

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL COROMANDEL VALLEY UNITING CHURCH 1965-2000

By Ray Elford, September 2000

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the changes to the body life over a 35 year period from 1965 to 2000 at Coromandel Valley Uniting Church (CVUC). This period saw the change from a small country Church to a large suburban Church, the influence of the charismatic renewal movement, continuous strong evangelical preaching, and the unique contribution of the Friday night Youth Group. During this period average worshipping numbers increased from 70 to 350, and total worshipping numbers increased from 70 to 600. The paper is not a history of CVUC, but rather a description of significant events that have shaped the body life over 35 years.

During the 1950s, the congregation of Coromandel Valley Methodist Church had decreased to less than 20 people and consideration was given to closing the Church. The minister at Blackwood Methodist Church gave oversight to the Coromandel Valley congregation. The Church was not closed, and numbers slowly increased until the mid 1960s when Coromandel Valley became a suburb of Adelaide with associated increase in construction of new houses.

Rev Andrew Wilson was appointed to Blackwood Methodist Circuit in the mid 60's and this included pastoral oversight and regular preaching at Coromandel Valley Church. He was ordained in England, and as well as ministering in England, had spent some time in South Africa before migrating to Australia. While in South Africa, he had experienced a dramatic charismatic renewal in the Church there. He was a gifted preacher and brought a strong message of grace as well as providing teaching on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

About a year after he came to the Blackwood Circuit, the Coro Valley Leaders Meeting decided at the suggestion of Andrew that, because of the small numbers attending the existing Sunday night service (on occasions there were only two in the congregation), it should close and be replaced by a mid week fortnightly Home Bible Study at the home of Kevin & Libby Moore. Andrew and his wife Helena led the group and provided in depth bible study. It also provided an opportunity for people to worship in a non-traditional manner where a new dimension of praise and worship was experienced.

The blessings flowing from these meetings became known, and in ensuing years, folk from other Churches in the circuit as well as from the surrounding hills area came to share in the rich fellowship. That meeting in Kevin & Libby Moore's home has continued to this day, although it is now comprised of people only from the Coromandel Valley church.

Rev Andrew Wilson's ministry was not accepted by all, and many found his teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit unsettling. As a result his term was not extended after five years at the end of 1970. However this teaching had a lasting and deepening effect on the spiritual lives of many people at the Coromandel Valley Church.

In 1970 there were 70 worshippers. Rev David Houston of Blackwood UC gave oversight to the growing congregation from 1971 to 1976, when Mr. Richard Miller, a student pastor, was appointed at Coromandel Valley. Rev. Arthur Jackson was appointed full time minister at CVUC in 1978. He was regarded as a strong evangelical with a charismatic emphasis.

In the mid 1960s and early 1970s, God moved sovereignly in outpouring of his Holy Spirit in the main line Churches in Australia. This became known as Charismatic Renewal. The word charismatic was used to denote the Gifts of the Spirit, which accompanied the renewal. Large numbers of young people became Christians and many older people were renewed in their faith.

Gifts of speaking in tongues, prophecy, miracles, physical healings, and other manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit often accompanied the renewal. There developed a new love between people in the body, and scripture became alive in a new dimension. The renewal was also characterised by the singing of new songs particularly scripture put to song. There was a new understanding of praise and worship before the Lord. The old hymns of Charles Wesley became alive in a new way. It was like a repeat of the Acts of the Apostles.

Not all Churches experienced this revival, and many UC ministers were sceptical about the renewal. Prior to the renewal many people in our Churches had placed ministers on spiritual pedestals, and their spiritual life was determined by the life of the minister. After renewal, people had a new boldness through the Holy Spirit to minister in a lay capacity. The Uniting Church in Australia largely misunderstood the charismatic movement, and many people experiencing charismatic renewal turned to the Pentecostal Church for teaching and guidance. A number of people left the Uniting Church at that time to join the Pentecostal Church.

