



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

A Message from Meeniyán, Victoria

The Editor,

I would like to encourage you and commend you and all responsible for the recent publication of Gathered Together.

I feel somewhat guilty that I haven't expressed my thoughts before now.

The articles in the April/June edition were very helpful indeed.

In your article "The Signs were there" you captured the thoughts of so many within the UCA. Many were caught by surprise. How could a Church so blatantly depart from the clear teaching of God's Word? Surely the teaching of the Bible on Sexuality & Leadership was so black and white that this could never happen. But it has and with little regard by those in authority for the vast majority who have supported the work of the UCA in ministry and financially over so many years. I am deeply saddened by the whole scenario. My personal conclusion and that of many I know including at least one minister (still in the UCA) is that the UCA is an Apostate Church. There are too many things happening within the UCA that would make it impossible to resume worshipping under the name.

- The continual questioning of the authority of scripture.
- The strong support for multi faith co-operation, compromising the Christian faith.
- The support of the Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal decision against two evangelical Pastors in Melbourne for allegedly vilifying Muslims. (Where has support for our Brothers & Sisters gone?) One could go on and on.

But great comfort and peace can come from the conclusion that God is purging His Church to present it as a spotless bride. He is at work and while many things have happened to bring sadness into our hearts, the joy of seeing people return to the Bible for answers and comfort far outweighs the downside.

As a congregation, the Meeniyán Christian Fellowship (that is made up of 80% of former Meeniyán Uniting Church members) is providing a worship environment that is providing spiritual nurture and scope for expression to 30-50 adults and young people each Sunday. People who have never prayed audibly before are openly bringing their prayers of thanks and request to God in an expectant way. Every second Monday evening at the moment 25-30 people are involved in a Network course run by the Elders to discover their spiritual gift/s so that they will be able to glorify God and edify or build one another up as they exercise their newly discovered gifts. It's been exciting.

However there are of course challenges, and we must expect those. The devil is still active but God is building His people up to be salt and light to this generation of people within our community.

He still rules and reigns. He is in control. What have we to fear? "The Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear HIM and trust in HIM." Psalm 34:7.

So thank you for your publication, it's encouraging.

Thanks also to Dr Nick Hawkes for his very timely and helpful article "Leaving the UCA and Planting a New Church"

I found the information on "Planting a New Church - A Process" very helpful indeed. Going through the check list it was amazing to see that we had covered most of the suggestions mentioned. However there were a few that we still need to consider.

This email was written in haste, so its probably not written as well as it could have been. Please excuse that, but every blessing to you and your partners who prepare the publication.

Les Smith,
Chairperson of Elders,
Meeniyán Christian Fellowship. (Established August 2003)

**LIVING BIBLE FELLOWSHIP
GOONDIWINDI CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

FROM EXODUS TO A BRIGHT NEW HORIZON

We discovered the existence of “Gathered Together” through the article in the latest edition of the Travelling EMU, and so offer to your readers something of our experiences and the subsequent direction we have taken.

The title of our new church is: Living Bible Fellowship, Goondiwindi Congregational Church, but more about that later.

The common denominator we have all shared in the recent past is the dismay, grief and to some degree even anger at the ungodly direction the hierarchy of the Uniting Church turned us towards, at the July 2003 Assembly, when it passed the infamous Resolution 84.

How could we continue to worship and obey our loving Creator and sustainer God, and remain part of and support an organization which was now blatantly and unashamedly contravening God’s eternal and unchanging Word? We couldn’t!

Our U.C. congregation at the time numbered about 50 and only one member was totally in favour of R.84, but, when “crunch time” came, only 17 were prepared to walk out “into the cold”. It is an interesting conjecture if the respective Synods around Australia did not have such a hold on church property.

We who have left the U.C. looked at the array of existing churches in Goondiwindi, but realized that we wanted to stay together as a group. The U.C. pastor, who had been inducted into the Goondiwindi church a mere 10 days before the advent of R. 84, was “blown out of the water” by it and informed the congregation that he would not be able to continue his ministry under the new scenario. We who were leaving approached him with the proposition that if we could form a fellowship, would he be the pastor. He simply replied, “Yes.”

We spent nearly 6 months prayerfully and deliberately considering our options. We felt that gathering and worshipping under the insular conditions of a home group could eventually lead to a “withering on the vine” somewhere further down the track. We came to the realization that we wanted to be part of an established denomination, in which the Bible is the absolute authority by which it taught its flock and by which it conducted its affairs; a denomination with an active missionary programme both at home and overseas; Biblical ministerial training; and a denomination which does not exert strict paternalism upon the individual congregations.

A big ask? Well, yes, but we believe we found a match for these criteria in the Fellowship of Congregational Churches (F.C.C.)

The F.C.C. holds two basic tenets: the Bible is the absolute authority, and each individual congregation has total autonomy over its own affairs (including the ownership of property). These two tenets were established when the denomination began its journey back in the 1550s when Elizabeth 1 decreed



that all citizens must worship according to the rites of the Church of England. The original men and women who rebelled against this royal edict became known as Dissenters and Separatists. Isn't that what we are today?

