Bangkok bombing reflections

More than 20 people lost their lives this week when a bomb exploded in a shopping village in Bangkok, Thailand. Just one week ago, James Standish was on the very corner where the bomb went off.

Insight: GC session changed me

For Pastor Glenn Townend, the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, was a life-changing experience . . . for more reasons than just a change in job title.
CEO to leave Adventist Media

Neale Schofield, CEO of Adventist Media, has asked for a leave of absence after seven years in the role.

$11,000 raised for ADRA despite icy weather

The day began like so many Melbourne winter mornings—icy cold. Huddled together at the starting line, 22 Adventist Development and Relief Agency supporters stood ready for the annual Run Melbourne event.

Adventist school's new approach to teaching

A Seventh-day Adventist school's innovative approach to teaching and learning could result in big changes for the rest of New Zealand's small schools.

Ancient words, present hope: Understanding Revelation

Avondale Seminary head Dr Kayle de Waal unlocks the secrets of the Bible's most mysterious book.

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Making headlines:
• Desmond Tutu calls out Tony Abbott on climate change
• Christian agencies helping out after Myanmar floods
• Community service goes large-scale in Venezuela

The great headscarf debate.

Resident human rights lawyer James Standish says the choice to express your faith through what you wear is an important element of religious freedom.

To smack or not to smack?

Family life educator Trafford Fischer heads for the naughty corner to
Beauty with scars

Her face was rotting and unrecognisable. Yet for Nicole Sandy, this young Indian girl was the most beautiful person she had ever seen.

Wise

James Standish is on a search for wisdom. "We need wisdom more than ever," he writes, "but in the crowded spaces in which we live, it is elusive."

Week of Prayer

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Week of Prayer (September 5-12) readings are now available on the Adventist Record website.
Bangkok bombing reflections

I was standing on the corner of Ratchadamri and Ploenchit Roads in Bangkok. It was hot, noisy, chaotic and, of course, smelly. There's no place on earth that smells quite like Bangkok. The canals. The durians. The drains, curries, exhaust, dried fish and boiling cooking oil in street-side stands. If you're looking for the ultimate olfactory experience, there's no place quite like it.

I was in the heart of Bangkok visiting one of my favourite shopping cites. And though everything had changed in the years since I was a tween eagerly shopping for music, clothes and watches on these streets, everything was exactly the same. The modern buildings and even higher overpasses didn't change a thing about the character of the place. Bangkok is still very much the same Bangkok I know.

Sadly, there's something else that hasn't changed: erratic acts of violence. I was on that corner shopping. But across the street others were worshipping. At the Erawan Shrine. And it was there that, this week —a week after my little shopping sojourn to the corner—that a dreadful bomb went off. And 20 innocent people lost their lives.

It took me back to one of the darkest memories of my childhood; the night a bomb went off as crowds streamed out of the racecourse across the busy city street from Bangkok Adventist Hospital. I accompanied my father to the hospital after he got a call that wounded were streaming in. The lobby of the hospital was literally covered in blood, with blood trickling down the front steps. There are many images I remember from that night, but the one that sticks with me most vividly was a middle-aged woman with a perfect hole right in the middle of her forehead. I suppose she was one of the six people who died that night. No perpetrator for that bombing was ever discovered.

After all this time, what I am struck by is the pointlessness of the attack. What did it accomplish? What was it for? How could someone engage in the level of planning and risk associated with a plot as pointless and as depraved as that? And how do you live with yourself afterwards?

Somewhere in our world today are the people behind the Erawan bombing. Somewhere there may be someone who knows about that Racecourse bombing. And around the world there are many thousands of people who have pointlessly killed innocent people. They have taken what they can never give back. The ramifications for friends, family and their victims, are irrevocable. How do those with blood on their hands live with themselves?
I don't know. I really don't. What I do know is that this world, as sparkling and wonderful as it is, is in such desperate need of Christ's healing, and people who are the hands of spreading that healing. May we, as weak and defective as we are, let the Holy Spirit use us towards that end. In our families. In our workplace. In our society.

*James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.*
Wahroonga, New South Wales

Neale Schofield, CEO of Adventist Media, has asked for a leave of absence after seven years in the role.

Mr Schofield is going to study Theology and the Arts in London. The South Pacific Division is recruiting a new CEO to replace him.

“Neale will be missed as, besides having great skills and experience in media, communication and marketing, he has a real passion to win people to Jesus and the last day message,” said Pastor Glenn Townend, president of the South Pacific Division.

