



Assembly of
Confessing
Congregations

BELROSE UNITING CHURCH

Good News Quarterly

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August - October 2021

Light in dark times

We are living in times with challenges that most of us have never experienced before. We may have heard stories passed down from those who lived through the Spanish flu epidemic in the early 1900s, or those growing up in the Great Depression, or coping with food rationing during WW 2. But to many of us they are just that – stories, albeit amazing stories of resilience amidst hardship and isolation, people making do with whatever they could find, being deprived of livelihoods, food and support; and the stories of grief and loss – just check out an old cemetery and notice the number of graves of children dated in the early part of the 20th century.

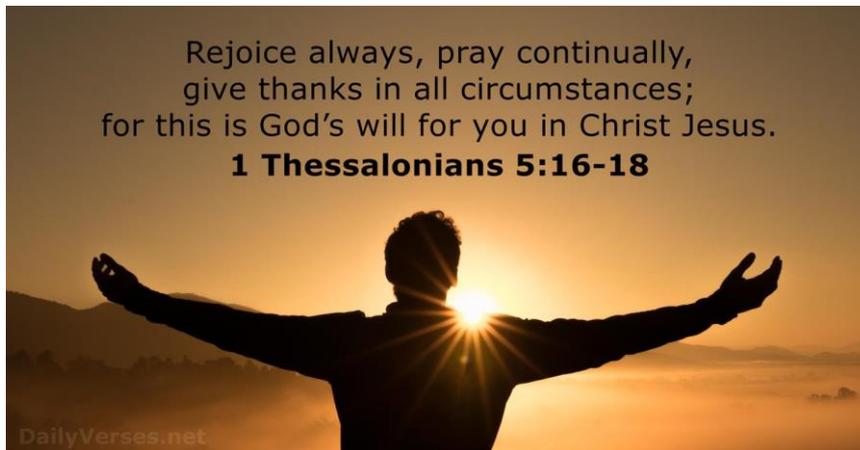
Perhaps in some small way, we now may have some appreciation for what other generations have endured as we manage life in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic with all the restrictions imposed upon us, and with the accompanying ramifications: loss of business, unemployment, restricted movement and isolation, challenges to physical and mental health, even our own mortality and the death of loved ones or friends.

For many in our community, these are very dark times. How, as people of God who have been given a living hope in the sovereignty of God and the triumph of Jesus over death, can we be light and offer light, to our community in these dark times? Throughout this next quarter (August to October) I hope that, as we draw upon the Word of God and the experience of the worldwide Church, past and present, we might gain some insights into these questions.

In **August** I will be looking at the **Book of Judges** – where, despite being a period of great darkness in the life of the Old Testament people of God, there was still a light shining – the light of God's faithfulness and saving grace. In **September**, I will be exploring the **Joy of the Gospel** from the New Testament book of **Philippians**, written by Paul in the context of imprisonment and suffering – yet filled with great joy. In **October** we will have the privilege of hearing the amazing stories of faith and perseverance from **the persecuted Church** past and present, from the Scriptures and from the testimonies of Christians today.

I pray that in these weeks ahead we may be encouraged and strengthened to shine the light of Christ into our community as God shines the light of His grace and peace upon us.

Ian Weeks



Belrose Uniting Church

in the Assembly of Confessing Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia
Corner Forest Way and Morgan Road, Belrose

We aim TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world since 1916.

Every Sunday 9.30 am and 5.30 pm

Good News Quarterly is the quarterly newsletter of the Belrose Uniting Church:

To Know Christ and Make Him Known!

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Living in a Covid Community – How has lockdown affected us?

Stories of Experiences in Lockdown

I have asked some people to share their reflections on the covid lockdown, and how it has impacted them. Here are their stories.

Allison Pitt:

I heard on the radio that just before COVID hit, a study announced that 8% of Americans suffered from significant anxiety and/or depression. The same study has just been completed 18 months later and the figure is now apparently 42%. So if you are feeling the pressure as the new COVID restrictions amp up - it means you are probably normal and have lots of company. As life hits us with the unexpected and we can't control what we thought we could in our comfortable zones, it is human to feel shocked and disorientated. But as we have the privilege to be Christians - we have a choice. We can lean into the drama. We can fill our thoughts with negativity, and therefore like sheep our feelings will follow - with self-pity and fear.

