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Who needs an Agenda from the Faith Page?

Much can be achieved in co-operation with friends who don't necessarily share the same faith or any faith at all. As a Christian group, Concern Australia gladly partners with people of other worldviews to provide relief and justice programs. If you're homeless, who cares whether an atheist, a Christian or a Buddhist provides you shelter?

There can be no discriminatory franchise on who does good. Certainly, there can be no

discrimination in the delivery of care. The unconscious, battered body confronting the Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan was their brother or sister made in the image of God. Every person is sacred. Christian agencies must protect, nurture and foster all in need, irrespective of belief, class, sex, race or behavioral history.

There are some distinctly Christian traditions, based on the life and teaching of Jesus that

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we are obliged, evenly sacredly compelled to uphold, to emulate, and even to propagate in our daily works. Here are some significant marks of a faith-based, holistic program of communication and caring organisation, as expressed in Mark 6:7-13 in *The Message* translation.

*He sent them off with these instructions:
'Don't think you need a lot of extra
equipment for this. You are the equipment.
No special appeals for funds. Keep it
simple.' And no luxury inns (6:7-10).*

In Concern Australia's [CA] duty of care for those in need of our services, the Christian tradition calls for personal commitment, personal restraint in lifestyle, resistance to exploitation, integrity in our professional dealings with others, and the recognition that it is the people rather than the programs that are the greatest agent for care and transformation. Dedicated, trustworthy, compassionate staff even outweigh technical professionalism. William Booth built a global empire of carers from the transformed converts of the streets, rather than from the professionals in the Seminaries. While scholarship and qualification are a bonus, at CA we believe the integrity, the faith, the love and the dedication of our staff have been a key to effective communication and welfare.

*He gave them authority and power to deal
with the evil opposition...right and left
they sent the demons packing...(6:8, 13).*

Unfortunately, there are forces of greed, of exploitation, of violence and marginalization in our world, producing human tragedy and suffering. Our task must include conflict with

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political and social structures on behalf of clients who in Bible terms 'cannot speak for themselves' – not because they lack ability but because systems, circumstances and structures restrict their opportunity. Bullies, dictators, corrupt officials, abusive husbands, drug pushers, ill-informed policy makers, politicians, and religious leaders require censure! Most social reforms in Western history (abolition of slavery, prevention of cruelty to animals, the Trade Union Movement, racial desegregation) were initiated by people of faith. A sense of divine love empowers courage to confront tyrannies.

*Then they were on the road. They
preached with joyful urgency that life
can be radically different...(6:12).*

It matters what we believe. What we believe we live. Our beliefs are greatly shaped by what we hear (Romans 10:14-17). As Paul asked, *how will they hear without a preacher sent to tell?* CA has responded to that need and seen thousands changed by the power of the spoken and written word. This task is achieved quietly, by staff responding with truth to requests by those they are assisting in social care, housing, educating and training.

*They brought wellness to the sick,
anointing their bodies, healing their spirits
(6:13).*

Speaking our message of hope and love is not enough. Without loving, caring, practical demonstration of care, our faith statements are dead and lack validation (James 2:14-22). Jesus said to the Pharisees that *religion without justice, mercy and love is hypocrisy* (Matthew 5:7; 9:13; 22:19; Mark 12:31-33). In the afterlife, our feeding the hungry, healing the sick, clothing the destitute, visiting the imprisoned will outweigh pious words of religiosity (Matthew 25:31-45). John says, *if we do not love our people, expressed in practical compassion by providing material possessions for the needy, we don't even know God* (1 John 3:10, 14, 17-18).

Something is terribly wrong when free, prosperous, societies are marked by pandemic depression and social injustice. There has got to be a better way.

But it is the liberating message that life should and can be different that marks faith-based human services of CA at a strategic time when much good, caring welfare has conceded defeat, settling only for harm minimization. Something is terribly wrong when free, prosperous, societies are marked by pandemic depression and social injustice. There has got to be a better way.