During his time at Adventist Media, Mr Schofield oversaw the combining of a number of the media outlets that the Church runs in the South Pacific. He developed a clear strategy of ensuring Adventist media was "never more than an arm's length away"—whether on a phone, computer, TV, radio or book.

Mr Schofield oversaw the production of the Beyond The Search series as well as the Tell The World film that will be released this year. He was also instrumental in establishing It Is Written Oceania and authored the Secrets of Prophecy Bible study series.

Mr Schofield is not only a leader and manager but also a skilled TV presenter. He developed and presented Masterstroke, a series on art and faith, and Dogtales, a lighthearted look at what we can learn about faith from his dog. Both of these series have shown on HopeChannel and can be viewed on demand at www.hopechannel.com/watch/shows.

Applicants for the Adventist Media CEO position are encouraged to send their CV to lionelsmith@adventist.org.au before August 31. For more details on the position, click HERE.
$11,000 raised for ADRA despite icy weather

Melbourne, Victoria

The day began like so many Melbourne winter mornings—icy cold. Huddled together at the starting line, 22 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) supporters stood ready for the annual Run Melbourne event.

It's more than a fun run—participants are encouraged to give back to the community by raising funds for a cause close to their hearts. And that's exactly what the ADRA team did, raising more than $A11,000 to support the agency's work in Australia and abroad.

Organiser and ADRA volunteer William Tai Tin was amazed with the amount raised by the group. He said the support they received helped motivate each runner to push through the pain barrier and finish the race.

"Every dollar that was so generously given provided that little bit more motivation to get each and every one of us across that finish line," William said.

"Run Melbourne has been a great opportunity for our teams to connect and put into perspective what it takes to make a difference."

The event raised almost $A2 million for various charities. William said ADRA supporters wanted to make a difference in a tangible way.

"Each cause represented had its own merits but in one accord we ran because of the underlying fact that we are a people who care and love," he said.

William challenged others to do something to make a difference. "We hope that each step we've taken pushes one person, one relationship and one community further forward and in doing so bridging the gaps that can often be left wide open. Thank you to everyone who has supported our efforts because while we may have put our bodies on the line, it is the supporters who truly champion what we endeavour to achieve," he said.

The $11,000 will support the following projects:

1. **ADRA Connections Laos**—To build a birthing unit that will provide maternal health and wellbeing to rural
areas of Laos and help improve the quality of life for mothers and infants.

2. **ADRA Connections Nepal**—To provide access to quality education for two rural schools by improving infrastructure such as classrooms, a library and play equipment.

3. **Asher Housing (JEM)**—To provide ongoing support for young women in Melbourne affected by issues such as family breakdown, abuse and drugs.

4. **Keep Girls Safe (Thailand)**—To enhance the ability of local communities in Thailand to protect their girls against sexual exploitation and abuse.


*Josh Dye is Media and Communication coordinator for ADRA Australia.*
Rotorua, New Zealand

A Seventh-day Adventist school’s innovative approach to teaching and learning could result in big changes for the rest of New Zealand’s small schools.

Rotorua Adventist School recently adopted an open-plan layout for its classrooms, meaning its 35 pupils from Years 1 to 8 now collaborate together at open tables instead of individual desks.

The complete refurbishment also includes the installation of solar light panels and other modern learning environment features.

Principal Lanea Strickland told the *Rotorua Daily Post* the new classroom setup allows students to be “more fluid depending on their academic capabilities rather than their class level”.

She also said “having the children sit together at tables rather than desks encourages conversation and teamwork”.

Despite still being in the “trialling” phase of this new approach to teaching, the school is already noticing huge improvements in the students’ behaviour, social interactions and willingness to learn.

“Rotorua is one of the schools taking immediate advantage of our modernisation strategy,” said Rosalie McFarlane, Adventist Education director for the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference. “We want to provide our teachers with every opportunity to harness the very best learning strategies and develop young people of the highest Christian character and principle.”

Research material is limited on collaborative learning for schools with small rolls and, if the strategy continues to prove successful, Mrs Strickland believes it could be used as an example for other schools in the country.
I remember my first glimpse of her. It was the first night. We had arrived at Bobbili School for the Blind, India. The students had organised a talent show to welcome us—the Asian Aid ambassadors. While waiting for the students to be seated, all ordered according to their grades, a group of teenage girls bustled in, engulfing one girl in the middle. It seemed slightly odd—the blind leading the blind—but perhaps the girl in the middle had a more limiting blindness than the others.

