

**FROM AN ACORN  
TO  
AN OAK TREE**

**A HISTORY OF  
WAVERLEY CHRISTIAN  
FELLOWSHIP**

**BY**

**RICHARD J. HOLLAND  
THE FOUNDING PASTOR**

# INDEX

		<i>Page</i>
<i>Chapter 1</i>	<b>The Oak Tree</b>	<b>3</b>
	- Beginnings	<b>4</b>
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<b>Homes and Halls</b>	<b>8</b>
	- Our First Outreach	<b>10</b>
	- Home Fellowships	<b>11</b>
	- Frankston Teachers' College	<b>12</b>
<i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>Waverley Mission</b>	<b>14</b>
	- Other Foundation Members	<b>17</b>
<i>Chapter 4</i>	<b>Evangelism and Missions</b>	<b>18</b>
	- Campus Evangelism	<b>18</b>
	- Foster Families	<b>20</b>
	- International Ministry	<b>21</b>
<i>Chapter 5</i>	<b>A New Name</b>	<b>22</b>
	- Rolleston Outreach	<b>22</b>
	- Rockhampton Outreach	<b>24</b>
	- Moe Outreach	<b>25</b>
<i>Chapter 6</i>	<b>Bible Schools and Buildings</b>	<b>27</b>
	- Waverley Christian College	<b>30</b>
	- Back to the Church	<b>31</b>
<i>Chapter 7</i>	<b>Waverley Christian Fellowship Builds</b>	<b>33</b>
	- Growth	<b>38</b>
<i>Chapter 8</i>	<b>Passing the Baton</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Chapter 9</i>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>42</b>
	- Conclusion 1: Church Planting	<b>42</b>
	- Conclusion 2: The Question of Faith	<b>44</b>

# **A HISTORY OF WAVERLEY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP**

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE OAK TREE**

At the time of writing, Waverley Christian Fellowship is a church of some 3500 people from over fifty nations. If you were to visit for one of the three main meetings each Saturday evening, and twice on Sunday morning) you would find a congregation not only multi-national, but spanning all age groups. Young families, older families, seniors, youth, campus students....all making up one huge church family. The ten-acre property is divided into the church complex with facilities for services plus offices for some sixty staff, and the Waverley Christian College complex educating from kindergarten through to Year 12, currently catering for 700 students and growing each year. The property itself is widening its boundaries as a further four acres is purchased from the local council, and already the Board of Directors is looking to purchase further land on which to build a large auditorium to cater for the church's continued growth.

Arriving at a church meeting, you would find a user-friendly church, experience a warm welcome and enjoy contemporary praise and worship followed by a relevant life-changing word as presented by the Senior Minister, Mark Conner. There is a standard of excellence in all that is done and a genuine desire to reach people from all walks of life with a relevant gospel. As you lingered in the foyer on the way out you would see all the different ministries of this church listed – community care, missions, children's ministries, counselling, youth, campus, teaching courses, creative arts and so much more.

When I look back over the years I can only wonder at all that the Lord has accomplished and is accomplishing in this church, and I marvel at what has emerged from small beginnings.

Firstly I know that God, as the author and finisher of our faith, declared and knew His purposes for this church, and thus called and prepared those of us who would be involved in its birth and development. It is humbling to look back and realise just what the Lord had for me to do when He called me into ministry.

## **BEGINNINGS...THE ACORN**

My name is Richard John Holland and I came into this world on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1919, the sixth child of the eight born to Ernest William and Florence Louisa Holland in Gippsland, Victoria. My father was a schoolteacher, and from all accounts a very good one. One of my high school teachers remarked that it was unusual for a country boy to surpass the more academic city boys!

Prayer was an integral part of our home. My father would spend many hours on his knees seeking God to supply the needs of our family, and those of many others. He was hungry to see God move in Australia and when he heard that a Methodist minister in Melbourne (with a population of 700,000 at that time) had experienced the infilling of God's Holy Spirit, he set to praying that the Lord would lead him to that same experience.

After two months of consistent prayer, he believed it was time to find this Methodist man. Setting off in his horse and buggy he drove to the railway station and caught the steam-train to Melbourne. Once in Melbourne he waited on the Lord and felt directed to get on yet another train on a line he had not been on before. At one station he was led to leave the train and began to walk down streets, all the time believing that although he had no

idea where he was, the Lord was indeed guiding him. After two hours of walking, he stopped in front of a house "This is the place" – he knew it in his heart. Knocking at the door, he asked the man who opened it "Are you the person who was filled with the Spirit and has spoken in tongues?" The man smiled "Come on in". That night my father experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues – that beautiful prayer language that was to become a great source of strength and power with God.

My father brought that knowledge of the Holy Spirit into our home, and I was filled with the Holy Spirit at the age of five and to this day have not ceased to pray and praise my God both in English and in tongues.

Although I grew up as a real boy, normal in every way, and doing the things children do, I always had the assurance that God was with me and had me in hand in spite of all my imperfections. He was moulding me for the future. I do remember at around ten years of age, reading the Bible with a big dictionary propped up beside me to assist me in understanding the "big words". We did not have a radio at that time (and of course this is way before television) and I truly enjoyed the stories I read and the gospel message. I can recall day-dreaming of taking a horse and wagon into town and preaching from the back of a van – although that didn't happen, I do believe that God put that desire to preach in my heart at this tender age and it has become my greatest call.

Our family was a family of faith and Family Altar was held each evening. We read the Bible, prayed, asked questions and were questioned in turn by our parents who endeavoured to bring up all eight children to love and serve the Lord. When accidents or illnesses occurred, prayer was our first recourse. Our parents would lay their hands on the sick or injured child and pray until they recovered. Anointing with oil was commonplace and many miracles of healing were seen in our family. Perhaps this is why today my faith in the miraculous is steadfast – we saw the hand of God move many, many times.

On leaving school I travelled to Melbourne to obtain work. Not long afterwards I contracted meningitis with severe complications which meant some nine months recuperation. This was the first of several near-death experiences I was to face. My brother Laurie remarked at my eightieth birthday celebration that I had practiced dying so often I was used to it! I can only say that each time the hand of God has intervened and kept me for His divine time.

In 1939 I was called up for army service and served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Army Medical Corps before being released to work in a protected company, Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation. I worked at CAC for some thirty-two years, rising to be Superintendent of Technical Services, and managing some ten departments.

It was while working in the city that I noticed a beautiful young stenographer who worked for the solicitor opposite my office. That we should meet was inevitable and soon we started to go out. Her name was Margaret, but she had taken the shorter name of Garry, and three years later, on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1942 she did me the honour of becoming my wife. Together we attended the Southern Evangelical Mission in the city and appreciated the solid Word preached there. The Lord blessed us with two children, son Robin and daughter Hilary. When they were still quite young, the company I worked for sent me to England for six months. This was a hardship for Garry and myself and I recall writing some 132 letters to her during this time.

After my return to Melbourne, a friend from the mission, Ron Bienvenu, called and invited us to services on the other side of Melbourne. Here we heard a fresh teaching message and were touched by the Spirit of the Lord. These meetings were an offshoot from the revival which broke out in North Battleford, Canada in 1948 and later became the basis of the church which came to be known at first as Immanuel, and later Melbourne Christian

Fellowship. Up until this time I had been content to read my Bible and attend church to enjoy a good sermon. Now the Spirit of God stirred within me and this time as I heard the familiar stories and verses, a quickening came and the Word of God became alive. I began to literally hunger for more of God. I prayed, I read, I cried out to Him for the gifts of the Spirit. I began to believe for the impossible and to see miraculous healings as well as many people coming to find the Lord is salvation.

Together with other emerging ministers we visited and preached in towns across the state, holding meetings in halls, homes and camps. We learned the value of caring for people, of visiting the sick, of helping in homes, transporting people to church, helping the needy in the city and counselling those with problems. This ministry continued for several years until in 1960 when I began a home fellowship with just two people. This couple still attends WCF today.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

# **HOMES and HALLS**

Dr. A. Earl Lee, a visiting ministry from the US held special evangelical meetings in the city of Dandenong. We attended enthusiastically and it was at this time that Bill Kean, a friend from the fellowship who had recently gone to a work in Bendigo, asked me who was going to start a church in Dandenong. In the wisdom of God, I volunteered.

