



"THE TOMB IS STILL EMPTY"



Rev. A. Barry Jones
WECF President

The last year has been filled with much doom and gloom as worldwide economic woes have rippled across every continent. Financial empires have collapsed, industries have been threatened with extinction and unemployment has travelled like a plague from country to country.

As we celebrate Easter 2009, let me remind you, "**The Tomb is STILL Empty.**" Jesus our Lord is still "**the resurrection and the life.**" His shed blood still has the power to cleanse every sin. Our Sovereign God is still on His throne. The Holy Spirit is still our guide and comforter. The Holy Bible is still the very Word of God. God still answers prayer. In these things we can be confident; though heaven and earth pass away God's eternal purposes still stand.

On Easter Sunday, boldly declare to all who will hear, "**The Tomb is STILL Empty.**" Jesus our Saviour is alive and because He lives, we also shall live. The Resurrection of Christ is not merely an **aspect** of Christianity – instead, it is a **central truth**. Without the Resurrection of Christ there is no Gospel and no Christianity. On Good Friday, we remember the Cross where the Lord Jesus died, but without His Resurrection the Cross would be meaningless. It would tell only of the death of a good man. But His Resurrection explains the "why" of the Cross. The Gospel is not only that we may have forgiveness of sins; the full Gospel message is that sinful men and women may know forgiveness of sins through the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross. As forgiven men and women we can, by the power of His Resurrection, live eternally to the glory of God.

On Easter morning His tomb was empty – the body of Christ was not there. In fact, the resurrection of the body is unique to Christianity; it is an essential part of the Gospel.

Christ arose in a glorified, physical body and we, too, will have a glorified resurrected body when we will leave behind the imperfections and weaknesses of this mortal body. In our changed, glorified, physically resurrected body we will dwell forever in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

As Christians, we worship on the Lord's Day, Sunday. We do so in concert with the early church which chose to worship on the first day of the week in recognition of the Gospel of the Resurrection. So, on Easter morning, shout the message loud and clear:

"THE TOMB IS STILL EMPTY."

AUSTRALIA MOURNS

Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 February, 2009, have entered Australia's history as dark days of suffering as the nation's worst natural disaster was played out in rural Victoria. More than two hundred people were killed [revised to 173. Ed.] and many were injured, more than eighteen hundred houses were destroyed and other property was lost, and countless animals were killed or injured. The nation has mourned, prayed, and displayed remarkable unity, resilience, compassion and generosity.

One of the towns to be engulfed in the inferno is Wandong, where at least five lives were lost, 30 houses were destroyed and half of the houses were damaged. In the face of this carnage, the Wandong

Congregational Church has sought to bring comfort and relief to its community. The FCC has supported the church in this ministry through its Social Services Committee (\$5,000) and generous gifts from churches and individuals (\$7,715 at the time of writing).

We never cease to be amazed by the vast contrasts in our land, for as bushfires burned in Victoria and New South Wales, there was severe flooding in Queensland, then later, in New South Wales [and again, recently. Ed.] Please continue to pray for the survivors and the families that have suffered great loss, and for the churches, community groups and government agencies that are seeking to meet their needs.

Printed with the kind permission of the Editor - Congregational Communications the monthly newsletter of the Fellowship of Congregational Churches in Australia – March 2009



A LAND OF CONTRASTS



In the March issue of Congregational Communications we reported the number of deaths in Wandong as five, this being the latest information we had at the time of writing. This number has risen dramatically. The Wandong Congregational Church Secretary writes:

Many thanks for your support and prayers, especially over the past few weeks with the current fire devastation that we have seen. In Wandong alone there were 30 houses and 16 lives lost through the

fires. Praise God that the wind changed at the last moment, and the fire was generally diverted around the outskirts of Wandong or else we would not be writing this letter to you today. Through all the devastation, you can see God at work. Here are some examples:

Two of our church members had the fire reach the back doorstep of their house, yet their house was saved (although a few repairs are needed). One of these people, Kim, was putting out spot fires on her

property when a man drove into her driveway and gave her a big hug. Kim was surprised and returned the hug and then asked the stranger who he was. The man replied, "I have just driven two hours from Banella to see if you were OK. I was the man who water-bombed your house when I noticed that you and your house were in danger when your pine trees started to burn!"

My husband, Michael, and I had some friends come down from Kinglake to help us defend our property against the fire. Praise God that they were stopped at a road block and sent home. Soon afterwards, their house came under threat from the fire, yet they were able to save their house and sheds, only suffering paddock and fencing loss! If they had gotten through to help us then they would have lost their own house!

*Written by Mrs. Kylie McDonald (for Pastor Allan Laurens and the congregation)
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the monthly newsletter of the Fellowship of Congregational Churches in Australia – April 2009*

At the time of printing (April), the FCC Social Services Committee and the FCC Treasurer have forwarded a total of \$15,537 to the Wandong Congregational Church to enable it to assist those in need.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers have done a wonderful job and it's also great to see everyone in the town helping and supporting one another.

