In times of trouble

You know what’s great about sharing Christian news? In times of joy and success, we get to see our Christian family cheering each other on. In times of trouble and uncertainty, we witness our brothers and sisters coming together and supporting those in need.

This week we've seen some very tragic news (see below). But we've seen first hand a Church community united in prayer.

Adventist engineer burnt in fuel fire

An Adventist Aviation Services (AAS) engineer has suffered burns on up to 50 per cent of his body, after a fire during routine maintenance on their newest plane.
Chief engineer Linden Millist was burned after a fuel tank caught fire and was medevac’d to Brisbane from AAS headquarters at Goroka, Papua New Guinea on January 22. He is currently in a critical but stable condition.

ADRA responds to fires across NSW

More than 20 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia volunteers have assisted in providing accommodation for those affected by this month’s serious bushfires across New South Wales.

Stop the [illegal boat] people?

Australia really is a brilliant, beautiful country. But it's not without its problems. Nathan Brown takes a biblical look at a very serious issue making headlines “down under”—asylum seekers.

RECORD would like to wish all our Australian brothers and sisters a happy Australia Day and a blessed Sabbath!
Adventist engineer burnt in fuel fire

By Jarrod Stackelroth

Goroka, Papua New Guinea

An Adventist Aviation Services (AAS) engineer has suffered burns on up to 50 per cent of his body, after a fire during routine maintenance on their newest plane.

Chief engineer Linden Millist was burned after a fuel tank caught fire and was medevac’d to Brisbane from AAS headquarters at Goroka, Papua New Guinea yesterday evening (January 22).

He is currently sedated and will be undergoing surgery over the next few days.
President of the Papua New Guinea Union Mission, Pastor Leigh Rice, is calling for Adventists in the South Pacific to pray for Mr Millist and his recovery.

“I and everyone in the National Office in Lae, are praying for Linden and his family,” said Pastor Rice.

“Adventist Aviation plays a significant role in the mission of the Church in Papua New Guinea, so this incident will impact on the mission of the Church here,” he added.

AAS CEO, Roger Millist, said that AAS is currently working with the Accident Investigation Commission to determine what exactly happened.

Wahroonga, New South Wales

The Adventist Aviation Services (AAS) engineer who was burned during a routine maintenance check is in a critical but stable condition in a Brisbane burns unit.

Son of AAS CEO Roger Millist, Linden, 33, was injured when a fuel tank caught on fire in the AAS hangar at Goroka airport, Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Mr Millist was in surgery for six hours on Wednesday (January 23) as doctors removed dead skin and checked his internal airways. He will remain in an induced coma for three to five days, with doctors hoping to begin skin grafts in two to three days. The hospital’s main concern is infection and blood clotting.

AAS plays a significant role in the work of the Church in Papua New Guinea, especially in the remote, rugged and isolated highlands and Fly and Sepik River systems. Because many of these village areas are one or two days walking distance, AAS assists with office itineraries, transfer of pastors and teachers, transport of resources and building materials, and medical evacuation. When the planes are not being used for the Church, they do commercial work for members in these isolated areas, which helps them to sustain a livelihood and financially support the Church.

Mr Millist is one of 13 AAS staff, four of whom are pilots.

AAS and the Papua New Guinea Union Mission ask that you continue to pray for Linden’s recovery and for the AAS ministry, which is so important to the people of PNG.
Wahroonga, New South Wales

More than 20 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia volunteers have assisted in providing accommodation for those affected by this month’s serious bushfires across New South Wales.

The volunteers, as part of ADRA’s formal agreement with the NSW Government to provide emergency accommodation during times of disaster, were activated across southern and north-western regions of the state, including hard-hit Coonabarabran where 32 of those affected we provided with safe, temporary lodging.

“Evacuation in these situations causes huge amounts of stress,” says Kevin Munro, National Manager, Emergency Services. “People are forced to leave their homes, animals and memories to the unknown realities such a fire brings.”

Volunteer teams remain on duty at the evacuation centre Coonabarabran.

In a sad twist of fate an ADRA volunteer, who serves in the ADRA Op Shop in Coonabarabran, was one of those who lost their homes in the blaze.

Thanks to ADRA’s established presence and connections with the community through the ADRA Op Shop, the Warumbungle Shire Council has allocated funding from their Bushfire Appeal to ADRA to provide essentials including food and other household items to those whose homes have been destroyed.

“Having a presence on the ground and being a trusted entity in the community allows us to respond in this way,” says Mr Munro. “The council recognises that our volunteers serve an important role in the community and understands the vital service the ADRA provides in the area.”
The soldiers were coming! In the early morning darkness, the parents grabbed what they could, packing as quickly and quietly as possible, not expecting they would ever be able to return. Whatever they couldn’t pack or carry would be lost and they had to carry whatever they needed to survive on the run. They had a little money and a few valuable possessions they might be able to sell but they would never receive what they were really worth. If they could make it to the border they might be safe but they couldn’t afford to wonder how they might be received in the neighbouring nation.

As the husband packed their meagre possessions together, he kept urging his wife to hurry. “The soldiers are coming!” he whispered again to his already frantic wife. The infant child was wrapped to keep him warm against the cool night air and the couple did one more look around the bare room to see if they had forgotten anything. This was not a time for sentiment but the young mother paused for just a moment. This had been their first home as a family and she anticipated that they might never see it again.

The village seemed unusually quiet as they stepped out the door after extinguishing the light. Sticking to the shadows, they were soon out of the village and less concerned about being quiet, more concerned about travelling as quickly as possible. By daylight, they were well away from the village but exposed to the dangers of the road. There were always those ready to take advantage of desperate travellers.

