

ANGLICAN DEACONESS MINISTRIES

2023

Annual Report





Inside you'll find inspiring stories of Christian women serving God faithfully in a variety of contexts and spaces. We pray that their stories, while demonstrating the value of Anglican Deaconess Ministries, our funding schemes, Mary Andrews College, The Greenhouse and the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute, will also encourage and spur you on as you serve God where He has placed you.

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

- PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6 NIV

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Anglican Deaconess Ministries acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which ADM stands. In His wisdom and love our Heavenly Father gave this land to them as caretakers on His behalf. We pay our deep respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to the many indigenous peoples of these lands now called Australia.

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Letter from THE INTERIM CEO

Maryanne Davis
Interim CEO, July 2022 to July 2023

What a privilege and a blessing it is to work for an organisation such as ADM!

For all who work and support Anglican Deaconess Ministries there is a general acceptance that we strive to follow the path established by those who have gone before. Recently, we have been sorting through the archives and this has provided many 'gems' that can challenge and inspire us as we develop and implement our strategic plan.

One such gem is a small booklet entitled *Book of Devotions for the Meetings of Church of England Deaconess Work*. The dull, brown cover, and title that can barely be read, give little indication of the wisdom within. It commences with sections of the Bible highlighting that God's Word was, and remains, at the core of all we do. This is followed by prayers.

The first is a prayer for those with governance over the deaconesses and their work:

Almighty God, Giver of wisdom, Who never failest them that seek Thee, control and govern, we beseech Thee, the hearts and minds of all who serve on the Council of the Deaconess Institution... Grant them patience with insight, faith and obedience to Thy Holy Will.

I would like to thank our Board for their untiring work throughout 2023 which reflects this prayer in abundance.

The booklet then moves to prayers for the deaconesses:

Grant O Lord, we beseech Thee, to Thy handmaids whom Thou hast called to the office of Deaconesses the grace of perseverance in their ministry; bestow on them the gifts of wisdom and sound judgement, of simplicity and singleness of heart, of sympathy with those amongst whom they dwell and work.

This is very much a prayer written in 1918, yet, as we consider the work undertaken throughout the year by the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute and The Greenhouse, we can see that this ministry reflects us walking together along the path of those who have gone before. This is also seen though the grants funding both in Fellowships and in the Women in Ministry Support Scheme. Both reflect perseverance, wisdom, judgement, simplicity and singleness of heart and sympathy.

This is followed by a prayer for those in training – this early practice of theological training that has grown throughout the many years of teaching and learning enabled through Mary Andrews College.

As disciples of Thine may they be apt to teach, fervent in spirit, that in all their words and deeds they might seek Thy glory and the increase of Thy Kingdom.

As you read about Mary Andrews College in this report I am sure you will see answers to this prayer.

The final prayer is for all who minister within and support ADM and its ministries:

Almighty God, Who by Thine Apostle has taught us that it is good to be zealously affected in a good cause, we thank Thee that Thou art willing to receive the humble ministrations of Thy servants here on earth... grant them the wisdom from above which is gentle, easy to be entreated, so that by thy gracious Spirit, they may reach out to do greater things which remain to be accomplished, and receive Thy promised reward.

How blessed we are to be able to walk together in the path of those who have gone before; and to serve and support ADM and its varied ministries which reflect the passion for the service of Christ that lie at its core.



Letter from THE BOARD CHAIR

Rev. Caroline Andrews
Chair

I am always amazed when I hear about the work of the deaconesses. One of my highlight books for the year was *View from the Faraway Pagoda* by Robert and Linda Banks. It is the story of Sophie Newton, one of our early deaconesses who served in China from 1897 to 1931. She served in very remote and harsh conditions setting up schools and training "Bible Women" – evangelists and pastoral carers to work in their local communities. She was passionate about serving Jesus and integrated all her life's work to doing good in His name for almost 35 years in China.

I am excited for all the women in ADM who follow in Sophie's footsteps at Mary Andrews College, in our funding programs, in the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute and in The Greenhouse. All of these women are passionate about serving Jesus and doing good in His name in their churches, their workplaces and their communities. We pray that God will continue to do amazing work in His world through them.

This year it is important to note the contribution of two directors who have recently resigned from the Board: Nerida Peart who served for the last 12 years, and Libby Janssen after eight years of service. We are so thankful

for their contribution over so many years and for their passionate commitment to seeing women encouraged and grown as they serve their Lord in the Church and in the world. I would like to personally thank them for their very significant support to me as Chair. They are wonderful encouragers, listeners, pray-ers and very wise women!

I wish to extend my deep thanks to each of the ADM Board members who give generously of their time and skills and for their deep commitment to seeing ADM flourish in serving Jesus.

I would especially like to thank Maryanne Davis who has served for a year as our Interim CEO. She has been a wonderful provision from God and her wisdom, stability and support have been a great blessing to the Board and the staff. We also are thankful for our wonderful staff who serve with such passion and generosity.

We look forward to serving together with the new CEO, Mary Un, in implementing the strategic plan and are excited about this new chapter of life at ADM. We thank God for the opportunity to have significant impact as we see women grow in their love and service of Jesus.



Introducing
MARY UN

The new CEO of ADM

The Board of Anglican Deaconess Ministries is delighted that Mary Un has been appointed as the next CEO of ADM, commencing in July 2023.

With twenty years of experience working in not-for-profits, community health and aged care, a passion for the marginalised, and a deep faith in Jesus, Mary is well placed to lead ADM into its next season. Mary brings strengths in people leadership, project management and transformational change. She joins ADM most recently from the private sector where she has been an Operations Manager for Vitalis Health and Home Care.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia in the deep south of the United States, Mary moved to Australia with her family at age 10, then back to Atlanta at age 16, finally returning to Sydney permanently after her first semester of college.

Mary recalls, "While I had not heard the gospel until high school, from as early as I can remember I prayed to God every single night. God is wonderfully active in pursuing His children."

Mary became a Christian in Sydney as a teenager, after hearing the gospel preached at her local youth group at Christ Church St Ives.

At age 16, after moving back to Atlanta, Mary knew she had to continue nurturing her fledgling faith, so took herself to church. She remembers, "The church I first went to had thousands of members. I stumbled into a youth service that looked more like a sporting event than anything I had witnessed in Sydney. I sat in the bleachers by myself feeling alone, but for the fact that this was my Heavenly Father's Church and I could trust Him to hold me near. That very day, I met a gorgeous older woman who gently cared for and supported me until I left for college."

Upon her return to Australia, Mary settled at UNSW and completed a BA in Politics and International Relations. While studying, Mary considered various career options, eventually settling on working in not-for-profits. Mary explains, "Since my teens, God has placed those with intellectual disabilities close to my heart, and I pursued a career as a case manager and behaviouralist advocating for and supporting people with intellectual disabilities in the workforce. I have gone on to work in aged care and community health. I am passionate about bringing God's view that all people are precious and deserve respect and value to organisational culture, strategic policy, processes, and governance."

Mary has now worked in the not-for-profit sector for over 20 years, serving recently in executive leadership roles

for programs run across NSW and the ACT. She is particularly thankful for having had the opportunity to be a part of rolling out human rights-based legislative changes to aged care in the last decade.

Mary characterises her leadership style in her past roles as passionate. She says, "I cannot help but ooze passion and energy for things I am invested in, including work. My experience is that passion is contagious, and I work hard to inspire those I work with to

come on the journey with me. I am innovative, creative, curious, a natural storyteller and listener, and get great joy coaching and supporting those I work with to grow and thrive in their areas of expertise."

Ministry has always been an area of interest for Mary and her husband Guan. She explains, "We began our married life with the intention of a more conventional ministry path. At differing times, we were both part of Ministry Training Strategy with Campus Bible Study at UNSW. Guan then went on to complete a Theology degree at Moore College

I am passionate about bringing God's view that all people are precious and deserve respect and value to organisational culture, strategic policy, processes, and governance.

Mary Un



while I continued to work with not-for-profits. But as is often the case, God had different plans for us than we anticipated.

“My experience in not-for-profits, and faith-based organisations, had been that they struggled to attract the brightest and the best in their fields. I decided to commit my career to developing strong leadership and business acumen to give the vulnerable in our communities the type of leadership, services and supports they deserve. They deserve the best of the best. I had hoped one day to take all God has taught me to a Christian organisation where I could serve His Church.”

Along with her husband and their two children, Mary is part of Newtown and Erskineville Anglican Church. That’s where she first heard about the role with ADM. Mary shares, “A woman I have churched with for years, whom I deeply respect, pulled me aside one Sunday and encouraged me to consider the role. She had spoken to me over the years about ADM and planted the seed that I may one day be of service to it. My plan was that a CEO role may be on the cards for me towards the end of my career, but throughout the interview process, I became convinced that what was really holding me back from leading a Christian organisation was my own need to want to do it “perfectly”, which will never be possible. God knows I am not perfect; in fact, He chooses the imperfect and broken in the world to be His people and involved in His work. I come to this role humbly walking alongside Jesus excited to see what He has planned for ADM.”

Mary’s delight about being appointed to the role is evident, as she says with enthusiasm, “I am still awestruck that I get to spend my days empowering my Christian sisters to better serve our Lord. I honestly could not have designed a better job myself had God given me the chance. It is an honour to be part of the long legacy of women who have served in this ministry.”

She continues, “I want my time with ADM to contribute to the success of the next 130 years of its history. We have a wonderful opportunity in the next decade to refine and embed our mission and strategy and deeply root ourselves into the lives of Christian women and the vulnerable in Sydney and beyond. I am particularly excited about exploring opportunities to re-invest in ADM’s compassionate ministries.”

Chair of the ADM Board Rev. Caroline Andrews says of Mary’s appointment, “We are delighted that Mary has accepted this role. We prayed that God would lead us to a stand-out candidate and He brought us Mary, for which we give Him great thanks. Mary’s experience, her obvious passion for ADM’s work, and her creative ideas for new ways for ADM to serve women and the vulnerable are a beautiful extension of the legacy of the deaconesses. The Board looks forward to working closely with Mary and seeing God work powerfully through her.”

Please join us in prayer, thanking God for bringing Mary to ADM and praying for her in this time of change. Mary asks specifically, “Pray for the ADM team that God will give them peace as they go through a time of transition. Pray that God will continue His faithful growth in me as He prepares me for my new role. It is not perfection that I need, but rather a deep trust that God loves His Church and because of His kindness and grace I can call on Him to see ADM thrive.”

*I am still awestruck that
I get to spend my days
empowering my Christian
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Mary Up





FIFTY YEARS OF FAITHFUL *service*

Celebrating the ministry of Rev. Jacinth Myles

As of 2023, Reverend Jacinth Myles has faithfully served in Anglican parish ministry for 50 years.

