to be dominated by the idea that it meant ensuring your soul goes to heaven when you die. Pie in the sky when you die (a spiritual pie, not even a real pie!). This is not the message of the Bible.

At the beginning of John's gospel, we find the central claim of Christianity, perhaps the most astounding claim in human history. John tells us that Word of God— the logos that underpins all creation— took the form of a single human life. The Word became flesh and lived among us. The implications of this are huge. The thing that God most wanted to communicate to humanity—God's 'Word'—could not simply be written across the sky in flaming letters, or dropped to earth in a book, but rather required a human life to say it. And not just one part of a life, but a whole life: the gospels give us the story of Jesus' birth, life, teaching, healing, socialising, calling together of a community, encountering opposition, death at the hands of the authorities, resurrection and ascension. Every bit is important.

This tells us that what God wants to say to us concerns our lives 'in the flesh'; it concerns the substance of our day-to-day lives in the material world. This is confirmed by the content of the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Books of the Law lay out the fundamental vision of how Israel is to live, and a central component of the Law concerns Israel's economic life: work and rest, agricultural practices, commerce, debt and credit, treatment of animals, social welfare and religious giving. The vision of justice and neighbourliness laid out in the Law is one of the primary subjects of reflection in the message of the prophets, psalms and wisdom literature.

> JESUS TALKS ABOUT MONEY, WEALTH AND POSSESSIONS MORE THAN ANY OTHER SUBJECT, AND THE STUFF HE HAS TO SAY ON THESE SUBJECTS IS BY FAR THE HARDEST STUFF IN THE BIBLE.

This is continued in the New Testament. Jesus talks about money, wealth and possessions more than any other subject, and the stuff he has to say on these subjects is by far the hardest stuff in the Bible. However we interpret these teachings, it is clear that the subject of economic life was critical to that thing that Jesus called 'the kingdom of God'. This is amplified in the story that recounts the birth of the church. In Acts 2, the chapter that begins with the 'distribution' of the Holy Spirit, ends with the distribution of material goods (in the Greek, it is the same word used for both). The message of Acts 2 is crystal clear: spiritual life flows naturally and inevitably into material life. In the life of the early Church, the counter-cultural economic life of the early Christians proved critical to their evangelical success in the oppressive world of the Roman Empire.

Once our eyes have been opened to it, it turns out that Word-becoming-flesh is the peculiar modus operandi of the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Paul. It is how God chooses to communicate with humanity. Where God's Word has not fully enfleshed itself in the whole of life, from our work, our day-to-day economic choices and our politics, then it is literally a dis-embodied gospel, that does not properly communicate God to the world.

Bringing creation back into the picture

Closely connected to the division between spirit and matter that has plagued Christianity, is a more recent blindness to the central role of creation within the Christian story. In 1967, Lynn White wrote a famous article in Science magazine, blaming Christianity for the ecological crisis, claiming that it created a dualism between humanity and nature, giving humans a licence to dominate creation, despoiling it for whatever purposes we choose. The tragedy is that he was partly right about what some versions of Christianity say about our relationship to the natural world. But he was dead wrong about what the Bible has to say about this relationship.

> WHERE GOD'S WORD HAS NOT FULLY ENFLESHED ITSELF IN THE WHOLE OF LIFE, FROM OUR WORK, OUR DAY-TO-DAY ECONOMIC CHOICES AND OUR POLITICS, THEN IT IS LITERALLY A DIS-EMBODIED GOSPEL, THAT DOES NOT PROPERLY COMMUNICATE GOD TO THE WORLD.

The creation stories are critical to understanding who we are and what our purpose is: they are 'DNA' stories that describe our primary coding as human beings. In Genesis 2, Adam (the human) is formed out of the adamma (the soil) and brought to life by the breath of God. Who are we? We are earth fused with spirit. Moreover, Adam is given a vocation to 'work and keep' the earth (v.15). Hebrew Bible scholar, Ellen Davis, writes that this verse could just as well be translated 'to serve and observe' the earth: to work for it, to watch it closely and understand it, and to observe its limits. In Genesis 1, humans are given a mandate of 'dominion' (or 'rule' in some translations) (1:26). Far from a license to dominate, the Hebrew concept of dominion/rule is a call to service. In the Old Testament, the rule of kings fails when it turns from service to domination. In the New Testament, the concept of dominion/rule is located firmly with the person of Jesus, who pointedly told his followers, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them. [...] But I am among you as one who serves.'

> HUMANS ARE GIVEN A SPECIAL VOCATION AS GOD'S SERVANTS WITHIN GOD'S GOOD AND ABUNDANT CREATION

Together, Genesis 1 and 2 make clear that humans are given a special vocation as God's servants within God's

good and abundant creation. In the books of the Law, the health of the land is a central concern; indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that it is the primary measure of human faithfulness to God's way. Conversely, in Genesis 3, and in the warnings given in the Law and prophets, it is made clear that when human's walk away from their vocation, the earth suffers and we suffer with it. Anthropogenic climate change is simply this very old story writ large. To a biblical way of understanding things, the idea that humans have induced climate change through their human greed and negligence, is not strange or confounding, it is predictable.

THE GOOD NEWS MESSAGE IS NOT THAT WE ESCAPE EARTH TO GET TO HEAVEN, BUT THAT HEAVEN IS COMING DOWN TO A HEALED AND RESTORED EARTH, AND THAT THIS HEALING BEGINS HERE AND NOW, WITH YOU AND ME.

