Worth celebrating

There seems to be a day for everything nowadays. Have you heard of International Talk Like a Pirate Day? What about Towel Day? Actually, maybe it’s just almost everything—there’s an International Lefthanders Day, but no worldwide celebration for right-handers.

This past Tuesday (October 1) was World Vegetarian Day, and the beginning of International Vegetarian Week. Despite the ever-growing list of commemorative days, vegetarianism is something worth celebrating. And despite the criticism and confusion directed at vegetarians from meat-eaters, being a “whole food hero” is something to be proud of. But are we?

“As the vegetarian movement gains momentum particularly in the West . . . it is a shame that I don’t see Seventh-day Adventists better represented pushing a healthy, whole vegetarian diet. Many of the Adventist vegetarians I grew up with now eat meat. Many are moving away from the health principles we pioneered. It is a shame to me that when mainstream media run stories about vegetarianism I don’t see more acknowledgement of the Church’s contribution. Are we ashamed or shy?” [Click here to read more]

Visit our website for more vegetarian-related stories, including the launch of some exciting new products. Also, for the latest Adventist news and views from the South Pacific, keep reading this week’s edition of Record eNews.

*By the way, today is World Animal Day. Is it just a coincidence that it falls right in the middle of International Vegetarian Week?
Exceptional tithe growth in PNG

Ten years ago, the Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) had the lowest tithe of the four unions that comprise the South Pacific Division, despite having the highest membership. This year, when measured in Australian dollars, the PNGUM tithe is almost triple that of the Trans Pacific Union and 50 per cent more than the New Zealand Pacific Union.

Against the wind

The first baptism at Lord Howe Island was supposed to include four people. But Janet King didn't make it. It wasn’t because she had cold feet or second thoughts. Rather, her husband intercepted her before she could leave for Soldiers Creek, grabbed her and locked her in a room . . .

Read RECORD

It's October. No, wait—it's Knocktober! What exactly is Knocktober? Find out in the latest issue of RECORD.

Watch/download InFocus

Australian Christian Lobby’s managing director Lyle Shelton comments on the progress of Australia’s new video game classification regime; family life educator Trafford Fischer touts the benefits of volunteering; and youth ministries researcher Dr Barry Gane reveals the factors that keep young people connected with God and church.
Keys to WA growth

The WA Conference is the fastest growing conference in Australia and one of the fastest growing conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Western world. What has it done to encourage this kind of growth?

More Features

Through South Pacific eyes

Here’s something that will blow your mind: people from a Pacific Island background have a distinct advantage when it comes to understanding the Bible. Why? RECORD assistant editor Kent Kingston explains.

More Editorials
I’m a vegetarian, not an alien

Today is World Vegetarian Day, the beginning of International Vegetarian Week. There seems to be a day for everything now. Most of them pass by unremarked but I’m glad that vegetarianism is getting a mention.

I’ve been vegetarian my whole life—born and raised that way but since I grew old enough to make my own decisions, I decided to stick to it. It always amuses me when I meet people and they find out that I’m vegetarian and always have been. They look at me like I’m from outer space, their expression ranging from bemusement to bewilderment. I always reply with, “that’s why I am so healthy and strong.” Many people seem to expect vegetarians to be pale and skinny, or uptight, liberal “save the Earth” types. An overweight but happy and healthy male does not fit their expectations.

The next question invariably comes. “Why?” Often it is phrased as “But haven’t you tried meat?” or “Have you always been vegetarian?” Here’s the answer I give them. Firstly, I have never (knowingly) eaten meat. There’s always the chance of a spider in the sleep, a fly down the throat or something slipped in somewhere at a church lunch but not by choice. And I have to be honest and say I’m not against the idea of eating meat, per se. In fact, I believe I would probably like it. That’s the problem. As a man who likes to eat, I know it would be tempting to eat a lot of meat. It would open me up to the temptations of fast food—McDonalds, KFC and others—which I find fairly easy to say no to as there’s nothing to eat. So it’s partly a case of, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”. I don’t know what I’m missing out on and I’m happy to leave it that way.

