



ADVANCE

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CHRISTIAN HOPE

Where can we go for hope in times of trauma?

In December 1997, the sleepy streets of Menai were once again devastated by bushfires. They came quickly to a community that still remembered the fires just four years earlier. Menai Church of Christ was right in the middle of the action and continues to be called on to help those affected by the trauma and needing assistance in coming to grips with life and hope for a future. Bruce Darge, Minister, tells us how one family has come to faith through the tragedy of losing everything:

Several hundred homes were in immediate danger. Large areas of Menai had to be evacuated, including the schools, causing dislocation to families.

Some families were separated for hours before they could re-establish contact and know that their children were safe.

The effective action of the emergency services meant only ten homes were completely destroyed with a further sixty homes suffering some degree of fire damage. But the fires left hundreds of residents in their wake, traumatised and wondering what life was all about.

Two weeks after the '97 fires, the church sponsored a recovery meeting. Many of the fire victims attended. They had come mainly to hear the Routs, a family from Menai Church of Christ.

They shared their experience from the



1994 fires in which they lost everything and the journey they have been on since those fires:

'Having lost everything in 1994, the recent fires which again swept through

"Some families were separated for hours before they could re-establish contact and know that their children were safe."

our area have caused us to reflect and reassess what has happened in our lives in the past four years.

'Only as time passes is it possible to look back and realise the growth that takes place through an experience such as this.

At the time the temptation is to ask, 'What did we do to deserve this? Why did God allow this to happen?' and there are no answers.

Despite all the assistance given by com-

munity and welfare organisations, the feelings of total loss of control over what was happening in our lives was overwhelming.

'The only positive thing we could feel was the thankfulness that our family had all survived, which in our case now seems like a miracle. It often takes a life-threatening situation such as this to make us realise how important we are to each other.

'At the time of the 1994 bushfires we attended church periodically but did not have a faith to sustain us during this time.

'It was only afterwards and at different times for each of us, that we came to accept the part that God plays in our lives. We came to accept that the Lord was not a vengeful God but one who had been suffering with us, who had been sharing our pain and loss.

'The most important thing which bought us to this point in our lives was the caring church family.

'Love and care were shown us in 1994, and again in December last year when

we had to relive what had happened. The community and the welfare organisations can offer material and practical help, but they cannot offer the hope.

'As a family who now belongs to a church we can view the recent disaster in this area from both sides. We can see the need for the church to really reach out into the community and offer help and hope. Not just when something like this hap-

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A vision for families

Hardy's Bay church, on the central coast north of Sydney is reasonably new. It joined Conference in 1991 and Andrew Ranucci came as a student minister in 1992 and was appointed full-time minister in 1994.

The church began with an evening congregation that was largely aimed at youth and adults. When Andrew started in 1992 some sixty people attended the evening service.

The demographics of the area are mainly working class/semi-professional families, who have decided to move out of Sydney to enjoy a quality of life without the large mortgage.

For that reason the vision of the church was focussed on reaching 'families'.

A morning service was started, with rather few people and no musicians. Families gradually began attending and a Kids Church was started.

By the end of 1996, with 80 adults and 50 children attending the morning service, the congregation had grown beyond the capacity of the building.

By February 1997 the church made a strategic decision to add a second morning service at Empire Bay Public School, a well appointed new school with excellent facilities.

1997 was an exciting year for the church as God brought more and more families into the congregation.

By the end of 1997 it had grown further, with 40 new families, over half of whom were previously unchurched.

On Sunday mornings the church now ministers to over 300 adults and children, with the evening service reaching about 100 youth and young adults.

A key element in its effectiveness is its very specific vision statement: "To turn central coast families into devoted fol-



The worship band

lowers of Christ'.

This meant all programming was focussed on the needs of families.

Andrew Ranucci firmly believes that if a family visits and the kids love the Sunday School, the family will be back!

"1997 was an exciting year for the church as God brought more and more families into the congregation."

The services are very seeker-sensitive, with contemporary bands and lots of variety to create a sense of anticipation. Practical Biblical preaching and conversion testimonies are also a key element.