We rented the Dandenong Scout Hall – at that time dirty, dusty, and smelling of beer and cigarette smoke after the Saturday night parties frequently held there. I would work a full week at CAC, spend Saturday with the family and then head off early Sunday to open the hall, sweep out the rubbish and set up the chairs. Even getting the key to the room where the chairs were stacked meant an extra eight miles on my journey. Not a very nice start to my dream for a prosperous and spirit moving church!

When we started Dandenong Mission there were just three people. I preached every Sunday morning and was aware of God's anointing. Soon we had six people and for awhile it seemed as though this would be all we would have. One night I spoke with the Lord "Lord, if we don't see anyone saved tonight, I am going to close the evening service." Wonder of wonders, a person responded to the gospel and then the move we so desired began to happen.

The first floor of a shoe shop in Lonsdale Street, Dandenong became available to us in 1963 and this provided two small apartments plus a large room, which would hold around seventy people. We prayed, fasted and believed God. It was after one prayer meeting that we saw the Lord move in the miraculous. A lady in the last stages of osteo-arthritis came to the prayer

meeting. Leaving her two walking sticks at the bottom of the stairs, she literally crawled up and fell exhausted into a chair. The Lord spoke to me that this was to be her night of healing – we prayed and God sovereignly moved. Beatrice Coates stood to her feet, straightened her stooped back and finally danced down the stairs. She remained a faithful friend to us all for the rest of her life. One of her praying jobs was to bring each of the Holland family before the Lord each day, and how we appreciated her intercessory prayer ministry. She passed that responsibility onto my sister Grace, before she too went to be with the Lord.

This miracle greatly encouraged the church and we believed more and more for divine healing, and the miracles and wonders of God's grace were plentiful for all to see.

I was still in secular work, working around forty hours each week and still travelling to and from Fisherman's Bend each day. I was now in the process of running a church, visiting hospitals or counselling during my lunch break and doing all that a pastor needs to do, just keeping my head above water. We saw God do marvellous things in areas of finance and healing but most importantly in the salvation of souls.

It would be a good time to mention the number of young men with whom I studied and ministered in the fifties and sixties and who had an impact on my life, enabling me to serve the King of Kings in a greater manner. Actually, I was the "old man" of the group of us who had been similarly stirred to press into all that God had for us during those days. I was thirty-three years old, Kevin Conner was 25, and Rob Wheeler and Peter Morrow were just twenty. It was remarkable to see that the four of us, united with a common desire to see God move in and through us, should develop such different ministries. Kevin excelled in teaching, Rob in word evangelism, and Peter in the prophetic. I was developing into a pastor-evangelist.

## **Our first outreach**

As the church in Dandenong grew, we considered it time to start an outreach. This finally opened up in Seville when Arthur and Rita Fish invited us to take Bible Studies in their home. As the group grew we extended to hiring the Seville public hall for a Sunday afternoon service. This outreach continued to gain momentum and quickly grew to about seventy people. Arthur and Rita loved children and many would come into the Friday evening Bible Studies. I remember teaching a series of studies on the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. To make it more interesting for the children, I selected seven of them to stand out in front of the group, each one representing a church. Each week I would go along the line and ask "Which church are you?" to which the response would be "Sardis" or "Philadelphia" depending on which child I was speaking to. We were greatly amused one night when I fired the question "and what church are you?" The little girl, startled, replied "Church of England".

I mention the outreach at Seville to emphasise the point that you do not have to wait until you are a large church to start an outreach. Just the call of God on your life and a desire to reach souls is all that is required – as God opens the doors, walk through.

People complain of busyness today, but even in the sixties with two churches and a full-time job, life was rather frantic. Sundays were jam-packed to say the least. Consider a typical Sunday for me: leave home at 8.30 a.m., pick up children en route to take them to the Sunday School in Dandenong, (while Sunday School was on, I led the prayer meeting for our city and outreach). Morning service would then commence and I recall the excitement of this group of people who came together desiring to see God move in greater ways. Cyril and Louise Arrowsmith stayed in one of the upstairs apartments and were spiritual parents to many at that time. Their daughter Rene (now married to Kevin Conner) and Elaine Seddon were active in the formation and

development of the church and stayed in the second apartment. Rene was already developing into a fiery, passionate evangelical preacher in her own right. Her gifting in a word of knowledge and the gift of healing ministered life to many over these years.

Following the Sunday morning service in Dandenong we would drive to Seville, where I would lead a Bible Study and then a communion service. A team would accompany me and we then returned to hold an open-air rally in Doveton followed by the evangelistic service at Dandenong in the evening. On Monday I returned to my secular employment, working a forty-hour week. For any that think that they are too busy to do things for God, the answer is to examine your schedule carefully. Replace the unnecessary things with that which is necessary: to do the will of God, to serve Him and his people.

### **Home Fellowships:**

We then became associated with another house meeting that had been started in the home of Jock and Betty Briggs in the Box Hill area. Kelvin and Pat Green, a Baptist couple, had been holding Bible Studies in this home, and invited me to come and minister to a blind, paralysed girl who had been staying with the Briggs family. They asked me to speak on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Of the fourteen people that gathered that evening, only four of us (the Greens, one Anglican lady and myself) had experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit. By the end of the service seven others had been filled, a teenage boy had been healed, and the young woman who had been blind and paralysed miraculously received her sight and her paralysis left. It was a dynamic demonstration of God moving in power. Jock Briggs would drive over two hundred kilometres to get to the services, drawn by the manifestation of God's presence.

Eventually we now had Bible Studies in homes in different areas in Melbourne on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday evenings.

During these times we repeatedly saw the hand of God moving in the miraculous. One Sunday a man drove to church from one hundred kilometres away, bringing his brother and nephew for prayer. This fifteen-year-old boy had been apprenticed to a baker, but as he was suffering from chalky bone syndrome, his apprenticeship had been terminated. During that service the boy's father received the Lord, and we prayed for the boy and anointed him with oil. The family drove home rejoicing in God's grace and goodness. That week the boy visited his doctors and the final reports declared him totally healed. He was reinstated into his apprenticeship!

It is good to recall that at this time the church was still only around seventy people. But these people were committed to seeing God move and we experienced dynamic prayer, praise and worship. Our daughter Hilary was an anointed musician, playing first accordion and later as we changed venues, piano.

### **Frankston Teachers' College:**

In the early sixties there had been quite a move of God in the Frankston Teachers' College (now Deakin University). From this several young students came into Dandenong and the other church we were still associated with. Carolyn Boyd, Rae Hussey, Wilma Calvert, Claire Morton and Kathie Chan (nee Figgins) became active in serving the Lord at this time. All have served the Lord over the years and at the time of writing four are still in full-time ministry.

The Van Netten family came to the Dandenong church in the mid sixties. Ray and Griet Van Netten were Dutch immigrants and Ray was a builder. Their three sons and daughter added new life to the church, but it was their eldest son Pier who caught our daughter's eye. Pier and Hilary were married in 1968 and Pier became involved in the music ministry and much later, in eldership and pastoring. He is currently on the Board of Directors for WCF

and has been a great asset to not only the church, but to our family. Their children Matthew and Sally have brought great joy to us.

With both the Dandenong and Seville churches now having seventy plus people attending each, it was suggested that I hand these over to other ministry and move on to found other works. Looking back we can see that this was perhaps not the best thing for the people who did not receive the care they deserved as the baton was passed. Two up and coming young ministries, Ron Jackson and Ray Jackson took the oversight of Dandenong, and Robert Murdoch took Seville. These worked with students from Calvary Bible College who regularly ministered, but sadly today these works have now closed. One thing we do know is that God's Word does not return void – seeds were sown, many grew and people from these churches are serving Him today in other areas.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

# **WAVERLEY MISSION**

In my heart I still longed to see a flourishing, growing church that would develop into a light and impact in the community. The home fellowship commenced in the Waverley area was still thriving and it became an excitement in my heart to find a building to once again start a church. The host family for this Bible Study was Ian and Marj Harry and they were the driving force for us finding a suitable building in which to meet. We finally chose a shop with dwelling in Glenwood Avenue, Glen Waverley. The shop area was about ten metres by six metres and came with a kitchen behind this area and four rooms upstairs. This upper storey housed a youth leader and his family. We named the church "Waverley Mission" in the year 1967 and started services with just eight families: Ian and Marj Harry, Brian and Margaret Hanger, Max and Judy Fisher, Stan and Viv Austin, Pier and Hilary Van Netten, Arthur, Nancy and Carolyn Boyd, Mike and Noel Woolf and the children of each family.