Apart from that, it is fairly easy to find research supporting the vegetarian lifestyle. Consumption of meat has been linked to increased rates of cancer, high cholesterol and other lifestyle diseases. I’m not a scientist so I won’t present the full scope of the research here but it helps to know.

The other major factor in many people’s decision to abstain from meat is the environment. Seems if everyone ate plant-based diets, we’d be able to feed a whole lot more people. Livestock tends to need lots of space, lots of food and can ruin the native landscape. So that’s another reason I’m happy to go green.

My wife and I recently visited a vegan restaurant called Loving Hut in Cabramatta. They are not only a vegan restaurant, with an array of Asian dishes, meat substitutes and low cost, but the walls are plastered with quotes promoting the vegetarian lifestyle. There are quotes from famous people, great thinkers who had chosen to be vegetarian. There were also verses from all of the holy books, supporting a meat free existence—the Qur’an, the Torah, Hindu scriptures, and the Bible.

It seems that the world’s major religions are in agreement. Man was not necessarily designed to eat meat. The reasons vary, from cruelty to animals, feeling close to other creatures, as a form of immorality or killing but the common theme is there. For me, I believe that when humans were created, they didn’t eat meat and if there is no dying in heaven, then we will return to that state. So I might as well practice now. However, I don’t judge people for eating meat if they choose to, I acknowledge Jesus ate meat and I understand that in some places in the world it is expensive, impractical and difficult to maintain a vegetarian or vegan diet.
As the vegetarian movement gains momentum particularly in the West (it has always been quite common in India and Asia), it is a shame that I don’t see Seventh-day Adventists better represented pushing a healthy, whole vegetarian diet. Many of the Adventist vegetarians I grew up with now eat meat. Many are moving away from the health principles we pioneered. It is a shame to me that when mainstream media run stories about vegetarianism I don’t see more acknowledgement of the Church's contribution. Are we ashamed or shy?

I must stop at this point and make an admission. For the past few years, I have not been a very good vegetarian. This year I have been on a journey to lose weight and reclaim my health. And I have realised that the highly processed, shiny packaged, easy to prepare food that is packed with empty calories, sugar, salt and fat, is not good for me. I was a bad vegetarian. Now I am cooking with much more variety, eating foods as grown and limiting my intake. I am taking my health, my body, God’s temple, seriously. This doesn’t mean that I am strict, it doesn’t mean I won’t eat out or eat cheese or sweets every now and then. What it does mean is that I am conscious of getting enough exercise and putting the very best in my body. After all, I am trying to eat more foods manufactured and invented by the best chef in the universe—God.

The results? I’m feeling better, more energetic, my mind is clearer and for the first time in my life I’m starting to be happy with the body I’ve been given. I’ve lost 20 kilograms to date and am committed to continue. (Interestingly, I was speaking with a friend recently who has gained 10 kilograms in the past few months. He was seriously skinny and is happy to put on the weight. He is on a very similar diet to me, eating good whole foods, although he eats chicken and fish, and has stopped eating junk food.)

So I encourage you. If you are vegetarian, stick at it but do it properly. Eat as much variety as you can, with plenty of colours and textures. If you choose to eat meat, source it as ethically and as naturally as you can, eat more vegetables or try vegetarianism. It's not about abstaining from meat or animal products. It's about exploring the wide range of beautiful foods our Creator has gifted us and looking after our health, so we can live our lives to the fullest.
New vegetarian products launched

October 1 marked the beginning of International Vegetarian Week—perfect timing for Life Health Food to launch two new products in their Bean Supreme range of meat-free options. The Gourmet Burger and Falafel Koftas are the new kids on the vegetarian block.

The launch took place at the Grounds of Alexandria café, in Sydney, with 15 members of the press present, including food bloggers. Executive chef Lilly Fasan designed a lunch menu exclusively for the event, featuring Bean Supreme’s Falafel Kofta, Mushroom Burger and Vegetarian Meatballs in pomodoro sauce.

As more and more Australians are making the switch to vegetarianism or actively reducing meat in their diets, Life Health Food are working to provide more options for them.

