

FREE Issue #5 September 2011

RISE

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Up Close and Personally Engaging

2011 Australian of the Year
Simon McKeon

Building Hope in East Timor

Graham May tells how his journey with Christ led him to volunteer overseas

Making Choices:

Learning How to Engage the Heart and the Head

Heart to Heart: Celebrating our volunteers

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Cover: 2011 Australian of the Year, Simon McKeon. Image courtesy of the National Australia Day Council.

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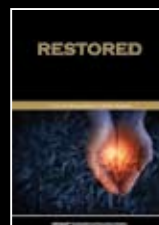
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RESTORED

A collection of stories, poems and journal entries celebrating the grace and mercy of God, as he stoops down to meet us at our point of brokenness and takes us on a journey towards restoration.



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Up Close and Personally Engaging

2011 Australian of the Year Simon McKeon talks to RISE Managing Editor Wendy Rush about the importance of becoming personally engaged in helping others.

“ Each year our nation celebrates the achievement and contribution of eminent Australians through the Australian of the Year Awards by profiling leading citizens who are role models for us all. They inspire us through their achievement and challenge us to make our own contribution to creating a better Australia. ”

(Australia Day Council)

There must be a significant weight of responsibility resting upon the shoulders of the selection panel when they come to consider who should be the Australian of the Year. How do you, with some degree of fairness, compare those who have achieved in the sporting field alongside those who have worked tirelessly for their community? How do you measure the contribution of an astute business operator against the gift that another may have given towards health or medical research? Do we recognise someone active in the overseas mission field before someone who devotes time and energy to our Indigenous citizens? Or acknowledge the person working with the homeless on our streets in preference to the individual

advocating for people with disabilities? An unenviable task.

But in the 2011 Australian of the Year we have, remarkably, a man who must have made the decision a little easier, because wrapped up in Simon McKeon is an element of all of these.

A prominent investment banker, Simon has an exhaustive CV. With degrees in Law and Commerce from the University of Melbourne, he practised as a solicitor in Sydney before joining Macquarie Group. He has achieved success in the corporate sphere, holds a world record for his sporting pursuits, and his advice is sought by governments and business alike. But Simon was not named Australian of the Year

for his investment in the business and financial sectors. Instead, it is his investment in the lives of those less fortunate through his work with multiple Australian and International charities that has earned him national recognition.

In 1994 Simon chose to move to a part time role with Macquarie, Melbourne to allow him time to support a range of causes and organisations while still in his most productive years. He has been quoted as saying that helping others goes beyond just donating money to a cause. It is about big business offering their skills, giving their time and becoming personally engaged to help those less fortunate. This could be quite challenging to many of us who find it easier to give money than time.

Simon admits that it is important to donate money to charity because without it the not-for-profit sector simply cannot survive. “But, for me, I have been taking every opportunity this year to extol the virtues of us as individuals also becoming personally involved. It might be one thing to write out a cheque, but it is quite another thing to become engaged in a way in which we directly and personally experience the challenges faced by parts of our society and to also experience the satisfaction, and indeed exhilaration, when some of these challenges are responded to by community organisations” he said.

“Playing a small part at the coalface is a very special experience which we won’t typically receive in our paid work environments. And ultimately, if we really want to be happy and have a good sense of wellbeing, surveys such as the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index have shown over many years that there is a much stronger correlation between happiness and volunteering than, say, happiness and being very wealthy.”

But when you are an individual with limited resources looking out at a world full of need it is easy to feel overwhelmed. How do you decide where to channel your energies so that you can make a difference?

“Choosing what to support is a very individual decision. This year I have not been encouraging people to support a particular cause, because I think this is something we should work out for ourselves based on what our interests are and what motivates us.”

“In my case, though, I find it quite difficult to answer this question.”

For as long as Simon can remember he has been interested in the developing world or, as we used to call it, the third world. “The idea of being able to radically transform lives and alleviate abject poverty is incredibly compelling to me. But closer to home I find myself supporting a range of other causes. Some have some relevance to me, like the disability movement because of my sister, and other causes, such as reaching out to our Aboriginal neighbours, just seem to me to be really important.”

Since being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis some years ago Simon has been determined to make every day count. Understandably the diagnosis encouraged him to support various organisations that assist people with MS. “I thought it would, in a way, force me to spend time understanding more about this condition as well as mix with people who may have lived with it for many years. And, in hindsight, that has been an excellent thing for me.”

As a Christian, his charitable and philanthropic activities have certainly been influenced by his faith. “There are many important aspects to the Christian message. But for me, faith without works simply makes no sense. Faith without works, to my mind, brings into question the very validity of what we believe in. And so whilst I think there is a symbiotic relationship between faith and works, I would go much further and say that the works side of it is not just a duty or something we ought to do out of obligation or a sense of guilt.

“Those of us who are blessed with options, with an ability to pick and choose how we spend some of our time and our money, can make choices to share ourselves and our things with the rest of the world. At the same time, we typically receive back a whole lot more than we ever give. So instead of it being a sacrifice, we can end up experiencing even more of the good things of the Kingdom.”

A few months into his term, does Simon McKeon know what he wants to achieve during his tenure as Australian of the Year?

“I have a wonderful opportunity to travel around this fabulous country and talk to hundreds of organisations because they have been nice enough to invite me!