The New Testament goes further: it makes clear that not only does God-in-Christ take on the form of creatureliness to save humanity from its mess, but comes to heal and restore all of creation. The very fact of the incarnation is God's massive 'yes' to creation, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus is God's guarantee to restore what is broken. In case we didn't catch these affirmations, John's gospel tells us that 'God so loved the kosmos that he sent his only son'(Jn 3:16), with Greek word kosmos meaning the whole universe. Similarly, the Apostle Paul tells us that God, in Christ, was reconciling the kosmos back to himself (2 Cor 5:19). Paul then goes on to say that God is entrusting this awesome ministry of reconciliation to us. Likewise, in Romans 8 Paul draws attention to the suffering of creation and says that its healing is dependent on 'the revealing of the children of God' (Rom 8:19). Who are the children of God? They are those who do what their Father in Heaven does, and who seek to heal and restore all that is broken in creation (Col 1:20). The final image of the Bible is not of angels floating on a cloud, but of the New Jerusalem coming from heaven down to earth, and God making his home amongst mortals. The good news message is not that we escape earth to get to heaven, but that heaven is coming down to a healed and restored earth, and that this healing begins here and now, with you and me.

Re-connecting justice and evangelism

Now I want to bring together the implications from these two points— the integration of spiritual and material life; and the centrality of creation with the gospel—to make my third point, which is about overcoming the division between social justice and evangelism. For a bystander looking at the Australian church (indeed, for many Christians) it could easily seem that you have to choose between two versions of the gospel: a social justice gospel and an evangelical gospel.

The social justice gospel focusses on Jesus' ministry amongst the last, the lost and the least, and stresses his message of the kingdom come. The good news is that Jesus redefines human relationships towards justice, equality and dignity. The evangelical gospel focusses on Paul's message of salvation by grace through faith. The good news is that we are restored to a new relationship with God that guarantees eternal life. Both of these gospels have their own version of holiness, one focussed on serving the poor and economic relationships; the other focussed on personal piety, sexual morality and clean living.

SIN IS A BIG, LITTLE WORD THAT ULTIMATELY DESCRIBES RUPTURES IN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD, HUMANITY AND CREATION.

It begins to seem like Jesus and Paul proclaimed two different gospels: one about right relations between people, addressing our material conditions of life (justice) and one about right relations with God, addressing our spiritual state (justification). Righteousness and justice come to be seen as competing agendas. How strange, then, that in the New Testament, righteousness and justice are the same word?

There are many ways we could address this artificial division of the good news of Jesus, but one really useful way is by examining our understanding of sin and salvation: how does Jesus' life, death and resurrection save us from sin? The evangelical gospel majors on stressing that Christ saves us from sin (implying being saved from hell) while the social justice gospel has little time for the concepts of sin and salvation, except to talk about injustice as a sin. Both of these have a rather thin a view of sin.

Sin is a big, little word that ultimately describes ruptures in relationship between God, humanity and creation. Sin describes a state of alienation. The wages of sin is death because we are creatures created for the full ecosystem of relationship that God has prepared for us.

Salvation in Christ is fundamentally about being drawn into a healed cosmos: "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17). We have tended to think about social justice as an obligation to do good and as salvation as something that is about "me" and where I go after I die. But actually the New Testament definition of salvation is to be drawn into whole the divine communion of love between God, humanity and all of creation, here and now. It talks about salvation in the past, present and future tenses: it is something that has already been accomplished, is happening now, and will one day come to full fruition. The New Testament words for righteousness, justice, justification, reconciliation and atonement, all circle around the same theme— restoration to relationship.

If we have no concern for the social and economic context of people's lives, then we are making a mockery of their status as enfleshed creatures, and of Christ's work reconciling us back into right relationship with each other. Without a concern for the state of people's souls and their need to be restored to God, then we are simply denying the central fact of their humanity and their ultimate source of life. We must have a gospel that addresses people in their real condition as earth-creatures animated by the breath of God, but alienated from the communion of love; people who need the whole divine community of love, which is the only true habitat for life.

IN THE BIBLE ETHICS IS EVANGELISM, COMMUNITY IS MISSION, AND SALVATION IS POLITICAL.

It is the vocation of the Christian community to embody within itself the reconciling of God, humanity and creation, and in doing so, this is the primary vehicle of its evangelical and political communication with the world. Reclaiming the whole gospel is, by definition, the work of communities. In the Bible ethics is evangelism, community is mission, and salvation is political. By reclaiming the gospel as a single integrated message that covers the whole of life we will discover a word of life that speaks into the challenges posed by climate change, mental ill-health, meaningless, poverty and injustice, and orients us to hope.

Good food, hospitality and poverty

Clinton Bergsma

If you've ever crossed paths with Asher, you'll know that he loves to cook up a delicious meal and share it with whoever's nearby. He doesn't seem to have a speciality cuisine, he cooks whatever sparks his interest and comes in portions larger than one. His interest in food isn't snobby, it never has an air of 'but-ye-minions-just-wouldn't-appreciate-it'; it's humble, earthy, inviting – the type that makes you want to sidle up to the wok he's working and ask: 'what's going on here?'

If you've ever crossed paths with Asher, you'll know that he loves to cook up a delicious meal and share it with whoever's nearby. He doesn't seem to have a speciality cuisine, he cooks whatever sparks his interest and comes in portions larger than one. His interest in food isn't snobby, it never has an air of 'but-ye-minions-just-wouldn't-appreciate-it'; it's humble, earthy, inviting – the type that makes you want to sidle up to the wok he's working and ask: 'what's going on here?'

