



September -
December 2006

Issue 8

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

God at Work

In the last issue of *Gathered Together* we printed a story of a man who asked God to tell him if he should not kill himself as he intended. Immediately the phone rang with the caller-ID indicating the call was from Almighty God.

That story was taken from a book of interesting stories, but I don't really know if it was true or not.

I do know the following story is true.

Several years ago a lady was driving home and as she passed the home of another lady a little way down her street that she knew, but not particularly well, she experienced an insistent inner conviction that she should stop and visit.

Despite other things to do and a hesitancy to visit, she decided to act on her conviction. She knocked on the door and spent a little time with the neighbour. At the end of the visit she came away feeling she had intruded and that her welcome had not been wholehearted, but at least she had obeyed that conviction to visit.

Quite some time later she saw the neighbour again and was told that at the time she had visited the neighbour, the neighbour had been quite depressed and was considering doing something to harm herself. The neighbour was very grateful for the visit as it had helped her through a particularly difficult moment in her life.

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One day, a little boy visited a nurse for a vaccination. After the nurse gave him an injection, she tried to bandage the boy's arm.

“I think you'd better bandage the other arm,” he said.

“But, why? I'm supposed to bandage the injected part of your arm to let your friends know not to touch it.”

“You really don't know anything about my friends, do you?”



From *A Barrel of Fun*, J. John and Mark Stibbe, Monarch Books, P 32.

Townsville Journey of Faith

Recently I spent an evening with Pastor Matthew Bolte from Hope Community Church in Townsville, as he was staying in Canberra for a couple of nights with mutual friends. I found his story of God at work fascinating.

Some years ago, before there was even a hint in his mind of leaving the UCA, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor friend Matthew had supported in prayer and fellowship through a difficult period, said out of the blue 'I don't know why I'm saying this, but if you ever find you cannot continue to worship where you are, you can use our facilities'.

Some time later it became clear to Matthew that God was calling him out of the UCA. To leave was a big decision. There were financial considerations – the loss of some benefits and of course the need to find some form of income, plus new accommodation. There was also concern for the people of his church.

Local Townsville ministers from a wide range of denominations and groups that Matthew met with regularly, indicated their willingness to support him until he was able to make new arrangements. As it turned out, Matthew was quickly able to obtain work using the chemistry training from his university days.

On the last occasion he was able to address his old congregation, Matthew advised them that they could keep track of what he was up to, if they wanted, by checking on a particular internet web site. Matthew knew most of those people were as dismayed with the UCA's direction as he was, but also felt that the style of church he believed God was leading him towards would not suit many of them. The 'stock route' was born.

Over a number of weeks, Matthew, with the knowledge and cooperation of other Townsville ministers, visited the different churches and many of his old congregation visited with him. He was able to explain the theology and practises of each church he visited which enabled people to make an informed decision on where God wanted them.

Finally Matthew set up Hope Community Church, making use of the SDA facilities that had been offered long before. Hope Community Church is different to the church Matthew had just left. There was a deliberate attempt to shed the churchiness that



Pastor Matthew Bolte (right) with Warren Clendenning after a service at the Canberra Christian Fellowship

most churches acquire over time. Having seen the difficulties that arise from people's attachment to a place of worship where they may have worshipped for many years, there was a desire to focus on worshipping God, not in a specific location, but anywhere and everywhere.

Worship services at Hope are slightly unpredictable and not always in the same place. The people are internet savvy and check their email for announcements concerning worship. Sometimes they will join with another congregation for a Sunday, other times meet in a prearranged location, perhaps a park. Matthew mentioned one 'mystery' service when cryptic clues were emailed out concerning the location – most people deciphered the clues and turned up. Another service was held at an army style obstacle training course. The 'sermon' on this occasion aimed to discover the practical outworking of the gift of encouragement. The people were divided into two teams and given the challenge of completing the course. Limited exemptions were made for each obstacle which could be saved up for the really hard parts if unused. Everyone started off a little unsure of themselves, but by the end, young and old, fit and infirm were helping each other to overcome all obstacles and the teams had dissolved into one cooperative unit - a very different but memorable 'sermon'.

Organisationally Hope Community Church is a company, part of a group of companies set up to provide a framework for churches and charitable institutions. This provides advantages when it comes to insurance and other practical matters. Hope Community Church also maintains contact with the group of ministers that offered their support to Matthew and they act as a reference panel. This provides a safeguard against the church deviating from sound Biblical teaching and gives church members an outside ear if they feel they need it. To obtain a wider church outlook and mission opportunities, Hope Community Church has also joined the Crosslink network of churches. This makes it easier to obtain licences for things like conducting weddings, etc..

