

# InterSections



## Editorial

To live in Australia is to live in one of the most culturally diverse nations on earth. This diversity enriches our society, but it also comes with many challenges for everyone. The same is true for the church. Culture is something that shapes every one of us, from the big things in our lives to even the most mundane—yet it usually goes unexamined. It's not until there is a conflict that we pay attention, and then we often lack the tools for navigating these differences effectively. How can we be a united body when we are all so different?

To help us grapple with this issue, we asked some churches around Australia to write about their experiences with cultural diversity. How have different cultural perspectives changed their churches, and how has the church changed their understanding of their culture? Also, Gill Raine tells us about the diversity among students at South Pacific Bible College, and what staff and students alike are learning from that. In our *Feature*, Benny Tabalujan asks the question, what is culture and what role should it play in our churches? Also, Christian & Noraine Bargholz together review *'Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church'* by Mark DeYmaz, a case study on what it takes to build a church community from different backgrounds.

We interview Karen Lam, from the Metro church in Adelaide, a former Rehab Physician. Our *International Letter* is from Charles & Darlene Coulston who helped establish Made in the Streets, an outreach programme for street kids in Nairobi, Kenya. And in the *News*, we hear about interns from Oklahoma Christian University at Coffs Harbour, and the latest Klesis Bible Program in Melbourne, Victoria.

We hope you find this issue uplifting as we all work together for God's glory.



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## ChurchScope - Cultural Diversity in the Church



### Cultural Diversity in Coffs Harbour, NSW

Coffs Harbour is a regional reception centre for African refugees. They arrive here first and then may settle here or the government may move them to other areas in Australia with greater employment opportunities. In the Coffs Coast Church of Christ we currently have people from The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Somalia.

Our African brothers and sisters are separated by different African languages but we joyfully sing together in both Swahili and English, translating these languages into one common musical experience. This requires more thinking about our song services. In African music, there is more of a rhythmical structure rather than the harmonic structure familiar in English worship. That's alright—it just means that we might have to learn a bit of rap, or at least how to clap in time with the ever-changing beat of African musical worship. No longer do we only think of the European harmonic scale, but now we are also learning the beauty of 'blue notes' and 'rhythmic infusions.'

We thus find diversity to be a great communication challenge, but an even greater cultural opportunity—a wonderful learning experience for everybody. It means that Bible classes must be given extra thought. How should we phrase things so that one common idea is achieved at the end of the lesson? While that takes extra time, true communication is essential for different levels in various cultural settings.

### Subscriptions

*InterSections* is available free in PDF format or at AUD\$27.50 (incl GST) per year for 4 print issues.

### Past Issues

Past issues of *InterSections* are available at:  
[www.klesis.com.au/InterSections.html](http://www.klesis.com.au/InterSections.html)

Top photo: Coffs church children with Brenner Buxton, OCU intern. Coffs Coast Church, NSW.

Side photo: Karen Lam, Metro Church, Adelaide, SA.

We have also found that even simple fellowship can be an area for growth. We now visit African homes and experience their concerns—thus gaining an insight into living a more positive, universal sense of brotherhood. We've found that it takes time to learn how to visit people. For example, in respect of food, we've learnt to eat rice and also semolina, and how to eat with just our right hand (though soup still baffles me). With my hands, more things are becoming a physical challenge and I tend to drip a bit more than I used to do. But now I just buy more multi-coloured shirts than before—so you can't see the stains as readily. It's all a challenge and a blessing. Praise the Lord for real diversification at the one and only, real church! □

*Marvin Ancell, Coffs Coast Church of Christ, Coffs Harbour, NSW. [lancell50@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lancell50@optusnet.com.au)*

### Eastside Church of Christ, Sydney, NSW

I came to Australia in 2013 from the Philippines to study. I chose Australia because of the existence of a sound church and many Christ followers whom I can join in serving God and who will encourage me to keep my faith. Since coming to Australia, I have learned that culture can influence our beliefs, but our faith in God can also change our views customs and social behaviour. Here, I share how Filipino culture informs a Christian's view of the church and also how the church influences our view of our own culture.