Extraordinary breadth and depth of ministry is being carried out at CA, mostly without public awareness. Values for Life has developed outstanding follow-up materials for teachers. Requests for visits to schools are at a high level.

God's Squad is having outstanding impact around the world, from the Ukraine and Finland to Hobart. Weddings, funerals, serious accidents, and family problems provide an amazing flow of ministry to people who would never otherwise encounter the Christian message of love and hope. In Manchester, our UK president has established a Garage Church that has succeeded such that the Anglican Bishop wants to embrace it.

In recognition of our Mission experience and formal training in missiology, I was invited to provide an intensive unit on Urban Mission theology and practice for Adelaide's Tabor College. I am currently a Visiting Scholar at St Mark's College/Charles Sturt University ACT, preparing courses on a Philosophy and Theology of Welfare, Justice and Advocacy. My Doctoral work has been recognized by a new academic unit investigating the history and significance of Revitalization Movements throughout history, and I provided the only plenary presentation on modern/postmodern revitalizations to the international academic gathering in the USA in October.

Opportunities to speak in Anglican, Uniting Church and Baptist congregations from Brisbane to Adelaide have kept the preaching fire alight. Last year's presentations at Black Stump were the largest in attendance of all the bible studies and seminars apart from the plenary session.

Eminent biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann states:

If consumerism is destroying the human spirit among us and crushing the values of >>>

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family and community, and if consumerism produces a pathology of abused persons in inadequate relations, then there is no remedy within that system. Remedy requires breaking with that system for the sake of a different set of relations ... requires a deep intentional break ... in order to be healed. There is no cheap, easy healing, but there is healing.

Jesus combined healing with declaration of a new way of living that he called the kingdom of God. He began his ministry by a public, spoken declaration of the causes and consequences of humanity's ills. Preaching, teaching and public proclamation are not tax-relief activities in Australia. It is therefore easier to obtain support for welfare than for the spreading of the message.

Few agencies maintain the balance of human relief with faithfulness and effectiveness in disseminating a transformational word, cross-culturally, and cross-generationally. Concern Australia will continue to speak the great

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message with urgency and compassion in festivals, rallies, schools, and conferences. We will continue to show and tell faith and love through street level contact and communication of *God's Squad, Steps, St Martins Churches, Livewires, Inside Out, and Handbrake Turn.*

I believe we have the right team of dedicated workers, in the right places, with a right message, at the right time, with the right holistic outcomes.





A condensed version of this article appeared in the Concern Australia News, Summer 2009 edition.

Mission... at home

A Missionary to the Invisible of Collingwood

Collingwood is known for its great bars, vintage clothes stores, boutique furniture, art galleries, cutting edge hairdressers, and culinary delights... and its football club of course! It's a suburb filled with amazing warehouse apartments, walls packed with stencil and graffiti art, and a hint of the 'uber' cool. When I tell people that I work and live in the Fitzroy/Collingwood area, the attributes described above are the things that are mentioned. So when someone suggested that I was an 'urban missionary' (a term that I am not so comfortable with myself) it was met with a snort of derision by others.

What isn't often seen in Collingwood is the incredible amount of material poverty, even though all it takes is looking up at the skyline towards Hoddle St and the evidence of it in the form of the Collingwood Public Housing Estate sends a shadow across the suburb. I'm amazed at how many people don't see it. It's like for some, it's invisible. For most of us who live here, it is hard to dismiss. Wealth and poverty sitting side by side. Sometimes they interact, but sometimes they appear to be in different cities all together. It's almost impossible to sit outside a café without someone coming up and begging for money.

At this point, poverty becomes a little more confronting. It's interesting to watch how people respond be it with a smile and a shake of the head, a welcome 'sure mate' and an exchange of names or just plain, ugly rudeness. It's the rudeness that creates the biggest barriers. It allows for an 'us' and 'them' mentality, suggesting that there is hierarchy of worth for human beings even though the inner city political correctness would suggest that this notion left Collingwood with the 60's...or at least the 90's! With every dismissal, with every rejection, with every derogatory word slung – all from both sides of the economic/social/cultural divide, the gap seems to get larger, as does the need for relationship and a sense of community.

