Out of sight, out of mind

Australia and Papua New Guinea are, at this very moment, holding innocent people—accused of nothing other than seeking refuge—in deplorable conditions. Surely, as Christians, we cannot in good conscience turn a blind eye. Surely, if the words of the gospel are to have any meaning at all, we cannot be silent.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers,” Hebrews 13:2 tells us. But our societies aren’t entertaining strangers; we’re brutalising them. And if we have any doubt, Josh Dye’s confronting piece lays out some of the facts that are leaking out of Manus Island.

—James Standish, editor of Adventist Record

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Adventist education quality in the spotlight

More than 40 MPs were gathered in the Great Hall of the Australian Federal Parliament for the Christian Schools National Policy Forum dinner in May.

The checklist

What qualities are you looking for in a future spouse? “Single, male and breathing,” 38-year-old Rebecca replies promptly.

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Graham Long: pastor to Kings Cross

InFocus host Kent Kingston chats with Rev Graham Long, CEO and pastor of Wayside Chapel, which is this year celebrating 30 years of connecting with the homeless, addicted and desperate of Kings Cross, Sydney.

Policy not politics

“Many deplore the wrongs which they know exist, but consider themselves free from all responsibility in the matter. This cannot be. Every individual exerts an influence in society.”—Ellen White

God’s timing

Prison is a place where time moves fairly slowly—particularly if you are innocent, truly innocent, with no date of release.

Practising Dietitians Sue Radd explains the surprising health-giving properties of that humble Asian staple, tofu.

Record poll

Which characteristic would/do you most appreciate in a spouse?

- Sense of humour
- Shared interests
- Romantic
- A friend
- Adventurous

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Out of sight, out of mind

Editor's Note: The apostle James has something odd to say. Rather than pure religion being about elaborate services or even particular rituals, he tells us pure religion is about helping the vulnerable in their time of need (James 1:27). We might be tempted to disregard his counsel, but we find Isaiah says the same thing (Isaiah 58). And then there’s Jesus’ description of the sheep and the goats, which is pretty hard to ignore (Matthew 25). However, all of that turns into irrelevant aspirations if we don’t apply the principles to our world today. But how can we?

Australia and Papua New Guinea are, at this very moment, holding innocent people—accused of nothing other than seeking refuge—in deplorable conditions. Surely, as Christians, we cannot in good conscience turn a blind eye. Surely, if the words of the gospel are to have any meaning at all, we cannot be silent. “Do not forget to entertain strangers,” Hebrews 13:2 tells us. But our societies aren’t entertaining strangers; we’re brutalising them. And if we have any doubt, Josh Dye’s confronting piece below lays out some of the facts that are leaking out of Manus Island.

Jungle covers most of Manus Island, which is just 100km long and 30km wide. Currently a PNG naval base and previously the site of an Australian World War II base, Manus is home to about 50,000 people. The island is also home to one of "Australia’s Regional Processing Centres", used to detain asylum seekers who arrive by boat. This centre, resurrected under the Labor government in 2012, is the same one that was used between 2001 and 2004 during the Howard government’s Pacific Solution.

Recently, the centre went under the microscope following the death of 23-year-old Iranian man Reza Berati in February.

Mr Berati was killed during violent confrontations between locals, camp staff and asylum seekers. It is alleged that Mr Berati was thrown from a balcony before being beaten to death. According to PNG police, he died from a blood clot in his brain following multiple blows to his head.

Liz Thompson, a whistleblower and former Manus Island migration agent, said there had been protests every day for months leading up to the tragedy, including demands for a resolution to the indefinite detention.

Ms Thompson’s role at the centre, where she worked in August 2013 and February this year, was to assist detainees putting together claims for asylum, a process she described as "fake". She was the first person to publicly resign from Manus Island following Mr Berati’s death.
According to Ms Thompson, asylum seekers became upset on Sunday, February 16 after being told by Australian Immigration officials they would be resettled in PNG, despite PNG having no provisions for resettlement. "Protests started up again on Sunday night and were brutally suppressed by the riot squad," she said.

Contrary to reports that the asylum seekers initiated the violence, Ms Thompson believes otherwise: "What has been described to me by detainees is that on Sunday they were attacked . . . On Monday, many of my young clients had broken hands, defensive wounds from shielding their heads from rocks thrown by guards."

Ms Thompson described the incidents as "a coordinated assault by security staff and locals". "Monday night has been described to me as an organised attack: the attackers went room to room in some compounds; guys were attacked in their rooms as well as outside of them."