“But seriously, I do have this very special opportunity to simply talk about the things that I find important. “

He is aware of the difficulties he faces directing his message about the importance of giving

to an audience of 20 million Australians, as opposed to advocating to government for a particular reform. He knows it will be difficult for him to measure precisely what he may have achieved over the 12 months.

“I do have a number of secondary messages which are more specific, such as increasing Australian overseas aid, the importance of a National Disability Insurance Scheme, encouraging the ultra rich to learn how to be generous, etc, etc. In each of these cases I’m merely joining a chorus of voices.

“Overall, however, I’m not particularly focused on what might be achieved by the end of this year. The reality is that I’m involved in causes that may take years and years to progress and hopefully I’m around for a little bit longer to keep my shoulder to the wheel!”

More than half way into his term, Simon McKeon is certainly meeting one key criteria of Australian of the Year – he makes us proud to be Australian.

Simon McKeon’s CV Highlights

2011 Australian of the Year

Executive Chairman, Macquarie Group Melbourne

Chairman, CSIRO

Chairman, Business for Millennium Development

Director, VisionFund, World Vision International

Director, Global Poverty Project

Big Issue Advisory Board Member

Board member, Red Dust Role Models

Australia Day Ambassador for the Victorian Government

Member of the Federal Government’s Human Rights Grants

Scheme Advisory Panel

Founding President of the Federal Government’s Australian Takeovers Panel

Founding Chair of MS Research Australia

Helmsman of Macquarie Innovation, which in March 2009 became the first sailboat in the world to sustain more than 50 knots, peaking at 54 knots (100 kmh)

Patron of the Australian Olympic Sailing Team which won 2 gold and 1 silver medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics

Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors

2011 ABF Australian Banking Ambassador of the Year

2010 Recipient of the John Studdy Award, MS’s highest honour



Making Choices:

learning how to engage the heart and the head

By Dr Janette Warwick, Director of Strategies for Stress in South Australia

There are many times during the course of a day when we have to stand at the crossroads and make a decision about something. Put simply, we have to decide whether we will say yes or no to the choices put before us.

What are some of these choices? On the home front, perhaps your spouse has asked you to do a particular task. Will you do it? Will you do it lovingly or grudgingly? Will you do it now or in your own time?

A single request may seem like such a little thing but in the broader context of whether we will have life and have it in abundance, the choice we make in response to the request may not be such a small thing. For example, are there little choices creating tension and conflict in your relationship that are quietly building up over time? Moreover, is your decision-making style flowing over into the workplace and affecting your ability to succeed?

What about some of the choices we make at work? A colleague makes a rash comment, steals a good idea, fails to complete a task in a timely manner or does a substandard job. Then we have to decide whether we will react, or choose how we respond. Do we deliver a polite response, but in our hearts a sliver of resentment quietly takes root? Do we rebuff the colleague for their poor attitude or performance, and essentially attempt to control their behaviour rather than our own actions?

Alternatively, do we stop and think about where the other person might be, what's happened during the course of their day or their week and instead think about what they need? In other

words, do we stop to think and respond with compassion and understanding rather than with a critical and judgemental attitude? In a nutshell, do we respond with a heart of love or anger?

The trouble is, as Christians, we want to respond with a heart of love but we haven't yet learned how. It really is as simple as that. We just haven't learned how to make the right choices and respond rather than react.

"...we want to respond
with a heart of love but we
haven't yet learned how..."

If I were to sum up the Bible I would say that our overarching aim as Christians is to learn how to make the right choices. In Genesis we see that

a single decision caused the fall. Then in 2 Chronicles, King Solomon asked for the ability to make wise decisions: "give me a discerning heart to know right from wrong". Again the same theme emerges in the New Testament where we are repeatedly encouraged to choose life.

To improve our ability to make decisions at work and home it's essential that we learn how to develop a "discerning heart". Here are some pointers.

- Be aware that Biblically based decision-making involves using both the heart (emotional skills) and discernment (thinking skills) to identify the right choices
- Develop the ability to sense or feel the difference between when a decision feels right and when a decision feels wrong
- Learn how to use your thinking skills and evaluate information thoroughly to make choices that feel right

- Be honest about your decision-making strengths and weaknesses. To learn, you first need to recognize and acknowledge that you have a need to learn
- Get into the habit of testing your decisions against Scripture. I consistently find that when a decision doesn't feel right, some element of the choice is not in keeping with Scripture
- Learn how to use Scripture correctly to help you grow in your decision-making skills. The Bible is an incredibly practical book for every area of life but it's vital that we learn how to use the Bible correctly as it can initially appear to be a difficult and even confronting text.

The thing that constantly amazes me about God is that whenever we take a small step in the right direction, such as making a commitment to developing a discerning heart, He is standing there ready to respond with an abundance of blessings. Take for example God's response to King Solomon. He was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom and in response he blessed him not only with wisdom but also with riches and honour. For example, King Solomon's reign was marked by 40 years of peace. I don't know about you but most people I know prefer the prospect of peace rather than frustration, conflict and grief. The same generous God is available to us today. The question before you now is, what is your next step in developing a discerning heart?

Dr Janette Warwick is a sought after author, speaker and trainer in problem solving and decision-making skills. She specialises in teaching people how to solve everyday problems and make decisions from a Christian viewpoint, to equip people with the core life skills that will enable them to genuinely resolve the stresses and tensions of life.

