

College News

Greetings!

We are now at the halfway point of the second semester—how time flies! Please continue to uphold our students in your prayers as their workload begins to pile up and due dates for essays loom ever closer.

The Gospel Driven Church

On the 8th of August we had the privilege of hosting (in partnership with Geneva Push and AFES) a mini-conference on 'The Gospel Driven Church'. Andrew Heard from EV Church on the New South Wales Central Coast was our main speaker. In two very engaging talks he focussed on how we can indeed make the gospel of Christ central in the lives of our churches. About 60 people from all over Victoria attended. It was great to hear from Andrew and have conversations with participants who are excited about the strengthening and planting of churches across our state. This is the second year that we partnered with Geneva Push to host an event aimed at promoting the work of Church Planting and we trust that there will be many more such opportunities in the future.

Preaching Conference

The 2013 Preaching Conference is only 3 weeks away! This year's conference focuses on preaching Wisdom, exploring the wisdom literature of both the Old and New Testaments. This will be held at the RTC in Geelong on Thursday 26 and Friday 27 September. We know this two-day conference will be well worth the time and effort to attend. To enrol please go to: (www.rtc.edu.au/Calendar/Events/2013-Preaching-Conference).

Faculty News

CRCA Short Term Missions Summit Dr Phillip Scheepers

From 29 August – 1 September about 30 delegates from all over Australia (and the Solomon Islands) met at the CRCA Resource Centre in Mt Evelyn for the 'CRCA Short-term Missions Summit'. This event, a collaborative effort of the Resource Centre and the RTC, was aimed at churches across the denomination that are involved in sending out short-term mission teams. A very encouraging part of the weekend was to hear the stories of what God is doing through short-term teams in places like the Solomon Islands, Uganda, Myanmar, Thailand, India and outback Australia.

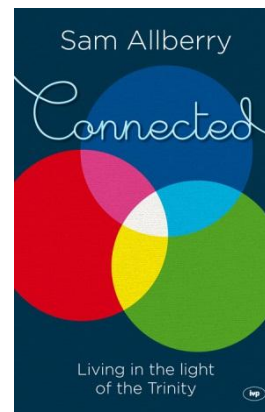
One of the purposes of the summit was to formulate a 'Code of Best Practice' for short-term missions. We trust that this will ensure that our churches will achieve and maintain the highest possible standards in planning and running mission trips. Delegates worked in different workgroups in order to formulate policy in areas like team management, leadership credentials, preparation, debriefing, cultural sensitivity and developmental considerations. The results of our discussions will be made available to the leaders of all the teams that were represented and will also be sent to CRCA churches that may be considering their own mission trips.

I was personally very encouraged by the enthusiasm and the desire to be involved in the building of the kingdom in evidence throughout the weekend. It was a privilege to represent the RTC at this event and it is my prayer that the policies and guidelines that we developed will be very useful in helping our churches to be effective, accountable and responsible through our short-term mission efforts. (See also my 'Mission Spot' on effective short term missions below)



Book Recommendation

by Dr Bill Berends



Sam Allberry, *Connected, Living in the Light of the Trinity* (Nottingham: IVP, 2012), 175 pages.

Every now and then I get a book that I just have to share with others, and this is one of those books. It is on a topic that many would avoid as too boring: the divine Trinity. But this book is anything but boring.

The author begins by looking at the doctrine of the Trinity as this unfolds in the Scriptures. Here he not

only explains the richness of the picture of God revealed in this doctrine but also corrects some misunderstandings that are commonly held. One such misunderstanding is that we should not seek to understand the Trinity, but be content to accept it as a mystery. Allberry points out that, mysterious as it is, the doctrine can shed a profound light on the nature of the Christian life when it is properly understood. In the opening chapters of the book he therefore proceeds to give us a Scriptural introduction to the doctrine. Here his fine use of examples assures a sustained interest from the readers.

In the larger part of the book Allberry proceeds to explain what difference an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity makes to understanding such practical matters as the nature of humanity, the purpose of genders, the shape of the Church, and the exercise of prayer and worship. In doing so he interacts with a number of current world and Christian issues. Some readers will find themselves strongly challenged by the material presented. But it is hard to argue with the answers, as the author mostly lets the Bible speak for itself.

This booklet lends itself group discussions and reading for personal enrichment. I heartily recommend it.

The book is engaging, practical and tremendously stimulating. It doesn't provide a silver bullet for doing mission, nor does it present a full biblical ecclesiology – there are some big gaps. But it does provide a new way of thinking about what it means to be the church in our culture. This is a helpful and important read.

Mission Spot

Short Term Missions that Make a Difference by Dr Phillip Scheepers



It was a great privilege to be involved in the CRCA Short-term Missions summit over the weekend. At this event we considered how we can be more effective

in the way in which we do short-term mission. It is very important that we consider this question as more and more short-term teams are being sent by churches around the world.

Well organised short-term mission trips can have certain very definite benefits that may include the following:

Useful ministry 'on the ground'. Short term mission teams can provide valuable assistance to the local church and long term missionaries. This may include assistance in areas where teams can undertake tasks that locals would find difficult on their own (e.g. 'covering' an entire suburb with literature distribution) or where teams can contribute specialised skills or knowledge. Short term missions can sometimes also be one of the only ways to do Christian ministry in certain restricted access situations'.