At CVUC, in the early 1970s, three significant events occurred which had a long term impact on the life of the Church. - the commencement in 1970 of a Charismatic Hills fellowship meeting in Blackwood Methodist Church and All hallows Anglican Church, the commencement in 1972 at Coromandel Valley Church of Saturday night charismatic meetings in homes and a Friday night praise/worship/bible study, senior youth group. At the Saturday night fellowship nights, families gathered for praise, worship, teaching and bible study. In the prayer time at the end of the Saturday meeting, healing and other gifts of the Spirit were experienced from young children to older adults.

The meetings were arranged independently of the Church leadership, and were led by lay people. Because there was an outlet for charismatic praise and worship, people did not leave CVUC even though the Sunday services morning were very traditional. Whole families came to a new understanding of the saving power of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit as a result of these meetings

In the mid 1970s many folk from CVUC would attend regular night worship at Pentecostal Churches, in particular, Bethesda Christian Outreach, Sturt St CRC, and Klemzig AOG, and were influenced by Pentecostal theology. A night service commenced at CVUC for those requiring a more Pentecostal worship style compared to the traditional UC morning worship.

At the Friday night youth group, many young people became Christians and experienced the manifestation of gifts of the Spirit. The leaders of the youth group became pastors to the young people and many of the young people saw Friday night youth group as their Church. Very few were involved in the Sunday morning services. The youth group was atypical of youth groups in the Uniting Church and the group felt more aligned with Pentecostal Churches than with the Uniting Church. Most of the speakers came from Pentecostal Churches who could relate to the young people. Most UC ministers were viewed with suspicion and ignored, with the notable exception of Rev Dan and Sue Armstrong from Sydney. Dan was a speaker in Adelaide at one of the SA charismatic conventions in 1975 and has had continuous ministry in South Australia up to the mid 1990s.

CVUC young people ran their own camps and did not join with the wider Church youth camps until Dan Armstrong preached at one of the Mt Barker Easter camps. These camps, arranged by Rev. Horrie Dunkin, had a reputation of being strongly evangelical and charismatic. A number of CVUC young people attended, and subsequently Dan spoke at a number of CVUC camps, often including Con Stamos from

Sydney. A local CVUC camp was held at Longwood in 1981 where Dan Armstrong and Con Stamos spoke. On the Sunday morning there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit accompanied by repentance and new life. Many lives were profoundly affected.

In 1985 Sue Armstrong spoke at a large CVUC youth camp at Cudlee Creek. About 250 young people attended from many Churches across the state. Again there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit with "signs and wonders" and repentance, and large numbers were converted. Many people today point back to this camp as a watershed in their spiritual life, and are in ministry today.

Bruce Wauchope remembers that there were several times in the youth group at Coro when the presence of the Holy Spirit was physically tangible as a light/glow or wind. These times left many permanently changed. "At the Longwood camp in 1981 at the Sunday morning session, the back door of the hall opened with a bang and a strong wind swept over the gathering from back to the front." (The team of cooks observed the manifestation of the spirit through the large servery opening as they prepared lunch. To them it was like a wind blowing in waves over a wheat field - some of the wheat stood, some fell over).

"Liz Dicks now Liz Corbett went over like a tree felling, fell to the right and hit her head on a corner of one of the seating benches. She was not hurt. People went in all directions like matches. No one was hurt. Chairs went everywhere, people were all on the floor. It was all I could do to stay standing. As I did I had a picture of my heart as a churning mess, and above it the beauty of God. Then there was this huge outflow from God into the churning darkness of my heart. I wept profusely.

As we came to - Dan Armstrong was praying for people - for many the work had been done. Some older Christians after the camp said to me that what had happened would not do any good because they all fall away and won't be believers in 10 years. Many of those affected have gone on to do mission work and service of different forms

These were the times that the Word met us in the Spirit and brought us into the community of God. People are changed when they meet with God not hear about Him."

