



"... where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20 KJV)

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### What's In A Name

"Gathered Together", - who or what is gathered together? What is this little newsletter all about?

Upheaval within the Uniting Church in Australia has resulted in quite a number of new groupings of God's people to form. Some groups are large, some are small, most lie somewhere between the two extremes. God has gathered together some of His people within these new groups and as we read "... where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20).

Now that some time has passed since the formation of many of these groups, a number of people have come to believe God is wanting to gather together some of these groups so they can provide encouragement and support for each other. This is certainly NOT an attempt to create any formal structure, although perhaps in time God may take us in that direction, but rather an opportunity for God's people to look beyond their own worshipping community and see God at work through His people in different ways and in different parts of this country. Witnessing God at work is an encouragement in itself, however by sharing experiences and being part of a larger worshipping community (even if it is just through an informal sharing of information) we can help each other tackle the difficulties we face and draw strength and encouragement from each other.

This newsletter may be part of God's plan for some of His people. For others He may have provided different means for them to receive the encouragement and support that they require.

For those who believe this newsletter is for them, we invite your active participation in it.

Our thoughts at the moment are for fellowships, congregations, house churches or whatever groups that have formed to provide some information on how they came to exist, the process of coming together and the challenges they have faced, have overcome or are still facing.

I expect we will discover a lot about God and about ourselves as we share stories of God at work amongst us.

God has gathered us together, but he hasn't just plonked us down and left us to fend for ourselves. He is in the midst of us and is leading, guiding and taking us along the path he has for us to follow. It should be an exciting journey.

Ian Denton

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## **Canberra Christian Fellowship in the Methodist Tradition**

Our fellowship formed early last year and held our first service together, quite appropriately, on Pentecost Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

Most of us were, over the previous year in particular, unhappy with a number of decisions and actions of the Uniting Church. The issue that aroused a great deal of debate and discontent and led to renewed focus on other areas of concern as well, was the Uniting Church's decision to permit practising homosexual people to take on leadership positions within the church. To us that conflicts directly with Biblical teaching and should not be allowed.

Despite the turmoil, church leaders appeared to downplay the concerns of so many members and took insufficient action to address the concerns. There were moves within two Canberra congregations to align themselves with The Reforming Alliance in order to identify with those opposing the Resolution 84 decision, however those moves failed. Moves within another congregation, more recently, also failed.

Some people resigned from the Uniting Church, others left although retaining membership, while others just ceased attending church or in some cases continued on as before but with an uneasiness about the Uniting Church's direction.

We felt the need for a form of support group for the many people who were hurting and felt displaced by the decisions and actions of the church which had been their spiritual home for, in quite a few cases, a great many years. Initially we circulated a small newsletter we named "The Next Step", then we met together for a dinner and thought about our future. As we discovered more and more people who thought as we did scattered across many Canberra UC congregations, the support group grew from just an idea, to a congregation which now meets regularly to worship God. ID



**At supper after our first service on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004**

## Practicalities

Some of the issues we (Canberra Christian Fellowship in the Methodist Tradition) faced are:

**Where could we meet?** – We thought about various churches and halls that might be available for use. Through one contact we became interested in the Campbell Gospel Chapel, an Open Brethren congregation whose chapel was close by and that we had gone past many times without knowing much at all about them. They proved particularly welcoming and supportive.

**When should we meet?** – This was in part decided for us. The Gospel Chapel was unavailable until 5pm on Sundays, so despite some uncertainty about that time that is when we meet. It has proved a good time as it enables those who still attend their old congregations to do so but join with us as well.

**How often should we meet?** – We began by meeting once a month. We soon felt the need to meet more regularly so introduced a fellowship tea / hymn sing song between services. We currently meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month for a more mission oriented service, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month for our main service and on any 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday for a time of fellowship. We always have enjoyed a time of fellowship after our services with sandwiches, cakes and other refreshments.

**Who would lead our services?** – We are fortunate to have a number of lay preachers in our group so we are able to make use of their talents. We have also been glad to welcome a number of ministers from the Uniting Church and other denominations, who are supportive of what we are doing, to our pulpit.

**What about a name?** – We have ended up with quite a mouthful for our name but it has served us well. We wanted a name that would provide some idea of our Christian outlook and heritage. Many of us came from a Methodist background so we linked ourselves with that heritage in as much as we have an evangelical emphasis while preferring a fairly traditional style of service.

Other information about us:

**How are we organised?** - We are trying very hard to include as many people as we can in our worship and our decision making. Many people have welcomed the freedom that lack of meetings and no formal structure gives, however we do endeavour to consult a representative cross section of our group when decisions need to be made. In our worship we encourage as many people as feel able to contribute through Bible readings, prayers and providing the welcome and announcements, etc..

**Where are we heading?** – It is hard to answer this. When we began we did not know if our group would exist for just a very short time until people developed new spiritual roots or whether it would continue for the longer term. We trust God will reveal the path ahead of us. We do know we are heading forwards and not back. God has done many great things through His people in the past but we are wanting to be part of His work in the world of today and the days to come.

**How many of us are there?** – We have averaged around 30-35 people with larger numbers at some special services (100 at Christmas).

**What is our relationship with the Uniting Church?** – Our fellowship has no connection with the Uniting Church although some of our people are still part of Uniting Church congregations. As we have mostly come from the Uniting Church we have a natural interest in the spiritual health of that denomination and so have joined The Reforming Alliance to support its work. To a large extent we have moved on from the issues that continue to cause so much pain within the Uniting Church and to hamper its work. We look to God for our future.

Visitors or newcomers to Canberra who would like to join with us are most welcome. We meet at the Campbell Gospel Chapel, Chauvel St., Campbell, A.C.T. at 5pm on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month. It might be wise to phone to double check on our programme – Howard & Ruth Bradbury on 02 62489574.