Many women have served in a variety of types of ministry around Sydney and NSW, including chaplaincy, theological education and mission, but perhaps none have had the depth of experience that Jacinth has had in parish ministry.

But despite this remarkable service, Jacinth, who has been a Christian for over 70 years, classifies herself as an “ordinary person”. She says that she came from a poor family and has no university education.

However, she does have a Theological Diploma, a strong faith in Jesus, and a passion for serving others – and God has used her powerfully.

The beginnings of a ministry life

Jacinth began her working life as a primary school teacher at Fairfield West Public School before transitioning into her ministry training at Deaconess House over 50 years ago. Initially, she had wanted to become an overseas missionary.

However, she found that God had other plans for her life and her ministry. When she was unable to pursue missionary service due to medical reasons, she began a life of ministry in NSW that spanned nine parishes.

Over the Australia Day weekend in 1973, Jacinth began in her first parish ministry role in Lawson. At the end of the year, she was sent a letter and a plane ticket from Bishop Clive Kerle, inviting her to an interview in Armidale. She got the job and ministered at the Armidale Cathedral for almost seven years.

During her time in Armidale, there were three highlights that stand out to Jacinth.

She recalls, “God gave me an idea to reach out through SRE classes which resulted in 100 primary school children attending weekly Bible study and prayer groups in parishioners’ homes and learning how to read the Bible and pray at home during the week. These groups were called Quest Clubs and the idea soon spread to many parts of NSW, QLD and beyond”.

Jacinth explains her second highlight: “Ordinary people, like myself, in a university city, were finding it difficult to understand the Dean’s sermons and the Bible studies led by him, as he was a highly intelligent academic. Once again, I believe that the Lord gave me the idea of starting a beginners’ Bible study for adults. Soon I was leading three of those groups every week.”

Despite this remarkable service, Jacinth, who has been a Christian for over 70 years, classifies herself as an “ordinary person”.

Jacinth’s third highlight was when she met Jackie Stoneman, a new parishioner with whom she built a strong and enduring friendship. Together they have shared accommodation and ministries across the same parishes for over 40 years.

Back to Sydney

Following her position in Armidale, Jacinth was invited to take up an assistant role in the Haberfield parish. During her time in Haberfield, the Christianity Explained course had just been written and Jacinth was able to use it as a resource. In that first year, 14 people in the parish became Christians. Jacinth continued to use the course over the next four decades of her ministry.

Jacinth shares that she was amazed and privileged at Bishop John Reid’s suggestion that she be appointed in the place of a Rector at the church parishes of South Canterbury and Clement Park as her next ministry position. One of the highlights was that Jacinth was able to lead a team of parishioners to knock on 3,000 doors, to give away many New Testaments, to invite recipients to do the Christianity Explained course and to see many people become Christians. Jacinth ministered in this role for three-and-a-half years before the parishes were amalgamated with the parish of Belmore, and she then continued on staff for another three-and-a-half years.

In 1989, both Jacinth and Jackie were among the first fourteen women to be ordained as deacons in the Sydney Anglican Diocese.

But as Jacinth continued her ministry, she began to feel the weight of burnout upon her.

“I was able to take some time out,” Jacinth shares. “During this time though, I became convinced that I would never be able to do any more parish ministry, ever!”

Rebuilding the Abbotsford parish

Thankfully, this was not the case and Jacinth received a phone call from Bishop Peter Watson. He asked her to start leading the services at Abbotsford, a parish that had no more than \$1,000 in its bank account, had 15 parishioners, and was on the brink of closure.

Jacinth shares, “He (the Bishop) wanted me to start the following Sunday, the week before Christmas, and to my amazement, I said I would, but when the call ended, I panicked, thinking that there was no way I could do the job. This situation was to be trialled for two to three months and then reviewed. The review never happened.

“This was the Lord taking a minister and a parish, both down for the count and almost out, and putting them together to perform more of His miracles.”

After fifteen years at Abbotsford, Jacinth chose to retire from that parish. But during her time serving at Abbotsford, the parish was able to employ six male student ministers, three children’s workers and an administrative assistant. Abbotsford is still going well 29 years after it almost closed.

Retirement and work at ADM

But retirement for Jacinth certainly wasn’t the end of her ministry. She went on to minister in the parish of St John’s Park and from 2011 was the Honorary Assistant Minister in the parish of Sadleir for 12 years.

In 2008, Jacinth became aware of a growing need amongst retired deaconesses in the Sydney diocese. Their regular meetings were at risk of being discontinued, which would make it difficult for them to continue in fellowship with each other.

Jacinth shares, “I contacted the Archdeacon for Women at the time and asked for the meetings for the older women to continue running. She was swamped with lots of different tasks, so she asked me to come on board and help to pastor the older women as a volunteer, which I did for six months.

“The CEO of ADM at that time heard about it, and offered to pay me to continue this role. I nearly fell off my chair at the opportunity to be paid to do something I really loved! Since then, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to be Chaplain to the deaconesses, some retired female deacons and a few lay women.”

Jacinth ministered to 49 deaconesses and female deacons in a myriad of ways. She recalls that she sought to “encourage them spiritually, and to give them undivided time and attention.”

“When I visited them or spoke on the telephone, I made sure that I never had a deadline – that I was there for them, for as long as they needed,” she says.

“I also used the traditional hymns they know and love so well to encourage them, and shared related Scripture



selections and the stories of the authors of those hymns. Because these ladies had ministered God’s Word to others for many years, this was a way I could bring God’s Word to them in a fresh way. They always found stories of the authors so inspiring.”

Jacinth also offered practical support to the women where she could. This included taking funeral services, organising significant anniversaries, providing hospital communion and driving some to appointments.

She also served as a much-needed bridge between the deaconesses’ needs and ADM’s financial services.

“Many of our deaconesses ministered before the days of compulsory superannuation contributions. They were paid very low stipends and when they retired, they had no superannuation and very little, if any, savings,” shares Jacinth. “The fact that ADM was willing to support them financially, in so many ways, made a huge difference to many of them. They were always so very grateful.”

Rev. Jan Donohoo shares of Jacinth, “In caring for the deaconesses and others who came within her remit, Jacinth is a true servant of the Lord Jesus. Her sense of responsibility towards these women – who themselves have served sacrificially – caused her natural diligence and organisational skills to have a fine Christian outworking, and to benefit the women.”

Jacinth saw her days working with the deaconesses and providing care as a way to put faith into action. She shares, “For many years I would say to people that I have the most wonderful ministry: I get paid to chat, eat meals and have coffee with my friends! It was a joy to be there for them. I will always be grateful to the Lord for calling me to this ministry.”

Since her retirement from ADM in late 2020, Jacinth spent two years in increased time caring for her elderly mother, who went to be with the Lord two years ago. She also continued in parish ministry at St Mark’s Anglican Church Sadleir until mid-2023. She says she looks forward to seeing how the Lord will help her to be a faithful minister of His word well into the future.

Jacinth says, “I have always been, and forever will be, immensely amazed at and appreciative of all that the Lord has so graciously and generously allowed me to experience during the past 50 years.”

Since then, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to be Chaplain to the deaconesses, some retired female deacons and a few lay women.

Rev. Jacinth Myles



Remembering REV. NARELLE JARRETT

1942 – 2022

On Friday 4 November 2022, Rev. Narelle Jarrett went to be with Jesus. Narelle was the Principal of Mary Andrews College (Deaconess House as it used to be known) from 1985 to 2007 and Archdeacon for Women's Ministry in the Sydney Anglican Diocese from 2002 to 2012.

Narelle, who was born in 1942, is remembered as a woman of great wisdom, warmth and faith, whose ministry impacted the lives of countless people in Sydney and beyond.

Narelle trained for ministry at Moore Theological College and was awarded a Licentiate of Theology (Honours) in 1969 and then a Bachelor of Divinity (London) in 1970.

In 1985, Narelle was appointed Principal at Deaconess House. As Principal, she had primary responsibility for a ministry training program for women enrolled at Moore Theological College, to address the special pastoral needs of female students. A variety of other programs were run under Narelle's leadership, including ministering to the university students living at Deaconess House, part-time Bible courses for lay women in Sydney, an annual women's conference, and Diploma courses. In 1996, Mary Andrews died, then in the following year (after consultation about alternative names), under Narelle, Deaconess House was renamed Mary Andrews College.

Remembered by former students

Rev. Marge Mills, now a lecturer at Mary Andrews College, recalls, "Mid-1987 I travelled on an overnight bus from Queensland for an interview to apply to study at Moore College/Deaconess House. After an initial interview with another staff member, I met Narelle in the hallway and she was instantly friendly and welcoming and said, "Of course you can come." So I knew her first as student-to-Principal,

but quickly came to have a friendship as well, spending time with her at Deaconess House, and later socially. In third year she asked me to be Senior Student and also work as a Student Minister, which deepened our relationship, working together. After fourth year she asked me on staff, which I happily agreed to and continued in for the next 30 plus years."

Marge continues, "She was able to go beyond surface level quickly with people and get a feel for what might be concerns for them. I noticed this especially with students and boarders who were studying at Sydney Uni. This meant Narelle could teach the Bible with relevance to real life and issues and apply the Word to people's hearts. I was initially so impressed by Narelle that I was in danger of putting her on a pedestal as some sort of saint! However, because I had the blessing of getting to know her I discovered she was an ordinary Christian, seeking to live Christ's way, and using the wonderful gifts God had given her. She, like me, was sinful and we didn't always agree. This was a much more helpful real view of Narelle and a more inspiring and impacting example to me of ongoing perseverance in faith and service."

ADM's Chair of the Board Rev. Caroline Andrews also studied while Narelle was Principal. She remembers, "I met Narelle as a teenager when she served as an honorary minister at St Paul's South Coogee. I can remember her insightful sermons and the long conversations as I weighed up decisions to move towards theological education and vocational ministry. She was so warm and generous with her time.

"Narelle also had a cheeky sense of humour and was lots of fun as she lived amongst the women students at Deaconess House.

"I can remember her office under the main stairs, where I would drop in to chat or when I was summoned for a meeting. She would always have a box of tissues waiting as her gift of spiritual discernment would undo me every time and then her kind wisdom would rebuild me. Her role as Principal and mentor during these years of early theological formation whilst at College shaped me significantly in encouraging me to look to Scriptures for wisdom and when offering pastoral care and guidance."

Remembered by colleagues

In 1989, Narelle was among the first group of women to be ordained as deacons. Also a member of that cohort was Rev. Jackie Stoneman, who joined the Deaconess House faculty in 1994 and followed Narelle as Principal at Mary Andrews College.

Jackie shares, "I think that Narelle was a true visionary. She was able to encourage and inspire women to see the importance of serving, sharing the gospel and being intentional about training to do those things. She was very aware that women often felt inadequate or not equipped to do this easily. Narelle wanted to find ways to inspire women and provide the training. She also had a deeply pastoral heart.

