

Resonate

ISSUE 41

Baptist
Mission
Australia



Teaching New Stories

Teachers with disabilities in Indochina are rising above perceptions and demonstrating a different story.

PG.2

+ *Alongsiders*

Living alongside with the hope of Jesus in Australia and beyond.

PG.9

hello



Scott Pilgrim is Baptist Mission Australia's Executive Director. He is passionate about seeing vibrant communities following Jesus in their own distinctive ways, in Australia and around the world.

It's great to welcome you to another edition of Resonate! There's some insightful and inspiring reading in the pages that follow.

This magazine ticks several boxes for our mission community: It raises awareness about mission issues – locally and globally, and fosters life long learning. It shares stories from our team members on location and it celebrates partnership.

And speaking of partnership, there's nothing that captures the heartbeat of partnership better for us than May Mission Month. What a great month we had connecting with churches, small groups and mission teams across the nation. I enjoyed being in five states and six cities during May and I was reminded time and time again of the power of partnership!

So a huge THANK YOU to everyone who shared with us in May. We look forward to strengthening partnerships and keeping missional conversations flowing.

It was great during May to consider together what it means to live as an alongsider, whether it be in a local community in Australia or across the world. As Jesus followers we're all called to live as alongsiders. Mark and Ngoc know this and they're fleshing out what it means day to day in Indochina. It's exciting to see how God's Spirit is using them and their local teammates. You can read about it in our feature article on pages 2-4.

And we continue to unpack the alongsiders theme in our centre spread – where you will see stories and examples from across the world.

I'm thankful for the contribution Marbuen Diaz from the NSW & ACT Baptist Association makes across our movement, and so it's great to have him writing on power and Jesus' counter cultural example on pages 5-6. There's learning for all different ministry contexts in this helpful article.

When I was in Mozambique last year I had the opportunity to meet the Bennett family from Albany, WA who were doing a short-term stint with our team. They made a real difference during their service and, I know, came home as changed people as well! You can read about their son Jake's experiences at the end of this Resonate.

We're keen to foster more short-term serving opportunities, so please contact our team if you would like to find out more.

Enjoy reading and thank you for your partnership!

Grace and peace

Scott

Baptist Mission Australia is the intercultural mission arm of the Australian Baptist Church. We long to see vibrant faith communities following Jesus in their own distinctive ways.

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Teaching new stories

Ngoc and Mark share how the ministry in Indochina is opening eyes, empowering young people with disability and sharing the Gospel in culturally relevant ways.



Mark and Ngoc have served in Indochina since 2020. They love to see people exploring faith in Jesus within their own culture.

Our partner NGO in Indochina was founded in 2007 by Hoa (Peter), with a vision to equip young people with disability with the skills they need to be able to live independently.

This led to a vocational training centre being formed to train people with disability in teaching, business management, English, baking and more. This is the foundation of a rich ministry, where many people have experienced God's love over many years. Before moving to Indochina, we had both served short-term with Hoa at the centre and seen first-hand its positive impact.

In April 2021, Hoa sadly passed away. And we were asked to prayerfully consider coming alongside his wife, Hien, to provide support and encouragement so that she could continue the ministry. After praying about it, we discerned God's calling was for us to join the ministry.

We celebrate that our partner NGO is fully managed and operated by local people with disability. As team members, we come alongside these young people with disability and share the love of Christ by doing life together.

Through this ministry, we can see that young people with disability are being empowered and encouraged to do things that they otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to do.

For example, there are four English teachers who provide night classes to 150 children from the community. In Indochina, people with disabilities are often undervalued, while teachers are held in high regard. This means it is very rare for people with disabilities to be teachers and to teach able bodied children.

However, at our partner NGO this is exactly what is happening. The community is entrusting their children's education to teachers with disabilities.

Perceptions don't change overnight, but we believe that this experience is opening the eyes of the students and their families. We hope that as they see their teachers as empowered, intelligent and capable people, their perceptions of people with disabilities more broadly will change for the better.

Please pray with us that this will happen through the love of the Father and His transforming power.