He'll give you more than the name of the dish. There's invariably a story behind it – it's linked to some special cultural event or time of year when a particular ingredient is harvested or at its peak. You'll smell some spice you've never heard of, and – somehow, among the busyness of chopping, stirring and wok-brandishing – an interesting conversation will develop and extend through the plating, prayer and partaking. He's unhurried, warm and inviting to the point that you almost feel like you somehow contributed something to this whole deliciousness. You didn't, but it felt like you did - the evidence of an experienced host making a guest feel at home.

To say that Asher is a food tech teacher at a high school is a terrible understatement. He understands his role as being so much larger than that; it's about connecting people to each other and the earth through food that nourishes in every sense: tasty, interesting, nutritious, sustainable, shared with others - and there's a wide trail of Asherian crumbs that run all over the school where he works and the neighbourhood where he lives. He asked me a few months back to share with his class about the intersection between hospitality and poverty, and I enthusiastically accepted the invitation. But once we hung up the phone, I began wondering how those two related to one another. It's rightly been said before that my tagline might run something like: '90% confidence, 10% skill.'

It's fascinating that we don't tend to see those things as linked, because good food and hospitality – in some respects - are so enmeshed in our daily lives. We eat so regularly that it's possible to consume food without being aware of its flavours and textures – I regularly have to remind my kids to slow down and taste their food (perhaps I should feed them more), only to look down and see that I've somehow already finished my own plate without being conscious of it.

But good food and hospitality have been eroded in many contexts for reasons beyond being 'too ordinary and every day.' We've commercialised a lot of food preparation and sacrificed it on the altar of market forces, creating a whole range of foods that aren't very reflective of their origins. Ever had home-made custard and compared ingredients or flavours with the shop-bought one? Ever pondered the mysteries contained within a can of Spam, compared a frozen pizza, take-away burger or loaf of bread with one that's been freshly made from scratch? Over a number of decades so many food products have slowly had real ingredients swapped out for those that are cheaper or have a longer shelf life. We've been duped into believing that these things are somehow worthy of the same names as their original counterparts (are they even really food?), and it takes a slice of homemade bread or a wok-stirring Asher to wake us up.

But it's not just the food and ingredients that have been eroded over time. Hospitality has been part of the collateral, and we're eating less in the company of others. We'll grab a quick bite on the run so we can get back to the 'important stuff' as quickly as possible, passing over the good things that happen when food is eaten in the company of others. Our schedules are packed tight and leave little room for the unhurried space that hospitality needs to be done well.

The fallout from poor food and inhospitality? You know them as well as I: a wide range of (new?) health issues, an earth damaged by over-consumption and increased plastic packaging, people isolated, lonely and disconnected. In short: a break down in relationships with the earth and other people (with knock on effects for our relationship with God and ourselves). Behold the link between good food, hospitality and Amos Australia's understanding of poverty! I was 90% confident we'd be able to work it out.

But let's kick the idea around a bit further at a global level, because this isn't just an issue at an individual, household or neighbourhood level. This stuff plays out on the global stage too. It shows up in small things like the proliferation of items sponsored by energy drink companies in rural communities in Indonesia that are already struggling to get enough good food each day – will buying and drinking Red







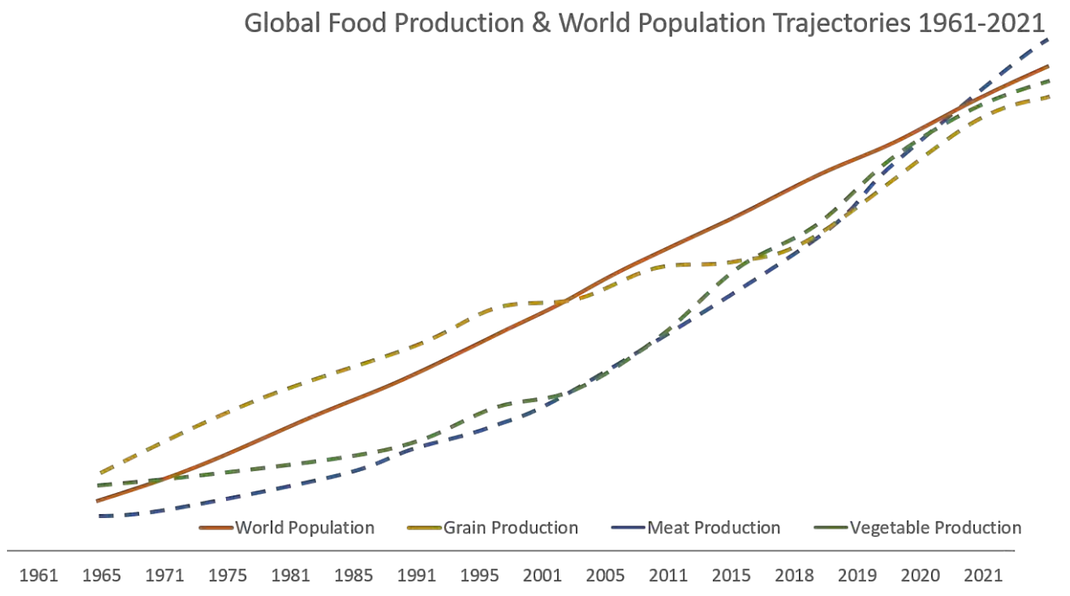

Bull or Monster improve things here? Amos Australia has just recently contributed to a program aimed at addressing malnourishment in pregnant mothers in rural Indonesia. The dominant practice there is to purchase expensive fortified milk due to some brilliant and persistent marketing by DanCow, a large dairy company. But a small trial that our partner – BKAD – ran with the local health department indicated that multivitamins alongside lessons on cooking nutritious, locally sourced food achieved better outcomes for pregnant mothers at a fraction of the cost of the fortified milk.

