



BCSA PARTNERSHIP DINNER 2022

SEEKING NEW SUPPORTERS FOR STRATEGIC GOSPEL MINISTRY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Partnership Dinner Address 2022

Rev Dr Tim Patrick, Principal

Let me add my welcome to you tonight and thank you for coming along to learn more about the ministry of Bible College SA. As I hope you'll be able to see, this is a ministry of, and for, our city and state that has had a quiet but significant impact over its long history, and it is a ministry that we believe has a critical strategic importance for the future.

The College was first established in 1924, and from that time onwards it has sent out graduates to all kinds of Kingdom ministries. Many have gone from us to serve overseas as missionaries—some in highly sensitive locations—many have become pastors and staff of churches both locally and further afield, many have given themselves to chaplaincy work, many have become university campus evangelists, and many others have served in many other ways too. In recent times, two of our graduates have gone to Chile to teach in another Bible college, joining another of our graduates who has been there for some forty years. Another recent grad is labouring to translate the Scriptures for a people group who have never had them in their own language, and one has gone to a country that we can't even name publicly because of the sensitivity around proclaiming Christ there. We also have a graduate working in the local office of a mission agency, helping those of us back home support those out in the field.

One recent graduate is leading the outreach and discipleship program at Flinders University, and others are part of the team doing the same work at Adelaide Uni and Uni SA, ministering to both Australian and international students. Another of our graduates is principal of a local Christian school, and some are chaplains at quite large denominational schools. One graduate is now serving as the Director of Ministries—that is, the overall leader—of the Baptist Churches of South Australia, and others are pastors in local baptist churches. We also have many recent graduates serving in Anglican, Uniting, and Acts 29 churches, as well as a large range of independent local churches and church networks. Some of these are senior pastors, other are associate pastors, and others have focussed roles like working with families, children, or youth. In addition to these, over the past few years, we have also been training up pastors of a number of the different non-English speaking churches that we now have across our city. I could go on and on, but hopefully it is already clear that our graduates are serving in a significant breath of gospel ministries both around Adelaide and South Australia, and right around the world too.

Even though this is the case, many faithful and passionate believers in South Australia don't really know much about the College. That is probably because we are what I like to call 'the ministry behind the ministries'. This means that most people do not directly experience what we do every day, even as they do see our graduates in action. We are not there on Sunday leading your church or preaching your sermons. We are not planting new churches to reach out and minister to the countless unchurched people of our city. We are not out on the overseas mission field sending updates about our work among cultures that have hardly any exposure to the gospel. We are not gathering together the denominational families for common purpose and fellowship. We are not daily sharing the gospel with young people who are searching for truth and meaning in their lives. But our graduates are doing all of these things all of the time—and we stand behind them as 'the ministry behind the ministries'.



Another way to think about this is to imagine what it would be like if our College did not exist, or was not able to flourish in its work. Imagine all of the overseas missions that would not happen. Imagine the number of new churches that would not be planted. Imagine the number of churches that would not have a pastor, or faithful and passionate staff teams. To a degree, as the College goes, so goes the Christian ministry of the city. We are not always seen but, under God, we play a significant role in the gospel ecosystem and many of us would really feel the impact of our ministry by its absence.

Of course, if there were no Bible College SA, we could always look to other places to provide for our ministry needs; we could continually get on the phone to Sydney or Melbourne—or overseas—every time we needed a new pastor or church worker or member of a ministry staff team, but that would be disheartening for several reasons. As much as we are thankful for the support of our interstate brothers and sisters, we do not want to be dependent on them this way. In God's kindness, the Christian community in South Australia is big enough and mature enough to raise up and train its own leadership, and then to even export them to parts of the world that truly are gospel-poor. We do not want to be a drain on the resources of other places, we want to be contributors. We also need South Australians trained up in South Australia for ministry in South Australia. This is because our state is not the same as other states; we have our own culture and history and networks, and while we have been blessed by many people coming to serve us from other places, it is our own who most understand this place, and therefore who can be most effective in connecting with it and connecting it with the good news of Jesus. Our College has been preparing leaders for our state and beyond for nearly 100 years, and it is our purpose to continue to do that for more years and generations to come, or until the Lord returns.

