

CMS
VICTORIA

branchmatters

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Church Growth: Talking about Jesus

Proclaiming life through Christ



Paul Arnott

What am I Worth ?

What makes you valuable as a person? It's a good question to ponder at the start of a new year. It's easy to let each year slip by without reflecting on the significance of what we are experiencing here on planet earth.

The danger for those of us in so-called "fulltime" Christian ministry is that our lives are no more than our ministries. For example, if all my worth derives from my role who will I be when I stop being the State Director of CMS in Victoria? Does my worth derive from what I do or who I am?

I once interviewed for the ABC a man called Nigel Goodwin, who began a London based organisation for Christians involved in the Arts and the Media. He commented memorably, "I am loved and because I am loved everything will be alright."

Am I of worth because I am loved? But what happens if we are not loved, or we feel that we are not loved, does that mean we are worthless? Am I of worth because I am alive or because I am human?

This gets to the heart of the euthanasia debate. If a person's worth derives from what they do does that mean that only those who contribute to society are of any worth? The book of Genesis tells us that human beings are made in the image of God.

While most commentators agree that being made in God's image is linked to having dominion over creation it also refers to our ability to have a relationship with God. On earth only human beings can relate to God personally. The bible asserts that each of us has a unique identity, which is the creation of God.



Psalm 139.15-16 remind us, "You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed."

Each human being is of infinite worth because we are made in the image of God and we are people for whom Jesus died. This is the message of the gospel our missionaries proclaim and on which we stake our lives.

TALKING ABOUT JESUS

Andrew and Dominique are working in a Spanish-speaking Anglican church in Catalan speaking Barcelona. The church had not had a pastor for 16 years. Now they are seeing growth.

Growing a Protestant Church in Barcelona, Spain, is not an easy task. Andrew and Dom Gifford have been working at doing that, and are convinced that the answer is to talk about Jesus.

The State Government of Catalunya has recently reformed laws that affect all religious groups, except Roman Catholics. These changes give power to each mayor to make decisions about places of worship within the district. These laws mean that a mayor can enforce particular planning laws and even decrease the number of Protestant churches in the district. Until 30 years ago, this kind of discrimination was the norm and those painful years are being brought to the fore.

So, dare we as guests here quote Tertullian, that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"? or Paul, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"?

Does the kingdom of God grow when it has an easy relationship with the State? What would lead to locals becoming Christians here in Barcelona?

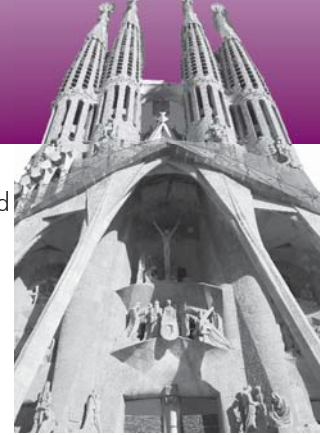
One factor that we have continually observed among locals is the level of ignorance in whom Jesus really was and is.

People's decisions about him are based on myth.

So, as guests here, do we suggest that whatever the government may seek to do legally, nothing can stop the growth of God's kingdom if only we would start to talk about Jesus again. Social programs can do that; but you don't have to be Christian to care for people. Being relevant has its advantages; but who could be more relevant here than the Barça football club? Being socially acceptable and having legal protection is nice; but is it necessary? In the end what Barcelona needs is people willing to talk about Jesus and be like Jesus. It's not rocket science.

When Marc came to church he told us he was an atheist. We said, "You're welcome here, we follow Jesus and we'd like you to come to know him too." Over the last year, we have noticed that Marc no longer calls himself an atheist, and we keep talking with him about Jesus.

The biggest lesson that we have learnt in our first term has been that church planting in our context is very hard work. It may be that it will get harder as the government makes other legal decisions. However, the opportunity to introduce people to Jesus (like Marc, Lorna, Miguel, Carolina, Nacho, Sonia, Erik, Carlos, Mariona) makes it all worthwhile.



Sagrada Familia in Barcelona



Image: Gifford family

Still in its 'Small Beginnings..' – The Celebrating Church of Phnom Penh

By Vana Eliezer

Inpa and Vana Eliezer have been serving with CMS in Cambodia since 1996. The small but growing Celebrating Church is one outcome of their ministry of Bible teaching and pastoral care.

We want to study the Bible in English", was the request from a few young Cambodians at the end of 1997, our first year in Phnom Penh.

We had met a couple of them at Dhiva and Dhanu's school and had invited them to our first Christmas in Cambodia during which we played the Jesus video in Khmai.

With our paltry Khmai and their meagre English, we started trusting the Lord to do His part. Through Bible studies, informal chats and even occasional outings, relationships began to deepen. Within a year three people wanted to be baptised. Sok, one of the new Christians, invited Inpa to teach his fellow students from his English Language class.



Ps. Sreytouch and his family

Though we tried to integrate the new Christians into local Khmer churches, they did not feel welcome. They said "We want to become a church." When we asked them why they wanted to start a church and what they meant by church, they said, "We want to stay together and worship together." We agreed to help if two or three people volunteered to form a committee. And so the Sunday Worship Group (SWGGrp) was born on 10th March, 2002.

Amazingly they have not missed meeting a single Sunday since then. There were some Sundays when the attendance was as low as six people but generally it was around fifteen. For all purposes they were functioning like a church with the leadership centred on three: Rasa Sok, Sous Sreytouch and Sreysors. After three years, Sreytouch, decided to accept the role of Church-worker and volunteered to go to the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS).

In the meantime, the three committee members appointed the first pastor, a graduate from the PPBS, and the SWGGrp began to be identified by the name Celebrating Church. The first two successive pastors left for secular jobs for financial reasons. But they have continued to come for worship with their families and to be involved as much as possible.