As a result of the 1985 Cudlee Creek camp, in the late 1980s, the youth group organised three weekend conventions, two at the Blackwood Recreation Centre and one at Norwood High School. The conventions attracted 400 to 500 young people from Uniting Churches around the State. The conventions were evangelistic and older people from CVUC assisted as counsellors at the night rallies. The speakers were Dan and Sue Armstrong, Con Stamos, Craig Bailey and Mark Elford. This was a significant time for Coro Church as large numbers of people became involved in this outreach work. It was a spiritual awakening for many people. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Craig Bailey and Mark Elford, both ex CVUC youth leaders and gifted with evangelism zeal for the gospel, spoke at many country and suburban youth camps. Churches recognised the ministry gifts of these men.

The Lord has raised up from the body all the youth group leaders, and the Appendix gives details of the youth leaders over the 30 year period. Large numbers of young people responded to the call of God on their lives and are scattered throughout Australia either in part time or full time ministry in many denominations and Missions. Numbers in the youth group have varied over the years but their aims have remained unchanged. The group has always attracted young people from other Churches in the hills area, and from time to time this can be 60% of the group. It is a place where people invite friends who are looking for meaning for life. In the late 1990s, numbers had again reached 70 to 80 people meeting on Friday nights.

In the mid 1970s very little ministerial oversight and guidance was provided at CVUC. The Church at Blackwood was large and consumed all of the pastor's time. Not all people at CVUC experienced renewal

in the Holy Spirit, and the gift of speaking in tongues had the potential to cause division in the Church. Those who were renewed had a burning desire to share the renewal of the Holy Spirit with others.

As a result of family connections, teams of mainly young people went to Uniting Churches in Karoonda, Dowlingville, Bordertown, Naracoorte, and Keith during the mid 1970s and early 1980s. As a result of these visits many people became Christians and renewed in the Holy Spirit. The teams comprised young Spirit filled teenagers and older people.

The early visits to country towns were arranged by the lay people without ministerial oversight. This was partly due to lack of support and understanding by local ministers to the renewal, and an understanding by the team that all gifts for ministry were available to lay people in the body.

In the late 1970s when the Uniting Church was formed, a number of renewed people with leadership and eldership gifts resigned as members of the Coromandel Valley Uniting Church but remained as part of the local Church.

In 1982 approximately 25 people, not included above, left CVUC and started a new church called The People Of The Way. It was a difficult time for the leadership of CVUC, and it was some months before the Church settled down

The Lord continued to bring people to the Church and in 1980 average Sunday worshipping numbers had grown to 130. Rev Arthur Jackson was an outstanding teacher/preacher of the Word, and he encouraged the young people in their missionary zeal for the Lord. The youth group continued to grow with numbers reaching up to 80 young people on Friday night praise and prayer time.

During Rev Arthur Jackson's ministry the new songs of praise being sung at the Friday night Youth Group and at Sunday night services were gradually introduced to the Sunday morning traditional Church service. This was an important first step in bringing the renewal movement into the main stream life of the Church.

Arthur Jackson was responsible for breaking down the barriers between those who spoke in tongues and those who did not. There were no first class or second class Christians. He also provided sound teaching on the work and person of the Holy Spirit. This helped a large number of people some of whom had adopted some extreme views about the healing ministry and some Pentecostal theology.

During Arthur's ministry, home bible study groups commenced as people wanted to come together to share God's word. These groups have proved invaluable not only for encouraging close fellowship, but also to integrate new people into the body life of the Church.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of people at CVUC were involved with New Creation Teaching Ministries, NCTM. To those involved in the youth group, NCTM did not appear to support the renewal movement and the message of grace, clearly taught by NCTM, was not readily received.

Rev Rod James was appointed minister at CVUC in 1983 and in theological understanding was similar to Rev Arthur Jackson. He introduced the Life In The Spirit course, which was an Uniting Church approach to the Pentecostal teaching on baptism in the Spirit. A significant number of people were filled and refreshed in the Spirit.