It was at this time, with just a handful of people attending that God broadened my vision for a church that would make its presence felt in the community. That vision of course if fulfilled today, not by my ministry only but as a continuation of the foundations laid and structures built by others: Kevin Conner in 1986 and Mark Conner in 1995.

With a permanent "home" our numbers began to increase, and in the space of two years we had over one hundred worshipping, praising, Bible-hungry people crammed into that small building. By this stage I was relating more and more with ministers from different churches and a great fellowship eventuated from this. Visitors from other churches regularly came to see what God was doing and left blessed.

At this point I want to express my thanks and admiration for the wonderful group of people who worked with me in the formation of this church and the great input they had in my life. They were given to hospitality and care and love for each member, and this attribute has remained with the church throughout its growth. Waverley Mission became known for its hospitality and care for people, both ministries and visitors as they came for fellowship, and later, for this same attentiveness in conferences and seminars open to all.

After two years the shop was full and it became urgent to find a bigger building, preferably one we could own. We found a Church of England hall which was no longer in use and purchased it – at last our own place of worship, it was wonderful. And so Mott Court, Syndal became our home for some five years, 1969-1974. A boys' clubs was commenced, with Brian Hanger, Ian Harry and Ray Van Meurs taking responsibility. Soon this building became too small to meet our needs. Also because of its location in a residential court, car-parking was difficult and the relationship with our neighbours was understandably affected. It was time to move again!

Before we move on further, we need to look at what else had been developing during this time. While Waverley Mission continued to thrive, I had again been involved with developing a house meeting in the Preston area. Each week involved a lot of travel to and from the Bible Studies, along with other pastoral duties there. At this time we were still associated with Melbourne Christian Fellowship and so I handed this work to Cec Barton and to my brother Laurie Holland. Shortly after this a revival in the Salvation Army in that area occurred with some 150 young people being added to the Army. I am sure it was the prayer and seeking God throughout this area that played a major role in that event.

Looking back at those days and at the several outreaches begun and relinquished I do feel a disappointment in not seeing these flourishing today.

However I believe that God knows His Church and He is preparing it, not us. We must surely have left a deposit of God and His Spirit wherever we ministered.

Stan and Vivienne Austin and their two sons came in while we were here, and they have proven themselves to be a blessing to many over the years. I still hear younger people declaring the deposit Stan and Viv have left in their lives.

Doug and Jean Denehy and their daughter Anne, Helen Biss, Pat Gillett and Kelvin and Pat Green and family were some of the faithful who fellowshiped with us. Doug was to start and head up the tape ministry, which he continued in for many years.

With over one hundred and forty people now in Mott Court, plus the parking difficulties, we began once more to look for property. The property we found wasn't much bigger, but did come with a parking lot. This was an ex-Methodist church in Electra Avenue, Ashwood. By today's standards, this was already too small. Can you imagine an area of about ten metres by nine metres crammed with 180 seats? What a squeeze! The platform area was another ten by three metres and held the musicians plus choir. Behind the platform area was our prayer room which doubled as a class room and offices. One of the additives to the church was a small room opening off the tiny foyer area. This became the first official bookshop. Up until then Arthur and Nancy Boyd had brought boxes of books to the church each week, keeping supplies in their home office, and our garage. Nancy was delighted to be able to have permanent space and room to display greeting cards and gifts. Today the bookshop is much larger and more diversified. We were later able to purchase an adjoining house and it was at this time that Rae Hussey became a permanent Waverley member, residing in the house and opening it for cell groups and Sunday School classes.

**Other Foundation Members:**

Graham McMechan had come over from New Zealand in the sixties. He had stayed for two years and married Susan Salisbury before returning to pioneer churches in his homeland. They returned to Melbourne in the seventies and were active in the church as I was recovering from a heart attack. They have remained great friends and have had excellent input into many lives over the years, serving on staff at Waverley in later years and currently pastoring City Wide Christian Centre.

The Totton, Bain, Fusco, Olney and Schoenfeld families also worshipped at Waverley during these years and each added that special something so necessary to a developing church. Ray and Gwen Woolley were also active, with Ray going on to help Doug with the tape ministry until recent times.

As a church we were now becoming mission minded and we began to support the works in New Guinea and in Indonesia. The sums of money was small compared to today's finances, but the people began to care for, and pray, and write letters to the missionaries, giving financially to the works, and when the missionaries came home on leave making sure that they had some finances.

We began in Mott Court and continued into Electra Avenue with camps for married couples and great fun was had at these times. This system continued in a much larger manner as we united with many other churches in combined camps, and great fellowship between the churches and ministers eventuated.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

# **EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS**

### **Campus evangelism...**

Up until this time we had concentrated on pastoral and evangelical ministry. We had been involved in supporting missionaries through MCF in Indonesia and New Guinea. Now we realised the mission field that was on our doorstep. Brian McKinlay, a church member studying at Monash University, invited some fellow-students to Sunday services. Several students from Malaysia began to come regularly. They brought with them an excitement and enthusiasm for outreach and evangelism that impacted our church community. Among these were Teow Khoon and Susan Yap, Simon and Lai Eng Eng, Eddie and Meng Chow Fong, Gordon and Sally Brown, Victor and Crystal Soo, Lawrence and Lip Yee Chen, Chan Kee and Lip Yee Low, Kuan Yee Yau and others. A young student from Thailand was in turn invited to attend – Kriengsak Chareonwongsak was to mobilise the students and to change the vision of the church.

Kriengsak's conversion had been through the testimony of a Singaporean student who attended Clayton Church of Christ. He had commenced sharing "Christ crucified" with fellow students from the moment he himself had been saved. Entering his room at the university one night, he encountered the sovereign Lord, was dramatically filled with the Spirit (without having heard of that experience beforehand) and called to reach his nation for Christ. A fellow student invited him to visit Waverley and when he entered our prayer room and heard others speaking in their prayer language, he felt at home! Sak, as he was called, was passionate in his pursuit of God. He read the Bible through nine times in his first year as a Christian, mobilised the students into evangelistic teams doorknocking the Ashwood area, and stirred the congregation to return to their first love. He commenced student cells and

Bible studies, meeting in homes and at the university. Monash Full Gospel Fellowship was founded by some of our students. Sake's marriage to Rojana (Eed) was the first of many student weddings to be held at Waverley. The ladies of the church would organise flowers, food and refreshments and decorate the church or the hired hall for the reception. Many students found not only the Lord, but a Christian spouse whilst attending Waverley Mission.

One Sunday, as Sak was preaching, the Lord gave me a prophetic word. Now remember, this was a young man, still a student and a "new" Christian, yet the word was that he would have an apostolic mantle upon him. As I prophesied, the words "and you will face death" also came out. Sak and Eed returned to Bangkok in 1981 and just a few weeks later started their first church. With only seven people in attendance, Sak led worship, made announcements, took communion and preached. When he made the altar call, his wife's sister surrendered her life to the Lord. The fruit of their ministry now includes the Hope of God movement with 1000+ churches throughout Thailand, churches of over 15,000 people in Bangkok alone, and over 100 churches around the world. Sak's successor as leader of our student group was Simon Eng whose outgoing personality and excellent leadership ability endeared him to the entire church. As a civil engineer he oversaw the structural testing of the building of the first stage of the church. Simon and Lai Eng returned to Malaysia in 1983 and ministered there. They currently pastor the Hope of Kuching Church and help oversee the international churches of the Hope of God Movement.

Teow Koon (Jeremiah) Yap married Susan Gay and returned to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to found the New Life Restoration Churches. Today he has a thriving mother church in Petaling Jaya, with many daughter churches in surrounding areas and supports missions in Russia, Myanmar, Cambodia and China. He is man of integrity and wisdom and a founder of strong, healthy churches. Many of his leadership team have been students who worshipped at WCF. On his pastoral staff are Ron Hee, and Lawrence Chen – Lawrence

assisted with the development of the acoustics of the new building that was to be the home of Waverley Christian Fellowship.

Chien Ming Wang married Poh Hong Aung and both were active among the students. Chien Ming (always known to us as simply Wang) returned with his wife and young son to take up a post as lecturer with the National University of Singapore. Today he is associate Professor of Civil Engineering, busy with lecture tours, conferences and the writing of engineering text books.