She shuddered at the thought of what might have happened if they had not been warned to leave when they did. But she was still uneasy. Was there the risk of being pursued? Had anyone seen them leave? Although her husband’s family came from this region, she had never before been this far south. How long would it take them to reach the border? Would they be safe even then? Would they ever see their home again?

She could barely bring herself to imagine beginning a new life in a foreign nation—different language, different food, different culture, different people. Getting away had been the first priority; where they got to and how they would be welcomed there now loomed as the next big questions.

**Seeking asylum**

Last year, 72 million people across the world were forced from their homes, the majority because of violent conflict. According to Australian Red Cross spokesman Michael Raper—launching this report recently—most of these people simply want to be able to return to their homes and need help in re-establishing their lives, whether permanently or as an interim measure. Exercising their rights as set out in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights, a small proportion of these displaced people request asylum in foreign nations, claiming they would be in danger of persecution if they were to return to their home countries.

That the tiny number of “boat people" who arrive in Australia—an average of about 1800 per year since 2001—should be such an ongoing source of fear and prejudice, political controversy and point-scoring does not reflect well on the character of the Australian nation. The first wave of “boat people”—mostly refugees from wars in south-east Asia, who arrived in Australia in the late 1970s—were generally greeted with sympathy. But social attitudes have hardened, particularly prompted for political ends since the infamous Tampa incident in mid–2001. Since that time, both major political parties have sought to use the continued arrivals and occasional disasters for political advantage in differing ways, without arriving at any kind of just, humane or effective solution.

Boat arrivals are not a simple issue but the basics of the situation are straightforward. Australia has an international legal obligation to help people escaping violence and persecution and current government policy allows for 20,000 such asylum seekers each year, a figure that has never been close to being met by boat arrivals. This number does not vary because of how people arrive in Australia or otherwise make application for asylum.

However, as has been demonstrated too often, the sea journeys can be dangerous and are often arranged by unscrupulous “people smugglers”. This is why the current government policies are aimed at deterring this trade, offering extended detention to boat arrivals to ensure there is no perceived advantage to those arriving by boat compared with those who apply for asylum from the comparative safety of a third country after having escaped their immediate danger.

But this, too, may be counter-productive, with regular concerns raised about the physical, mental and emotional damage that long-term detention risks among these legal asylum seekers. Images of violence and stories of self-harm and hunger strikes add to our fear and distrust of these people, while demonstrating their desperation for resolution of their situations. It’s a complex and serious issue that is complicated further by the suspicion and prejudice that seem to fester and are too easily aroused in the wider Australian community.

“Biblical lenses”

Veteran Christian justice advocate Ronald Sider emphasises the call for Christians “to find a fresh starting point for the [immigration] debates” and that our best response should be to adopt the “biblical lenses” that “remind us first of all that these debates are about people—people made in the image of God, with all the inherent worth and standing that lofty designation entails. Policy debates, statistics, spreadsheets and economic outcomes can often cloud this simple fact that we must ever keep before us” (“Afterword" in M Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church and the Bible*).

It’s remarkable how often people who were outsiders contribute to the story of God’s actions in our world as portrayed in the Bible story. From Melchizedeck to Rahab, Ruth to Nebuchadnezzar, the Wise Men to the Greek poets, the Good Samaritan to Cornelius, outsiders were not merely tolerated but were essential to the progress of God’s story and His people.

A concern for foreigners was a core component of God’s purposes as set out in the laws given to the people of Israel after their escape from slavery and persecution in Egypt: “Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33, 34, see also Exodus 22:21). Even "foreigners living among you" were to benefit from the Sabbath rest (Exodus 20:10) and the gleanings of the freshly harvested fields (see Leviticus 19:10).
Among God’s repeated concerns about injustice, and the poor and the oppressed, His focus on the outsider, the aliens and the foreigners should not be overlooked. In short, “the Lord protects the foreigners among us” (Psalm 146:9). One expression of this in the New Testament is the command to hospitality (see Luke 14:12–14, Romans 12:13), hinting at Abraham’s experience of unwittingly “entertaining angels” as one motivation for such generosity of spirit and action (see Hebrews 13:2).

Jesus’ “golden rule” about doing to others what we would like done for us if the roles were reversed is also highly relevant (see Matthew 7:12, noting the echo of Leviticus 19:33) and Peter urges that our faithfulness to God gives us an insight of what it is to be “foreigners in the land” (1 Peter 1:17) in a similar way to the experiences of the Israelites.

But, as with other aspects of the incarnation, Jesus’ identification with asylum seekers is notable. He lived their experience. The night-time flight of His parents to Egypt to escape Herod’s soldiers, then their return to a different part of Israel to be out of reach of the next king (see Matthew 2:13–23), are another reminder that when we do something for the “least of these”—including the refugee, asylum seeker, outsider and foreigner—we are doing it for Him (see Matthew 25:40). This isn’t some kind of clever metaphor; it’s a reality of what it means to serve Jesus and others in our world today.

A fresh starting point

It should be obvious that neither indefinite mandatory detention, “Stop the boats”, the attempted legislative gymnastics of many Australian politicians or other abuses are sufficient or good responses to the questions raised by asylum seekers and their arrival by boat on Australia’s shores. The problems that cause these desperate people to seek escape and asylum call for larger responses of peacemaking and doing justice in their home nations. And when these neighbours arrive on our shores, we need to find credible and careful ways to demonstrate greater hospitality and generosity.

Illegal arrivals, “boat people” and worse terms are employed to dull our primary recognition of these people as people who need our help. By our voice, our vote, our influence and our actions, we must find ways to welcome and value the stranger, speak up for the outsider and join with God in protecting the foreigners who come among us.

*Bible quotations from the New Living Translation.

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