So much of global poverty is caused by or perpetuated by bad food, bad food systems, production of food that is unsustainable and poor hospitality. You've probably heard advances in food production being touted as 'helping solve famines.' While advances in growing food are important and certainly contributed a lot of good to the world, there is actually already enough food in the world for everyone. Global food production has kept steady with increases in world population since we began measuring it in the '60s:

THERE IS NO GLOBAL FOOD SHORTAGE

There is no global food shortage. While there have at times been regional or global shortages of particular commodities, the world has consistently produced enough food for everyone over the past 60 years, even with a steadily increasing world population. That's pretty phenomenal, and the world's farmers and agricultural researchers deserve a tip of the croissant (that global symbol of goodness) for making this happen.

If we can predict broad weather patterns up to twelve months in advance, and can move massive amounts of product around the world in a matter of weeks, then for at least half a century we have had the rather glorious situation where famine and starvation aren't necessary anymore. This has meant that famine and starvation have moved from being unfortunate evils to, well, choices. At the heart of that choice is the option for wealthy countries like Australia to extend hospitality or withhold it. We have the choice to welcome our global neighbours to the table to share an abundance of good, healthy, nutritious food with each other. Sure, we have aid programs and we'll send off a bulk carrier of grain when things get really serious. But at times it feels like we want to keep them just fed enough so that they don't become a threat to the power we wield. Could there be any other reason as to why we haven't been avoiding famines before they happen? Is that really reflective of the abundant creation that God created? Is that the kind of stewardship that best reflects his character?



Data source: Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QCL

FAMINE AND STARVATION HAVE MOVED FROM BEING UNFORTUNATE EVILS TO, WELL, CHOICES.

And if hospitality means creating space for others to feel welcome and at home, then we've got some work to do on in other areas too – and perhaps some that might not typically be understood as belonging to the realm of hospitality. How might a hospitable posture re-shape the treatment of refugees in our country (hint: check out the CRISP program)? Or what could hospitality – as a principle – shape the way we treat folks exiting our prison systems, folks with disabilities or migrant workers? What might it confirm and challenge in our homes if we thought about our relationship to the rest of creation through a hospitable lens? In his fascinating book The call of the Reed Warbler, XXX shares how one morning he came to the realisation that – as a farmer – he was waking up most mornings thinking about which weeds and pests he needed to fight and kill that day. A key turning point was when he began waking up thinking about what life he could foster and encourage on his broadacre farm.

What if we explored that kind of principle to our homes, and made them places of hospitality for birds and the types of plants that once flourished there long before we arrived? What if our understanding

of 'ruling over creation' looked a bit more like the Noongar view of humanity as 'the ones who are strong enough to care for everything?' I suspect Mortein and Round-up would trend downwards for a while (but then plateau – I'm good at loving spiders when they're outdoors).

All that to say that I cobbled together a PowerPoint presentation that contained a few ideas of the type that Asher already has deep in his bones, and I shared them with his class while he provided stories, cooking techniques and the glories of an Indonesian classic dish: martabak. It brought back memories of a particular street vendor on the island of Sabu who seemed to dance and smile as he stretched the impossibly thin pastry and whisked his particular mysterious omelette-like filling in the evening light. No matter what kind of day's been had, I could take that piping hot pastry down to the harbour and share it around with whoever stopped to chat, enjoying the sunset together while the kids played barefoot soccer nearby. Deliciously restorative.

I left that class with more than just fond memories of martabak in my heart and belly. I left with a deeper realisation of the important stuff that my neighbours and friends have done by opening their homes and lives through foster-care, the CRISP program, boarding international students, folks in recovery or finding their feet post-incarceration. People who host street parties, or make time to invite a few friends or someone they felt could do with some conversation and a home-cooked meal. I came away with a deeper appreciation for the folks who are rarely the loudest or up the front, but are found in the kitchen prepping the food, crafting flavours and textures that will help the rest of us enjoy the evening and one-another's company. Folks who have a secret recipe for a home-made jam or pickle that they love to make and share with people.

I CAME AWAY FROM ASHER'S CLASS WITH A CONVICTION THAT GOOD FOOD AND HOSPITALITY ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO ADDRESSING POVERTY.

I came away from Asher's class with a conviction that good food and hospitality are fundamental to addressing poverty. I left wanting to slow down when I eat. To savour the food, to taste it, enjoy it, honour those who gave their time growing, sorting, transporting, displaying, selling, preparing the ingredients. To put my phone down when eating alone and be present to the food.

There's nothing new here really – or anywhere under the sun, it turns out. But it's good to be reminded of these things, and I raise my half-eaten apple and slightly cold tea to Asher and the folks who have hosted me time and time again, both here and overseas, who understand – almost intuitively – that good food and creating space for folks are fundamental to the good life we long for and were designed for.

If you're needing practice, I'm happy to be cooked for anytime.