Suong's story

Suong is a 25 year old woman who was affected by Agent Orange. As a result, she has a severe deformity which prevents her from being able to walk. Before she came to our partner NGO, she had not gone to school because her family thought she would not have a future due to her disability. She could not read or write.

After being trained at our partner NGO for five years, she decided to move back to her hometown. Since then, she has opened up an English school and is a well respected English teacher in her community. Praise God for this transformation!



"We come alongside young people with disability



& share the love of Christ



by doing life together."



House church

In this culture, hospitality is incredibly important and frequently practised. People often spend time in each other's homes to share a meal and talk about life.

Therefore, we have a strong conviction that running church at someone's house is culturally appropriate in this community. We also find this practice biblically familiar. In Acts 2:42-47, we read an account of how the first believers gather everyday at someone's house, for communion and to study God's Word together.

So we have begun a weekly house church where we prepare a meal and invite the local staff to join together. Afterwards, we run 'wordtime', where we share Scripture and explore how it could be applicable to our own lives. Then, we invite everyone in the group to share what's going on in their life with us - the ups and downs and how their week is going. Finally, we pray together. It's a simple, yet rich time together.

From our experiences, it takes perseverance, disappointments, genuine relationships and time, for people in Indochina to truly experience God's genuine love. This is because the people of Indochina have been oppressed and taken advantage of by so many different countries, governments and wars over the nation's history, so it takes time to build trust.

Our hope and prayer is that through our house church ministry, our friends will have the opportunity to experience God's love and care, and to slowly grow in relationship with Jesus.

Cong's story

There is a young man, Cong, who comes from a strong atheist background. He is one of our excellent teachers and is very well respected among his students. However, when he first came to us, he had a cold and unapproachable demeanour.

We had the impression that he strongly opposed our faith, but over the years his heart has softened and he is becoming more open to having conversations about Jesus. He's not there yet, but we pray that through the house church he will one day choose to follow Jesus.

Power for **what?**



A powerful memory.

When I look back to the memory, I always arrive mid-scene. A 10-year-old kid standing in the middle of the classroom.



Marbuen Diaz serves on the team at Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. Here he explores power and the counter cultural example Jesus leaves us to follow.

Shamed. Paralysed. Tears uncontrollably streaming down my face from feeling helpless. I was a new immigrant of just a couple of weeks and my Year 4 teacher was towering over me and repeatedly yelling, 'Do you understand what I am trying to say!' I did, indeed, understand – I just felt powerless to respond.

His strong voice struck fear into my young heart and it made me feel like I didn't belong. I am almost certain that wasn't his intention, but it is what I remember vividly as my welcome into a country I now call 'home'. Since then, there have been many similar incidents which have upheld the narrative that I was different and I didn't belong.

It's taken many years to work that stuff out, including seeing counsellors. I am in a much better place now but that same feeling still creeps in here and there, when an authoritative teacher-like figure raises their voice towards me.

That feeling of fear, alienation and powerlessness. Though a different story, it is a similar cry that our First Nations brothers and sisters expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In absorbing the inequalities that their peoples experience, I can hear their heartache when they say, "This is the torment of our powerlessness."

The dynamics of power.

A quick Google search will help us understand a biblical word study on 'power'. I looked up the different kinds of Hebrew and Greek words that paint a picture of how the ancient world viewed 'power'. But I am less interested in its definition and more curious about its function – how power is used.

In human history, we have seen 'power' used horribly. I am sure we could all think of times when human beings thought they had the solution to the world's problems, only to discover that it is usually at the cost of other people's freedoms, rights and even lives. It has been a 'torment of powerlessness' indeed. Unfortunately, in many instances – including sadly, in Christian mission – power has been used atrociously.

Partnered with colonisers, power was used to dominate, tower over and scream at cultures whose primary posture was welcome.

This includes the peoples of my ancestors, in the archipelago now called the Philippines. In the city where I grew up, the colonisers arrived on gunboats. They greeted the villages with raining canon shells – a show of power.

My point is that in our human sin, power can be used to dominate, destroy and oppress – to colonise.

