

# Nathan Bettcher

## Report on CRC SA Scholarship Trip

### July 2017

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#### INTRODUCTION

I had a fascinating 4 weeks of vastly different ministry experiences, mostly related to worship practices in churches. It was personally and professionally uplifting.

I started with 40 degree heat in Redding California, where I attended **Bethel's Worship U Conference** for a week. This was with a group of our CRC students and a few of our college staff.

I then went to **London** and **Oxford** for a week where I attended two academic conferences on the topic of worship.

My next stop was sunny **Scotland**, where I enjoyed some site seeing and also ministered at a church called The Bridge.

The last stop was in **Halifax**, Northern England, where I met with Pastor John Warren who has planted two churches and just started a third. Although I was there to minister to him and his church, I feel I gained just as much.

Finally, in the week after I returned home, I welcomed Reverend **Sam Allberry** to Adelaide who helped train pastors and leaders on the topic of same-sex attraction and launch a new ministry group called 'Living Hope SA'.

It was an outstanding time (apart from being separated from my luggage for a few days in London!). As part of this report, I've made comments against the anticipated outcomes as listed in my application – along with highlights of new learning and ideas that I think will be helpful.

I want to again thank the State for assisting in making this trip possible. It's motivated me in a range of areas with ministry initiatives for the future.

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## PROJECT / STUDY REPORT

### 1. WORSHIP U CONFERENCE, BETHEL CHURCH, Redding California

- **Dates:** July 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2017 (Leaving Adelaide on July 8<sup>th</sup>)
- **Description:** Attending the Worship U Conference at Bethel Church in LA with CRC College Students.
- **Outcomes:**

#### *1.1 Learn from current global practitioners regarding worship*

In the week that I was at Bethel, I was greatly encouraged by their team who did most of the sharing. In addition they had invited **Kari Jobe and Tim Hughes** as world renowned worship leaders to also share out of their experience. **Chris Quilala** from Jesus Culture was also there, however he is a former Bethel member.

I found some of the topics to be very refreshing and original. One speaker (**Amanda Cook**) spoke about issues like recognising the strengths and weaknesses of creative people, whether they are introverts or extroverts by nature. She spoke about aligning the heart and the mind so that we're not just all about feelings or thoughts, but that we know the strength of using both in the creative process. I found this refreshing as you don't often hear these kind of discussions at a creative conference.

I have to say **the women speakers** impressed me more than most of the men. They had a real passion for what they do and they share from some pretty amazing experiences in worship. In fact none of the speakers from Bethel are that great in terms of public speaking skills. The strength of their presentation is an ability to minister in the spirit and share from the heart.

The **culture** here is quite interesting – very strong. They have a way of talking which seems to be common amongst the team. I spoke with **Rebekah Van Tinterin** (Bill Osborne's daughter) who attends Bethel and plays violin on the music team. She gave me a bit of insight into their team culture and how they've developed over recent years.

I was personally challenged about being creative, especially in the area of song writing and musicianship. I love to song write but have rarely made time for it in recent years. I would love to see a new wave of song writing in the CRC, and be instrumental in encouraging people to do so.

**The big learning point here was learning to be sensitive to the spirit in the creative process for worship.**

### *1.2 Facilitate discussion with CRC students to help consolidate their learning experience.*

This happened at many points during the week with our current students. There was a great sense of fellowship amongst the group and it was good to see many talking together about what they had learned throughout the day.

I used opportunities on the breaks and during meal times to talk with individuals about what they were learning and also how that might apply to their own local contexts in coming back home again. I was pleased that the students have a good sense of who they are, what their own churches are like, and that they don't want to imitate Bethel but learn the best from them and apply that in their own context. So I felt these were positive conversations with the students.

I will continue to have contact with students as they finish up their unit of study on Worship.

### *1.3 Apply new learning into the Worship Stream of the CRC Diploma for 2018*

Through visiting Bethel and then attending the conferences in the UK, I've picked up some new resources and thoughts which I will be integrating into a re-write of the Worship course for next year. This needs to be done by the end of August for ACOM, which is good because it will be fresh in my mind. A list of resources purchased during this trip can be found later in this report.

### *1.4 Disseminate learning to CRC Churches via other means where possible (such as conference presentations, email correspondence, written report)*

I would like to do something before/after/during **State Conference** next year to share some of my thoughts and insights from my trip in a casual format for those interested. I'll also make a cut-down written version of this report available to pastors and leaders.

