In times of crisis

In last week’s edition of Record eNews, we dubbed October as a month of appeal. Turns out it could also be called a month of crisis.

In response to the ongoing situation in Syria, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia has launched a special Syria Crisis Appeal. The initiative will fund a project that will provide access to education for Syrian children. As part of the initiative, ADRA will this weekend feature as part of a special ABC Radio broadcast. Beryl Hartmann, the agency’s Humanitarian Program officer, who recently visited Syrian refugees in Lebanon and has helped design the new project, will feature on the program. Tune in to your local ABC Radio at 12:45 (AEDT) to hear Beryl’s experience, or listen online at <www.abc.net.au/radio/listenlive.htm>.

New South Wales, meanwhile, is in the midst of its worst bushfire crisis in more than a decade. Dozens of people have lost their homes, including an Adventist pastor in Sydney. Earlier in the week, a member of Raymond Terrace church lost several sheds and a granny flat in a bushfire in Port Stephens. Visit <record.net.au> to find out what ADRA Australia and other Adventists are doing in response to the crisis.

For more gripping news and views, keep reading this week's edition of RECORD eNews.
Church issues statement on Sabbath in Samoa

The office of the president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued a statement on the question of the Sabbath in Samoa. The statement also refers to the Sabbath in Tonga, Wallis and Futuna, and Kiribati.

Is doctrine dead?

Doctrine is an essential part of our Christian experience. At this time in history, however, knowledge and the role of doctrine seem to be more under threat than ever before—both outside and within the Church.
Oh yeah!

Forget Big Brother, if you want drama, intrigue, scandal, heroes and villains, turn off the TV and fly the hour and a half from Sydney to Lord Howe Island. The island itself isn’t half bad either (see photo).
An Adventist pastor is among the dozens of victims who have lost homes in what has been described as New South Wales' worst bushfire crisis in more than a decade.

More than 90 fires were reported across the state yesterday, forcing thousands of residents to evacuate.

One of the worst affected areas was the suburb of Springwood, with fires destroying a number of properties including the home of Janusz Jagiello, pastor of Pendle Hill Polish and Warrimoo churches.

Earlier in the week, a member of Raymond Terrace church lost several sheds and a granny flat in a bushfire in Port Stephens.

“We’re just devastated by the impact these fires have had on the community, including our Adventist community,” said Pastor Michael Worker, president of the Greater Sydney Conference. “Our prayers go up for Pastor Jagiello and all those affected by these terrible events.”

Cooler weather and easing winds have brought some relief to fire fighters, but a number of areas in Sydney’s north and south are still under threat.
An Adventist Church member is among the victims who lost property in a bushfire that engulfed the Port Stephens suburb of Salt Ash on Monday.

Reg Hyde, a boat builder and a member of Raymond Terrace church, had several large sheds and a granny flat destroyed in the fire. He also lost a number of boats that were in the process of being constructed.

Despite the loss, Mr Hyde said he was very grateful to God for protecting his house and keeping him and his daughter safe.

Soaring temperatures and strong winds have sparked a number of bushfires across New South Wales in October.

Members of Raymond Terrace and Maitland Adventist churches have been assisting in the relief efforts in Port Stephens by processing victims at the a local community hall, and helping relocate those stranded by the fires.
Church issues statement on Sabbath in Samoa

The office of the president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued a statement on the question of the Sabbath in Samoa. The statement also refers to the Sabbath in Tonga, Wallis and Futuna, and Kiribati.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church fully believes that the seventh day was set apart as holy by God at creation. The church further believes that in the Ten Commandments, the holiness of the seventh day is once again reiterated. Jesus as well as the disciples and apostles kept the seventh-day Sabbath. This is one of our fundamental Biblical beliefs and foundations of church practice as is amply indicated even in our name. The Sabbath is a wonderful day of worship, time with family and a break from all the busyness that can crowd out the most important things in life.

Recently, Pastor Wilson provided an article to Adventist World which talked about the wonderful subject of the Sabbath. It is a core belief of the church. However, some have unfortunately misused that article to imply that perhaps Pastor Wilson could have been referring to the Sabbath subject discussion in certain islands of the South Pacific where the International Date Line has changed. In a conversation with Pastor Wilson, he indicated that there was absolutely no intent on his part to connect that article with any discussions that may be taking place. Anyone trying to draw a direct connection is misusing the material.