Thanks to God, today, Bible College SA is well placed to fulfil its ongoing stated purpose of 'preparing the next generations of gospel workers for Adelaide, South Australia, and beyond through the integrated teaching of Bible, theology, and ministry at the highest standards'. Around 30 years ago, we affiliated with the Australian College of Theology, the oldest and largest provider of theological education in the country. Through them, we have governmental accreditation to offer tertiary studies from Certificate level, through to Diplomas, Bachelors degrees, Masters degrees, and even PhDs. That is, we offer all that a university does, except in the areas of Bible, theology, and Christian ministry. The reason that we are not just a department of a university is that it is not actually possible to teach these things in Australian universities which are secular by constitution. But while the government wants to maintain this separation of church and state, they do allow for what are called other Higher Education Providers to exist in parallel with the university sector, teaching at the same level, but with their own faith convictions prioritised. To maintain that level of accreditation, we must operate at university levels—and so all of the College's full-time faculty are PhD qualified, indeed with two of them having taken their doctorates from the University of Cambridge in the UK—and several of us are actively involved in publishing our work internationally. These kinds of standards not only mean that we are more than meeting what is required of university level education, but we are meeting our own mandate to train local students to the very highest possible standards. In fact, over the past decade or so, we have seen our average, externally moderated grades rise by 7% taking us from a little below the average for Bible colleges in our national consortium to solidly above.

In the same time period we have also worked hard to lift every part of the College to the highest levels. We have not only considerably raised the standard in our lecture rooms, but we have also developed and introduced our nation-leading Ministry Formation Program which ensures that our students are not only having their heads filled with knowledge, but are also learning so many of the practical and pastoral skills needed to be effective in frontline ministry today. We are actually blessed with to have been able to build up a faculty who are not only academically excellent, but who also have decades of real-world experience working in churches and other Christian ministries.



Drawing on that rich, personal experience—and occasionally bringing in key people from outside too—our students are not only taught the Bible and theology, they also learn about everything from managing their work diaries, to dealing with grief, to understanding local subcultures, to helping people with addictions, and more. There is no other College in Adelaide that does all that we do with the same convictions or the same focus.

The past few years have also seen us rewrite our constitution, create a new membership, and establish a full suite of governance policies and procedures. We have improved and increased our communications and public profile. We have set up entire new IT systems. We have developed our library collection, including our access to digital resources. We have built our wider staff team and grown our academic support for students. And we have substantially built our engagement and partnerships with local churches and other ministries. There is always more to be done and so we are not in any way taking it easy now but, humanly speaking, we feel we are in a strong position to continue our ministry for and through those next generations who we hope will come to train with us.

And we would love to have more and more students come to study, not because we want to brag about our size or numbers or anything like that. But because we want to keep sending well-formed, faithful, and competent graduates out to serve in Adelaide and in many other places too. And the need for these graduates is now greater than it ever has been. You will know that the percentage of people in Australia who identify as Christian is dropping with every census. The latest data show that number is now below 50%. And, of course, the number of people who actually have a lively Christian faith is significantly lower than this. Our estimates are that the number who currently attend weekly protestant churches in South Australia is less than 50,000—that's somewhere around just two percent of our population, the lowest it has ever been. And by my rough calculations, for every five people who are working in Christian ministry today, but who will retire by 2040, we need six to replace them, just to keep up with population growth—and we need more than six to replace them if we actually want to grow the relative reach of our gospel ministries in the next generations. That is a lot of people we need to see encouraged into ministry, given the deep formation they're going to need for the changing world we're living in, and then heading out as sheep for the shepherds and labourers for the harvest.

As daunting as that is, I'm excited that we have the chance to be part of it. Wouldn't it be incredible to see more solid graduates of Bible College SA receiving the mantle of our current generation of pastors and church workers and other ministry workers, and continuing to faithfully teach the Scriptures and nurture God's people in the faith? Wouldn't it be great to see our future graduates planting dozens of new churches too? It would be exciting to see many of them reaching out to the ever-sprawling suburbs of Adelaide with the good news of Jesus over the decades ahead. It would be great for them to head out to regional and rural South Australia to serve Christ in those places. And we want more of them to head overseas too, to those places where it can be tough to proclaim Christ, but where many people are so open to his good news. We want our hospitals, our military, our police force, our schools and even our sporting clubs to have the care and support of more and more clear minded and soft hearted chaplains. We want our young people to be engaged by a new generation of preachers, teachers, pastors, and ambassadors of Christ as they grow up in an ever more complex and fragile world.

Bible College SA has been preparing men and women to serve in these ways for 98 years now, and God has used our graduates at the front edge of his purposes over that time. Under God, we want to continue preparing many more of them to do much more of this so that the life and ministry of the Christ's kingdom grows and thrives into the future, right across our city, state, and beyond. All for his greater and his ongoing glory.

Thank you.