However, **I'm inspired to start a regular gathering for CRC churches where we teach on worship and cultivate the expression of that in our churches.**

Attending other churches like Bethel and Hillsong is great, but if we want to strengthen the culture of worship in our churches then we need to do that through gathering together in some way. I'm still thinking about what this might look like and how it might work, but I'm convinced of the rightness of this.

## 2. INTEGRATING THEOLOGY & CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP DAY CONFERENCE, LONDON SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

- **Dates:** July 17<sup>th</sup>
- **Description:** This is a one day conference ahead of the Oxford Conference (see point 3 of this itinerary).
- **Outcomes:**
  - 2.1 *Share findings from my PhD research on method for analysing Theology in congregational songs.*

It was a privilege to share at this one-day conference, attended by approx. 100 academics and church practitioners. I presented a paper that I had previously delivered at another conference titled “All the Earth Let us Sing: Narrative Theology and Transnational Routes of Hillsong’s Congregational Songs.” This has received good feedback at previous conferences, and again sparked some interesting discussion at this event.

The only negative aspect of this conference was, having only arrived in London the night before, my luggage did not arrive with me! Hence, I had to present in the clothes I had with me – which won the sympathy of the delegates.

### 2.2 *Network with other presenters to learn from their new methods*

Even though this was a one-day event, I made a couple of connections which I think will be of future benefit.

Firstly was the organiser of the event, **Jeremy Perigo**. Jeremy runs courses on worship at the school. He has a charismatic background, yet has significant interdenominational connections across various networks. I had some good conversations with him both here and during the week at Oxford. I’m keen to keep in touch with him as an academic reference.

I also met **Daniel Thornton**, who is an Aussie teaching with Alpha Crucis College in Sydney. Daniel is a credentialed minister in the ACC. His parents attended Bible College at Sturt Street under Pastor Harris in the 1970’s, so Daniel has fond childhood memories of the CRC and was well acquainted with the Chants and Silverbacks when I mentioned them. Daniel’s research areas are very close to mine and he would be an excellent contact to stay in touch with, particularly if we were considering a worship conference of some sort.

Finally, a gentleman by the name of **Graham Twelftree** introduced himself to me as one of the other presenters that day. He was a former student of Adelaide University, had been a Uniting Church minister in SA at some point, and I believe was involved in the early days of Tabor – so he knew Bill Vasilakis as soon as I mentioned his name. Graham now lives in London and teaches at the School of Theology. It amuses me greatly to travel half way around the world to meet people who know of our CRC Churches and Pastors!

### *2.3 Apply learning into the Worship Stream of the CRC Diploma for 2018*

Probably not as much from this short conference, although there was one book “*Lovin’ On Jesus: The Concise History of Contemporary Worship*” by **Dr’s Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim**. I’ve purchased this in eBook form, and will certainly be integrating it with our worship course for next year.

### *2.4 Disseminate learning to CRC Churches via other means where possible (such as conference presentations, email correspondence, written report)*

See comments at 1.4

### 3. CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONAL MUSIC CONFERENCE, OXFORD

- **Dates:** July 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>
- **Description:** Academic conference of various researchers and practitioners from around the world who all study congregational music in their field.
- **Outcomes:**

#### *3.1 Share findings from my PhD research on method for analysing Theology in congregational songs.*

It was wonderful to attend this conference again in the picturesque countryside of Cuddesdon. Ripon College is a beautiful seminary, though somewhat liberal in its theology. However, they don't host the conference, rather they just offer their facility for this conference which attracts around 90-100 academics from various fields.

I presented a slightly different paper at this conference, with new material that I've recently been working on for my thesis. SO the content was a little raw and unpolished. However this was helpful as I received constructive feedback on my paper. It was also a stroke of luck that the other two presenters in my session, were able to build on what I shared and therefore we had some very interesting discussion across the presentations, which doesn't always happen.

#### *3.2 Network with other presenters to learn from their new methods*

I really appreciated the relaxed and informal conversation opportunities that aren't normally possible at academic conferences. I was able to talk further with Daniel Thornton, Jeremy Perigo and Lester Ruth who I met at the London School of Theology.

I also met **Marcell Seuernagel** who presented in the same session as I did. Our papers really complimented each others and there was good discussion that flowed from this.

The conference organisers are also happy to sit for an hour or so and have in depth conversations, which is extremely helpful. Two in particular, **Tom Wagner** and **Monique Ingalls**, have been formative as I read their materials in the early stages of my research. They are both pioneers in the area of researching Congregational Music. I believe Monique is a church practioner, but Tom declares himself to be an aethiest – although in my conversations with him, I suspect he is on a journey of faith.