Hope Community Church actively looks for opportunities to spread God's message in Townsville and further afield. They have a standing commitment that 10% of all their offerings will go directly to support chaplains in local schools. The church is growing and now numbers around 100 people.

I found Matthew's story very encouraging. God does watch over His people and helps them move forward along the path He has mapped out for them.

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Visit to Catani

On Sunday 8 October while visiting friends, June and Ken McPhan attended the morning worship service at the Catani Community Church, which is in a farming area in southern Victoria. There were about 30 people at the service with the ages ranging from toddlers to grandparents. We were delighted with the children.

It was obvious that the adults were glad to greet each other. One of the members conducted the service and we learnt quite a few new songs from a folder of photocopied hymns/choruses. The speaker visits regularly and travels many kilometres from his home. We gathered in a semi-circle facing a lectern placed on a side wall, the idea being to give an informal home church atmosphere - and it worked.

Following the service we shared lunch and had conversations with some of the members.

We felt that we had been part of a solid, worshipping group of God's people. They have been through travail and have triumphed. They greeted us warmly and we were happy to pass on greetings from the Canberra Christian Fellowship and undertook to convey their greetings to our Fellowship. We invited anyone visiting Canberra to contact our Fellowship and spend time with us. Welcome, Catani!

Ken McPhan



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.

No contributions = no *Gathered Together*.

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 Blackett St., Downer 2602, A.C.T..

We will 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

A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon. "How do you know what to say?" he asked.

"Why, God tells me."

"Then why do you keep crossing things out?"

From *A Bucket of Surprises*, J. John and Mark Stibbe, Monarch Books, P 32.

Leanyer Christian Fellowship Update (Darwin, Northern Territory)

We are now approaching the third anniversary of our formation. The events of those nearly three years can perhaps be seen through the following perspectives.

Steady as She Goes

In the wake of Resolution 84's upheaval we were determined to model our then proposed House Church around Acts 2:42-45 – most especially around verse 42 where: "***They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers***".



**Four of the current
Leanyer Christian Fellowship
house church members**

Happily this approach has served us well right through to this day. Each week I prepare a service sheet featuring excerpts from the "Word of God" (which we all read together), an opportunity for prayer and sharing, the singing of those good old Gospel songs/hymns and finally the preaching of the Word. The service proper lasts about 75 minutes after which we have fellowship of similar duration over tea and biscuits. On the first Sunday of each month we celebrate "the Lord's Supper".

Though it may be seen that we are drawing upon an ancient (but Biblical) model we do not hesitate to make use of the latest technology. Indeed such has proven to be a marvellous marriage. Singing those golden truths as inspired by those hymn writers of old, along with the "Hymn Makers" CDs never fail to take us to the heavenlies. Many a time I've found it necessary to have a tissue box near at hand. Having said that, we are also blessed by the singing of some of the more contemporary worship songs such as "How Deep the Father's Love", "Shout to the Lord" etc.

The Word continues to be preached to us via CD by one of the soundest Bible expositors I have ever encountered. His name is Joe Focht, the Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel, Philadelphia USA – a church of some 10,000 souls. He employs a verse by verse approach and is in possession of the God given ability to indeed render Scripture "quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword". We have taken some time to complete three books of the Bible – Genesis, James and John and have just commenced the Book of Romans.

We continue to be involved in outreach distributing 100 copies of "The Challenge Good News Newspaper" each month around our neighbourhood. Every so often we also "letter box" Gospel booklets etc and recently completed a 3,000 booklet effort encompassing some three suburbs. Occasionally we receive a response, but nothing like as many as we would wish. Happily however, we have within our little congregation (6 members) one lady who responded to a free Bible invitation given by us. One thing led to another and she has since joined our House Church.

I also continue to conduct a Monday Night Bible Study for our little group, including from time to time, folk from other churches. We commenced with Rick Warren's "40 day Purpose", but have moved on from there with studies on those early chapters of Genesis (the creation, the fall, the flood); "An Overview of the Book of Revelation"; "The Once and Future Church"; "Heaven and Hell"; "Once Saved Always Saved – True or False?"; "Calvinism versus Arminianism", "A Study of the Epistles of Peter and Jude", "Dispensationalism versus Reformed Theology"; "Israel in Prophecy". Obviously some of those topics have inspired lively debate, but have also encouraged us to dig deep into Scripture. Happily I am able to report that in the wake of all of that we all remain good friends.