Some notable Filipino cultural traits include being respectful, helpful and cooperative, having a strong work ethic, being hospitable and caring, having strong family ties and a deep faith. Some of these are also traits that should be possessed by followers of Christ. Filipinos generally respect their teachers, preachers and elders in the church. Christians are taught to be helpful and cooperative in upholding the truth taught by the teachers and to maintain the unity of God's Word (Titus 2:1—5). Filipinos also respect their parents; this happens to be a command from God with a promise (Ephesians 6:1—3). We also respect the church by our actions in worship—for example, many Filipinos wear their best clothes on Sundays.

Meanwhile, because our culture of strong family ties, Filipinos tend to view the church as a family, often over several generations. If a parent is part of the church, it is more likely that the whole family will eventually be converted because of strong family ties. Families usually go to worship and pray together because for most Filipinos religion is important and creates a strong bond.

Hospitality is one of the most popular qualities of Filipinos. Foreigners who have visited the Philippines often find

themselves falling in love with our warm hospitality. We will offer our bedrooms and are willing to sleep on the floor for our visitors. We will invite visitors to join our meal even if there may not be enough for us. No wonder that most Filipino Christians in Australia are known for their hospitality—also a Christian attribute.

On the other hand, the Word of God also teaches us how we are to evaluate and deal with our culture. For some Filipinos from other religious backgrounds, when they obey the Gospel they are moulded by the Word and this can change their view of their own culture. Some have to sacrifice strong family bonds and embrace a new spiritual family—the Church. As Jesus said, 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.' (Matthew 10:37)

*Pakikisama* is another distinguishing custom of Filipinos. It's the ability to mingle with people from different backgrounds. This means Filipinos are generally adaptable and enjoy cultural diversity. In my case, I have a better understanding and learned how to embrace other cultures when I came to Australia—a multicultural country. In fact, my home church in the Philippines does not have to deal with cultural diversity to the level that we have here in Australia—because we have a different migration situation there.

In summary, as part of the Eastside church in Sydney, with fellow Christians from different backgrounds with different cultures, I have learned that this is another way or opportunity to encourage each other. □

*Jay Sabio is from the Philippines and is part of the Eastside Church of Christ in Sydney. [jskitsabio@yahoo.com.ph](mailto:jskitsabio@yahoo.com.ph)*

### Malaga Church of Christ, Perth, WA

The church at Malaga has over 180 members from 25 different nationalities worshipping God together as one. People get very excited when they read that statement or visit our church full of people from all over the world. It is exciting! However, it can also be mutually challenging for each of us.

Our diverse membership encourages us to examine ourselves and reassess the cultural norms we've inherited. Think about loving one another as Christ loved us—after all, Jesus in one sense comes from a different culture to our own. How did he interact with people different to his own social world? How do I best love my neighbour? What if 'loving as I would want to be loved' doesn't feel loving to a sister from another culture? It's a challenge for every member of our culturally diverse family?

The challenges and the blessings are too complex to cover adequately here. One example of a blessing will have to suffice. We have spent some time over the last few years giving away free Bibles at various local markets. This gives us a chance to share, literally, God's Word, and also to get to know people in our local community. In these situations, members from various backgrounds volunteer to help. It's wonderful to see the diversity of the wider community reflected in the church. At these markets, we're able to connect and communicate with a wide variety of people because of the diversity we have been blessed with.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.*  
Galatians 3:28 □

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Fiji & Kiwi enjoying the International Dinner Night



Three cultures in fellowship together



Students in the Christian Worship Class

# Food for Thought

## Embracing Diversity: The Multi-Cultural Face of South Pacific Bible College



I walk into the SPBC student kitchen and it smells—not in a good way (to my Western nose). When I say, 'Be ready for devotional at 8:25 am,' I mean 8:25, not 8:45 (on my Western timeline). When I ask a question I just want a straight answer, a yes or no (it's a simple thing, to my Western way of answering). Answer the exam question in a linear way so than I can get to the answer unhindered (in my Western linear way of thinking).