Unlike the ancient gods and kings, we see throughout the Bible that our God is fondly consistent in aligning Himself with those who felt powerless. While kings justified their oppressive power under their gods, our God allied Himself as a defender of the widows, a father to the orphans and a comforter to the marginalised. And He invites His people to do the same.

And like the Father, the Son's kind of power gave voice to the powerless. This is where I am continually challenged by Jesus in how He understood the dynamics of power. Just as He modelled it, Jesus corrected our use of power by pointing to serving others, rather than being served. (Matthew 20:25-28)

As Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako wrote, "Jesus' way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming, arising from a unique concept of power – power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination."

Jesus had a non-dominating use for power. In fact, in Philippians 2:5-11, it describes Jesus choosing to give up any rights to the kind of power our world obsesses over – domination through authority, popularity and force. Instead, He uses power to humble Himself.

He uses power to serve, to love... even to sacrifice Himself to the point of execution. Jesus kept His heart humble and left it to the Holy Spirit to do the filling, lifting and empowering.

In other words, Jesus uses His power to move into our neighbourhoods, get alongside those at the bottom rung of the ladder and lift everyone towards the Father.

What is our power meant for? Well to follow Jesus' counter cultural way... our power is for freedom, love and justice.



There's more! Listen to Marbz explore the dynamics of power on our podcast.

Head to: www.baptistmissionaustralia.org/Missioning

It's

God's

mission

Team members explore what it means to participate in God's mission.

Lisa | South Asia



"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." (James 1:5)

If. That word makes me smile. If we lack wisdom? Of course we do! Leading a team of nearly one hundred local staff in a transforming work among some of South Asia's most vulnerable people requires incredible wisdom. Time and again, together with the local director, we have discussed our reliance on God's wisdom, prayed together and praised Him as our provider.

The vision for the next two years is birthed from such reliance. As we strengthen the local people to become agents of change within their communities, we know that the vision is inspired. Inspired, because God our Father is the one who heard the cry of the over 20,000 people we are working with. And it was He who sought to intervene in their circumstances, helping them to become a blessing within their communities.

David and Eliza | Silk Road Area



Bucketing concrete house foundations – that's what participating in God's mission looked like one Saturday recently.

As we were driving up the lane to our house, our neighbour rang. "David, where are you? We need your help." Five minutes after arriving home, David was in his work clothes, standing next to the concrete-mixing tub, lifting buckets of cement over the formwork to pour the foundations. The crew of 15 local men welcomed his muscles and height – they deliberately made room for him where the most tiresome lifting was required!

It was a long, hot day. But being willing to do hard work speaks volumes when it comes to relationship building. It shows you're in it for the long haul. That you care about helping. That you're willing to get dirty.

Building trust with neighbours to the point that they are open to considering a different worldview takes a long time. It is our hope that giving a day on a building site like David did, will make the way for us to share stories about Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

Naomi and Paul | Sydney



As we have stepped into a new role with Baptist Mission Australia, it has been crucial for us to remind ourselves that mission is God's initiative, not ours! Rather than being self-reliant, we need to prayerfully depend on God and ask Him to go before us in all things.

One woman from our church volunteers at a local community support centre. She met a woman there who wanted to practise conversational English. They agreed to meet on a weekly basis and within three weeks there were seven more people who joined them! Since then, Paul has been going along as well and this space has become a place of genuine community and support. There has also been opportunity to share the good news of Jesus, and a couple of people from this group are now regularly studying the Bible with others from the church. Praise God!

God is clearly at work in all of this. Our prayer is that God would use us to inspire and encourage local Baptist churches to be attentive to His leading and to join Him in His mission to redeem people from all nations, both locally and globally.

*What does being an
alongsider mean for
followers of Jesus across
Australia and around
the world?*

alongsiders

“I am learning what it means to be an alongsider in my context on the Silk Road, which is quite different from life in Sydney!

