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The WA Story

Churches Planting Churches That Plant Churches

by Peter Abetz

The original Reformed church congregation in Perth is the Perth CRC, located in Victoria Park. This church gave rise to the (now) Gosnells CRC in 1974. The Perth congregation in 1983 agreed to start a daughter church in Willetton, roughly half way between the Perth and Gosnells churches.

It was on the 3rd July 1983 that the Reformed Church of Willetton began with its first worship service held in Rostrata Primary School under the auspices of the Perth church. The people who committed themselves to this new project were made up of 58 communicant members, and 55 baptised members, a total of 113. On 23 Sept. 1984 it became an independent congregation within our denomination, and Rev. W. Bosker was its first Pastor, commencing to serve on 1st. Dec. 1985.

The church soon out grew the school facilities, and after much hard work, on 2nd. Sept. 1989 the present, splendid church facilities were formally opened on Portcullis Dve. Shortly after, Rev Bosker accepted a call to serve in Canberra, and while the congregation was without a pastor in 1990, the Lord continued to pour forth His blessing. During that year the manse was built adjoining the church, and an additional meeting room was added to the church. In

those first 6 years, the number of members more than doubled.



Perth CRC, Victoria Park, WA

Many of the founding families had the view that once the church grew to 200, that then they would plant a new church. In January 1991 Rev Peter Abetz arrived to take up his call as Pastor of the Willetton congregation. There were many discussions about church planting and a task force was established to look at various possible locations. In the end, Yangebup was identified as a good location, as the Rehoboth Christian School had opened a campus there. The expectation was that many of the young couples would move to this outer suburb as housing was cheaper there. With the church so crowded, the decision was made to plant a church in Yangebup. It was agreed that we needed a minimum of 10 seed families. But 10 families willing to be part of the new church plant could not be found in the Willetton congregation! Everyone thought planting a daughter church was the way to go,

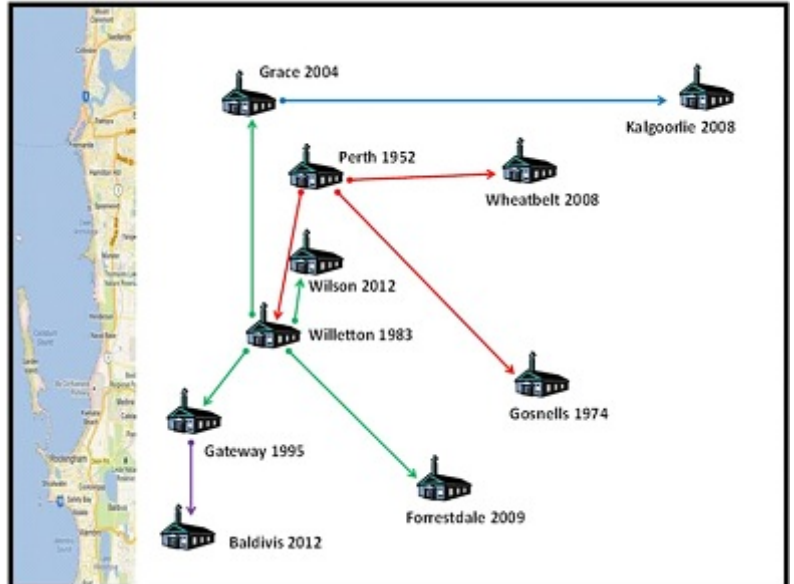
as long as they did not need to cease being part of the Willetton Church!

Due to difficulties in neighbouring congregations, we managed to get a few families from the other reformed churches to join, and then two Willetton families committed to being part of the new congregation for a two year period, to help get it started.

To facilitate starting a new congregation, it was agreed to ask for a vicar, and Alan Quak came in early 1994. On 14th May 1995 the inaugural Yangebup CRC service was held at the local community centre attended by over 50 people. The group grew in numbers and late in 1995 Vicar Peter Smit was called to serve in a team ministry with primary responsibility for the Yangebup Group. He arrived early in 1996 and was ordained to the ministry on 14th April 1996. Pastor Smit moved to Yangebup, to enable him and his family to be more part of the local community. The Yangebup congregation was formally instituted on 4th May, 2003.



