

InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement

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Editorial

Welcome to the November 2020 issue of *InterSections*.

Recent decades have seen rapid social change. Things that once seemed immovable and taken for granted are now widely questioned. Our society believes everyone should be free to define themselves however they wish, but can't offer any firm categories or values by which to choose. But as Christians we don't need to define ourselves by our jobs or which ethnic group we belong to. This issue focuses on finding our identity in Christ. He is that fixed point by which we can see ourselves for who we truly are. It's in Him that we find our true sense of belonging and connection with others.

Our *Feature* article considers what it means for us to find our identity in Christ and how that changes our own identity. Christian Bargholz discusses in *Food for Thought* about the temptations of virtue-signalling and what that can teach us about our Christian identity. We also interview three new Christians, asking them how their decision to follow Jesus has changed them and how they see themselves.

Church Scene features results from the latest Klesis church survey, illustrating some challenges facing non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia. In our *International Letter*, Gordon Hogan reflects on Ezekiel and our prophetic call to share the Gospel. In the *News*, it's encouraging to see some events back up and running after the pandemic hiatus: the annual Bible Bowl and Camp Revive were both a success despite taking place online over Zoom. There's a report about a recent webinar where church leaders from around Australia met to discuss their congregations' ongoing efforts to deal with the pandemic. Also our new Facebook page is now online—we'd love for our readers to get involved!

As this difficult year draws to a close, let's remember God's goodness and the blessings we have in Christ.

The Editorial Team

ChurchScene – 2019 Church Survey

Non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia



The 2019 Survey of Non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia is now freely available on the Klesis Institute website (www.klesis.com.au).

Background

The first survey took place in 1984 and was conducted by Stephen Randall of the Canberra Church of Christ. Stephen conducted a further six surveys up to 2001. The next four surveys were conducted by Alan Rowley on behalf of Klesis. So, we now have a 35-year dataset on membership, attendance, and baptisms for non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia. Peter Gray of Southern Pacific Christian Research has undertaken the analysis of results of each of the eleven surveys on a voluntary basis (our sincere thanks, Peter).

The surveys ask three simple questions of each congregation: the number of members; average Sunday attendance, and the number of baptisms over the previous 12 months. The figures relate to the month of October in the year of the survey. Since the 2006 survey, churches are also given the opportunity to update their church details to be included in the *Directory of Non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia*. The Directory is also published on the Klesis website and is updated at least once annually.

What's different in 2019?

Unlike previous survey reports, the 2019 survey report is in two parts. Part One presents highlights of the 2019 survey and provides an overview of the past 35 years. Part Two contains a more detailed analysis of the results, including information on the size of churches in rural and urban areas, major cities, and states & territories. Importantly, it provides details on changes in the size of churches from 2013 to 2019 along with some key questions resulting from the changes.

In the table below are the figures for 2019, compared with data from the past 20 years:

	2001	2006	2010	2013	2019
Total baptised members	1,842	1,825	1,956	1,941	1,906
Total ave Sunday attendance	2,308	2,208	2,394	2,338	2,272
Number of churches	78	73	78	80	81
Ave church size (members)	23.6	25.0	25.1	24.3	23.5
Ave church size (attendance)	29.6	30.2	30.7	29.2	28

Source: Australian Church Surveys 2001, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2019.

Some trends

Over the last 20 years (2001-2019), there are some points to note:

- The average number of members per church remained between 23 to 25 and the average Sunday attendance during the period remained between 28 and 30 people.
- The period of greatest growth took place between the surveys of 2006 and 2010, with a 7.2% growth in members, an 8.4% growth in average Sunday attendance, and an 8.2% growth in the number of churches.
- 2010 saw the highest number of members (1,956) and highest average Sunday attendance (2,394).
- The number of members has dropped 0.8% (2010 to 2013) and 1.8% (2013 to 2019). Average Sunday attendances dropped by 2.3% (2010-2013) and 2.8% (2013 to 2019).

Interestingly, when we go back to the first survey in 1984 we see other trends. Over the 35-year period, the number of churches has increased significantly (nearly 25%). However, almost everything else is lower: total number of members (-1.0%); average Sunday attendance (-9.2%); average church size by members (-20.6%); and average church size by attendance (-27.3%).