Our Living Bible Fellowship officially began corporate worship in July 2004. We rented the local CWA hall, together with the adjoining house for our pastor and his wife. We applied to the F.C.C. to become a member church "in association" and were willingly granted this status at their annual Assembly in September 2004.

By June 2005, we noted that the local Lutheran Church was holding only one service per month at 5pm. It was resolved that we approach the Lutheran folk re the possibility of hiring their lovely cream brick church built in 1981. Our secretary had a brief meeting with their local contact person and departed that meeting bearing the key to the church door. The Lutherans are delighted that we are using their church, keeping the inside and surrounds clean and tidy, and attending to minor maintenance. At the same time, our pastor and his wife purchased their own home in the town.



**Standing L to R: Kathy Jensen, Philip Matthews, Ethan Matthews, Merv Beare, Merlene Clapham, Justin Matthews, Linda Matthews, Michael Anderson (football injury)
Seated L to R: Pastor David Jensen, Felicity, Zeke.**

We are now at the point where we have applied to become a fully affiliated church in the F.C.C. and confidently expect to be granted this status at the annual Assembly of the F.C.C. in September 2006.

Finally, a personal note from one of our members. At the height of our dilemma, he had tuned to the ABC "Hymns of the Forefathers", and the choir and congregation sang William Cowper's well-known hymn "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform" and there in the third verse was the direction we were looking for:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and will break
In blessings on your head.

Since taking fresh courage, the blessings on our heads have been manifold.

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Our God is Faithful

It is 2 years, 4 months since Pinery congregation exited the Uniting Church and became the Pinery Community Church, and about 8 months later affiliated with the Church of the Nazarene at Gawler. The Nazarenes are not well known in Australia, but are a significant force overseas. They grew out of the Methodist Church about 120 years ago, and strongly adhere to the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and to John Wesley's teaching about holiness as God's standard for Christian living.

It was with some trepidation that we moved out of the UCA - one member commenting, "I don't know what we're letting ourselves in for." We all could have echoed this comment, but we were confident in this, that our wonderful Lord knew exactly what lay ahead, and He is totally adequate for every situation that can arise.

The first Sunday after leaving the UC, the sermon focused on the exodus from Egypt, when the Lord promised, "I have come down to rescue them, ... to bring them up out of that land, into a land flowing with milk and honey.", the emphasis of the message being that God was committed, not only to bring them out, but also to bring them in, - in to the Promised Land. The Children of Israel proved faithless and unbelieving, saying, "God has brought us here to kill us by the sword of the Egyptians, - by thirst, - by hunger, - by the sword of the Amorites." But God faithfully maintained His commitment to them, to "bring them out, and bring them into the Promised Land."

Our experience, and our testimony in these 2+ years is that our God is a faithful God, adequate to every need and situation, - consistently providing "manna" for the journey, - a rich fare of Godly, biblical preaching, fellowship, encouragement and support, - (both prayer and practical). We also send our thanks to Ian and Howard for their encouragement and support, in establishing "Gathered Together", to be a help to all in the same situation.

Colin Blacket
August 2006



PINERY since R.84

When we announced our decision to leave the UC, we applied for permission to continue using the church building, as there was no one else to use it. This was refused until public liability insurance and incorporated body status could be established. This resulted in us using the Pinery Community Hall for worship. After 18 months in the hall, our church family was given permission to lease the church building. We were also able to have our own notice board.

All the Australian Hymn Books had been removed, - obviously for use in other congregations, but we are enjoying some old favourites from the Methodist Hymn Book, various chorus books, and the Nazarene hymn book which has some really great hymns and songs, - some of them by Bill and Gloria Gaither, who are, we found out, Nazarenes.

When we left the UC, there were folk from other congregations who hinted that they would join us, but to date that hasn't happened. We are a small group, in a very small rural community. Our numbers haven't grown much, but we have had some good outreach, e.g. four Kids Holiday Clubs, two Country Gospel Concerts in the local hall, (all of these have been well attended), four other functions to mix with the local community and build bridges of friendship, and we take our turn on the roster, to lead the mid-week service at the Mallala hostel / nursing home.

Over the years many small churches in rural South Australia have closed, so we feel blessed that Pinery continues as a light in the community. People outside the church were upset when we were refused permission to use the church building and expressed their relief when we were able to return, - even though they don't attend. But they do look to share with us if troubles or problems arise in their lives.

We find that we are accepted and respected in our former UC parish and we accept invitations to their special events when we are able, to maintain a point of contact. We haven't experienced much criticism or flack and I believe this is one of many answers to prayer.