A multicultural classroom brings more ways to see things differently. Sometimes these things make us laugh and enjoy each other's differences; sometimes they bring a little frustration from both sides.

Although we all have one faith in the same God, culture gives us different lenses to look through and see him as his Spirit works in our lives, moulding and shaping to get us looking more like we should and less like we do now.

Matthew 21:28—31 proved an interesting discussion between cultures in the classroom one day. Which son obeyed his Father? The one who honoured him publicly by saying yes but never actually obeyed his Father's request, or the one who publicly dishonoured his Father but relented and obeyed later? To our culture, whether the work gets done is what matters. To many other cultures, shame and honour are far more important. Examples like these are wonderful ways to discuss what God is saying to us as we love each other and stretch our minds to search for truth regardless of the cultural lenses we wear.

This year we have students from many cultures all seeking to know God and be transformed by the inspiration of his Word and the strength of his love. Countries represented at the South Pacific Bible College this year are Australia, China, Fiji, Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. A mini glimpse of heaven if you ask us!

We love the family this creates as teachers, staff, and students mix, chat, laugh, and sometimes cry together. The words, 'one Lord, one faith and one baptism' come to my mind as I see God's plan for his family. As staff we feel privileged to see the array of God-given gifts our students have, and to see them use these as opportunities are presented.

Yes, the good works God has planned for us are certainly alive and well in our student body. To see Australians and Fijians working together in the low socio-economic area of town with a group of hungry kids, or to see Filipinos and Chinese singing together to residents in our old folks' home, to hear our young men start to teach—all these things are a glimpse of the multicultural face of SPBC, but even more so of God's plan for his people, no matter where they originate from.

If you are familiar with the idea of hot and cold climate cultures (cold climate cultures are task oriented, like New Zealand and Australia; hot climate cultures are relationship based, like Thailand, Fiji, Philippines, etc) then some of the quotes below from our students will help you understand the joys and difficulties as we try, above all, to love each other and serve alongside one another.

I asked our students 'what is the hardest thing about being in New Zealand?' and some responses went like this:

- 'They don't show respect to their elders';
- 'People in New Zealand like to say directly but in my culture they try to care about the words they use and the person they talk to';
- 'The food and the sarcasm.'

When I asked how being in a multicultural environment affects your view of God the answers were wonderful:

- 'Being in a different culture makes you understand that the core is the same but how we think of God and do Christianity, is quite different,' and
- 'It is a challenge to listen to God's plan... I know God will not leave me alone.'

Unanimously, the students said SPBC helps them, encourages them, and is very understanding in assisting with adjustments across different cultures. Through all the challenges, from all sides of the cultural field, we strive to love and be patient with each other, learning from one another and caring for each other as Jesus loves each of us.

*'Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.'* Ephesians 4:1—6 □

# International Letter



'Good on You'

by Charles & Darlene Coulston, Nairobi, Kenya

Charles and Darlene are American missionaries who helped establish Made in the Streets ([www.madeinthestreets.org](http://www.madeinthestreets.org)) in 1995. MITS runs a shelter, dormitory and training centre for dozens of street kids in the slums near Eastfield in Nairobi, Kenya. In March—April 2017 the Coulstons visited Australia and shared about their ministry with MITS to churches in Melbourne and Coffs Harbour.

Of all the new expressions we learned in Australia, our favorite is 'Good on you!'—and we want to say that to the Belmore Road Church in Melbourne and to the folks in Christ we met at the Coffs Church in Coffs Harbour. Our visit to Australia was truly good—blessed by Alan and Debby Rowley's love, accepted and listened to by the Belmore Road congregation and our new friends at Coffs Harbour, and thrilled by the beauty of both city and coast.

One of our greatest pleasures was the way Belmore Road handled the auction of donations at their annual church camp—such great fun, such obvious love and care for one another, and the blessing of a nice gift to Made in the Streets. Another highlight was dinner out at a restaurant on the river with the Coffs Harbour participants—heavy rainfall and excellent conversation! This rich fellowship gives the Australian Churches of Christ resources to change the lives of Australians. It is our prayer that you will all 'make it count' for Christ.