But for us in those difficult and challenging moments we can also choose to lean towards our loving Christ Jesus. We can seek His presence. We can pick up the bible. We can listen to uplifting worship music or a podcast with a strong biblical message. We can reach out and call a trusted friend who may be just as glad in the moment to hear from us.

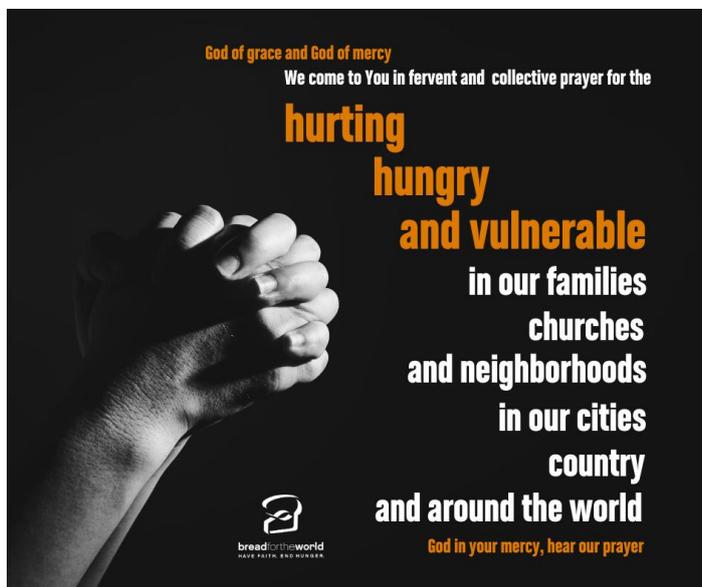
These are ways we can protect from the inundation of media messages which seems intent in creating uncertainty and an atmosphere of negativity. How fortunate are we that we have a God who cares and can renew our hearts and minds? All we have to do is ask our Father in Heaven for help.

Venessa and I have observed to each other how fortunate we are to know that God has everything in hand. He knows the future and is in control, despite the superficial appearance that all is amiss. This gives a great steadfastness and sense of trust.

These times are when we can make the conscious choice to trust in God even though we may not understand what is happening or why. We find it is crucial to remind each other of God's love and His strength is our refuge. We often pray and sing the parts of praise songs we can remember, if we are challenged - especially when we hear of how others have been affected. We have watched as some friends of ours have crashed and burned during these unsettling times.

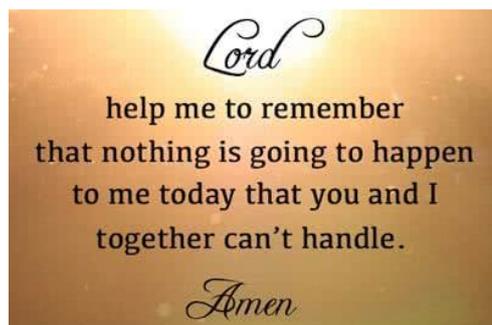
Times are tough for many. For example, Venessa's best friend was retrenched this week from a job she has held for 19 years. It is very difficult times for those who cannot be with those they love or are worried about their own or others' health. It is easy to fear. But how fortunate are we that we have a God who cares and can renew our hearts and minds? All we have to do is ask our Father in Heaven for his powerful, wise and love and help. As Peter says (in 1 Peter 5:7) - *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."*

Prayers for you, our Church family, and feel free to call me if you would like a friendly voice to hear how you are faring.



David & Nicola Pengilly:

We have been fortunate that lockdown has not impacted us greatly with regards to work. We both still have full-time jobs locally. The nature of our roles means that we are both still going in to work on occasion, David particularly, as he has outdoor trades staff in the team that he manages. We both had periods of being unwell and off work, so it was easier to stay at home and rest.



We put ourselves into semi-lockdown as soon as the first cases in Sydney appeared, as we were booked to go to Western Australia in late June during the school holidays. We were trying to avoid accidentally being in a Covid hotspot and not being able to travel. Our trip was of course cancelled, and we now have credits with a couple of companies that hopefully we will be able to use at some stage!