Providing a living link to the worldwide church.

The composition of the global church is changing rapidly with the 'centre of gravity' of Christianity moving from traditional heartlands to places like Africa and Southeast Asia. Short term mission can help believers (on both the receiving and sending end) to experience something of the interconnected and worldwide nature of the body of Christ. It can also embody an expression of the care and love that believers are called upon to show to one another even across ethnic, linguistic, cultural and national boundaries.

Short term missions can have a very positive impact on the lives of participants.

Short term trips are often experienced as faith shaping and building times by participants. Having to live out our faith in circumstances that we are not used to and observing the lives of other believers and how they cope with the challenges of following Christ cannot but 'stretch' us. It is therefore not surprising to note that God has used short term missions as a first step on the way to permanent cross cultural service for many missionaries around the world.

Short term missions can broaden the vision and ministry of the sending church.

Mission trips give local churches the opportunity to be actively involved in the building of God's Kingdom beyond their local areas. This involvement can release new energy and enthusiasm for the work of mission among churches both 'over there' and in their own backyards.

It should be noted that the positive outcomes mentioned above will certainly not happen automatically. Not all short term trips are created equal and short-term trips can in some cases lead to problems or be of questionable value. Some of the issues that may arise from badly planned and executed mission trips may include the following.

- Lack of consultation with the receiving church and or long-term missionaries may lead to short term trips being a burden rather than a help on the 'receiving end'. This is because the hosting of a team may place significant demands on local believers. Participants, furthermore, rarely have time to immerse themselves in the language or the culture of the areas they visit and their ministry emphases may therefore be inappropriate (if not discussed with local believers beforehand).

- Short-term trips can sometimes be very expensive and legitimate questions will sometimes have to be asked on whether the money could not be better spent on local ministry initiatives.
- I referred above to the positive impact that short-term missions can have on participants but sometimes the opposite may happen, especially if the trip is not well planned and led. An example of this is where participants are exposed to issues and challenges without being provided with an adequate emotional, spiritual and theological framework through which to process the experience.

It should be clear from the above that we should work very hard to launch mission trips where the problems listed above can be avoided. I would like to suggest observing the following guidelines as a means to ensure that our short-term missions steer towards the positives and avoids the negatives:

(1) Always plan trips in consultation with the local church and/or long term missionaries. We need to be sure that mission trips will be useful in the local context. Ensuring that believers 'on the ground' have a vital role in planning the short term mission will avoid trips that are unwanted, inappropriate or may be an unnecessary burden on local believers.

(2) Appoint experienced leaders. As in so many other areas of life and ministry leadership is crucial for the success of short term mission. Leaders should be sound in life and doctrine and should preferably have solid experience in ministering in the host culture. They should also be able to manage team dynamics and to provide pastoral care for team members.

(3) Identify and plan for desired outcomes. As the saying goes 'Those who aim at nothing hit it every time!' The planning process should clearly identify the purposes behind the trip and include some thinking on how these outcomes may be achieved. This process should include both what the team would like to see happen 'on the field' and in the lives of the participants. There are obviously some things that we cannot plan for (e.g. spiritual growth) but we can at least make sure that favourable conditions for growth and faith formation exists.

(4) Maintain careful stewardship of God's resources. Questions will obviously have to be asked on whether the trip is 'worth' the resources that will have to be expended to make it happen. This may be a hard call to make and it would be worthwhile to consult local believers and experienced missionaries on this matter. If the decision is made to go ahead it goes without saying that careful shepherding of monetary and other resources will be of the utmost importance throughout the process.

(5) Ensure that the mission trip will help rather than harm the local church. Some mission trips may create dependency or unhealthy attitudes (e.g. through doing for local believers what they can and should do for themselves). Hard questions will therefore have to be asked on whether the trip will contribute to the establishment of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches. Local church leaders and/or long term missionaries could once-again be of immense value in helping to answer questions in this regard and in the design of mission trips that make a significant contribution to the health of the local church in the host area.

(6) See the mission trip as a process rather than as an event. As indicated above short term missions can provide significant opportunities for growth, service and Christian fellowship across cultures. These aims are more likely to be achieved if participants and churches are willing to invest significant time on either side of the actual trip. This would create space for adequate training (hopefully including people from the 'host culture') on the biblical theology of mission, ministry in the host culture and the knowledge and practical skills required for the trip. Time should be spent after the trip to make sure that participants are adequately debriefed and to nurture the spiritual growth and commitments to service that may have resulted from the trip. There should also be continual investment in the relationship with the host church and/or long term missionary in the period between mission trips.

Short term mission should not take the place of the long-term commitment required from some missionaries but, if done well, they can form a valuable part of the larger missions landscape. I offer the suggestions above as means to help achieve this goal. At the recent CRCA Short Term Missions Summit a great deal of work was done to formulate a 'Code of Best Practice' that incorporates these suggestions and much else besides. It is hoped that the end result of this process will be resources that can be effectively used by churches to help ensure that our short term mission efforts bless both the participants and God's people who receive them around the world. These resources should be available in a few months' time from the RTC and the CRCA Resource Centre. Watch this space!