As Australian Christians look for ways to serve in the world, we see many ways that you can help MITS continue serving the street kids of Nairobi. You can visit us in Kenya at almost any time of the year. Most of the 50+ visitors who visit MITS annually come in May, June, and July; but other months are open since we develop and run our own schedule. We have plenty of guest housing for a large group or a family or an individual.

We love having people visit MITS who have specific skills and job experience. They have much to teach our team of teachers and supervisors, who can then pass it on to our students. A group can do many different things: lead a camp with a special focus (sports or reading or math or problem-solving, etc); add something new to our training classes (maths, computers, Bible, English, science, woodworking, catering, auto mechanics, hairdressing, jewelry and crafts); do a work project (paint some walls, refurbish the playground, improve the child care centre, landscape the site); or lead a workshop for graduates in anything that helps them live a better life.

There are also ways to serve from afar. We want each student at MITS to have a sponsor, someone who loves them from afar without ever knowing them, someone who prays for them by name every day. Sponsorships are US\$75 monthly, which covers about 50% of each student's cost. We also love for people to write emails or letters to the students; they have come from the streets and some have never known mail! And, of course, we always need general funding for the street ministry and for continuing the connection to our graduates.

We believe that when you visit us, you will become deeply aware of the problems of children in the modern world, and you will want to stand with Jesus at the giving edge of human need. Nairobi's street kids have a way of getting into the heart and changing us. How richly blessed are those who are born into a country like Australia with freedom and prosperity! And how easy it is to become a rich blessing to others, when we put our hearts in it.

Thank you, fellow-believers in Australia, for the blessing you have been to us—and the blessing your prayer is to our students at MITS. □

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**InterSections** is a quarterly journal designed to inform, inspire and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s). Advertisements in *InterSections* are broadly consistent with the ethos and goals of the journal; however, they do not necessarily constitute endorsement by the journal. *InterSections* is published by Klesis Institute (© Klesis Institute, 2017). Copyright permission is given to anyone wishing to reproduce an individual article for non-commercial purposes, as long as due attribution is given to the author and *InterSections*. Klesis Institute is a division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

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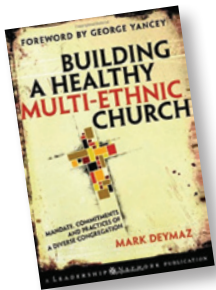
Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox [igekko.com.au](http://igekko.com.au)

Publisher: Klesis Institute [www.klesis.com.au](http://www.klesis.com.au)

Email: [info@klesis.com.au](mailto:info@klesis.com.au) Fax: +61 3 8677 9575

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# Book Review

## 'Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church'

Mark DeYmaz, (Jossey-Bass, 2007)



The world we live in today is experiencing, simultaneously, two forces of change and influence of opposing effect. On the one hand, multiculturalism has been the dominant cultural and social development in the Western world for the better part of the last century. Multiculturalism is the movement of different peoples from all over the globe coming together to form a new, heterogeneous group of people, pluralistic in culture, background and ethnicity, all coexisting together.

On the other hand, and in tragic irony, racism continues to rear its head. As cultures come together through the movement of people across borders, tensions between races often don't decrease with greater proximity. Instead, they increase. The old problems of the old world remain as the new problems of the new world.

And so, as society, culture, and ethnicity have all grown (geographically) closer together, people may be pushed further away from each other. As we move closer together, we grow further apart. It is in such a world that the church of the twenty-first century has to function.

*Building a Healthy, Multi-Ethnic Church* is a book written about a church planted in Little Rock, Arkansas. The church is called 'Mosaic' by the book's author, Mark DeYmaz. It tells the story and experiences of DeYmaz in planting a multi-ethnic, economically diverse church in an area some say is infamous for racism and segregation.

