

A Cord of Three Strands or a Rope of Sand? Moderator's Comments Posted 1 March 2019

By Rev John P Wilson

The proverb says: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Meaning: it's better to work together than alone.

Rope is made by stretching out very long strands of yarn and twisting and braiding them together into larger and stronger form. The result is such tensile strength that it's not easily broken.

I remember visiting Donaghy's Ropeworks, Geelong West, in its heyday, and being especially fascinated by the 500m rope walk. That's ½km of yarn stretched and twisted into magnificent rope. The beauty is that rope is many more times stronger than the sum of its constituent fibre.

The application of Ecclesiastes 4:12 is easily seen: the proverb applies to all relationships and is certainly relevant for members of the body of Christ. Individualism and divisions make for weakness.

Now, let's think wider and use the analogy of rope as a picture of our church. One reason the Presbyterian Church of Australia has strength for gospel work is that it's blessed by the contribution and experience of its constituent strands. Together, the PCA has sufficient tensile strength to withstand opposition endeavouring to pull it apart.

I recall reading how George Whitefield was concerned about what would follow after his time. He bemoaned the state of the next generation of evangelicals surrounding him and the lack of cohesiveness among his own converts. He called them "a rope of sand":

Whitefield met an old friend, Mr John Pool and confronted him in the following manner:

"Well, John, are you still a Wesleyan?"

Pool replied, "Yes, sir, and I thank God that I have the privilege of being in connection with him, and one of his preachers."

*"John," said Whitefield, "you are in the right place. My brother Wesley acted wisely—the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in classes (that developed discipleship), and so preserved the fruits of his labour. **This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.**"*

It's a striking metaphor, isn't it? Rope is used to secure, strengthen, keep safe. The image of a rope of sand is ridiculous. Bishop J C Ryle used this same expression in describing the Anglican churches of the 19th century. I don't think that won him many friends among his fellow clergy.

Let's say that the Presbyterian Church of Australia is like the three-fold cord, that's not easily broken. Some strands of the PCA "rope" met recently, quietly going about the Master's business on your behalf. Let me give you three brief examples of the fruit of some unseen, unsung, quiet labour of the committees of your church last month:

APWM

Bibles for South Sudanese Presbyterian Christians. Through the extraordinary generosity of the members of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, APWM now has **\$184,000** with which to order Bibles for Nuer-speaking South Sudanese Presbyterian Christians in the refugee camps in Ethiopia. Some of this money will be used to buy 'Talking Bibles' for blind refugees. What a thrill it will be for our brothers and sisters in the camps to hold their own Bible in their hands, to have the Word of God available to be freely read. Lives will be changed as our African friends read the Scriptures for themselves, see who Christ Jesus

is and give their lives to him.

Vijai and Suchitra Tagore. APWM increasingly finds itself in the position of training national pastors and leaders who go on to train their own people. In late January 2019, APWM brought Vijai Tagore, with his wife Suchitra and their two children, to Christ College in Sydney so that Vijai could commence studies for his PhD. They are a gifted and godly couple who teach at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehradun, India. When they eventually return to India, lives will be changed as pastors and other Christian workers are equipped to teach the Word of God to those under their care. This is an extraordinary ministry and we are privileged to be involved.

CHURCH & NATION

What a privilege for the PCA to be invited to speak to the Senate Committee exploring the question of amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act.

In what other country would the Presbyterian Church be invited to the parliamentary table to present and defend the Christian view? Last month, Rev Chris Duke, Rev Bruce Meller and Mrs Sheryl Sarkoezy presented the PCA's position with clarity and conviction. They received a fair and attentive hearing. Without going into detail, the major positions put were:

1. that consideration be given, to insert in law a positive affirmation and protection of religious freedom in Australia;
2. if changes are made to the Sex Discrimination Act, they should clearly affirm the liberty of religious organisations, such as schools and colleges, to employ staff who adhere to the doctrine and moral code of the institution.

As a result of the Senate Committee's deliberation, the recommendation is that the proposed amendments (from last year) not be passed, but rather the whole matter be referred to the Australian Law Reform Commission for full and proper consideration.

PresAID

The PresAID committee decided to present to the Church at

Easter three amazing causes:

- God's Word comes alive – the Tetun translation project for our partner church in Timor Leste (EPC);
- Assistance for the Prisons Chaplaincy Dept of the Presbyterian Church in Malawi (CCAP) to provide bore hole, tanks and reticulated water for a prison that has run dry; this is Gospel ministry at grass roots: living water of Jesus along with the fresh water of life;
- Provision of plumbing for the Synod office headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Zambia (CCAP) which is the centre of outreach and gospel ministry for the church.

All the working committees of the church (except College Committee) met in Sydney over four days at the end of January. The three snapshots above are just that: three little cameos of the work that's going on continually on your behalf.

As the Scriptural writer says in Hebrews 11, "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about ..." the National Journal Committee that, under constraint of fiscal responsibility, is moving the journal from print to online; the Christian Education Committee that, from the sale of books, has funded PCWA youth ministry in Perth; and the Public Worship Committee that's preparing liturgies for use in wedding services that are in-line with our theology on marriage.

On top of this, the Reception of Ministers (RoM) Committee receives ministers from other denominations in a way that's consistent with our standards and helpful for the gospel. The Relations With Other Churches (RWOC) Committee relates to other like-minded churches across the world on our behalf.

We could attempt none of this solely as state churches. The union of churches under the banner PCA makes the work stronger and better. A cord of three strands or a rope of sand?.

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of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.*