



From the Centre Chaplains Desk:

It will soon be Christmas ... the marketing and retail folks are putting pressure on their sales teams to extract as much cash as they can from the Australian public. In the next couple of weeks, they will be working hard to exceed last year's total of approx. \$8.8 billion on presents. That's a lot of presents, and there is great joy and happiness in receiving a gift that someone has obviously put a good deal of thought into. There is much joy to be had in seeing the recipient of your gift truly happy with it. On the other hand, a gift that is given as a token gesture - a thoughtless gift - has the potential to damage a relationship.



How fortunate are we Christians then, to be once again celebrating the most appropriate and thoughtful gift anyone could ever receive? Our God knows how to give good gifts, and none better than the gift of His Son through whom the promises to Abraham were fulfilled. The One who would reconcile the breakdown between life and eternal life was born, "...that man will live forevermore." The whole world knows the history and in nations all around the world, "Jesus Christ is born today..." will be heard over and over before and on Christmas Day, as it has over the past 2,000 years.

In other words, this gift was no token gesture. It remains the most expensive gift ever given, but more than that, the sheer wonder of its promise has the power to elevate us to heights of peace and goodwill that has seen wars stopped and Christmas celebrated among and between bitter foes. And so, what is the gift? The offer of eternal life through belief in the Son of God, Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, "... the name above all names, ... the name by which all must be saved."

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about our Christmas bags. In February's newsletter we hope to be able to share some stories about what the gifts meant to the men and women known here and elsewhere as seafarers.

May God bless you and your loved ones this Christmas, and may you in turn be a blessing to someone who needs to know that God loves them enough to have sent His Son in fulfilment of His promise to restore all who will believe in Him to a right relationship, or righteousness.

Back in the Pilbara After 44 Years - a journey of faith.

In 1972 I had my 21st birthday at Karratha, working as an industrial chemist in the Pellet Plant laboratory in Dampier for Hamersley Iron. I never, in my wildest dreams, saw myself spending my retirement back in the Pilbara, but God moves in mysterious ways.

I was a typical product of the 1950s, born into an Anglican family where going to church on Sundays was a way of life. My father was a linguist, teacher and amateur anthropologist, and took a very scientific and analytical approach to the Bible, spending most of his life acquiring archaeological and scientific evidence for the existence of Jesus, and proving inconsistencies in the written Bible, arguing that it could not therefore be infallible. He never made the step to accepting that a belief in Jesus is a step of faith, based on eyewitness accounts and on the testimony of people who spoke to eyewitnesses. Jesus was the son of a carpenter and eventually executed as a common criminal. He didn't build monuments, fortresses or palaces, so it is improbable that there would be any archaeological evidence of his existence beyond a note in the punishment records of a Roman governor in an outpost of the Roman empire. Consequently as I studied geology at university, I moved away from the church and became agnostic at best. However, the more I studied, the more order I noticed in what should have been a random universe. My wife Helen has always had a strong faith that I couldn't understand. I went through a series of personal crises that broke my proud self-reliance and I had to admit that I couldn't do life on my own. I started to read the Bible, especially through Nicky Gumble's daily emails *the Bible in one Year*. A real turning point was doing the Anglican Cursillo course, and I have grown since then. There have been numerous occasions when God has firmly slammed the door in my face when I've tried to go in a different direction and a few occasions when I have felt the power of the Holy Spirit. Once you have experienced that, there is no turning back. I took an interest in church life, ending up as a Parish Councillor, liturgical assistant, synod rep and church warden.

We moved to North Pine Parish in northern Brisbane, which has a very evangelical focus and they push strongly for people to go and make disciples. I had felt for some time that I should be doing something in mission – God's voice is sometimes very soft and hard to hear clearly. Having retired after working for 40 years in the mining industry in 26 countries around the world as a geologist, I was trying to work out which part of deepest, darkest Africa or South America I should be going to, not realising the mission field was ripe here in Australia.