More importantly, the book is an expression of DeYmaz's conviction that the church, if it is to be successful in its mission today, will have to be intentional in its vision to be a church for *all* people. It must be a church that reflects both a people reconciled to Christ, and a people united together not in spite of their differences but in recognition of, and with respect for, those differences.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, over three chapters, deals with the biblical mandate for diversity within the church. DeYmaz first cites Jesus' prayer in John 17, where the only thing Jesus asks of the Father for future disciples is that they '*be one... that they may be perfected in unity*'. For what purpose? '*... so that the world may believe that you sent me*' (John 17:22—23). Second, DeYmaz cites the example of the church at Antioch, where the church leadership was multi-ethnic (Acts 13 in several places mentions the ethnicity of the leaders). It was the church at Antioch which sent out Barnabas and Paul to evangelise the world.

Finally, the author cites Paul who explained the mystery of the Gospel—that both Jews and Gentiles are '*fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel*' (Ephesians 3:6). It was God's plan that the church be multi-ethnic. When outsiders see a truly diverse congregation living in unity because of a deep love for God and one another, they'll know they've stumbled across something truly special—so special it can only be from God.

The second section, covering chapters 4—6, draws on the author's own experience in establishing a multi-ethnic congregation. He outlines seven necessary core commitments:

1. **Embracing dependence** on God, not relying on ourselves or our business plans and programs to make the church successful.
2. **Taking intentional steps** to embrace cultural diversity within the church and to promote the spirit of unity within the body.
3. **Empowering diverse leadership** so all ethnic groups feel they are represented.

4. **Developing cross-cultural relationships** through activities outside church services to grow closer together, and to help eliminate tension and division.
5. **Pursuing cross-cultural competence**, ie. becoming more culturally sensitive and attuned.
6. **Promoting a spirit of inclusion.**
7. **Mobilising for impact** by preparing for the influence of the church's unity in diversity on the local community.

The third section offers examples of, and advice from, three congregations that have taken the path to diversity. The first is an intentionally-planted multi-ethnic church, the second is a revitalised church that had been in decline, and the third is a church that was transformed from being a homogeneous church.

On the surface, it would appear the book is not necessarily useful in the Australian context. There isn't a noticeable racial divide within our fellowship in this country. The situation may have been different one hundred or even fifty years ago. Australia was a different country then, with the White Australia policy not officially ending until the Whitlam government in 1973. And, as one American Christian living in Australia said when we told her we were reviewing this book, 'The church here is too small to have the sort of racial divide seen in America.'

Even if we assume that our churches are cultural melting pots, how deep is the unity in our congregations across cultural lines? Have we made a conscious effort to promote such unity? This is where we believe the book has something to offer us. Looking at another measure of diversity—the economic one—it would appear that our congregations are pretty homogeneous. How many of our churches include people who live on the fringes of society, perhaps in hostels or refuges? Perhaps our churches are limited by our suburban settings, but this shouldn't stop us from seeking out, helping and welcoming the needy.

In all this, the DeYmaz is to be commended for not falling into the trap that many fall into: misidentifying the real problem and its solution. As DeYmaz states from the outset, the real problem is not racism in institutions or people, but sin in the human heart. Correspondingly, the real solution is not racial reconciliation offered by governmental programs or more education, but reconciliation between man and God offered by and through Jesus Christ and his death on the Cross.

It is because of that Cross that the church can truly be united in diversity: a shining beacon on a hill, an example to a multicultural world where tensions are higher, where divides grow bigger, and where people become more unyielding in opinion, and hard of heart. In a world like ours, what better way to show the path to real unity and reconciliation than being a multi-ethnic church—whose spectrum of members are all cherished, loved, and forgiven—worshipping their Creator together. □





# Feature

## Christ, Culture and Church - some reflections

How would Jesus Christ view human culture—that amalgam of habits and beliefs, ways of thinking and doing, everything from worldviews to food, art, and music—which characterise different ethnic groups? Would Jesus endorse multiculturalism? Does Christianity call for the creation of a super-culture which dominates other cultures? Or is the Christian faith merely a small sub-culture of an increasingly diverse and globalised world? And how does all this affect the church?