### **Foster families:**

Loneliness and culture shock were experienced by many of the students arriving to study in Melbourne. The church responded with open hearts and homes and a "foster family" ministry was established. Doug and Jean Denehy and Vic and Helen Nelson were the first to open their homes to students who would gather for Sunday meals and great times of fellowship. The Nelsons lived close to Monash University and their home became a second home and a dropping in place for many students over a number of years. Doug and Jean really wanted to retire to the hills – he was an ardent birdwatcher and enjoyed photographing and recording. Somehow I prevailed on him to change his mind and we are so thankful that they stayed. Doug had a trailer and was always available to move students and their belongings from the halls of residence to a flat or house. Nothing was too much trouble. Arthur and Nancy Boyd also opened their home, adopting eight or ten students at a time! They became grandparents to many as children started arriving. Both Doug and Jean and Arthur and Nancy travelled to Asia to visit our returned students and churches there. Their daughter Carolyn continues to go regularly and the friendships are stronger than ever. Needless to say, lifelong friendships were made and both ex-students and ex-hosts have travelled to and from each other's countries to continue fellowship over the years.

Waverley was now becoming known in the area as a church that reached out to different nationalities. By now we had about 25% of the congregation coming from overseas, and as new students came in, baptisms became a

regular occurrence. At this time we had a pool in our backyard, and baptisms were performed there, with Garry providing love and hospitality to family and friends who gathered.

### **International ministry:**

In the 1960's I travelled to Papua New Guinea and New Zealand and to the United States for ministry, but it was in the 1970's that I began to travel in earnest. Each year we would take between ten to twelve weeks to visit and minister to other nations, particularly ministering to those who had come through WCF. Many times Garry was able to come with me and we made wonderful friendships with ministers in different areas. Kevin and Joyce Conner and their family were in Portland, Oregon and we visited with them many times.

On one such trip we ministered in New York, Virginia, Los Angeles, Seattle, Vancouver, Anchorage, Honolulu, Fiji, Indonesia and Singapore. These journeys were a maturing experience, and an enlargement of ministry, realising that God was moving in Australia and overseas, and that God had given me an ability to minister with authority in certain areas. I knew that the Word of God we had received in Australia was a blessing to many in the churches we visited.

In the 1980's we ministered mainly in South East Asia with an annual trip to Thailand for some ten years, along with regular visits to Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong and India. I can assure you that it was always great to come home and be with my own family and the church family whenever I had been away on my own. It was always a great joy when Garry was able to journey with me and we had great times together. Some of my travelling companions in ministry included Arthur Boyd, Pier Van Netten, Bill Kean, Frank Lee, Bill Driessen and Kevin Conner, and they were a great encouragement to me and to the people we ministered to.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **A NEW NAME**

In the seventies the majority of churches consisted of small congregations. We worked at encouraging our church people to engage in friendship evangelism to see the church grow. By now we no longer had any official ties to Melbourne Christian Fellowship (previously Immanuel) as we began to focus on evangelism and community relationship that meant we were heading in a different direction. I acknowledge that much of our basic teaching principles came from that organisation, and both Kevin Conner and myself are grateful to the Lord for that period in our lives when He first began to quicken the Word to us. My brother Laurie remains an elder there and there are some great men and women we still count as friends to this day.

With our focus becoming more evangelical and multi-cultural, it was felt that we needed a broader name. The name Waverley Mission was outdated, and after a lot of discussion and prayer, we decided on Waverley Christian Fellowship. As far as we knew, this was the first time Christian Fellowship had been used for a specific church, but today we see that this has been used around the nation.

Sunday afternoons were now spent in evangelism. Sak had initiated this with the students and we now sent out 40 people in pairs to visit homes around the area. In eighteen months we had 150 new converts, most of who attached themselves to other churches. Waverley did not grow significantly numerically, but the experience was invaluable.

#### **Rolleston Outreach:**

The next outreach was commenced in Rolleston, Queensland. In 1976 a cattle farmer, Eric Coates, came down from Rolleston to visit his Aunt Jessie

who attended Waverley. He began to speak of the spiritual dryness in his area, and of how they had just a one hour service on a farm once a month. He told how the farmers and their families would gather, trying to bring a word but with little success. Eric invited me to visit and I agreed. He was subsequently baptised in our pool before he returned.

A few weeks later I flew to Rockhampton to be met by Eric to drive the two hundred and fifty kilometres to Rolleston. This was a journey over rough terrain, through rivers and creekbeds. In this one week's visit we had four baptismal services with thirty-two people going through the waters. Of these, thirty-one came up speaking in tongues, gloriously filled with the Holy Spirit. The water we used came from a variety of sources – one was a child's wading pool, two were the river, the final one a home swimming pool. The river posed a problem with its quick flowing waters, which could quickly pull you downstream. Eric Coates was about my size and we would hold onto a log with one hand and to the person with the other, praying over them for the Holy Spirit to charge and fill them. They would come up with a jump, hands up high praising the Lord and speaking in tongues.

For the next six or seven months I returned, often with Garry, to bring Bible Studies and introduce them to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The farmers and their wives would gather for days on the property, and I would minister for up to ten hours each day. Their hunger for the Word of God meant that many farming chores were neglected during these visits! During this time we met Colleen Dunis with her baby daughter Clare. We invited them to visit and they stayed for fourteen years. Colleen is now the bursar of Waverley Christian College and Clare is happily married to Mark McGlashan. She is our adopted granddaughter.

The Rolleston church has now moved to Emerald some 150 km away, which is a large country town of 8-10,000 people. The church owns a 32-bedroom

property built in three stages to accommodate firstly school students from properties and stations who were great distances from suitable education.

The church is in the final stages of building a new Christian college on their procured seven acres of land.

They have a "drop in" centre in the middle of the town to reach the many youth with little to do at night. This is being increasingly patronised.

The minister Eric Coates who had the vision for all this has handed the work over to his daughter Olga Kirk and his son Alan who now have the oversight of that area.

Many progressive changes have taken place to meet the needs of a greater population. Recent visits with John Jacks have been most rewarding.

### **Rockhampton Outreach:**

Eventually another outreach was established in Rockhampton. Rae Hussey who had been living in the church house in Ashwood, accepted an invitation to travel to Rolleston for a time of input and ministry. She then moved to Rockhampton and looked after the small house church that met there. She was later joined by Rene Arrowsmith, who ultimately pioneered a church there. Rene had been one of the team in the early days of Dandenong Mission. With a powerful evangelical ministry in prayer and deliverance, she gathered many young people from the drug and alcohol scene, along with others who were hungering for God. One of these others was a beautiful young girl – a windsurf teacher – who ultimately met and married Kevin Conner's son, Mark. Today she and her husband are the senior ministers at Waverley Christian Fellowship. (It would appear that we had a part in this great romance)

### **Moe Outreach:**

Another fellowship opened during the seventies in Moe, a town in the Latrobe Valley of Gippsland, in Victoria. Aileen and Brian Newbeggin opened their home and gathered people for fellowship and Bible Study. I would regularly travel down for Bible Studies along with others from our congregation. Eventually we purchased a building and set in Brian and Marilyn Harrison as pastors. They did an excellent job making it into a beautiful worship centre and caring for the people who attended over the years. Marilyn was a great worship leader and Brian preached with authority and insight. Pier Van Netten, still in the building trade, supplied huge amounts of materials and workmen without cost to the church, to establish this worship centre.

Moe was even then a very hard place. A brothel was established close to the church, and the battle was on. The church set itself to pray and the prayer warriors continued to storm the throne of heaven until the place was closed down. It seemed that as Brian and Marilyn laboured over the years here that although God's Spirit drew a number of people, the breakthrough we desired did not happen. Sadly, we eventually sold the building – the finance from this sale was eventually used to help purchase the land on which WCF currently stands. Brian and Marilyn and their family returned to WCF being active in the music ministry. Marilyn was later to initiate and run the extremely successful Action Night program for children, and the musical productions she staged each year were outstanding.

One of the basic requirements for growth of any kind is the necessity of prayer. The prayer room behind the platform at Electra Avenue was just 10x3 metres in size and into this small area some seventy people would crowd, praying and interceding for the needs of the people. People would reach out their hands to touch the heads of others (there was so little room) and many healings occurred even before the church service commenced.

