

I've been working in the area of MRA's finances, with a seemingly endless parade of otherwise ordinary folk who've set out on this same path of entrusting decisions about all aspects of life to a sense of leading from God. God seems to honour their commitment, and good things happen around them.

Almost as a by-product, the corporate needs of MRA to maintain an infrastructure for individual and team programs continues to be met by generous and sacrificial participation. In many cases friends so committed through life in the disposition of time, effort, friendship, and money have chosen to make a final contribution to MRA on death through their wills. Indeed MRA's ownership of nearly all its Australia-wide centres has been made directly possible by either bequests or direct gifts of property.

The spectacular gift of Armagh nearly half a century ago has not lost any of its wonder, and still, along with all the home and centre is used for,

prompts willing and generous commitment. Our official accounts only capture the bits that are recorded in money's worth. There's scant mention of the unending efforts of those who come in to take on many areas (see page 3) or play their part in other ways.

There's the friend who leaves her own home-making to spend every Monday washing and ironing here. An early retired engineer devotes a day in most weeks to supervising the maintenance of this property. A busy professional couple fill a faxed grocery order and deliver the goods each week. And there's the retired builder of the 1976 extension, and his wife, who only recently apologetically wound down an generous annual donation which has completed a wonderful circle in helping to fund some of the activities which the extension was designed to facilitate!

On a broader front nationwide there are those who give time to join forces with others in campaigns of various kinds, in organising and running courses or conferences, in planning events, in deliberations within MRA's committees or other groups, and in vital person-to-person connections.

The Creator's purposes will surely advance as more and more of us listen to what the deepest voice in our heart says about all of life – and obey!

*Next issue: MRA-IC finances...  
Facts and opportunities*

## Resources – for what?

To think about resources immediately leads to thinking about purpose. For example, the computer hooked up to the internet that I am currently using to produce this issue of *Newsbriefs* can either be a resource, or a toy and a distraction depending on what purpose it is put to.

All the contributors to this issue of *Newsbriefs* have come to believe that the greatest purpose for their lives is to seek for and follow God's will. Yet, as Jonathan Lancaster writes, making this a reality is an ongoing minute-by-minute series of decisions, rather than a simple one-off transaction. In making those decisions we release resources – our talents, energies, wallets and even our weaknesses – for God to use in the healing and transformation of the world.

As John Donne wrote: No man is an island unto himself. Our individual decisions are enhanced and enriched by the decisions of others. St Paul used the analogy of the parts of the body – each one different yet each one essential for the whole body to function. On our own we are painfully inadequate for the purpose God calls us to, lacking the character, the skills, the time and the money for the job. Yet in faith, and together, miracles do occur.

*Mike Lowe, Editor*

## More than money

*Jonathan Lancaster serves as treasurer of MRA-Initiatives of Change in Australia. He writes of personal decisions about resources, and his appreciation of the faithfulness of others:*

Back in June someone suggested running an issue of *Newsbriefs* on finance. A little later there was ready agreement to broadening the theme to include all kinds of "resources".

As these pages show, it's proved easier to elicit contributions about money – after all a useful focal point.

It's perhaps no accident that the word "money" appears 52 times in Garth Lean's *Frank Buchman – A Life*, yielding an inspiring and challenging collection of observations and real-life experiences at the heart of Buchman's "faith and prayer" approach which has always been the hallmark of MRA-IC.

However, for me back in the '60s in my upper teens the main issue wasn't money. The challenge that gripped my heart when I searched deep for a direction for my life involved a broader spectrum of resources that I had under my control – among them time and energy.

And while an intended career in medicine felt like a vocation and was imbued with idealism, the unwelcome-ness of my own thought to defer my second year of university and pull my weight with contemporaries in MRA for 12 months made me realise what a hold I had developed on my future.

As it turned out, that was nothing compared to my inner struggle against a growing personal conviction not to resume medical studies but devote my full time to this work, without end in sight or visible means of support.

