

# InterSections



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## Editorial

Welcome to the May 2025 issue of *InterSections*.

Our May issue usually follows the broad theme of restoration – bringing us back to the faith and practice of the first Christians. This is a worthy ideal, but it's important for us to know what it is we're restoring. In this issue we want to probe further into the mindset and culture of the earliest Christians. What were they like and how did they live? To do this we've chosen to look into some literature from the early church outside the Bible – in particular we have two articles inspired by the well known *Letter to Diognetus*, written in the 2nd or 3rd century.

In our *Feature*, Dale Christensen considers what it means to be 'in the world but not of the world' and how we navigate these divided loyalties. As *Food for Thought* Graham Wall looks more closely at the *Letter to Diognetus*, and what some of its contents might reveal to us.

We also have a wonderful tribute to longtime church minister of Southwest Church of Christ in Sydney, Frank Cunningham, who finished the race and went to his reward last year. Debby Rowley reviews a helpful study guide to the book of Ecclesiastes, *The Search for Significance* by Luke Dockery. We interview Isaac Bates and hear his thoughts about congregational singing. And in the *News*, we have a report from the latest CampING in Victoria. We also hear about the Gosford Church of Christ's new premises, and a new course offering from South Pacific Bible College in NZ.

May we, like the early Christians, be a faithful community that proclaims the Gospel in both word and deed.

*The InterSections team*

## Feature *The Ethos of the Earliest Christians: Being in but not of the world.*

Dale Christensen

Australia is one of many nations that allows its citizens to maintain dual citizenships. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the 2021 census found that nearly half of our population has at least one parent who was born overseas.

However, when it comes to representing the country as a member of Parliament, section 44 of the Australian *Constitution* disqualifies any person who 'is a subject or a citizen [...] of a foreign power'. The logic of this is fairly intuitive: those entrusted with the power of governing Australians must have no split allegiance – not even a hint of fealty to another country.

The New Testament speaks of Christians as citizens of a new country, by right of our new birth. That country is not one bounded by mountains or seas or neighbouring powers, but is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We're 'fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19).

But the picture Scripture paints is not one of dual citizenship; rather it talks of our new citizenship superseding the old. Christians are called 'exiles' and 'strangers', even while they inhabit the same cities and houses they always have. This undergirded the ethos of the earliest disciples.

The 2nd century *Letter to Diognetus* says of the earliest Christians that they 'follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in' with regards to dress, food, and so on, yet they live there 'as though they were only passing through'.



This dichotomy is often summarised by the phrase ‘in the world, but not of the world’, borrowing from the Lord’s words in John 17:14–15. But what does this framework look like in practice?

We can gain one insight from the recent TV series *Shōgun*, set in 17th century Japan. This was a time when extensive trade with Portuguese Catholics had resulted in some Japanese conversions to Roman Catholicism. In the second episode, *Servants of Two Masters*, the warlord Yoshii Toronaga asks his vassal, Lady Mariko, ‘Would your loyalty to God conflict with your service to me?’ Mariko replies, ‘If I were just a Christian, yes. But, I have more than one heart.’

In modern psychology, we might call this compartmentalisation: different domains of our life are kept isolated so as to avoid the discomfort of internal conflict. Such explicitly divided loyalty is easy enough for godly Christians to condemn. None of us would – I hope! – dare to tell Christ that he may be Lord of our weekends, but our weekdays are devoted to our boss. Yet there are more insidious ways in which we are tempted to split our allegiances.

Take the book, *Liberalism as a Way of Life*, by University of Sydney philosopher Alexandre Lefebvre. Here, Lefebvre sets out to make a positive case for liberalism as the basis for a fulfilling and generous mode of living, ‘no less noble [...] or beatific’ than the religious foundations it replaces. In making his argument, Lefebvre identifies liberalism as ‘the water we swim in’ – surrounding and shaping us in a myriad different ways, most of them imperceptible simply because they are all we’ve ever known.

This is an important insight for Christians: we’re products of our culture whether we realise it or not. Yet, although liberalism has historical roots in Judeo-Christian faith, the culture of contemporary liberalism in Australia is often hostile to God and his people. In so many domains of our lives, we Australian Christians act more Australian than Christian. Passively tacking ‘Christian’ as an identity marker on top of our cultural formation will not be sufficient.

