

Potholes & Playgrounds

with Rachael Bell • May 2025



I had such an encouraging start to the year with four new chaplains appointed. A further candidate, interviewed in 2024, began in Term 2 across three SRE positions, and another candidate is still working to complete the qualifications needed for school chaplaincy, but will step into a role once finished.

I spent most of January on leave, taking some much needed rest and recovery while things slowed down on the schools ministry calendar.

This proved to be helpful as I hit the ground running again in late January and early February with various parts of the recruitment process, as mentioned above.

However, there are a couple of positions to re-advertise after staff resigned as well, so I'm still looking to fill 14 vacancies – six chaplaincy and eight SRE. I would appreciate continued prayer over this.

Please pray that God would raise up faithful people to fill the vacant schools ministry positions in Central West NSW. Pray specifically for Chaplains for Cowra, Orange, Eugowra, and Dubbo/Wongarbon; and for SRE teachers and coordinators for Forbes, Parkes, Dubbo, Wellington, Cowra, Blayney, and Leeton. Some places have more than one position.

The other things squeezed into February, around recruitment processes, were board meetings, supporting board members in school SRE negotiations, supporting teachers in tricky situations, and speaking at the Dubbo SRE Service.

As we are still looking to employ a Primary SRE teacher/coordinator in Dubbo, I've also been supporting the board as they've sought to fill

the gaps and support the many volunteer teachers in Dubbo.

March was filled with ensuring that the new SRE teachers were set up to start well, a chaplaincy review at Oberon, interviewing that same chaplain for an additional SRE teaching role in Litgow (in which he is now successfully employed as well), meeting with board members, and planning for a staff training day.

My health (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which I've had for the last five and a half years) also took a bit of a dive recently so while I was able to work during the week, I spent my weekends resting and recovering in order to be able to work the next week.

Unfortunately, this meant missing out on some events that would have been beneficial to attend, like the Central West Missions Expo in Molong, the Bathurst Anglican Diocesan Conference in Dubbo, and the Bathurst SRE Commissioning Service.

Please pray for physical and spiritual refreshment for me; that I would confidently engage in the work God has prepared in advance for me to do, relying solely on Him for all I need to do it well and for the wisdom to know my priorities.

At the beginning of April, we held the SU Australia In-Service (training) Day in Orange. I was largely responsible for planning

Banner Image: A church playground

Circle Image: Rachael Bell

Middle Image: Dubbo SRE Service

Bottom Image: Game discussions at the Orange In-Service Training Day



The Central West team at the Orange In-Service Training Day

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and running this event for my team of SRE teachers and Chaplains, with the help of some SU staff who came to support and run the professional development (PD) modules.

It was a wonderful opportunity to gather my team together in person, particularly since half of them were new and hadn't ever met each other. Of course, we get together so infrequently that many people who had met each other last year didn't remember each other either! This is something I am hoping will change this year, by offering more opportunities to meet together in person.

During the day they had opportunities to play games together, such as a survival game which was played similar to 'Rob the Nest', where teams had to try to gather as many 'supplies' as they could for survival on their island. It was great fun to see some teams really committed to protecting the supplies they had gathered!

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However, as they worked through the PD module on 'Mentoring' and came together to reconsider their approach to the game, they realised they could be much more effective by sharing resources and working together. It was a beautiful realisation.

Please pray for spiritual refreshment for SRE teachers and Chaplains; that they would depend on Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit to sustain them when they face obstacles and challenges in their roles.



Kim creatively protecting her resources at the Orange In-Service Training Day

April also contained a two-day induction that SU Australia runs for all new staff across the country. It was great to gather with my new staff during the online networking time. Even better was that I had seen all of them in person two weeks before, and they had already met each other! It's not very often that I can say that, with their roles spread out across my area.

I also had a week off during the school holidays, which was well needed. I came back to a full week in Sydney – attending the SU Australia In-Service Day to support the Sydney FDM team and then speaking at the Bush Church Aid NSW/ACT AGM.

Over the last couple of months I've been reflecting on why I do the job I do. It started with reading through the book of Micah and being struck by 3:11 *"Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money."* It caused me to stop and question – why do I do the job I do? Is it just for the money, because that isn't the right motivation for ministry.



The Sydney In-Service Training Day

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I knew it was more than that but I wanted to spend some time figuring out the answer. By the time I was asked at the Sydney in-service "Why do you do what you do?" I had a more thought out answer. It was an answer I shared part of at the BCA NSW/ACT AGM because it has a bit to do with my story.

When I moved with my family from England to Australia, I was eight years old. It took a bit of time for us to settle in, but come Easter the following year, my mum decided it was time to find a local church. I was in Year 4 at school and that year my SRE teacher was Helen McPaul. I really enjoyed scripture classes, particularly the workbooks.

When we walked into Menai Anglican Church, who came up to say hello and welcome us? Helen McPaul. She invited my mum to have coffee and we felt welcomed. We stayed at that church and it still feels like home to me, despite moving over 15 years ago.

I do the job I do because SRE classes and school chaplaincy provide opportunities for Christian people to go into public schools and build relationships with students and staff who are there. SRE teachers can share the Good News of the Bible and introduce students to Jesus, personally. It means that if one of those students or staff walk into the same church as that SRE teacher or Chaplain,



they will be the friendly face who greets them and makes them feel welcome. It's the case in many areas in Australia, and it's been my experience in the Central West, that churches are seeking to engage with families and build children's ministries but are finding it hard to get families in the door.

They hold evangelistic events but local families are not always in attendance. From my own experience, I firmly believe that we need to step into the spaces and environments where these families are, and spend time building real relationships with them and showing them how deeply we

care. Through those relationships, perhaps when we invite them to a church event, with them knowing that they will be welcomed, they just might come.

That is why I do my job, because students in public schools might never meet a Christian person without our SRE teachers and Chaplains, and they might never get to hear the saving news of Jesus and put their trust in Him! And I can't think of anything more important than that.

Praise God for the encouraging stories that filter through about things He is doing throughout the Central West.

Stories like the 70 students who signed up and attended a recent SRE seminar at Wellington High School. This is a school which had no SRE classes for the last year and a bit, because we can't find a teacher. Or the school principal who rang me to sing the praises of her chaplain and the impact they've had in creating a school 'walking bus' in the community. This was set up to provide for one particular student but it has blossomed to 20 or so students opting to walk rather than drive to school each morning.

Thank you for your continued support of me. I am so very thankful for each of you!

**In Christ,
Rachael**

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in NSW's Central West**

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