Welcome to reality

“Always look on the bright side of life”, or so goes the famous Monty Python song (feel free to add the whistles if you wish). But while this idea is admirable, there is a very real danger in letting positive thinking blind our eyes to some very real issues.

Imagine for a moment that your child was sexually abused at a church event, and somebody came up to you and said, “Don’t worry, try to look on the bright side”. How would that make you feel?

There are just some issues that we simply can't brush aside or turn a blind eye to. We need to stare them straight in the face and address them, no matter how hard or painful it may be.

Ignorance is bliss, but no excuse.

We’ve got some very open and candid conversations about issues such as child abuse in this week’s edition of Record eNews. Please don’t turn a blind eye.
Church welcomes investigation

The Seventh-day Adventist Church welcomes the work of the Royal Commission and its focus on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia.

AC/DC’s highway to heaven

AC/DC drummer Phil Fudd was charged in New Zealand today for attempting to arrange two murders. His story is yet another example of how a life’s journey without God is nothing but a “highway to hell”.

Read Adventist World

Job’s ten children got precisely what they deserved when they died in that house during one of their regular feasts. Why? Find out in the latest edition of Adventist World.

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Cut back on the booze—doctors’ orders
• Apple and Facebook egg freezing programs get a cold reception
• Eating more fruit and veg may cheer you up!

Houston, we have a problem—the Texas subpoena debacle. Religious freedom expert James Standish identifies a
hopelessly naive?

Avondale lecturer Brad Watson has conducted research into child sponsorship programs around the world and says it's important to do your homework.

Prayer, prostitutes and the power of love

Once a month, a group of Christians pay a visit to brothels dotted along New South Wales’ Central Coast. They are there to see the prostitutes—to show them the love of Christ.

Caution

If you think child sexual abuse has never happened within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, think again. It has—and we have an obligation to talk about it honestly.

"clash of rights" that requires clear heads to solve.

So are sports drinks really a healthy alternative to sugary carbonated beverages?

Recommendations from one of Australia’s leading nutritionists, Sue Radd.

What the Bible really says about homosexuality

Dr Michael Brown offers five key scriptural truths that dismantle the modern-day argument that God's Word condones the homosexual lifestyle.
Church welcomes investigation

The Seventh-day Adventist Church welcomes the work of the Royal Commission and its focus on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia. The Church is committed to addressing issues of child sexual abuse and has created a new role in response: the Royal Commission project officer. Appointed earlier this year to serve in this role, I have the privilege of liaising with our Church community, informing you of Commission issues and expectations. As a father, psychologist and counsellor, the protection of children anywhere, but particularly in our Church context, is of the utmost importance to me.

The Royal Commission is investigating how institutions with a responsibility for children have managed and responded to allegations and instances of child abuse. Specifically, it is focusing on systemic failures where allegations and instances have been managed inappropriately. Many institutions have been formally investigated through public hearings. These are institutions where abuse has occurred and their responses to abuse will make helpful case studies for learning and informing final Royal Commission recommendations. To date, public hearings have involved entities such as Scouts Australia, YCMA NSW, numerous schools and a variety of religious denominations.

The Commission also provides an opportunity for victims of sexual abuse to be heard and to tell their stories directly to the Commissioners. Finally, and critically, the Royal Commission provides an opportunity for Australian society at large to learn from the tragic mishandling of sexual abuse. The ultimate intention is to make recommendations resulting in legislative reform, improved policies and practices so that institutions will be held more accountable in protecting children and managing child abuse.

Justice Peter McClellan, who chairs the Royal Commission, stated that the nature and consequences of abuse are not readily understood in communities, and that this needs to change. He emphasised that, as Australians, we need to be "shocked" out of our current state and fully grasp what constitutes sexual abuse and what could be the expected consequences for the victim and their families. McClellan’s words have indeed proven true as all hearings to date have included stories that not only shock the conscience but break our hearts.

Unfortunately, it is naïve to believe that Church entities are havens, safe from those who abuse children. As a Church we need to address with honesty, compassion and humility whatever issues may emerge for us. We know that as a faith-based institution, along with other denominations, we will be asked by the Commission to account for what we
are doing to ensure child protection “best practice”. It is also likely that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or one of our entities, will eventually be the focus of a public hearing.