Thank you for your financial support, which will go towards aiding people to rebuild their lives. We could not do what we do down here without your prayer and financial support! We will keep you updated on our progress.

On a happier note, we had six people baptised last Sunday, and several new people visited the church! Even in the midst of all this destruction, God is still working and moving in peoples lives.

FROM NORTHERN IRELAND



Leonard and Daniela

(Some members of the WECF family will recognise Daniela. They met her in Skopje, Macedonia, while visiting the churches there and on several occasions, appreciated her skills as a most capable translator. Editor)

In the Spring, 2005, edition of The Congregationalist, Leonard Campbell (the son of the late Rev. David Campbell, Rugby Ave. Church, Belfast) wrote about his work with young blind people in Beirut.

Now he shares how God has been leading him and his fiancée, Daniela, to continue working with visually impaired young people in Northern Ireland.

After four years of living in Lebanon, I returned to Northern Ireland in December of 2007. My time in Lebanon was an amazing experience; I spent most of my time there teaching visually impaired students how to make bread. Before I left Lebanon I had the pleasure of helping to open a new bakery in an orphanage which employed Nadine, one of the visually impaired students that I taught. They also employed Chady, one of the boys who lives at the orphanage. I left the bakery in the capable hands of Brent, an American volunteer, who has been running the bakery for the past year. He originally went to the orphanage to teach in its school but whenever he was called upon to run the new bakery, he willingly obliged. The bakery produces a range of Western-style products which they sell in the local evangelical schools. They also produce around 200 loaves of bread every week which are given to other orphanages free of charge. This 'free bread' distribution programme is funded by donations and many children are benefitting as a result.

Over this past year I have been studying part-time at Union College doing a Masters in Theology. I am enjoying my course very much and getting used to writing essays again and meeting deadlines. I don't have many classes to attend but spend most of my time studying by myself and then meeting with my supervisor to get feedback on my work. So I have to be very disciplined as I do most of my work from home. I still have another year-and-a-half left and hope to graduate in the summer of 2010.

On 1st November last year I started to work part-time with Torch Trust for the Blind as a regional networker. Torch is a UK-based Christian charity which, among other things, organises fellowship groups for visually impaired people. My job involves supporting the existing fellowship groups in Northern Ireland and in particular, trying to facilitate the development of new groups. Currently, around nine groups meet in Northern Ireland and there are none at present in the Republic of Ireland. So there is a lot of potential for growth. I started to attend Torch's Young Adults' Fellowship Group and was appointed as the leader of the

committee for this group. The group consists of around 35 people, including visually impaired and sighted helpers. They usually meet on the second Friday of every other month in Templepatrick. Many of those who attend the meeting travel from different parts of Northern Ireland. The visually impaired young people enjoy the fellowship with other people their own age. As a group we are planning on doing some fundraising activities to raise some money for the bakery project in Lebanon.

Torch has a large library at its headquarters in Market Harborough which contains over 2,000 books in a range of formats such as audio, giant print and Braille. They also produce free magazines, newsletters and devotional readings in various formats. Torch has a holiday retreat centre at Hurstpierpoint in the south of England. Many groups of visually impaired people from all round the UK go there for holidays. I went on one such trip myself as a helper a number of years ago.

Last July I got engaged to a girl from Macedonia named Daniela. She grew up attending a Congregational Church, as did I. She previously worked with the mission organisation, Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) for seven years. In the summer of last year she left CEF and recently has been doing a placement in the finance department of an insurance company. In the past, she completed a degree in Financial Management. Daniela and I hope to get married on 11th April, 2009, in Macedonia. A group of family and friends are planning to attend the wedding, after which we will return to Northern Ireland to live, assuming that her visa application is successful. Then Daniela will be trying to find a job here in the finance sector.

I am excited about the future, particularly the prospect of entering a new phase in my life with Daniela. I also look forward to the fresh challenge that lies ahead in working with Torch; by July of 2009 I hope to be working full-time with them. I appreciate the prayerful support so far and trust in God's leading for the future.

ADVERTISEMENT

Dr Digby James, minister of the Quinta Independent Evangelical Church in England, a member church of EFCC, has been working for many years on reprinting Congregational works from the past. The authors include John Cotton, William Jay, John Angell James, R.W. Dale and P.T. Forsyth. (It must be remembered that the last two were questionable when it came to the reliability of Scripture.)

These works are now available in PDF format at:

www.quintapress.com/PDF_Books.html

A variety of other books are available as well. These include many accounts of revival, among which are the testimonies of people converted in the revival at Cambuslang in the early 1740s (never before published) and the revival newspapers published by supporters of George Whitefield.

Soon to appear will be the beginnings of a new edition of George Whitefield's Journals, more complete than the one currently available.