	1984	1990	2001	2010	2019
Total baptised members	1,926	1,781	1,842	1,956	1,906
Total ave Sunday attendance	2,502	2,439	2,308	2,394	2,272
Number of churches	65	76	78	78	81
Ave church size (members)	29.6	23.4	23.6	25.1	23.5
Ave church size (attendance)	38.5	32.1	29.6	30.7	28

Source: Australian Church Surveys 1984, 1990, 2001, 2010, 2019.

Some questions

For those wanting to dig deeper, Part Two of the report is recommended. Part Two compares more detailed data from 2013 to 2019, with a particular focus on larger churches (with 100 members and above) and smaller churches (with less than 30 members).

Continued page 3

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, 2020). 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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	2013	2019
Baptised members in Australia	1,941	1,906
Churches in Australia	80	81
Larger churches (100 + members)		
Number of churches	2	3
As % of churches in Australia	3%	4%
Number of members	300	457
As % of members in Australia	15%	24%
Smaller churches (< 30 members)		
Number of churches	62	63
As % of churches in Australia	78%	78%
Number of members	769	675
As % of members in Australia	40%	35%

Source: Australian Church Surveys 2013, 2019.

Comparing the 2013 and 2019 data suggests that we may have a two-track dynamic in process: larger churches are getting larger and smaller churches are getting smaller. If so, some questions come to mind:

- What accounts for the growth in larger churches?
- What lessons can larger churches offer to other churches?
- Why did smaller churches remain much the same in number yet fall in membership?
- How can larger churches help smaller churches to flourish?

Additional insights are also available in Part Two of the 2019 survey report concerning medium-size churches (30-79 members) and upper-medium size churches (80-99 members). Please consult the report for more details.

Conclusion

The 2019 survey has provided additional data and insights for everyone interested in non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia. It's also raised important questions worthy of further conversation. To facilitate this, Klesis is scheduling a one-hour Zoom webinar on Saturday, 21 November 2020, from 3.00-4.00pm(AEDT). During that session we intend to discuss the main findings of the report and encourage open conversation concerning possible trends and future plans. The webinar details will be sent to all who subscribe to *InterSections*. We encourage you to attend and also pass on the invitation to others who may be interested.

Finally, a big thank you to all the congregations who provided data for the 2019 survey to be completed. May God help us to use this information to further his kingdom.

*Alan Rowley is a member of Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne and undertook the survey on behalf of Klesis Institute.
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Feature - Our Identity in Christ.

One day, while cleaning up some old papers, I came across the first business card I had. It was from my first full-time job in 1985. I had become a full-fledged lawyer with a Melbourne law firm. There it was: my name centred in elegant, raised letter printing on richly textured card. I can still recall the pride and sense of identity which that business card gave me then.

Today, business cards aren't so prevalent. We use digital substitutes. But our yearning for identity still beckons. (Just note how much time – and money – people invest in curating their digital photos and profiles on social media.) We care about how we're perceived. We care about what others think of us. For many, personal identity is closely connected to a sense of self-esteem and life fulfilment. Others find personal identity (or lack of it) a source of misery.

What about the Christian? Scripture is united in affirming that our identity is to be found in God. Jesus makes it explicit in the Gospels when he calls people to himself (e.g. Matthew 11:28-30; John 7:37-38). The apostle Paul elaborates by detailing how God's blessings are to be found 'in Christ'. Consider the longest sentence in the New Testament – Ephesians 1:3-14 (where the original Greek runs for 202 words) – a sentence-paragraph brimming with God's blessings. In the English Standard Version, I count ten occasions when the terms 'in Christ', 'in him', and 'in the Beloved' are used. The inescapable conclusion is that Paul wishes his readers to know that the grand panoply of God's blessings – including forgiveness, redemption, hope, inheritance, purpose, life in the Spirit – are all to be found in Christ.

But what does our identity 'in Christ' mean? Do I lose part of who I am, part of myself, when I'm baptised into Christ? Are my freedoms to choose how to live life, my autonomy, as well as my preferences and desires more restricted when I pledge allegiance to Christ?