"I also believe that Narelle was often ministering in her various roles out of her 'comfort zone' and yet was prepared to serve because she believed that God wanted her to and relied on Him to enable her. She was a great example of trusting God."

Rev. Jill Williams is another member of the MAC team who remembers Narelle fondly. She shares, "Having worked with Narelle for many years I found her most outstanding gift was being a woman of vision. This vision was coupled with her ability to inspire others to grasp the vision she set and travel with her to see it worked out. She thought big things for God's glory and her desire was for women to grow deeply in their walk with Him. I think she was humbled by how God used her. She would keep thinking of ways that people, especially women, could know Jesus more. It was amazing to see God work beyond what Narelle felt capable of herself, even though she was an inspiring teacher."

Sarah Barry, MAC's Registrar, remembers, "Narelle and a team of women organised and ran a Deaconess House/MAC Women's Ministry Conference on a weekend in early July each year from 1990 to 2007. At these annual Women's Ministry Conference weekends away, Narelle was always the main speaker, with a range of other women running elective seminars. This was a unique conference at the time with a few hundred other women

She was able to encourage and inspire women to see the importance of serving, sharing the gospel and being intentional about training to do those things.

Rev. Jackie Stoneman

from all over Sydney and beyond. At the time, there were no other women's conferences like it. They were great times of faithful and thought-provoking Bible teaching, discussions, good music from a great group of musicians, and fellowship with other women (regardless of whether you had gone on your own or with a group of friends from church). Groups of women or individuals would come back regularly each year."

In 2002, while still serving as Principal at MAC, Narelle was appointed Archdeacon for Women's Ministry in the Sydney Anglican Diocese, a role she held until 2012.

Remembered with hope

Narelle's friends and colleagues at MAC mourn her passing and will miss her dearly, but in the words of Jackie Stoneman, "It is at times like these that the hope of the gospel is so real. Narelle is now experiencing the 'best' that the Lord has for her. To hear Jesus' words 'well done, good and faithful servant' and to receive that new, glorious body is so exciting for her. And to know that one day we will be reunited with every tear wiped away, although I do suspect tears of joy will be in heaven."



The Greenhouse



FINDING A HOME IN THE GREENHOUSE

Jessica's experience

After the isolation of the COVID pandemic, and now running her own business, Jessica Carroll Smith has found The Greenhouse to be a nurturing community for like-minded Christian women seeking to utilise their gifts for God in their respective contexts.

"It's been really confidence-giving for Christian women, saying, 'You can be your distinctively you-shaped version of you as you serve Jesus,' and just celebrating what women are doing," Jess explains.

Married to Byron and blessed with two children, a 13-year-old and a 10-year-old, Jess took her freelance work full-time two years ago. Her work days involve a unique combination of project management support for individuals pursuing endeavours such as writing books or starting businesses. She also undertakes a variety of social research and supports Bible translation organisations in their work.

Jess has experienced a tangible sense of connection through The Greenhouse – a connection that transcends the isolation she feels in other aspects of her life. Post-COVID, with her work meetings often taking place online, and being a mum to slightly older kids, she feels much less embedded in her local community than she did in the past.

"I think this is one of the reasons why The Greenhouse has been good for me," Jess says, "because it's giving me a community of women to belong to, an anchor, a home.

"I think there are a lot of things that mean that my connections are looser. So it's a really good time for this kind of an initiative," Jess explains.

Dr Katrina Clifford, Program Manager of The Greenhouse, agrees. "We have found the need for greater peer support for Christian women, for more relationships of mutual encouragement, particularly in parts of their lives such as their work," she says.

Jess admits that she didn't realise she was missing something until she found it through The Greenhouse. But when she joined, she says, "I knew I had an environment or a culture that was really encouraging for women to be able to use their gifts. It feels really affirming of the opportunities for women to do all kinds of things as they serve God. I want to use a word like 'honouring' of women. It's something that lifts you up and endorses you in your role and in your task."

Jess raves about her experience as part of the Greenhouse Guild for Working Mums. Greenhouse Guilds are small groups of Christian women with something in common – they work in the same industry, or have similar key relationships, or are passionate about the same issues, or serve in the same ministries at different churches.

The online community connection with other women in a similar stage of life has been life-giving for Jess. "It's been really nice to meet people and have the chance to feel connected and have that sense of belonging, and hear other people in a similar life circumstance asking similar questions," she explains.

Jess is quick to point out that being part of a Guild is not just "another Christian thing" on top of ministry at church or involvement in a small group. While Jess feels supported by her local church in many ways, there is something precious about her involvement with The Greenhouse being uniquely for her – a space where she is

Being part of a Guild is not just "another Christian thing" on top of ministry at church or involvement in a small group.

Jessica Carroll Smith



not also juggling the needs of her children. "It's a gift," she admits, "particularly in this season of life. Church doesn't necessarily have the targeted ability to meet you in your space." While for Jess in particular it's the working mum context, there are currently Guilds available for birth workers, playtime leaders, regional ministry workers, trauma workers, readers, mentoring and more.

Jess has also cherished the community of The Greenhouse Gatherings. "I love meeting other women who are trying to be thoughtful about their faith and their practices," she says.

In addition to attending gatherings, Jess was also a speaker at one of the gatherings. She shared insights on goal-setting and project management. She appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the broader community of women seeking support, skills and resources to pursue their projects. The event attracted a diverse range of women with distinct goals, further highlighting the inclusive nature of The Greenhouse and its commitment to encouraging and empowering women.

"I found it really encouraging just that here were all these women who were excited about serving God in different ways and were wanting skills or resourcing or someone to think with them about how they go out and get their jobs done or their projects done," Jess says.

Down the track, The Greenhouse will offer professional development and training across a range of topics, bringing Christian women together with top quality thinkers, trainers, industry professionals and ministry leaders. Jess is excited to see whether there might be opportunities to utilise her experience and partner with The Greenhouse to encourage women in this way.

Even further into the future, Jess looks forward to The Greenhouse being a space available for the next generation of Christian women. As mum to a 13-year-old daughter, Jess is aware of the need for a specific ministry that encourages her and blesses her with her unique God-given gifts.

While a traditional greenhouse provides an ideal environment for plants to grow, Jess is a real-life example of the way ADM's The Greenhouse is releasing and blessing Christian women, enabling them to flourish where God has planted them.





SUPPORT FOR THE HARDEST WORK

Angela's experience in the Trauma Workers Guild

Connection and compassion are two of the values pivotal to the work of a social worker. Social workers establish relationships with those they care for, and address the unique needs of those individuals. But for those working with survivors of trauma, those relationships and needs can feel a lot more taxing as time goes on, and require the workers to have their own support.

Angela Ferguson is a Christian who has worked as a social worker with trauma survivors at Anglicare for the last six years. Angela originally trained as a scientist and re-trained as a social worker once she'd had her children. She says she loved the experience, despite finding it a challenge. "It really opened up a whole world of service for God in lots of different ways," she shares.

Since she began working with trauma survivors, Angela has had to work through the impact of hearing about what people have gone through, and how it has affected her personally. "I think in the beginning, I didn't really realise how much of an impact it was having, and it took a couple of years for that to really hit. It called into question a lot of my beliefs. There was a lot of wrestling with why and how horrific things happen, and how to respond," she explains.

At that time, Angela addressed these questions with a Christian counsellor. "Being able to wrestle with these questions honestly was really helpful," she shares.

But she also began to see a need for ongoing support from others who really understood what she was going through. "When I did some vicarious trauma training through work, that really helped me to see that I needed to prioritise connection with other workers. Support from other workers is part of making this role sustainable."

Angela began speaking about this need with a friend at church, Dr Katrina Clifford. After talking through how to increase connections with other workers, Katrina invited Angela to take on a facilitating role in a new ministry initiative that she was setting up, The Greenhouse.

Katrina asked Angela to coordinate the Trauma Workers Guild, which is a group for professionals who work with clients who have experienced trauma from childhood abuse, whether as social workers, counsellors, legal professionals, or in other roles. The Guild gives those working in this space opportunities to together build a trauma-informed way of working, and share information about good continuing professional development. The Guild provides a safe place for trauma workers to discuss how their work affects them spiritually and in their personal relationships, while not replacing professional supervision.

"I thought, this was a way that I could formalise some of my links with people in this space. At first, I felt very underqualified but I felt God's prompting to give it a go and to help Katrina. I felt passionate about it because I knew it was going to be beneficial for myself also, and I wanted it to get off the ground," Angela shares.

From her tentative beginnings, Angela says that so far it has been a really positive experience. The women in the Guild have a real sense of support for each other as they connect with each other, share their lives and pray for one another.

The Guild meets once a month over zoom on a Monday night, but they've also had one in-person meet-up.

"Meeting online works quite well because many of us have families and other pressures and it just makes it easy at the end of the day to jump online rather

than having to find a time when we can all physically leave our houses and meet somewhere," she says.

At each monthly meeting, the members take it in turns to go around and share, whether that be things they're currently experiencing in their workplaces or bigger issues that they'd like to discuss. One of the topics of discussion has been how to be a Christian in the workplace.

"We've also talked about hope and how we approach hope and its meaning in this space, both as Christians and for those we walk alongside who are not Christians. It's really good to talk with other people who are also in this space, and to manage the complexities of that," Angela shares.

Due to the foundation, structure and core purpose of the group, Angela notes that it's nothing like a regular church Bible study or prayer group.

"We are very conscious of confidentiality in our group," she says. "We are very careful about what we share. It's great to be able to talk with women who understand what it's like to work in this space, and we don't have to fill in the details. They just get it."

Angela's hope for the group is that by continuing to meet and talk with each other, they will reduce their own risk of being traumatised in their roles.

"It is difficult work, but once you've wrestled with it and got to the point of being able to stick with it past a couple of years, then you think, 'I want to be able to stick with it long term'. This Guild and other supports that I've got in place are enabling me to stay with this difficult work for the long term, serving God and helping bring healing in this space," she concludes.

The women in the Guild have a real sense of support for each other as they connect with each other, share their lives and pray for one another.

Angela Ferguson





Inside THE GREENHOUSE

Since starting in February 2023 (to 30 June)

- 117** members of The Greenhouse
- 64** Guild meetings
- 19** online co-working sessions
- 146** attendees in person at gatherings
- 337** attendees online at gatherings
- 1** streamlined digital platform for The Greenhouse members to connect



The Greenhouse Guilds

- Birth Workers
- Business Is Mission
- Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Practitioners
- Clinical Psychologists
- Creatives
- Evangelists
- Finance Workers
- Higher Degree by Research Students
- High School Teachers
- Marketing and Communications Workers
- Mentoring
- Parents and Supporters of Neurodivergent Kids
- Pastoral Care and Mental Wellbeing
- Pastoral Carers
- Playtime Leaders
- Post PhD and Early Career Researchers
- Primary Teachers
- Readers
- Regional Ministry Workers
- Theology Grad Students
- Trauma Workers
- University Student Ministry Workers
- Working Mums



A photograph of a woman with short brown hair, wearing a white lace top, standing at a wooden podium and speaking into a microphone. She is positioned on the left side of the frame. In front of her, a large group of people is seated, viewed from behind, listening to her. The room has a drop ceiling with recessed lights and a projector mounted on it. A vase of pink and white flowers sits on a table next to the podium. The background consists of white wall panels. The text "ADM Fellowships" is overlaid in white serif font on the right side of the image.