These questions have taxed the people of God for millennia. In the Old Testament, a key challenge for the Israelites was how to keep themselves a holy, set-apart people in the midst of the polytheistic and often immoral Ancient Near East cultures. In the New Testament, the early church struggled with its identity. Was it a sect of Judaism like the Pharisees? Should Jew and Gentile be treated alike in the church? What about class distinctions and socio-economic status—so important in Greco-Roman culture? What did Paul mean when he wrote that, for Christians, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek... slave nor free... male and female... for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28)?

Today, the view we Christians have towards culture has a significant impact on our individual practice of discipleship and our corporate life as a church. As H. Richard Niebuhr surmised in his classic work, *Christ and Culture*, whether God's people oppose, agree with or seek to transform our surrounding culture determines, to a large extent, our engagement with, tolerance of, and separation from the world. In turn, this has an impact on which movies we watch, what festivals and traditions we celebrate, whom we marry, and how our churches function. Whilst the question of how God perceives human culture is complex, there are some hints from Scripture which can help guide how Christians can view culture. Let me outline four pointers which I have found to be helpful.

First, we should acknowledge that God is the ultimate creator of culture. When God gave Adam and Eve the mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28), that would include a commission to fill the world with culture. Where humans went wrong was when we rebelled against God (Genesis 3). From then on, whatever culture humans created was tainted with sin, so much so that even the object of our architecture became perverse (Genesis 11).

Second, even though human culture is now tainted by sin, living within such a culture does not necessarily make us sinful. Jesus was born a Jew and spent more than three decades among Jewish communities within a Greco-Roman world. Yet Jesus lived a sinless life in what was a sin-stained culture.

Third, whilst Jesus lived within his cultural context, he also challenged it. During the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7), he taught new values fitting for a new kingdom: values of love, holiness, justice, and grace. On various occasions, he questioned the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Roman authorities of the day. He lived in his culture, but he was also willing to question and challenge it.

Fourth, it appears Jesus ultimately sought to redeem culture. He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mark 1:15). Yet his kingdom was not designed to destroy humanity (as did Noah's flood) as much as to transform it by redeeming it. His apostles proclaimed a new Lord and Saviour (a new king), a new way of seeing things (kingdom perspective), a new way of dealing with people and problems (kingdom ethics) and a new ending—which is actually a bright new beginning (kingdom glory). And that glory includes the glory

of the nations—seemingly in the splendour of their respective cultures, now made holy—paying homage to God (Rev. 21:24–26).

For me, these four pointers from Scripture help shape my view of contemporary culture today—inside and outside the church. As a migrant from Asia who has spent more of his life in Australia than anywhere else, I'm generally grateful for the welcoming and generous Australian culture. At the same time, there are aspects of our contemporary Western culture—including low moral standards in some areas and excessive consumerism and individualism in others—which run contrary to Jesus' kingdom values. This creates tensions which I must navigate when making daily decisions as a disciple.

Similarly, being part of a multi-ethnic church in suburban Melbourne exposes me to more than a dozen international cultures. From what I observe, each culture has its strengths and weaknesses. Some cultures are better in some things—like Australian culture and its emphasis on sport. Other cultures which emphasise community and family can have a tendency to descend into tribalism and nepotism. Godly wisdom helps us to discern which aspects of our ethnic culture we should ameliorate for kingdom glory.

In sum, one key challenge for a Christian is to evaluate all cultural norms critically from the perspective of Jesus' kingdom. Aspects of culture which appear to run contrary to kingdom values should be questioned and, if need be, forsaken. In this way, as salt and light we preserve the good and dispel the evil in culture, becoming a redeemed people who gradually transform the world. Meanwhile, we await Jesus' return, faithfully living out that delicate calling of being in the world, yet not being part of it (John 15:19). □

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## OCU Interns at Coffs Harbour, NSW