Last week, down the street from St Martins Community, a tragedy happened. One adult son, a more than a little drunk, started having a go at his mother. A family friend stepped in. The result was a brutal bashing which led to the friend barely being recognizable and dying before he could be taken to hospital. That all happened down on the Public Housing Estate. A couple of weeks before that, a girl was raped by a drunken guy on the hood of a car owned by a friend of >>>

mine. It was parked around the corner from one of the bars on Smith St, the one that they had just come out of, the one that I often go to. Violence comes from every quarter, it's just easier for some to point a finger at the Housing Estate and say 'they live like that, it's how they live, they're used to it' so that we don't have to confront the violence and dysfunction in our own 'got-it-together-PC-educated-middleclass-wear the right clothes-sing the right songs to Jesus' circles. By no means are the darker sides of humanity seen only on the Collingwood Public Housing Estate, everything negative is just highlighted and condensed there.

People live on the Public Housing Estates because they are economically poor. Not many people I know want to stay on them, especially those with children. It is certainly not the most ideal place as a child, to grow up in with people injecting drugs outside your door, defecating in your laundry, stealing your favorite clothes. With parks not safe enough to play in unsupervised, neighbourhood gangs of teenagers bullying, threatening and teasing you on your way home from school. Being too scared to stay over at your best friend's house, or having your mother be too scared so you can't stay over at anyone's house. Always having a mild sense of anxiety because you are not sure who is going to be in the lift everytime you want to go out or come home. Having your Christmas and Birthday presents hocked every year to help pay for the 'electricity bill'. It's not an easy life for many of the Primary School aged children who come to LiveWires. Some of these children have massive hang ups before they even get to school. It's an amazing thing to see them change and grow over the years, to be part of family celebrations, school performances and weekly engagements.

I believe Jesus calls us to have true and real friendships with people who the mainstream easily make scapegoats of.

It is in Collingwood that I have been re converted time and time again. This is because I have seen the face of Jesus and heard his voice in so many of the people who live here, clearly teaching me what it is to love and be loved. I am learning compassion, to manage exhaustion, to sit in grief, to advocate, to practice true hospitality and to laugh heartily – all from sharing life, being in relationship with and learning from those (including the children) who are considered to be 'other' in the eyes of many. The LiveWires Programs are an expression of our desire to do something to break down levels of material and emotional poverty – for the Primary School aged children that live on the Collingwood Public Housing Estate, for their families, *and also for ourselves*. It is a place of constant conversion for me, and that's why I believe Jesus calls us to have true and real friendships with people who the mainstream easily make scapegoats of. It is because we are called to aim for the creation of equality, for seeking just ways for all, and to be in the places that Jesus chose to be. It's because it is in the margins where we are taught by Jesus, in the most profound and life changing ways, through those who are labeled the most unlikely to do so and who are also the ones that Jesus knew who would.

Ann Van Leerdam
LiveWires Programs Manager



The Church: A Tree and its Rings

Some years ago, we were forced to chop down a magnificent Australian native Silky Oak tree. I had grown this tree from seeds I collected from the bush and it had reached about sixty feet in height. The next door neighbor, a lawyer, had issued veiled threats of action if we didn't remove it... it was dropping leaves in his swimming pool.

I nearly wept as my son cut it down with a chainsaw. The family watched in silence until only the stump was left. The silky oak has a beautifully grained timber so our son who was working at a saw mill, took the wood away, had it dressed and made some tables out of it. At least something good came from this disappointing event.

We had a brief argument about the year the tree was planted. Then I said "Of course, we can settle this argument by counting the annual rings of the tree on the remaining stump." A good dendrologist can tell you not only the age of the tree but which were good years and which were drought years from the width of the rings.

Another interesting fact is if you cut a two inch wide ring, half an inch deep around a tree, it

will die. They call it ring barking. In one sense, the life of the tree is simply the last half inch thickness of bark. If this half inch is ring barked, the sap which provides life to the branches and leaves is cut off and the tree dies.