That's now 38 years back down the track. Sounds impressive. But I know full well that the tussle for control of life in all its aspects continues in my heart daily. The issue is whether all the resources at my disposal are to be controlled by me, or be subject, without reserve, to the higher authority whom I know as God. This, I believe, is equally true for one working as a full-time volunteer or someone earning their living in a conventional setting.

I seem to experience God's provision of the resources that I don't naturally have, but need – which include many "short-supply" qualities like patience, grace and courage, as well as material wherewithal – in direct proportion to my preparedness to give God the final say about the things I do have at my disposal – time, energy, possessions, money, in whatever quantities they may be mine, large or even minuscule.

It's been a joy and privilege to have been connected, during the 22 years

# Stepping out in faith

On 21 October, Mike and Jean Brown from Adelaide flew to India to prepare for the second "Action for Life" program which runs from 1 November to 30 June 2004. Raising the funds for this has been a journey of faith for all involved. Mike writes:

To Liu Ren-Jou, it came as one of my crazy ideas drawing together up to 40 people, across the generations, and working together as a living mobile community for nine months in Asia as part of the outreach of MRA-IC.

And from 1 November, it is happening...

They are coming from places like Kenya, Canada, Cambodia (as well as Australia). We start with five months in India and then move on in three smaller teams to East and South-East Asia, combining again for an Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Cambodia. Everywhere we will be in partnership with local networks of MRA-IC, of people who are trying to make a difference. For the purpose of *Action for Life* is to mobilise a new generation of change-makers equipped with integrity, faith and commitment".

Wonderfully full-of-unknown-potential, crazy!

Pulling it all together the people, the program, the partnerships has at times seemed to verge on the crazy, too. Before stepping on the plane a few hours from writing this, Jean and I have been part of a coordinating team in 10 countries keeping daily in touch by e-mail, and occasionally phone hookups. Two of them are 20-some-things, who were part of the last such

program two years ago.

A budget of US\$210,00 was worked out by Kiwi accountant Peter Wood, who later joins the program with Glenys and their daughter, Sarah (a Chinese-speaker who will join a team on the mainland). Run that figure by me again... as they say. Gasp! But that's what it costs to keep 35-40 people moving and living for 10 months in 15 countries of Asia. Work it out.

Well, working it out in reality has so far been a test of faith and persistence. There have been some unexpected (to the point of miraculous) big-figure grants one IC body selling a training centre passing on a slice of the capital for this training program; the Karl Popper Foundation in Switzerland making a grant to support the costs of five from East Europe. An IT entrepreneur based in London/Boston/St Tropez (we're never quite sure) sent US\$2,000, apologising it could not be more because his charitable trust had been bankrupted by an investment manager now in a Swiss prison. Making up for that, a Swiss couple gave US\$10,000 from their savings. And the same figure was contributed from the charitable trust of a Korean Buddhist nun. All breathtaking.

But no less miraculous have been the efforts by the participants them-

selves to raise airfares and the \$2,500 participation fee to cover living costs. Back in June one young law graduate in Siberia wrote despairing that my last hope for a big-time financial salvation has gone all the NGOs she had approached had turned her down. She only had \$200 from teaching my neighbour's kids English. How could she come? Her plea went out by e-mail. Some young people banded together in Britain and raised a good chunk, partly with an Action dinner at the IC London centre. We allocated some amounts from other gifts. Finally her father gave his whole retirement lump sum benefit so she could go. What sacrifice! What expectations!

## Miracles of transformation

Two Cambodian students similarly put together a proposal and collected US\$700 from various NGOs before setting out on the two-day bus trip to Malaysia where a friend, in faith, had booked plane tickets to Mumbai. While *en route*, an Indian accountant and his wife in Adelaide held a garage sale (*see below left*) and, together with an afternoon tea gathering next day, raised A\$1,161... enough for their fares.

Next door in Vietnam a slight young woman insisted she would not take out travel insurance (required) because there wasn't enough of her to insure! With earnings and help from a work mate she got most of her airfare. Then friends in our church in Adelaide who had travelled in Vietnam dropped in a cheque for US\$1,250. She's on her way now, properly insured.