To find out more contact Janette at janettewarwick@optusnet.com.au or telephone 0431 584 567



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Why Volunteer?

By Mac Benoy, volunteer.

We tend to think of volunteering as an altruistic activity. We live in a world where we get paid to “work”. Money for work is the visible reward for giving our time and effort. While in a career spanning 40-odd years of 7 hours a day, 5 days a week on the job, we can only imagine that volunteering to “work” for no money must be a major sacrifice. Who in their right mind would spend precious spare time working for someone else? Surely volunteering is altruism of a high order.

Having volunteered almost fulltime for the past 7 years, I’ve realised that the reasons people volunteer are as complex as society itself. While it is pleasing to be called altruistic, I know there is no one correct view of volunteering. By its own definition, volunteering is a choice. People do not volunteer unless they feel some inner compulsion to do so. Without a compulsion to keep engaged, to freely give their time, surely ‘volunteers’ would simply walk away.

To understand why people choose to volunteer, a report for the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care is instructive. Carried out by Heartbeat, an Australian company that analyses consumer trends, it identified four categories of retired volunteers and their fulfilment needs:

- Nurturers are volunteers who seek emotional connection and self-worth through nurturing others. Quite often, their work directly results in strengthening the social resilience of our community. Footy dads and ballet mums help grow our youngest population. Volunteers working through their local church to support the elderly and socially isolated contribute to the health and well-being of a vulnerable group in our community.
- Socialisers gain a sense of belonging through social interaction. Many people who have recently retired soon realise that a large part of their social community evaporates the day they leave work. Thus, volunteering in a team is the reward that is more important than the civic responsibilities discharged by removing of graffiti from public places, or planting trees in a despoiled environment. I worked with a

7 day volunteer who was a socially isolated alcoholic before he discovered the therapeutic value of working as a valued member of a back-office team for a large humanitarian agency.

Typically, this is as far as most people will venture in explaining why volunteering attracts their fellow citizens. However, the study goes on to identify another two more prosaic types of volunteers:

- Adventurers are volunteers seeking personal growth and challenges by developing new skills. I have witnessed an IT professional become a sleuth in salvaging old weather data (for climate change analysis), an accountant plan the delivery of humanitarian services to a vulnerable group in the community and a project manager turn her hand to literacy programs in jail. Often, these are activities that if these people had applied to do them as paid jobs, their CV would not have made the first cut.
- Workers seek self-worth through being useful and productive. Volunteering is a recognised route back to work for the long term unemployed. Often starting out as reluctant volunteers, they may be required to work as part of their pension obligations. In many cases, they soon experience the self esteem engendered by meaningful and structured activity. Stay at home parents also reach out to volunteer when the ‘nest becomes empty’.

Beyond these four categories, there are other types of volunteers that fill out the complex tapestry of this unpaid workforce:

- Networkers build their contacts to support their career aspirations. This can include an upwardly mobile professional serving on a committee through to the underemployed providing blocks of time to do paid work for free. New migrants having difficulty being recognised for the skills they possess are a new class of networking volunteers. Stuck in a low a paid job beneath their qualifications

(or indeed, unemployed after many job applications), they hope to establish their credentials by offering their skills for no cost.

- Affinity volunteers gladly give their time to get further involved in an activity they find enjoyable. For instance, volunteering at the V8 Supercar race attracts motoring enthusiasts some of whom would bend over backwards to be close to the premier car racing event in our city.

There are also Reform volunteers who undertake community reform campaigns typically aimed at moving governments and social groups to take action for a cause. There are even Power volunteers who want to directly influence the lives of others. This can be as benign as search and rescue volunteers saving the lives of their fellow citizens. Finally there are compulsory volunteers, a contradictory outgrowth of government policy that requires the unemployed to volunteer 15 hours per week to qualify for government payments.

Volunteers give their time for a wide variety of reasons, but one factor unites them. Stripped of the pay cheque, volunteers typically experience the positive value of work in their daily lives. The element of choice in volunteering eliminates the fog of the employer-employee relationship forced on us by a pay cheque. Volunteers enjoy their work or they would not be there.

Interested in volunteering? Most community-based and humanitarian enterprises have volunteer positions. The larger of them have paid volunteer coordinators you can contact to talk about placements. Most Councils have volunteer programs as do a number of government departments, hospitals and schools. Online you can check out www.volunteering.org.au, www.volunteer.com.au, www.christianvolunteering.org and www.australianvolunteers.com.

For the past 7 years, Mac Benoy has reported to ‘work’ three days a week as a volunteer in two organisations. He is a vocal advocate for the benefits of volunteering to the recently retired. “Volunteers are valued workers like anyone else, they’re just on a different pay rate.”



Heart to Heart

Patrick

Meet Patrick Humphreys, an Anglicare SA volunteer who has a continuous drive and determination to help others, dedicating two days a week to help out at The Magdalene Centre. The 60-year-old has had his fair share of ups and downs in his lifetime and believes he is able to help and relate to others who are also going through a tough time.

"I volunteer because I'm trying to do something for myself and it's also a pleasure to do something for someone else," he said.

"Some people just come into the Magdalene Centre for conversation and they are often a bit stressed so it's nice to help them and give them some social interaction.