Disruptions

While the House Church expression of corporate Christianity has much to commend it, it also can be vulnerable to spiritually destructive visitations upon it. Of course such can occur to any sized Church, but the impact upon a small group can be more immediate and profound. So it was that we were put to the test by a couple who had joined us in the wake of the aforementioned "40 Day Purpose" program. Soon after settling in with us they became enraptured with the teaching of the Jehovah Witnesses. Many heart rending debates followed as we tried to expose the heresy of

that cult, while they at the same time put great persuasion upon us to come on board with their new found beliefs. In the end there was a sad, but unavoidable, parting of the ways.

Another one of our number, who joined with us during our second year, brought with him the erroneous teachings of the "United Church of God" – an off-shoot of "Armstrongism". He insisted that we observe the Jewish Sabbath, the Passover Feast and the Jewish festivals as listed in Leviticus 23. Once again strenuous debate was the consequence. In the end the best we could do was to agree to disagree. He has subsequently taken a seventh month sabbatical in Israel. We are hoping and praying that by the time of his return he can join with us in embracing the following sentiments:

"Free from the law, O happy condition! Jesus hath bled, and there is remission; Cursed by the Law and bruised by the fall, Christ hath redeemed us once for all."

In the light of these unwelcome distractions I was led to write a document entitled "Here We Stand" setting out our Church's theological position. This has since been endorsed by the present "congregational members and will be used as our "plumb line" of belief should there be any further doctrinal imposts made upon us.

[Still concerned for God's people in the denomination he has left, Rob Porteous was in Brisbane for the 11th UCA Assembly where he was a prayer intercessor]

The Eleventh UCA Assembly (Brisbane 5th –11th July 2006)

It was a roller coaster ride at Kings College, taking me to the mountain tops (when joined in prayer and worship with my fellow intercessors - they were forever unforgettable); the dark valleys (the apostate Resolution 108); and back to the mountain tops (the visionary proposal for the formation of an Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church).

There were basically three groups at work, all inextricably linked:

- a) the 260 Assembly delegates.
- b) the 6 or so Reforming Alliance leaders. Their job was to present the evangelical point of view at the Assembly.
- c) the 10 prayer intercessors led by Rev Anne Hibbard (of which I was part).

The intercessors' job was, through prayer and worship, to cover the things discussed at Assembly and to prayerfully minister in person to the RA leaders and RA delegates who visited us from time to time, salving their wounds and encouraging their hearts. We provided a presence in the Chapel and joined together for the morning Holy Communion Service and an evening praise, worship and prayer service

Anne wept when Resolution 108 was finally ratified.

After Assembly, some 150 members of the Reforming Alliance and EMU arrived to consider what to do in the wake of Resolution 108. The formation of an Assembly of Confessing Congregations was proposed. The idea was to set up "a church within a church" providing conservative evangelical congregations with a place and voice within the denomination. (The Assembly of Confessing Congregations has of course since been officially inaugurated as of 13th October).

It was indeed a remarkable 10 days the ramifications of which will continue for many more days to come.

The Future

Despite the formation of the ACC and myself having joined same as an individual member we feel that in one sense we may have "crossed the Rubicon" and are happy to continue as we are until we are prompted to do otherwise, always praising the Lord for both the blessings and the challenges which have come our way over these nearly three years.



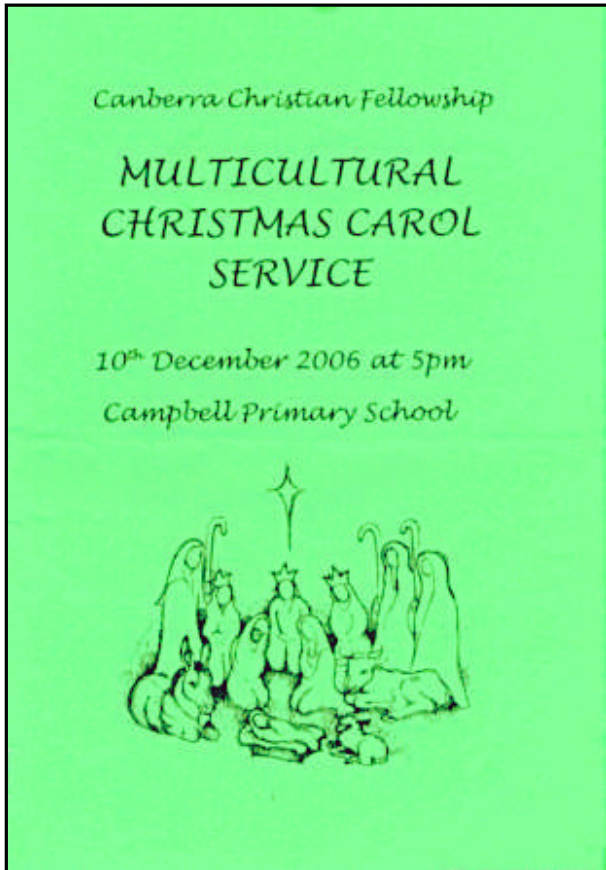
Cheers and blessings,
Rob Porteous.