I am part of a fitness group here, and God is teaching me that being an alongsider in this group not only means exercising and encouraging healthy lives with each other, but also celebrating birthdays and babies, being part of a micro loan program and going out for tea and dancing once a month. And sometimes it means eating a second dinner when you bump into your friends on an evening stroll and are invited for dinner and dessert!” - *Mel, Silk Road Area*

“In recent years, there has been significant flooding in our area which has caused pain and major damage to the community. As a church we have tried to practically and relationally respond to our community’s needs.

We want to share God’s love through word and deed. And something I am learning is that being a people of love is less about what we do *to* people or even *for* people, but that it’s something we do *with* people.

Being an alongsider is about noticing where God is at work. Because He is at work! It’s not about trying to contrive, create or force something... but it’s about having our eyes open for where there is Gospel curiosity and being ready to open that door when people want it.” - *Steve, Lismore Baptist Church*

“One of the things that God has been saying to me over many years is to listen well.

The ability to be attentive to both what God is doing and what is going on for people is very powerful. I don’t always get it right, but as I seek to be a peacemaking alongsider, I am seeking to be an attentive listener.”

- *Kath, Mozambique*

“Being an alongsider means journeying together with people as they walk towards God’s Kingdom. At the same time, we are further being formed into Kingdom people too.

A key characteristic of being an alongsider is humility. We don’t pretend that we know it all. We don’t pretend that we have already arrived. But we do set our gaze firmly on the King of the Kingdom and encourage those we are journeying with to do the same.”

- *Mike, South East Asia*

“We reach out into our local community through an op shop and cafe that has been running for 10 years.

That gives us a lot of connections and we have been able to build relationships with people in our local community and come alongside them. It’s encouraging that a number of them have been open to me praying with them or visiting them in their homes.

As a church, we just come alongside people who come amongst us! We don’t need to go out and look for them - God brings them to us and we take the opportunity to build relationships. We make sure to get to know each person and hear something of their story.

And as we do, we look for opportunities to talk about Jesus and to help them know that Jesus is *the* good news. It’s just about faithfully living alongside people.”

- *Tricia, Camden Baptist Church*

“Losing your home due to natural disaster is an incredibly traumatic and destabilising event. Over the last few months I have had the privilege of walking alongside folk in our local communities who have lost their houses as a result of Cyclone Freddy.

It’s been a slow process as we assess each of close to 90 houses and start to assist with materials and labour for the rebuilding process. As we attend to people’s practical needs for shelter, we get to hear their stories of hardship and pain.

Supported by generous supporters in Australia, we are able to provide some hope – both physically and spiritually – to people who have had one of their most basic necessities stripped away from them.

In the midst of their distress though, we also get to hear their stories of incredible resilience and endurance, which is a great encouragement as we journey together.”

- *Gunther, Malawi*



Explore the full suite of Alongsiders resources:
www.baptistmissionaustralia.org/Alongsiders

Photo diary:
An afternoon in a village
outside Chiang Mai



Christine Tan is a Melbourne based photographer who recently spent time in Thailand. Here she shares a photo diary of an afternoon with Muana and a group of local believers.

I arrived in Chiang Mai on a hot and humid summer day in August. Muana, the Thailand team leader picked me up from the airport in his silver truck. After a warm greeting and some introductions, we headed off to visit a new faith community in the village of Sanpatong. It's a 45 minute drive on the outskirts of Thailand's second largest city.

We whizzed past familiar sights along the main shopping strip – a McDonalds and KFC every few minutes, cinemas, shopping centres, outdoor markets and dozens of Buddhist temples. Even Hindu shrines appeared every so often. Eventually traffic thinned out as we turned off the main road and approached the village.

When we arrived at our meeting place, I was greeted first by a smiling yet inquisitive grandmother named Kaew. She quickly offered me fruit from their longan tree and cold water. We waited outside with Muana for others to join us for food and fellowship.

Here in Sanpatong is a fledgling community of the village's first known followers of Jesus. They don't meet in a chapel or travel to the city to gather in a church building. They don't even sing hymns as some typically imagine. Rather they meet around a table in the shade outside of a home. They share a meal, recite Psalms for worship, read the Bible and pray together. It's a simple gathering, but one filled with hope, sincerity and generosity.