"It makes me happy to volunteer to the point that I would like to see more people do it. I'm there at least twice a week and I'm just over 60 years old. When I first started I was in a really bad state but the Magdalene Centre kept me centred and saw me through all the disappointments. I just wanted to give something back to them."

Each month the Magdalene Centre provides information, advocacy and practical crisis support to over 700 households through its Assistance Centre. The Magdalene Centre empowers people to develop essential life and social skills through its Community Programs and creates meaningful opportunities through its enterprise ventures. The Centre has 100 dedicated volunteers in addition to a small team of professional staff.

Patrick has been lending a hand at the Magdalene Centre since 2006 and says he can relate to what others are going through.

"It's rewarding to see how people from Anglicare SA help out as much as they do and it's great to be a part of it and help other people - I love it!" he said.

www.anglicare-sa.org.au

Betty

UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide (UCWPA) recognises how integral volunteers are to the services they provide. 62% of their 127 volunteers assist in community welfare programs and 33% help in aged care facilities. The remaining 5% provide general administration support at head office.



Clockwise from left: Patrick, Betty, Corrine and Tim, Happy Homes.

To UCWPA staff, Betty defines the meaning of the word 'volunteer'. A woman with an enormous heart, she has devoted an incredible 21 years to Kingston Supported Employment Services (KSES). Her involvement began at the very beginning when families and community members recognised a need for supported employment for those with a disability. Betty has been involved ever since.

"Betty is very important to us. She makes a huge difference to our service, assisting wherever and whenever she can. She keeps us real and is a much loved member of the team at Kingston" said co-ordinator Sue Chester.

"She keeps our feet grounded on difficult days and her bubbly personality provides great companionship for staff and supported employees. Betty is always busy. She provides assistance with business finances like account keeping, invoicing and banking and often serves customers in the shop front of Grandma's Pantry".

Like many volunteers, Betty has a personal reason for becoming involved in this particular cause. Both her sons have disabilities and one of them is a KSES supported employee.

"Like all of our volunteers, Betty puts the needs of others before her own self and has great belief in what she sets out to achieve" said Sue.

"I think KSES is a really important service for people with a disability in our community" said

Betty. "I want it to thrive. I try to make the staff feel treasured and seek to provide assistance in a way that makes their jobs a bit easier."

www.ucwpa.org.au

Corrine and Tim

by RISE journalist Kristen Theologou

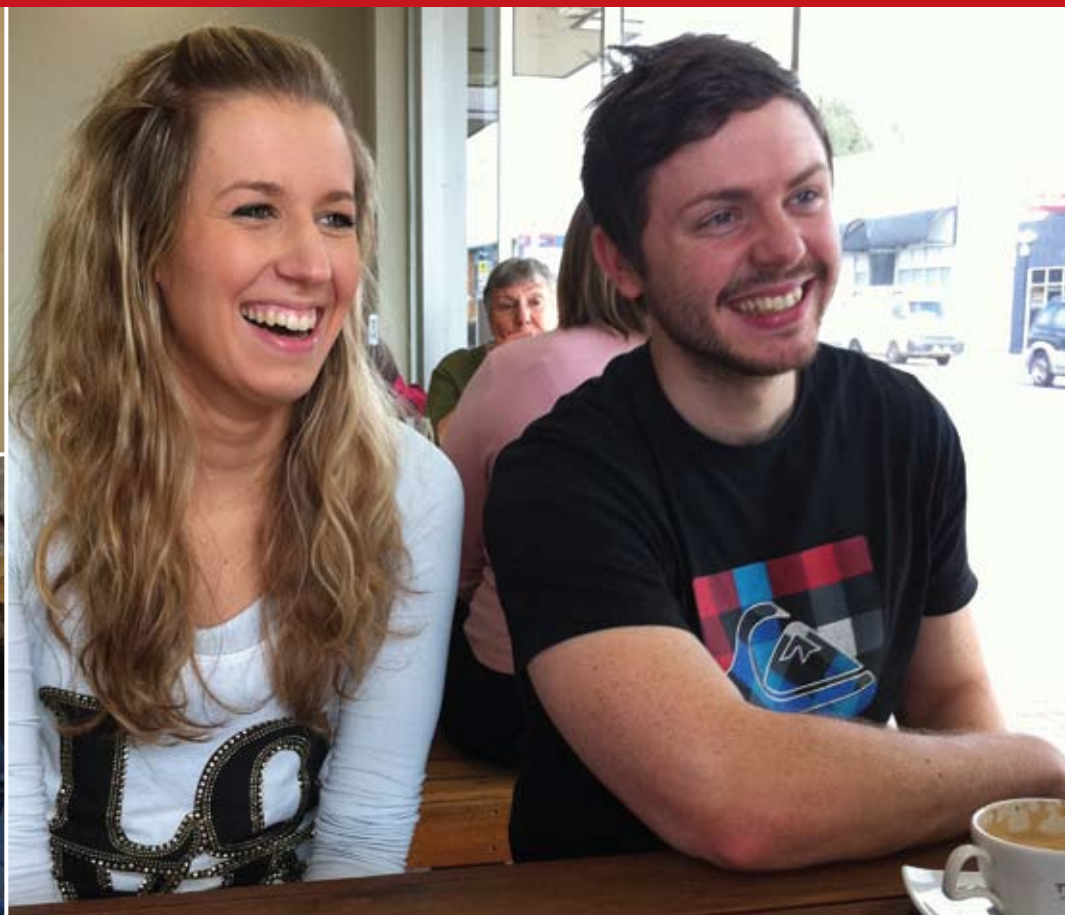
Team Leader with Vision

When Corinne Dickman met the State Director of Vision Generation and was offered a volunteer role with the organisation, it was the perfect opportunity to channel her passion and burden for social injustice, and actively be involved in improving the lives of others that feel powerless in their situations.