We were fortunate to get to our niece's wedding in the Blue Mountains the day we went into lockdown. We had to wear masks and the numbers at the reception were halved, but at least they could get married. We spent the weekend in Katoomba with our children and their

partners, so at least we got to see them also. Jackson and Erryn had 2 weeks in lockdown in Canberra as they had been in Greater Sydney when they returned to the ACT. It will be some time before we are able to see them, or Becky & Lachlan again.

We are keeping in touch with friends and family as much as we can via Zoom meets and phone calls. It is particularly difficult with Nicola's parents in lockdown in their Nursing Home – communication is difficult at the best of times, but at least we can see each other's faces on the screen.

We are watching church on-line from Holy Trinity Brompton in London – the church that started Alpha. We are also enjoying Ian's messages each week and continue to pray for our church family using the prayer diary. We are appreciating the extra time together and the time at home – and the opportunity to have a walk outside several times a day. It is also a time to reflect on the many blessings we have and a determination not to take these for granted.

A different type of grief – A pastor's reflection on pandemic fatigue and "covid grief"

As we have endured the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic, some new words have entered our vocabulary: "pandemic fatigue" and "covid grief". What are they, and how can we manage them?

The Rev Nich Cole, pastor of Mt Colah UC, counsellor, and Chaplain to NSW Rural Fire Service, shares some reflections on this new aspect of grief.

We all know that grief comes after a loss of a loved one, a job, a relationship or the like. Sometimes however grief strikes before the event like when some people head to retirement, they lament the loss of their working life before it's ended. But what about covid grief? I would best describe this as the challenging and uncertain time living between potential infection and keeping safe or vaccinated into the new year. When this is mixed with the media commentary, it heightens our sense of fear, and perhaps brings some of us to a point of facing our mortality. We start thinking of the significant others in our lives, and what it would mean to us if we, or they, were infected or worse, our, or their, lives ended. It can easily lead to feelings of helplessness, despair and hopelessness.

Having dealt with grief in many different contexts over the years one of the more helpful things I and others have found is to name where we have been, where we are at and where we are heading with grief. It helps us wrestle some control back into our hands as we venture forwards again.

My **first encouragement** is that God is always with us and he will never fail us.

The **second** is, this is all written about through the scriptures, very prominently in the Psalms, so you can get into the scriptures and have a look.

My **third encouragement** is that we have one another. When we stop fellowshiping and being in a connected community we tend to listen more to the clashing worldly views of society and media, and not to God and his Word.

So let's journey through the **5 stages of grief** as it may help us understand the framework which some are operating under at this time.

1. Denial – You may have thought this covid virus won't affect you. You may have looked at other places and thought *"That's not going to happen to us"*. You may even have thought *"if we have a lock down it's only going to be for a week or two"*. There is a tension here as we in Australia have lived in relative freedom compared to many other places, so we're lulled into a false sense of security. Denial can be a false protective mechanism to try to keep us positive when things around us start to fail.

2. Anger – Anger urges us to find someone to blame. We might be asking the questions: *Who created this? Why are people not wearing masks? Whose fault is this? Why didn't the government lock us down sooner, or later, or lock us down at all?* Anger allows us to set a blame point against someone or something. This can help us distance ourselves from the reality that we are becoming fully involved in the situation or circumstances.

3. Bargaining – This is where we seek to make deals with ourselves, or others, to change our situation: *If we all stay isolated for 2 weeks then we can lift the restrictions*. Bargaining can also take on a sneaky or deceptive aspect as we seek ways out of our situation: *"If I go 15kms from home when I am only allowed 10km"*, or *"How will they know if I go to meet up with friends while shopping?"*, *"What legitimate excuse can I manufacture in order to go out?"* However when bargaining seems to fail we then move to stage 4...

4. Depression – You may feel lonely, sad, disconnected. The weight of this season falls on your shoulders and it seems that there is no joy in life at this time. Motivation drops, family and friends can even get the raw end of our words and attitude. We find more annoyance than positives in our day. Sometimes what we have thought would be a convenient & pleasant novelty like working from home and not having to commute, more flexible working hours, etc, are now seen as a burden, not a liberation.