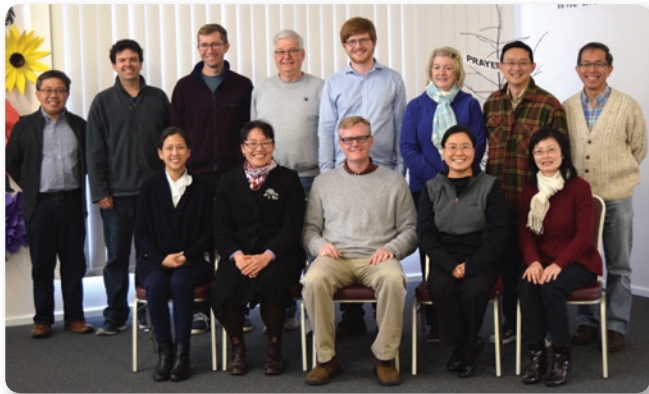
goal was to have Tess and Brenna help us with lots of youth activities, including mentoring students in their school subjects, participating in devotionals, and engaging in simple visitation and friendship.

All this has been embraced joyfully and it has produced a result far beyond our expectations. Tess and Brenna have adjusted well and they have worked as hard as could be expected. They were with us for only six weeks, but their work is worth much more. Good planning and communication are required to produce fruit that is commensurate with our expectations. These young people who come to us as interns are not relief workers for older church members as such. Instead, they showed us that they are Christians with a hope and a zeal that just naturally abound as they undertake more and more good projects. □

Marvin Ancell, Coffs Coast Church of Christ, NSW

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Tess Brunkhardt  
& Brenna Buxton



## Klesis Bible Program, Melbourne, VIC

This modular Bible program which began in 2014 caters for those who are interested in taking a Bible study program on a part-time basis. Through this program I have met many students with a similar desire to study the Bible. Each module attracts between 12—16 participants. They come from different congregations. Each student brings with them their unique experiences and challenges. It has been a joy to be able to study together, helping us become better and more faithful stewards of God in our home congregations.

The fifth KBP module—on Advanced Bible Study Methods or Hermeneutics—held in Melbourne from 19—24 June 2017 was very helpful for my personal Bible study. In the beginning, I was overwhelmed by different terminologies and the subject itself. But it's better to learn from Christian teachers like Dr Tim Westbrook from Harding University who taught the module, rather than from other sources who may mislead or cast doubt on the inspired Word of God.

Attending this program has helped me to meditate on God's Word in greater depth. It has strengthened my beliefs and taught me to handle Scripture more faithfully—whilst continually examining what I have learned with humility and sincerity. This has also enriched my relationship with God and has taught me the importance of conveying clearly God's message to those whom I have the privilege of sharing the Gospel.

I strongly believe a program like the KBP is not only helpful but essential to equip fellow Christians, especially those from smaller congregations who cannot afford to have full-time minister(s). Therefore, such a Bible program can help equip Christians to take on a more active role in teaching, preaching and ministering in their local church on part-time basis. □

Kenneth Gong, Seremban Church of Christ, Malaysia

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## Interview - continued

than hire someone else to look after them, I felt it was important I do this myself and spend time with them.

Children are God's gifts to us and I believe it was important—along with Earl—to be the right guide and teacher for our children, setting a good example on how to follow God's Word. One of the greatest opportunities for us to teach God's Word and the ways of the Lord is within our own family. Also, on a practical note, it was also not easy to skip days from work, and with three children taking in turns getting sick it was hard to find last minute carers for them as well as arrange someone to cover for me at work.

### What advice about careers would you give to younger Christian women today?

This is a hard question but there are probably a few factors I can think of. First, I would say consider your talents, capabilities, and interests which God gave to you. Everyone is different and has different skills and so are suited for different jobs. Second, a good solid education is always helpful. So, do complete school—and tertiary studies if that is suited to you. Third, when considering a career, you should look at its security and chances of employment. Fourth, consider how flexible the working hours would be (such as the option for part time work or the chances of having to work on call or on the weekend). This was important to me when I chose my specialty as I knew that one day I would have to balance family and work. Last, and perhaps most importantly, the way to go is to do the hard work, try your best, pray and ask God for guidance in your decision making, give God the final control, and then trust in his outcome and plan for you. □