Friendship, not location, is the drawcard. So, members come from both far and near. This also means their attendance is often influenced by the transport cost, and a few hold jobs requiring a seven day commitment.



Celebrating Church Phnom Penh

Home visits have become the key vehicle for pastoral care and outreach.

The Friday intercessory prayer meeting, we believe, is the backbone for this growing church. The prayer requests range from praying for healing of coughs and colds, jobs and for deliverance from spiritual warfare. With persistent Bible teaching, members started praying for their community and for those less fortunate than they are.

Bible teaching, pastoral care with home visits, intercessory prayer and mentoring of leaders, are the key building blocks placed on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

The leadership of five committee members and two volunteer pastors assist the Pastor in Charge. During our extended home assignment, they fared well but realised they were weak in relationships. The recent camp brought out some hidden fears and weaknesses in the leaders. Yet, the silver lining is that these leaders have woken up to the fact that they need to build relationships! It is a miraculous breakthrough!

Today, the number of regular attendees has increased to 26-28 adults per Sunday, and about 12 children.

Will they keep growing to be able to stand together to provide God-honouring leadership? Will the Celebrating Church continue forever? It is in God's hands.

"Behold I am about to do a new thing..." (Isaiah 43: 19) This verse has become the promise the leadership is holding on to.

On the 10th March, 2012 Celebrating Church will be 10 years old. Ps. Sreytouch, the pioneer, is already trying to move the committee to think about celebrating the 10th anniversary.

God's faithfulness in the life of Celebrating Church deserves to be celebrated.

To support Inpa and Vana Eliezer in prayer or financially go to: <http://www.cms.org.au/missionary/southeastasia/inpa-and-vana-eliezer>

What's On

Dates for Your Diary this

February

CMS Family Festival Saturday 25th February

12 - 3pm including BBQ lunch, kid's entertainment, meet CMS missionaries Andrew and Claire Livingstone.

Glen Waverley Anglican
800 Waverley Rd Glen Waverley
Details call Office 98944722

Missionary Care Fellowship (MCF)

meets on Wednesday 8 February at 10.15am starting with morning tea. Andrew & Claire Livingstone will be our guest speakers. Everyone is welcome, but please bring your own lunch. More details from Marjorie Linton on 9497 1605.

St Andrew's Hall

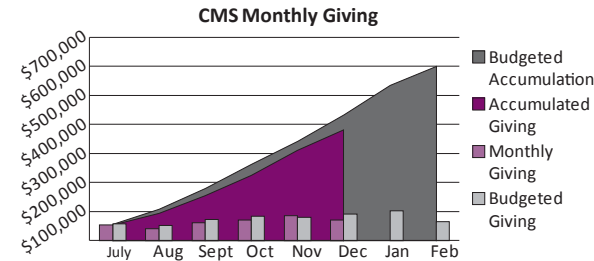
Course One begins on Monday 6 February.

1MPG (First Monday Prayer Group) meets on Monday 4 February. BYO Lunch and prayer for God's worldwide mission. Call Hugh Prentice on 9014 0968 for more information.

All events will be held at the CMS Centre, 9-13 Queen Street, Blackburn, unless otherwise indicated.

Thanksgiving for Peter Broadbent

The Revd Peter Broadbent, who served with CMS in Malaya and Thailand from 1961-1970, died on 5 December. On his return to Australia Peter served in parishes in WA and Queensland. We give thanks to God for his life and ministry and pray for his wife, Margaret, and family at this time.



Praise God for the \$100,830 given in December and \$692,051 so far this financial year. We are however, \$132,804 behind budget in giving. Please pray for CMS Vic finances.

Comings and Goings

Arriving: Hallyburton Family on 29 February



Deb Bird is currently in Nepal for 3 months as a medical student to complete a placement at Tansen Mission Hospital. Deb says "I am excited to have this opportunity to learn about how medicine differs in a developing country and experience how people share the love of God in this context." Deb began her time in Nepal in late December, 2011.

Missionaries need you!

Actually what they really need is furniture and cars. The Hallyburtons will be returning for Final Home Assignment at the end of February. CMS is currently needing to furnish a house for them with furniture and cutlery, crockery etc., in good condition. Also they need a fridge and washing machine which is in good working order. They will also need a car.

The Sonnemans will need a house to live in which is in good order from mid June to late July/ early August, while they are on leave and Home Assignment. If you can assist with these needs, please contact Graeme Vines at CMS on 9894 4722.

My Thanksgiving Gift

MoneyMatters

Yes! I want to donate to CMS to help proclaim life through Christ:

- Here is my cheque/money order payable to CMS – Victoria Inc.
- Please debit my credit card. Visa MasterCard

Card no: / /

Card holder name:

Signature:

Expiry date:

Amount:

Thank you for
your partnership in mission!

Name:

Address:

State: P/c: Phone:

Please return this form to: Reply Paid 410, Blackburn VIC 3130 BM – FEB 12



CMS Family Festival

Saturday 25 February 12 - 3pm
BBQ lunch and Kids Entertainment
Come and meet newest CMS missionaries
Andrew and Claire Livingstone
Free if you bring a friend who is not a CMS supporter
or \$10 a family
GWAC, 800 Waverley Rd, Glen Waverley



Are you up to speed with our missionaries?

What pieces of communication from CMS do you most enjoy reading? What many CMS members look out for are the missionary prayer points and newsletters. These provide a real sense of the ministries in which our missionaries are engaged and aid our prayer. Recently we discovered that some people didn't realise how easy it was to subscribe to these via email.

All you have to do is **log on** to the CMS website and **subscribe** to monthly Missionary Prayer Points or Quarterly Newsletters. Try it...

www.cms.org.au/get-involved/subscribe