

## 'Kairos moment': Inside the institute preparing Christians for when society 'unravels'

Caitlin Fitzsimmons

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The world is heading for a "Kairos moment" when secular society will "unravel" - and Christians need to be prepared.

That's what the Australian Christian Lobby is telling its foot soldiers, who are urged to prepare for what lies ahead through a course at the Lachlan Macquarie Institute - an educational charity spun out of the ACL five years ago.

Addressing the group's national conference last month, Stephen Chavura, a lecturer in European and Australian history at Campion College in Sydney, said departure from biblical morality was "dehumanising" and people were starting to recognise that "things are going wrong" in society.

"People are going to start asking, what went wrong? Where did we go wrong? And that is the opportunity that Christians need to seize," he said.

Dr Chavura encouraged young Christians to attend an upcoming course at the Lachlan Macquarie Institute, where he teaches part-time, and urged Christians of any age to apply for the institute's longer fellowships. Conference attendees also received flyers for LMI at registration.

LMI chief executive Paul Henderson told *The Sun-Herald* the institute's focus was on cultivating Christian men and women for "wise leadership". The flagship fellowship program was modelled on Christian academic fellowship programs overseas, such as the Venn Foundation in New Zealand or programs at the Acton Institute, Cato Institute or Heritage Foundation in the United States.

Mr Henderson said about 120 fellows from around Australia had graduated so far. One of them is a Sydney-based marketing executive called Rebecca, who requested her last name be withheld and her face obscured as protection from internet trolls.

Rebecca completed an LMI fellowship, then called an internship, in March 2018 after finishing her Masters degree. The three-month program included two placements, a short one with an unnamed federal MP and a longer one with a film company.

Rebecca said she gained a deeper understanding of law, politics and society and learned leadership, debating skills and how to disagree respectfully. There was discussion about how to live within society in accordance with Christian values rather than how to change culture.

"It's about how we listen to what's going on around us culturally and to be prepared for that and to influence it," Rebecca said. "But not in the sense of 'we've all got to band together and change the world'. It was more like be alert, be prepared and do what you can in your area."

The institute's core business are the fellowships: a 14-week course on "leadership and public policy", and a 12-week summer course on "leadership and civil society". Between seven and 11 students attend at a time and stay on a homestead in Murrumbateman, near Canberra, for the duration. The day includes the lectures and study, liturgies and prayer and informal socialising.

"On average the people who come to us are 22 to 30 years old and you'll see that for most of these people there's a personal, transformative effect," Mr Henderson said. "They're more likely to be in leadership roles when they're in their mid 30s or 40s so that's when we'll see the fruit."

In his conference speech, Dr Chavura described how culture changed because of forces beyond control, including economics, technology such as the contraceptive pill, wars and demographics. The one thing Christians could control was to develop their own character in readiness for the "Kairos moment" - or moment of opportunity.

He urged Christians to listen for stories that indicate this unravelling: young men lost to porn addiction or young trans people who "blame parents and doctors for giving them the scalpel".

"We are not in control of culture, but that doesn't mean we can't be a part of cultural change," Dr Chavura told the conference. "Culture does change, and the question is, are we going to be ready when it is ready to change in a good direction?"

The Lachlan Macquarie Institute also runs two courses on behalf of ACL; one for church leaders and an eight-day "GPS" course for 18 to 25 year-olds. Mr Henderson said the purpose of GPS, which costs \$700, is to give young people a "way of navigating university" using a Christian framework to understand the secular ideas they might encounter. So far about 200 people have completed GPS, which runs twice a year.

Michael Wu, a young economist from Sydney, has written a [blog post](#) about his "intense" experience on the GPS course in July 2018, recommending it to other young Christians and saying he learned more in one week than in an entire semester at university.

As well as studying scripture, Mr Wu said the lecturers tried to "address perplexing contemporary issues from a Christian perspective: from the porn-epidemic and transgenderism to global jihad, just war theory and artificial intelligence to name a few".

The fellowship courses are heavily subsidised by donations, with an out-of-pocket cost of \$4000 to \$4500. The ACL home page has a link soliciting donations for the LMI scholarship fund, described as an "investment to ensure God's truth is spoken in our nation ... in the public square of tomorrow".

In its financial reports to the charity regulator, LMI reports total income of \$948,624 mainly from course fees and donations and total expenses of \$642,586.

The responsible official is James Wallace, also an ACL director and involved in ACL projects, Eternity House and the Human Rights Law Alliance. In 2017, LMI, a registered charity, successfully applied to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission to keep the identities of other directors private on security grounds, after activists targeted their employment.

Mr Henderson said LMI was non-partisan and non-denominational. While it was "pretty important to be Christian", there was "room for diversity of views" even on contentious issues such as same-sex marriage.

Mr Henderson agreed the notion of a tipping point where secular society could start to unravel was "possible" because there was a "restlessness in society and a sense of disappointment".

"A lot of young men and women I work with, they're looking for meaning and purpose," he said. "If there is a shift in society, then perhaps Christians have something to offer."