I am sure you can imagine the style of meetings, which resulted from this pre-service prayer . We came out of that prayer closet pumped up by the Holy Spirit, expecting God to move and He did.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **BIBLE SCHOOLS AND BUILDINGS...**

During the seventies we ran a Bible School course over the period of two years. With over forty students enrolled, this was an exciting time for the church. The teaching staff consisted of Keith Holt whose wife Rhonda became one of the pianists in the church, my brother Bob whom we invited in from MCF, Michael Woolf (his background in Greek was a great help and gave insight into the Word of God), and myself. Enthusiasm for the teaching of the word was high and young and old came to study the Word of God. It was during the late seventies that my health suffered some setbacks. In 1978 I had a massive heart attack and thought my time to die had come. Graham and Susan McMechan flew over from New Zealand to look after the church during my slow return to health. Garry and I so appreciated their willingness to come at such short notice and the church family responded well to their care and input. Keith and Deenie Rensford who now pastor Goulburn Valley Christian Fellowship, also helped out with the church at this time.

God's hand sovereignly rested on my life – the vision for a large, thriving church impacting the community had not yet been realised and I clung to that hope. As I regained strength, so the vision burned more intensely. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" writes Paul in Acts 8:28. My physical need became an instrument used by the Lord in bringing in the man who was to be my successor, the one to whom I would pass the baton.

In 1981 Kevin and Joyce Conner believed it was God's time for them to return to Melbourne. They had been in Portland, Oregon for some ten years, where Kevin had been Dean of the Portland Bible College. They returned, bringing their son Mark with them. (Their daughter Sharon remained in Eugene, Oregon where she and her husband Frank Damazio were pastoring Eugene

Christian Fellowship. Today Frank is the Senior Minister at City Bible Church in Portland.) With Kevin's outstanding teaching ministry, Bible Studies took on a new dimension and people started to visit from many other churches, hungry for the insight he brought. Arthur Boyd, who had become my dearest friend, worked in a volunteer capacity as administrator and treasurer and his integrity and wisdom became a legend in the church family. His daughter Carolyn had served as secretary also in a voluntary capacity while remaining with the Education Department. It soon became apparent that another move was necessary with the Sunday services now full and more and more visitors turning out each week.

Our church was indeed growing, the Electra Avenue building cramming in up to 200 people and the prayer room consistently filled by up to 70 worshipping, praising, praying, believing people. Many times the healing power of the Lord would descend and be manifest.

The Asian population of the church was continuing to grow and the excitement each new convert generated was exciting and contagious. We were all one family with a common vision to see a great move of God.

With the building full on Sundays, we started to look for land in earnest. My vision was for ten acres at that time (if only I had realised that even this would not be enough!) and several of us commenced looking for land.

In the interim we hired the Special School hall in Waverley Road, Glen Waverley, just a short distance from our first building in Glenwood Avenue. We met here for Sunday services, and continued to hold Bible Studies and other meetings in Electra Avenue during the week.

It was during our time here that Kevin introduced formal membership into the church. The congregation as a whole studied the basic principles of church life, which covered our statement of belief, the sacraments and other

foundational truths. Following this, we held a membership Sunday, with some two hundred of our congregation pledging their allegiance to God, and to the local church. Likewise the eldership pledged their allegiance to God and to serving the people. This was a foundation stone. Since then, memberships Sundays have become a regular occurrence as new people come into the church. Membership is not mandatory, but it is required for those aspiring to an active church role.

One man may have a vision from God, but it will not work unless there is a people behind him who believe in the vision and actively work toward it. And so the team aspect was commenced in its infancy. Not an easy thing for one who had done everything himself. I admit that this had been a difficult thing for me to realise – until the heart attack I had had seemingly unlimited energy. I would rise early each day to seek the Lord, work at my secular job (I resigned from CAC in 1972), run the church, preach, pioneer outreaches, always being available to counsel, visit and pray with the various church members. It is often easier to do something yourself than ask another to do it. But I acknowledged the power and place of growing a team.

Arthur Boyd was such a team man. He and I were the same age, and he and his wife Nancy were married in the same church as Garry and myself in 1942. We beat them by just seven weeks! We were married in St. Mary's Anglican Church in Caulfield by a "Big Shot", Canon Langley. Over the years it has been wonderful to have had a friend whom you could trust in all things, and be confident that he would do what was right in God's eyes. In 1982 Carolyn formerly resigned from teaching, and was now on staff, working between my house and Kevin's.

During these few years in the Special School, I had been fellowshiping with numerous other pastors including Pastor Wal Braley of the Parkmore Full Gospel Church. Wal had had a vision to start a Christian College and Parkmore Christian College had commenced in 1975.

Sadly Wal contracted cancer, and I started to visit him more and more frequently, taking communion and praying with him until in due time he entered into the presence of his Lord and Saviour. At a business meeting of the Parkmore Church, it was decided to hand both the church and the college to Waverley Christian Fellowship. The church family dispersed, but the majority elected to move across to Waverley. Our Waverley church family embraced the different ones that came. Of those remaining in Waverley today we have Peter and Mardi Sheahan (Peter was teaching at Parkmore Christian College and is now Principal of Waverely Christian College and on the eldership team). Peter and Susie Nash, (Peter heads up counselling department), Stan and Coral Leigh (Stan is Chairman of the College Council, and an elder) and his son Peter is the General Manager of the church and an elder, the Bryant Family (a mum and six beautiful daughters, now all married), Tom and Coral Walsh, Val and Mark Hickmore and others. Ian and Lillian Nash moved from Waverley to an outreach at Cranbourne, which has now merged with another church in that city. They are still vitally involved in pastoral and mission activity.

### **Waverley Christian College:**

When Waverley assumed responsibility for the college in 1982, it was housed in the old Vermont Primary School on the corner of Mitcham and Canterbury Roads. The number of students was decreasing, finance was insufficient and so a slow change began. The founding principal, John Morice retired to other employment and has done very well. The next principal, Trevor Field, was a sound Christian man but he also moved onto other employment. With funding difficulties the staff was cut to a minimum and Peter Sheahan took up the responsibility of being Principal. It was this appointment that declared that God was having his way. Peter had been a teacher from the beginning of the college and had worked at reduced salary (as others had) in an endeavour to make ends meet for the college. He proved that he was indeed the right man for the job and throughout the following years, has built, with the hand of the Lord upon him, an increasingly successful college. Ray

Hussey who was ministering in Rockhampton with Rene Conner (nee Arrowsmith) at this time, moved back to Melbourne and was instrumental in revising and implementing much of the secondary curriculum.

Since that time, numbers slowly increased along with loyal staff (Chris Jackson (nee Schoenfeld) along with Peter Nash and Rob Hallworth were staff members in the early days.

Gradually the buildings filled with students and staff grew. David Searle became College Chaplain and all was going well until the Victorian Government decided to sell the land. A move was needed and so the college relocated to the existing property in Cathies Lane. Today the blessing of the Lord is evident with the college now covering Kindergarten through to Year Twelve. There are 700 students with a prospective 1000 students when triple-streaming is completed. The building complex includes newly constructed two-storey blocks with other wings, oval, playing fields and great facilities. God's hand has been on the vision that Wal Braley had all those years ago.

### **Back to the church:**

With this increase from Parkmore and now over 350 people gathering each Sunday, we prayed for the Lord to show us the right place for a permanent home. Arthur Boyd started in earnest to pursue this and while reading the property section of the Age newspaper, found a tiny little four line advertisement for 9.6 acres at the corner of High Street Road and Cathies Lane, Wantirna South. He rushed to have a look – it was perfect! We contacted the agent and found that a judge from the High Court in Melbourne, owned the land and the asking price was \$250,000. Today that is not too difficult a sum for a large church to raise, but in 1982 it was enormous! We went to prayer, told the people to pray with us and then at a leadership meeting looking at our resources and potential, decided that we could not offer more than \$210,000. Arthur wrote a letter to the agent, the

agent contacted the judge, and the judge said "no way". The agent replied "Can I just read you their letter?" After listening the judge replied "They are not trying to rip me off at all – tell them they can have it for \$205.00". Praise the Lord! We signed the papers and on the first possible Sunday concluded our morning service at the Special School and everyone drove to Cathies Lane for the turning of the first shovel of soil – our soil, our land, our home! We sang, we prayed, we rejoiced. The vision was coming to pass.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **WAVERLEY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BUILDS**

My son-in-law Pier Van Netten was the builder. He gave a year of his time without pay to build the church. He asked me what I wanted, and although I did not know much about building, I told him we needed 6 metres walls with width of 30 metres without droppers, and the roof to be the lowest trajectory necessary. Our Civil Engineer was Simon Eng, an elder in the church who now pastors a thriving church in Kuching, East Malaysia. Peter Olney and Michael Hanger were active participants in the building of the church, using their special giftings. The next few months saw us pouring over plans and drawings, anxiously waiting for our submissions and forms to the Knox Council to be accepted. As we planned, there had been much discussion about just applying for approval for the first stage of the building, however I believe God gave me the wisdom to insist on applying for approval for the total building, stages one, two and three. This proved to be extremely timesaving as the later stages were undertaken.