No matter what stage the Hardy's Bay church is at, Andrew Ranucci believes its best years are still ahead.

The church is presently negotiating to buy a 2-acre block of land in the hope of building a ministry centre. *(Any donations would be greatly appreciated!)*

This is an urgent need because the present school hall only seats 220 and the church is already at capacity — with no other larger halls available in the area.

This year Glenn Dibley has joined as youth pastor with a vision to build on the

church's strength in youth ministry.

In just 2 months Glenn has built the Junior Youth Group to over 80 kids and his monthly 'Reachout' service have attracted some 200 youth.

With the growing number of families in the church, it is obvious that an effective Youth ministry is vital in order to care for the many children who are soon to become our future youth.

Families are the foundation of our society. Andrew Ranucci firmly believes that churches need to develop a clear vision of how they can best reach out, minister and care for families.

Unchurched families are quite willing to rediscover church and pleasantly surprised when they find themselves and their children enjoying the experience.

Relationships are developed and before you know it, people want to discover more about what it means to be a Christian.

Even bungy jumping doesn't come close to the excitement of seeing an unchurched family commit itself to Christ and become enthusiastic about worshipping together on a Sunday morning. Our vision has become a reality.



Andrew Ranucci

The way forward

It is important to understand that while there may be any number of ways to advance our cause, the only successful way is to move forward in harmony and togetherness. At my induction at Northside, our Conference President graphically demonstrated that while we may differ on our mode of operation, we are all of the same essence. Then let me fill in the dots so the picture may become clearer.

PRIMARY UNDERSTANDING

1. Whatever our personal penchants, practises or peeves, the unquestionable and central truth for our existence is the Lordship of Christ. 'Jesus Christ is Lord.' The Heavens know it and rejoice. The demons know it and shake. We must know it and surrender to His will.
2. There has to be a firm commitment to our historic New Testament plan of salvation. Like the juggler keeping the balls in sync so must we — without compromise or omission. Walter Scott called it the five finger exercise.

Faith - without which we cannot hope to please God the Father.

Repentance - the change of mind and will that sets a new direction.

Confession - I will declare Him to be my Divine Lord and Saviour and my life must show it in many possible ways.



Bruce Armstrong
Ministry Coordinator
Churches of Christ NSW

Baptism - a graphic air-lock through which, in normal circumstances, all must pass.

Gift of the Holy Spirit - the Divine presence within each committed believer is the gracious gift that assures of salvation and empowers for daily fruit filled living. While some might say that that is returning to the past, I must confess I have never left it.

3. We have become a vital part of the Body of Christ. Then there must be a desire to see the absolute forward progress of the 'Church of Christ' as it

is through this movement we have entered the Christian Church Eternal.

4. The God-given intent is to work within the context of your local church within the concept that we are a valid network of believers. Our strong connection within the network of the Conference of Churches enhances that body strength. What is good for us as a movement is good for the Church at large.
5. Within my local church I play my role as God has allocated my position. I share in the Spirit generated and enhanced 'good works' and the resulting balance that my local church brings to blending each believers talents.

So I strive to bring prominence to the Christ and His church Matthew 5:16,

I endeavour to enable the church to be more effective in its calling Ephesians 4:12,13.

My commitment will help the churches to grow in number and in service Acts 5:14,42

PRIMARY DEVELOPMENT

1. There can be no more primary goal than to bring people to Christ. I may serve the poor or the elderly or the impoverished. But I do that on the way to win people to Christ for eternity.
2. While youth are part of the church of today they are the leaders of tomorrow. These are the important years of decisions-making for careers, marriage and values. What more important value can they understand and receive than Jesus?
3. The ratio of leaders to followers is slim. We need to concentrate on the development of leaders with vision, gumption, faith and compassion. It is an absolute must: otherwise we will disintegrate in a pile of rust left by the failure of the tin gods that are about!
4. The early church made it a point to plant churches where ever they located. While it is not just as simple as that today, we must plant or disappear. We have nearly 25 churches under 29 members and that's a time-bomb waiting to destroy us.

Rather than lament the recent changes, rather than long for the past grandeur of our movement in NSW, let us rally to avoid an agonising and disgraceful death.