Corinne is the Team Leader of Vision Generation in South Australia and the Northern Territory, the youth movement of World Vision that aims to inspire, empower and educate young people, urging them to take action in their communities and create awareness and understanding about serious issues prevalent in our world. The movement aims to raise awareness about issues such as poverty, maternal and child health, and trafficking and exploitative labour in developing countries.

"I accepted the role because I am passionate about improving the lives of those who are in poverty. I am mostly passionate about those who are trafficked and forced to work in exploitative

The benefits of volunteering are felt by those who give their time, as well as those who receive a helping hand.



situations, so I saw this role as a way of making a contribution towards something I was passionate about."

In the time that Corinne has been involved in Vision Generation she has experienced both testing and challenges, as well as significant rewards. Contributing to such an important and pressing cause has allowed her to explore her own values, ideals and convictions, and be challenged in the way she actively shows love and commitment.

"[Jesus Christ] has called us to love our neighbours...and that love implies action. I can't love someone who is suffering if all I do is talk about their affliction. Love in action is what is key. Jesus taught me that, and has continued to teach me that throughout the challenges that volunteering brings. And Jesus not only taught us that through his words, but he lived it out."

Impacting Youth

Having been involved in youth leadership for over seven years, Tim Hawke is passionate about being able to facilitate a safe place where young people are encouraged and empowered in everyday life.

On reminiscing, Tim attributes his decision to take on a youth leadership role to the love and encouragement he himself found as a youngster at Youth Group. Having had people around him to invest in his life and support him as a family, Tim has not only seen the importance of a safe

environment for young people to explore and grow, but has personally experienced how life changing the love of Christ can be shown to him through leaders and peers.

"I found the people who spent time encouraging and loving me were an amazing support in my teenage life. I also found most of my role models in my teenage years through my youth group and the people I met."

Experiencing such a great impact on his life because of people in a volunteer role leads Tim to testify to the significance of people's actions that are motivated purely by passion and love, and the crucial part that relationships play in any kind of service. Now Youth Team Leader at Enfield Baptist Church, he continues to serve in this way as a response to the love that he has been shown, and continues to be impacted by the youth he now ministers to.

"By encouraging and caring for young people as Jesus did – I see they appreciate it and grow so much."

Happy Homes

Volunteer parent mentors play a vital role at Playford Secure Families, a new program run by Mission Australia that works with parents in Adelaide's north to provide homes in which children can thrive.

At free playgroups, parents receive help to respond to their children's needs and to build safe, nurturing relationships with them.

"Our volunteers come to us with a wealth of skills and life experiences that can assist families to create happy homes," said Alisa Willis, Operations Manager, Children and Families.

"They help parents take home and use the parenting information they've learned at playgroup. Parents respond well to volunteers as they are already part of the local community - it is just like having a really helpful neighbour."

Before the launch of Playford in September, volunteers said they were looking forward to making a difference: "I've had a fortunate life and want to give back," said Yvonne. "It's all about being friendly and building a stronger community."

Parents are also supported with a range of other issues such as income, health and relationships, and are connected with relevant services to help them build on what they learn through the program.

A Christian community service organisation, Mission Australia has been transforming the lives of Australians in need for more than 150 years and today operates over 550 community and employment services across Australia. Volunteers play an integral role in supporting the delivery of these services.

www.missionaustralia.com.au



Being Ambassadors for Christ in the Marketplace

By Geoff Kempster, Executive Director of CBMC International SA Inc.

CBMC is an international marketplace ministry in more than 80 countries and has been in Australia since 1950. "It started as a ministry to businessmen, however, as the world of business changed so has CBMC to become more inclusive."

The Mission of the CBMC Network is:

- To present Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord to business and professional people
- To develop Christian business and professional people to carry out the Great Commission
- To serve business and professional people as followers of Christ.

The CBMC Network is made up of

- Ministry Teams who meet regularly to pray for people by name and to develop opportunities to connect with these people, to serve them, and share the 'good news'.
- Business Groups where small groups of 6-8 who are involved in the marketplace in some way (business, education and government) and a facilitator meet monthly to discuss and learn new strategies to solve important issues. CBMC provides the resources, mentoring and the system to establish and run these groups in conjunction with Churches, organisations, businesses and groups of individuals.

Business Growth Groups offer:

- o **Counsel** - shared wisdom, giftedness and experience of likeminded people based on sound values and ethics
- o **Be Accountable** - gaining the courage to follow through on tough decisions and issues as they arise
- o **Mutual Support** - receiving and giving understanding, empathy and encouragement

- o **Confidentiality** - gaining trust and confidence in one another that comes with honesty and transparency in a confidential environment
- o **Business Tools** – resources, training and networking opportunities
- o **Gain Skills** – to more effectively interact interpersonally in the marketplace
- o **Grow** – personally, spiritually and professionally

- The South Australian Prayer Breakfast - a major state outreach event - is a core aspect of the CBMC ministry. "We invite a prominent business person, who is a Christian, to share their testimony of how faith in Christ has been an integral part of their business success.