A more active rooting out of what conflicts with God’s character is needed. After all, the apostle Paul cautions us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.’ (Romans 12:2)

While we remain in this life, we’re subject to the laws and customs of our earthly governments. ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, Jesus commands his followers, ‘and to God the things that are God’s.’ (Mark 12:17) But there’s no split loyalty here: everything belongs to God, and the only authority that Caesar (or the Australian prime minister) has is that which has been granted to him by the Creator of the universe.

As ‘ambassadors of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 5:20), we must be proactive in our efforts to ‘section 44’ ourselves. While we may remain fond of – and work for the good of – our earthly nation, we must allow no splitting of our loyalties. When conflicts come between the customs of Australia and the commands of Christ, we ought to stand with Peter and John as they declared to the Sanhedrin, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’ (Acts 5:29)

Do I hear an ‘Amen’ to that? ◇

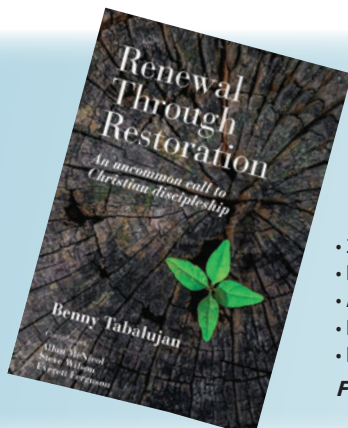
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## The Letter to Diognetus

The writings of post-apostolic early Christians can be both interesting and encouraging. Although such writings aren't equivalent to the Old and New Testaments, they often shed light on Scripture. Additionally, they can provide insights into the issues the church faced during the second and third centuries, before the New Testament canon was formalised.



One such early Christian writing is the *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* (or *Letter to Diognetus*). Usually dated from the 2nd or 3rd century, in Greek *mathetes* means disciple, and the letter is taken to be a defence of Christian doctrine and practice sent by a disciple to a prominent recipient called Diognetus. While scholars have speculated about the identity of both Diognetus and the author, the letter is worth reading. In fact, J. B. Lightfoot, the 19th century Anglican bishop and expert on the patristic period, once described it 'the noblest of early Christian writings.'<sup>1</sup>

The *Letter to Diognetus* makes a persuasive case for the Christian life, often in eloquent prose. In explaining the Christian faith, the author begins by highlighting the vanity of idol worship, then contrasts Jewish and Christian worship. The letter also goes on to discuss Christian virtues and ethics, the incarnation of Christ, the timing and manner of his arrival, and the benefits of being a Christian – both now and for eternity – along with the consequences of not being a Christian.

Chapter 5, however, is perhaps the most well-known section. It stands out in its portrayal of a Christian's perspective of life on earth. Here is a translation by C.C. Richardson from *The Library of Christian Classics*:<sup>2</sup>

*'For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth.*

*They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require.*

*They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.'*

Reading this section, I find myself reflecting upon faithful Christians throughout history. Despite facing persecution and hardship, many maintained the tension of living in this world without recognising it as their true home. They lived as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) while residing in an environment which is far from heavenly – one that is often unresponsive to their benevolence and generosity.

This letter is both encouraging and comforting because it serves as a reminder that we're never truly alone in our Christian experience of life. From the first century until today those who are faithful in Christ have experienced (and continue to experience) the same struggle of being in the world but not truly fitting in (John 17:14–15).

Moreover, this letter causes me to consider that if early Christians (who faced hostility greater than I ever have or will) could hold onto their faith, what excuse do I have to abandon Christ and embrace this world as my own?

Ultimately, the description provided by the author of this letter, calls me – and even dares me – to be different. This requires me to stand out from this world by holding onto Christ and embracing now my heavenly status, even as I await the day when I will appreciate God's kingdom in all its fullness. ◇

1 J. B. Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon – A Revised Text*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, first published 1875 (Zondervan, 1973) 156.

2 Available from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library:  
[https://ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers/fathers.x.i.ii.html#fnf\\_x.i.ii-p8.12](https://ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers/fathers.x.i.ii.html#fnf_x.i.ii-p8.12).



## *The Search for Significance: A Study of Ecclesiastes* by Luke Dockery (Regnum Media, 2023)

About three years ago, I was engaged in a conversation with a middle-aged man who had come to Christ in his late 20s. In my friend's story of his conversion, he talked about the outstanding success he had experienced in his academic studies and the stellar start he had achieved in his professional career. He had a finance and scientific background which enabled him to move up the corporate ladder quickly. With promotions, he found himself relocating from one city to another.