Azita Bokan, an Iranian translator working for the Australian Immigration Department at the centre, was the first person to speak out about the attacks, leading to her suspension by the department. She described the scene as "horrific" and alleged that PNG locals, including employees of security contractor G4S, initiated the attacks.

"There was blood everywhere. The number injured was horrific; people with massive head injuries, at least one with a slashed throat," Ms Bokan said, adding that detainees had only plastic chairs to shield themselves.

Since the outbreak of violence, Ms Thompson holds grave concerns for the asylum seekers remaining at the centre. "People are in despair," she said. "They are frightened and sleeping in shifts, keeping guard over their sleeping quarters in fear of another coordinated assault."

Another source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said eyewitnesses to the murder had received death threats and were fearful for their lives. Some detainees have asked for protective custody, but are yet to receive it.

Ms Thompson concurs: "Those who witnessed Reza's death fear reprisal. The killers know the witnesses very well. While [the witnesses] live with no protection from reprisals from outside the centre and under the threat of being resettled in PNG, they don't feel safe to speak."

The anonymous source described the mental health of detainees as "absolutely dire" and said there had been multiple suicide attempts, instances of self-harm and mass hunger strikes.

While the Australian Government recently released its departmental inquiry into the violence that occurred, the findings were diluted and inconclusive. The Government has absolved itself of any wrongdoing by asserting the centre is under PNG's control, while PNG claims innocence and says Australia is responsible for its operation.

At the time of writing, no charges have been laid following Mr Berati's death. Two human rights inquiries into Manus Island, set up by PNG judge Justice David Cannings, have been blocked—with Australia recently admitting to funding the court proceedings. Ms Thompson said the level of interference by the Australian government into the inquiry is "extraordinary".

"Australia is responsible for what happened," she said. "The [detainees] want that acknowledged and they don't want to stay on PNG."

Ms Thompson is not only concerned for the detainees' safety but also about their living conditions. "The conditions are extremely hot and humid, disease spreads easily [and] whole compounds have zero internet access so they can barely keep in contact with family. Guys spend hours every day lining up for everything in the hot sun."

Detainees are stripped of their dignity, too. "They don't have a change of clothes—they met with us in their pyjamas, which some people found deeply humiliating," Ms Thompson said.

The conditions described mirror those detailed in an Amnesty International report into the detention centre from November last year. The report asserted that asylum seekers in one compound were denied sufficient water, with
each detainee receiving just 500ml per day.

In an example of the punitive rules in the centre, detainees are only allowed to go on excursions outside if they are wearing covered shoes. But despite requests for covered shoes, no-one receives them.

However, the issue is not the conditions the asylum seekers endure; it is the existence of detention centres in the first place. "Those inside the camps don't want nicer cages—they want freedom," Ms Thompson said.

Refugees are entitled to Australia’s protection under the Refugee Convention, which Australia was one of the first countries to ratify in 1954. Consistently, over 90 per cent of asylum seekers arriving by boat are found to be genuine refugees in need of protection. The fact that just one asylum seeker from Manus Island has been processed since the centre reopened in 2012 is both a travesty and a disgrace.

Successive government policies of mandatory detention have created a system where people are simultaneously punished and denied their rights. "Offshore processing is inhumane, deliberately cruel and a breach of our obligations under the Refugee Convention," Ms Thompson said.

The tough, uncompromising policy on asylum seekers only exists because a majority of Australians either support it or don't make enough noise criticising it.

Ms Thompson’s advice on how to achieve change is simple: "[Find] a way, where you are, to do something practical to dismantle the camps."

Interview with Liz Thompson & interview with anonymous source (identity protected)


Amnesty International Manus Island report pdf


Josh Dye is currently studying for his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Communication at the University of Technology, Sydney.
Australian Education Minister Christopher Pyne was there. So was Opposition spokeswoman on Education Kate Ellis. In fact, more than 40 MPs were gathered in the Great Hall of the Australian Federal Parliament for the Christian Schools National Policy Forum dinner. Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) director Dr Daryl Murdoch and associate director Lyndon Chapman also attended.

The two-day conference focused on the federally adopted National School Improvement Tool. Dr Murdoch gave a thorough presentation to the conference on the new Quality Adventist Schools (QAS) improvement framework. "The response was outstanding. The Adventist school system is seen as a leader in implementing a comprehensive quality schools improvement program," Dr Murdoch says. "The interest is strong, in part, because our program exceeds national standards."