I suggest that the answer to the two above questions is a categorical 'yes'. But don't despair. A 'yes' in this context is, paradoxically, for our good. Let me explain.

First, although humanity is created good in Genesis 1-2, the rebellion of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 means that thereafter all individuals are subject to sin and its consequences. Sin thus stains us. The wonder of the Gospel is that when we're baptised into Christ, through God's grace we wilfully set aside that sinful self – that rascal of our old self – in favour of a new life in Jesus (Romans 6:3-9). In that sense, baptism *does* mean a losing of part of our selfhood. But it's the nasty part we're losing, the ugly, fake, and selfish part of us. We're better off with that charlatan gone.

Second, being in Christ *does* constrain our desires. In that sense, being in Christ limits our freedoms. That's because the mind set on the Spirit is now re-directed: it pursues life and peace, not the things of the flesh (Romans 8:5-8). But that's not a bad thing either. In the fifth century, Augustine described sinful humans as having 'disordered loves'. This breeds addiction, not satisfaction. For example, sexual relations are healthy and life-enhancing in their proper realm; in contrast, sexual relations which are totally free and uninhibited by any constraint becomes disordered sex which debases and corrodes relationships. (Incidentally, Augustine also noted: '...every disorder of the soul is its own punishment'.¹) In short, living in Christ does involve a re-ordering (and, sometimes, an excising) of desires. Yes, this limits our freedom – but in a positive, not negative, way.

It's been 35+ years since that first business card described my role as a lawyer. Now as I encounter retirement, I can see even more clearly that professional identity is transitory. My identity in Christ – then as well as now – is incalculably more significant.

As the inimitable C.S. Lewis observes:²

'It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.'
'In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him.'

That's why being in Christ matters. ◇

1 Augustine, *Confessions*, Book One, XII:19, trans. F. J. Sheed (Hackett Publishing Co., 1993) 13.

2 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperOne, 2009) 232.

Benny is an elder with Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne and editor of InterSections.

Food For Thought

'Choose You This Day Whom You Will Signal.'

Virtue-Signalling & Christian Identity. Christian Bargholz



According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, virtue-signalling is 'the action or practice of publicly expressing opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one's good character, or the moral correctness of one's position on a particular issue.' Simply put, it's the action of signalling one's own virtuousness and drawing attention to the strength of one's own moral standing.

Virtue-signalling has a powerful allure owing to its low-cost social currency. It's a trend people engage in with particular regard to social, cultural, or moral issues that dominate the social *zeitgeist* for a variety of complex reasons. Regardless of intentions, virtue-signalling has become a primary way people navigate the complexities and controversies of our online moral landscape.

Given the prominence of social media in our world today, virtue-signalling provides a difficult dilemma for the Christian seeking to engage meaningfully with people online. Is the practice of virtue-signalling something that Christians should engage in? Is it something antithetical to a Christian's identity? Is being a Christian a 'virtue-signaller'?

In the search for answers, it's worth reconsidering one of Jesus' stories. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a story about two relatively unknown men, but the details he gives are telling. One of these men is revered by Jewish society, the other is reviled. The former is a Pharisee, and the latter is a tax collector. The story goes that these two men go to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prays first. As he stands up – quite possibly in an area of the Temple where he knows he's going to be seen and heard – he says:

'God, I thank you that I am not like other men; extortioners, evildoers, the unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of everything I possess.' (Luke 18:11)

Through this prayer, the Pharisee is effectively engaging in an act of virtue-signalling. By drawing attention to his piety, he's signalling the excellence of his character. By comparing himself with those he deems reprehensible, he's demonstrating the moral correctness of his own position. This Pharisee takes the platform of prayer – a platform intended for praising and honouring God – and uses it as an opportunity to praise and honour himself publicly (while simultaneously shaming others). By taking the moral high ground, this Pharisee becomes a virtue-signaller.

It's at this point in the story that Jesus reintroduces the tax collector. He's different from the Pharisee. He's not standing where he knows he can be seen; more likely he's where he knows he can't be seen (the content of his prayer suggests it's spoken in a manner befitting a private petition). All he manages to say is:

'God, be merciful to me, because I am a sinner.' (Luke 18:13)

The tax collector uses the platform of prayer as an opportunity to humble himself and confess his need for God and his mercy.

