Melbourne Campus Opening

Over the last few weeks a vast amount of work has been done to prepare our new Melbourne campus for classes this year. A formal opening ceremony will take place on 16 February, and if you are interested in seeing our new campus there is a **Public Open Day on Saturday 18 February**, 1.00pm to 4.00pm. You are welcome to visit us at Level 3, 221 Queen St, during that time to have a look at the facilities and enjoy afternoon tea with us.

We look forward to welcoming new and continuing students the following week, with classes beginning on 21 February. We are pleased to have several new ministry students both from Australia and New Zealand, as well as other students joining us for part-time or full-time study, both online and on campus.

We earnestly desire your prayers as we complete preparations for the year ahead. There is still much to be done, but we are excited by our new location and new opportunities. Please pray
that the Lord will enable everything to be ready on time and that he will use the RTC for his
glory and for the blessing of many people.

RTC News

As well as the new Melbourne campus, we have seen steady progress on the new Child Care
Centre being built on our property in Geelong. After extensive earthworks the slab has now
been laid.

Dr Phillip Scheepers is away for a week in Myanmar, visiting our sister college there – the RTC
Myanmar. He is taking training seminars and also speaking at their graduation ceremony.

Dr Martin Williams is back to teaching this semester after a very profitable period of study leave.
Among a range of pursuits, he began to write a commentary on Ephesians that he will continue
to work on over the next few years. This promises to be a great resource for preachers.

Dr Murray Capill, has been speaking at a number of churches and events in Melbourne over the
last few months. Next week he will be speaking at The Gospel Coalition Australia Victoria event
entitled *Preach the Word*. You can check out or register for the event here:

Towards the end of last year the RTC Board proposed a number of changes to the Constitution
to support the College’s new model. The most significant change was designed to make the
Board more reflective of the membership as a whole and based more on Director competence
than regional representation. Other changes were designed to clarify aspects of payment to
directors for services provided, faculty appointments and the use of new technologies. These
changes have now received overwhelming support from the members and have been
implemented. We thank the members for their support of the Board and trust that these
changes will enhance the ministry the College under the new model.

2017 Study Options

It is not too late to sign up for study this semester… but you’ll need to act quickly!

- Our on campus courses are held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. To find out
what is on, check out our website or contact our registrar, Paul Lucas
(registrar@rtc.edu.au).

- If you live somewhere in Melbourne, you could take the after-work class we are offering.
On Tuesday evenings, from 5.45pm–7.45pm you can study *Old Testament Foundations* –
a course that gives an overview of the first half of the Old Testament.
There is a unique opportunity to learn Biblical Greek this year no matter where you live. Classes are being live-streamed on Wednesdays.

Distance subjects include a course on Jesus and the Gospels, and a survey of Church History from 1550 to Modern Times.

There is also a one-week intensive on Christian Worship in May, with preliminary material online in March.

For more information, contact the RTC today.

**Book Recommendation**

*by Dr. Murray Capill*

The statistics around ministerial burnout are shocking, but it is not just pastors and church leaders who burn out – so too do hard–working, committed church members. As soon as you start to juggle multiple responsibilities at work, home and church, there is the risk that sooner or later your body says, enough!

Christopher Ask addresses this reality in a wonderfully clear, simple way in his little book, *Zeal Without Burnout* (the Good Book Company, 2016). He in no way advocates a life of ease. We are to be zealous for the work of the Lord and that rightly involves sacrifice. But he reminds us that we are also dust – frail, fragile people who need to find out how to live with "sustainable sacrifice." He argues that there is a difference between sacrifice and burnout, and while the former is called for, the latter is not.

Most of the book is given to seven keys to striking the right balance. They include very fundamental issues like getting enough sleep, cultivating friendships and experiencing inward renewal. The keys are interspersed with stories from the coal face of Christian life and ministry – men and women who have experienced burnout while serving the Lord. The stories bring a sense of reality and of hope to this somber theme.

Here is a short book full of common sense, addressing an issue we cannot afford to ignore. As Ash says, “none of us thinks we are on the path to burnout until we are nearly burnt out.” He vouches for that personally and I can too. So maybe it would be smart to read and implement some of these ideas before you become another Christian worker casualty.

**Ministry Spot: Burnout**

*by Dr. Murray Capill*

There are many Christians who are in no risk of burnout whatsoever. They don’t overly invest themselves in the life of the church or other people, they are not given to being at every meeting or event that is put on, they seldom volunteer and they don’t go out of their way to take on extra responsibility. To be honest, they’re not that committed.

But for the host of Christians who are not like that, the Christian life can at times seem like too much. There are so many needs, responsibilities, opportunities, burdens and concerns that they may feel constantly overwhelmed by all that should be done. They know that Christ gave his all for us, laying down his life in our place, and we are also called to live sacrificially, readily giving,
serving, loving and caring. But the work is never done and so it is hard to take time out, to rest or to say “no.”

