Something worth sharing

Sure, it's been overly commercialised, and the weekend celebration may have pagan roots. But Easter is still first and foremost a commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is a message worth sharing, and *Signs of the Times* has provided an easy way to do so with the help of two flyers from its *Goodwill Flyer series*.

“While we might not officially endorse the celebration of Easter—especially in its current forms—we also recognise it's a time when people's minds are open to spiritual things,” *Signs* editor Lee Dunstan said. “[The flyers make] a great gift to visitors at a church's Easter program and is also small enough to slip into mailboxes.”

For more information, visit <www.signsofthetimes.org.au/flyers>.
Fire destroys home at PAU

A fire has destroyed a student village house at Pacific Adventist University (PAU). Pastor Rex Koi’s house caught fire just after 4pm on Thursday, April 3. The cause of the fire is currently unknown.

Honiara floods: ADRA responds

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has begun distributing emergency relief in the wake of destructive floods that have killed 19 and left 49,000 homeless in the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara.

New details released in cyber attack saga

New details have been released in the ongoing investigation
of a sophisticated cyber theft that defrauded the Seventh-day Adventist Church of approximately $US500,000 during the span of a four-week period late last year.

**More News**

**The greatest tragedy**

It’s the most tragic story of the New Testament, one we should all find time to reflect on this Easter—the death of Judas.

**More Features**

**Mists**

A dirty dawn breaks over the memorial park, and James Standish stands by his father’s grave. In this moment he is reminded of two things: the tragedy of death, and the triumph of hope in Jesus.

**More Editorials**
This week's offering (April 12, 2014): World Mission Budget Offering
Wahroonga, New South Wales

*Signs of the Times* is urging church members to share the real meaning of Easter with their communities with the help of two flyers from its Goodwill Flyer series.

“More than a Symbol” gives the meaning of the Cross in the context of the great controversy while “Thoughts on Easter” explains the origins of the tradition and summarises the most important aspect of salvation—Jesus’ resurrection.

“While we might not officially endorse the celebration of Easter—especially in its current forms—we also recognise it’s a time when people’s minds are open to spiritual things,” *Signs* editor Lee Dunstan said.

“It makes a great gift to visitors at a church’s Easter program and is also small enough to slip into mailboxes.”

Fire destroys home at PAU

National Capital District, Papua New Guinea

A fire has destroyed a student village house at Pacific Adventist University (PAU).

Pastor Rex Koi’s house caught fire just after 4pm on Thursday, April 3. The cause of the fire is currently unknown.

Pastor Koi returned from meetings at the Central Papuan Conference headquarters to find his house engulfed in flames. Members of his extended family—as well as his infant daughter—were in the house at the time, but all were safely evacuated.

Pastor Koi’s wife, a final-year Business student, was in class when the incident occurred.

Safe and sound: losing their home hasn't stopped the Koi family from smiling.

Students and staff members tried unsuccessfully to put out the house fire. However, they did manage to save a nearby duplex from serious damage.

The PAU community is very grateful to God that nobody was hurt, and has asked for prayers for the family.

Dr Barry Oliver, the university's chancellor and chairperson of the PAU Council, said he was thankful to God that nobody was harmed, and expressed his sadness for the loss of personal property.

A fund will be set up to assist the Koi family as they look to rebuild.
Honiara, Solomon Islands

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has begun distributing emergency relief in the wake of destructive floods that have killed 19 and left 49,000 homeless in the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara.

Entire riverside communities and bridges have been washed away after the Matanikau River broke its banks on Thursday. The government has declared a state of emergency.

"Honiara is essentially split in two," said ADRA Australia Humanitarian Program officer Beryl Hartmann. "Thousands of people are stuck in emergency shelters, unable to return to their homes and unsure if they even remain standing."

"People have lost everything. Without safe access to food, along with clothing and bedding there is a significant health risk to those affected."

**ADRA volunteers prepare emergency packs for distribution.**

With support financial support from ADRA Australia and other ADRA offices around the globe, ADRA staff on the ground have begun distributing emergency packs containing cooking and eating utensils, blankets and other essential items to 1500 people.

"In co-ordination with the Government and other agencies on the ground, the need these items was identified," said Ms Hartmann. "These items will ensure people can utilise the food being provided safely."

In addition, ADRA has been able to support the response of the Government and other agencies by making the three-tonne truck available for relief deliveries.

