

# WALKING AND GROWING IN FAITH

By Bill Pugh



Two magpies have ruled our backyard for some time. In Spring they produced a male child, incessantly demanding to be fed. Morsels of food are shoved down its throat. A gulp then the demand for feeding continues. Gradually he is learning about life.

He is slowly leaving mum and dad and exploring the garden himself, surprised at what he discovers. Mum or dad are not far away to rescue him if a predator looms. Moments of pleasure rolling with dad on the grass and with wings outspread basking in the morning sun. But his child time is running out. His parents want him to stand on his own two feet and leave home. How will he go? Many unseen challenges are over the fence for the immature and unsuspecting, but mum and dad have prepared him the best they know how, drawing on their own experience.

It is not hard to imagine human experience as similar for children growing up. Some have the example and wisdom of mum and dad as they cross the fence into adulthood. Sadly some are without such help and have to go it alone.

The strength and support of good friends is important when the fences are crossed into adulthood, and the influence of moral education in development brought into focus. How strong is the mental and spiritual fibre of our young as they face the tests of growing up and taking part in adult society?

Individual and social awareness is important.

The report of a young man who made the most of his education in school and synagogue is found in the Gospels. Jesus of Nazareth grew up in a family, respected his parents and teachers in synagogue and school and challenged the Temple teachers in Jerusalem with his questions.

Luke writes that Jesus grew and increased in wisdom and stature in favour with God and man. Is this the best progress report ever written? He asked the right questions and came up with wise rules to keep his disciples, who were pupils or learners, as the Latin root indicates, on the right path.

How are our young developing? Do we care? Tolerance, forgiveness and support are important attitudes. And the values we live by are the social foundations on which we build our young as they cross the fences, high and low. All have their challenges. We know because we have been there before.

Some think it's not cool to be religious. But people of faith, however simple, seem to have a kind of serenity about life. Maybe it's time for those challenged by the fences to put church goers and people of other faiths on the spot, asking them to explain themselves. Faith is not the passport to a secret society, but a way of coping with life over the fence, empowering ordinary people to walk each day by faith.