ADM Fellowships



BRINGING FORTH LIFE

2021 ADM Fellow Jodie McIver releases her new book



Birth has always been a big part of Jodie McIver's life. When she was a child, she was with her parents in the birthing suite as her mother gave birth to her brother Tim, and once again a few years later for the birth of her sister Tarn. For young Jodie, watching her siblings being born was a positive and encouraging experience that sparked a lifelong interest in pregnancy, birth and babies.

After finishing school, Jodie studied to become a midwife. She loved the job, but she found it challenging to balance her career with her involvement at church.

Jodie grew up in a Christian family and says she always accepted the truth of the gospel. She really took on the Christian faith as her own in high school when she started to go to church by herself. Along the way, her commitment to her faith and ministry raised some tough questions.

"Working as a midwife was hard and the full-time shift work was getting in the way of the ministries I was involved in at church," Jodie explains. "After just a year of midwifery, I ended up deciding to go to Bible college and be equipped for vocational ministry. I thought I was leaving midwifery behind me at that point."

Jodie initially viewed her two career paths of midwifery and ministry as separate from each other, but over time, began to find similarities between the two roles.

"Some of what I was doing in each role was similar,

caring for and supporting women, and there's overlap there. At work as a midwife, you're primarily focused on the physical health and wellbeing and the emotional; in ministry, you're primarily caring for the spiritual health and emotional health of women and families," Jodie explains.

But the depth of the connection between ministry and the beginnings of motherhood didn't quite strike Jodie until a little later.

ADM firstly provided me with a confidence that this book was something that was needed and was worth pursuing and working towards, and that I was a good person to do this.

Jodie McIver

"It really wasn't until I had been through the challenges of the transition to motherhood myself that I began to think about the spiritual, physical and emotional elements of pregnancy and birth."

Jodie began to think that a resource on this topic might be just what Christian mums-to-be needed.

The right support

At the beginning of 2020, Jodie McIver saw an ad on Facebook about the Anglican Deaconess Ministries (ADM) Fellowships program. She decided to apply, seeing this as an amazing opportunity to create a resource for Christian women on pregnancy and birth through a Biblical lens that would prepare and support them through this life-changing journey.

Jodie was one of six ADM Fellows in 2021. She received a bursary and spent two days per week in the dedicated ADM office space working on her book. Jodie credits



ADM, as an organisation committed to building up and equipping Christian women, for their ongoing support during her fellowship, which went far beyond the provision of space and financial assistance. She explains:

“ADM firstly provided me with a confidence that this book was something that was needed and was worth pursuing and working towards, and that I was a good person to do this.

“We were placed into a supportive cohort of other fellows, undertaking a variety of different projects alongside one another, and benefited from interactions with the wonderful staff in the office space. ADM also provided professional development opportunities every few months, namely group or individual sessions on goal-setting, project management, writing and editing your work which offered an opportunity to assess where you were at and thoughtfully move forward.

“I’m very thankful to have received the fellowship which enabled me to prioritise and commit to writing this book within my work and family life. It was also so important to have someone else – beyond just my family – believing in this idea and in my ability to even write a book.”

What she wrote

Jodie could think of a million different ways to describe the contents of her book, *Bringing Forth Life: God's purposes in pregnancy and birth*, but sums it up as a book “exploring the experiences of pregnancy, birth, and the transition to motherhood in light of the bigger picture of the gospel”.

Jodie says that she really enjoyed the process of writing the book, and that it was unlike anything else she’d done before.

“I loved it because I was bringing together different parts of my life and experience and reflecting on that, but also there was the community factor, including the stories of lots of other women and chatting to them about it. There were lots of other people who read and gave feedback on the drafts too,” she reflects.

“I loved thinking deeply about how our bodies work and the theology of birth and the transition to motherhood, but also particularly how each of these are interconnected and impact one another and the process of weaving them together into a book. I also enjoyed the sense of purpose I had throughout, that this wasn’t all just for my own interest or edification, but in writing a book, I had my audience in mind the whole way, the women and families that I work with and have supported in ministry undergoing this big and overwhelming transition. I was able to offer pastoral care by distance, beyond even those I come face to face with.”

Getting it out there

Once the book was complete, Jodie went about the notoriously difficult task of finding a publisher for her work. Many of the publishers she approached were interested in the idea but weren’t willing to support it. However, Youthworks was different.

Jodie shares, “Early on, Youthworks was really interested and ready to take the next step. The process with them was great. There are a lot of different editing stages and so I think the final product ended up quite well polished.”

She says she was thankful for them being keen to take on her project, despite it being different to what they usually publish. She was particularly thankful to the various members of the Youthworks team who edited and assisted her in the process of turning the manuscript into a published work. “It was such a positive process,” she says.

The ministry of the book

Jodie says that since the book’s publication in February 2023, she has already been hearing stories of pregnant women who’ve read the book and had their perceptions changed about what lies ahead for them.

Additionally, Jodie says, “Other women have shared how much they enjoyed reflecting on their past experiences of entering motherhood years ago as they read. So many have said how excited they are for an exploration of this topic which isn’t as commonly spoken of in church settings.

“I really hope that it will support and provide a firm foundation for women/couples as they become parents. Also that it will elevate womanhood, birth and motherhood in all of our minds, revealing this unique and powerful role in bringing forth life.”

Further ministry

Jodie is also keen to use her experience and thinking to encourage other Christian midwives, and has taken on the role of coordinator of the new Birth Workers Greenhouse Guild this year. The Birth Workers Greenhouse Guild is a space for birth workers who love their work and for those who find their work difficult to love within the constraints of the system, but are keen to consider their role within the bigger picture of God’s work in and plans for the world. The Guild maintains a realism about working in this area but is optimistic about its potential for showing love and care that both supports the families involved and gives opportunities for sharing the love of Christ. It facilitates thoughtful interaction with colleagues, families and the world more broadly.

I really hope that it will support and provide a firm foundation for women/couples as they become parents. Also that it will elevate womanhood, birth and motherhood in all of our minds, revealing this unique and powerful role in bringing forth life.

Jodie McAver

When asked what excites her about being part of this Guild, Jodie commented, “I’m looking forward to connecting with other midwives and birth workers who want to think about their role, pregnancy, birth and motherhood in light of the God who gives us new birth. My hope is that this Guild will be a place where Christian women working in this area can build deep relationships, share resources, and support and pray for each other, as we think together about how the work we do reflects the work God is doing in our world through giving us new birth in Christ.”

Widespread recognition

Jodie’s book has been very positively reviewed since its release, and was one of ten shortlisted nominees for the 2023 Australian Christian Book of the Year. This award has previously recognised past ADM Fellows Dr Meredith Lake (winner, 2018) and Susy Lee (nominee, 2022). Congratulations, Jodie, on this fantastic achievement!

2023 ADM FELLOWS



Rachel Ciano – ADM Senior Fellow

The Radical Impact of the Gospel – The Reformation's transformation of marriage and ministry (funding matched by Sydney Missionary & Bible College)

Rachel is researching and writing about the radical nature of the gospel and its transformation of society, as demonstrated specifically in religious ministers being allowed to marry as part of the Protestant Reformation.



Donna Toulmin – ADM Senior Fellow

Good News when Creation is in Crisis

Donna is writing a book focusing on how ecological crises are opportunities to engage our world with the gospel.



Dr Ruth Sutcliffe – ADM Senior Fellow

Persecution for the Name – Lessons from Scripture and the early Christian Church

Ruth is writing on the New Testament's teachings on persecution, and the theological reflections of the early Church's experiences of persecution.



Zoe Earnshaw – ADM Senior Fellow

Real Life Bible – A new YouTube channel with supporting video ministry

Zoe is developing a new Bible teaching video format informed by the communication techniques of YouTube, and will launch a new YouTube channel for Christian women called 'Real Life Bible'.



Louisa Raggatt – ADM Fellow

Partying for Jesus – A practical guide to help Christians share hospitality for the sake of the gospel

Louisa is writing a book providing a practical guide to hospitality, which will address many of the challenges people face when opening their homes to others.

Books by ADM Fellows

Over the past 12 months, current and past ADM Fellows have released five books into the world! Join us in celebrating each of our authors as they continue to engage our world with the gospel:



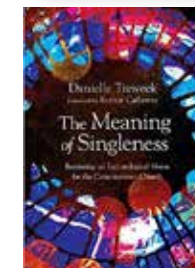
Imperfect Reflections: The art of Christian journaling

2018 ADM Senior Fellow Rev. Dr Kirsten Birkett
Christian Focus Publications
christianfocus.com/products/3037/imperfect-reflection



Bringing Forth Life: God's purposes in pregnancy and birth

2021 ADM Fellow Jodie McIver
Youthworks Media
youthworksmedia.net/products/bringing-forth-life



The Meaning of Singleness: Retrieving an eschatological vision for the contemporary Church

2019 ADM Senior Fellow Rev. Dr Danielle Treweek
InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com/the-meaning-of-singleness



Shakespeare, the Reformation and the Interpreting Self

2019 ADM Senior Fellow Dr Roberta Kwan
Edinburgh University Press
edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-shakespeare-the-reformation-and-the-interpreting-self.html



10 Dead Gals You Should Know: Leaving an enduring legacy

2023 ADM Senior Fellow Rachel Ciano (with Ian J Maddock)
Christian Focus Publications
christianfocus.com/products/3124/10-dead-gals-you-should-know



Women in Ministry
SUPPORT SCHEME



MORE THAN TOYS

How Arda values families from diverse backgrounds in her ministry

Growing up in an Armenian family, Arda Cholakyan reflects that going to church was just part of their Armenian identity. She says that as a child, she knew about God and learned about Jesus, but the Christian faith wasn't something that she understood on a personal level.

"I don't think I had a personal relationship. I never remember actually asking Jesus to come into my life or anything like that. I just went to church because I'm Armenian, and that's what we did," she remembers.

But these days, Arda is the Children and Families Minister at Lakemba Anglican Church.

So what took Arda from being a somewhat uninterested young girl to a passionate minister of the gospel, sharing Jesus with kids and families in Lakemba?