After acquiring what could best be described as a metal shed at 63 Spencer Road Cockburn Central in September 2004 the congregation began worshipping there, and gradually developed these premises into what is now a very pleasant church facility. Having moved those few kilometres from Yangebup



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to Cockburn Central, the church decided to rename itself as the Gateway Community Church. The name "Gateway" comes from the nearby shopping complex, and the church is the gateway to knowing the Lord!

The Gateway Community church, which has grown to around 150 members, has long been considering planting a church further south in a rapidly growing area, and this gained fresh impetus when the church called Rev David Groenenboom as its pastor in July 2012, to allow their founding pastor to devote himself to planting a church in the Baldivis area. A core group of 13 adults and 8 children have been meeting fortnightly since July 2012. They are seeking ways to connect with the local community in order to share the gospel and serve. In time they will be moving to regular public worship services.

Meanwhile, in Willetton Rev Peter Abetz developed a special interest in reaching the South African migrant community. As CRCA congregations and leadership we were very concerned that very few of the Reformed background migrants were surfacing in our churches, and indeed only a tiny fraction connected with other evangelical churches. Rev Abetz developed a closer working

relationship with an independent Afrikaans Church in the northern suburbs of Perth. This church had fallen on hard times due largely to the on going tensions between those who wanted Afrikaans services, and those who wanted English services for the sake of their children. The Afrikaans speaking group started their own church, leaving a very small group who wanted English services, but who had not felt able to join a non – Reformed church. Rev Abetz persuaded the Willetton session to allow him to commence services with this group and to use it as an opportunity to plant a CRCA congregation in the northern suburbs of Perth. (Until then all CRCA congregations were in the southern suburbs.) As Willetton was also served by Rev Clinton Berends at that time, he took the morning services in Willetton, while Rev Abetz took the Grace CRC services each Sunday morning.

As the group was from all over the northern suburbs, the name Grace Christian Reformed Church was chosen. It held its first service in the Perth Bible College Chapel on Nov 21, 2004. The group grew steadily, primarily through members reaching out to fellow South African migrants with practical help, and through migrants finding the church's website and making contact. After a calling process, Rev Abetz was installed as the minister on 22nd Jan 2006. As the chapel at Perth Bible College had become too small, the church began renting the Seventh Day Adventist church in North Beach in June 2007, which accommodates around 120 people. The Grace Church was formally instituted 3 years after its first service, on 18th Nov 2007.

After Rev Abetz was elected to the State Parliament in Sept 2008, the congregation called Rev Joe Vermeulen, who arrived in Jan 2009. Under his leadership the church has continued to grow, and has moved to two morning services, which together now attract

some 180 -220 adults each Sunday plus around 40 to 60 children.

The Grace congregation became aware of a significant group of South African migrants in Kalgoorlie (a mining town some 7 hours drive east of Perth), who were experiencing difficulty in finding a church to call their home due to either the worship style or the lack of Biblical preaching.



Being itself a young congregation, Grace CRC did not have the resources to fund a work in Kalgoorlie. However, the Lord answered our prayers for a way to forward, when retired Christian School principal, Ross Patterson volunteered to live in Kalgoorlie for 6 months or so to commence the work of what is now the Kalgoorlie Christian Reformed Church. He was commissioned by Grace CRC on 25th May, 2008. The six months grew to be 4 years! But the group has now, together with Grace, agreed to call Rev Jaco Classen to take on this work on a part time basis. The Kalgoorlie CRC congregation has varied in size over the years with people coming and going, but is currently around 30 people.

Rev Geoff van Schie served the Perth congregation in Victoria Park since 1999, but with his wife Florence, felt a real calling to ministry in the Australia outback, among small country towns. Since 2006 Rev van Schie had begun work in the country town of Wongan

Hills. In 2008 Rev van Schie was formally set apart for this work and through the Wheatbelt Christian Fellowship he provides Christians from all denominations the possibility of worshipping together and pooling resources together provide spiritual and social support to their communities.

In August 2009, the Willetton congregation agreed to establish a core group syle of church plant in Forrestdale, approximately 12 km south of Willetton. The group is under the leadership of Rev Oliver and Nadia Heggars, and the group was commissioned in January 2010, with Willetton providing two days a week support for Rev Heggars.

The Willetton Church in 2012 decided to commence a church planting work in Wilson, which is approximately half way between the Willetton Church and the Perth Church. Services are yet to commence, but planning is well underway.

May the Lord be glorified!