Before the new land was purchased, our properties consisted of the Moe property, the Electra Avenue property and the house next door, which had been used for offices and Sunday School. With the sale of these properties we covered the cost of the land. We were so excited about this until we realised that we would now need a further \$600,000 for the building. On today's figures this seems to be a small amount, but to us it was enormous. I began to pray and weep before the Lord asking, "Lord, how can we get this money?" One day as I prayed, I heard the voice of God "The money is in the church". Stangely the lump of agony and disbelief in the pit of my stomach began to dissolve and I went to the leadership and said "God told me the money is in the church, we do not have to worry."

The Church gave \$200,000, people loaned some \$200,000 without interest, and we borrowed the final \$200,000 from the bank which we paid back in just three years. In the building of the church, Arthur and I prayed over spending \$200 but in the end we were signing cheques for \$20,000 with the same faith. Under Kevin's ministry in the building of the second stage, they were signing cheques for \$50,000 and \$100,000 with the same amount of faith and no further pain than we did all those years before. Our God is a faithful God – when we know we are in the centre of His will faith is easy.

We had a huge sign put up in the front of our land that this was to be the home of Waverley Christian Fellowship with a seating capacity of 1500. I liked this thought to agree with the vision of a large church to make a noise in the community. (Unfortunately we didn't quite make the 1500 seats but did complete a 1250 seat auditorium in the second stage.)

As building commenced, it was wonderful to see the multitude of volunteer workers who turned out at each working bee. Whole families worked side by side, the students completed a week of study and then turned up to help – it seemed everyone was involved in some way. David Croft was a 20-year-old bricklayer and he singlehandedly laid all 70,000 bricks with the exception of one. He saved the last brick for me to put in place and you can still see that brick – they tell me it is not quite in line! What an accomplishment for one person - he should be in the Guinness Book of Records.

The workers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, plasterers, painters, roofers...all worked together so well. Our son Robin Holland had a team of men working on the extensive electrical systems – he took \$5 an hour per man off the price and covered that himself. God used many to bless and cause the church to be built.

One young man and his wife moved out of their house and bought a caravan and became the resident caretakers of the property while all the building was

in operation. Keith and Natalie Park left a great deposit of good faithful service. They are with us in the church to this day.

We finally had an auditorium that could hold 1000 with a baptistry, large platform, kitchen, offices, cry room, tape room, foyer and bookshop and two additional smaller meeting rooms. Over the kitchen were rooms for Sunday School. Well-appointed bathrooms for ladies and gents completed the complex.

The staff moved in: Garry and myself each with an office, (Garry was an excellent records manager), Kevin and Arthur each had an office. Carolyn was secretary to both Kevin and myself, and receptionist, Colleen Dunis assistant to Arthur and David Searle who joined the staff as a teacher. Keith and Natalie Park became resident caretakers.

Towards the end of 1983 our new building at 1248 High Street Road, Wantirna South, Victoria was ready to be opened and dedicated. Dick Iverson was our guest speaker from Portland, Oregon, USA and some 1200 people gathered for this momentous occasion. Stage one of our building was really only able to hold 1000, but we managed to get some extra seating for the day. Ministers from all across Australia and representatives from the US and Singapore came to this dedication. Pastor Rhoda Lee (US) and Pastor William Lee (Singapore) were very special guests – I had attended opening ceremonies in their respective churches. It was Rhoda's husband Dr. A. Earl Lee who had so impacted Kevin's and my ministry during the sixties.

Over the years we invited several preachers from the USA and Canada to minister and these were instrumental in enlarging the church's vision. We shared the ministry with other churches with whom we fellowshiped.

Kirk Duncan in his prophetic teaching mantle came more than once with both his wife and daughters and they endeared themselves to the church people. David McElhoes and his wife Vi ministered greatly to leaders and developing

leaders and blessed the church. Frank and Sharon Damazio with their teaching and musical ministries respectively have ministered at WCF on many occasions for conferences and camps. David Hubert and his wife Frances ministered prophetically with a great willingness to serve the body of Christ. Sam Poe – also prophetic – came from Washington State and was here at the time of the Mount St. Helen’s eruption. He was on the phone continually checking on his wife and family back home as they were in the passage of the dust and floodwaters. Sister Violet Kitley – a church planter – also left a great deposit. Jeff and Gloria Emerich who presented excellent musicals with a message were well received and there were many others.

During the eighties we invited several other recognised ministries who were well known to Kevin and they filled any lack of ministry that was needed. Emanuel Cannastraci and his wife have given excellent input, as did Ern Baxter, Ernest Gentile and others.

Both Kevin in his time as Senior Minister and Mark as the present Senior Minister, have invited strategic ministries to give an additive to the growth of the church. As mentioned previously, one such ministry has been Frank Damazio. Frank (Kevin’s son-in-law) has been to Australia some forty times. On one of his early visits he suggested that I start a conference similar to the leadership conferences he had been involved in, in the USA. My remarks were “Frank, tell me what and how you did it and I will do the same”. We commenced with a live-in conference at the Mt. Evelyn Recreation Centre with 140 people. The speakers were Kevin Conner and Frank Damazio. This conference was so successful that we organised a second conference the following year. Some 200 leaders attended the residential conference and this time Hal Oxley from Life Ministry Centre joined with us. Kevin and Hal continued to advance this conference which became known as INTERMIN (Interchurch Ministries). We increased each year, although it was no longer residential, with over 800 attending. The conferences at Waverley were

noted for the hospitality, billeting and servant spirit who attended to every wish and need of the visitors.

The church quickly became a landmark and began to grow. Kevin initiated ACTION NIGHT with electives and combined sessions covering many wonderful themes and topics. Marilyn Harrison took up the challenge with ACTION KIDS and the children's ministry began to grow not merely in numbers, but in the experiential spiritual growth of the children. Claire Morton managed the creche and nursery ministry along with taking responsibility for the junior section of the children's program. Kelvin and Pat Green commenced an outreach Sunday School before the regular service; Claire established playgroups and looked into the requirements for establishing a kindergarten. Yvonne Bensch and Claire took up hospital chaplaincy and worked closely with Joyce Conner in visitation and prayer. Garry had handed Joyce responsibility for the women's ministry, and in addition to that, Joyce had started a Young Mothers Group, which met a real need in the church and quickly grew.

Now we saw some of our Asian ex-students returning to Australia as permanent residents. Families began to increase and dedications of children occurred frequently. Carolyn Boyd initiated training of leadership to establish the Royal Ranger program. (WCF were the first non-AOG church to be given permission to run this program.) This program provided an outlet for many of the church children as well as becoming a successful outreach program under the leadership of Brian and Margaret Hanger and later, David Roberts. The program ran for a season of a decade and met the needs of many children and young teens. Carolyn also commenced the Children's Church for Sunday morning services, with the children attending worship and communion with their parents before being dismissed for their own relevant teaching time during the preaching of the Word.

The leadership during these early years consisted of myself, Kevin, Mike Woolf, Arthur Boyd and Pier Van Netten. I particularly appreciated the support that both Michael and Noelle Woolf gave to myself and the church during these years. Mike was instrumental in getting the first WCF newspaper out to our immediate community. David and Rosemarie Searle came on staff shortly after our building was completed as did Mark. The White family journeyed from Queensland to join the church with Cathy coming onto staff as Arthur's assistant.