“The more choice available to Australians the better,” said accredited practising dietitian Angela Saunders. “Increasing plant-based proteins and reducing animal-based proteins in the diet can reduce chronic disease risk, has a lower environmental impact and can be a nutritionally adequate eating plan.”

Research carried out by Life Health Food Australia shows that Australians trial vegetarianism primarily for health reasons but that one in five stop being vegetarian because of a lack of options.

Bean Supreme products are available in major supermarkets in Australia and New Zealand.
Ten years ago, the Papua New Guinea Union Mission (PNGUM) had the lowest tithe of the four unions that comprise the South Pacific Division, despite having the highest membership. This year, when measured in Australian dollars, the PNGUM tithe is almost triple that of the Trans Pacific Union and 50 per cent more than the New Zealand Pacific Union (NZPUC).

“If you would have told me 10 years ago that PNG’s tithe would eclipse NZPUC’s, I wouldn’t have believed it,” said Rod Brady, chief financial officer of the South Pacific Division, “but in this case, seeing is believing!”

PNG is one of the fastest growing economies in the world primarily due to its booming resource sector. From 2008-2012, the country’s average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was 7.42 per cent per annum—exceptionally robust. In contrast, over the past five and-a-half years, PNG tithe has grown an average of 18.02 per cent per annum. Even when this is adjusted down to reflect the average annualised inflation rate during the period of 6.54 per cent, the real average annual tithe growth of 11.48 per cent is significantly faster than the rate of GDP growth.

In some cases, villages are compensated by companies for mining rights. But there are cases where villages are being compensated not to mine due to historical or ecological reasons. Bob Butler, chief financial officer of the PNGUM, said one village on the southern end of the Kokoda Track is compensated 5 million Kina a year by the Australian Government not to mine. The village is tithing the payment. Many similar stories of faithfulness are coming from PNG.

“We are very happy about the reports coming from Bob Butler about the faithfulness of our church family in PNG,” Mr Brady said. “The
increases we’re seeing in PNG tithe are much faster than inflation. What this means is that the Church’s capacity to serve the population of PNG is increasing in real terms. But, and this is very important, this doesn’t mean PNG is now a nation without needs. Support from Australia and New Zealand has never been more important as PNG society struggles with the inevitable consequences of very rapid social change, and the growing chasm between the rich and poor.”
The first baptism at Lord Howe Island was supposed to include four people. But Janet King didn’t make it. It wasn’t because she had cold feet or second thoughts. Rather, her husband intercepted her before she could leave for Soldiers Creek, grabbed her and locked her in a room. A week later when she was eventually baptised, he stood on a bluff overlooking the Lord Howe Island lagoon and witnesses claim he called to Pastor Butz “hold her under!”

Janet King’s story of courage and sacrifice is not unique. Many of the early Adventists on Lord Howe joined the Church despite fierce opposition. Their perseverance paid off. On Sabbath September 21, three of Janet King’s grandchildren, four of her great-grandchildren and three of her great-great grandchildren were among the Lord Howe Island Seventh-day Adventist Church congregation for its 100th anniversary celebration.

The church was packed to overflowing for what proved to be an incredibly rich day of music, oratory and drama. Visiting pastor Keith Jackson took the opportunity of the capacity crowd—made up of many people who don’t regularly attend church—to present the story of Jesus in simple, winning words that went straight to the heart. He concluded his message with the story of the most recent Lord Howe baptism: Nathan Thompson, a descendent of the first generation of Adventists on the island. This June, as Nathan lay dying of cancer in Sydney, his request to be baptised was honoured as best as it could be under the circumstances. A jar of water, specially flown over from Lord Howe Island lagoon where his ancestors were baptised, was used for the event. Nathan died later that day. Pastor Jackson looked at the crowd and encouraged them not to leave it another day to give their lives to Jesus. One of the non-Adventists who attended the service reported the next day that he had been up until 2am mulling over the sermon.