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## A Sermon on Prayer – Mr. Alan Melmoth

Mr. Alan Melmoth of Wyalong Community Church is well known to a number of Canberra people as he was active in a local church while attending the Australian National University in his younger days. He also met his wife in Canberra.

The Canberra Christian Fellowship in the Methodist Tradition invited Alan to preach for them at their service in April 2005.

Alan Melmoth mentioned that he, as a farmer, is more used to yelling at sheep than preaching, but then gave us a great deal to think about in his sermon on prayer.

He started with a possibly apocryphal story about a small town that boasted two churches and a distillery with an atheistic owner. The church people believed the distillery was harming their community so gathered together and prayed that it would be shut down. A short time later a storm hit the town, lightning struck the distillery and it was burnt down. The owner claimed the church people were responsible for his loss as a result of their prayer meeting and sued. The church people denied any responsibility. In his verdict the judge mentioned his confusion at having an atheist distillery owner professing a belief in the power of prayer while committed church people were denying any connection between their prayers and the demise of the distillery.

What do we believe about prayer?

Jesus assumed prayer was normal. Prayer is an integral part of even a “base model” christian. The Disciples asked “Teach us to pray”.

Alan suggested we should pray and not give up praying.

- 1 We shouldn't worry but pray.  
Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives us something to do but it doesn't get us anywhere.
- 2 We shouldn't quit praying, but pray persistently.  
We can see in the Bible that David was an “all day” prayer.
- 3 We shouldn't doubt but pray positively.  
We should expect God to answer our prayers.  
We should pray to God in faith and not doubt (James 1: 6,7)  
We can approach God with confidence (I John 5: 14)  
If prayers are not answered, look for a reason:- a wrong question; unconfessed sin; wrong timing.

God answers prayers in different ways:

Quickly – A lady looking for a dry parking spot in teeming rain prayed for God's help. Immediately the perfect parking spot became available right in front of her. God had answered but her prayer continued ‘Don't bother, I've just found a spot myself’.

Later – God's timing is impeccable.

A better way – God sometimes has something even better in store for us than what we are requesting.

No – We shouldn't stop praying until we receive a clear NO from God.  
Prayer is a request, not a demand.

Alan concluded by stating that listening to sermons on prayer is not as valuable as actually praying.

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God loves everyone, but probably prefers “fruits of the spirit” over “religious nuts”!

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## The Future

This “Gathered Together” was prepared in the belief that some form of information sharing would be beneficial to many of the new groups that have come into existence. This belief has been reinforced by the reaction received from many people with whom the idea has been discussed.

If “Gathered Together” is to continue, we need contributions from those groups who want to receive it. My hope is that each issue can be made up of contributions from different groups. For now those of us in Canberra are happy to continue coordinating its compilation and distribution. Depending on contributions, we will try to produce an issue every one or two months. Contributions can be e-mailed to Ian Denton ( iand@naa.gov.au or iancd@yahoo.com ).

We will email or post out each issue which can then be copied for the people within the recipient groups.

Perhaps we can include contact details for the different groups so people who are travelling can get in touch if they are staying close by.

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## The Past

While we do not want to dwell on the past or become caught up again with issues from which we have moved on, it is good to be aware of what has happened and the changes of which we have been a part. The following information is from a report prepared by Dr. Howard Bradbury after much fact finding. The figures given are an accurate reflection of movements away from the Uniting Church that he has been able to discover. There could easily be many more people and groups involved that are unknown to him. One thing this report tells us is that those of us who have moved away from the Uniting Church are definitely not just a small inconsequential number of misfits. We appear to be part of a growing movement.

A lay and ministerial network of contacts throughout the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) provided information on losses from the UCA over the issue of homosexuals in leadership in the church. About one quarter of the losses occurred after the Eighth Assembly in 1997 and three quarters after passage of resolution 84 by the Tenth Assembly in 2003.

More than 6500 attenders have left the UCA, many of whom were leaders in their own congregations. There have been splits in 109 congregations (with an average loss of 50 persons per congregation) and 41 new congregations have been formed outside the UCA. Forty three ministers have resigned or retired over the homosexuality in leadership issue, 14 Uniting Churches have closed and one presbytery is dysfunctional. The UCA is in denial over the losses and it was reported on ABC Radio National’s Religion Report that the figures are “exaggerated”. They are in fact less than the true total. Unless the UCA accepts the reality of the situation and rescinds resolution 84 and reforms the church, a widening of the current schism is inevitable.

### Uniting Church in Australia losses due to issue of homosexuality in leadership

| Time period               | Number of attenders lost by UCA | Number of split churches <sup>a</sup> | Number of new congregations | <u>Number of ministers</u><br>resigned      retired |          | Lay pastors, youth workers resigned/ret. |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|----------|--|
| 1997-2000                 | 1834                            | 22                                    | 9                           | 8   | 0        | 0  |
| since July 2003           | 4734                            | 87                                    | 32                          | 28  | 7        | 8  |
| <b>Total 1997-present</b> | <b>6568</b>                     | <b>109</b>                            | <b>41</b>                   | <b>36</b>   | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>                                 |

<sup>a</sup> A congregation is considered to have split if 15 or more attenders have left over the homosexuality in leadership issue. The average loss per UCA congregation is 50.

Dr Howard Bradbury  
Canberra  
May 2005

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## Bible Study



Our Canberra Christian Fellowship in the Methodist Tradition has a Bible Study group that meets at the Campbell Gospel Chapel, Chauvel St., Campbell, every Tuesday at 2-30 pm.  
Pictured are some of those who attend the Bible Study.