People are then given an opportunity to indicate on a response card if they would like to know more. We encourage Christians to bring along their non-Christian friends to hear a business person speak in a friendly environment about the importance of faith in life and business."

What led Geoff to become involved in CBMC?
"As a Christian in business I was finding it increasingly difficult to function in a moral and ethical way when so many others around me had another agenda.

I needed to be around people who could reassure me and help guide me to be faithful to God in my business life. The support and encouragement from fellow travellers as well as the opportunity to grow in my faith has been an important part of my life since then. Importantly CBMC has given me the opportunity to share with others in the marketplace that there is a better way to operate in business and life."

Geoff believes we can all have an impact for

Christ in the marketplace and he encourages us with some advice on how we might do this.

"Be an Ambassador for Christ. People need to know who we represent, that we are not just 'good people'. God has blessed us with talents and abilities, not for ourselves alone but so that we can be a blessing to others. We are to share the 'good news' of what Christ has done in our life – His story intersecting our story.

"Be a Mentor. Come alongside of your workmates and peers, many of whom come from a dysfunctional family life, and care for them, develop an intentional relationship of trust and enable them to maximize the grace of God in their life.

"And be an Encourager. Catch people doing something right. Take them for a coffee and ask how they are, care about their needs and pains and give them words of encouragement. Compliment them. Offer to pray for them. There are far too few encouragers."

"He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Luke 10:2

South Australian businessman Geoff Kempster has been involved with CBMC International SA Inc for the past 18 years and Executive Director for the past 5. He is responsible for the oversight of the ministry in South Australia and heads up a small but dedicated team of volunteers responsible for the different aspects of the ministry.

Small Business Owners

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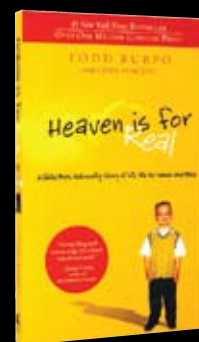
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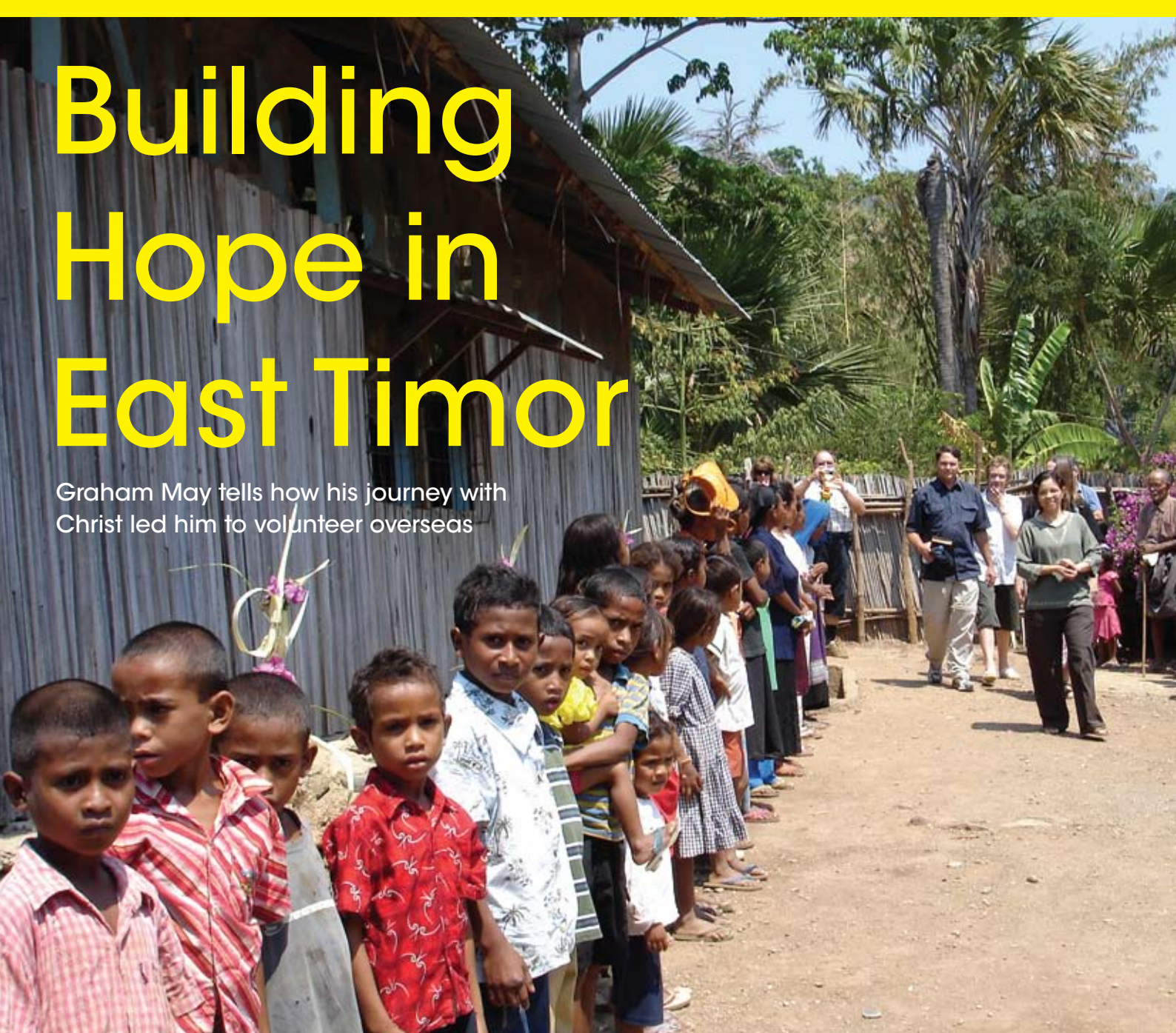
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Building Hope in East Timor