5. Acceptance – This is the start of a new season when we realise what we are living in is the new normal. To enjoy life again, we need to see how this new season can best be engaged by us. Sure we are locked down, wearing masks, limited in connectedness... but in 2021 we still have the telephone, as well as Facetime, Zoom, Video chats, and more. And once lockdown is lifted, we will be able to socialise (safely!!) again.

The Old Testament character Job loses everything ... family, wealth, status. Job is challenged to curse God and die. Job's reply astounds as he says: *"How can we only love God and give him praise when the seasons are good to us?"* Psalm 22 starts with *God, Why do you forsake me?* Yet it finishes with words of hope and triumph in God. In the New Testament Jesus reminds the people *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.... you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Matt 11:28-30).

In this challenging time, can I encourage you to find a new way of connecting with others, of fellowshiping together, perhaps sharing in meals and coffee over the internet. It is easy to lie down and take on the despair of this world, however our call is to be Christ's ambassadors in these times. The world is watching and wants to know how we as Christians are going to deal with these challenges and where is God for us all. It is a tough season, but tough seasons come and go, and the product is a tough Christian with a testimony of hope!

Rev Nich Cole

Belrose Uniting Church
Morning Service Preaching Plan September - October 2021
(Assuming Worship restrictions will be lifted by then)

	Date	9.30 am Morning Church	MISSION OF THE MONTH
	September	<i>Philippians – Joy in the Gospel</i>	<i>Pioneers – Graham & Sarah Edwardes in Ireland</i>
1	5 th	Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Joy in Suffering</i> Philippians 1:1 – 30	<i>Pioneers</i> mobilises teams to glorify God among unreached peoples by initiating church planting movements in partnership with local churches.
2	12 th	Rev Anton Dykman <i>Joy in Service</i> Philippians 2:1 – 30	<i>Pioneers</i> seeks is to glorify God throughout the nations of the world, through obedience to the Bible and by living and proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is an act of worship to actively participate in some way in the Great Commission.
3	19 th	Mr Ross Swadling <i>Joy in Christ</i> Philippians 3:1 - 21	Some cultures in the world have no neighbours who can tell them about Jesus Christ. <i>Pioneers</i> hopes to share God's love with those people in places where the gospel is yet to be effectively proclaimed.
4	26 th	Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Joy in Contentment</i> Philippians 4:1 – 23	<i>BUC partners with Graham & Sarah Edwardes, with their children Sydney & Enzo, who are sharing the Gospel in Ireland.</i>
	October	<i>The Church Under Fire</i>	Supporting The Persecuted Church
1	3 rd	Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Suffering to be expected?</i> Matthew 5:1 - 12	<i>Open Doors – Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide</i> <i>Open Doors</i> was established in 1955 when Brother Andrew, a newly committed Christian, began smuggling Bibles into Eastern Europe. <i>(Read the story from the book God's Smuggler – available in the Church Library)</i>
2	10 th	<i>The Lord's Supper</i> Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Confidence despite suffering</i> Revelation 1:9 - 20	<i>Since then Open Doors has expanded to work in over 70 countries, providing Bibles, training and practical support to the persecuted church.</i>
3	17 th	<i>Open Doors Sunday</i> Guest Speaker Jordan Scott	<i>Open Doors</i> seeks to strengthen and prepare Christians living in persecution, and to mobilise the Australian church to identify with the global body of Christ.
4	24 th	Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Strength to endure suffering</i> Revelation 2:8 - 17	<i>Open Doors</i> works through local partners and build long-term relationships in countries all around the world. We partner with people who know and understand what is needed to see the church strengthened and the gospel proclaimed. Our mission is to help the local church transform their nation for Jesus.
5	31 st	Rev. Ian Weeks <i>Suffering will end!</i> Romans 8:18 - 39	<i>At BUC we also acknowledge that there are other worthwhile organisations assisting the persecuted Church, such as The Barnabas Fund and the Bible League. Uphold them all in prayer.</i>