As is the case for anyone on social media, it can often be tempting for Christians to engage in virtue-signalling. Everyone enjoys being seen to be correct or right about a contentious issue. Everyone is concerned about ending up on the wrong side of history, and the moral high ground seems to provide safe sanctuary. We all have within us the capacity to be like the Pharisee.

But at the heart of virtue-signalling is something that's deeply at odds with Christian identity: an attitude almost completely devoid of humility. A 'Christian virtue-signaller' is, in essence, an oxymoron. The very act of becoming a Christian involves humbly admitting the moral bankruptcy of our own position. Therefore, to live as a Christian means living a life of humility as one who has surrendered the moral high ground. Central to the Gospel is the belief that the ground on which we stand is not built on our virtue, but on the grace of God in pardoning our sins.

Jesus concludes his story by telling us what happens to these two men as a result of their visit to the Temple. Jesus says that the one who was justified — made right — in the sight of God was not the one who signalled his own virtue, but the one who signalled his need for God.

In seeking to engage with people on the online moral landscape, Christians should seek an attitude more in line with the tax collector. Christians aren't a people who signal their own virtue. We're a people who signal Jesus. ♦

InterSections editorial team: We welcome your response to Christian's article. Send your comments to: info@intersections.com.au marked to the attention of the Editor. We hope that some responses can be included in a future issue of this magazine.

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International Letter

Who Will Sit Where They Sit? Gordon Hogan

Some time ago, I came across a video produced by Oklahoma Christian University entitled 'Love In Any Language'. The video is intended to encourage people to share God's love through missions. Here is an extract which quotes the Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, and raises questions for us:

'I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who were dwelling by the Chebar canal, and I sat where they were dwelling. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days. And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul'.

Ezekiel came to the captives as they dwelt at the river and he sat where they sat. How many of us who are God's children are willing to do the same? How many of us are willing to seek out those still held captive in sin and sit where they sit? Feel how they feel? Cry when they cry? Agonise with them over their hurts, become one with their sorrow? How many are willing to die that they might live? Who will sit where they sit?

Jane and I and our family spent years in Pakistan and Singapore sharing the Gospel. We went because billions of people on the continent of Asia are waiting for those of us who know Christ to come. They're waiting for us to sit where they sit and tell them about Jesus who longs to save them.

If you wish to take up the challenge, here's what to expect when you go to Asia:

- Masses of people like you've never seen in your life.
- The reality of pagan idolatry that darkens the hearts of billions of people and imprisons them in fear and without hope.
- In many places, abject poverty. Farmers and labourers who barely make a living. And, by contrast, people with enormous wealth.
- Amazing natural beauty: mountains, rainforests, rivers, lakes, tropical islands, and beautiful modern cities.
- Deformities in people and incredible filth: many brought about by ignorance, poverty, and disease.
- Illiteracy on the one hand and wonderfully educated and gifted people on the other hand.
- The non-existence of the Lord's church and the presence of militant religions.
The presence of small struggling churches and, on the other hand, self-supporting and growing, mission-minded churches.
- Humans as God's creation, each with a soul that will spend eternity in hell if they do not come to know Jesus and salvation. People who are wonderfully receptive. People who hunger for the hope that is in Christ. People who are marvellously generous with whatever they possess.

If you go and share the Gospel, your reward will be a fulfilment and satisfaction like you've never known before, since you'll know for sure that you're working in line with God's purpose.

I've been there and it has been and remains the joy of my life.

Gordon Hogan, at the age of 92, is a member of the College Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas, where he serves as an elder. He and his late wife, Jane, and their family spent decades in Pakistan and Singapore as missionaries.



Gordon Hogan with children Julie, Beth, and Dave, on a memory-lane visit back to Lahore, Pakistan, in February 2020.

News Bible Bowl 2020, NSW. Emma-Jean Bargholz

This year has forced many events to adapt to the circumstances brought about by the pandemic. Some events have been cancelled, others have been postponed. In order to go ahead, the Bible Bowl had to adapt. So this year it was a little different.