Karen Lam was interviewed by Nancy Wu Won

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# Interview



*It was also extremely rewarding to be able to help people in their lives, to make a difference when their future was looking bleak.*

## Karen Lam, Metro Church of Christ, Adelaide

*A migrant from Asia, Karen became a medical doctor specialising in rehabilitation medicine who later gave up medical practice to become a stay-at-home mum.*



### Tell us about your background.

I was born in Singapore, but migrated to Australia with my parents when I was two years old. We lived in Cleve for a short time but then moved to Adelaide where I have since spent my childhood and my adult life. So although I have a Chinese Singaporean background I am also proud to be considered Australian. An almost ABC (Australian Born Chinese)!

I studied medicine at Adelaide University where I met Earl. It was soon after graduating that we got married in 1999. Fortunately, he was happy to continue his life in Australia and since then we have grown our family and now have three children aged 13, 9, and 6 years.

### How did you become a Christian?

Growing up as a child, religion has been a part of my life—first as I attended an Anglican school, and then during my teenage years when I attended an Anglican church every week with my mother. Their teachings were something that I never questioned—it was easy to take for granted what was taught and given to you. It was only since meeting Earl during medical school that he introduced me to the Church of Christ, but more importantly to understanding God through the Bible and what it means to be a Christian. It was through Bible study with Earl and reading the Bible that I realised the importance and meaning of baptism and so I knew in my heart that was the first step in the right direction.

### As a Christian doctor, what did you find rewarding about your work?

I think as a Christian we have another outlook on life which is so valuable. Christ taught us how to love and serve one another and to be humble, patient, and to treat others how you would like to be treated yourself. Consequently, in my workplace and also in everyday life I would try and use these values when I interacted with those around me whether it be colleagues, peers or patients. I think people appreciate being treated like human beings, and it was always rewarding to get positive feedback from grateful patients and staff. It was also extremely rewarding to be able to help people in their lives, to make a difference when their future was looking bleak. That was one of the great aspects of rehabilitation medicine—to be able to return people to their function and lives after significant illness.

### What parts of your work in rehabilitation medicine were challenging?

There were many challenges that I can recall. Work was always busy and people could be demanding, so I had to use much resolve at times to stay patient and calm, providing time for others so I could listen and solve any issues the best I could.

Another aspect I found very confronting was having to give bad news to patients and their families. In rehabilitation medicine, it was not so much having to tell someone they have a serious illness such as cancer, as most times they already have been diagnosed before being admitted to the rehabilitation ward. Instead, our job entailed us having to discuss their prognosis and outcomes, with a focus on their

function—such as whether they will walk again, perform their job again, live at home independently, or would they need to go to a nursing home? These can be major life changes for them. Their reaction to the bad news—sadness, anger or denial—was always challenging to observe.

As a rehabilitation medicine specialist, it is also our role to be the team leader. We work with a team of people to get our patients better. The team includes nursing staff and therapists such as physiotherapists, speech therapists and occupational therapists. It is only natural to have better results if a team works well together. Being a leader is not in my nature. So, having to lead meetings felt out of character for me, but it had to be done. With groups of people there can also be politics, different personalities and power struggles. So, keeping the peace was important. Having staff listen to your advice could also be challenging.

Finally (and probably applicable to other careers and not just rehabilitation medicine), was the challenge of achieving that all elusive 'work-life balance'. As a mother, it's hard to feel sometimes that you are performing either role—work and motherhood—well. I worked part time and arranged my hours so that I could pick the kids up from school or kindergarten. I would try and fit my clinical work during my on-site hours and catch up with any paperwork out of work hours and at night time. As I was responsible for a rehab ward, I would have to be contactable on all days in case the ward registrar or a patient's relative had to ask an important question. It was certainly difficult to have a serious conversation with a noisy child in the background!

### Why did you decide to give up medical practice?

It was not an easy decision to make. But after the birth of our third child and after a lot of thought and prayer, I decided to give up practising as a doctor and focus on my family. I was blessed that I had this option as financially we were stable. I felt that, with my work commitments, it was not fair to my young children. Rather

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