It was partly thanks to her older brother Mark. When Arda was a teenager, Mark had begun to attend a church with a more evangelical outlook and focus. Arda recalls a number of conversations at that time with Mark about the gospel. She shares, "I remember one conversation around the dinner table where I said, 'Mark, I'm a good person. I don't do anything bad. I haven't killed anyone and I'm going to heaven', to which he responded, 'No, sis, you're not, because you don't know who Jesus is.' I told him I disagreed with him and that he could believe what he wanted."

But while she may have brushed it off then, this conversation stayed with Arda.

Fast forward to around 20 years later. Arda had everything: a great job in early childhood education and great friends. But she still felt that something was missing and she began to question her life. Mark's comments came back to her.

"I remembered that conversation I'd had with my brother and he was still attending church and still willing to talk about Christianity with me. I started to ask him about the end times and what was going to happen when the world ended. He suggested I read the Bible with him and his wife, and we looked at the Gospel of Mark and my eyes were opened to the truth! I met Jesus for the first time and that's when I gave my life to Him."

The next step in Arda's faith journey was to join a church that taught the Bible faithfully, and so she started attending an Anglican church with Mark and his wife in North Sydney. Due to her experience in early childhood education, Arda joined the children's ministry team, and her commitment to the Lord and to her church only grew from there.

With a new perspective on life, Arda eventually decided to leave her career in early childhood education behind to study theology. Arda went on to study at Sydney Missionary & Bible College (SMBC) and had the opportunity to move to Lakemba and join Lakemba Anglican Church to learn about cross-cultural ministry.

Arda remained interested in working with kids, and so while she was still studying she took over the children's ministry at Lakemba in a volunteer role. Once she'd finished her studies she was invited to join the staff team

at the end of 2020, two days a week as administrator and three days a week working with children and families.

The main religious demographic of Lakemba is Islamic, with 60% of the population identifying as Muslims and around 33% identifying as nominal Christians.

"We've got a kids' program at our morning service and that service is made up of many different cultures which reflects the suburb. The youngest member is a couple of months old and the oldest would be in their seventies. There's a big range of people from different cultures," Arda shares.

The night service runs a Discovery Bible study method where they open God's Word and ask a series of simple questions to get people thinking about God and what each passage says about Him. "We've got people from so many different backgrounds and understandings, many from Muslim backgrounds, and some who are seeking answers. We have dinner

before our service on Sunday where everyone brings something to share and we all sit down to a meal together," Arda explains.

Mid-week, Arda is involved in a number of other ministries, including a mobile community pantry and running the church's outreach-focused music playgroup.

Arda shares that around 95% of the women bringing their children to the playgroup are from an Islamic background. The playgroup provides Arda and the others running the ministry with the opportunity to speak with these women about their beliefs. "This ministry has provided many opportunities to build relationships with women, to learn about each other, to show Christ's love and to share Bible stories. We can have over 50 women and children attending," Arda says.

This ministry has provided many opportunities to build relationships with women, to learn about each other, to show Christ's love and to share Bible stories.

Arda Cholakyan



Lakemba Anglican, like many churches, does struggle with finances. Arda has felt the impact of this in resourcing the children's ministries at church. "Across our parish and congregations, we don't receive a lot of offertories and so buying resources is a big expense for us. Most of the resources that we have have been donated to us by kind supporters who don't need their toys anymore. We are blessed to get these donations but a lot of the toys come to us used and they don't last very long and we have to get rid of them," Arda explains.

That's what led Arda to apply for a financial grant through ADM's Women in Ministry Support Scheme (WIMSS).

WIMSS provides Christian women with small grants of between \$200 and \$2,000 to be used for ministry resources, or for professional and theological development. The scheme is open to women in both paid and unpaid ministry roles, to those who are ordained and to women in lay ministry. ADM awards up to a total of \$25,000 in the WIMSS scheme each year.

Arda felt that there was a specific need for new, good quality resources and activities for the kids' church and playgroup at Lakemba Anglican and this was the focus of her grant application.

"We wanted to provide quality things for the people who use them. Because I come from an early childhood background, I know that the environment is one way to show people that you respect and value them. Giving them quality resources and things that are interesting to look at helps to start conversations with children and their mothers. It helps them to want to come back; they know that this place is somewhere where they can feel safe and valued."

Now that the funding has come through, Arda is purchasing new resources including new magnetic toys, some furniture including a lockable set of storage shelves, and chairs that are child friendly.

Arda hopes that having new and better resources will ensure that families keep coming along to the playgroup, and she can keep having conversations with the mothers in particular. Of course, she also hopes that the children who use the resources will have lots of fun and feel valued too!

A lot of the women at playgroup ask her if she's married and has children, to which the answer is no. "Then they ask me why, and if I'm sad about it. I share with them my longing to have children but also the fact that God's plan for me is this ministry. I talk to them about how Christ satisfies my needs. We get to talk about marriage and what it means for them in their holy book. I also wear a wedding ring on my finger which says forgiven and so I always point to that

and talk to them about what it means to be forgiven. It's a great opportunity to share the gospel story with them. I share with them how God has abundantly blessed me with children through my work and ministry and through friends and family," she shares.

Arda says that in south-west Sydney it is a lot easier to share faith and Christianity with people there as many of them are already quite faithful to their own religions. They are happy to be prayed for and it's much easier to start conversations because people are more willing to share their own faith and practices.

Please pray for the ministry that is taking place in Lakemba through Arda and the others who are serving there. Pray they can be a light for Jesus and that people will be drawn to the church through their outreach ministries including the playgroup. Pray that as a church, they can share Christ's love in the way they interact with others, and that more believers from a Muslim background will join the church.

"Here in Lakemba, we are always ready to share the joy that we have in Christ," Arda concludes.

Giving them quality resources and things that are interesting to look at helps to start conversations with children and their mothers. It helps them to want to come back; they know that this place is somewhere where they can feel safe and valued.

Arda Cholakyan





ALISON'S *story*

Alison Moffitt from St Oswald's Haberfield (Christ Church Inner West) was awarded a grant to purchase a camera to support her creative communications ministry.

When ADM asked Alison why funding for women in ministry is important, she told us this powerful story (it's long, but incredible!):

"When I initially applied for WIMSS, a small part of me thought I was 'rorting the system'. Surely someone else needed this money more than me. Surely I could get by without a proper camera.

"Surely we could keep relying on our existing, highly experienced, highly talented, (male) volunteers – Liam, Cam and Miles – to supply the photography gear we were using.

"Surely it was too much of a luxury to ask for money to buy a camera.

"I shushed that small voice: 'Be quiet, Alison! This is exactly what the WIMSS is for!' And I proceeded. The funding came through and I ordered a camera, one that Liam suggested for me.

"In December last year, a huge parcel turned up at my house, and I started opening the box. It took me a moment to register what it was.

"When I realised it was the WIMSS camera, I immediately stopped unboxing. I can't unbox this, I thought. Not without Liam or Miles to show me what to do! What if I break it? How will I work out how to use it?

"The parcel sat on my kitchen bench for four hours. I did housework around it, and tossed up whether to call Liam or Miles to ask for their permission and assistance to keep opening the box. It sounds so ridiculous now that I am typing it out. Why did I think I had to ask for their permission!

"But, in that moment, I really did have such a low sense of my abilities and agency in this ministry, I genuinely believed that I couldn't begin using this equipment on my own. Even though I had the backing of my minister, the approval of ADM and the encouragement of my volunteers, I still felt like I wasn't qualified or experienced enough to own this camera and shape this ministry.

Funding programs like WIMSS can help women face up to the incredibly important reality that our ministry actually is valuable and worth supporting.

Alison Moffitt

"We call it by many different names – an inferiority complex, imposter syndrome, low self-esteem. Whatever it was, until that day I didn't think it was my problem. But it came to the surface through that parcel on the kitchen bench. I got to see it, call it out as a lie, and hold tightly to the truth that God is helping me to do this work He has asked of me without fear.

"I love my camera. It's become a sign to me that God can help me learn new things, a sign that I can encourage others to learn new things, and a sign that I can nurture a growing team of volunteers.

"This is why I think funding for women's ministry is important. Sometimes we think we don't need funding, or we don't deserve funding. When we fall into the trap of thinking like this, funding programs like WIMSS can help women face up to the incredibly important reality that our ministry actually is valuable and worth supporting."



FELICITY'S *story*

Felicity Kerr is a ministry trainee (a 'Howie') with the Sydney University Evangelical Union. She was encouraged to apply for a WIMSS grant by her trainer.

Felicity says, "I was surprised and excited to realise that there was an organisation that would be so committed to supporting women in ministry – not only in principle, but in such a practical and genuinely helpful way.

"I have used the grant to purchase a new laptop for my work. I use my laptop every day for all aspects of my ministry traineeship: to prepare and write Bible studies; to work through the digital training booklets we are provided with each week, both as trainees and in turn for training

our students; to email/text/message students and staff that I minister to; to conduct ministry over Zoom, such as prayer groups, training courses and Bible studies; and to complete my theological studies as I progress through an online Diploma of Ministry."

Far beyond just meeting a practical need, Felicity explains the impact that receiving this grant has had for her: "It is an incredible encouragement as a woman in ministry to know that you are valued and your work is significant; that you are not 'second class.' Grants such as WIMSS help to affirm, support and make possible the role of women in ministry spaces, celebrating their unique contribution and encouraging them to continue in their work."



2022 WIMSS GRANTEES

Professional Development and Ministry Training

Megan Haviland

Newtown Erskineville Anglican Church

Louisa Macourt

St John's Anglican Church, Ashfield

Vicki Brasington

Sydney Anglican Focus on Ministry (Women)

Miki Sinfield

Richmond Anglican Church

Set-up Expenses for a Ministry

Arda Cholakyan

Lakemba Anglican Church

Llynden Singh

Burnie Anglican Church, Tasmania

Katrina Pritchard

Dundas Telopea Anglican Church

Chloe-Jane Muscat

Fairy Meadow Anglican Church

Resources

Elizabeth Barrish

Cross and Crown Church, Gold Coast

Courtney Morris

Christ Church St Ives

Alison Moffitt

Christ Church Inner West / St Oswald's Haberfield

Felicity Kerr

City Light Church, Balmain /
Sydney University Evangelical Union

Hilary Smith

Orange Presbyterian Church

Anna Moran

City Light Church, Balmain

Theological Education

Tirzah Smith

Thornleigh Community Baptist Church

Lauren Dewhurst

Christ Church St Ives

Since the Women in Ministry Support Scheme was launched in 2021, 56 women have received funding to support their ongoing ministries. Christian women continue to faithfully serve Christ and His Church, ministering in a range of contexts and settings, and WIMSS continues to support and encourage Christian women in gospel work.