Finally it was good reconnect with a lovely Australian lady **Robin Ryan**. I met Robin at the CCM Conference in 2013 and we have had a few connections since then. Robin supervised Mark Evans (another CCM pioneer) in his PhD research several years ago and has been a great supporter of seeing ruther study done in this area. Robin's research interests are mainly to do with indigenous congregational music

### *3.3 Apply learning into the Worship Stream of the CRC Diploma for 2018*

Over the last few years, conference organisers have started producing a series of related books which have become the cutting edge research into congregational music. One is called "*Congregational Music, Conflict and Community*." written by Jonathan Dueck. Another is "*Contemporary Worship Music and Everday Musical Lives*" by Mark Porter (who is another conference organiser). I have include chapters from both these books into the worship course for next year.

### *3.4 Disseminate learning to CRC Churches via other means where possible (such as conference presentations, email correspondence, written report)*

See 1.4

## **4. CHURCH VISITS AND INTERVIEWS**

- **Dates:** Various
- **Description:** This list varies from the original submission as my itinerary changed
- **Proposed Itinerary:**
  - Bethel Church LA – July 9<sup>th</sup>
  - Oxford Church Tours – July 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>
  - The Bridge – Ardrossan, Scotland July 23<sup>rd</sup>
  - Northern Lights – CRC Church in Halifax UK July 30<sup>th</sup>
  - Life Church, Bradford – July 30<sup>th</sup>

- **Outcomes**

#### *4.1 Note activity in services and information from interviews*

##### **Bethel**

I attended the 1pm service that Bethel runs (They have four services on a Sunday – 9am, 11am, 1pm, 6pm) I took lots of notes and made lots of observations. Their services didn't differ a great deal from what we do at Seaton. This is for purely practical reasons: when you're doing multiple services you have to keep things to time so they had to be fairly structured in that sense.

In talking with Rebekah Van Tinterin, it was clear that Bethel foster a creative culture. In fact, that is why they started the Worship U Conference many years ago.

They have a very high level of flexibility in their musicianship. For example, they will sometimes have a string quartet accompany the worship band, but they don't use written arrangements and occasionally change the key at short notice so the strings just have to follow! I wouldn't have known this if Bek didn't point it out.

They also foster a culture of song writing. Bethel have several materials designed to facilitate and guide song writers, which are very good quality resources. We are going to use one with a group of our song writers next year at Seaton.

#### **Oxford Churches** (No interviews)

There were no additional interviews while at Oxford. However one afternoon there was a tour of Cathedrals which was quite interesting looking at the various inspirational spaces designed for worshipping.

#### **The Bridge** (Bernie, Nan and David MacLaughlin)

Bill Vasilakis first met Bernie and Nan through Dag Heward Mill's Healing Jesus campaigns, where Bernie is a board member along with Bill. We have since had Bernie minister at Seaton and Bill has also visited them in Scotland. Their son Gary and his wife Sarah have since joined our church.

As a church they have had a few set back in recent years but are now repositioning for growth. I was very impressed with how well resourced they were, particularly in video and media. Their video was of a very high standard with a very contemporary feel. It's one area that we have lagged in at times as a denomination and yet it's such a powerful tool in our public services when used well.

I was also able to encourage the team and make several suggestions for where they can grow creatively as musicians.

#### **Northern Lights** (John and Catherine Warren)

I was pleasantly surprised to see what Jon and Catherine have done. They are very inspirational people as I hope you picked up from Jon's sessions at National Conference.

I felt they church plant with such ease and don't complicate it. They have seen the need for more contemporary churches across the North of England and are responding with a vision to plant many many churches there.

Of interest, I attended a couple of meetings with Jon. One was online with 4-5 church planting pastors who talk once a month and encourage each other. This is a wonderful use of video conferencing and should be something we learn to use more across the CRC. The other meeting was a small group Jon runs in his home to train preachers. They work through a book together and discuss the elements of preaching. I found this to be a refreshing and different way of teaching new preachers.

### **Life Church**

My final church visit was an unexpected one, but when I realised I was so close to Paul Scanlon's church with a spare evening in my busy itinerary, I felt I couldn't miss the opportunity, especially as I heard many good things about Charlotte Scanlon-Gamble's preaching. (This is Paul's daughter who now leads the church with her husband Steve).

Unfortunately Paul wasn't there. He travels most of the year now in his itinerant ministry. However I did meet and talk with Steve Gamble after the service. We exchanged email addresses as he offered to make further ministry connection if we ever needed to.

The services again weren't much different to Bethel or our own CRC Conference sessions. On one level this encourages me that we have come a long way. However it also challenges me to pioneer something unique across the CRC and develop our own 'brand' of congregational worship which is growing.