It is better to be:

- divided by truth, than united in error;
- to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than to speak a lie that will comfort and then kill;
- to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie;
- to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude;
- to die ultimately with the truth, than to live with a lie.

From A Bucket of Surprises, J. John and Mark Stibbe, Monarch Books, P 202.

Carolling in Canberra



Having held successful Multicultural Carol services in 2004 and 2005, the Canberra Christian Fellowship were hopeful of another wonderful evening in 2006. There was much encouragement during our planning and everything seemed to fall into place.

Finally the evening arrived and we were pleased to welcome around 220 – 230 people to the local primary school hall. Our goal was to present a mix of choirs from different communities and carols that everyone could sing together, followed by a time of refreshments and fellowship afterwards. We deliberately tried to avoid 'churchiness' which can put off non-church people while delivering a strong Christian witness and message.

The carols sung together had a real warmth and power



Above: **Our musicians (piano not shown)**



Left: **Chinese Methodist Choir**

Below: **Reid Korean Choir**

and our choirs provided variety while reminding us that Jesus came for people everywhere. We had singers from the Chinese, Korean, Fijian, Philippino, Papua New Guinean and Tongan communities plus there were Indonesians with us too, although they didn't sing for us this time.

Our carols involved a lot of effort, but that effort resulted in an evening when people came together and remembered the true meaning of Christmas. It was gratifying to welcome a number of people there who had been attracted by our advertising or personal invitations. ID





Top Left: **Fijian Methodist Choir**
 Top Right: **The congregation**
 Middle Left: **Papua New Guinea Cultural Group Choir**
 Middle Right: **Philippino International Christian Group singer**
 Bottom Left: **O'Connor Tongan Choir**
 Bottom Right: **Refreshments**

Canberra Christian Fellowship's Multicultural Christmas Carol service featured choirs and songs from six Asia-Pacific nations; a talented ensemble of musicians; five carols sung heartily by a large congregation and small gifts to the children present – all to celebrate the birth of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Reverend Abraham Tang preached on the theme “Any room for Jesus?” Abraham noted that to some people Christmas means shopping; the exchange of gifts; a holiday; time with family, but for Christians the birth of Jesus remains paramount. Christians celebrate because Jesus’ entry into the world brings joy and hope. Some churches have a crib with Jesus and his earthly parents surrounded by animals. We forget the smell of the stable and the cold on that Bethlehem night. Jesus – Creator and Sustainer of all things, Almighty God – was born in a manger as a baby because He loved us. The occasion for these events – the journey to Bethlehem, the town of David – was for the most bureaucratic of reasons: Caesar ordered a census to be taken to find out how much tribute (tax) he could levy on Roman subjects.

Joseph and Mary had been married for less than nine months – Mary was carrying a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. There was no room at the inn. Would you give up your place in a hotel for Jesus?, for a pregnant woman coming into labour?

Meanwhile, on the hillsides around Bethlehem, shepherds plied their low-status job in the cold night. It was to such as these that God chose to first reveal the Good News. Angels appeared; the shepherds were terrified. Scripture says two things cannot be overcome: death and sin. The angel announced liberation from both through the Saviour Jesus.

We need to involve Jesus at the centre of our lives. He is the friend who enters our house and we don’t mind where he goes. With some guests we might be cautious – we wouldn’t let them out of the living room, but with Jesus on the throne of our lives there is no-where in our lives that he cannot go.