Muana spends time with this community regularly. He equips them to live out their faith in a manner that is authentic to who they are as Thais.

They are not asked to conform to any tradition or style of meeting. They don't need to meet in a building if they choose not to.

They can stay engaged in their temple activities where so much of village life occurs, though they are learning to discern the difference between taking an active versus passive role. "We do not extract people but rather encourage them to live out their faith in their community," Muana explained.



Discover more of Christine's work: www.ChristineTanPhotography.com



Muana is discipling Kasem to lead this group of believers. Even with limited education, he eagerly accepts this role. With intention and gentleness, he sat at the head of the table during our meeting.

Kasem was raised as a rice farmer, but is now a self taught builder. While he showed me his rice paddy, storm clouds began to roll in. We swiftly left the fields and crossed to the other side of the street where Kasem showed me his vegetable garden and the fish farm he constructed himself.

When I ask how his life has changed since becoming a follower of Christ, he answered, "I used to worry about all the decisions I have to make. I'd feel anxious and pressured to make the right decision. Now I don't worry any more. I see that God has been protecting me all along and I believe He will continue to provide for my every need."

Our time together was too short. During this half day trip, the most moving thing to me was experiencing the community, hospitality and generosity of the Thai villagers.

I was also stirred by the re-realisation that God is at work in all corners of the globe, calling people to Himself.

Jake



Jake Bennett spent 2022 in Mozambique with his parents and the Baptist Mission Australia team. Here he reflects on the experience and how it changed him.

Hi, my name is Jake, I'm 20 years old and I live in Australia. Last year I went on a mission trip to Mozambique for 11 months. I decided to go at the last minute as it wasn't something I thought I would be interested in. Other countries can be uncomfortable and strange, *and who likes being uncomfortable?*

Not to mention it would be a year away from all my friends and people I knew and trusted. I went to school in a relatively small town so this would be a big adjustment! I ended up going purely because I thought that if perhaps God was calling me to go, it would be bad to ignore Him.

My time in Africa was completely life changing for me. I went with very low expectations and was amazed time and time again with God's love and provision for me. Before I went, I prayed something like, "Alright God, I'm doing this crazy thing for You so please look after me!"

God blessed me with good relationships, not only with the lovely hospitable Baptist Mission Australia family that we stayed with, who went over and above to meet my needs, but also a few local guys my age. He blessed me with amazing food, beautiful scenery, deepened relationship with Him, exposure to a completely new culture and escape from the superficial western world. My previous worldview was turned upside down by the beauty and rawness of a developing country.

I experienced so many blessings that it felt like my cup was always running over! All the things I used to rely on were taken away from me, and I began to realise what I actually value and where I truly find my identity.

But even so, my year wasn't completely without hard times. Many days I would feel lonely and awkward. Sometimes I would feel so exhausted that I couldn't move, and so sick that tears would stream down my face.

No, my trip wasn't without hard times. But those hard times made me so much more grateful for when life is going well and also put into perspective how fragile happiness is.

How much greater it is to your find your joy in the steadfast love of God! Looking back, I can see that before I left for Mozambique my faith in God was weak and now it is firmer than it has ever been.

Coming back to Australia, I've found it difficult to not just let my experience in Mozambique be a distant memory. It's a battle for me to serve God in a country with so many distractions and values that don't align with Jesus. But I feel more confident to share my faith in Jesus now, even if other people around me think differently.

I loved my time in Africa. It changed my life for the better and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Want to explore short-term opportunities for yourself?



Catch up with a mission coach: www.baptistmissionaustralia.org/Coach

“

My time in Africa changed my life & I wouldn't trade it for anything.

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God, help us to be alongsiders.
// Alongsiders who ask questions,
listen & journey with people //
Alongsiders who humbly share the
good news of Jesus // Alongsiders
who are peacemakers & risk-takers
// Alongsiders who retreat in prayer
& listen to the Spirit's leading //
Alongsiders who love the people
God has put in our world & love the
world // Alongsiders who share the
Father's love in active & real ways //
Alongsiders who partner with God &
others – sending & being sent, giving
& receiving // Working together as
partners in God's mission.

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