### *4.2 Main Learning Points*

I have listed a few of the main learning points synthesised from my church visits and interviews below. I will develop these further for dissemination to our churches.

- Create Space for Creativity (be intentional about recreation and innovation)
- Embracing Digital Technology with a Purpose – not just chasing after new ideas for the sake of it.
- Express the Gospel very clearly, but do it in your own local style
- Be a Pioneer. Don't just imitate other churches but consider your unique calling.
- Cherish Old Worship memories AND Embrace New Worship Experiences

*4.3 Disseminate learning to CRC Churches via other means where possible (such as conference presentations, email correspondence, written report)*

*See 1.4*

## 5. MEET WITH SAM ALLBERRY AND OTHER LIVING OUT TEAM MEMBERS

- **Dates:** TBC
- **Outcomes:**

*5.1 Preparation for fruitful meetings in the Adelaide the following month, which CRC ministers will be invited to*

Unfortunately my meeting with Sam and other Living Out members didn't happen. I had made plans with Sam several months prior, but his itinerary changed and we weren't able to find a new date to meet.

There was no financial loss as a result. It just would have been nice to meet Sam prior to him coming to Adelaide plus meet with some of his colleagues.

Nevertheless, the meetings in Adelaide were very fruitful and timely as Sam's arrival coincided with the announcement of the same sex marriage plebiscite.

*5.2 Accumulation of latest resources to disseminate to CRC Churches.*

Sam has written several books himself. Most of you will be aware of "Is God Anti Gay?". He has also written some devotional material (one with Tim Keller) and a short book on helping people understand the Trinity. So he is quite diverse in his topic areas. He was working on a book about being single which is just about to be released.

Sam also mentioned several other books which will be good resources. These include Ed Shaw's "The Plausability Problem" about sharing the gospel in light of a world with changing values around marriage and sexuality. Another was "A Better Way" by Glynn Harrison, which highlights the need to share good news stories.

There are many other good Christian materials available on the topic of sexuality. However, rather than list them here, Living Hope SA have a resource list available if pastors are interested or need advice regarding this.

*5.3 Report of Adelaide Meetings*

The meetings with Sam were all excellent and well attended. Sam shared brilliantly. He is an excellent Bible teacher and fitted in with our culture quite well.

He spoke at all three of our services at Seaton on August 6<sup>th</sup>. I would certainly recommend him as CRC Conference speaker in the future as he is a world-class communicator who is much sought after.

We had 340 people attend the public event put on by Living Hope SA. This was over twice what we expected so very pleased about this. The following day we had 60 pastors and leaders, of which 4 were from the CRC. The rest were mostly evangelical Anglicans. Feedback from these events were very positive.

Ministry events that focus on same-sex attraction are naturally controversial and historically haven't attracted high attendances in Adelaide. But this is changing and people have lots of questions because they all know someone who faces these life issues and they want to help not hinder them.

As a result of these meetings Living Hope SA is considering the next event they will run. This may be in late 2018 or early 2019, depending on the availability of speakers which may include Ed Shaw or Rosaria Butterfield.

#### *5.4 New Learning for Application to Living Hope Ministry & CRC*

Resourcing Pastors, leaders and churches with biblically-grounded and compassionate teaching is the most effective tool we have right now.

Most LGBT+ people are afraid to talk about their struggles with people they know, let alone to strangers. If we can educate churches how to handle this more effectively on the ground then support ministry will be much broader.

It's a topic we need to talk more about at State Conference level and provide these good resources to our pastors.

I have now connected with and counselled several people around the topic of sexuality. For people who struggle with any issues relating to their sexuality, it's incredibly freeing when they focus on Jesus and put him at the centre of their lives. It's my heart and passion to see this happen more and more.

## PERSONAL LEARNING

This is a summary of the things I felt God speak to me personally about during the trip.

### Personal Learning

- **Reading** – to be more intentional about my reading. I accumulated a long list of books during and after my trip which I'm working through.
- **Learning** – to be more intentional about learning from what I'm reading and to apply it.
- **Book Writing** – after the completion of my PhD next year, to set goals of what I might write about and some accountability to set deadlines so I get it done!
- **Song writing** – I've been challenged in recent years about 'returning to my first love' which is song writing and arranging.
- **Musicianship** – I haven't been a disciplined musician for a long time. So I've started learning a new instrument to keep fresh.
- **LESS** – boards, meetings and nights out.
- **MORE** – creating, writing, teaching, mentoring, counselling, and family time!