I continued to watch the small huddle until her face became visible among those of her friends. I blanched. Her face—or the ruins of it—was not recognisable. Her nose was decaying, with only a few scraps of fleshy skin remaining. Other parts of her face were missing, the rest distorted with blotchy, scabby skin. Her one remaining eye was cloudy . . .

But after that I turned away. I was horrified. The rest of the evening I found myself turning to look her way, only to quickly regret it when I did. I knew it was so shallow—only caring what she looked like—but it was hard to notice much else when her physical appearance was so ghastly, almost inhuman.

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Now here I was, just a few metres between us. My mother was beckoning—no, summoning—me to her side where I would also meet this girl. As terrified as I was, I could not defy the burning wishes of my mother, so miserably I all but crawled to her. My heart beat erratically. I dared not look up until it was absolutely necessary. After all, she could not see me nor the trepidation on my face. As Mum began making introductions, I chanced a glance up.

My heart stopped.

She was my age—17—and studying in the equivalent of our grade 12. She had skin cancer and her village had abandoned her. At that moment though, I could not conceive why they would do such a thing.

My heart had stopped, not from the shock of seeing her up close, but from complete awe in her presence, almost reverence. I found she did not repulse me. Instead my eyes were able to roam her face, taking it all in yet not feeling the need to turn away. I felt such a deep sorrow for her, more profound than I'd ever felt.
I was completely oblivious to the exchange of questions between the girl’s teacher and my mum, simply captivated by her at the same time as being overtaken by grief. Suddenly, in an act that felt so intimate yet so needed at that moment, she reached out and took my hand. Her scarred hands were in mine, and I held onto her hands with as much urgency as she held onto mine.

Then, unexpectedly, she smiled and I couldn’t help but smile too. She was so beautiful. Not just her nature but also physically. The way her smile lit up her face created creases around her eyes and mouth, lifted her lips and showed off her teeth. It was the most stunning thing, the most beautiful smile I had ever seen.

The short time passed quickly and she was to join the other girls eating lunch. But our hands were still joined and I felt as reluctant as she did to let go.

Before the teacher turned to lead her away, she squeezed my hand but ultimately she squeezed my heart. I can’t describe the overwhelming emotions I felt at that moment. I had known this girl for only minutes, yet I felt such a bond.

I quickly excused myself, hurrying along the corridors back to our cabin, desperately eager to be alone. Yet as I rushed away, I couldn’t control the wave of tears that hung in the recesses. When I saw my own perfectly normal, healthy face in the mirror, I couldn’t help but cry.

Why was it her and not me? Why am I privileged to escape such terrors? Why does she deserve this?

But I am the one with smooth, unscathed skin. Free of cancer and abandonment. I who think so poorly of myself, wishing to look different, and complaining about this and that. I am the one who is blessed.

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It comes with recognising a different beauty: “Your beauty should come from within you—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. This beauty will never disappear and it is worth very much to God” (1 Peter 3:4).

More than a year later, she is still fresh in my mind, the emotions still raw. I know it’s foolish to hope but I wonder if she is alive today. Though I knew her for only a few minutes she is imprinted in my mind, her beautiful smile—despite everything—entrenched in my memory.

In those short moments I realised that whenever I am fearful I can think of her.
But most of all, whenever I look at myself with disapproval, I can think of her and remember how she didn’t shy away because of herself and how she might appear to others. Instead, she seized my hand and understood that while we were worlds apart we were also much closer than both of us realised.

Nicole Sandy is a university student in Townsville, Queensland. With this story, Nicole won the Signs Publishing Writing Prize at the Manifest Creative Arts Festival 2015.
If Solomon was so wise, why did he have 700 wives and 300 concubines, many of them pagan? If anyone knew that was a formula for disaster, it was Solomon. After all, he’d seen firsthand the familial, societal and spiritual chaos caused by polygamy. He’d lived through a civil war where his half-brother tried to kill his father in order to grasp the throne away from Solomon’s reach. How could the wisest man in history make such foolish choices in his personal life?

Maybe it’s not such a mystery. Like Solomon, we live in a world awash in knowledge, where very smart people do very impressive things on a daily basis. The achievement of modernity are truly astonishing. But despite it all we’ve created a society where people are sadder, more drug dependent and less connected to each other. We live brilliant, fast lives, consumed by distraction but missing the core. Like Solomon, we lack for nothing, but somehow in the blur of our beautiful lives, we miss everything.