Vince Lorimer

Church / Fellowship Contacts

Australian Capital Territory

Canberra Christian Fellowship (in the Methodist Tradition)

Howard & Ruth Bradbury (118 Vasey Cres., Campbell 2612, A.C.T.)
02 62489574 bradbury@cyberone.com.au
Ian Denton (64 Blacket St., Downer 2602, A.C.T.)
02 62487953 iancd@yahoo.com

New South Wales

Bunnaloo Community Church

(near Deniliquin)

Greg Jasper (RMB 530, Thyra Rd. via Moama 2731, N.S.W.)
03 54897249 jasperten@bigpond.com

Church on the Green

(Beverly Hills)

Peter Wilson (P.O. Box 63, Beverly Hills 2209, N.S.W.)
02 91538076 pastorpete@ozemail.com.au

Crossway Christian Fellowship

(Holbrook)

Don Abrahams (92 Swift St., Holbrook 2644, N.S.W.)
02 60363989 d.abrahams@eftel.net.au

Mountain Hope Church

(Orange)

Dae Sop Yoon (P.O. Box 8552, Orange 2800, N.S.W.)
02 63624017 daesopyoon@optusnet.com.au

Narrandera Christian Fellowship

Tony Smith (20 Argyle St., Narrandera 2700, N.S.W.)
02 69592652

West Wyalong Community Church

Allan Melmoth (P.O. Box 15, Wyalong 2671, N.S.W.)
02 69722180 amelmooth@bigpond.net.au

Northern Territory

Leanyer Christian Fellowship

(Darwin)

Rob Porteous (24/52 Leanyer Drive, Leanyer 0812, N.T.)
08 89271849 rporteous@vtown.com.au

Queensland

Cunnamulla

Wayne & Jane Dillon (64 Jane St. (P.O. Box 186), Cunnamulla 4490, Qld.)
07 46550567 wayne@dillonministries.com

Hope Community Church

(Townsville)

Matthew & Kathy Bolte (18 Toucan Cres., Condon 4185, Qld.)
07 47234790 mlbolte@bigpond.net.au

Living Bible Fellowship,

Goondiwindi Congregational Church

David Jensen (18 Donald St., Goondiwindi 4390, Qld.)
07 46714449 dakajens@bigpond.net.au

The Range Christian Fellowship

(Toowoomba)

Alan Small (58 Kingsford Smith Drive, Toowoomba 4350, Qld.)
07 46330530 alanrobsmall@dodo.com.au

South Australia

Clare Valley New Life Church

Mark White (P.O. Box 80, Clare 5453, S.A.)
08 88421546 mncwhite@sa.chariot.net.au

Eyre Family Church

John Adams (P.O. Box 408, Cummins 5631, S.A.)
0427 004276 adams11@epc.net.au

Home Ground Church

(Port Neill)

Tony Rodda (P.O. Box 30, Port Neill 5604 S.A.)
08 86889051
Kym Shepherd (RMS 35, Butler Tanks 5605 S.A.)
08 86880040 kjmab@bigpond.com

Pinery Community Church

Colin & Grace Blacket ("Bee Shaw", Pinery 5460, S.A.)
08 85277001

Rivergate Christian Community Church

(Athelstone, Adelaide)

Nick & Mary Hawkes (39 Burnbank Grove, Athelstone 5076, S.A.)
08 83655107 mary.hawkes@adam.com.au

Southern Gateway Community Church

(Victor Harbor)

Rob Moores (16 Africaine Drive, Victor Harbor 5211, S.A.)
08 85521295 southerngatewaycc@hotmail.com

Tasmania

George Town Christian Fellowship

John Bigham (188 Old Bangor Tram Rd., Mt. Direction 7252, Tas.)
03 63948216 barbjb@supernerd.com.au

Wesley Vale Community Church

Shirley Bramich ("Wren Haven", 35 Chaplins Rd., Moriarty 7307, Tas.)
03 64269369 fax. 03 64269370

Victoria

Catani Community Church

(West Gippsland)

Harry & Diane Brown (625 Heads Rd., Catani 3981, Vic.)
03 56294250 hdcabro@sympac.com.au

Community Church of Kyabram

John Hosking (4 Emu Close, Kyabram 3620, Vic.)
03 58531010 janice_john_hosking@hotmail.com

Community Church Lockington

Allan Johnson (494 Willow Grove Rd., Echuca 3564, Vic.)
03 54837523

Invergordon-Katandra Community Church

Lawrence Morley (RMB 4350., Numurkah 3636, Vic.)
03 58655223

Meeniyah Christian Fellowship

Les Smith (1835 South Gippsland Highway, Meeniyah 3956, Vic.)
03 56647310 ruthless@dcsi.net.au

Western Australia

Katanning Wesleyan Methodist Church

John Taylor (38 Clive St., Katanning 6317, W.A.)
08 98212490 revjohn@wn.com.au

"Gathered Together" Contacts

Gathered Together editor

distribution

Ian Denton (64 Blacket St., Downer 2602, A.C.T.)
02 62487953 iancd@yahoo.com
Howard & Ruth Bradbury (118 Vasey Cres., Campbell 2612, A.C.T.)
02 62489574 bradbury@cyberone.com.au