One of our parishioners at North Pine said she saw on the BCA web site that King Island, off Tasmania, was looking for a chaplain and encouraged me to have a look. That position required a fully ordained priest, which I'm not, but in the process of looking, Helen saw the ad for the Operations Manager position at Port Hedland. When I read the requirements, it seemed that everything I had done in the last 40 years had been training for this job, so I sent off an enquiry. It seemed an even better fit that Helen is a retired CPA and they needed help in the Accounts section, and the local parish treasurer was leaving, so there was something else we could contribute.

I was born in Parkes in western NSW, and grew up in the bush. Helen is a Broken Hill girl, and we had two of our four children born in Mount Isa. We're not really "city people" and Helen enjoys the big arc of sky on the plains. There is something about the outback that gets under your skin, with a rugged beauty all of its own, and very down-to-earth people.

My job is to make sufficient income to pay the bills but not to lose our focus on the seafarers – we are here for them, not to make a huge profit or build a business empire. The previous Senior Chaplain Allan Mower has left me a business in very good financial shape with some brilliant innovations, so I don't plan to make changes for changes' sake.

The Port Hedland Centre has 11 full-time employees and nine part-time or casual staff, with hours worked equivalent to 14 full-time staff. We have six volunteers who help out as required, and some regular grey nomads or BCA nomads who spend six to eight weeks with us to relieve for senior staff on annual leave. We see 35,000 plus Seafarers at the Centre each year, which is only about one third of those coming into port.

Like most mission work, we have the moments that make you laugh, make you cry or give you goose bumps. The chaplains deal with parents who have lost children while their ship was at sea, workers who have lost friends to accidents, overboard or died of natural causes while at sea. Sometimes they may have to sail for two weeks with a body in cold storage until they reach port. The Mission is there to carry them through.

But the rewards come for us in the beautiful moments. I heard the piano being played recently, and looked in to see a young Filipino guy playing without sheet music, flawlessly and with passion. Then I noticed he had his phone set up on the piano on Facetime – his wife was putting the kids to bed in the Philippines and daddy was playing the piano for them from Port Hedland before they went to bed.

I also heard a child giggling loudly, and saw a young Chinese dad with one of our green stuffed turtle souvenirs, poking it at his daughter in China via his mobile phone, to her delighted laughter. We also had two brothers, from different ships, meet up in the Centre, not realising they would both be in the Centre on the same day, and they hadn't seen each other for several years. We have about 300 Filipino families in Port Hedland, and a mum had arranged to meet up with her seafaring son when he came into port at our Centre.

These are the magic moments when you see God's love at work.

Chris Towsey Operations Manager

Excitement in the Centre

One of our staff members, Kattie, is a carer with PWCA (Pilbara Wildlife Carers Association) and is currently looking after 2 young joeys.

Kattie occasionally brings the joeys, Wombat and Parker, into the Centre for the Seafarers to see. They always create great excitement as the Seafarers don't normally get the chance to see our native animals up close.



Wombat

Wombat and Parker will be released next winter, when they reach sexual maturity at about 15 months. They will be tagged and released on a station near Tom Price that does not allow shooting on the property. This is hard on the carer as they put so much time and energy into raising the animals, but it is also rewarding knowing they are now able to care for themselves.

PWCA carers must follow strict guidelines for the care and treatment of the animals. Feeding is regimented with time and quantity schedules strictly adhered to. Joeys are usually cared for in pairs with some carers having up to 3 pairs at a time. The pairing is important to reduce the risk of animals thinking they are humans or dogs. Kangaroos are not the only animals cared for. Other animals could include bats, dingo's, eagles, owls, turtles and snakes.



Parker

Seafarers worldwide responsibility

A Seafarers life on board can be a lonely one. They sacrifice time with family to go to sea moving goods all around the world. In Australia over 90% of imported goods come by sea. Most of us never think about how the things we use every day get here. The cars we drive, our electric and electronic goods, our clothes and even those imported foods. There are an estimated 2 million Seafarers around the world, so the Seafaring community is far greater those than we see here in Port Hedland.