Raising community awareness means that individuals who have suffered childhood sexual abuse are being reminded of painful experiences. It is by talking openly, candidly and freely that our community as a whole can address the painful and secretive reality of child sexual abuse in the past, eliminate the stigma and shame attached to victims, and work together to ensure it is prevented in the future.

The Royal Commission process is painful but it is necessary. It has strengthened our resolve as a Church to address any previous inadequate responses and create a better future; a future where the children in our care are ultimately much safer.

If you suffered sexual abuse while in the care of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or one of our entities, and would like to tell your story, please contact the Royal Commission on 1800 099 340 or visit: <www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au>.

If you, or someone you know, is a victim of sexual abuse within our Church community, please contact Safe Places Services on 1800 220 468 (Australia) or 0800 442458 (New Zealand). If you leave a message at either number, it will be checked during usual working days Monday to Friday and someone will return your call. For urgent matters, please call Safe Places on (02) 94875833 (Australia) and alert the police. You can also contact Safe Place Services by sending an email to: safeplaces@adventist.org.au. Alternatively, please visit: <http://safeplaceservices.org.au/allegations>.

As a community God has given us a sacred trust to protect the children in our care. We need to honestly acknowledge our failure to do so in the past and work tirelessly to ensure we honour that trust today.


Safe Place Services is the Seventh-day Adventist Church unit in Australia and New Zealand that assists our church community members who have suffered abuse or have concerns about abuse that may be taking place, develops policies and procedures to protect children in our care and trains ministers and churches in their implementation. Safe Place Services works cooperatively with the police when child sexual abuse is disclosed and facilitates counselling and support for victims of abuse.
For two generations of Aussies and Kiwis, the power chords of AC/DC formed part of the soundtrack of our youth. From *Highway to Hell* through to *Hells Bells*, AC/DC rocked our world.

Today, AC/DC is on the cusp of their 40th anniversary tour. If their last tour, which ranks among the top five grossing tours in rock history, is any indication, this tour will be a monster.

But behind the enormous success, is a group of men who have had a very rough run in life. The legendary Bon Scott, their first lead singer, left a session with his band mates in 1980 where they were working on a song entitled *Have a Drink on Me*. He did exactly that. And not just one. A friend left him passed out in a car on a night when temperatures were sub-freezing in London. He died alone. The official cause of death: acute alcohol poisoning. Like every good rock and roll death, there are always other versions—maybe he choked to death on his own vomit, maybe something else. Either way, his ashes are buried in Fremantle, WA.

This year it was announced that Malcolm Young, who is 61 years old, is suffering dementia and is now living in an assisted living facility in Sydney. An article in *The Australian* makes a veiled connection between Malcolm’s years of heavy drinking and his early onset dementia.

But maybe the most stunning news broke today that AC/DC drummer, Phil Rudd, has been charged in New Zealand with attempting to arrange two murders. Associated with the charges are reports of a dispute arising from his frequent use of prostitutes. And when his home was raided, the police found among other things, methamphetamine.

It is three very tragic endings to lives of people who, by most measures, have been astonishingly fortunate. Are these tragic ends the natural result of the living a life true to the sentiments of AC/DC’s music embodied? Although I don’t take their lyrics literally, it is hard to reconcile the sentiments and lifestyle promoted in AC/DC music, with a healthy, positive, loving life. Maybe these three men were influenced by their music, or maybe their lives influenced their music. Either way, thinking of the circumstances surrounding Phil Rudd’s arrest, it is hard not to reflect on the tragedy of a life lived outside of the love of God.

I hope Phil Rudd didn’t do what he is accused of. And I hope that each remaining member of AC/DC encounters the God of forgiveness, grace, love and life. I hope that in God’s arms, they find hope and a path to healthy, positive way of living. I hope that they get off the highway to a living hell in this life, and eternal separation from God in the next.
and get onto the highway to heaven. And, when it comes to heaven, I hope, in the words of AC/DC, that all “my friends are gonna be there too . . . ”.
Inconspicuous places by day: chatty school children amble past; the elderly sit out the front waiting for the bus; couples walk by hand in hand. But behind the doors of these unremarkable exteriors is an industry as much secretive as it is exposed.