Sunday morning services continued the slow definite change from traditional conservative worship to one incorporating freedom of praise and more lay involvement in the services. The format of the Church services now included at least 15 minutes of opening worship using the new songs of the renewal. Rod was an outstanding evangelical preacher and many people came to life under his ministry. As numbers

grew, the demands on the minister increased and Colin Beaton provided lay pastoral assistance half time during 1990. Increased administration necessitated the appointment of a half time administrator and Ros Byrne was appointed in 1991.

In 1985 the church building, which had been enlarged in 1980 to increase seating to 140, was full and two morning services commenced. Many young people who had met their future partners in the youth group remained as married couples in the life of the Church and influenced the style of worship at the later Sunday service.

The older people and most Magarey families attended the early service and the younger families the later service. The Magarey families had made a significant contribution to CVUC. The Magareys owned the 40 acre apple and pear orchard adjacent to the church building. In the 1960s, they and a few others were instrumental in keeping the Church open. In the late 1980s there were 9 related Magarey families worshipping at CVUC.

The Sunday night service closed in the early 1990s as the style of the later morning service now met the needs of those who attended the night service.

This was an important step as the night service (where held) in most Uniting Churches catered for young people who did not attend traditional morning worship. The thrust at CVUC, consciously or unconsciously, was towards intergenerational worship - all age groups worshipping together. The night service was later reopened in 1998 on a monthly basis as an outreach service.

CVUC continued to grow, and in 1990 both morning services were full. New people came from a wide range of denominations, Baptist, Pentecostal, Independents etc. as well as some who had not been to Church for many years. This is still the case. In 1993 investigations commenced to provide increased accommodation. In 1992 Rev Deane Meatheringham was appointed minister at CVUC to replace Rod James.

Again Deane was similar in theological outlook to Rod James, and the strong evangelical preaching of the Word continued. The Church continued to grow, albeit slowly, because of limited accommodation. Deane had been Director of NCT ministries for many years and the Lord called him back into the pastoral ministry.

A change in people's attitude to singing hymns, songs, and scripture choruses took place early in Deane's ministry. In the late 1980s all hymns, songs, and scripture choruses, were put on transparencies for use on overhead projector. This coupled with the use of the new New Creation hymns/songs led to more freedom in the service. In the late 1990s they were all referred to as songs.

Ray Elford was appointed half time pastoral assistant at the beginning of 1992. As the Church continued to grow, further assistance was required and Rev Gordon Martin was appointed half time as a pastoral assistant in 1996. Gordon retired at the end of 1999 and was replaced with Geoff Hill in January 2000. In the late 1990s a ministerial staff team met weekly to review pastoral concerns and administration matters. The team comprised Pastor, Pastoral Assistants, Administrator and Children's and Youth Coordinator.

Deane's teaching of grace and the trinitarian view of our relationship in the God head, has brought freedom to many, enslaved in a theology which placed man's effort of reaching and finding God as the driving spiritual force in their lives.

During Deane's ministry the Alpha course was introduced which replaced the Life in The Spirit course. Many people have grown in their faith as a result of the Alpha course. Some became new Christians. As a

result of Deane's connection with New Creation Teaching Ministry he was invited to preach at various country Churches. He took a team of people from CVUC to assist in the weekend ministry.

Deane also introduced the Discovering Church Membership Seminar, which covered three main areas; our evangelical theology within the UC, belonging to the Church family, and church structure. It became the norm for new worshippers to take up membership.

In 1998 a new 400 seat church was built in Coromandel Valley 1 km South of the existing church building. During the planning and construction phase, the Church experienced God's provision in many ways.

It was not without pain, and a few families left the Church as result of the new building. The financial response by the people was outstanding. The project was supported by 95% of the congregation.

The new church, incorporating a sound system appropriate to the size of the building, has provided the opportunity to introduce a large musician group with grand piano and singing group. This was a quantum increase compared to the old church. Together with excellent acoustics, the praise of God's people has enriched the whole worship service.