He was a single man and in search for meeting new people. One day he stopped by a local church building that was welcoming guests. According to his own testimony, he was 'unchurched and uninterested', but curious. One of the churchgoers engaged him in conversation. Upon hearing his life's story, his host handed him a Bible and suggested he read Ecclesiastes. That was a turning point in his life and he hasn't looked back since.

As he retold his story to me, I thought: 'What an interesting book of the Bible to start with to introduce someone to the Lord. I wouldn't have started a Bible study with a non-believer with Ecclesiastes.'

But, as my friend talked, it started making sense to me. Here was a man full of success by the world's standards. Yet he's yearning for something more. What better place to start with than a book that hits that situation head-on?

Then again, reading through Ecclesiastes can be quite daunting. There's a negativity that threads its way through some chapters. There's the vacillating value that the writer places on concepts such as wisdom, work, and pleasure. Plus the seeming irrelevance of archaic terms like manservants, living dogs, and dead lions.

That's where Dockery's text, *The Search for Significance: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, becomes a very useful resource. Dockery is the Youth in Family Minister at the Cloverdale Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas, and an adjunct instructor in the College of Bible and Ministry at Harding University. He's made Ecclesiastes accessible through his approach to the biblical text. In 112 pages, Dockery unpacks Ecclesiastes chapter by chapter.

The focus of Ecclesiastes, according to Dockery, is the search for the meaning and significance of life. Early in his book, Dockery helps us grapple with the Hebrew word *hebel*, often translated as vanity or meaningless. He points out that *hebel* is used 38 times in Ecclesiastes. Therefore, our grasp of this word is crucial to our understanding of Ecclesiastes.

Literally, *hebel* means breath. Human breath connotes something that's fleeting, temporary, and hard to grasp. With these interpretations of *hebel*, Ecclesiastes becomes a less pessimistic piece of ancient writing. Perhaps it even becomes more useful as it helps us to understand that many aspects and pleasures of life are there for temporary enjoyment as blessings from God. While blessings, they're nevertheless short-lived; therefore, they fall short of the true purpose of mankind – which is to fear God and keep his commandments.

Each of Dockery's chapters begins with an anecdote to set the stage for his exploration of Scripture. The book can be used by various age groups starting with teens through older adults. With a decidedly American influence, Dockery's comments are relevant for the most part and they help readers ease into the text. The biblical text (primarily the English Standard Version) is included in the book, interspersed with Dockery's observations, and sections like 'A Closer Look', 'In-chapter Discussion Questions', and 'Discipleship Prompt'.

The interspersed sections makes Dockery's book very usable as a study book for Bible classes, small groups, or even individual use. For example, the 'A Closer Look' sections provide deeper dives into biblical material. This

enhances the study of Ecclesiastes, bringing in information from historical references, parallel Scriptures, and cultural details that illuminate some aspect of the biblical text.

When examining Ecclesiastes 4, Dockery uses 'A Closer Look' to home in on verses 13–16 which discuss the fleeting nature of power. He includes a short refresher on Israel's experience of kings and how these kings exemplify the words of Ecclesiastes. In this same chapter, Dockery includes 'In-chapter Discussion Questions' like those below:

- For verses 1–3: What forms of injustice and oppression do you see in our society today? What should be our response to problems like these when we witness them?
- For verses 4–6: What do these proverbs mean?

Then, with each chapter, Dockery closes with a 'Discipleship Prompt.' For Ecclesiastes 4, Dockery discusses the idea that humans are designed for fellowship. So he encourages readers to organise a small working bee activity in the community in which they can serve together, living out the principle that 'truly, we can do more together than we can on our own!'

If you're planning to read Ecclesiastes, by all means grab a copy of Dockery's book. It's published by the Center for Christian Studies, Austin, Texas. CCS is affiliated with Churches of Christ and publishes the book under its imprint, Regnum Media. Let Dockery help you get more out of your study of Ecclesiastes! ◇



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## Frank Cunningham (1951 – 2024)

(For more about Frank, go to [www.MrFrank.net](http://www.MrFrank.net) where you can also read tributes at his passing.)