### **Growth:**

Kevin is recognised worldwide as a "teacher of teachers" and people were drawn to his study sessions from churches across the state. I and the leadership acknowledged that he would be my successor, and I knew that at some stage I must pass the baton. When I think of Moses passing the baton to Joshua, I see that the Lord took him. He had given Moses the vision of the promised land, and even took him up the mountain to show him that land. (Deuteronomy 34:1-4) He then told him that it would be Joshua that would take the people in. When it came to myself, I acknowledged that it would be better to pass the leadership on to Kevin without the Lord having to take me yet! My health had suffered a number of "close calls" and I had practiced dying several more times since my initial heart attack. In my heart I sensed that my greater vision for the church would only come at the hands of others, and even then realised that Kevin too would only take the church to the next stage – his son Mark would realise the dream of my heart.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

# **PASSING THE BATON**

Knowing what to do and doing it are two separate issues. Some have said I held onto the church too long, but I can only say that my heart for the people was such that taking that gigantic move was a big thing. Kevin was a teacher – who would pastor? Would the sheep be cared for? The answer of course was YES. When I think of the apostle Paul, I usually think of a man who was a theologian, who was an organiser, who instructed in all his epistles. But when I read those epistles and listen to the prayers he makes I see the heart of a shepherd with a care and concern for his sheep.

At the Annual General Meeting of church members in 1986, I formally put before the church my decision to step down and to pass the leadership to Kevin Conner. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of this and so in September of that year in front of some 600 people Garry and I took the hands of Joyce and Kevin and passed on the baton to them. We asked the people to show to them the same love and care that they had shown us. The church building was paid for, and we had a bank balance. The new extension of the church would be Kevin's responsibility and as we can see today, Kevin and Joyce did an excellent job. The church ran smoothly and the transition was easier than perhaps had been anticipated.

The Sunday following Kevin and Joyce's installation, Garry, Colleen Dunis and her daughter Clare (who lived with us) and myself left to drive to northern Australia for some nine weeks of itinerant ministry. For the next several years I travelled much – overseas ministry in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the US and ministry around Australia. Kevin had initiated Ministers' Fellowship International (MFI) and as Garry and I visited many smaller churches around the nation our hearts had gone out to struggling,

independent pastors. Many of these came to join MFI and know the security of belonging to a “pastoral family”. Our hearts have always been concerned with the need for encouragement and spiritual support of pastors of independent works. We need each other – God made it that way.

There were some that advised Garry and myself to move interstate in order to give Kevin a “free hand” in running the church. That idea did not come from the Lord – why would we leave our natural family and our spiritual family? We itinerated much in the early years, but were always around home for many months each year. When we had a free Sunday, we would be in Waverely, thoroughly enjoying the presence of the Lord, the love of the people and the able ministry of Kevin and Joyce. We were filled with excitement each time we saw the increase of numbers in the church. These days I travel less and less. Garry is not at all mobile and mostly confined to a wheelchair - but each Sunday you will find us in church, many times alongside Kevin and Rene when they are not itinerating. The founding pastor and the former Senior Minister united in a desire to see Waverley continue to grow and prosper in the Lord and become a voice in the nation of Australia and a beacon in the community. We submit to and support unequivocally the leadership of a much younger man – Mark Conner – and it is easy to do so. Mark in turn, acknowledges the roles we have played in founding and building the church and includes both of us on eldership. We recognise God’s calling and hand on Mark and his wife Nicole as they carry the baton of WCF into the twenty-first century.

So there it is, after twenty years of hard work, study, prayer and fasting, preaching the Word of God to my best ability, that I finally saw fulfilment of the vision I had in its first part. I WAS THE GATHERER. Twenty years to attain to 650 people, then I passed the mantle to Kevin J. Conner who in seven years turned the church population into 1500. He was to PLACE THE CHURCH IN ORDER. He then passed the church leadership to Mark Conner

who in five years turned the church population into 3500 people. He was the MULTIPLIER.

I have had an exciting life in the church from 1950-2000. Fifty years of ministry for God, and it has been most rewarding. Great Christian fellowship with wonderful Christian men and women. Fifty years of caring, of teaching of ministering in some seventeen nations, averaging at least five ministry sessions for every week.

I came from a godly family and bless God for the impartation of His Word to me over the years by faithful preachers, both men and women. The Church at Waverley is my family, and they are wonderful people. Not all come now to the church here, but they are settled men and women whom I will meet with joy in heaven when we are called to our eternal home. There are many more faithful people who laboured alongside us to see WCF become what it is today – you are not forgotten.

May God continue to richly bless this place as He prepares for the great harvest, and may each of the readers of these pages accept my thanks for all you have done to make my life worthwhile as I have served Jesus, the lover of my soul.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my loving wife of 58 years – Garry. She has walked beside me through good times and difficult times, and her love and support has meant so much.

**THANK YOU ALL - AMEN**

## **CHAPTER NINE:**

### **CONCLUSION**

In concluding I wish to make two statements, one being what I have learned in going about planting a church, and the other of faith being the driving force of my ministry life.

#### **Conclusion ONE:**

##### **Some things I have learnt about church planting:**

I think I learned a little over the years in the handling of a church, the training of so many people, loving people from the different nations, and embracing the love of God for us all.

Many new branch churches and outreaches will be commenced by our great church and some of the basic conditions for preparation are as follows:

Too many churches seem to be in the motion of starting and it is found that the foundations are faulty and so many then fail.

The following twelve points deal with some of the foundations for a launch of a successful church.

Today we are not starting churches as I did – with no outside help, no team, nor any financial backing to support a new church.

But in this new move of God the essentials are:

1. **To have a team set in order.** A group of people are needed to start a church. A leader approved of God and accepted by the team must be chosen.

2. **Loyalty** of team and members is to be encouraged by the team so that unity may be expressed. Every one considering the other to be better than himself, and so does not fight for position.
3. **Commitment to** the cause and to each other is to be encouraged and emphasised as they come into fellowship.
4. **Faithfulness** is to be assumed at all times, with attendance to all services, and doing jobs willingly and well to make the church function properly.
5. **Support** for the work by tithes and offerings and work, so as to make the church a viable institution.
6. **Unity** is to be espoused by each leader so that they may encourage this aspect of church life to all who come.
7. **Honor** is to be given to the ministry for the Word's sake.
8. **Foundational truths** is to be taught to all leaders so that they may all speak the same thing.
9. **Strife, bitterness, jealousy, anger, rebellion** must not be named or seen in any leader or potential leader.
10. **The choice of leaders** must be carefully and prayerfully considered. A novice is not to be set in a place of authority.
11. **Dealing with number nine.** This must be scripturally expounded. A novice will again rebel. A bitter person will cause division in the church. An angry person will say words which are not easily forgiven. Strife enters in when unity goes out of the window.
12. **Pride** comes in when one thinks of himself higher than he has the capabilities for.
13. **Humility** is an attribute of Jesus Christ. He came to die in humility and love.
14. **Rebellion** is an attribute of Satan. Lucifer rose in pride and rebellion and became Satan.

Because we are living in the end-times and Satan is entering into all aspects of life in the world, we find that errors in life and faith in the church has been affected by a Humanistic philosophy and New Age philosophy. On the surface

some of the things espoused in these philosophies seem to be Christian, but sad to say the error which lies underneath soon shows itself and causes many to fall.

If we desire to do God's will we will be students of the Word, we will be a person who prays earnestly, be one who fasts consistently, and be a doer of the Word and not just a hearer.

Our tithes and offerings and abilities will be dispensed into the operation of the church God is founding.

### **Conclusion TWO: The Question of Faith:**

Probably the most important facet of my life was that of the development of faith for the impossible.

From my early age faith was demonstrated in our family for all sorts of needs, for finance, and we were not in any way rich, healing, study and the God-given ability in the family to care for others.

When the touch of revival touched me in the early 1950's I was continually challenged by the Word that Jesus is the High Priest of our confession, and as God moved upon me I became confident in the challenge of His Word to look at Romans **10:9-10..**"**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth, the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved... For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.**"

Then the words of Paul in his usual confident manner as he stated, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.**"

In those early days I think I touched something in God which has stood with me over these many years. We must learn to trust God. I chose to trust God in all things, and as I went through some dark experiences the Holy Spirit enabled me to trust Him in the midst of sufferings,

Several experiences which happened to me, and some which were told me have also affected me greatly.

These nine types of faith cover a multitude of experiences which many of us have experienced.