Interview with Lyn Chapman

Aimee: Can you tell us a little bit about what and who Smile Group is? What does SMILE stand for?

Lyn: My friend Chevaunne came back from working in China, because of family. She was in the line at Centerlink, and there was a lady in front of her who didn't speak much English. The Centerlink person did what a lot of Australians do, and just shouted, talked louder, because "then you will understand!" While Chevaunne was standing in line there, it was like God said to her, I want you to start a group to help migrants in Busselton. That was 11 years ago, back then we didn't have many migrants here. But the Australian Government had just started a programme and they said that if you wanted permanent residency, you actually had to work in a regional area. So then, from that time on we started seeing a lot more migrants in Busselton.

We've got two ladies in our SMILE Group who've been here for over 30 years. And when they came here, they were practically the only Asians and very conscious of the way that people would treat them and look at them as different. They found it hard to get the food items that they'd like.

So Chevaunne started the group Smile, thinking at first that it would be to help migrants learn English.It used to stand for Supporting Migrants In Learning English. However, TAFE does a really good job at that, they have some excellent courses, and we never wanted to compete with them.. So about seven years ago, I was talking to a lady who was new to town about coming to SMILE, and she said, "Oh, we've lived in Perth for four years, and we're sick of "learning English groups"." And I said, "Oh, well, that's not really what we do." So from then on, we started still calling it Smile, because that's a great name, but we call it a friendship group.

Aimee: How did you get involved with SMILE?

Lyn: Chevaunne and I knew each other through school... I was calling her to talk at a lady's event about China. She started telling me about starting a SMILE group. I had heard about these groups in capital cities, and had really wanted to do something similar. I had long service leave in 2011 and, because I wanted to do something with migrants, I'd done a four week intensive course in learning how to teach English as a Second Language up in Perth. That was in May and I was talking to Chevaunne in September when she started telling me about SMILE. I just said, "Oh!,that is so what I want to do, do you need any help?" She said, "I've been praying for someone else."

Aimee: Would you like to describe a typical SMILE morning?

Lyn: We're usually gazetted to start at 10 and finish at 12. But it never happens. There were times where Chevaunne and I thought we should maybe change the starting time because most people arrive from 10:30 onwards; some people don't get there till 11:30. But we sort of figured that it's just really flexible. We've got to stay flexible. We can't say, "oh, you know, these are the starting/finishing times."

We do different things. Sometimes we do targeted language activities. There have been times where someone's come along whose English was very weak. We've might do this as a small group or one on one. If we're going to have a language focus, it might be because someone said something, or it might be to do with Aussie slang. We've found that rather than sitting around a big table, it is more effective if we have coffee around small tables with four people. Whoever is leading will start the ball rolling, and then get the ladies to talk about something specific.

Aimee: How have you found that's worked better, having a more, I guess, casual approach, or more relationship based approach?

Lyn: A few ladies commented that at TAFE, they've got a curriculum they must follow whereas at SMILE, we get the opportunity to actually talk, to have conversations. Some of our ladies are married to Aussies so they get English all the time. But if there's a Taiwanese couple, or an Afghani couple, they don't get to speak English. So SMILE is really important. And it's quite funny because you've got all different accents...we've got all levels of English. Those of us who are on the team always look out for opportunities to just engage in conversation.

Another activity we'll do is cooking. Maybe they'll show us how to make something or we will make something. In the winter terms, we always make some sort of soup. We have the most amazing food. My husband thinks the only reason I go to SMILE is for the food! We do craft, we do games. Once a term we try to go out to a kid friendly cafe, and then at the end

of each term, we have a party at someone's house. And everyone brings something to share.

Our main activity though is talking, lots of talking. I said at the end of the SMILE mornings, "Oh, that didn't turn out as I planned" and one of the ladies said to me, "just so long as we can talk, that's all that matters." So it's very, very flexible. We do have a plan. But it doesn't always happen.

"JUST SO LONG AS WE CAN TALK, THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS."

Aimee: Are there other things that you've noticed as you've been a part of this friendship group that English speaking people might take for granted?

Lyn: In Australia, we're so isolated. We live on our own. There's a fellow from one of the African countries - his wife comes to SMILE. And he said, that when he came to Australia and saw all the beautifully manicured lawns, he thought, 'well, when the men come home from work, they must all sit out there and talk and chat.' And I was like, "No, that's not what happens in Australia. We have our manicured lawns, then we go inside. And if I want to visit you, I've got to ring you first and make sure." The ladies will say, "Oh, you know, if I make a big pot of food, I go over to the neighbours and say come over and share it - there's none of that [here]." And often, the loneliness that they feel is what we just can't imagine. So there are not only language barriers, but also coming from cultures where they're used to living in community...and then they come here, it's really hard. Really hard!

I have learned so much. You don't realise what your own culture is until you mix with other cultures. I feel so rich from this. It's just incredible. One of the ladies moved to Albany. And she's like "when are you coming to visit, so and so has visited? You haven't visited yet!"

IN AUSTRALIA, WE'RE SO ISOLATED... SO THERE ARE NOT ONLY LANGUAGE BARRIERS, BUT COMING FROM CULTURES WHERE THEY'RE LIVING IN COMMUNITY...AND THEY COME HERE, IT'S REALLY HARD, REALLY HARD.

Aimee: It's nice to see that those friendships extend outside of the main meeting group.