Francis ('Frank') Cunningham was born in England in 1951 to Philomena Cunningham. At just four years of age his mother took him to live in a Boys' Home where he was the youngest resident. When he was 11 years old, on her weekly visit Frank's mother told him that she was leaving England. He was left without contact with his mother or any knowledge of his father or extended family.

After being raised in the Boys' Home and in foster care, Frank met his wife Faith, married and moved to Australia. Faith introduced him to the Church of Christ in Campbelltown, southwest of Sydney. She had come to know the church through their neighbours, Dale and Sheila Hartman, who were working there as US missionaries.

At first, Frank questioned everything about the church. When his mother left him as a young boy, he had lost faith in God. However, as Frank got to know more Christians, his interest in learning about God grew. Eventually, in 1987 Frank was baptised at what is today the SouthWest church in Campbelltown. At last Frank came to know his Heavenly Father – the one who would love and guide him!

After 28 years of separation, in 1991 Frank found his mother. Philomena was living in Sydney! He visited her regularly and cared for her. In 2012, in the final weeks before she died, Frank sat with his mother in the hospital. He strove to give his mother what she had been incapable of giving him. He came to understand that, under difficult circumstances, she had done the best she could.

After Philomena died, Frank was able to locate her relatives in Ireland, his mother's birthplace. He was welcomed enthusiastically by the aunts, uncles, and cousins he had never known. He visited Ireland and found much joy, love, and identity in his extended family. He cherished his Irish connection and relished learning about his Cunningham Clan heritage!

Frank was a shy, humble, and somewhat introverted man. He didn't see himself as a preacher or teacher. However, he saw a need and felt a desire to help others to find the Christ he had come to know. In the 1990s, Frank took early retirement from his job as a gas fitter and began to work full time, together with Kent Hartman, ministering with the SouthWest church. After two years in co-ministry, Kent returned to the US. Frank became the minister at SouthWest church, where he served faithfully for 26 years. He was loved deeply and respected by his church family at SouthWest and by congregations and Christians throughout Australia.

For 25 years Frank led the annual Camp Soul youth retreat. A regular at the retreat said: 'Many of us would possibly not be faithful Christians today without Frank. He has been our rock, our mentor, our teacher, our example, our encourager.' Frank also played a major role in the 50-N-Over Retreats.

Frank was happily involved in volunteering in his local community and schools where he was widely known and appreciated. He loved children, especially those who had received less than they needed from their home environment.

For 25 years Frank taught Scripture classes in local primary schools. After observing Frank's good influence at the Rosemeadow Public School in Campbelltown, both with staff and students, the school principal asked Frank to become their 'school chaplain'. He was also a tutor at the school and volunteered serving breakfasts. Students would call out to him and run to give him a hug whenever they saw him at school or in town. Everyone felt his genuine love and understanding.

Frank was a devoted father to his two daughters, Stacy and Emma, and father-in-law to their husbands, Tyson and Ehan. He loved being a grandparent to Esther, Josiah, Ruth, and Eve. In the church family and broader community he was a father and grandfather figure to many who leaned on him for wisdom and nurturing.

For many years Frank served as a supervisor and mentor to numerous church interns and Helpers in Mission (HIM) workers from Oklahoma Christian University. Each felt blessed to learn from Frank, and many speak highly of his godly influence in their lives.

Frank had a wonderful way of coming alongside people – no matter their circumstances. He listened well and loved well. People felt God's love through Frank. Friends fondly remember his non-judgmental attitude, delightful sense of humour, and his happy whistling within church halls!

On 28 May 2024, Frank passed away unexpectedly after leading the annual Camp Soul youth retreat. A friend remarked, 'Just like Frank to slip away quietly, with no fuss.'

Frank Cunningham was a gentle, humble, faithful, kind, and generous man who loved God and who loved the people God put in his life. He let his Father use him to teach, preach, and lead – even though he was content to serve in the background, as he was often found

doing. He overcame various life challenges with courage, determination, a positive attitude, and bold faith.

For much of his life, Frank's motto was 'Stand Firm'. Those of us who were blessed to know Frank will always feel him encouraging us to 'Finish Strong' and 'Stand Firm'. And to enjoy a good cup of tea! ♦



*Nancy & Kent Hartmann are former missionaries with the SouthWest Church of Christ in Campbelltown. They are now part of the Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, USA  
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## New premises – Gosford, NSW

The Gosford Church of Christ moved into their new premises for their first worship assembly on Sunday, 16 March 2025. After delays from waiting for the tenant's lease to expire and an 18-month wait for council approval, work began in September 2024 to make it suitable. The congregation is excited to have a bigger space that is a blank canvas and excited about what it can be and what God can use it for.