One could write about the American teaching couple, both in mid-30s, who resigned teaching jobs, rented out their home and sold their new van to come. Or the Ghanaian who daily wrote dear Dad messages to me, having raised US\$200 in Accra but confident the Lord would get him there. He's in Kenya, on his way. Or the Brazilian member of the Support Team who wrote over 100 messages asking for support and for weeks only got good luck replies; then small gifts started appearing and she is right now in a plane to India.

To top it off, our son gave us an envelope last night with a one-liner the chapattis are on me, and enough inside for chapattis all round for a month!

We are within \$20,000 of covering that awesome budget. Now we pray for the even-bigger miracles of transformation in lives and communities.

## The garage sale

Sanjay Shah from Adelaide writes:

The sceptic in me thought: Why waste time trying to sell other people's unwanted possessions for as little as 20 cents? I thought that people had better things to do on a beautiful spring day than to visit a garage sale. Why would anyone in their right mind want to buy such odds and sorts?

Little did I realise the benefits of having a garage sale. In the span of half a day we raised \$790 to help young people from third world countries take part in the *Action for Life* program. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of friends and neighbours who donated boxes of stuff on hearing what it was for. One local participant of *Action for Life* who had

already raised her own funds gave things to help fund the airfares of other participants.

There were several other benefits. We got a chance to meet some interesting and like-minded people. It was an opportunity to explain the *Action for Life* program and *MRA-IC* to many who were interested. The kids had great fun selling lemonade and toys and even developed some innovative sales campaigns: Every customer who buys \$5 worth of goods gets a free half glass of lemonade!

Neighbours kept coming back for more bargains, more food and just to chat. It was also an opportunity to dispose of lots of unused stuff that was lying around the house. Suddenly our home feels bigger and we have more storage space, and it was heartening to see stuff being reused rather than wasted.

# 'We talk about things that matter'

Each month Newsbriefs is sent out to approximately 475 Australian and 150 overseas readers. The actual work of dispatching it is done by a team of dedicated volunteers – the "Tuesday Ladies". Dorothy Hicks, who coordinates the Newsbriefs send-out, writes:

We are a group of about 20 women of varying ages who meet every Tuesday at Armagh for fellowship, sharing our stories, and discussion, as well as helping meet practical needs in the home. Once a month, we fold and send out *Newsbriefs*. There is a wonderful spirit as hearts and minds are opened while tongues and hands are at work.

Among the group are a former hospital matron, two Sri Lankan sisters who had to flee the fighting in their country, mothers and grandmothers, a Polish scientist, a Syrian widow, the wife of a surgeon, the widow of an adviser to several Australian Prime Ministers, and former teachers and nurses.

This gathering was initiated nearly 50 years ago soon after Armagh was given for the use of MRA - Initiatives of Change. For many years, the women have given practical help in the home ironing, cleaning silver, baking, mak-

ing beds, arranging flowers etc.

Our education continues as we learn from visitors staying at Armagh, like a youth leader from the Ukraine, a young teacher from Moldova and a student from Zimbabwe, who have all come to attend the *Life Matters* course. A Buddhist nun and a young Muslim mother have shared something of their life's journeys with us. We feel so privileged that "the world walks into our heart" week by week.

Why do we come? What do we value most?

A kaleidoscope of answers includes:

It pumps up my spiritual tyres ; It is my life-support system ; We talk about things that matter ; It gives me a wider perspective ; People talk from the heart ; We listen to God ; I get my edges rubbed off ; I can talk with



real, honest people ; God changed my hate to love ; We are fed, and feed others . One who comes from Syria said, "It feels like my family." Another, from Sri Lanka, said, "I miss my sisters, and find the ladies at Armagh easy to relate to. They are kind and caring, and look after each other and the young people who live at Armagh. They aren't petty or squabbling. They accept me as I am, and we learn about other cultures. I realise that we are all the same, with the same problems and reactions. With many Australians conversations rarely go beyond the weather, but here I can talk with people at a much deeper level.