Lyn: Yeah. So what ends up happening, of course, is that we have ladies come in to SMILE, and then they might go to TAFE. We say, "go to TAFE. Don't worry about SMILE", but they stay part of the extended SMILE family. We have a Whatsapp group, so they will hear what's going. The group is very fluid but we stay connected. And sometimes, even though they might not be coming on a SMILE day, they'll say, "Can you help me with this form?" So we do lots of that.

Aimee: If you think about some of the perceptions you might have had of migrant women before you started these friendships can you think about some of the ways that they have been challenged or changed?

Lyn: I was just talking to a lady the other day who had come to the group for a while. And she said it was such a beautiful place of acceptance. It doesn't matter how you're dressed, or where you've come from, or what your level of English is, or what's happened to you, you are going to be accepted. So that is really, really special.

Aimee: Why do you think friendship is so powerful and integral to how everything goes?

Lyn: I think it's because most of these ladies have left cultures where they live in community. And so we now will often say that SMILE is your family. And we really try to watch out for the ones that are on the outer. What really makes me excited is when the SMILE ladies form cross cultural friendships. Because you can't make that happen. But when it happens, it's really, really good.

There was one lady in our group who was South African and one lady from Turkey, and the South African lady lived a little way up the street...there's a thing called Google Translate, and that's how she and the Turkish lady became friends – amazing!

The saddest thing is that one of the ladies way back in the beginning, had lived in a group of houses, and she'd been living there for four years and no one had ever spoken to her. Just because she was covered. I wanted to cry. How can that happen? So whenever I get the opportunity I tell people not to be afraid. Say hi. In a regional area too, you can't live in your little communities so that means people are spread out. So get over that fear of someone who's dresses differently. Get out, talk to them, get to know them, because they really want to get to know you.

"GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS, INTRODUCE YOURSELF."

Aimee: What's something that you've learned through your interactions with these women, that you think that we could maybe do better in our own lives?

Lyn: Just to get to know your neighbours, introduce yourself. Twice it's been said to me, "oh you know, we tend to keep to ourselves." And I'm going to respect that, and they're still friendly, but it's sad. So often the thing I hear my migrant friends struggle with most is the lack of community.

It's given me a real insight into what happens in say, Afghanistan. If ever there's an earthquake in one particular country, or we get it on the news, we always say "were any of your family involved?". We always ask about their family back home. And that's where COVID was so hard, because they couldn't travel home for their Ramadan, and that sort of stuff. But, you know, to sit across from one of our Afghani friends who says, "they've just blown up the university", or when they've lost a family member, it just takes the whole thing that we hear on the news to a new level. And how can we best support them in their grief? All you can do is sit with them. Because there's nothing you can do.

There are so many freedoms that we take for granted, like being able to walk in in safety, that we can go wander around outside and enjoy it, that we can take our kids to the park safely. So you just learn not to take so much for granted.

Aimee: How has your understanding of the gospel been deepened through your experiences?

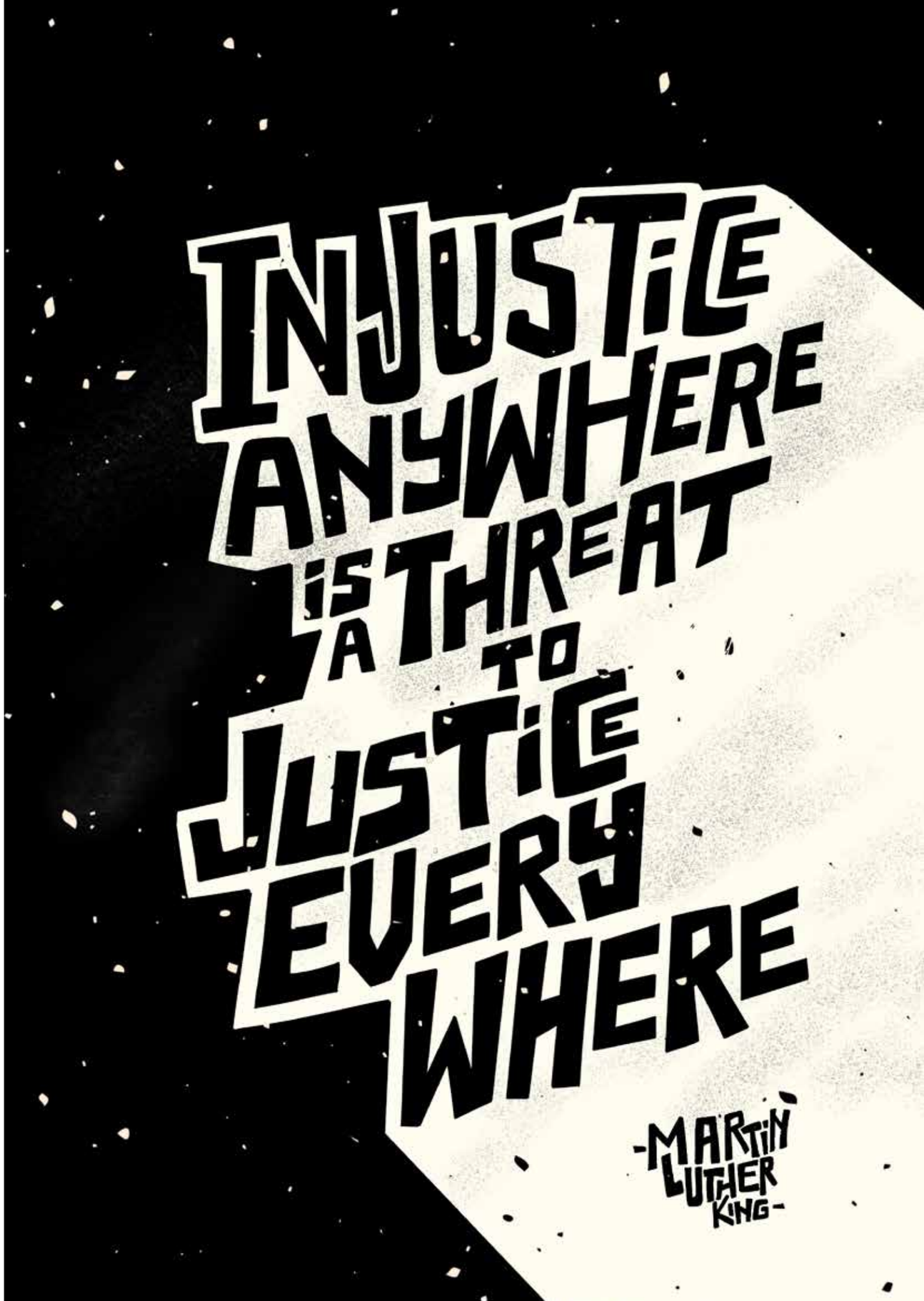
Lyn: I guess I've got a much, much deeper appreciation for God's grace. And so I guess that for me, and for us, as a team, it's just that deeper gratefulness for God's grace, that I don't need to perform, that we do what we do, because we love God. When you've been brought up in the church, you just take the death of Christ for granted. But to our friends from other belief systems, that is crazy. So you get that deeper appreciation for how crazy it is that God would send his Son and allow him to be killed by people.