One of our deacons said it is like standing on the hill looking into the promised land – filled with potential for the congregation and the community we serve. We recently hosted a missionary family from Chile, who we support. We were also able to have a couple of fellowship activities without having to book a venue. Our thanks to all those congregations and individuals who helped to make this happen. You can now find us at Unit 2, 15 Koala Crescent, West Gosford! ◇

*David Mowday, Gosford Church of Christ, NSW.*



## New Diploma in Christian Studies at SPBC

The South Pacific Bible College is getting ready to launch new study options, with a revamped Diploma of Christian Studies coming online to Australians in February 2026.

'In Australia we're often asked about online study. We know things like work, family, and church commitments can all make on-campus study challenging,' says Steve Raine, New Zealand-based SPBC Executive Director. 'We're prayerfully making this change to make it more accessible for Christians all over who want to enrich their relationship with God, knowledge of Scripture, and gain skills to live out their faith effectively – whether in church ministry or day-to-day life. Many graduates have told us this is life-changing, so we hope to bless more people and advance God's Kingdom.'

The diploma will have a focus on God's Word, with textual studies making up half of the content. The remaining half is designed to help Christians live out their faith practically – through models of ministry, theological tools, personal spiritual development, and a practicum that integrates classroom learning with real-world experiences in a local setting. On-campus study will also remain on offer, and online students may even have the option to do a short term of study in New Zealand, if they choose.

Full details of the new diploma, including part-time options, will be available following accreditation with New Zealand's government, expected in late 2025. Learn more at [www.spbc.org.nz/study/courses/DipCS](http://www.spbc.org.nz/study/courses/DipCS) ◇

*Rosie Atchley, South Pacific Bible College, Tauranga, New Zealand*

## CampING 2025, VIC

CampING (Camp I Need God) is the annual family camp of Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. This year, CampING was held over the (Victorian) Labour Day long weekend, 8–10 March, at the Belgrave Heights Convention Centre at the eastern fringe of Melbourne. With around 80 campers plus day visitors, there were over 100 adults and children participating in the Sunday worship assembly – a wonderful time of honouring God and dwelling on his Word.

Lessons and the sermon during camp were delivered by father-and-son team from the Eastside congregation in Sydney, Michael & Christian Bargholz. The camp theme was 'Just Jesus'. We explored what this meant in Scripture and in practice today. We're reminded that this includes the pre-eminence of Christ in our lives and the priority of Christ as head of the church. It was a treat to have Michael, Norainie, and Christian again – the Bargholz family were part of Belmore Road in the 1990s!

The CampING Committee led by Alvin & Joanne Tjipto did a fantastic job with coordinating events – including thrilling camp sports like water volleyball, soccer, and cornhole toss; a live auction starring Will Tabe as auctioneer assisted by Matt Tabalujan; and a fun-filled Trivia Night run by Ash & Charlotte Crill. To top it off, food and hospitality this year were superb.

That's why many are now looking forward to CampING in 2026! ◇

*Benny Tabalujan, Belmore Road Church of Christ, VIC.*



## Interview cont.



I think this can be achieved uniquely in smaller congregations in a way that's not practical in larger ones. Encourage members to bring a song that's meant something to them during the week, and to share that meaning. Let them share a song in connection with the Lord's Supper or the sermon. When the hearts of members are shared, the message of the song and the bond among family with God will be more important than the music made by the voices. Some will enthusiastically sing what might normally seem strange or dull to them.

More practically, with smaller groups, other than old classics such as *Amazing Grace* I often go to simple echo songs: leader and audience, or male and female. Most people are comfortable and capable of repeating something back when they've been shown how to do it. ◇

Isaac Bates is a teacher at Redlands College in Brisbane, QLD. He and his wife Mel are members of The Point Church.

He was interviewed by Nathan Holyoak.  
nathan@helmsdeep.org



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## Isaac Bates

### You grew up in Churches of Christ. What role did church singing play for you in your youth?

Church singing was always a part of my life – it was normal and expected, and I happily got on board. During my primary school years in Melbourne we worshipped at the Belmore Road church and they sang *acappella* really well. They would sing those great songs that have clearly defined sections for different parts such as echoes or a step-out little solo. I would pay attention and try to figure out how it worked and how I could join in.

