Happy Christmas?

Family gatherings, feasts, festivities and fun—there’s much to be excited about during this time of year. But for many people across the South Pacific, the Christmas season serves as an opportune time to break out the booze. And the results aren’t pretty—hangovers, hurt feelings, and horrible accidents.

The head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific, Dr Barry Oliver, offers a sobering reminder of the consequences of alcohol to health, family and society (click here to watch the video). It’s something we all need to be conscious of during this Christmas season.

Record eNews will be taking a break for the next two weeks. Keep an eye on our website, however, for the latest Adventist news and views from around the world.

Until then, to all our readers, viewers, listeners, contributors—and complainers—we wish you a happy Christmas and safe start to the New Year.
Unwrapping the Christmas riddle

If you could give the world just one gift, any gift, what would it be? It's an obvious question at this time of year. But is it one you've thought through? What exactly would you give?

One step at a time

"Back and forth, round and round I pace around the dining table. Every so often I stop and hop up and down or jog on the spot." What's made Jarrod Stackelroth go so step-crazy?

Read RECORD

Have you read the love story of Linden and Bri yet? If not, make sure you check out this week's issue of RECORD—the last one for the year! Or, click here to read the story on our website. Warning: story may make eyes water.

Watch/download InFocus

Nutritionist Sue Radd explains the surprising power of cherries to help joint pain, gout, muscle soreness and even insomnia. And Dr James Wright has long been a feature of the Australian media landscape—television, radio and magazines—advising the community on health matters. But now he's
For each has a gift . . .

It was a meeting of hearts, minds and hands in Cambodia. A week at work like none other for 13 Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing employees who recently travelled there to serve alongside the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

emerging from a serious threat to his own health.

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If you could give the world just one gift, any gift, what would it be? It’s an obvious question at this time of year. But is it one you’ve thought through? What exactly would you give?

Would you give the entire world wealth—the complete and total end to poverty? Imagine if children living in desperately poor conditions could wake up tomorrow in a home with food, clean water and good shelter—all the things that go with wealth. Surely that would be the ultimate gift to the world?

But what good is wealth if you don’t know what to do with it? So maybe instead of wealth, should we give the world education—knowledge, understanding, the building blocks of civilisation, science and technology? After all, if everyone was educated, wouldn’t economic development surely follow?

But that just begs another question: what about health? Aussies and New Zealanders live in a society of tremendous wealth by world standards. They have universal access to excellent education systems. But it hasn’t ended pain, has it? Think of all the suffering, disease and death you’ve heard about just this year. Imagine solving it all, forever, with one magnificent gift. Wouldn’t that be the best imaginable gift?

But I have an uneasy feeling.

If people were stronger, more robust and immune from disease, what would the ramifications be? Would we use our bulletproof bodies to accomplish good or evil? Would we use our strength to lift others up or to oppress them? Would we live long lives to glorify God or to indulge ourselves?

Yes, we do want to give every person on earth health. And we want to give education. And we don’t want even one person left in poverty. But there’s still a huge–an unsolvable–problem. No matter what gift we give, it will only ultimately benefit the world if it comes with an essential ingredient: a new heart.

What am I talking about? Even good health is a curse if our heart is in the wrong place. Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian who didn’t smoke or drink—he had good health. He had wealth. He even had enough education to write a book (unfortunately). But what an ultimate curse all of that was to our world! All of it combined when sin lurks at the centre can never be a blessing. Giving the world wealth, education and even health, without giving the world a new heart, is only setting us up for even greater pain.

So what is the ultimate thing we can give? I have to believe the best, the most important, the gift we should give before all others, is the gift of the Gospel. Why? Because the Gospel brings wealth. Don’t believe me? The OECD recently ranked the “happiest” countries on earth. The ranking was largely based on economic indicators. Every nation in the top 10, every single one, had one thing in common: a Protestant Christian heritage.
If the Gospel brings economic development, what of education? It's no coincidence that wherever Protestant Christianity has gone, education follows. Even today, every university ranked in the top 25 in the world by the Times Higher Education rankings is located in a nation with a Protestant Christian heritage. Every single one!

Think about that! Protestant Christianity, even generously defined, makes up about 12 per cent of the world’s population but has produced 100 per cent of the world’s best nations to live in and 100 per cent of the world’s best universities!

But the Gospel isn’t just about temporal blessings—it’s about eternity. It’s about being restored to the heart of God. It’s about hope and faith, love and belonging. It’s about healing us in our entirety. And nothing could be a better gift than a balm for all our wounds, a light for all our longings, a solution to our every problem. The best gift to give this Christmas, the gift that exceeds all others, the gift that goes on giving for eternity, is the hope found in Jesus. Let's use this Christmas season to give the Gospel to everyone we love!

_Pastor Gary Kent is speaker/director for It is Written Oceania._
My wife thinks I’m crazy. Back and forth, round and round I pace around the dining table. Every so often I stop and hop up and down or jog on the spot.

My wife watches on from the couch, puzzled.

“What are you doing?”

“Trying to get my steps up! Nearly there,” I reply. I’ve been logging my steps with a pedometer every day, keeping track of how much activity I do—trying to reach the elusive 10,000 steps a day. Some days I go to the gym or do extra walking but other times I get there via a few laps of the lounge room.