Graham May tells how his journey with Christ led him to volunteer overseas



On 12th August 2000 I married Coral. It may be a strange way to commence this revelation of my life, but it is most significant. I had been divorced and moved to Pt Augusta, South Australia to live. During that time I spent three months in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and got a taste of working in a mission field, and there were seeds sown in my mind of other things that could be done. When I got home and spoke of these ideas they “fell on stony ground.” That was disappointing to me.

About the same time I prayed for a “spiritual woman” in my life. I met Coral when she visited her son in Pt Augusta and it was several weeks after that that we had our first date. I met her after she attended a PraySA meeting – I thought it to be a curious combination at the time. However in meeting and then marrying Coral a great spiritual journey began because I soon was involved with Mission World Aid (MWA) which sends shipping containers of aid to what the UN calls ‘least developed countries’, and I became the aid administrator for a period of time.

In November 2002 Coral’s daughter Heather went to Melbourne to do a Discipleship Training Course through Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

and Coral and I went over to listen to the guest speaker. While in Melbourne I made an appointment with the CEO of Australian Relief and Mercy Services (ARMS) to see if Mission World Aid could be of assistance to them. I met the CEO who promptly told me he had double booked his appointments, but to talk to a lady called Soraya Nepomeceno. I began by explaining to Soraya what I thought was the purpose of the appointment and then Soraya told me her story. She had a list, she said, and described very passionately how she wanted to start up a pre school in East Timor. I asked if I could look at the list and after foraging around, she showed it to me. It was eight pages long.

Now you have to understand my background – I had spent a substantial amount of my working life as a building estimator and one continually analyses tradesmen’s and suppliers’ lists of materials to assess their accuracy.

As soon as I started to cast my eyes down the pages of listed items my first reaction was “she is organised.” The eight pages had ALL the items to equip a house – beds, linen, pillows, mattresses, cupboards, cutlery, crockery, stove, refrigerator, freezer, etc and then all the items for a pre

school. While the outcome from my visit to PNG had been disappointing, I knew then that this was “God’s appointment.” And, looking back, I can see now that the PNG disappointment prepared me for this “God’s appointment.”

In a flash I saw someone who had big dreams for God’s work and how I could be a small part of it, and my heart was singing. I looked at Soraya and said to myself “it isn’t going to be my fault that you don’t succeed.” But I contained myself and told her I needed approval from Jenny Hagger, the head of Mission World Aid, but I would do all I could to present a good case for her. So I got a copy of the list and brought it home with me.

Back at Stirling at Mission World Aid I related to Jenny my meeting with Soraya and her eight page list. Jenny listened and then told me that it was very difficult to fill a container with a “wish-list” and that it never had been done at Mission World Aid. I said I wanted to try and was given approval to go ahead for a 20 foot shipping container.

God had some more interesting things for me to learn. Do you believe in the power of prayer? Just from the experiences I am about to relate, I do, TOTALLY, ABSOLUTELY.



Part of the list was double bunk beds for the orphans of the war and I drew the drawings, took off the quantities of timber required and prayed that some timber merchants that I knew would supply the timber. One timber merchant donated half of the timber and another supplied the other half at a discounted rate. The timber was delivered to our home. Coral and family friends Delma and Doug and I cut up the timber as required, assembled it and then disassembled it ready for the shipping container, all under our pergola.

As the materials were being collected for the container I came to the realisation that a forty foot container was required. So early one morning when Jenny came to the Mission World Aid shed I told her this news.

"No, Graham" she said "It is only a twenty foot container" and as she was walking away added "unless you find the money for a forty foot container."

Well, when the volunteer workers stopped for morning tea at 10.30 am, we prayed that God would provide the money for a forty foot container, as it was for God's work in East Timor. Later on that morning, at 11.30 am to be precise,

a local man pulled up in his Land Cruiser and came over to me and asked what we did here. I explained the work of Mission World Aid, found out that he was a builder's son like I was, and showed him around our site. After viewing all that we did he asked what our greatest need was. As we had only just prayed an hour previously I said "to upgrade from a twenty foot container to a forty foot container for a pre-school in East Timor."

He went out to his Land Cruiser and came back with a cheque for AU\$2,000.00. I thanked him for his generous gift – that extra seed of money has been an untold blessing for Kids Ark Ministry many, many times over.