If, however, we push ourselves endlessly, living with sustained stress and pressure, and inadequate times of refreshment and reprieve, our energy reserves will become depleted. We may be able to sustain the pace for a length of time, maybe even years or decades, but over time we become susceptible to one or more of the three classic hallmarks of burnout: a sense of being emotionally drained and exhausted; a sense of ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction with what we are doing; and a sense of distance and disconnection in relationships. Along with these symptoms of burnout we may also experience feelings of isolation, frustration, anger, guilt, disillusionment, physical exhaustion, sleeplessness, lethargy, depression or anxiety.

It is also possible that even when we are still performing well emotionally and mentally, our body is at the end of the road. To our surprise it suddenly refuses to go any further and we fall in a heap physically. We succumb to chronic fatigue, to panic attacks, to heart problems, or other health issues.

The concept of self-care or sustainable sacrifice is not to be rooted in selfishness but in recognition of the fact that we are human, not divine.

Books that address the issue of burnout in ministry frequently talk about the importance of self-care, though I prefer Christopher Ash’s term, “sustainable sacrifice”. Both concepts largely focus on what we as individuals must do to avoid burnout, but in addition to that, we need also to consider the culture of our churches. Sometimes it is not our unhealthy habits that kill us, but the system that we are in. If a church culture is laden with unrealistic expectations or unhelpful structures, then we may well see a church burning its best people out, despite those people doing all they can to avoid it.

Here, then, I will outline some critical strategies for self-care or sustainable sacrifice, and next month I will take up the impact of church (or organisational) culture.

The concept of self-care or sustainable sacrifice is not to be rooted in selfishness but in recognition of the fact that we are human, not divine. As human beings we are frail and fragile, formed from the dust of the earth, subject to the effects of the fall and, because of the judgment of God, destined to die (unless Jesus should return before then). As flesh and blood, we cannot be everywhere (we’re not omnipresent), we can’t do everything (we’re not omnipotent) and we don’t know everything (we’re not omniscient). So any ministry we engage in is limited by our humanity.

What does that mean in practice?

1. It means we need to look after our bodies.

We need to allow adequate time for sleep, setting morning and evening routines that allow us time to unwind and to sleep well. We need to eat healthily so that our body is fuelled to perform well. We also need to exercise so as to stay reasonably fit for service.

Not only do we need regular patterns of sleep, exercise and a healthy diet, but we also need to compensate for times of heightened stress. If we have had a particularly demanding week (or month), a highly stressful pastoral situation, or circumstances that have taken a heavy emotional toll on us, we need to allow additional time for recovery afterwards.

The difficulty with sleep, healthy eating and exercise is that it takes time. We may well feel guilty giving it time because we could be serving, leading, preaching, teaching, reading, witnessing or doing a hundred other important things. But God has given us a body to care for, and to allocate time each day and each week to looking after this earthly tent is not selfishness but
stewardship.

2. It means saying “no”.

For many of us “no” is an incredibly hard little word to master. Each thing we are asked to do seems so worthwhile and there is no one else to do it. So we say “yes”. Ironically, the more burdened we become the harder it is to say “no” because “no” takes effort. It’s easier to say yes than to delegate it to someone else, or to explain why we can’t, or to see something good lapse for want of people to do it.

Behind the tendency to take on too much, however, can lie the need to be needed, or the pride of being the most committed and hard-working person around, or the arrogance of thinking we are the best for the job, or the temptation to be a people pleaser, or the folly of thinking that we are needed to save the day.

If you are notoriously bad at saying no to other people, find people who can help you say it. Talk over commitments with them before taking them on. Sit on requests for a week or so and see how that can reduce the sense of urgency. And above all, commit each decision to God, seeking his wisdom as to whether this is something you should do or not.

3. It means enjoying time with God, time with people and time alone.

If we are to thrive in Christian service and ministry, we need to find ways of being refreshed in our souls. The foremost way is through time with God. We must not only minister God’s Word to others but also to ourselves. We need time to think and meditate. We need to pray, casting our burdens on him because he cares for us, and thanking him for his kindness and grace. Ultimately, God alone can restore our souls, refresh our hearts, lift our burdens, and carry our sorrows.

But as with sleeping and exercising, this takes time and our tendency may be to short-change time with God because there is so much to be done. We then feel bad about that and so add guilt to stress. Perhaps the key to breaking the cycle is to see time with God not as a duty, or one more thing to fit into the day, but a blessing, a reprieve from the rush of work and demands of people, as we sit quietly for a little while to talk to God and listen to him.

In his grace, God refreshes us not only through his Word, but also through people and through the good things of life. We need to set ministry boundaries so that we can spend time with those we love – with our marriage partner, our children, our wider family and good friends. If the only people contact we have is with people we are ministering to, we will become worn out. We need time with people where we just enjoy each other’s company.

We also need to enjoy the good gifts of our Father in heaven. It is not ungodly to enjoy sport or recreation, music or the arts, the bush or the sea. We need to find those things that bring refreshment, so that we are recharged to keep serving God and his people.

There can be no “one-size-fits-all” formula for how to build these things into life. Our capacities, personalities, interests and opportunities vary enormously. But whatever our situation, we must balance hard work, sacrifice and diligent commitment with those things that make such service sustainable and enjoyable.