So far through WIMSS:



11 women have received funding towards professional development and ministry training



16 women have received funding towards resources (including commentaries and books, laptops and children's resources)



9 women have received funding towards set-up expenses for their ministries



15 women have received funding towards theological education costs



5 women have received funding towards lost income during maternity leave





mary
andrews
college





CARE IN THE COUNTRY

Why Liz Halbisch studied the Graduate Certificate of Pastoral Care for Mental Health

Liz Halbisch has loved the country for a long time. She grew up in northern Sydney, but moved to the regions after university with her husband Ian. He'd grown up in the country, and his heart for ministry in regional areas remained – a heart that Liz came to share.

“We’ve always liked the small-town style of life and the way that you can have such deep relationships with people,” Liz says.

But the sad fact is that people in regional areas have significantly less access to services than those living in cities – a fact that Liz has particularly noted in the area of mental health support.

Liz works alongside her husband in pastoral ministry. He is a Presbyterian minister and Liz often goes on pastoral visits with him as well as leading Bible study groups and meeting with women one-to-one.

She and her family, including three teenage children, recently moved from Mudgee to Nowra, but even with a change in town the same topics keep coming up. Liz says a lot of the pastoral conversations she has been having with people are related to mental health, and how it fits within a Christian worldview.

“I felt like every second conversation I was having was with somebody wanting to know more about what the Bible said about mental healthcare and how they could approach their own mental illness and still be a Christian,” she recalls.

One young woman in particular Liz had been discipling at their previous church in Mudgee was struggling with her mental health to a degree that was beyond Liz’s capacity to help. Liz continued to disciple her and walk alongside her, but felt ill-equipped to know how to best support her.

It was around this time that Liz found out about the Graduate Certificate of Pastoral Care for Mental Health at Mary Andrews College (MAC). She instantly recognised the value this course would offer her as a pastoral carer, and enrolled.

Liz has enjoyed her experience of studying the Graduate Certificate, saying it has been both real and practical. It’s also been helpful for navigating conversations with people who have wrong ideas about mental health and Christianity.

“It is so topical! Mental healthcare at the moment is everywhere. It’s in politics, education, youth, aging, it’s in everything. So to have thought about what the Bible says about it, and to remove and reframe that awful stigma that is associated with Christians and mental health, that often associates poor mental health with demons and a need to ‘pray away’ the need for medication, is just so important,” she says.

“I have found that everything that we’ve done has been useful and all of the things that we’ve covered have been things that I’ve used every day. The best thing about it has been that I use something that I’ve learned in every pastoral conversation that I have.”

The best thing about it has been that I use something that I’ve learned in every pastoral conversation that I have.

Liz Halbisch

One of the drawbacks for Liz in studying with MAC was that she was able to complete her course online from her home in Mudgee and now in Nowra. “That has been excellent and I’ve found it to be really accessible, and really easy to do. I wouldn’t have been able to do it at all otherwise, because I don’t live close enough to be able to attend lectures in person. Having the online classroom as well as the library online has meant I haven’t had to go anywhere to be able to do it. I’ve been able to do it all from home,” Liz explains.

And the young woman in Mudgee? After Liz had been studying the Graduate Certificate for almost two years, this woman began to really trust that what Liz was saying was biblical and she finally felt comfortable to seek out help from a psychologist.

“She’d started seeing a psychologist who then referred her to a psychiatrist and then she was starting to question whether or not she should be on medication. So I was able to talk to her about that. She’s tracking much better now. Initially she was really worried that something would happen in psychological treatment that would pull her away from Jesus. I was able to reassure her and talk about God’s plan for our flourishing,” Liz shares.

Liz describes her role as a ‘helper’, noting that a Christian pastoral carer is only ever a helper, and not

as a replacement for mental health workers, as the two need to work hand in hand. One of the positives of this helper role is being able to provide practical support that a medical professional wouldn’t be able to.

“We can have relationships with people and invite them to our house for dinner and all of those great things that medical professionals can’t do,” she says.

Liz stresses it’s important for a Christian pastoral worker to have the ability to recognise when a person needs help and support beyond what they’re capable of in a volunteer capacity. But she notes that just because a professional gets involved, that doesn’t mean that she has to say goodbye to the person she’s been helping.

Overall, Liz is deeply grateful for her studies: not only for how they have equipped her for ministry, but also for how they have deepened her personal relationship with God.

“I have constantly been reminded about how God is interested in the little things. He’s amazing and huge and He created all of us, but He is interested in when I have a bad day and I’m feeling awful. Those things can feel like little things, but He’s interested in all of those things. Even the tiniest little bits of brain chemistry: He’s in control of all of that.”





DISCIPLINE AND DELIGHT

Liz Woo's experience studying a Certificate course at Mary Andrews College

Liz Woo grew up in a Christian ministry family and says it was during her high school years that she came to know Jesus for herself. Now as an adult she works as a primary school teacher and loves that as a Christian in a public school, she gets some good opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

Recently, Liz decided to drop down to working four days a week. When she began working part-time, she wanted to make the most of the spare time and extra days she had, acknowledging that it would be very easy to waste them. As she was thinking about what she could be doing, she realised she'd like to grow in her walk with God and be able to better understand His Word. She says a friend recommended the Certificate course at Mary Andrews College to her. Liz liked that she would be able to work towards a Certificate rather than just undertaking random subjects, and decided to enrol.

Liz began studying towards the Certificate at MAC earlier in the year and says the flexibility of the online study, which she is able to balance with her part-time work, was really appealing to her.

"I love it!" she shares. "I don't have to travel, so it's very convenient. I just love the fact that they're very caring online and you get to know the other ladies studying and grow in community. It's been organised in a meaningful way to engage and get through the content," she explains.

So far Liz's subjects have included Old Testament and Knowing God. She says that even though it has been a while since she's done an assessment, she has found the process approachable and valuable.

*It is a privilege to study and
to have the time out, to delve
deeper, to learn under God and
to keep growing.*

Liz Woo

"Doing the assignments really sharpens and gathers your thoughts in a deeper way. One of the assignments for the subject on Knowing God was on the resurrection and it was worded in a meaningful way: 'If you're talking to a friend, how could you explain the resurrection to them?' The Old Testament assignment was on the book of Ezekiel and applying some of its passages in a New Testament context. What is God doing, not only in the Old Testament, but how is that fulfilled in Christ? And that was so helpful," Liz explains.

Liz shares that she's learnt a lot about God and herself so far from studying these two subjects.

"It is a privilege to study and to have the time out, to delve deeper, to learn under God and to keep growing. I pray what I learn can be a blessing to my home group, to my church and to people who ask what I do," Liz says.

"Studying is a mixture of discipline and delight. It's discipline in the sense that it's great to go to lectures and be sharpened but it doesn't stop there! It's not just head knowledge, it is lived-out worship. I delight in it," she explains.

Liz really values and appreciates what she's learning at MAC, and the time she gets to spend studying. She also acknowledges that while so many churches teach the Bible, you don't often get the opportunity to look deeply into what's taught. She says MAC has given her the opportunity to do just that.

"I've got this time and space to dig deeper, to ask questions, to prompt thinking that I haven't had the time for before. I've really enjoyed not only learning from the Bible, but the application pastorally; it's been very encouraging. The other ladies, you learn from their questions, their ponderings and sometimes there's small group work, so you get to look at a passage or think about a theological question in a breakout room. So it's not individual, it's community. It's enjoyable and it's meaningful," Liz concludes.



Certificates at MAC

The new MAC Certificate units began at the beginning of this year. MAC no longer teaches the ACT's Certificate course. This has given us more freedom in the course structure and unit content. MAC has continued to see the lives of many impacted by the teaching of God's Word, whether directly in studying the Bible or through related areas such as pastoral care, theology and Church history. All this has only been possible through the dedication of the MAC staff and lecturers.

Mary Andrews College is also excited to be launching bursaries for the Certificate course this year. The Narelle Jarrett Bursaries, named after former MAC Principal Rev. Narelle Jarrett, will be offered to women in need to encourage them to complete a Certificate course through MAC. For more information on the Narelle Jarrett Bursaries or on the courses offered at MAC visit www.mac.edu.au



AN INVESTMENT FOR THE WILDERNESS

*Rebekah reflects on the value
of her study at MAC*

When Rebekah Dredge was diagnosed with a major, life-altering medical condition, it was her studies at Mary Andrews College that gave her the theological foundations to carry her through a devastating time of her life.

A few years earlier, Rebekah had found herself at a crossroads where she no longer needed to work in her career as a Speech Pathologist. She leapt at the opportunity to complete a Diploma of Theology at MAC. A season of equipping was the perfect antidote to the ministry burnout that had been creeping in, and fulfilled a long held dream to pursue theological study.

After looking into several options, MAC stood out as the clear choice. It had been twenty years since Rebekah had last studied formally, and she was nervous about returning to the classroom and completing assignments, but the culture at MAC put these fears to rest. Rebekah shares, “I went to morning tea with a friend who had done a subject at MAC, and it struck me as a very supportive learning environment for people like me... A big majority of the cohort were returning to study after a hiatus.” She found that MAC provided the perfect balance of academic challenge and support.

The community at MAC was another point of attraction. “It was such a lovely opportunity to learn with women, from women,” says Rebekah. Together, students of all ages connected over not just what they were learning, but also living as Christian women, parenting and more.

Rebekah quickly found she enjoyed reading and wrestling with ideas through her study. It allowed her to diagnose the cause of her ministry burnout. “I was finding my identity in my ministry,” she admits. “I saw myself as indispensable to God’s plan for His people.”

But it wasn’t until after she’d graduated that the concepts she’d learned at MAC came to life in an entirely new way.

In September 2022, Rebekah was diagnosed with a very rare spinal cord tumour. Mild symptoms meant that the slow-growing mass had gone undetected for years, but it had become so large that it threatened to leave Rebekah

with quadriplegia. Yet the alternative was major surgery with a 50 per cent chance of leaving her severely disabled.

A whirlwind of appointments later, Rebekah was scheduled for surgery just three weeks after her diagnosis. With her life turned upside down, she found herself reflecting on the nature of submission. “You realise how we have very little control over our lives and destiny, and that ultimately, God is in control.”

The night before her surgery, she discovered she couldn’t bring herself to pray. “I was thinking a lot about submission, and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying ‘Your will be done’. And I actually couldn’t pray that,” she says.

Instead, Rebekah drew her comfort from knowing that her church was praying for her when she couldn’t. Her time at MAC had taught her about the unity of God’s people through Christ. With this understanding, she was able to trust the prayers of His people to carry her through an immensely difficult experience. She recalls that the night before her surgery, “Rather than praying, I was counting the number of people praying for me. It struck me that it was like counting sheep, only I was counting God’s sheep, the flock of the Good Shepherd. And that gave me enormous encouragement and comfort to be a part of the body of Christ in my distress.”

Rebekah’s surgery was immediately followed by three long days in the Intensive Care Unit that were both terrifying and lonely. To ensure the best possible outcome, she needed to lie flat to prevent possible spinal fluid leaks and promote healing in her spinal cord.

