

Stepping Out

By Bryan & Heather McClelland

“Crunch, crunch, crunch, they ate my lunch!” This song has become a favourite with kids in our area. It also makes us think about the risk that boy took when he gave up his lunch so that Jesus might feed the crowd out there in the wilderness. (John 6:9). He might have missed out entirely. In contrast to his five loaves and small fish, the crowd’s hunger must have seemed overwhelming.

At Woolloomooloo Baptist Fellowship (WBF), in inner city Sydney, it would be easy to feel overwhelmed by the needs of those marginalised by our society.

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Are we really
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Will we be let down
and disappointed?
Will our hospitality
be abused?**

Sometimes society decides that certain people belong in the “too hard” basket such as people with acute mental illness and those who sleep rough or are addicted. And those who struggle with severe relational or emotional problems are only too ready to believe society’s verdict. Their hearts tell them they are not even equal to others. They certainly don’t recognise how much they have to offer to others.

Our small worshipping community embraces such people, so that their disbelief in themselves can be turned around. They receive God’s love expressed through his people, and discover, in turn, the gifts he has

given them to offer. Worship is bracketed between street breakfast and morning tea, often followed by picnics, discussion meals, parties, meals in homes and mutual support friendships. It is open at the edges.

This is the risk. Are we really achieving anything? Will we be let down and disappointed? Will our hospitality be abused? The truth is that at our core we are challenged and inspired intellectually, and relationally, by those who manage severe mental illness with courage. We are blessed by some who have overcome addiction, and others, even the same ones, who feel their addictions have yet again overcome them. In mutual efforts at authentic relationships all of us are encouraged to grow in honesty, accountability, tough love and acceptance. Did Jesus give up on Peter because he failed him?



Some in WBF have never seen such a degree of suffering and marginalisation in their lives before. Yet Jesus’ teaching disturbs them into taking risks as they identify with those who have. Some have relocated to the inner city, or they go onto the streets from time to time to sleep rough, and to eat at food vans with those who have no-where else to go.

Building community according to Jesus’ values is not orderly or predictable, in fact it is sometimes seriously chaotic and worship often

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reflects this. Yet it is also surprising. Who would have expected Japanese students to explore HopeStreet’s community development projects as a model for something similar in Japan, and to become integrated into church life? We have had Muslims at picnics and Christmas dinners, and serving sandwiches with us to homeless people at the Sunday breakfast. Who would expect a Chinese student to join us with the express desire of exploring Christianity?

This community is blurred at the edges. Fringes extend out to include Woolloomooloo’s children through tennis, or Scripture and through counselling. It includes women, and transsexuals, in the sex industry, adult children of sex workers, gay men, some living with HIV Aids, and many seeking to recover from addictions, trauma, and grief.

Central to the church is its relation to the variety of ministries HopeStreet is involved in, addressing issues such as homelessness, and unemployment, offering hope to sex workers or gamblers, and community development to a lower socio-economic area of our city. These ministries are owned by the church community, and often provide entry points into the church.

Each day WBF takes risks, but we keep in mind that little boy who gave up his lunch and experienced God’s provision on a scale beyond imagining.

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