ADRA Australia is calling for donations to ADRA's Disaster Preparedness and Response Fund in order to support this and other ongoing relief efforts. [Donate now.](http://record.net.au/items/honiara-floods-ada响应)

Kent Kingston speaks with Angele Nkou-Deemi from ADRA Solomon Islands.
Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

New details have been released in the ongoing investigation of a sophisticated cyber theft that defrauded the Seventh-day Adventist Church of approximately $US500,000 during the span of a four-week period late last year.

Church leaders say a compromised password appears to have allowed online scammers to hack into the Gmail account of a church employee authorised to initiate instructions for money transfers. Impersonating the employee—and unbeknownst to him—the scammers sent emails to financial personnel at Adventist world church headquarters, approving the transfer of funds on behalf of a denominational entity. An elaborate filtration system set up by the scammers marked all responses from headquarters as “read” and “deleted,” thus bypassing the employee’s inbox.

Meanwhile, the scammers laundered funds from 16 fraudulent transactions through the personal bank accounts of five apparently unwitting victims, church financial officers said.

“We have modified procedures to do our best to prevent anything like this from happening again,” said Robert Lemon, treasurer of the Adventist world church.

Lemon said incidences of fraud in which scammers troll the Internet for emails giving instructions to “pay, transfer or send” funds are growing in occurrence. In such cases, scammers carefully study the account holder’s emails so they can send transaction requests that closely mirror the tone and content of legitimate emails. Some hackers may even include personal comments—often work or family details gleaned from actual emails—to make the transaction requests appear more genuine.

“We urge church employees and members to exercise extreme caution when acting on instructions for handling funds that come through an email without a second independent verification through another means, such as phone call, text message or fax,” Lemon said.

At headquarters, internal controls were in place that church leaders said should have alerted financial personnel of a problem with the first transaction, but several key employees who would have questioned the transactions were traveling or were otherwise out of the office at the time, Lemon said. Additionally, the transfer amounts and explanations were “within the normal scope” for the denominational entity in question, he said.
Church financial personnel discovered the fraud after growing suspicious of the high rate of transaction requests and an alert from one of the banks involved. The scammers quickly discontinued fraudulent activity associated with both the email account and the linked bank accounts.

While the church was able to recover some of the funds that were still in the bank accounts before they were frozen, Adventist financial officers said they’re unsure whether the remaining losses are recoverable. Cooperation with US Federal authorities in the ongoing investigation is expected to continue, they said.

“There is no indication that any employees were involved in unethical behavior, and no church email servers or bank accounts were accessed or compromised in the scheme,” Lemon said.

“Having something like this happen on our watch is very difficult for those of us in treasury,” Lemon added. “We would like to thank each church member for their faithfulness and solicit their prayers that God will help us guard His funds in an ever-changing landscape of online fraud.”
There he hung. Motionless. Lifeless. Nothing more than a broken body with a broken heart. Just a few hours earlier he'd been sitting around a table among friends, sharing a meal. Now, he was alone, strapped to a tree. A life cut short. Finished.

It's the most tragic story of the New Testament, one we should all find time to reflect on this Easter—the death of Judas.

Wait, what? Don't you mean Jesus? No, I mean Judas—the one and only Mr Iscariot.

Don't get me wrong—there's no denying the extremity and significance of the suffering of Christ. What He endured will forever remain unparalleled. But there's also no denying the amazing things that stemmed from His death—the resurrection, the conquering of sin and the saving of humanity.

The same can't be said of Judas. There's no silver lining to his story. He is and forever will be known as the man who betrayed the Son of God unto death . . . nothing more, nothing less.

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The story of Judas Iscariot is incredibly tragic for a number of reasons.

1) He walked with God

Not in the way that Enoch walked with God, but in the literal sense. Judas was handpicked by Christ (Matthew 10:4) and for three years walked side by side with Him. He would have heard the parables and witnessed the miracles, including the resurrection of Lazarus. One couldn’t hope for a better opportunity to get to know Jesus.

2) He was skilled

Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages* describes Judas as “a man of keen discernment and executive ability” (p 294). He was also a great leader who the disciples looked up to, and was “called upon to provide the needs of the little company and to relieve the necessities of the poor” (p 717). Imagine the good that could have been achieved if Judas had fully surrendered his heart and talents to the mission of Christ.
3) He was warned

Jesus knew the heart of Judas and gave him every chance to change. “He placed him where he might, day by day, be brought in contact with the outflowing of His own unselfish love” (p 294). When the time for subtlety had run its course, Jesus also tried the direct approach.

“Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, ‘Rabbi, is it I?’ He said to him, ‘You have said it’” (Matthew 26:25).

“. . . But Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:47).