In the 12 months since the new church was opened there was a dramatic increase in worshippers - some 110 new faces. Two factors contributed to this increase. People knew that there was ample room for children and babies without being crushed, and friends were invited.

The second factor was the introduction of a new children's ministry program, KBG (Kids belonging to God) to replace the Sunday School type program, and the appointment of Simon and Cath Moore as children's ministry coordinators.

Some 80 adults are involved in the KBG program, and the roster system has reduced the number of Sundays per year working in the KBG to 8 for most helpers. This has overcome the previous problem of Sunday School teachers being separated from the Sunday worship.

Two other groups have had an influence on the body life, the previously mentioned Sunday School and the formation of a Junior Youth group in the late 1980s. Leaders of these groups are given in the Appendix. The Sunday School was formed when the Church opened in 1850 and always been part of the life of the Church. Up to the late 1980s it arranged family picnics and social occasions, which has always been an important part of the life of the Church of bringing people together.

The Junior Youth group formed in the late 1980s catered for young teenagers who were too young for the senior group. The program, mainly social, was aimed at developing group friendships.

A matter of crucial concern particularly to new worshippers, is the attitude of the Uniting Church to sexuality. CVUC is unanimous that same sex gender marriages are contrary to the authority of scripture, and therefore in 1999 the congregation declared itself an Evangelical Congregation within the Uniting Church in Australia.

Coromandel Valley Uniting Church has been particularly blessed over the last 30 years. The three ministers mentioned above have provided strong evangelical preaching of the Word, and have encouraged the lay people to respond to the call of God on their lives, and minister in the gifts they have been given.

SUMMARY

The above story, while it describes the events that have shaped the body life at CVUC, it is really the story of God dealing with His people. We have seen His patience and faithfulness in our mistakes and sinfulness and our attempts to discern His will for our Church. We give praise to our Father for the people he has raised up in our Church to proclaim the good news across the land. As we enter the next millennium we have confidence in the God who is our hope and salvation.

APPENDIX

Senior Youth Group Leaders

David Potter	1972, 73, 74
Ray Elford	1975, 76, 77, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82
Richard Hawk	1983
Ian & Tricia Fuss	1984
Craig & Kay Bailey	1985, 86, 87
Mark & Joy Elford	1988, 89, ½ 90
Alison Moore	½ 1990
Peter & Kim Hobart	1991, 92, 93
Leigh Cameron	1994
Nigel & Cath Litchfield	1995, 96, ½ 97
Andrew & Debbie Potter	½ 1997, 98
Simon & Cath Moore	½ 1999
Simon & Caroline Dent	½ 1999, 2000, ½ 2001
Simon & Cath Moore	½ 2001
Adam & Cath Dunkley	2002 (combined with Junior Youth now Activ8, to form Coro Youth) 2003, 2004
Sam Barnes	2005

Junior Youth Group Leaders

Phyllis Williamson	1980
Marie Nicholls	1991
David & Sue Thompson	1992, 93, 94
David & Alison Moore	1995
Matthew Harrison	1996
Mike Davis	1997, 98, 99
Cath Greb	2000, 2001 (Activ8 combined with Senior Youth in 2002)

Sunday School Superintendents

John Vawser 1949 to 1975

Max Winter 1976, 77, 78, 79

Graham Byrne 1980, 81, 82

Russell Carpenter 1983

Graham Byrne 1984, 85

8.30 am

John Magarey 1987, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 94

Ruth Work 1996, 97, 98 (replaced with Children's/Youth Ministry in 1999)

10.15 am

Graham Byrne 1986, 87, 88

Brian Thompson 1989, 90, 91

Teresa Burke ½ 1992

Kerry Turner ½ 1992, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98 (replaced with Children's/Youth Ministry in 1999)

Children's/Youth Ministry

Director

Simon & Cath Moore 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003

Richard Schirmer 2004, 2005