Let us lift the name of Christ and see His church grow and multiply.

Under God we can make it happen.

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RECONCILIATION

"You can't fix the past but you can affect the future"

Shirley Rankine grew up in South Australia, having been taken from her family as a child.

Despite the trauma of being one of the 'stolen children', Shirley has overcome the past with a positive faith. She recalls:

I remember growing up at Point McLeay, where there was no drink and no fighting. Everybody was family. Adults played cards while children played together. We used to go to different aunties and buy home-made ice cream. We watched the cows being milked and collected the milk in our billys and scooped the cream off with our fingers as we carried it home. We would pick apricots from the orchard before going swimming.

I remember going to Renmark tip and crossing the railway bridge and picking up a big load of junk and taking it to the bridge. Then we found we couldn't take it with us because it was heavy and we couldn't drag it across because the sleepers were too far apart.

We also got half-way across the track and a train would be coming, so we would have to jump down between the tracks until the train passed. It was a happy life.

The big change in my life came when the family went to Adelaide for a holiday. While at Adelaide, the Community Welfare heard of a new family in town and came to check us out.

When they came I was in the front yard and was asked had I eaten. As it was almost tea-time, I said 'No' thinking that she was referring to tea.

I got a good slap from my mum, and she said that they would be coming again the next day, because I said that I hadn't eaten.

The next day Community Welfare came and split the family up. This was the last time that I saw my mum.

I was taken to an institution and at Christmas, when all the kids were placed in private homes, I was sent to people who



Shirley Rankine

eventually became my foster parents.

Living in a white community caused many changes to a once carefree life. There were rules and regulations to follow and time became an issue. These factors caused me to resent the changes that I faced each day in my 'New Life.'

I became a Christian at an early age. This gave me the strength to cope with the changes I was facing — then and now.

A few years later my foster mum encouraged me to get among my own people. One way to achieve this was to work with the Churches of Christ Federal Aboriginal Board at Norseman.

At Norseman, God used me to help many of the Aboriginal kids who were facing the same changes I had already faced.

I found that the ugly duckling I con-

sidered myself to be in the white society became a swan (which happens to be my totem) and I fell into the ways of my own people.

After a few years at the mission I needed to find my own family. Community Welfare was no help.

I located my mum and the first attempt to contact her failed because she had 'gone bush.' When I came to live in Sydney I tried to reach her and found where she was.

I intended to visit South Australia during my holidays but a few months before they were due I was told by my cousin that my mum had died.

Since then I have met some brothers, a sister, aunties and nephews.

I've found that I have had to learn a lot about Aboriginal issues - land rights, culture and so on.

I have white people look at me and see me as Aboriginal and Aboriginal people look at me and see a white person — and I feel caught in the middle of two cultures.

I have found many Aboriginal people in Sydney in the same position. Different Aboriginal people handle this situation differently and this can cause racial discontent.

Many white people have commented to me 'You've made it, why can't they all make it?' but different circumstances have a different outcome.

I know that we can never change the past or forget it, but we must not dwell in the past.

We must move on to the future.

My goal for the future is not to talk about reconciliation but to be reconciled.

I know this works for I have made very many friends. Not all my friends have said 'I am sorry,' but their actions and friendship show true reconciliation.



R to L: Mikala (children's worker), Silvia, Graham Long with Silvia's children

Community Care – Welfare

Silvia came into our care at Pendle Hill because violence by her husband had made life intolerable for herself and her children.

While with us, she gave birth to her third baby daughter, Jasmine. It was our great honour to be able to support Silvia through this most sacred event. Our Children's worker had the special privilege of being the support person for Silvia at the birth.

Silvia now faces the extra burden of treatment for cancer. Pray for this brave woman and her three children.

Graham Long

Aged Care

Many years ago Churches of Christ saw the opportunity to minister to older people — with the assistance of Government funding.

Our care services have grown where today they care for 750 people.

While the partnership with Government has helped financially, both with the establishment and running of such care services, things are changing — and not for the better.

Before the Government would assist with the capital cost of establishing and upgrading care facilities.