Dr Murdoch has been invited to present at a meeting of the NSW Association of Independent Schools, the board of a secular private school system, and is working with a number of Christian systems to explain the Adventist approach to achieving outstanding educational experiences.

"The Quality Adventist Schools improvement framework provides principals and teachers with a tool to assess their progress across a broad range of school functions," Dr Murdoch explains. "It's designed to empower schools to conduct professional conversations and reflections regarding how they are doing currently and to then lay plans for improvement. It's a 'bottom up' initiative where ownership of change strategies originates from parents, teachers and the school boards."

"We began the improvement process after thoroughly exploring the educational experiences in Finland, Singapore and Scotland," Mr Chapman says. "Finland and Singapore score at or near the very top in educational outcomes among OECD nations. Education Scotland has been outstanding in improving the educational experience of its system. We have drawn from all these models to inform our approach."

Dr John Collier, a leader of a large, prestigious Christian school, talked openly about the struggle of maintaining a school's Christian identity. He used the metaphor of cake. In many Christian schools, Christianity is like a thin veneer of icing that never permeates through to the heart of the cake. He went on to note that no Christian school can be complacent. Harvard University, for example, was once a devoutly Christian institution. But through a process of one small compromise at a time, it became a thoroughly secular entity.
"We are very aware of the slow drift through compromise," Dr Murdoch says. "That is why the first four components of our Quality Adventist Schools program focus specifically on the spiritual mission of the school, with the first being fostering the special character of Adventist education. If our schools aren't different; if they aren't uniquely Adventist; if Jesus isn't the centre of all we do, then there is no point having them. So we are determined to keep our spiritual mission at the core of all that we do."

Adventist Identity is the first of four domains in the improvement framework and consists itself of four components:

- Special character
- Vision, mission and values
- Sharing faith
- Pastoral care

"As each school reflects on how well they are doing—as they determine how they know this in each area—and then identify what they intend to do about it, ASA expects and the research suggests that the collaboration required to come to these conclusions will support positive future directions to emerge for each campus," Dr Murdoch says.

"The exposure of the Quality Adventist Schools improvement framework in this Christian schools conference has been applauded," Mr Chapman adds. "It's exciting that every Adventist school in Australia is engaged in the implementation of the QAS improvement journey."

Information on the conference provided by Dr Murdoch and Mr Chapman.
What qualities are you looking for in a future spouse?

“Single, male and breathing," 38-year-old Rebecca* replies promptly. “I used to have a really long checklist when I was in my twenties and early thirties. Now I've narrowed it down to those three."

“What if he’s single, male, breathing and has a lot of emotional baggage?” I question.

“We can work through it,” Rebecca says confidently. “We can go to a therapist.”

“What if he’s single, male, breathing and a compulsive gambler?”

“I would send him to Gamblers Anonymous,” she says. “Also, maybe he gambles because he’s lonely and he’ll stop once we’re married.”

I begin to wonder if anything can dissuade Rebecca from her goal.

“What if he’s single, male, breathing and doesn’t believe in God?” She pauses. Have I finally stumped her?

“Well,” she says slowly, “as long as I could still go to church, I guess that's OK.”

Natalie* on the other hand has no intention of shortening her checklist. She has been waiting for her prospective husband a long time. The 36-year-old is not going to lower her standards now.

“He has to be a dedicated Adventist,” she says firmly. “That's not negotiable.”

“What does ‘dedicated Adventist’ mean?” I ask.

“You know, he’s involved in church, has daily devotions, keeps the commandments, believes in the Spirit of Prophecy, can preach, give Bible studies, play an instrument . . .”

“Does he have to be attractive and intelligent too?”

“Yes, of course—that’s a given!” Natalie exclaims. “Plus he needs a 9-5 job.”
Well, that cuts out policemen, firefighters, shift workers, pastors . . .  

“Someone who can cook and do housework, speak more than one language and is athletic. And he needs to make enough money so I can quit my job.”

She’s not kidding.

Maybe I’m being cynical, but I feel like Natalie’s pool of possibilities is shrinking by the minute.

And it’s not just the ladies who have checklists.

“She needs to have a sense of humour,” says 27-year-old Harry*. “I can’t imagine marrying someone who was always serious. Someone who can cook because I can’t. She has to care about her appearance and put effort into looking good. Someone who has an adventurous spirit and likes to travel. I hate it when people are late, so she’d have to be punctual.”