As an aid administrator you arrange the goods that are going into a container, correspond with the recipients and ensure its delivery to them, and with a country just coming out of war, in famine or a combination of disasters, we, in Western society, just don't have a fleeting thought of these sorts of circumstances. After receiving a container, we at MWA get at best, generally a two page "thank you for the container" and that is okay, but you are left wondering what did really happen.

So, as I made arrangements for the delivery of the container to East Timor I broached the subject with Coral and pointed out that East Timor was just above Darwin. It was a huge opportunity to see what really happens when a container is opened by its recipients.

Suddenly we were going to East Timor to coincide with the container's delivery, and staying at Soraya's rented house in Dili. Oh! What an adventure!!!

Soraya is Brazilian, and I think she organised half of the Brazilian community in East Timor to help unload the container. Initially we were told it would take four days to unload a forty foot container. We unloaded it in a day!!!

It was bedlam at Soraya's house, and it took a fortnight to tidy things up but the joy of having everything there overcame any difficulties in the ensuing days. During that time Soraya, with prayer, had decided to investigate opening the pre-school at Hera, a village on the other side of the mountains 16 kilometres from Dili. She made an appointment to see the village chief to get his approval and blessing for it. After that she arranged for the rental of a small six roomed house as her residence and pre-school and this is where she started with 20 five to six year old children. The only schooling at that time was primary school which commenced at age seven, and even today the pre-schools are non-government and privately funded.

This initial visit, seeing the embryo stage of Soraya's vision unfolding, cemented our working relationship and my desire to assist wherever possible to support God's work with her, and we have used our building skills to provide the facilities that most benefited her ministry.

I came back to Australia bubbling with enthusiasm and telling all that would listen to me "Come with me to East Timor, and see how 'mission' can infiltrate the inner most depths of your heart, and how 'mission' can change people's lives over there."

Initially four couples responded, and the East Timor Building Group was founded. In 2004 twelve volunteers came and we built a classroom at Sidara. Another Brazilian, Branca Lopes, a clinical nurse joined Soraya, and they continued to lay the foundation of God's word in the community's hearts. In 2005 work on the Hera Pre School commenced and was built with voluntary labour with a donation of AU\$78,000.00. Next a fence around the school grounds, then a playground was built, and 3 more classrooms added to the facility where now 100 children are attending up to grade 3 primary school.

“In a flash I saw someone who had big dreams for God's work and how I could be a small part of it”

In 2004 Sidara, where 48 families live, was animistic - today they have a thriving on-fire Christian church of a regular 100 strong congregation, with over 30 people baptized, a medical clinic, a birthing clinic and a vegetable garden. All the newly born village children are given birth certificates and are inoculated against childhood diseases - the first village in East Timor to achieve this.

In 2005 our group was formalised and we registered Help And Nurture Developing Societies (HANDS) Incorporated as a Christian interdenominational aid organisation and in 2010 we sent a shipping container loaded with desks for the expanded school as well as materials for a disability clinic – nearly ten tonnes of goods worth AU\$25,000.00.

We are truly nurturing this small part of East Timor, and are focused on showing the love of Jesus. We pray that the children will grow up with Christ in their hearts and be better educated to see how they can develop their own society for themselves and their community.

Soraya's vision to serve her Lord continues to bear fruit.

Brothers and sisters, believe God's Word: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

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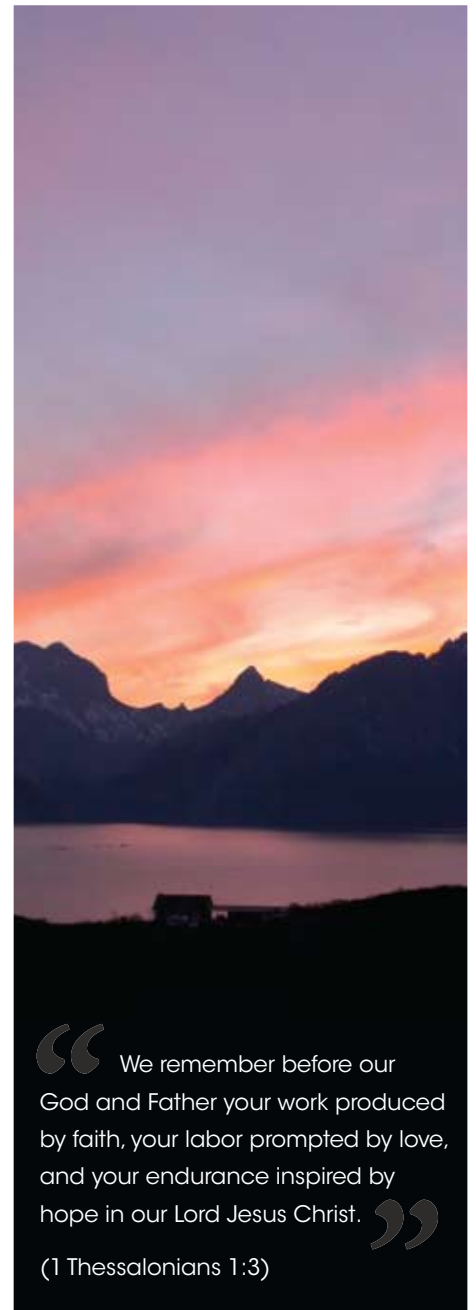
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