

44 Nottingham Street  
Northmead, NSW 2152  
AUSTRALIA

7 January 2019

Dear Friends and Faithful Supporters:

A new year is always a milestone of sorts. As the calendar of one year ends and another begins we are reminded that we are ever closer to our Lord's return and to our transference into the Kingdom God has promised. But here on the ground we are also confronted with the downward spiral of this world's kingdom. The challenges to Christians are looking to intensify in this new year for us here.

The Christmas season is filled with images, most of which rarely come to mind apart from the Yuletide celebrations. In Matthew's Gospel we read about a star that appeared to some Eastern sages that led them to the infant Jesus. Annette and I were blessed to see a "star" of our own again this year. Our Star is now a lovely young lady. Her given name is Star, and about 15 years ago she was a little girl in Annette's Sunday School class. She was the only child of a young couple who had recently migrated to Australia from Malaysia. We had become acquainted with the family and had invited them to come and worship with us.

Not long afterward we were touring the U.S., reporting to supporting churches when I received an email advising me that this family very much wanted to contact me. Little Star was in hospital and very desperately ill. At about 3 ½ years of age she was stricken with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and was not expected to survive.

On the day we returned to Australia, going to our house only long enough to shave, shower, and change clothes, I went immediately to the children's hospital, which is not far from where we live. Upon arriving I found the parents, who had no other family here in Australia, absolutely distraught, for it looked certain that little Star was about to be taken from them. I remember praying with them then, and then every day afterward for weeks, sometime twice a day I went to the little girl's room and prayed with them there. I have been in pastoral ministry for more than 35 years now, and that time is the only occasion when I have ever been asked by hospital staff for my contact details. They too, although they were doing all that could, were expecting to lose little Star.

But God, who is able to do "exceedingly, abundantly above all we ask or think" showed Himself merciful and mighty! What a blessing it is every Christmas season when the Ng family visit us! Star has just finished high school and will in a few weeks begin her university studies in civil engineering. She has no memory at all of having been so sick. But her mom and dad do! And so do I! If ever I begin to lose sight of the privilege and power of prayer my Christmas star reminds me each year and directs me again to journey closer toward the Saviour.

Otherwise our Christmas celebrations here were rather low-key. After our Christmas morning service at church Annette and I joined our daughter, Jessica, her husband, Luis, and our two teenaged grandsons, Gabriel and Roman, for a BBQ lunch. Our son, Nathan, also joined us. We shared with them the news that Rachel, our younger daughter who lives in Norway, is expecting her third child. So I am once again caring for an expectant grandmother, trying my best to look after her in her delicate condition.

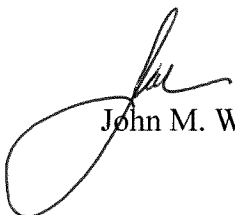
A couple of years ago we made a trip to Vietnam, my first time back there for almost half a century. I really did not know what to expect there, but what I certainly did not expect was to meet some young Christian folks there. We maintained contact with them and then this past year when we revisited Vietnam we were amazingly blessed to worship with them and their tiny church congregation. Seeing some needs there that were financially out of reach for that little gathering, we raised a bit of support from our churches here. It was not a staggering amount of money, but it was enough to help them make some much-needed repairs to their small building. We intend to make another visit there in April and are looking forward to seeing the fruit of the Gospel in that place that was so devastated by war for so long. Sometimes it seems that God delights in irony. And what an irony it is that He has brought me to find peace in a place that I had for so long remembered as a place of war, terror and tragedy!

This past year also brought me to have to accept that I am now officially middle-aged. At a routine visit to my doctor's office he chided me for not having seen my cardiologist for two years. Mind you, I have eaten sensibly, exercised regularly, and felt well. So upon entering my cardiologist's office when he asked how I was. I replied confidently, "I'm just fine!" After an ECG and a stress test he looked me in the eye and said, "No, you're not! I want you in hospital immediately!" Apparently my heart is fine, but my arterial system not so much. The angioplasty was not entirely successful, but he seems to think that I am in no immediate danger of a heart attack. I'm not a bit fan of country music, but I do like Vince Gill's song "Threaten Me with Heaven"! What a comfort it is to know that my reservation has been made and my ticket paid for!

Annette is well and enjoying a break from her job at the preschool. She is here supervising me until the end of January. Normally we use this break each year to catch up on jobs around the house. But since Christmas the weather here has been outrageously hot. So far the top has been 108 degrees Fahrenheit. It's a little cooler today, but there is more to come. We try to get as much done as possible during the cooler spells.

We both want to thank you once again for your prayers in our behalf and for your support for the ministry to which God has brought us on this side of the planet. We count it a joy to serve the Master here and are acutely aware that without your partnership we could not do what we do. I hope that you feel a genuine sense of sharing in all that the Lord does here through us. And may the Lord reward you richly! I remain . . .

Your servant for Jesus' sake,



John M. Wickine