Brothels on the Central Coast of NSW are dotted throughout its city hubs; they sit above or behind these centres of activity—a little bit down the road, above the shopfront, down the alleyway—some more concealed than others.

And once a month, on a Monday night, a pair of women carry baskets filled with beauty products and Bibles and walk down those alleyways, knocking on the doors beneath the big numbers and fluorescent lights. Neither worker nor client, these women are visiting with a new purpose—to show genuine friendship to the prostitutes inside.

These are Rahab women.

Rahab is the only service for sex workers of its kind on the Central Coast. Fleur Duke, a Seventh-day Adventist, began leading it in mid-2011 after reading the conversion story of American woman Harmony Dust in her book *Scars and Stilettos*. After finding freedom from her own life as a stripper, Dust established Treasures—an outreach and support group for women in strip clubs. Duke was itching to find someone in Australia participating in this kind of ministry. And that's when she heard about Rahab.

Rahab began in Adelaide in 2003, founded by Paullette Cairns, a woman passionate about showing sex workers another way of life. Outreach teams are made up of Christian women willing to visit local brothels. Their goal is to offer help to sex workers in a variety of ways: friendship, gifts, prayer, English lessons or a way out of possible slavery or trafficking.

Cairns began the non-denominational organisation following visits to sex workers in Southeast Asia.

“But I had a weakness for languages,” she says. “I told a friend that I wanted to work with Vietnamese women but (couldn't) pick up the language . . . she said, 'Why don't you work here in Adelaide? No-one is working with the sex workers in Adelaide.' And a coin just went click into my spirit. And I pursued it."

Cairns found her calling on the streets when she met a sex worker for the first time.

“The very first girl I met said to me that every job she did, she died inside. That spoke volumes to me. So that was the
key that God was putting in me—that girls were dying on the inside while they were servicing a man," she says. "Women are built to be loved, especially through sex, and to have no love and just cold sex is very empty."

A report in 2012 about the NSW sex industry by the Kirby Institute, affiliated with the University of New South Wales' Faculty of Medicine, estimates between 1500 and 10,000 sex workers are working at any one time in NSW (a specific number is hard to determine due to the secrecy and high turnover of the sex industry). The report also shows that two-thirds of sex workers in NSW come from Asian (53.2 per cent) or other non-English speaking (13.5 per cent) countries. Nearly half of these workers rated their English as "fair" or "poor". Many of them remain on the margins of society—ineducated and afraid to leave the brothels to go to the shops because of their inability to communicate in English.

They are tentative in their conversations with Rahab women; some haven’t ever seen an Australian woman in the flesh. Rahab offers free English lessons to any worker.

Cairns has seen the power that language brings. "It empowers the women," she says. "A lot of the women don’t speak any English . . . So if they’re abused they don’t know their rights, they can’t shop, they can’t do anything without English.

"It helps them understand why that woman walks past every day at nine o’clock and she goes, 'Hello', and maybe make a relationship and maybe they won’t be so alone."

Duke can’t help but talk maternally of the “beautiful girls”. To her the sex workers are family.

"It’s like they’re my own sisters or aunts or friends,” she says.

"If my daughter was stuck in a brothel I would want someone to be visiting her. I would want her to know that if she needed to tell someone that she wanted to get out or needed help . . . then there was a face that she knew she could trust."

Cairns believes in “loving the women for who they are”. Previously a manager of a young women’s shelter and a street chaplain, she is no stranger amongst sex workers in Adelaide. She relates to the girls through a shared understanding of brokenness.

“You realise that they’re just a broken girl, they’re just like you and me . . . because of the brokenness of my life I see what they’re going through. So I think they’re great women.”

Some places do not open their doors to Rahab visitors but Duke believes the sex workers are looked after.

“If we’re praying for the ones we’ve met and even the ones we haven’t met, God knows who they are and he can look after them,” she says.

A closed door does not deter her.

“We don’t fear; we are used to it. We know there are girls down the end of the road who could be needing a lift back or just to be ministered to. To me, God has looked after us all these years,” she says.

Recently, Rahab expanded internationally. From its humble beginnings in Adelaide, it has now opened new outreach teams in the UK, Mexico and Papua New Guinea. The expansion comes unexpectedly and through word of mouth.

