

## Towards a Harvest in the Wheatbelt

It is not the year we thought we were going to have, at least for the work in the wheatbelt. To be sure we have made progress yet at times when we review the year, it can seem little has been achieved. A number of planned and unexpected events took place which reduced twelve months to more like eight.

Up to the end of 2008 we had, for two and a half years, been conducting a monthly service in Wongan Hills (200km NE of Perth – see map) on pulpit swap Sundays (so as not to affect my presence in the pulpit at CRC Perth). With the arrival of Rev Reinier Noppers to take responsibility for the local work at CRC Perth in December 2008, I was officially set aside as CRC Perth's rural outreach minister.

However, in spite of the shorter period of actual labour in the field, important ground has and is being broken as the work in the wheatbelt is progressing. Every day we are aware the Spirit is at work, going ahead of us and preparing the way and blessings our efforts. For this we give thanks to the Lord.

The progress made covers the following areas:

- Training
- Services at Wongan Hills
- Online Catechism
- Embedding ourselves in the community
- Growing the network of towns

### 1. Training

At the beginning of the year no specific training had been planned for 2009. There

was a two day church planting event in Tasmania in February hosted by the CRCA Church Planting Committee but as it began the day after my arrival back from South Africa I was unable to attend.

### **Church Planting**

Good news was that a full week church planting training event was held in Perth in March, hosted by the South Perth Church of Christ. It was split into two sections, the first three days being for church planters which provided very valuable tools for recognizing what needs to be done and when and how. This was really inspiring stuff, a really big asset in terms of providing a framework upon which to really launch into the wheatbelt work. The last two days qualified me to become a trainer of church planters using the course materials – something I hope to do both within CRCA as well as in my travels in South Africa and possibly New Zealand when fulfilling Synodical duties.

### **Ministry Training Strategy (MTS)**

This ministry is about raising up leaders within the local church both for ordained ministry but also for local leadership tasks such as small groups, youth and children's programs, music ministry etc. It is a four day course which I completed in May.



*Worship Services at Wongan Hills*

Rev. Geoff van Schie  
 Minister of the CRC of Perth, WA  
 Trowel and Sword Editor

## Scripture Teaching

At short notice, just before going on long service leave, I was made aware that a trial was to begin in the local Wongan Hills primary school as to the introduction of Christian Religious Education (CRE). The school had no CRE at the time and the trial would allow those in pre primary to grade three to have lessons once a fortnight till the end of the year. News just received from the principal is that the teachers are strongly of the opinion that CRE should continue and so, as per the current arrangement, we have been advised to be ready to teach in 2010! We thank the Lord for this answer to prayer!

Of course such an endeavour needs teachers and assistants. To this end the CRE head office in Perth were providing a trainer to take any volunteers through the mandatory two day equipping course. This course covered such subjects as class room management, appropriate discipline of children, appropriate levels of physical contact with children, lesson planning and delivery etc. While I have taught many classes over the years, this was a great training program – both as a refresher course but also alerting me to the new world of teaching in a community school.

## 2. Services at Wongan Hills

The very first step, in consultation with the group in Wongan Hills, was to double the amount of worship services so that we now worship the first and third Sundays of each month.

At the end of 2008 we had around 20 attending if all were there on the same Sunday – which we did have from time to time. Being a country town with seeding and harvesting schedules that go twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, attendances do vary. Besides that, Wongan Hills being so close to Perth, the rural families like to go to Perth for weekends, especially since most have family in Perth.

On my return from South Africa at the beginning of February we discovered that two of our South African families (a total of 8 people) had moved to Australind! These

two families were shaping up to be core families and had signed pledge forms and had shown promise of being real supporters of the work. Not all was lost as these two families are now attending the Australind CRC church – something that may not have happened if we had not had the services in Wongan over the previous years. Since then we have had another couple move to Perth and another family set to move in December.

All this means attendance has been anything from none up to ten, Florence and I included (we actually did one Sunday have no one turn up!). Indeed the work is fragile and the expected financial contribution from the bush does not even cover fuel costs.

## 3. Online Catechism

A feature of the rural work, especially as it was at first based in Perth, was to have been an online catechism class. The young people who were to be the first students have since moved to Australind and the junior class did not take off as expected. It is still hoped to gather CRCA youth in regional areas to join an online class for 2010. A country trip is planned to meet with the families and demonstrate the possibilities. In this way country members of CRCA churches, especially in Perth, can be spiritually supported as to their reformed heritage.

The good news is that on Tuesday nights I have a regular class with BJ Bruton from Parkes NSW. BJ is from a Sth African family who have keenly felt the need for sound Reformed teaching which they have not been able to find in their town. This led to an inquiry via email and since then BJ has been meeting with me online and is well advanced in his pre profession of faith lessons. Lord willing some time in the near future he will

be ready to make public profession of his faith in one of our CRCA churches.

I had the pleasure of meeting BJ and his family when passing through Parkes on the way home from Sydney in June after picking up the new work vehicle for the wheatbelt work. I had the pleasure of leading him in a face to face lesson as well as having a pastoral visit with his family.

## 4. Embedding Ourselves in the Community

On our return from long service leave, Florence and I spent some time with Ross Patterson in Kalgoorlie. Prior to his taking up that work, Ross had been principal of a country school east of Wongan Hills and is well acquainted with how small towns 'click'.