When you're working cross culturally, it's like, I can't do this. In doing the Bible studies or reading Bible stories, it's like, the Holy Spirit's got to take this because I don't know if they understood what I wanted them to understand. So we joke about speaking in tongues...and when we pray, it's just like being in heaven. To sit around and everyone's praying in their heart language, I feel like I'm in heaven. It says that there's going to be people from every tribe and language and tongue. It has been an incredible privilege to actually be part of that.

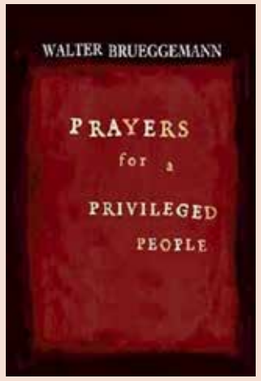
TO SIT AROUND AND EVERYONE'S PRAYING IN THEIR HEART LANGUAGE, I FEEL LIKE I'M IN HEAVEN.

We're told to rely on God's Spirit and He does the work, but until SMILE, I don't think I've ever really realized that. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is going to take the words and apply them to our hearts. So, okay, it's over to you now!

Chevaunne and I used to say, it's like, we're on a train, and God's just doing it. We're just following because it's just happening.

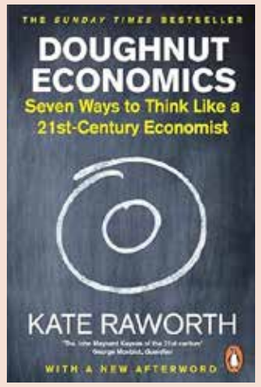


From the Library



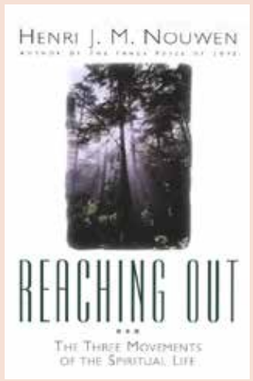
Prayers for a Privilleged People (2008)
Walter Brueggemann

While I lean towards extemporaneous prayers – those we make up on the spot – I've also found that there's many situations where I don't have the words to pray. Perhaps I'm overwhelmed, or angry, or stuck in a rut of repeating similar prayers. There's also things that I'd rather not ask God for help with, primarily the darker recesses of my heart. And so I've found myself drawn towards prayers written by others that can give words to situations where I have nothing to pray, and to help me pray for things I'd rather avoid. I've always had a deep appreciation for Walter Brueggemann's work, for its honesty and its depth and I regularly return to this book of prayers.



Doughnut Economics (2018)
Kate Raworth

This book offers a way forward for the seemingly irreconcilable tension between caring for the environment and the resources needed to sustain human life. And Raworth's premise is really quite simple: we need to think more about doughnuts. Raworth uses the metaphor of a doughnut to think about an inner boundary of human need and an outer boundary of planetary limits. She looks at seven areas of life, and suggests how we can ensure there is enough for everyone while working inside the capacity for the earth to renew itself. This is an easy read, practical and grounded that provides some helpful insights to a key challenge our world faces.



Reaching out: the three movements of the spiritual life (1975)
Henri Nouwen

I've always found Nouwen very human and honest in his writing while helping me to self-reflect and perhaps think about things from an angle I might not have considered. While the title of this book might suggest that there's three clear stages to spiritual growth, Nouwen is not suggesting that! He highlights three areas of life, showing how the practicalities of life are intertwined with spirituality, and explores movements of loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality and illusion to prayer.
This book is really like rum and raisin chocolate: difficult to describe, and best to just enjoy it. Peppered with little treasures that make you stop for a while, perhaps to be encouraged, perhaps to challenged, but always with warmth and grace. It's the kind of book you come back to every few years for a reread. Pairs well with tea and those wintery evenings.