A highlight of the service was a re-enactment of the church’s early years, superbly scripted and directed by Kristy Thompson and starring a cast that included many of the children from the island’s public school. Cute, funny, poignant; the play had it all. Later in the day, Karen and Craig “Macca” Wilson presented a slideshow that gave names and faces to the remarkable story of this small community with such a rich history.

Five members of the Melbourne Advent Brass led by Reynold Gilson were on hand to provide uplifting music throughout the day. They ended the celebration with a superb concert. Their exceptional musicianship added inordinately to the occasion.

Clive Wilson, who celebrated his 80th birthday on the same weekend, compered the events. Graham “Chappy” Chapman, pastor of the church, reflected on the day: “It was great to have people from all over the island and special guests from the mainland with us. This
celebration reminded our community how central the Adventist faith is to the story of Lord Howe Island and, more importantly, how central the love of Jesus is to Adventist faith.”

James Standish is editor of RECORD.
The 2011 Australian Census revealed there was a 27 per cent increase in the number of people in Western Australia who identified themselves as Seventh-day Adventists over the period from 2006 to 2011. That is an average growth of 5.4 per cent per year during that period. From another angle, a recent membership report for the Western Australian Conference shows a 3 per cent growth per year, for the past three years, in the number of people joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church in WA.

These two independent statistics confirm that the WA Conference is the fastest growing conference in Australia and one of the fastest growing conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Western world. What has it done to encourage this kind of growth? What are the keys that unlocked the growth potential?

**Listening to God and people**

The first key to the growth in WA was simply listening. The conference administrative team, under the leadership of Pastor Glenn Townend, spent time listening to the pastors and church members to really identify the common challenges and dreams that were shared within the Church. They also cultivated an environment of listening to God by modelling prayer and Bible study in order to discern God’s vision for the Conference. It was after spending significant time listening that the Conference could move confidently into His preferred future.

**Shaping and implementing a vision**

The next key was to articulate the vision. Dr Russell Burrill shared at a camp meeting in 2005 that the Adventist Church was originally a lay movement, and he noted that “we can only become what we once were”. The WA Conference leadership sensed God’s vision for them would be based on our heritage and drive them to a better future. It would supersede existing growth patterns. Having spent time listening and brainstorming, the executive committee articulated the following shared vision: "Renewing the Adventist movement by creating significant lives and transforming communities."

While the picture of a renewed Adventist movement was clear in the minds of the conference leadership, later it became evident that some people needed tangible numbers, which led to the formulation of the 2020 vision:

- 20,000 Adventist disciples
- 2000 groups
- 200 churches
- 2 new schools . . . by 2020
The 2020 vision initially challenged many people, but after persistently communicating the vision with stories of WA people trying to fulfil the dream, many within the Conference caught it.

**Letting the growth be Spirit-led**

Another major key was to allow the growth to be led by the Holy Spirit. Rather than being prescriptive and conscripting people into a predetermined strategy, the conference leadership encouraged people themselves to listen to the Holy Spirit and follow His leading, whether they start a kids' club, a soup kitchen or door knock. While this involves taking the risk of giving people freedom, the results have demonstrated that a Spirit-led movement is more powerful than one that is tightly constrained by human strategies.

**Mission training and development**

The WA Conference leadership team understood that one of its key roles was to train people for mission. This mission focus included a whole range of projects, including public evangelism, STORMCo, overseas mission trips and church planting. Training occurred by modelling mission as well as facilitating key events, including the annual life renewal and church planting summits, which teach the biblical principles of mission.

**Communication**

Finally, the WA Conference has been actively communicating the stories of what God has been doing in the Conference, as well as the challenges being faced. This has been accomplished through the conference leadership and departments telling God stories in worship every Sabbath in the various churches around the Conference. The monthly *NewsWest* magazine and the AMNWest video media unit tell the stories of what God’s people are doing. People love hearing these stories and it provides them with tangible examples of what can be achieved.

Prior to the current growth phase, it took 100 Adventists to disciple one new person into the faith. It now takes 30 Adventists to make another disciple of Jesus. The church plants are particularly effective in reaching new people, with only 19 Adventists in a church plant being needed to make another disciple. Tithe has also grown in the period from $A3.8 million to $6.3 million.