For over 100 years, Seventh-day Adventists who live in countries of the South Pacific close to the international date line (eg The Kingdom of Tonga) have been ordering their worship practices around changes to the drawing of the date line that have been made by specific governments. They have done so in a consistent manner that has long been accepted by both the local people and the Church. More recently, Seventh-day Adventists in Kiribati, Wallis and Futuna, and most recently Samoa, have had to make decisions about Sabbath observance. With respect to Samoa, the decisions of the Executive Committee of that local field as supported by the Trans Pacific Union and the South Pacific Division have maintained the integrity of the seven-day cycle and the consistency of Sabbath worship across all of the countries that have been affected by changes in the drawing of the dateline by national governments.

This has been a difficult time for those Seventh-day Adventists who are living in countries where changes to the date line have occurred recently. Our members around the world are upholding them in prayer as they endeavor to locally review and adjust to this very unique situation. In as much as the South Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been delegated by the General Conference to care for the activities and responsibilities in that region, we urge all individuals interested in this subject to work with the South Pacific Division, the Trans Pacific Union and the local fields concerned. It is at those levels that these concerns are to be reviewed and cared for. In this responsibility, the Division has the full support of the General Conference. The General Conference wishes for all to support the efforts of the division, union and local field as they work toward resolving issues in this matter. It is important that all prayerfully work to advance the mission of the church in lifting up Christ, His righteousness, His sanctuary service, His Sabbath, His three angels’ messages and His soon return.

Click here to download a copy of the official statement.
The following information is provided by the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in support of the General Conference’s statement.

To understand the question of the correct day on which to keep the Sabbath in Samoa, it is first necessary to understand why Seventh-day Adventist Christians keep the Sabbath day holy:

• **The seventh day was set apart as holy by God at creation**

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:2-3 NIV).

• **In the Ten Commandments, the holiness of the seventh-day is once again reiterated**

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11 NIV).

• **Jesus kept the Sabbath**

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom” (Luke 4:16 NIV).

• **Every reference to the Sabbath in the New Testament record of the early Christian church makes clear the Christian Sabbath was kept on the same day as the Jewish Sabbath**

“When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,’ he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women” (Acts 17:1-4 NIV).

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church, while not unique, is the most numerous among Christian denominations that keep the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. It is a wonderful day of worship, time with family and a break from all the busyness that can crowd out the most important things in life. For most of us, it is our favourite day of the week.

Around the world, the name of the seventh day of the week changes from language to language. For example, in Korean it is Toyoil, in Swahili it is Jumamosi, in Hindi it is Sanivāra. The name of the day used by society isn’t important to us. What is important is that we rest on the seventh day of the weekly cycle. As Saturday is generally the name given to the seventh day of the week in English, we sometimes use the term Sabbath and Saturday interchangeably. But this should not be confused with an endorsement of Saturday as the Sabbath, only an acknowledgement that in most of the world, the day we refer to as Saturday in English is, indeed, the seventh day of the weekly cycle. We know this with certainty, as the Jewish community has maintained the weekly cycle unbroken over thousands of years.

For 120 years, Adventists in Samoa kept the Sabbath in the same weekly cycle that early Adventist Ellen White kept when she visited Samoa on her way to Australia. During those years, Samoa and American Samoa, which are only 64 kilometers apart, kept the same weekly cycle. When the government of Samoa decided to switch sides of the dateline, the Seventh-day Adventist Church faced a difficult decision: should it join the government in breaking the weekly seven-day cycle to remain worshipping on Saturday? Or should it retain the integrity of the seven-day cycle, and hence meet on the day the government had renamed Sunday? After significant discussion, the Adventist Church leaders in Samoa decided to retain the integrity of the seven-day cycle. Why? Because God instructs humanity to rest on the seventh day of the week, not on the day we refer to in English as “Saturday”. That said, in making the decision, they acknowledged that Samoa is in a small area of the globe where legitimate ambiguity exists on which day of the week is actually the seventh day.

Why is there ambiguity? Like the Jewish community in Auckland, we believe the seventh day of the week in New Zealand is the day we call Saturday. Similarly, Adventist Christians and Jews believe the seventh day of the week in Chile is the day of the week called, in Spanish, Sábado. The question is, where in the space between New Zealand and Chile should the dateline be drawn? For that we don’t have
anything in the Bible to guide us. So as a community we have proceeded with much prayer and consultation to decide how best to honour God in a region where ambiguity exists. In so doing, we recognise that for every commandment in the Bible, there is always ambiguity on the margins. The fact that ambiguity exists does not undermine or negate the commandment. Precisely how to apply Christ's instruction to "love your neighbour as yourself", for example, is ambiguous. Should we all sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor as Jesus instructed the Rich Young Ruler? Or should we keep what is necessary to sustain ourselves and give all else away? If so, by what standards do we measure what is necessary? Or should we, like Abraham, enjoy both the spiritual and the material blessings that come from God? Easy answers to complex spiritual questions are seldom right. Complexity is a natural part of reality that Christians of all denominations navigate every day—sometimes with much thought and prayer, sometimes with less thought and prayer than we should.