Despite early signs of success from the surgery, this experience in the ICU continued to make prayer difficult. This time she turned to the concepts she’d learned from studying the Psalms at MAC.

She reflects, “My entry level to communing with God was to complain like a psalmist... I started with Psalm 22, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And in praying

through these things and laying out my complaints to God I had the realisation that I shared those words with Jesus Himself, who entered the pit in order to rescue His people.”

Rebekah’s confidence in turning to the Psalms came directly from her time at MAC. She explains, “We talked a lot about lament [at MAC]... how the psalmists are just so honest about their emotions before God, and often the psalmist comes full circle and commits himself once more to trusting in God. And that was certainly my pattern of prayer that night in the ICU.”

God, in His grace, answered the prayers of Rebekah’s family and church, and Rebekah was able to walk out of the hospital six weeks later with mobility in all her limbs. Her recovery continues as she navigates chronic pain and the new limitations of her body.

Rebekah has also returned to MAC this year, taking up a special discount offer for alumni to audit a unit on Disability and the People of God with Dr Louise Gosbell. “It’s been a really helpful time to process my new limitations within a theological context,”

she shares. “I’ve been processing a lot of my own personal journey out loud with the class in the context of trying to understand disability from a theological perspective.”

Rebekah credits studying at MAC and the encouragement of her lecturers with giving her the confidence to pursue further study. She has enrolled in a Master of Divinity which she is completing online, though her recent health issues have slowed down her progress a bit.

Rebekah is deeply grateful for her experiences at MAC, and actively recommends the College to other women considering theological study.

“My diploma turned out to be a valuable investment for a time in the wilderness. While there are still physical and spiritual struggles, looking back at God’s handiwork helps me to trust Him with my future.”

*I’ve been processing a lot of
my own personal journey
out loud with the class in
the context of trying to
understand disability from a
theological perspective.*

Rebekah Dredge



From **THE INTERIM
PRINCIPAL**

Rev. Jill Williams

This past year has been a challenging one for MAC. After much soul-searching and prayer, Dr Louise Gosbell came to the decision that she needed to resign her position as Principal of Mary Andrews College. Her illness had not improved to the degree that she could continue in her role in the way she needed to. We are extremely grateful to Louise for her time as a lecturer, as Acting Principal and then as Principal. It is wonderful that Louise is still able to do some lecturing with the College this year, because she is an outstanding teacher.

Louise is remembered as someone who united a team, brought fresh ideas and had enormous enthusiasm to see women grow and be equipped in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. So many have had their ideas about disability challenged and extended through her teaching. We pray for her that in the days ahead, God would heal her and lead her into avenues of service that are less demanding than being Principal.

God has provided for the College during this time, first with Rev. Dr Keith Condie stepping into the role of Acting Principal for two months and then with Rev. Jackie Stoneman in the role for the second half of 2022 through to the end of January this year. I was able to take on the role of Interim Principal following Louise's resignation. Each of us in this role has been aware of people's prayers and their gratitude for each of us stepping in during this time. We look forward to what God has planned for MAC in the future.



Spotlight

**ON THE MAC
LIBRARY**

Over the past few years, thanks to the hard work of the MAC Librarian Rebecca Shead, the MAC library has made great strides into the digital age. Many resources are now available online, facilitating access for students who are making the most of MAC's hybrid classrooms and don't come in to campus regularly or at all.

Rebecca, who previously served as a CMS missionary in Chile, has just completed her Master of Information Studies. While in Chile Rebecca volunteered in the library at CEP, the Chilean theological college where her husband Stephen lectured. This experience, and the generosity of a number of Australian librarians who came and lent their expertise to the CEP library, prompted Rebecca to undertake her Master's when the family returned to Australia. She realised that if she ever held a role like that again, a formal qualification would be extremely beneficial.

While studying, Rebecca came across the job ad for the Librarian position at MAC. She applied and joined the team in late 2020.

With the impact of COVID lockdowns keeping students away from campus, Rebecca's first priority was to help the MAC team as they developed their online learning platform. She has worked hard to ensure that it is straightforward for students to access their readings and other resources directly from within the learning management system.

She's also been working on acquiring new resources for the library, many of them ebooks. Rebecca receives requests and recommendations from lecturers, but also keeps on top of new releases from Christian publishers and suggests books that may be useful for MAC to add to the library.

The MAC team and students are extremely grateful for Rebecca's hard work and dedication to upgrading and maintaining the library as a vital resource for the College community.



MARY ANDREWS COLLEGE

Graduation

The 2023 Graduation was held on the last Saturday in March at St Andrew's Cathedral. This year there were 17 students graduating from across three levels of study. It was especially exciting to see the first graduates from the Graduate Certificate of Pastoral Care for Mental Health.

It was a delight to have Dr Louise Gosbell give the Graduation address. She shared her own experience from the last two years and the way God has led her and helped her as she has faced some very hard decisions. This was an opportunity to thank Louise for her time as Principal, with students, lecturers, staff, the Australian College of Theology Dean and CEO, the ADM Chair and Board members, the Interim CEO, and the Archdeacon for Women all present. The graduates were celebrated by family and friends and the ceremony was live-streamed for those unable to attend in person.



GRADUATE LOCATIONS

With our hybrid classrooms, MAC students can participate in their classes in person or from anywhere in Australia. Take a look at where our 2023 graduating class members came from.





Trauma & Christian perspective on care

Picking up the brokenhearted: Understanding trauma biblically and psychologically will help Christians care for those impacted by trauma


MH+PC
THE MENTAL HEALTH +
PASTORAL CARE INSTITUTE



PRESSING ON

Paul and Margie Sheely

It's really good because it puts mental wellness on the table as a normal part of who we are.

Margie Sheely

It was a hard year – plagued by medical issues and a death in the family – that impelled Albury couple Paul and Margie Sheely to focus on their mental wellbeing.

“We were at a conference where Keith and Sarah Condie were talking about *Press On*, and I said, ‘That might be worthwhile to try,’” says Paul, who is a minister at a Presbyterian church in Albury. His wife Margie has been working in aged care.

Juggling ministry, work and family life meant they sometimes had to be creative about when and where they did their weekly sessions (even slotting one into a long car trip), but they found that *Press On* – an online Christian mental health course – gave them the opportunity to dig deeply into a range of issues impacting their emotional and spiritual states.

“I found it to be very helpful, both at the time and ongoing, in giving me strategies to implement in my week that are helpful for managing stress,” says Margie, who comments that she felt particularly encouraged to set boundaries on her volunteer work and prioritise important friendships as a “precious gift from God”.

Paul was similarly affected, saying *Press On* opened the door for him to talk about mental resilience with others, and helped him keep self-care in perspective.

“It gave me permission to see that self-care is not necessarily selfish – we care for ourselves so we’re better at caring for others,” he shares.

“And a low day is not necessarily bad. It’s about your ability to bounce back from that.”

The pair has now parlayed the impact of the course into a benefit for their whole church. They’re running *Press On* for a group of almost 40 people, kicking off with a joint session and then allowing individuals to run at their own pace, with occasional check-ins.

“There’s not many resources like this in this space,” says Paul.

“I’m often asked for recommendations for Christian counsellors, but that’s often at critical times, and this is way back before that.”

He says it also equips Christians to care for each other pastorally, and is accessible for diverse participants, from young adults to people in their 80s, including unbelievers.

“It’s really good because it puts mental wellness on the table as a normal part of who we are,” says Margie, “as opposed to not talking about it until there’s a crisis.”



JOY AND RENEWAL IN THE CANBERRA AND GOULBURN DIOCESE

In this past year, Keith and Sarah have spoken at several conferences for men and women working in full-time ministry. In this story, we share the impact their talks and presence had on around 100 men and women serving the Lord in the Canberra and Goulburn Diocese.

In May 2023 this Diocese ran a conference on Joy and Renewal. The Diocese includes small rural villages scattered over large distances and the large Australian capital city of Canberra.

Jonathan Holt, one of the organisers of the conference and an Anglican minister at Lanyon Valley Anglican Church in Canberra, says that the organising team recognised the fatigue and tiredness many ministers were experiencing from managing varying ministries under COVID challenges, which followed in the wake of bushfires and floods.

Jonathan explains, "The world's also getting more complex. Compliance issues are coming into play a lot more than they ever have before and people in ministry roles can sometimes feel absorbed by administrative tasks and taken away from their core tasks such as preaching and pastoring. We were keen to think about joy in our lives and ministry.

"It's one thing to fix your eyes on Jesus and know the joy that He brings, but it's another thing to be able to identify what it is that's stopping me from enjoying God."

There are other unique challenges faced by our men and women in ministry. Jonathan says:

"A number of those factors relate to the decline in rural centres, particularly after times of drought or flooding, and you don't have a tertiary education institution meaning that you lose your young people who leave to further their education.

"Sometimes the Anglican church is the last church in town, with a single minister on site. Sometimes that minister is covering three, four or even seven towns and they become the default chaplain for the whole area."

And then for those living in Canberra, the challenges are slightly different.

"There's a well-entrenched culture of secularism and a strong distance between your private personal beliefs and your work. That's a particular challenge for how Christians live in Canberra and what it means to be faithful to Jesus in that setting.

It's one thing to fix your eyes on Jesus and know the joy that He brings, but it's another thing to be able to identify what it is that's stopping me from enjoying God.

Jonathan Holt



"And then, ministers are rarely told how they should spend their time. This can lead to a temptation to overwork, which can lead to chronic stress and burnout. And when you're burnt out, you feel that there is no joy.

"Keith and Sarah helped us unpack some of the obstacles to joy. They told us that:

- Our bodies can impact joy: 'If we're not eating well, sleeping well, resting properly, and working sensibly, we can be hindered in experiencing joy just because we are run down.'
- Our relationships impact joy: 'we flourish best in healthy relationships, but we need to be able to establish what sort of relationships we need and how many relationships we need. Since God made us differently, perhaps we need to kind of ponder whether we're in relationships that are energising and helping us and how to manage the relationships that are draining us.' [Speaking personally, Jonathan has found that relational challenges are one his biggest obstacles to joy.]
- Our spiritual habits and disciplines impact joy: 'Sometimes they can operate like a bit of a burden or a bit guilt inducing, but are there ways to actually engage in those and positively foster the spiritual part of who we are?'"

Overall, the conference was well received, and the vast majority found the content to be extremely helpful.

"What's helpful is that Sarah and Keith bring a solid understanding around mental health issues that can arise for people, and they set clear boundaries and parameters around how we talk about and think about those issues. Their course *Press On* is an accessible and practical resource."

Jonathan also noted that "Sarah and Keith were great at engaging with the whole program and being there during all parts of the conference, not just the parts they were running. They took time to chat to people, they listened well and engaged with a lot of different people. That was a great blessing for us all."