As this is no longer the case, it is difficult to maintain our proud record of excellence in care, particularly the upgrading and replacement of existing buildings.

The opportunities for ministry are greater than ever, yet there are fewer people to answer the call.

Australian demographics will soon see the number of people aged 65 or more will exceed the number of children under the age of 15.

While not denying the need for ministries aimed at young people, the aged are often forgotten, both by family and the church.

The Gospel is for all people regardless of age.

The challenge is how to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to hear it or experience it through caring ministries.

Jack Murphy



Seniors' Ministry

Ministry to seniors encompasses a wide age range from 55 to 95 and beyond.

We encourage local churches to minister to them, diversity being the key to effective contact and fellowship.

We encourage churches to clearly target the senior age group they want to reach and create a program accordingly.

As Ministry Leader, Pam Clapshaw is available to assist you with resources and advice.



STATE CWF

The theme for our 97/98 Conference year was: 'The Same...But Different.'

In that time we conducted the second National Gathering primarily for women. Held at Stanwell Tops Convention Centre, it followed the theme of 'Putting the Pieces Together.'

Our guests were Marje Dredge as CWF World President, Ron Brooker our Australian President of World Convention and Lorraine Hensby, our Australian



College

During the first half of 1998 we are offering six courses at local church locations in Sydney:

Castle Hill: *Foundations of Pastoral Care* - from 21st February at 8:30am with Keith Farmer.

Northside: *Pastoral Leadership and Administration* - from 23rd February at 7:15 pm with Keith Farmer, Les Gainer and Kevin Fitzpatrick.

North Turramurra: *Contemporary Communication* - commences from 14th April at 7:15 pm with Lloyd Irwin.

During the second half of the year courses will be held at Epping, Greenacre and Pendle Hill.

We invite people to sit in on all or any part of these courses in order to be further equipped for their ministry in the local church.

For further details please contact Les Gainer on 9630 7533.



Keith Farmer

Youth Vision Australia

YVA continues to be a reality and we are now working towards our second cooperative venture in a National Youth Workers Gathering in May 98.

For the second time in two years, Youth Ministers/Workers and key Youth Leadership from Churches of Christ across Australia will gather for two days of encouragement, teaching and networking. This will be followed by the Australian Youth Ministry Conference. AYMC runs every two years for trainers from across the board of denominations for an intensive four day conference. Speakers will be Tim Costello, Stuart Piggitt, Peter Corney, Ruth Powell and Michael Frost.

— Gordon Barr

Stanwell Tops Conference Centre

About three years ago three people approached me independently with a vision each had received. Remarkably each vision was the same.

Its now history that seven houses on our site are available for ministry as part of the day to day ministry of Churches of Christ.

It gives ministers and their families, the wider church, a place to get away from the pressures of every day life and ministry.

For information, please call Vanessa on Freecall 1 800 816 496.

Greg Rees



CWF representative to World Convention.

It was a tremendous event of spiritual and mutual upbuilding and was well attended from across our great Southland Continent.

In February this year we held our planning forum at Auburn with Lois Tagg from Melbourne facilitating.

We affirmed what has gone before and now look to initiate the necessary changes that will make the women's ministry in this State most effective.

Judy Cayzer
President, NSW Women's Work

Christian Hope cont'd

pens but through all the everyday disasters of life that people have to face.

'I know that in the past I had viewed churches as insular organisations that looked after their own members but through experience I know that isn't what Christianity is all about.'

Now a whole family has been won to the Lord.

Since the 1994 fires we have seen Kerry recommit her faith, Max recently gave his life to Jesus and the two girls, Lee and Eleanor also have committed their lives to Christ.

This little church has been given an enormous task in reaching out to those in

spiritual need, a task that is over stretching our available resources — yet isn't God awesome as He continues to open the hearts of a community to the ministry of His Holy Spirit.

As we read in Acts, God is bringing daily those that need to hear His word of salvation and hope in a world that is full of hurt and distrust.

Please pray for us that we will have the strength and workers to run and not grow weary as God fulfils His mission in Menai.

Bruce Darge, Minister
Menai Church of Christ
Phone: (02) 9520 8516

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