Interestingly enough, I haven’t yet met a man whose checklist is restricted to "single", "female" and "breathing"! But I have met a lot of people, male and female, who would rather marry a person who raises red flags than never get married at all. They’re tired of waiting. They’re tired of being alone.

For the most part, I personally appreciate and take advantage of the freedom that comes with being single. But occasionally I do find myself thinking about what my future holds—usually after weddings and visits with the relatives.

It helps me to remember Abraham and his decision to take God’s plans into his own hands. Was God able to bless Ishmael in spite of the iffy decisions that brought about his birth? Sure. But could a lot of pain and heartache been saved if Abraham had chosen to wait patiently and trust in God’s promises? Definitely.

As for checklists with too many characteristics, one thing stands out. Now there’s nothing wrong with having preferences. But these checklists are often more than just preferences—they list non-negotiable characteristics that their future spouse must have. For the most part, they describe perfect men and perfect women—you’ll never find "leaves dirty dishes in the sink" or "tends to forget important dates" on the list.

But guess what? Perfect men and perfect women don’t exist.

Just ask the newlyweds who are living together for the first time. Suddenly he realises she doesn’t look like a model at every moment of the day and suddenly she realises he’s a bit of a slob. Uh-oh. The honeymoon is officially over!

“What about you?” I asked Natalie. “Have you got a checklist for yourself?”

She looked confused. “What do you mean?”

“Well, what qualities do you have that would make someone want to marry you?”

Another thing I’ve noticed about checklists—the people with high standards don’t necessarily set the same standards for themselves. Should you be aiming for Jennifer Lawrence if you’re an ordinary Joe Schmoe or Ryan Gosling if you’re a regular Plain Jane? Is it fair to expect your spouse to be a spiritual leader if your own spiritual walk isn’t a priority?

When it comes to perfection, there is ultimately only one Person who can meet and demand the highest standards—and that’s Jesus.

Now I’m not advocating the "Jesus is my Boyfriend" concept. But if the average checklist is an indication of what people expect from their future partner, they’ll soon become discouraged and disillusioned. Searching for a perfect husband or wife to fulfil your life isn’t going to satisfy you. Only a perfect Saviour can.
Funnily enough, He doesn’t demand the highest standards from us before we can enter into a relationship with Him. Our greatest attempts at righteousness are just filthy rags. Jesus asks us to come to Him just as we are: miserable, wretched and broken. He offers to heal us, mend us and carry our burdens. Having a relationship with Jesus isn’t about what we can do for Him, simply because we can’t do anything for Him.

When it comes to our love lives, settling for "single, male and breathing" isn’t the answer and neither is expecting standards of perfection from an imperfect human being.

Perhaps it’s time we change the way we view things—not just potential romantic relationships but also our relationships with family and friends. Maybe it’s not about what they can do for us. Maybe it’s about what we can do for them.

*Names have been changed.

Vania Chew is PR/editorial assistant for Adventist Record.
Graham Long: pastor to Kings Cross

Featuring Kent Kingston

InFocus host Kent Kingston chats with Rev Graham Long, CEO and pastor of Wayside Chapel, which is this year celebrating 30 years of connecting with the homeless, addicted and desperate of Kings Cross, Sydney. Viewer feedback: letters@infocus.org.au
Policy not politics

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has never engaged in partisan politics, an historical fact that underlines the church’s primary allegiance to a Lord whose “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Indeed, Ellen White strongly condemned those who use their church positions to support political parties or candidates.²

At the same time, the Adventist Church has always been actively engaged with critical policy issues in the public square, some of which inescapably have a political dimension to them. From our earliest days Adventists fought crucial battles to preserve religious liberty,³ led in the movement for prohibition of alcohol, advocated for the rights of the poor, firmly opposed war and not only urged the abolition of slavery, but adamantly refused to obey the US Federal Fugitive Slave Law.

Ellen White went so far as to state that if an Adventist did not oppose slavery, he should be excluded from the movement.⁴ This at a time when many Christians supported slavery. Not only did early Adventists oppose slavery, they supported the most radical solution to it: complete abolition.⁵ Ultimately over 600,000 Americans died in a civil war battling in large part over this contentious issue. How could Adventists speak with such moral clarity in the midst of such powerful conflict?