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THE THREE MIRACLES



Mrs Sylvia Kenosian

(Sylvia was recently called home, but her testimony speaks of God's goodness and grace in her long and productive life. While she was a member at Carlsbad Community Church, others of the WECF family from England and Australia were privileged to meet her in 2007. Sylvia and her husband Joe were part of the group tour organised by Rev. A. Barry Jones. This followed the WECF Meeting at Hothorpe Hall, England where Sylvia and Joe were much-loved by their fellow travellers. Editor)

The Lord had His hand on Sylvia's life from the beginning. There were many miracles in her life, but these three events, taken from Sylvia's own words when she spoke at the Carlsbad Community Church, changed the whole course of her life.

Sylvia's family were Armenian Christians who escaped the Armenian genocide in the early 1900's, instigated by the Ottoman Turks of that time. They managed to settle in Thessalonica, Greece. It was there that Sylvia was born. Through the providence of God she was blessed with a good education in her early years.

But when World War II broke out and the Italians overran Greece, her education came to an end. Her family suffered many privations during this time, including what they called 'the year of starvation.' Although still a young girl, Sylvia could speak several languages, including German. Because of this, she was allowed to work at the local hospital which was overrun with war casualties. There, she came to the attention of a German 4-star General who was suffering from malaria. Noting her good work

and talents, he gave her his card and said, "If you ever need anything, get in touch with me." She put the card away and didn't give it another thought.

As the war began to wind down, the Germans closed the hospital and ordered all the workers to be shipped out to Germany. No-one was allowed to take any of their family with them. Only Sylvia and her mother, who also worked at the hospital, would be allowed to go. Her father, two sisters and a brother would have to be left behind. They were all very distressed and prayed that God would not let their family be separated. It was then Sylvia remembered the General's card. In fear and trembling she contacted him and he stepped in. He gave her a letter and arranged for the whole family to go to Germany together.

THAT WAS THE FIRST MIRACLE!

But when the night arrived for the General's car to take them all with great secrecy to the railway station where they would join the other hospital workers, the car was late and they missed the train. They were distraught. All they could do was to wait for the next train. All through that anxious train journey, her father kept singing softly, "Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go." After a long journey, the train stopped unexpectedly. There was a long delay of several days before they continued their journey, but during the delay, they discovered the reason for the hold up. There had been an air raid further up the line. The first train that they should have taken had been bombed and none of the hospital workers survived. Surely God was watching over them!

THAT WAS THE SECOND MIRACLE!

The family finally arrived in Germany. There they had to work in a local factory. By now Germany was losing the war and food was in scarce supply for everyone. Once in a while they would receive a care package from a group of Armenian Americans. Typically, Sylvia wrote to them to thank them. At the urging of her mother, she included a photograph of her family.

At the end of the war, many refugees and displaced persons in Europe were sent to various countries. Sylvia and her family were sent to America, where of course they knew no-one and had nothing. After two weeks of travelling, they disembarked in New Orleans. From there, all the immigrants were told to take certain buses to their final destination. Sylvia's family was told to take the Fresno bus where there was already a settlement of Armenians and work was available. But when they tried to board the Fresno bus, they were told they were not on the list for that bus. After some confusion, they were told they had to take a bus to Los Angeles. It was now three weeks since they had left Germany and when they finally arrived in Los Angeles they were exhausted and dishevelled. They knew no-one, had nowhere to go, had no money and no jobs. "What now?" they wondered.

In Los Angeles, they told their story to those in charge at the bus station. When it was discovered they were Armenian, they were taken to an Armenian church which was not too far away. The pastor of the church came out to greet them and after talking to them for a few moments, he suddenly said, "I

know you! Come with me." So they followed him to the study where he pointed to a photograph on his desk. It was a photograph of Sylvia and her family. It turned out that this was the church that had sent them care packages when they were in Germany working at the factory. It was the same pastor to whom Sylvia had written in thanks and to whom she had sent the photograph of her family.

THAT WAS THE THIRD MIRACLE!

Right away the church allowed them to sleep in the basement. In addition, since it was the day after Thanksgiving, the church had much food left over from their celebrations – most of it real Armenian food at that! Later, the church found an apartment for them and paid the rent, gave them \$20 a week for food and helped them find jobs. They were overwhelmed. Certainly the Lord had taken care of them throughout all these difficult years.

When Sylvia told this miraculous story of her family's survival, she always ended by quoting this verse from Romans 8:28.

"ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD, AND TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE."

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ARE YOU ABLE TO HELP?

Mrs. Awit Castillo (NACC Philippines/Caring Community Inc.) writes:

"Please pray with us. We are in earnest to re-open the **Caring Learning Center** in New Taugtog. We need at least \$US200/month."

The **Caring Learning Center** is a school that allows children whose families are very poor to receive a quality education. If this school is unable to operate, these children will not be able to receive a formal education, and so, they will struggle to eke out an existence.

Email address for Mrs Awit Castillo:
www.caringchurch@yahoo.com



WECF 9th Triennial Meeting

BRAZIL

Mid 2010

Rio de Janeiro

**Watch for further details
in the next issue of OCW**



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the forum for disseminating news from around the

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Please forward articles, news items or prayer requests for the next issue of *Our Congregational World* to the Editor, Kerrian Cartledge, by Friday 29 May, 2009.

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