I’m on a search for wisdom. And in this quest, I’ve come across a few snippets and an insight. First the snippets. “Graveyards are full of indispensable people,” quipped Brad Thorp to me. It isn’t Brad’s original thought. But coming from a man who is nearing the end of his career, it is particularly poignant. Brad has accomplished something very few have: he has created a global TV network. Not alone. But not without him either. And yet, he can see that life will go on with or without him. And there’s something very liberating about this idea. In a sense all of us are irreplaceable. In another we’re all disposable. Because, whether we like it or not, we will be disposed of by this world, sooner or later. Keeping our lives in perspective adds a gloss of healthy humility.

“The best way to serve the age is to betray it.” Dr Nicholas Miller of Andrews University has this Brendan Kennelly gem hanging in his office. It encapsulates the imperative not to conform but to transform. Sometimes the Christian life feels like a losing struggle against the prevailing tide; a protracted rearguard action. But after considering Kennelly’s thought I think it is something altogether different. It is the byproduct of living an authentic life. A life dedicated not to seeking safety via assimilation but meaning through differentiation. If we are going to give anything to our society we can only do it by being distinct from it. To serve, we must struggle.

“We need to shatter before we heal.” I heard this lyric one evening as I drove into a rural Illinois town. It just so
happens the town’s principal employer is a prison. And as I listened, I wondered how many of the men in that prison had been shattered and how many would ever heal. I know for myself that my greatest moments of insight, the well of tenderness, the perspective that gives me the greatest humanity, all come from being shattered. And then slowly put back together. Maybe not all who shatter heal. But maybe all who truly heal were first shattered?

Intelligence, quickness, smartness, sharpness. They’re all around us. But wisdom? As Job puts it, wisdom is “hidden from the eyes of every living creature . . .” We need wisdom more than ever, but in the crowded spaces in which we live, it is elusive. Job concludes his thoughts on wisdom by quoting God: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Many years later, Solomon repeats this thought in Proverbs 1.7.

So how did Solomon fail so spectacularly?

Eric Greitens reflects on wisdom: “in an age of distraction, we’ve lost touch with practical wisdom. Our wealth of common sense fails to become common practice.”

That is the essence of Solomon’s failing. Solomon knew wisdom. But he failed to practice it. As a result, what was built with his brilliance was utterly undone through his foolishness. Specifically, the evil of Solomon’s successor Rehoboam was due in part to his pagan upbringing. Rehoboam’s ruinous reign split the kingdom. And the split kingdom eventually became an easy target for Babylon, which enslaved Judah and obliterated Solomon’s glorious temple. Thus, one unwise decision undid all of Solomon’s achievements. Like Solomon, we have access to great wisdom. And like him, we must decide what we do with it. Let’s choose . . . wisely.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.
Life changed for me at the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in San Antonio in July. Every General Conference session I have been to (the last three) has changed me. The inspiring and insightful biblical messages, the reports of the progress of God’s work in various parts of the world, the challenge of unreached areas and people groups—all change me. However, what moves me to tears are the stories of sacrifice that people make in mission: seeing and hearing of families separated, in prison for 10 years in a communist country and yet remaining faithful to God and now growing Jesus’ kingdom. Missionary pilot families who lost a father and yet the whole family is still involved in church aviation because of the difference it makes in saving people’s lives now and for eternity. The doctors who risk their lives in Ebola affected areas. The dentists who give free medical care to those who cannot afford it. The people who could opt for a comfortable life but the love of Jesus compels them to be involved in mission (2 Corinthians 5:14). And there were dozens of such stories heard in San Antonio, representing the millions of Seventh-day Adventists around the world. These are ordinary people but their commitment to Jesus and His mission to be disciple makers changes them.

I was changed because I renewed my commitment to Jesus and His mission and want to be a part of the discipleship movement that changes the world before He returns again.

Life changed for me at the General Conference. I went as a delegate, was on the nominating committee and left the GC not on the nominating committee but as the South Pacific Division president. This immediately meant more responsibilities and meetings. It has meant a shift from Suva to Sydney, from hot to cold, different clothes and food, but this change is nothing compared to what Jesus has done for me and the changes He desires in me, His church and the world.

Pastor Glenn Townend is president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific.