

## Lending to the Lord Moderator's Comments Posted 1 June 2019

By Rev John P Wilson

Remember Tabitha of Joppa (Acts 9) ... “always doing good and helping the poor”, otherwise known as Dorcas? I found a Dorcas when least expected, among the swirling crowds and cacophony that is India.

Let the reader understand, it's always noisy and chaotic travelling in India, but even so this day was taxing. From a 5am rise, seven hours on a continual stop-start “express” train from Delhi to the body-crush and jostling of human madness at the station's exit in 40-degree heat. Welcome to Dehradun!

Then after partially climbing toward Mussoorie, along bending narrow streets, we arrived at a haven of calm, a respite, a place of refuge and quiet – Chhaya Café. I wasn't expecting to find such a sweet memento of the Presbyterian Church of Australia along this narrow windy road in the northern hills of India. Disarmingly small from the outside, it opens to reveal one of God's treasures. There on the café wall, in pride of place: a marvellous hand-made wall hanging bearing the name and logo of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

For this weary traveller, representing the PCA far from home, the quilted treasure refreshed and encouraged me. The wall hanging is a constant reminder of the prayers and partnership of Presbyterian women in Queensland who for years supported this gospel ministry. And that's not even mentioning the refreshment of delicious pot pie, pasta, salad and iced tea.

Chhaya Café (*Chhaya*, Hindi for “shade” or “protection”) is both a beautiful place to rest with its charming views across the valley and a place with a beautiful story. It's the result of the vision, godly desires and drive of our dear friend Annamma Ebenezer, wife of the Principal of Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Annamma is not only the owner of this café, but she also runs within its premises a Dorcas-style gospel ministry under the banner of the Womens Development Society of India. She leads a group of women who work with her in the centre to train to bake, tailor, print and quilt. It's designed to assist the poor of India, particularly women, to help themselves by learning how to support their families by making and selling quality craft products.

Through this venture, Annamma promotes the talents of these very needy women, builds up their sense of worth, shares the gospel of Christ and gives them a new start in life. It's staggering to learn that over the last 20 years, she estimates that she's trained more than 800 women.

This is Dorcas all over again, always doing good and helping the poor. The kindness of the Ebenezer family, the personal investment of their own funds, the prayerful vision and drive of Annamma, is an inspiration. It's like a cup of refreshing water to a weary soul – good news from a distant land. And I'm pleased to see it has been supported by the Australian church.

My mind went to an intriguing Proverb that says:

*“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.”*

**Proverbs 19:17 (NIV 2011)**

It's not immediately obvious how to understand this biblical proverb – how God becomes our debtor. But I think I was inclined towards an understanding by this Dorcas-like gospel work of Chhaya Café, Dehradun. When we share our worldly goods with those who are in need, by the very fact that we're

no longer storing things up for ourselves, we become more dependent on the Lord and we are more ready to trust God for daily provisions. When we are less reliant on our own safety net, we learn to trust God in the breach.

In giving to the poor it's as if we have lent to the Lord, and in this way, God is always true to his word and "must" provide for our needs.

Think of it this way: remember when you paused and hesitated to give to the poor? Remember thinking: "If I give, it'll kill this week's budget and I'll suffer loss"? I think Proverbs 19:17 lifts our eyes heaven-ward and changes our perspective. Trusting God and not relying on my own insight means that there really is no big risk in giving to the needy, because I know how much God loves to be trusted. In fact, God loves to be trusted so much that he always blesses those who trust him with a life more fulfilling than if they hadn't trusted him.

That's what I've learned afresh: there's really no big risk in my giving to the needy. The ministry of the gospel at Chhaya Café Dehradun speaks to this principle.

John Piper explains:

*"Being kind to the poor is an act of trusting God to take care of us ... so while we don't really lend God anything in being kind to the poor, we do put ourselves in a situation where God must bless us — if we have done our kindness out of reliance on the mercy of God to take care of us."*

But it doesn't stop there at the Café. Profits from sales, apart from re-stocking material, are loaned to the Lord in the

form of scholarships for women who enrol in Bible training at Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS). Women who otherwise could never manage to find tuition fees are now preparing themselves for gospel ministry.

PTS is another place where the support and presence of the PCA is treasured. At their recent 50th anniversary celebrations, the PCA was sincerely thanked. The PTS community is profoundly grateful for the love and prayers of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. It's as if they're amazed that we would consider and remember them – a small Bible-teaching pastor-training college in northern India.

So, as a prompt for our prayers: remember that we have a partner church in this part of the world – Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) and a beloved sister college – Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS).

And it doesn't stop there at PTS. Risk-free giving and trusting God in the breach is for us here in this land of plenty. I know a Presbyterian Church in Melbourne that's been practising this sort of "faith promise" generous giving for fifty years, and the Lord has (and is) graciously blessing the people and growing the kingdom in their midst. What about you? "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done."

***Rev John Wilson is the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.***