Today a majority of Seventh-day Adventists Christians in Samoa are meeting on the day now commonly called Sunday in Samoa—which is the same day of the week that their Adventist church family in American Samoa, only 64 kilometres away, worship on and call Saturday. A minority of our community is meeting on the day now commonly called Saturday in Samoa, but is called Friday in American Samoa. Both groups believe they are meeting on the seventh day of the week. The Adventist Church acknowledges the unusual ambiguity that exists in Samoa, and accepts communities meeting on both days for the time being. Unfortunately, not everyone has been as respectful as they should be of the differences over this question. The South Pacific Division encourages all those involved in the discussion to remember that even the Apostle Paul said that we see spiritual matters through a dark glass or mirror, not a complete picture (1 Corinthians 13:12), and therefore a good spirit of humility is necessary for all followers of Christ. It is hoped that in time, unity will be restored. Discussions continue towards that end.
In a recent chat I had with a non-religious colleague, discussion turned to the topic of spirituality. I had the opportunity and so asked the sometimes discussion killer question: “Do you ever wonder if there is a God?” His response intrigued me. He said, “Well sometimes, but I think I live a pretty good life and if all of that stuff is true then I should be OK.” A simple answer but there is a heap of underlying assumptions that must have got him to that position. Three stand out in particular. Firstly, he entertained the possibility that there could be a God and heaven but that any God was impersonal and just played some type of judge role. Secondly, the criteria for judgement and any potential entry to heaven was based on what he had done and nothing else. And, thirdly, there was no need to worry about any of that right now.

A recent US survey of religion and public life showed that over the past five years, while there had been some growth in those saying they were agnostic or atheist, the biggest rise was in those described as “nones” or “nothing in particular”—those who answered they had no specific religion. However, when asked about their spiritual beliefs, 68 per cent of them believed in God, 37 per cent said they were spiritual but not religious, and 21 per cent said they prayed every day. But even with this background, 88 per cent still said they weren’t looking for a religion that would be good for them. So what’s happening?

From this research and other similar studies we see a rise in spirituality but not religiosity. Individuals are piecing together their own worldviews based on exposure to a multiplicity of information sources, while at the same time there is no longer exposure to education or grounding in core Christian beliefs. In fact, we are now exposed to so much information that in consumer land, mass marketing is often termed “mess marketing”. There are so many mixed messages in the media and social media that people simply don’t know what to believe. As a result individuals are choosing to construct their own belief systems and sit on the sidelines because they aren’t sure anymore if they can believe in any one organisation. The substitute to supporting an organisation might be to support a cause that interests them.

The information overload is only going to get worse. In the past five years the amount of digital information created per annum has increased nine times to around 3 zettabytes (1 zettabyte = 1 billion gigabytes). This is projected to increase to 8 zettabytes in 2015. In this emerging world of massive and easy access information the number of conflicting viewpoints will grow and it will be virtually impossible to tell the difference between solid, well researched, balanced opinions and those of the radical uninformed or perhaps genuinely misguided fringe. No wonder then that it's becoming easier to sit on the sidelines and let “the experts” work through “all that stuff” while at the same time constructing a world view that makes sense for me.

Let’s park all that external environment and turn our focus internally to the broad Christian church and even on ourselves as Seventh-day Adventists. Over the past two decades we have seen a swing away from preaching of what could perhaps be described as a more legalistic approach, to God’s love, grace and more recently social justice. This is not a criticism of that swing, as much of what has occurred I believe needed to occur to bring “heart” back into our religious experience. However, an unintended consequence may be that the generation coming through has not had the same exposure to or grounding in the core doctrinal beliefs of the Church.
Here's the chicken and egg question: Does relationship with God come first and then doctrine or does doctrine lead to a relationship with God? My personal view is that neither comes first. The Holy Spirit comes first and both relationship and knowledge form an integrated whole and interact constantly with each other in a journey that continues throughout a lifetime with individuals experiencing different pathways to God.

While we feel and experience the calling of God emotionally and physically, our knowledge and intellectual understanding of God and His plan and purpose for us adds depth, meaning and structure to that experience, giving richness that otherwise would be impossible to obtain. Both aspects are absolutely essential in helping us construct a jigsaw of God. God’s gift of grace forms our foundation, while doctrine forms a beautiful framework of understanding that allows us to build our context, meaning and purpose in life. It assists us to build resilience against the constant bombardment of information and different world views that exist today. The combination of knowledge and experience allows us to move away from a legalistic “have to” mentality to an informed “choose to” approach. We experience the “aha moments” when the lights go on and suddenly we get depth and insight that previously we didn’t have. We should be confident in our core beliefs and ensure we have ways that explain these simply, in context and linked to grace-based behaviours to the upcoming generations.