The Bible is clear that “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22:3), but this doesn’t mean he was beyond restoration. If that were so, Jesus wouldn’t have warned him. The fact that He reached out to Judas showed there was still hope of repentance.

4) He wouldn’t repent

“Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood’ . . . Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3-5).

Remorse is of the Holy Spirit. Thus, consider this sequence as God’s last-ditch effort to reclaim the life of Judas. But remorse without repentance is useless, and Judas “felt no deep, heartbreaking grief that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God” (The Desire of Ages, p 722).

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The story of Judas may not make for an uplifting read, yet it’s one we all need to consider. Why? Because we are all Judas Iscariots—people handpicked by God, with every opportunity and warning to surrender our lives to Christ.

So are you following Christ or are you a follower? There’s a stark difference. Judas spent three years with Jesus, but “did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully . . . He did not give up his worldly ambition or his love of money. While he accepted the position of a minister of Christ, he did not bring himself under the divine moulding” (p 717).

After his act of betrayal, Judas cast himself at the feet of Jesus (p 722). The eyes of the Saviour looked pityingly upon him, as if mourning a life of what might have been. Each of us will one day find ourselves at the feet of Jesus. How will He look upon us—with pity or with pride?

Linden Chuang is assistant editor of Record—digital.
I almost never rent a GPS. I like to figure out my own way. A friend told me it’s a “man thing”. Maybe it is. But I think it’s something more. I like to understand how a city knits together. Driving to directions leaves me with a superficial familiarity; driving without them demands attention to detail. And, I suppose, I’ve found my way around cities from Moscow to Manhattan without a GPS, so why would I need one to visit Melbourne?

It’s for that reason I was hopelessly lost early one morning recently. I knew where I was going. I’d been there before. But as I drove back and forth on roads that all seemed to look the same in the predawn haze, I just couldn’t find the right turnoff. Like in a dream, I was lost in a mental fog, entirely incapable of finding my way home—home to my father.

A dirty dawn broke through overcast skies as I stumbled on the narrow entrance to the “memorial park” I was searching for. On this day, the home I was visiting was his final resting place to reflect on the profound silence that is death.

Visiting my father’s grave is always an intensely emotional experience. When I visited it a year after his death, I noticed his was the only gravestone in the row that didn’t have even a single flower on it. This man who once could command an enthusiastic audience in much of the world, a man whose hands had healed people around the globe, a man whose books sat on shelves from Sydney to Saskatchewan; completely alone in death. Without even a flower to mark his grave.

I went to a florist and bought artificial flowers so that at least his grave would be marked by one sign of remembrance, love, respect.

Not long after my dad’s death, his belongings burned up in the Black Saturday fires. So, in a matter of months, he was gone, his belongings were gone, and all that was left were ethereal memories. Even the best of us, the greatest of us, the kindest and bravest, disappear into dust. I knew that. I just never expected it could happen so quickly. And never imagined it would happen to my dad.

On this day, it wasn’t the flowers, the dawn, the fresh dug graves or the slow dribble from an indifferent sky that caught my attention. It was one of the graves nearby. There, on a gravestone not so far from where I was standing...
mourning my lost father, smiled the prettiest of girls. The picture was new—like it had been taken yesterday. There were a couple more photos of her, arranged like a schoolgirl's scrapbook. The inscription told of a family’s anguish for their little angel.

Who was she? How did she die so young? I could only guess. That she was a bright, attractive girl full of life was clear. And yet, here she was, a beautiful girl who would never be anything else in this world.

I paused and looked into the eyes of this beautiful young girl. How could someone so lovely, so precious, so perfect, be dead? Gone. Buried. And then I thought of my own child who died in utero. My child who never had a chance to laugh, sing, to be pretty, cute, grand or bold. My child who I would give everything I have to hold, to comfort, to share a little of this life with. To tickle, play, run and laugh.

But that isn't how life is.

We don't get second acts here.

In milliseconds accidents take the wisdom and love of fathers away from their children.

For no good reason, beautiful girls die.

And sometimes parents, full of hope and joy, leave the hospital without words to express the hole torn in their hearts.

That is the world we live in.

It feels like an incoherent joke of darkest proportions. Except for one slim hope. A hope we can only grasp with our broken fingers clinging to a slippery rock of faith; a Saviour we cannot see; a Lord who, in our darkest moments, can seem so far away, lost in mists of space, enthroned in a heaven that is divided from us by an impenetrable barrier. A Saviour who Himself felt the despair of separation; the agony of affliction. A God who understands my depth of loss, because He experienced it Himself.

James Standish is editor of Record.