As I contemplated this, to use a 60's expression, it 'blew my mind' because that's an analogy of the church. The majority of the tree is what people would call "dead wood". So it is with the church. The majority of what people see could be called "dead wood" but without that trunk, without the rings of its history... all that's happened, its tradition, the fragile life out on the edge could not stand without that core. That's how tenuous the life of the tree is and similarly, that's how tenuous the life of the church is. If one strips that creative marginal outer edge of the life of the church, you end up with something like first Century Judaism. You have all the history, all the tradition, but it is as if the tree of life has been ring barked. There is no life and the historic tree bears no fruit. The life of the tree is always vested in the risky outer edge. It's at the margins.

That's why Jesus always worked at the margins. That's where the life is. No matter how successful >>>

The Church: A Tree and it's Rings

yesterday was, one year later, it's a dead ring in the tree, but without the dead rings in the tree, you have no history, no continuity and the tenuous outer bark cannot exist.

The postmodern world wants to ring bark itself off the tree of history and tradition because it views that core as dead and irrelevant. The tradition would often like to "ring bark" the outer edge but we need the life of the rebelling, creative, unpredictable new ring. One can have all the history and all the tradition, but if the tree has been ring barked, there is no life and as Jesus described the Judaism of His time, "It bears no fruit." The tragedy is that people want to deal with one or the other, but for the tree to stand, one must have all the rings – its tradition and its history, the sap-bearing bark conjointly working together in the trunk of the tree. That fragile, easily vulnerable, open to attack ring of life, must also be added annually to the history of the tree.

Perhaps in this era of Gen X, Gen Y and other generational obsessions we need to revisit the fact that the Kingdom of God, according to Jesus, always brings forth *something old and something new*. There is a great danger in this time of adoration of youth, that generationalism or ageism replaces sexism and racism as the divisive force in the culture of the Church.

There is a great danger in this time of adoration of youth, that generationalism or ageism replaces sexism and racism as the divisive force in the culture of the Church.

It is worth remembering that the disciples were probably not far beyond what in modern terms is teenage-hood. Mary, the bearer of the Messiah and Saviour of the world, was also very young. On the other hand, the one most mystifying, futuristic Bible book was a revelation trusted to an aged disciple, John, possibly in his nineties.

The outer ring of youthful energy, visions and contemporary relevance must not be torn from the historical core of tradition and instead great lessons learnt by godly experience, persistent discipleship, proven principles and purifying conflict.



DONATE NOW

to further our mission work with disadvantaged youth, here on our own doorstep.



Concern Australia is the Christian mission, education and youth outreach organisation John Smith founded in 1972 along with God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club, to transform the lives of marginalised youth on the streets, in schools and in prison.

Concern Australia relies on the support of churches, individuals and businesses to continue its outreach and education work.

We invite you – in response to receiving this complimentary copy of the John Smith Quarterly Essay – to support Concern Australia's mission to transform the lives of marginalised and disadvantaged young people on our own doorstep, by praying for our work and making a donation.

Our Programs and Ministries



Concern Australia Missions incorporates the outreach and evangelistic activities of John Smith, and God's Squad. CA Missions recently expanded to include more systematic research that helps engage churches, welfare agencies and social workers to understand the Biblical basis for social care.



Your donation to this ministry will help bring a message of justice, love and mercy and a deeper understanding of God's heart for social justice to thousands of people across Australia.



Values for Life are highly-engaging and interactive values education seminars for primary and secondary school students, teaching them not what to believe, but how to think!

The seminars, now in hundreds of schools, present the wisdom of a Biblical worldview and challenge students to think about the values underlying their own behaviours and the framework their values are based on. Topics include love, sex and commitment; bullying, abuse and disregard; why people use drugs or alcohol as well as larger issues of identity and worldview.



Your donation will help Concern Australia have a radical impact on the lives of young Australians in Victoria and beyond.