Grace Blacket
August 2006

It has been said that Socrates and Aristotle each taught for 40 years, Plato for 50 years, but Jesus for only three. Yet His influence far surpasses the combined 130 years of teaching by these men who are acknowledged as the greatest philosophers of all antiquity. He painted no pictures, yet the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci received their illumination from Him. He wrote no poetry, yet Dante, Milton and others of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him. He composed no music, yet Haydn, Handel, Beethoven and Bach reached their highest perfection in hymns, symphonies and oratorios composed in His honour. Jesus is quite simply the greatest teacher who ever lived.

From *A Barrel of Fun*, J. John and Mark Stibbe, Monarch Books, P 102 (complies with their rules of use)

church and Church

During July I was able to visit England to attend a family wedding. Of course I took the opportunity to 'see the sights' and that included a number of churches, abbeys and cathedrals.

What mighty structures so many of these wonderful places are. They are BIG, their purpose was primarily to be places of worship, they were built, furnished and decorated to bring praise and glory to God, they contain much that is beautiful and valuable, they are a part of history and have stories to tell.

The present St. Paul's Cathedral in London is at least the 4th church on that site and other churches too have been rebuilt a number of times often with little remaining of what had gone before. The previous St. Paul's, destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666, was itself a monumental building. While I couldn't help but be impressed by what I saw, the realisation that even such imposing buildings, perhaps standing for nearly a thousand years and made from vast numbers of blocks of stone weighing many times more than me, are still subject to decay, decline and destruction stayed with me. Some such places of worship, once the spiritual home to large thriving communities, are now just open fields or maybe the crumbling remains of a few walls. Other more modern, church buildings have been converted to other uses, presumably due to a decline in their congregations.

As we grow and important parts of our lives are played out at our church (friendships, marriages, baptisms, farewelling loved ones, etc..) it is easy to become attached to that place. History, however, shows us that buildings and property, even churches, lack permanence. They may help us focus upon God and provide a means for us to express our praise and worship, but they remain buildings. God is the object of our praise and devotion, not the place where we meet for that purpose. Church buildings are not the Church.

I did see signs of the Church. While I found the cathedrals and their magnificence, not to mention the tourists, distracting, it was good to discover God's people using the opportunities God provided to witness for Him. At Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's prayers are said regularly and publicly over the public address system, reminding all visitors that those places are places of worship to God. The Bath Abbey leaflet that I received begins with information about Jesus, explaining a little of His life and what He has done for us - a very positive statement, before providing information on the Abbey itself. I was pleased to note that at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon where tourists flock to see William Shakespeare's burial site, the bookstall is well stocked with christian material as well as the more touristy items.

Inside and around many of these churches, I saw gravestones and memorial stones galore for men and women from times past. Some stones reminded us of people of power, wealth and importance, but other stones remembered ordinary people who had been associated with the church. I found it a good reminder that God works through His people, the Church, in every age. As I read of the generosity, kindness and good works done in God's name of just a few of these people, it was clear that God has been, and still is, active through His people - the Church, not just in a building, but in the wider community.

In England there is a great challenge for the Church. There are non-christian people in abundance and many of those with a so-called 'christian' background are apathetic towards faith and christian teaching.

In Australia there is a great challenge for the Church. Few people outside the church seem to have much interest in spiritual matters and even some churches seem to have lost sight of God's message of love, hope, help, healing and forgiveness and of God Himself.

We are Church. I am confident God can and will use us in His service if we make ourselves available to Him.

Next Issue

We would welcome contributions for the next issue. I'm sure there must be blessings from God that each group has received that would encourage us all if shared.

Thanks to those who have sent us information about their activities.

Contributions can be e-mailed to Ian Denton (iancd@yahoo.com) or sent to 64 Blacket St., Downer 2602, A.C.T..

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

Please include the best contact information for your group so people who are travelling can get in touch if they are staying close by.

ID

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Salvation

A minister was working late one Saturday night, and decided to call his wife before he left for home. It was about 10:00pm, but his wife didn't answer the phone.

The minister let it ring many times. He thought it was odd that she didn't answer, but decided to wrap up a few things and try again in a few minutes.

When he tried again she answered right away. He asked her why she hadn't answered before, and she said that it hadn't rung at their house. They brushed it off as a fluke and forgot about the matter.

The following Monday, the minister received a call at the church office, which was the phone that he'd used that Saturday night. The man he spoke with wanted to know why he'd called on Saturday night. The minister couldn't figure out what the man was talking about.

Then the man said, "It rang and rang, but I didn't answer." The minister remembered the mishap and apologised for disturbing him, explaining that he'd intended to call his wife. The man said, "That's OK. Let me tell you my story. You see, I was planning to commit suicide on Saturday night, but before I did, I prayed, 'God if you're there, and you don't want me to do this, give me a sign now.' At that point my phone started to ring. I looked at the caller ID, and it said, 'Almighty God'. I was afraid to answer!"

The reason why it showed on the man's caller ID that the call came from "Almighty God" is because the church that the minister attends is called Almighty God Tabernacle.

From *A Barrel of Fun*, J. John and Mark Stibbe, Monarch Books, P 178 (complies with their rules of use)