## Changes, challenges and choices

Phil Jefferys writes of the series of events and decisions which enabled him to find funding for his work with MRA - Initiatives of Change

Wool growing in the late 'sixties and 'seventies was hard enough but by the mid 1980s, Margaret and I decided to move to northern NSW where there was a higher rainfall. But a dramatic drop in wool prices, high interest rates and a series of droughts made it extremely difficult. I had to supplement our income by working off our farm to get our children through school. I had no bits of paper to flash around when looking for a job. Years of riding motorcycles and heavy lifting had taken their toll. Bits were starting to crack up and this didn't inspire prospective employers.

Managing the sheep for a large property in central NSW was familiar work, but on the last day of shearing I was knocked over by a sheep and dislocated a shoulder. This meant 18 months off (with compensation) while taking a series of compulsory courses towards finding work I could physically do. At the end of that I was still looking for a paid job.

Being involved in a church and being available gave me some experiences in voluntary work. I had some involvement with the Farmers Dialogue , a

group of farmers working under the umbrella of MRA - Initiatives of Change. I have great concerns about world agriculture and would like to work with farmers.

I approached Centrelink with a view to accessing unemployment benefits. You need to bare your soul and supply many details. As a person who always has paid his way, having to go cap in hand to Centrelink filled me with guilt. This is a huge problem for many farmers.

### A timely proposition

I was interviewed by a very down-to-earth person who commented that given my age I was not old enough for the old age pension, not crippled enough for a disability pension so what are we going to do with you? Do you do any voluntary work? Well, yes for a church.

Any other organisation? Well, I have done a few things with MRA. What's this MRA? Do you think they would employ you on a voluntary basis?

This led to consulting about the possibility of a work agreement with MRA-IC. We drew up a job specification. More

than being convenient, this proposition seemed timely .

After some procedural details, I began working on a voluntary basis for MRA-IC. I am required to work at least 32 hours per fortnight to receive Centrelink payments, which are subject to asset and income limits. I keep a log of the hours worked.

There is an obligation to inform Centrelink of overseas travel, and payments cease when you leave Australia. However when I travelled to Cambodia to help run the Farmers Dialogue conference, Centrelink continued my payments because the work I was doing in Cambodia was humanitarian in nature.

Through this arrangement with Centrelink and MRA-IC, Margaret and I have been able to follow our convictions to see world agriculture become more sustainable, and that all people have adequate food and clean water to drink. This has opened up opportunities with farmers and agricultural leaders in India, Cambodia and parts of Europe in unexpected and potentially far-reaching ways.



# 'Back your hunch and give it a go!'

*Jim Coulter's memoirs "Met along the way" will be launched in Perth by the Hon. Kim Beazley MP on 13 November in the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library. Jim writes of his experiences of God's provision:*

"Where God guides, He provides!" This claim of Frank Buchman, the initiator of MRA-Initiatives of Change, provoked a debate in me. During WW2 I spent part of my service leaves in the UK asking probing questions of those who said that the money they needed came through "faith and prayer". Later when I met Frank Buchman in the USA I found he had a rider: "Make sure it is your faith and prayer and not the butcher's."

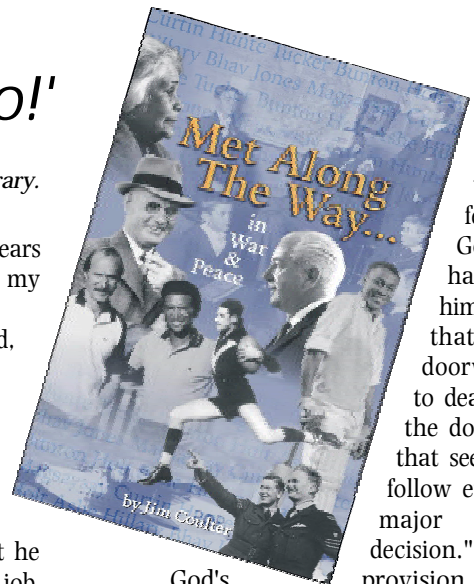
I have had an open heart to the USA and even gridiron football ever since seeing a player turning as he reached the touchdown line to receive a 50-metre pass to win the Rose Bowl end-of-season playoff. It was 1945 in Pasadena, California. Buchman had bought seats for 100 of us from abroad who were travelling with him. He had chartered a special train as we took three plays to cities across the States. His conviction was that the USA needed to hear first hand what Europe had lived through during the war as well as pointing to the changes needed to make build a different future. His faith seemed to produce enough to pay the considerable bills and I realised he was a "big petitions with you bring you are coming to a King" man. I came to believe that God could provide in the UK and the USA, but deeply doubted His ability to do so in my homeland.