Doctrine is an essential part of our Christian experience. At this time in history, however, knowledge and the role of doctrine seem to be more under threat than ever before—both outside and within the Church. It’s this threat, added to the changing societal views of religion, that forms a major risk to the Church. Failure to adequately educate our membership internally will lead to apathy and a slow drift toward a church that is a purposeless social club, while failure to explain our beliefs in the context of God’s grace externally will exacerbate the slide to the “nothing in particular” mentality and suggest we have nothing compelling, different, special or unique to offer our community.

Let’s through the experience of God’s grace re-embrace, reclaim and remind ourselves of the beauty and completeness of our core doctrinal beliefs and in doing so rediscover a renewed passion for our Creator, Saviour and Lord and sharing His message of hope to our world.

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Kevin Jackson is the CEO of Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing.
There’s a hint of pretense about my local bookstore. It’s not just the displays—rich with French cooking books and memoirs by obscure intellectuals—it’s also the prices. For example, they sell birthday cards that cost more than I generally pay for birthday gifts! But I go there any way. I go there because they have a knack of stocking the precise book I never knew I needed until I saw it on their shelves. And I go there because I’m a bit old fashioned when it comes to books—I like to touch, feel and read sections in a book before I commit to buying it. The Internet is great for some things, but books are too important to buy unhandled.

My book selection process is rather rudimentary. I walk in, survey options in the sections that I generally enjoy, then I pick up the volume that catches my eye, crack it open to the middle and start reading. If it reads well, I then choose another random section buried in the middle and read it too. If two sections are beautifully written, the book will likely find its way into my library. Why? Because when it comes to books, the skill of the writer is more important than the topic challenged. A good writer can turn even the most mundane subject into scintillating prose. Unfortunately, the reverse is just as true. They say look before you leap; I say read before you buy.

And that all explains how I happened to be in my local bookstore on a sunny Thursday lunchtime. As I went to purchase my latest treasure, I noticed behind the cashier a large coffee table book entitled *The Most Beautiful Places on Earth*.

“I wonder if Lord Howe Island is in that book,” I said to the cashier as I motioned towards its shiny cover.

“Lord Howe Island? Where’s that?” she replied—and as she did, she began furiously googling.

“Noooohoooo,” she replied incredulously, looking dumbstruck at the stunning pictures on her screen.

“Yeaheahah,” I replied, “and what’s more, I’m going there this weekend.”

“Nooohohooooo!,” she let out in a breathless wheeze.

“Ohyeaheahah . . .”

Flying to Lord Howe seems very much like flying anywhere else, until you realise everyone on the flight knows each other. Well, everyone except you. Still, my seat companion was happy enough to chat. Very happy in fact. Within the first three minutes she declared her ex-husband a complete [unprintable]. The next hour was a tutorial on all things Lord Howe. Forget *Big Brother*, if you want drama, intrigue, scandal, heroes and villains, turn off the TV and fly the hour and a half from Sydney to the island.
As we approached Lord Howe my seat mate leaned over and began pointing. I followed the direction of her finger, and there out the window was a scene from a fantasy novel. A rock formation jutted straight out of the ocean. "That’s Balls Pyramid," she said, "it’s half a kilometre high.” Half a kilometre of jagged amazing.

On my first morning on Lord Howe, the Sabbath, I woke up early and walked down to the lagoon. The sun was shining over my shoulder, dark clouds hung high in the air in front of me, and making a perfect arc in the sky was an unbroken rainbow. There was not a single manmade noise, the islands twin peaks were catching the first glimpses of the day, and in spite of the muted light, the lagoon’s water looked almost luminous as it danced gently over the coral reef.

If there’s been a perfect moment in my life, I can’t recall it. And that perfect moment was only the beginning. From the vibrant reef to its pristine beaches, the perfectly clear water to its beautiful hikes, from its soundscape made by birds and wind to the low key guest houses built on a very human scale, Lord Howe is like no where else I’ve ever been.

The next time I walk into my local book shop, I’ll have a message: Lord Howe Island is very much like a good book—much better in real life than on the internet.

I can hear what my friend behind the register will say, “nnoohooohhhooohooohoooollll!”

And you can guess my reply . . .

James Standish is editor of RECORD.