God led the journey and is to be glorified for the growth in the WA Conference. We would like to acknowledge the keys that He has given to us for this growth.

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**Runs on the board**

In September, we carried a church growth story from the Australian state with the slowest population growth. Here, we look at church growth in Australia’s fastest growing state. It’s no secret our Church is growing faster in West Australia than in any other state in Australia. Indeed, the growth in WA is impressive by any standards—and certainly by the standards of developed Western nations where many churches are shrinking. Yes, WA’s population is growing faster than any other state in Australia, so, yes, the Church should be growing fastest there. But from 2006—2011, reported WA church growth significantly exceeded WA population growth. It therefore appears that there is more than a happy coincidence behind the healthy growth of the Adventist Church in WA. Do you know of real, verifiable church growth where you live? Then share with RECORD the good news—including the why, the wherefores and how it may be replicable.

*Dr Sven Ostring is Global Mission and leadership director for the Western Australian Conference.*
Through South Pacific eyes

I was sitting on the beach, chatting with a friend on a sunny Sabbath afternoon. My friend has a Pacific Island background, which prompted me to mention his cultural advantages when it comes to understanding the Bible. He gave me a bewildered look that suggested he’d never seen it that way.

So, in honour of the 80 per cent of Adventists in the South Pacific Division who live in or hail from the Pacific Islands, let me explain.

There are a lot of parallels between the lifestyle and cultures of the ancient Middle East and traditional Pacific ways—more, in fact, than there are with Anglo-European cultures. Consider. People in Bible times mostly built houses out of locally available materials, lived in villages and ate from their gardens, their flocks and local markets. In hard times they went without meals; other times they feasted on freshly caught fish or sheep roasted on a spit. If they wanted to get water, they had to walk. If they had to travel, the walk might take days.

Ancient Middle Eastern cultures were very status conscious. Women were very much second-class citizens and religious leaders were given great respect. Most people couldn’t read and had to rely on these leaders to explain the Scriptures to them. Anthropologists would describe these cultures as being driven by “honour and shame”.

Take a fresh look at popular Bible stories through Pacific eyes. Can you see the village elders disapproving of teenage Mary’s pregnancy? No wonder she escaped to her cousin’s house in another village. If Mary was in Samoa today, she might end up in a village like Vaitele Fou, populated by people exiled from their home villages.

What about Zacchaeus? In my Anglo-Australian culture, his pariah status makes little sense. But what if I imagine him as a PNG man who worked his way up the management ranks of a foreign mining company in his home province? How would his wantoks feel if Zacchaeus earned “consultant fees” of millions of kina while fleecing them of their traditional land?

Can you see a respected Tongan chief lifting his tupenu to expose his legs and running through the village to embrace his prodigal son? It’s a picture of God the Father at His most vulnerable—casting aside His reputation in reckless love.

The Bible is not a European book. It took centuries for it to be printed in English. For most of history its stories were conveyed through oral tradition or by reading aloud. Bible study was a community discipline, not an individual one. Western culture—postmodern, wealthy, sedentary, educated, individualistic—is about as far from the cultural context of the Bible as it can be.

Those of us within that culture—in Australia, New Zealand and the rapidly developing population centres of the Pacific—need to be aware of the vast gulf that separates us from the mindset of the Bible’s first readers. It’s too easy to interpret the Scriptures through our own
cultural lens, and miss basic truths.

On the other hand, those of us who are closely tied to traditional Pacific cultures have an extra responsibility to understand the Bible at a deep cultural level. And not just to understand, but to apply it to our lives, our families and our churches. The way Jesus challenged the culture of His day should take on extra weight when we realise how close it was to our cultures. What did Jesus say about leadership and status? How did He deal with the politics of oppression, corruption and violence? How did He treat despised ethnic groups, the disabled, women and children? What picture of the Father did He paint when God was seen as judgemental and angry?

It’s time to take a fresh look at what Jesus says is really most important in life. It’s time to read the Bible through South Pacific eyes.

Kent Kingston is assistant editor of RECORD and spent some years of his childhood in Papua New Guinea.