Explaining the rationale for Adventist public policy activism, Ellen White wrote: “Many deplore the wrongs which they know exist, but consider themselves free from all responsibility in the matter. This cannot be. Every individual exerts an influence in society.”⁶

Put another way, by our very existence as a faith community within a society, we have an influence. With that influence comes responsibility of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). Doing nothing in the face of social evil is not neutrality, it’s complicity. Passivity in the face of human need is not faithfulness, it is sinful indifference.

Adventist Christians reject complicity and indifference in favour of carefully considered public action. Our work on public policy is not an extra, grafted onto the stock of who we are, but a core responsibility of all those who follow
God.

We tell our children the Bible stories of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel, who used their time on earth to exert an influence on the public policy of the societies in which they lived. But we should also be telling those stories to adults—drawing out the lesson that believers today must also exert a godly influence on our community.

But how do Adventist Christians do this today? How do we “loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free”?7 How do we “speak up for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute”?8 How do we “defend the rights of the poor and needy”?9

I’m privileged to have been part of a team who advocated on behalf of our church during my years at the General Conference. Issues we worked on include advocating against the use of torture, speaking up for the rights of religious minorities from Nigeria to Turkmenistan, and supporting legislation to, among other things, protect prisoners from rape, provide visas for people illegally trafficked, regulate tobacco products and to protect the religious rights of workers.

Has the church always acted with moral clarity at times of crisis in society? No. But should we should aim to? Consider what Ellen White said in describing Abraham’s decisive move to free Lot and the hostages: “It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham’s religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed . . . Abraham regarded the claims of justice and humanity. His conduct illustrates the inspired maxim, ‘thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’”10 Let’s all aim to experience the living faith of Abraham. Let’s stand up for the oppressed. Let’s turn love into action. Let’s be courageous.

1. This editorial draws in large parts from an article I wrote that was published in the Adventist Review in 2006.
2. Ellen White, Gospel Workers, 391-396.
3. Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, vol 5, 713, 714.
4. Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, vol 1, 359, 360.
5. Roy Branson, Ellen White: Racist or Champion of Equity, http://www.oakwood.edu/goldmine/hdoc/blacksda/champ/
9. Ibid.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.
Depending on what you’re doing, a minute can fly by, hardly noticed. But when waiting for a bus or for water to boil, a minute can plod by, using every one of its 60 seconds. Together, minutes add up. There are 525,600 of them in a year.

I suppose prison is a place where time moves fairly slowly—particularly if you are innocent, truly innocent, with no date of release.

Imagine Joseph. Confined to a dungeon, no sentence to serve, no hope of freedom, just living out his existence by doing the best he could. Imagine the hope kindled in his heart when the cupbearer was released, with an interpreted dream and back into Pharaoh’s service. It must have seemed like a God-ordained meeting, one step closer to walking out into the world, one more righted wrong in Joseph’s charmed life. However, Joseph’s plea to remember him was forgotten and the cupbearer went on with his life.

More than one million minutes shuffled by in the next two years. Hope must have turned to ashes in Joseph’s chest as meal after meal came, with no release—day after day, week after week.

We don’t know what Joseph did to fill in those two years. He had already showed great fortitude by rising up to run his own prison. But he endured another two years! We can only assume he continued on in hope, trusting God and making the most of his situation.

Patience may be a virtue but it’s often undervalued. I know I have my fair share of short-tempered moments, causing me to say things I shouldn’t, or at least think them. So a lack of patience can lead to sin. But it’s more than that.

Patience is about control. If I am uncomfortable with myself, I will try to control people and things around me to make me feel safe again. If I have relinquished control or expect the unexpected, on a holiday for example, then I am quite happy to go with the flow.

If I am impatient, I want to be in control, but I am angry because that control is slipping.

Sometimes it’s hard to be patient with God. When praying for a loved one to come back to Christ or for opportunities
to minister or waiting for the church to grow, or even hoping for a cure—we often give up or get angry. It just seems like it will never happen. But God brings about amazing, unexpected results in His own time. Don’t give up. Keep praying and working. Sometimes the seeds you plant will only grow years later.

When I was younger, I prayed God would show me what to do with my life. I was impatient. I wanted to know. And the answer took years. But the result was better than I could have expected.

Joseph went from the dungeon to second in the land. God’s timing is perfect. Are you willing to be patient and give Him full control? God’s peace passes understanding. Give Him control and follow where He leads.

Jarrod Stackelroth is associate editor of Adventist Record.