Jonathan's main takeaway was a helpful reminder: "Embrace the goodness of rest and trust God, that he's got it when I'm not rushing around busy doing stuff."



HOW WE CAN ALL PREPARE TO CARE

MH+PC Trauma Seminar

Christians striving to meet the needs of distressed refugees in their area. Church members seeking to prepare for difficult future events after a fatal accident out the front of their building revealed how unprepared they felt to help. Individuals equipping themselves to better care for loved ones as they deal with the fallout from painful experiences. Mental health professionals gaining a better understanding of the Bible's teaching about their field.

These are just some of the people who came to the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute's day-long seminar on trauma in May 2023.

"We didn't promote it extensively, so we were surprised at the response," admits MH+PC co-director Sarah Condie. Ninety people took part in the seminar, which was held both in person and online.

Many were motivated to hear from the guest speaker – internationally acclaimed author, speaker, clinical psychologist, and CEO of Oasis Africa Centre for Transformational Psychology and Trauma, Dr Gladys Mwit.

Mary Andrews College recently began offering a Graduate Certificate of Pastoral Care for Mental Health in which the other MH+PC co-director, Keith Condie, teaches. Last year they ran a unit on Trauma, and it attracted much interest.

"We realised that there hadn't been a lot done locally in the Christian space about trauma, and about helping churches understand their unique contribution to responding to critical events such as a suicide, or floods, or a major traffic accident, or even the impact of lots of difficult events in a person's life," Sarah says.



"When we heard that Gladys Mwit was coming to Sydney from Kenya, we invited her to speak at a professional development day.

In recent years, the study of trauma response and its ongoing effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder has escalated, with mental health professionals developing better insights into the physical and psychological suffering that results.

A committed Christian since childhood, Gladys Mwit has made the study of trauma her life's work, deepening her understanding via studying some of the very worst behaviour humanity can inflict on each other. The Rwandan genocide in 1994 led to some of her earliest professional experiences. Gladys is undergoing the impact of trauma and loss herself after the recent death of her beloved husband, Gershon.

"She has dealt with trauma all her life, and now she is walking the walk," Sarah says.

"Gladys is just the sort of person you'd want to sit with you in a time of need – a mother hen, so humble, she oozed kindness and graciousness. It wasn't just what she was saying, it's the person she is, saying it. She genuinely modelled the presence of Christ."

In fact, that sense of bringing the spirit of Jesus into people's lives forms the bedrock of Gladys's teaching about how to minister to people who have suffered trauma.

When asked what makes the Christian response to trauma distinctive, Gladys said, "You are the aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2:15). When you bring your presence and sit with them, you will bring Christ to them." And it is the comfort that

we personally draw from in our own personal relationship with God that enables us to offer comfort to others (2 Cor 1:3-5).

Gladys emphasised the importance of caring for one's own mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. She shared how things such as gardening and time with family and friends were helpful. However, her daily mornings with the Lord in prayer and reading the Bible are where she draws the comfort that sustains her, enabling her to keep on offering care and support and love.

Sarah says that many seminar participants went away empowered by her words and with a fresh understanding that the comfort we draw from God can be used to minister to others.

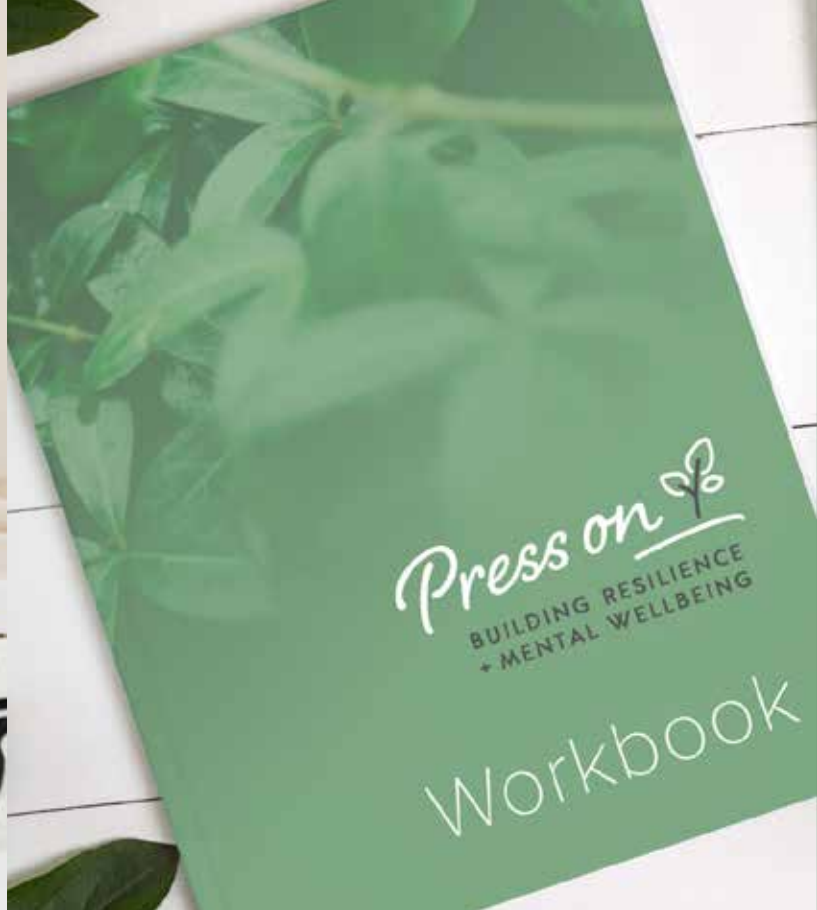
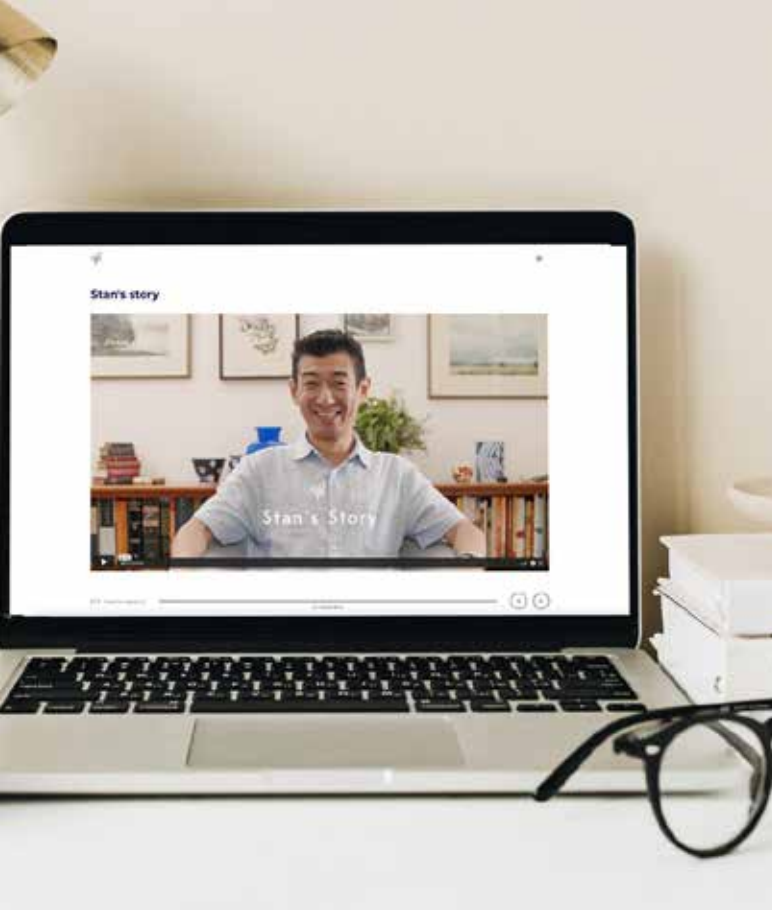
"One of the big takeaways was that we can all do something to respond to traumatic events," says Sarah. "We can all be that aroma of Christ to someone who is hurting."

Gladys advised her listeners to go away with an action plan and take concrete steps to prepare themselves to care for others and their own emotional wellbeing.

One way to do that, she said, is to undertake a Psychological First Aid course. This is a short course designed to equip people to support those impacted by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event.

Another useful resource is Gladys's own book, *Crisis and Trauma Counseling*.

MH+PC hopes to run similar professional development days on other topics in the coming year.



SPEAKING

There have been many opportunities for Keith and Sarah to speak at churches, Christian organisations and university groups on a range of topics including:

Marriage enrichment

Reach Australia – Conference for over 50 ministry couples from all over Australia

Springwood Anglican – Marriage enrichment afternoon for 40 couples

Professional development

UTS AFES group (Credo) on mental health and wellbeing

Theological and pastoral approaches to mental health for ministry workers – in conjunction with MAC

Trauma: A Christian perspective on care

Mental health and wellbeing

Presbyterian Church of NSW/ACT family ministry camp

Canberra/Goulburn annual clergy conference

National Grandparents Conference

Numerous speaking and preaching events in churches, university groups and Christian organisations

BRANDING

This year the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute has had a significant 'makeover' and has merged two websites into one – making it easier for churches and individuals to find resources and courses. Courses can be purchased from one shop. A complete rebranding with a new logo has helped the Institute have a website that is functional and attracts visitors to look at available resources.

COURSES

Building a Safe & Strong Marriage was launched in 2019. *Press On: Building Resilience & Mental Wellbeing* was launched in late 2021. Despite the impact of the pandemic, 180 churches have run at least one of these courses, 20 churches have run a course more than once, and six churches have run both courses. A number of churches have incorporated these courses into their annual program of supporting marriages and mental wellbeing. Participating churches are from all over Australia, are from a wide range of denominations, and are both large and small.

688 *Building a Safe & Strong Marriage* participant workbooks sold

187 *Press On* participant workbooks sold

182 registrations for *Press On & Building Marriage* online courses

RESOURCES

Significant content has been added to the Institute's website to provide information on mental health to assist Christians. For example, Lily Strahan, a 2021 ADM Fellow, wrote a very helpful series on bipolar disorder. Lily is currently completing a book on living with bipolar disorder and loving those who do.

• • •
— ✕

Top resources on the website

- 1535 Understanding bipolar part 1
- 889 Staying mentally and spiritually strong as a Christian woman
- 460 Understanding bipolar part 2
- 332 Understanding bipolar part 4
- 291 A mother's prayer for her baby

VISIT THE WEBSITE TO FIND
OUR RESOURCES
MENTALHEALTHINSTITUTE.ORG.AU



OUR STAFF TEAM

FROM LEFT:
BACK ROW:

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Co-director, Mental Health
and Pastoral Care Institute

SARAH CONDIE
Co-director, Mental Health
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MARINA BEYNER
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