Take a little time, this Christmas to think about the goods we use and consume and those men and women who face the dangers of the sea to bring them to our shores.

Christmas gift bags

This year we have prepared 2000 gift bags to be handed out to Seafarers in port or at anchorage over Christmas. It is expected this will cover 85/90 vessels. This tradition has been running for a few years now and the Seafarers look forward to receiving a gift at Christmas from the Centre. Those that are not in Port Hedland at this time are very disappointed, especially those leaving just a day or two before we start handing out gifts. They start asking about the gifts in November, but it does get earlier each year. Unfortunately, we can't give a gift to all our Seafarers. Each year we increase the number of bags, but there must be a line somewhere.

It is a wonderful experience to give a gift to someone so far from home. A small gift means so much and shows that someone cares. Merry Christmas.





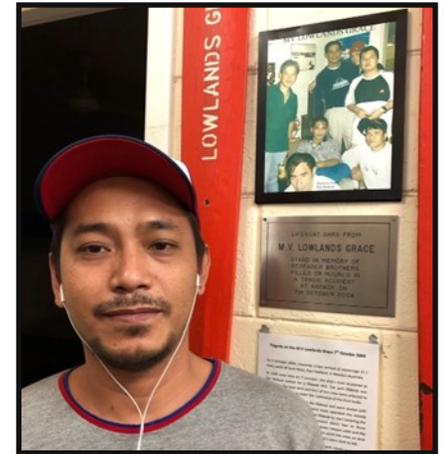
From the Port Chaplain:

As Port Chaplain I come across many Seafarers suffering from pain and loss. The life of a Seafarer and his family is not an easy one. Most of the Seafarers have 9 month contracts. Some may only come ashore 2 or 3 times during their time on board and some may not come ashore at all. A Chief Officer told me the biggest problem for Seafarers is "homesickness". Many of the Seafarers' wife's give birth while their husband is at sea. I have seen thousands of photos of Seafarers babies. They have many photos of their babies, but they may not have been able to hold them yet.

Just recently a Myanmar Seafarer was notified that his 18 year old son had passed away, more than a month ago, from a blood disease. His son had already been buried so he decided to stay onboard to complete his contract.

While I was on duty at the Centre one night this month, I noticed a Seafarer reading a plaque on the wall. I could see tears welling up in his eyes. I went over and spoke with him and he told me, "they were me crew mates." The plaque and accompanying story told of an accident on board a vessel off Port Hedland, in 2004. The vessel was conducting a lifeboat drill when supports let go and the lifeboat flipped and fell 16m into the sea. All 5 Seafarers on board were injured. Sadly 2 later died from their injuries. The Seafarer I spoke to was a 22 year old Engine Cadet at the time of the accident. The Port Hedland's Peace Memorial Seafarers Centre's sole aim is to be a Christian witness to the care of all Seafarers regardless of race, colour or creed.

Heavenly Father we ask you to give us compassion and wisdom as we minister to the Seafarers. We ask you to give the Seafarers peace of mind. Keep them and their families safe. In Jesus name. Amen....Garry.



Memorials around the Centre

There are several plaques and memorials around the Centre reminding us of Seafarers who have been injured or killed while on board. We become complacent and forget of the dangers they face every day while at sea. Once a year, around the world, we stop to remember the Seafarers. Sea Sunday both celebrates and commemorates Seafarers worldwide, both past and present, and the sacrifices they make. This year on Sea Sunday we passed out letters written to encourage and thank the Seafarers for the work they do and the sacrifice they and their families make. It is hoped this will become another tradition here at Port Hedland Seafarers Centre just as our Christmas Gift Bags are in this coming season

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or

Port Hedland Seafarers Centre
Tours