“Pretty much everywhere we go it accidentally gets started,” says Rahab program coordinator Sharon Hawke.

She explains how a chance meeting with a stranger on a bus in London led to a Rahab branch opening on the streets of London.

“We were praying that day, then we met someone on a bus who said that we needed to go to the church and speak at
the church. That’s how it started in London,” Hawke says.

Cairns believes international growth is vital. “Rahab has to grow because there is a thriving sex industry all around the world and many people don’t believe that the sex workers can be reached. They think that it’s organised crime, they think it’s trafficking, they think it’s far too dangerous. But we’ve got a God who created the heavens and earth and He’s much bigger than we are and He can protect us . . .”

For the outreach teams, it’s the moments of connection that keep them going out every month. Duke remembers one time as she was leaving a brothel.

“A lady grabbed my hand and just wouldn’t let go. And that kind of thing really tugs at my heart big time. You can really feel the connection,” she says.

“I was just happy that we could be there in that moment whatever that meant for her . . . I won’t know I guess but maybe one day. But that was special.”

Both Duke and Cairns attribute the success of these connections to their faith.

“We don’t do a thing without God,” Cairns says.

“People were saying, ‘God is not in places like that,’” Duke says, “and then meeting the women and seeing how God was in them and talking to them through us was unbelievable.

“He’s there.”

Lara Campbell is editor of Avondale College’s student magazine, The Voice and is studying to be a high school English teacher.
"I encounter stories of paedophiles in the church on a regular basis. It literally is an epidemic. We are fooling ourselves to believe otherwise." So writes Church of Christ minister Jimmy Hinton. Why does his perspective hold so much weight? Because his own father, a pastor, is a paedophile, and it was Jimmy who reported him to police.

Think Pastor Hinton is overstating the crisis? According to the Centre for Sexual Assault, one in six boys are sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 16, and a staggering one in three girls are sexually assaulted.

Think about that for a minute. If you go to a church with 50 women and 50 men, and if that congregation is roughly representative of society, then 17 of the women in your church and eight of your men were victims of sexual abuse before they turned 16. Overall, it could well be that a quarter of your church has suffered sexual abuse!

But surely that isn’t the case in the church? Pastor Hinton now speaks widely on the issue of sexual abuse and meets many, many people who were abused by church members. His advice? "If you don’t think it could happen to your child, you better reconsider. Church is one of the most appealing places for predators, precisely because we are not expecting it to happen."

Tragically, sexual abuse doesn’t just happen at other people’s churches. Sexual abuse has occurred at our Church-sponsored camps, it has happened during sleepovers at church members’ homes, it has happened at church schools, and yes, it has even happened on the premises of local churches. I wish it wasn’t the case, but it is. And because it is, we have an obligation to talk about it honestly, as only when we confront reality can we respond adequately to it.

Of course, it is very difficult to balance trust and caution. And, yes, the vast bulk of our church family are wonderful, caring people who have the love of God in their hearts and are outraged by sexual abuse, no matter where it occurs.

The confounding thing with child abuse, however, is that it’s impossible to know who harbours such dark intent before it’s too late. So, in the case of children, caution must guide our actions—even at church.

Sooner or later the Seventh-day Adventist Church will come up before the Royal Commission investigating...
institutional responses to child abuse. As a parent, I think that's very good news.

As we go through this process, we will find our Church—and maybe even people we respect—have not always handled sexual abuse with adequate care. Yes, it’s fair to say that the same is true of any entity that has a history of contact with young people—public schools, sports coaches, the military, Scouts, etc. But just because others have the same problem, it doesn’t excuse our church. We are servants of a Lord who said it would be better to be thrown into the sea with a stone around our necks than to offend a child. And yet we have instances in our history of failures that are incomprehensible.

Our past does not, however, have to dictate our future. By this I don’t mean the excellent work that Safe Place Services is doing. Or the procedures that require reporting to police of any accusations of abuse. Yes, that is all in place and appears to be working well.

But we need something else. We need a change of culture. When it comes to protecting our children, a little paranoia is not a bad thing. Because once abuse occurs, it can never be undone. Trust is generally a virtue. But when it comes to children, trusting others—even church members—it is not.

Beware and be alert and do all you can to protect the child God has entrusted to you. Even when your child is in the church.


---

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.