Am I a little obsessed? Maybe. But I made a commitment—a commitment to myself—to lose weight and be more active this year. As James alludes to in his editorial (“Reckoning”), I am succeeding. At the beginning of this year, my weight had crept towards the heaviest it had ever been. Things needed to change. I set specific goals and I’ve reached them. I am back down to the weight I was before I got a desk job. And I haven’t finished yet.

It’s been tough. Staying up and pacing, when I’d rather jump into bed and read, saying no to cheese . . . change is hard. But I’m certainly enjoying the results: increased fitness, positivity and the ability to find clothes that fit so much easier.

My guess is that you’ve experienced change this year. It may not have been pleasant—the loss of a loved one, a job or a relationship. But it might have been new opportunities, experiences or friendships. Either way, lessons are learnt and life changes—sometimes unnoticeably, sometimes obviously.

If we’re Christians the Gospel should change us. God gives us a new heart and we are called to grow in our faith, to mature and start on the meat, leaving the milk behind.

Just as commitment and conviction can change our faith, so can hardship. Sometimes it takes a threat or a fear to cause us to change but it is how we react to these stressors that determines the outcome. One of the most dramatic changes in the Bible is the whole city of Ninevah repenting after Jonah’s warning. This was change on a grand and corporate scale. It was revolutionary.

Change is hard. It requires commitment, discipline and perseverance. But it also brings growth. As the year ends, it’s a good time to look back and acknowledge the changes—good and bad. It’s a time to dream new dreams and set new goals, to keep growing and developing.

I’m not saying change for change’s sake. That can be damaging. But as we reach the end of 2013, I hope you will join me in looking for positive ways to improve our lives, our churches, our families, our communities and our world next year. And I hope we can stop for a
moment to thank God for the changes that have come our way.

We can make a bigger difference in this world than we realise, but big changes are achieved one step at a time.

Jarrod Stackelroth is associate editor of RECORD.
It was a meeting of hearts, minds and hands in Cambodia. A week at work like none other for 13 Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing employees who recently travelled there to serve alongside the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

In a country where more than 50 per cent of children experience stunted growth and health problems as a result of malnutrition, the team used their expertise to improve health, nutrition and education opportunities by working alongside communities in the poorest areas.

The ADRA Connections trip was undertaken as part of Sanitarium’s annual Spirit of Sanitarium Awards (SOSA), an employee reward program that recognises employees whose behaviours reflect Sanitarium’s values of care, courage, humility, integrity and passion. This year SOSA recipients had the opportunity to take part in a community project linked in to an existing cooperative arrangement between Sanitarium and ADRA to produce and promote fortified noodles, bread and instant rice porridge. Through this cooperative arrangement, $A128,000 is being invested in nutritional intervention programs to address malnutrition.

“It’s not a cliché to say that it is a privilege to be involved in these programs,” said John Menzies, from Sanitarium’s Development and Innovation team, who instigated the program with ADRA and has remained a key supporter for the past few years.

The Vissot food company in Phnom Penh mixes, packages and distributes enriched noodle flours and also uses fortified wheat to make healthy noodles. Vissot’s role is also being expanded to include production of fortified instant rice porridge and nutritional bread. The Sanitarium team worked alongside Vissot staff, sharing knowledge and advice on marketing, accounting, electrical systems, packaging, importing raw materials and recipe development.

“What an amazing team at Vissot—they even came in to work on a public holiday just to be with us!” said Julie Praestin, Sanitarium's Corporate Communications manager, who led the SOSA team. “Their smiles were infectious and their willingness to learn and help was inspiring. It was a great alignment of Sanitarium’s mission and expertise to work with a team so passionate about improving nutrition.”

The Sanitarium team also spent time in Rovieng, in northern Cambodia, building shelters and play equipment for children on behalf of the Family Nutrition Project, which ADRA Cambodia conducts in 80 villages throughout the region. The team presented cooking demonstrations using the fortified noodles and Sanitarium’s dietitians worked with members of local mothers’ groups to cook up a delicious noodle stir-fry for sale at local markets. The team also helped install a latrine and "tippy taps" to improve sanitation and health. In addition to Sanitarium and ADRA’s joint investment, an extra $A30,000 was donated by Sanitarium on behalf of the SOSA team.

“Doing the cooking demonstrations together with the locals was so much fun and it was so inspiring to see the wonderful work that ADRA does—so collaborative in approach and so targeted,” said Chris Stanbridge, from Sanitarium New Zealand’s head office in Auckland.

The ADRA Connections program reflected Sanitarium’s commitment to health, nutrition and wellbeing in the community, and built relationships and connections within the team and with ADRA. “For those in our team who weren’t previously familiar with the work...
ADRA does, this trip opened their eyes to the practical ways ADRA empowers people and communities,” Ms Praestin said.

ADRA Connections are short-term volunteer trips for groups from Australia, matching skills with service opportunities so people can make a real difference in countries throughout the South Pacific, Asia and Africa.

The experience certainly made an impression on the Sanitarium team. “The selfless nature of both the Cambodian people and the ADRA staff was inspirational on a number of levels,” Export manager Matthew McKenzie said. “It has made me reassess my life by challenging me to spend more time supporting others.”