Outreach Services seeks to reach out, stand alongside and bring hope to the most marginalised young people that society has forgotten. Programs like Inside Out, LiveWires and Steps provide isolated children and young

people with personal support, mentoring and role models as well as a safe place.



Your donation today will help Concern Australia stand alongside the most marginalised young people in our society.



Hand Brake Turn is a radically life-changing experience inside an automotive workshop for marginalised and at-risk young people. Located in Sunshine, Dandenong and Geelong in Victoria and Gosford NSW, HBT incorporates automotive hands-on training, personal mentoring and support. HBT also provides coaching in communication and life skills, work-readiness and job-search skills. It improves a young person's attitude, relationship skills, self-image, purpose and direction.



Your donation today will help Concern Australia radically turn around the life of a marginalised young person and provide additional mentoring and support they need to have a better future.

We pray you will be challenged to further your missional walk with us. Help Concern Australia take up the challenge to meet the growing needs of marginalised young people in your and our communities in the next 12 months.

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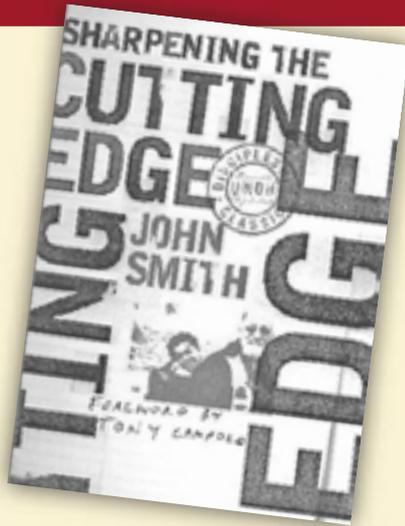
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by **John Smith**



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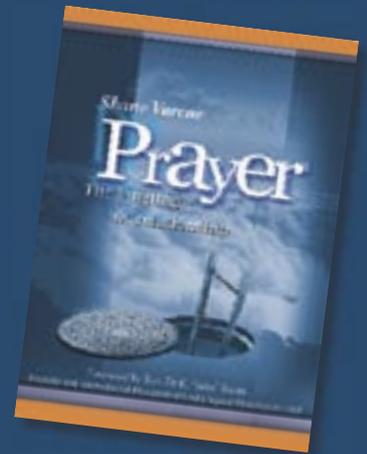
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— **Ash Barker**, Director, *Urban Neighbours Of Hope* and
author of *Make Poverty Personal*

Prayer – The language of relationship

by Shane Varcoe



'As the church records unprecedented growth especially in the Third World it is significant for us as its leadership to seek to live lives of biblical purity, integrity and holiness. That's the only way we can impact our nations. We cannot do that without prayer. This remarkable book "Prayer: The Language of Relationship" is not only timely for the entire body of Christ in this context but very significant for me at this point in my own ministry — highly recommended!'

Dr Appianda Arthur (PhD)
President, Global Leaders Initiative (Partners In Discipleship)

'Empowering, inspiring, encouraging — and workable. This book should be in the hands of every Christian who desires to have an intimate relationship with God. Unlike many other "prayer" books, its emphasis is on what prayer really is — a relationship. It helps the reader to refocus on their prayer life and find a new and wonderful world of devotional communion with God. A must read.'

Lerisse Smith
Alive Magazine

ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

by John Smith

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revised
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"Truly a preacher to the convertible...
John Smith's message is for people
who want to do more than just listen."
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Featuring the foundation stories of
God's Squad and Concern Australia

In his autobiography, which sold more than 80,000 copies in its first print, John describes the events that shaped his life and fostered a movement of risk-takers, willing to stand with the marginalised in the name of the marginal Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.

It tells the foundation stories of God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club, Concern Australia as well as his evangelistic ministry, including many stories from the past four decades living on the radical edge: riding with outlaw bikers and sitting with street kids; standing with the marginalised and fighting third world injustice; ; nurturing artists and debating academics, consulting to politicians and business leaders.

In this special revised edition, John adds new details to the story including a special 'Postscript' that gives a glimpse of the action filled twenty years since it was first published.