These books (and many more!) are available for borrowing through the Amos library, which is accessible at most Amos-hosted event.

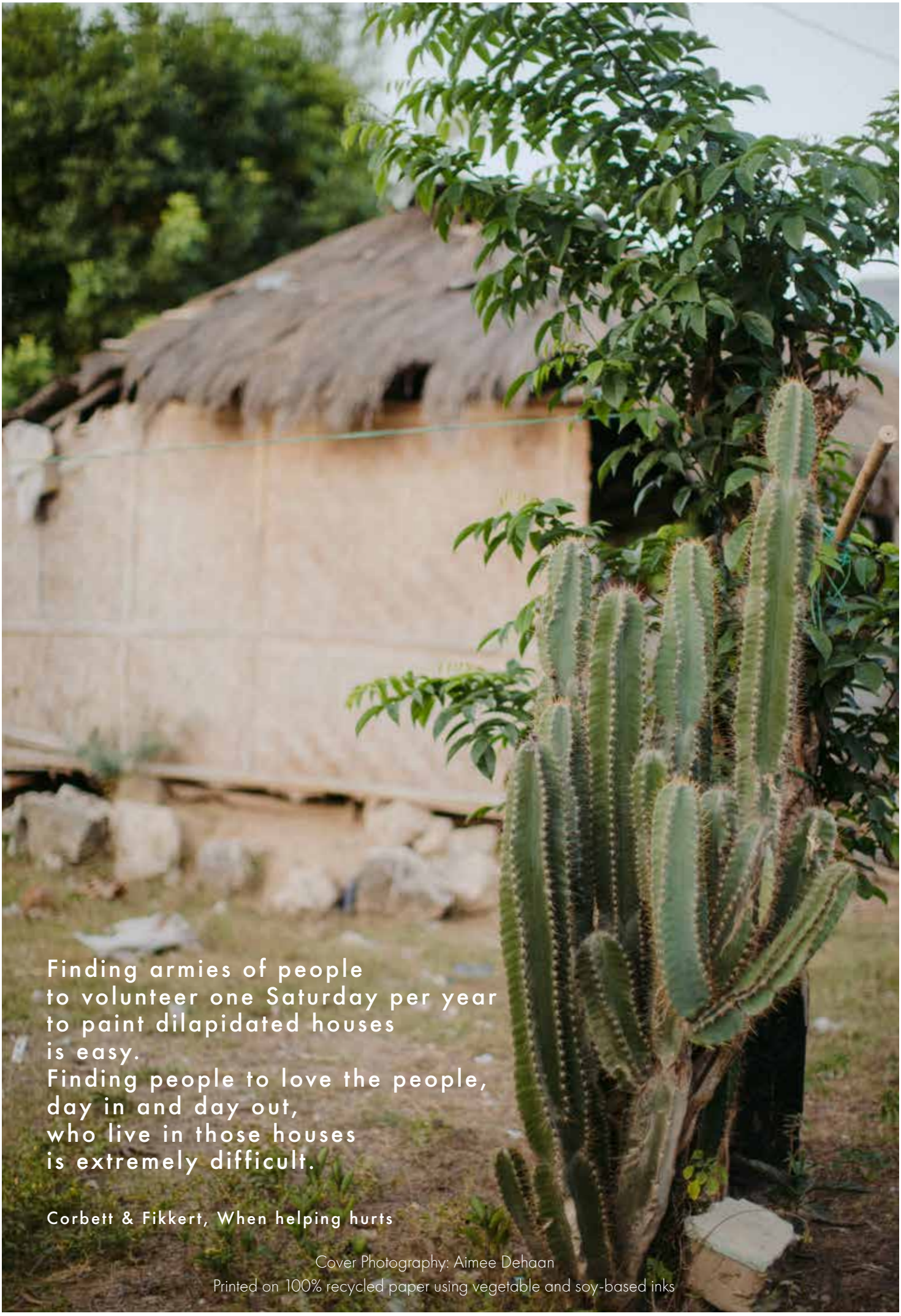
The Lecture Hall

MASTER of TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

If you're interested in undertaking some formal studies that wrestle with the practical implications of the gospel for issues of poverty and injustice, we love the Graduate

Diploma in Transformational Development (or GDTD) delivered by the AGST Alliance. It's highly accessible and you'll be interacting with other folks who are working in poverty alleviation. This is a course that has its feet firmly on the ground and its head in the Bible. You can find more details at: https://agstalliance.org/gdtd-program/

If you'd like a higher level of study, but with that same grounded, gospel-oriented nature, we highly recommend the Masters of Transformational Development (or MTD) through Eastern College of Australia - which the GDTD from AGST Alliance is based on. Our Executive Director Clinton Bergsma has completed the MTD through Eastern College, and now helps to facilitate it - if you'd like some personal insights into the course, get in touch. He'd be more than happy to share his experiences of the MTD with you. https://www.eastern.edu.au/courses/master-transformational-development



Finding armies of people
to volunteer one Saturday per year
to paint dilapidated houses
is easy.
Finding people to love the people,
day in and day out,
who live in those houses
is extremely difficult.

Corbett & Fikkert, When helping hurts

Cover Photography: Aimee Dehaan
Printed on 100% recycled paper using vegetable and soy-based inks