- 1. Confident faith**
- 2. A new converts faith**
- 3. The eye of faith**
- 4. Faith by a word**
- 5. Faith in the Word of God**
- 6. Faith of the elders**
- 7. Faith in communion**
- 8. Perservering faith**
- 9. The sovereignty of God faith**

1. My father – he manifested a CONFIDENT FAITH. Briefly the story is this. In the early 1900's when the baptism of the Holy Spirit was in its infancy in Australia, he heard that a Methodist minister somewhere in the city of Melbourne had received this gift. Although much searching went on, this minister could not be found. My father went to prayer, day and night for nearly two months, and then set out for the city in a steam train, on to suburbs he did not know, getting out of a station unknown to him, and began to walk the streets. Some two hours later he stopped in front of a house and knocked on the door, a man came out and was asked "Are you the man who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" He said "Come on in". My father left that home with that experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.

That confidence stayed with him through the years, and many wonderful healings and signs were seen as he trusted God for everything.

2. The lost wallet – A NEW CONVERTS FAITH:

This experience has affected me greatly and I have told this story many times. We had a new convert in the church and he and his family invited me and my wife to a weekend with them at a seaside home.

He was a great golfer and he and I played in the morning and in the afternoon went with his two boys to a beach some 15 kilometres away. At night time I went to show him something from my wallet and realised that I had lost it, possibly on the beach where we had played.

This new convert said "Let us pray", and before I could get down on my knees he was getting up and saying "It's alright Richard I will go straight to it." We drove to the top of the cliff and it was dark, a weak moon shining a little, the waves were coming in on the shore, and we climbed down to the beach with the aid of two small torches, we could see the footprints in the sand and the sea weed everywhere. What hope of finding a brown wallet. We stood there and I had the last word, "You go that way and I will go this". I turned to walk and had gone three steps when he shouted "I've got the wallet."

Where are we now? Where is this kind of faith? What is holding us back from believing for the impossible? This new convert just believed God.

3. The lost button. THE EYE OF FAITH:

I WAS IN THE United States of America and after a three-course dinner with my hostess and family I set off 100 metres to meet my transport to go and preach in a church. It was a balmy spring evening and as I walked my jacket button broke off. I walked up and down 20 times

looking for it but could not find it. Next day I asked my hostess did she have a button like this. She poured out about 1000 buttons on the table but there was not a match.

In answer to my statement that I would go buy another set, she told me to go look again, which I did, and after another twenty times walking over the spot where I though the lost button might be, I could not find the button. Just as I was about to leave a voice spoke to me and said "Remember the wallet". Of course I remembered the wallet lost and found some four years previously, but I was still preparing to return to the house, when this same voice said "Pray". I stood still with two lumps of unbelief in my stomach and could not pray for a silly button worth about 5 cents. For possibly ten minutes I stood and stared into space and fought this simple request to pray.

Finally I knew that God was dealing with me and I began to cry unto Him to forgive my unbelief, and gradually the two lumps disappeared. I said "Lord show me the button", and as I looked down, there was the button at my feet. It took now the eye of faith to find it.

Surely if God can do this little thing, He can do the great things.

4. The blind man – FAITH BY A WORD:

I was due to leave for Taiwan and had been prayed for by the church. As I was walking out at the end of the service Fran Bakunowicz of the church laid hands on me and said "You will see a mighty miracle on this journey."

I was ministering in a large camp many times a day and at the evening service we had a line of people desiring healing. Many were healed and then a man with a white cane and being helped by a lade came to the front. I prayed for this blind man with great enthusiasm and then

he tapped his way back not healed. Suddenly I remembered the words of the lady in the church and I called the man back again. This time I prayed with the same enthusiasm but with a different kind of anointing. He was immediately healed shaking hands with everyone and excitedly blessing everyone in the days following.

We pray, we endeavour to believe, we quote Scripture, but what is missing that we do not see these miraculous happenings more frequently. We need the anointing, and again the anointing which comes by prayer, waiting on God, fasting and growing in confidence in the Word of God.

5. Prisoner in Russia – FAITH IN THE WORD OF GOD

The interrogator sat at his desk with a Bible in front of him, and had the book opened at **Mark chapter 16:18**. A doctor sat in the room, and alongside of him was a huge dog.

A prisoner was brought into the room and stood before the interrogator sitting at his desk

“You are a Christian” he barked at the man. “Yes I am” he replied “In that case you believe what is written in this book”. Again the prisoner replied “Yes I do”

The interrogator then read the words written in **Mark, “If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them”**. “Now do you believe that” he barked. Again the man replied “Yes I do”.

On the desk was a full glass of drink, and the interrogator said that this held a deadly poison and the Christian then must drink it. To prove his point he called the big dog over to him and took a teaspoon of fluid

and gave it to the dog. In just 30 seconds the big animal dropped dead.

“Now you must drink the whole glass” said the interrogator. The prisoner said “Could I be permitted to pray first” and he was given approval.

He prayed for God to look after his family, and guard them, and by his drinking this cup please cause someone to be saved. (What an evangelistic spirit)

He then stood up and drank the whole glass and remained standing. After a minute the doctor came over to him and examined him, and then sat down again. In five more minutes he again examined the Christian, and in amazement he declared “I want this Jesus whom you speak of, I want to be saved.” He then tore up his party card and called upon the Lord.

I have been moved by this testimony for many years and the basic fundamental of having such faith in the Word of God, believing it, and practicing it more fully, we must continue to follow this pattern to see the fulfilment of God’s plans for us. Faith in the Word to be more important than life itself.

6. Healing of osteo-arthritis – FAITH OF THE ELDERS:

We had a church over a shoe store in the main street of Dandenong, and while a prayer meeting was in progress a woman, Beatrice Coates in the last stages of osteo-arthritis was dropped off at the front door. It was one flight up stairs to the church and she left her two sticks at the bottom of the stairs and literally crawled to the top and fell into a chair in the church room. At the conclusion of the service I turned and saw this stranger and asked would she like to be without pain and

sleep that night, knowing nothing about her condition at all. She wept and we prayed for her, and saw the remarkable happen, the curled up hands and the bent back and the horror of the condition literally lifted off her and she stood upright.

She danced down the stairs, went home and got her car and went to all the members of her family at 2.00 a.m. in the morning to look at her healing.

7. Healing of cancer – FAITH IN COMMUNION:

We were gathered around the communion table and Cyril Arrowsmith stood there with a cancer over one side of his face. The minister was speaking on healing in the communion and taking deliverance by what Jesus did on the Cross, that by His stripes we are healed. Something of the touch of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit came upon him, he believed, and he came back to the church the next Sunday without the cancer which had fallen off during the week.

Is God any different today? Is it that we need to be revived and begin to believe that again the miraculous will happen? I continue to pray for the anointing to again fall upon us as a church, that as a church we might believe for a revival of truth, a hunger for the Word of God, and see the multitudes coming to be built up and blessed, spiritually, physically and mentally.

8. Multiple Sclerosis – PERSERVERING FAITH:

The story of Barbara Cummiskey who had M.S. for 15 years and suddenly God healed her, miraculously, completely, putting flesh over bones, restoring the lungs, healing the blindness, and giving her the ability to immediately enter into a fullness of life.

9. Woman behind the Iron Curtain – THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD:

The story told me by Tony Abram an evangelist to over 80 nations.

The pastor of an underground church had been taken away, and a 30 year old woman had taken his place and continued to speak in her village standing on the street corners and declaring Jesus as Lord.

The commandant of the village decided to make an example of her and had her tied to a stake in the middle of the town while all the people were forced to watch. A machine gun was tested, and she sang aloud the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm, and finally the machine gun would not work, a second one was tested and would not work when pointed at the woman, but the third one with the commandant pulling the trigger finally discharged all the bullets while dust and chips from the pole where the woman was tied filled the air. She still sang and not one bullet had touched her.

They took her away and threw her out of a plane at 1500 metres, and God held her up and gently laid her on the ground. Finally they put her into the inner prison where she found her pastor, where he had been without food and water for 52 days keeping alive by drips of water on the walls. They prayed together and he said you must go back to our people. Then the pastor died. She cried to the Lord as a hole appeared in the wall, and it grew larger and larger until she could crawl through. She finally came up a pipe in the town. The last Tony Abram had heard of her was that she was continuing to speak of Jesus, but no one dared to interfere with her any more.

What a standard. What faith. What dedication. What a miracle, but to get these things it takes our life, and we must be hidden with Christ in God. **All things are possible to him who believes.**