

A Flood of Opportunity

A Westside Story of Needs Orientated Evangelism

by Jack De Vries
Josh Hartog

Thousands of people were forced to evacuate their properties as the Brisbane River in SE Queensland peaked on Wednesday 12 January 2011. Homes and businesses were inundated in more than 30 suburbs as the river, swollen by water being discharged from the overloaded Wivenhoe Dam, peaked at 4.46 metres by Thursday morning. The Brisbane River was a swirling torrent, with boats, pontoons and other debris being swept towards the sea and muddy water inundating low-lying areas.

There were similar scenes to the west in the city of Ipswich, where homes and businesses in the CBD were submerged up to their roofs as the Bremer River approached a peak of 20.5 metres.

community. WCC is a Christian Reformed Church (CRCA) located in Goodna, an area severely affected by the floods.



Flooding on the Pine River area north of Brisbane



The Goodna Caravan Park under water

Following the floods in Ipswich, on Monday 31 January, the Council of Westside Christian Church(WCC), met and developed a proposal to help flood victims in the local

WCC appointed their own church council to liaise with local authorities and agencies to create a plan which would make an impact in the lives of local people affected by the flood. It was immediately apparent that local families needed temporary housing, in the way of a caravan, set up on their flood affected properties, for the purpose of providing security and oversight during the reconstruction and repair of their homes.

A decision was made to “Adopt Families” and WCC would provide them with caravans purchased with some of the monies collected. Families were offered the use of the caravan for an indefinite period, which takes away the urgency and uncertainty of long term

accommodation. WCC plans to be in regular contact with their adopted families over the coming months and journey together and assist where possible to make the repair of their homes as easy as possible.

This idea was sent to the committee of the World Development and Relief (WDR). WDR already made an appeal to CRCA churches all across Australia to help with disaster relief for those affected by the Queensland floods. WDR agreed to forward the funds raised for the Queensland Flood Appeal to Westside to administer on behalf of the CRCA. On the 25th February we had received \$38,630.70. Here is how WCC responded with compassion to help people in their local community as relayed by their pastor, Josh Hartog.

Damien & Sheralee

The first family that we interviewed was Damien Main and his fiancé Sheralee on the 4th February. Their house had been completely destroyed by the flood and they lost nearly everything they owned. They were insured but not for flood damage and were told they would not receive any money. We have set



Damian's home

aside a sum of money to begin rebuilding their home. On Sunday 20th February we had a working bee to dog-proof their backyard, so their two dogs could return home. A builder, Steve Bradke, has volunteered his services to

oversee the rebuilding of their place and work has begun.



Damian standing proud inside his rewired home

Greg & Janet

The second family we interviewed was Greg and Janet Owen on the 17th February. They have two children, Hannah (1 year) and Chloe (1 month). Their house was also

The Owen home on Woogaroo Street



inundated, and they only managed to salvage a few clothes. We have purchased a caravan for them which was stocked with basic supplies and set up in their front yard on 23rd February.



Greg and Janet outside their temporary home

Soledad Lloyd

The third person we interviewed was Soledad Lloyd on 24th February. A Caravan was purchased and set up on her property on Friday, 4th March. Sol was overseas during the flood and she returned to find her house stripped bare and all her belongings gone. We have taken her shopping for clothes and general items and are preparing to replaster her home.

Sarah & Paul Smith

We visited John and Ruth Bayer on 16th February and met their daughter Sarah and her family. On 25th February we purchased a water tank and paid for its installation so Sarah and her family could move into their own home.



Bruce Willis and Eileen Bell

I met Bruce Willis and Eileen Bell on 25th February and we are currently planning how we can best help these retired people begin the process of getting back into their homes. Neither need caravans, but we hope to be able to help them in other ways.

We have also made some tentative connections with a few other people that may develop into projects in the near future. With each family we have appointed an Elder to oversee their on-going care, including further opportunities to support them in the rebuilding process, to encourage volunteers to help, and provide pastoral care.¹

Find a Need and Fill It

Robert Schuller, the Reformed preacher and televangelist from California, speaks of his strategy to reach the lost for Christ: "Find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it; find people in need of a Saviour and point them to Jesus." These words are as simple as they are profound. The best way to reach the lost for Christ is through needs orientated evangelism: finding a need and filling it and pointing people to Jesus.

Dino Rizzo, in his excellent book *Servolution* (Zondervan: 2009), writes: "If we will engage the needs God allows us to see, He will show up and do something that never would have happened if we had just gone our way and ignored the need. Life is so much fuller and more significant

when we spend it engaging others around us." (p. 100) He goes on to say: "People are the top priority to God. As a church, as believers, we must make our top priority the same as God's top priority: the poor and hurting of our community, the people who don't yet know Jesus.... He sees the millions of people who desperately need a revolution sparked in their lives, and He calls us to be the servolutionaries to ignite that fire." (pp. 162-3) The recent floods in Queensland have been a great opportunity for the Westside church to be servolutionaries igniting that fire of God's saving grace.

Josh Hartog sums it up like this: *It has been a great experience to be able to pray with these people and share the Gospel with them. They have all been incredibly grateful for the help and support we have been able to provide.*

¹ Check out Westside's website:

www.w4g.com.au for up to date details