When I turned 11 we moved to Brisbane where we attended the Wynnum church. At that time the congregation didn't sing as many songs where people took parts. However, we started getting tapes from *Hallal Music* by Ken Young, and that brought new life to our singing, which was fun. We held singing nights and the *acappella* tradition continued with renewed interest. Oh, and we had the amazing Harding and Lipscomb choirs come to visit. I wanted to sing like those guys – I was transported by the music!

### What were some of the formative influences on you as you became more interested in church singing and song leading?

My family shaped my perception of what's normal and expected. Mum and Dad always sang: Mum was a quiet alto; Dad was a booming bass; and my sister Lindsey, closest in age to me, was always requesting her favourites and learning new songs and their harmony parts.

At age 19, I spent a semester at Lipscomb University and had some amazing singing experiences in chapel services. One man stood out in the way he would lead: he'd share what was on his heart, what God was doing in his life, and then as he was mid-sentence his words suddenly became the lyrics of a song we knew and we all joined in singing with him. I admired that seamless transition from song to spoken words to prayer. It was beautiful. There was also a huge impact from Christian *acappella* recording artists such as *Acappella*, *AVB*, *the Vocal Union*, *Rescue*, *Hallal*, *Zoe Group*, and more recently *United Voice Worship*.

### How did you first get involved in leading singing?

My first experience of song leading was around grade 10. It came out of the blue on a Sunday morning – someone was sick; another away. After some encouragement I gave it a go and I think it went okay, but that was it for a long while.

The next step was in youth and young adult groups – we'd often sit around and someone would request a song and I'd help to start it off. That informal situation was an easy first step. Through that I became more comfortable leading songs in our 'Sunday Arvo at the Point' youth gatherings, which were a little more formal as they were held in the hall we hired for Sunday morning services. But being among high school age and young adult peers, it was less daunting. After a while it wasn't too big of a step to do the same thing on Sunday morning, with everyone present. I'd recommend other prospective song leaders to find some version of this for themselves. It may be in smaller Bible study groups, at home or in a hall, leading a few songs before or after the lesson.

### You have attended some worship and song leading seminars in the United States. Tell us about that experience.

I was encouraged, particularly by Peter Searson, to apply for Worship Leader Institute (WLI). I was both excited and nervous to finally get there. I'm naturally introverted and avoid risks and this course asks you to step outside your comfort zone for the sake of edifying the church. They call it 'drinking from a fire hose and spinning a dozen plates'. It was a

challenging and humbling experience, but it's one of the best things I've done, and I was very glad to be able to go back the following year.

I learned to direct both tempo and dynamics, read solfège shape notes, create medleys, move with energy and purpose, express emotion, memorise and quote scripture with passion – and so much more. I felt equipped to encourage my brothers and sisters in many of the methods I'd admired in others, as well as in new ways that would reach and connect to different people in different ways. One big take-away was that our singing and worship should be full of real emotion, so let our body language and voices convey our joy, sorrow, peace, doubt, love, hope – whatever it is – honestly before our God and one another.

People from outside the USA have access to scholarship funding to attend the WLI, so I would highly recommend Aussie song leaders to apply.

### What do you think are some of the strengths of the *acappella* tradition in Churches of Christ?

The simplicity of *acappella* singing is wonderful – all you need are people and their voices. You can be anywhere and start singing – sitting around a lounge room, a fireplace, in a park, and of course a church hall – even with the power out! Each person is contributing their heart and voice – whether in tune or not – and the Father loves to hear the praises of his children. Even learning new songs can be as simple as listening and repeating a line, verse, or chorus until it catches on. You don't have to read music, most people learn really well by ear.

There's nothing quite like a host of people lifting their voices together, but it's even more meaningful when it's worshippers honouring their God. There's something unifying about it – a bond between all involved.

### Many churches are quite small and don't have many singers. What encouragement would you offer about the value of singing together?

In a congregation of any size, if singing is done simply out of duty then there won't be much encouragement from it. Instead, try your best to be purposeful in encouraging one another and offering your genuine heartfelt worship to God. 1 Corinthians 14:26 is a helpful reminder of our responsibility for mutual edification, where each person in the assembly brings something to it, whether a song, teaching, or something else.

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