During that visit we shared with him that we had bought a house in Wongan Hills and would be shifting upon our return to work. He informed us that this was a big and very important step to take as this would say more to the locals in town than anything else. Such a move, he said, would be noticed and talked about and would be seen in a very positive light by the locals.

Writing this report finds me at the start of my new life based in Wongan Hills. We





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are just about unpacked and set up and ready to start some focussed work. We have purchased another house in Gosnells where our youngest daughter Clarissa will live and where also Florence stays Monday to Friday. Florence will come up to Wongan on Friday nights and head for work from Wongan on Monday mornings. Meanwhile there will be trips mid week to Perth for Session and other meetings.

The challenge ahead is to become a genuine part of the community and will be easier now I live here. The plan is to connect with the community and Lord willing, as the Spirit works, to grow a spiritual community while at the same time be a spiritual and social support to all in the community, including other workers of the kingdom from other denominations. As the only ordained minister actually living in town there is much potential to be a real blessing to the entire community.

Good news is that in October I was appointed president of the local YouthCare Council which oversees the work of the local school chaplain as well as Scripture classes in the school. This work will take me to other outlying towns where the chaplain works, so

this position will help build up the network of the ministry. Interestingly I was phoned up by the YouthCare secretary after my appointment and informed that in her town (Cadoux – about 30km further east) the local school principal said she knew me and that I had baptised her children in Perth! She expressed interest in renewing contact and possibly attending the services in Wongan Hills. The Lord just keeps opening up possibilities!

A little while ago it was great walking down the street mid week with Florence and coming across a group of school children lined up to enter the bank on an excursion. As we approached they erupted in a chorus of "Hi pastor Geoff", with one asking out loud "Are you coming up to school to teach us today?" A similar contact with a young aboriginal girl with three other aboriginal children outside the local Retravision store occurred the day before. Really heart-warming stuff!

We also have already made good contact with three neighbours and look forward to building fruitful relationships with them. The words of the apostle Paul are very close to our hearts: "To the weak I became weak,

to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, NIV)

### 5. Growing the network of towns

It is clear that a town of about 800-1,000 cannot sustain one minister full time which is why in most small rural towns there are no ordained ministers.

For this work to have meaningful financial support will mean building a network of towns to support the ministry – even then such a ministry may never become fully funded by the rural townships being served. For now it will depend on tent making ministries such as Florence's and mine in which a substantial amount is self funded (like the apostle Paul with his tents), as well as denominational and mother church support. Creating possible future income streams is also something we are investigating so that the work never has to end due to financial constraints.

Already we have begun working in Dalwallinu (75km further north east) at the invitation of the churches there. Over the past two years I have been asked to lead the Dalwallinu Wattle Festival service at the beginning of the wildflower season. This was attended by 80-100 locals on each occasion. This year (September 6th) the T21 team came up and ran a Saturday children's activity in the centre of town and then a quiz night in the recreation hall. They also were active in the worship service the next morning. This work of the T21 youth has greatly raised the profile of our ministry and very strong positive feedback is still being received in Dalwallinu. Such work has helped make the Wheatbelt Christian Fellowship and Florence and myself better known in that community.

The weekend of the T21 visit we organised with the help of the local Baptist Church who also provided dinner on Saturday night for us all, as well as billets over night. Together with my previous preaching engagements in town, this festival weekend had the Baptist



*Online Catechism - BJ and his parents*

Rev. Geoff van Schie  
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Trowel and Sword Editor

Church in Dalwallinu formally ask me to preach in their church once a month for the foreseeable future, beginning Sunday October 11th. This is now going well and we look forward to our times of worship there.

Furthermore, I have just been asked for the first time by the local Wongan Hills-Goomalling parish of the Uniting Church, to lead a service for them on November 22nd as they have not been able to secure a preacher. So in November the 1st four Sundays I will be preaching in 3 different contexts in the wheatbelt. This aids in building the network of towns for the future sustainability of the ministry.

### Summary

I was recently asked how long I saw myself in Wongan Hills. Florence and I had actually talked about this a lot during our long service leave. It would appear the Spirit is leading us to become local residents and work quietly and purposefully right up until my retyrment in nine years time. It is also possible the Lord will cause us to remain there till He calls us home in which case we will continue for as long as we have health. The challenge will be to develop a strategy for the work to strongly continue with a full time ordained ministry either after we have moved onto another 'coalface' or to be with the Lord. Whatever, it is our prayer that this work may prove to be a successful 'pilot' project which can lead to other such rural and remote missions of the CRCA to be conducted within Australia.

As has been noted, the work is fragile and financial support is an issue. Should you be moved of the Lord to give a gift you can do so by directly crediting the following the account:

**Account name:** Christian Wheatbelt Fellowship  
**BSB:** 066 153  
**Account No:** 10441603

In the 'Description' box please type 'gift' or something like that.

As we move forward we do so with confidence that the fruit of this mission is not ours to produce, but that it is the Lord who alone makes things grow: "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1 Corinthians 3:7, NIV)



Target 21 dinner supplied by the Baptist church



Quiz Night with the Target 21 team



CRE training at Wongan Hills