The Bible Bowl is hosted each year by the Southwest Church of Christ in Sydney. The 2020 Bible Bowl was held online because we were unable to meet in person. People from seven different churches logged on to watch and participate in the competition. They included people from the Southwest, Eastside, Macquarie, Bairnsdale, Western Melbourne, Canberra and Holland Park congregations.

This year the focus was Joel, a book which is only 73 verses long. All in all, the event was fun and engaging, and everyone had a chance to compete. In the end, Canberra won the Bible Bowl this year. We're looking forward to another great event next year! ♦

Emma-Jean is part of the Bible Bowl Committee and a member of Eastside Church of Christ in Sydney. emma.nash@hotmail.com

Camp Revive 2020 – 'Let's Be Real', VIC. *David Chao*

This year's Camp Revive was unprecedented. On Saturday, 26 September 2020, we gathered on Zoom for a virtual online camp for the first time ever. We focused on reviving our connections with one another. The topic was: 'Let's Be Real.' It was good.

Forty-eight 'campers' from over 14 congregations (interstate, US, Singapore) joined the event. It was midnight for some of our campers across the globe. For the first time, distance and time weren't limitations. How exciting and encouraging it is to witness youths and young adults from our Christian community come together in such a way to have fun and reassure each other!

Our 2020 camp theme was dress up or dress crazy. I had a set up in my living room and was dressed in a formal shirt, with bowtie and trackies – while it felt like 2 degrees Celsius in Melbourne. As ridiculous as it might have looked behind the scenes, the event was a success. The virtual activities we engaged in included playing Pictionary, charades, and a home scavenger hunt. Being behind a screen didn't hinder the intensity of our camp spirit.

We also had the privilege of having Christian Bargholz, an impressive speaker from Eastside Church of Christ this year. Drawing from Ecclesiastes 4, Christian reminded us that God designed life for companionship not isolation, and for intimacy not loneliness. We discussed the importance of real relationships with real people and how the challenges of a pandemic have affected us.

This year's Camp Revive was a necessity rather than a luxury in these challenging times. While we're physically apart, we're able to be more socially connected than ever. Let's all stay connected. And let's all be real. ◇

David Chao is part of the Camp Revive Committee and a member of Belmore Road Church of Christ, Melbourne. dav077553@hotmail.com



“Being behind a screen didn't hinder the intensity of our camp spirit.”



www.facebook.com/InterSectionsbyKlesis-

We're on Facebook. *Kate Jennings*

InterSections is now on Facebook! The new *InterSections by Klesis* Facebook page launched recently. It's now building up an online community. The page serves as a new avenue for sharing *InterSections* journal articles on social media. It also regularly posts encouraging Scriptures and is a hub for connecting with Christians and churches across Australia.

You can follow the page by going to www.facebook.com/InterSectionsbyKlesis. There you will get regular updates on new articles, provided in a format that's also easy to share on your own Facebook page. We would love to have you join! ◇

Kate Jennings is the administrator of the InterSections Facebook page, and a member of Canberra Church of Christ. kates@hotmail.com

Webinars: Churches & the pandemic. *Alan Rowley*

On 18 July and 15 August, Klesis Institute organised and conducted a three-hour Zoom webinar for a number of church leaders. This was to enable them to have conversations and share ideas on how their congregations are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The webinars brought together elders, deacons, church leaders and interested church members for a time of conversation. Altogether, 57 people from 18 congregations participated.

The first half of the webinar examined three questions:

1. How has worship and Bible study changed for your congregation during the pandemic?
2. What other aspects of 'being church' have changed?
3. What do you envision the post-restrictions 'new normal' to look like and what changes might your congregation implement in response?

The webinar used break-out rooms to allow groups of participants to exchange information and ideas. Each breakout room then shared their conversations with the entire group.

The conversations were wide ranging. One common theme was the widespread use of technology (Zoom, Facebook, Youtube, etc) to facilitate worship, Bible study, and other church activities. Participants were also thankful to learn new ideas that they could take back to their own congregations.