My first day back in Australia I found myself in the office of Prime Minister Ben Chifley. With his encouragement I told him the moral and spiritual goals I felt the country needed. I even volunteered that I had wondered about resigning my job as a journalist to do something about it, but that I held back because I wasn't sure God could provide for me. Chifley with a real warmth of eye leaned forward and said: "If I were you young fella, I would back your hunch and give it a go."

So it was that a few weeks later, somewhat to my surprise, I found I had done just that. But as I recount in my book, "I left Newspaper House with quite a few misgivings. I was conscious of a man standing in the deep shadow of a door so I could not see his face, but his voice brought back

another world separated by four years of war. He was the headmaster of my old school. His words were to the point: You remember my son, Ted, who like you was in air crew and he died in Europe. They have just sent me his diary and he makes it clear that had he survived he wanted to spend the rest of his life working for a better world. Would you be prepared to do what he wished to do? I had resigned my job just half an hour before, but had already been doubting my step of faith. I told

God's always seems to include after sales care!



my headmaster I felt God had put him in that doorway to deal with the doubts that seem to follow every major decision." provision

## The person behind the gift

*Peter and Rosemary Thwaites work without salary for MRA-Initiatives of Change. Peter writes of their visit to Sydney in 1976 having had a strong thought that this was the city where they should live:*

We stayed with Miss Nan Hall, a retired headmistress, and met other friends who were very supportive of our coming. For Rosemary and myself, Sydney was an exciting but still foreign city.

Shortly after we had returned to Canberra one of the most astounding letters either of us has ever received arrived. Nan Hall wrote to offer us the complete occupation of her attractive home, a 3-bedroom semi in Cremorne, while she would advance her own plans to move to a retirement village. We would be asked to pay only enough rent to cover running costs.

As unsalaried voluntary workers we had hoped that someone might find two rooms for us and our new baby to live in but we had been offered a house! We discovered later that Cremorne is one of Sydney's most sought-after suburbs.

Everything happened as Nan had proposed. Two years later she gave the house outright to Moral Re-Armament as a base for its full-time workers.

Thus began our 27 years living and working in Sydney. Nan lived another 25 years, dying in 2001 aged 100. During those years we got to know Nan as a friend and counselor. We came to appreciate more deeply the visionary person behind the remarkable act of courage and generosity that

helped make so many things possible for us and for MRA in Sydney.

In 1990 Rosemary and Jane Mills interviewed Nan about her life. Typing a transcript of that 70-minute tape, and reading her memoir written with the help of her sister Barbara, has brought alive for me again the passionate seeker, carer, artist, thinker and educator that Nan was. A century of Sydney's history shimmers through her story. As the eldest of ten siblings her large family had always been important to her, and remained so. Her visit to the Caux conference in 1950 opened her eyes to an active, worldwide spiritual community that became a further focus for her care and imagination. In that wider, spiritual sense, Rosemary and I and our children became part of Nan's family too.

### PowerPoint resource available

Last summer a PowerPoint slide-show - *Introduction to Initiatives of Change: What kind of world do you want?* - was given at every session of the Caux conferences. This resource has now been revised and is available at no charge for general use. It requires a computer and one or two people to talk the audience through it using a script. The kit can be downloaded from the IC Development Team page of the <http://iofc.org/extranet>, or alternatively you can contact Mike Lowe (email: [fffmike@yahoo.com](mailto:fffmike@yahoo.com))