In the second half of the webinar, Evertt Huffard presented a session on how to become resilient churches during and beyond the pandemic. He also shared a range of resources to help churches stay healthy. Evertt is former Dean of Harding School of Theology (affiliated with Churches of Christ in the United States). He has been an elder, missionary, lecturer and still consults to Churches of Christ around the world. ◇

Alan Rowley helps organise Klesis events and is a member of Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. burlington.ajr@bigpond.com

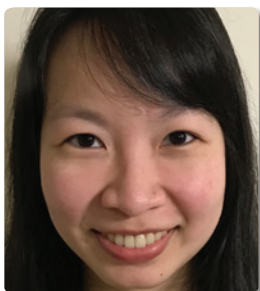


Interview – Three Young Christians

For this issue, InterSections interviewed three young women who have made their commitment to follow Christ in recent years. Each responded to the following questions: What prompted you to follow Christ as your Master? How has God been transforming your life since making this momentous decision? In what ways does Christ define you now?

Li Xin Ong

Growing up in a non-Christian family, my only exposure to the Gospel was the occasional church invitation by Christian friends. Later, I was introduced to the Church of Christ by my husband who encouraged me to worship regularly with him.



As I began to understand the Gospel and became acquainted with other mature Christians, I marvelled at their Christ-like behaviour - their quiet strength, forbearance, and gentle humility that came from having a strong faith. This inspired me to seek my own faith.

Before knowing Christ, I thought I only had myself to depend on. This bred a degree of selfishness and a sense of 'what can I get out of this?' After getting to know God, I have learnt to trust and depend on him more. That has brought a sense of calm. It's transformed my way of thinking into more of 'how can I help others?'

Working in a retail environment and facing abusive customers has challenged me to remember God's command to love one another. Learning to respond to harsh words with love and calm patience instead of anger and defiance might also be viewed as counter-cultural (it can also be seen as weak and submissive). I hope I can continue to rely on God's strength to show love and patience to everyone. I also hope to have the courage to do his will even if it goes against societal norms. ◇

Li Xin Ong is a member of Belmore Road Church of Christ, Melbourne. lixin1987@hotmail.com

Faith

Being raised in a Christian household, God and the church have always been a part of my life. However, I decided to claim my faith as my own after realising how much I love my church family, how the intricacy of nature could only be the work of a 'Master Designer', and ultimately how empty my life would be without God by my side.



I believe God has transformed me by placing some truly special people in my life. I think of the small church in Lyon, France, who welcomed me with warmth and hospitality during a challenging six-week language exchange. I think of the older, mature Christian couples – from overseas and interstate – who have shared dinner and much wisdom with our family through their stories of faith and loss. I think of Veron, who really was a Christian sister to me during my first solo overseas trip in Jogjakarta. But, most of all, I see God's transformative power in my family – their persistent acts of patience, forgiveness, and humility are slowly transforming me into a better daughter, sister, and fellow Christian.

While I still struggle with the idea of my 'identity', becoming a Christian has freed me from an unending search to 'find myself' through success, others' approval, travel, or possessions. I'm simply an imperfect, yet earnest, work-in-progress for Christ. So, I now define myself as a blessed and valuable follower of Christ, ultimately created to live up to my name in everything I say, do, and think. ◇

Faith is a member of Belmore Road Church Christ, Melbourne.



Laura Tickner

I grew up in the church and everyone there is family to me. Being influenced by my immediate family as well as so many others gave me that extra push to make God the Lord and Master of my life.

It's been two years since I was baptised and it really gives me something to relate things back to. Things are still hard, and I have ups and downs. But what's most important is that God has a plan for me, and that he loves me. That makes all the difference. Christ has always been a part of my life. I've grown up going to church twice a week, going to different church lectureships and services, learning about the miracles that Jesus performed, and singing Bible songs.

Without God in my life, I wouldn't at all be the same person I'm today. Going to church and learning about God teaches me so many things about life. As I read more of the Scriptures, I understand more about how the impact of Jesus dying on the cross and taking away people's sins will affect the rest of eternity.

As Galatians 2:20 says: 'I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (ESV)

Christ defines me by influencing how I think and act daily. God has made an impact. I have to stop and think when I make decisions in order to make sure that what I'm doing is right and pleasing to Him. Of course, we all make mistakes and we slip up. But it has really changed the way that I do things. ◇

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Li Xin Ong, Faith and Laura Tickner were interviewed by Jenny Ancell managing editor of InterSections.