

## Beginnings of the Ministry

It was just a BBQ after church with new folk to the church that Pastor Geoff van Schie and his wife held from time to time. Yet this one was to lead to a dramatic change of course for them both and the beginning of a whole new outreach into the Central Wheatbelt.

This ministry began in March 2006 with one South African couple working on a farm some 30km outside of Wongan Hills. Not being able to find church with a style of preaching they were accustomed to, they could not settle in any of the small groups meeting for worship in the towns round about them. Already downloading service material from the website of the Christian Reformed Church of Perth, they began to travel the 200km to Perth to attend services there once a month.

In conversation with Pastor Geoff van Schie of the Christian Reformed Church of Perth over that BBQ, they made him aware of other South Africans of Reformed persuasion living in the Central Wheatbelt. These people also had the same experience of finding it hard to settle in the local churches.



**Worship service in Wongan Hills - 2010**

It was agreed to call a meeting of these people in the country and In March 2006 a BBQ was held at Wongan Hills attended by about 30 people (*including children*). Most of these people were South African migrants working in country towns as far away as Dalwallinu.

These people came from various Reformed churches in South Africa: the Nederduitsch or Nederduits Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NH),

Nederduitsch or Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk van Afrika (NG) and the Gereformeerde Kerk van Afrika (GK).

At this gathering it was decided to begin monthly services at Wongan Hills in a way that would be supportive and helpful for anyone who was interested in joining a non denominational fellowship.

Over the years local Australian residents have joined us which was just as well as by 2009 most of the South African families had moved to the coast.

## **The Birth of the Wheatbelt Christian Fellowship**

Realizing the need for the return of an ordained ministry in the bush, Pastor Geoff van Schie and his wife Florence felt the call of God to minister to people in rural and remote areas. On December 7th 2008, Pastor Geoff was formally set aside by his local congregation in Perth to move into a full time ministry in the Central Wheatbelt.

It was during 2008 that the Wheatbelt Christian Fellowship got its name and since then has been growing to become a ministry of Christian support and service to everyone seeking such assistance as well as an outreach to those with no previous relationship with the Christian Church.

**First Sunday School class – Teacher Kelly Johnson**



In 2009 the monthly services in Wongan Hills gave way to fortnightly services (*1st and 3rd Sundays of the month*) and

Pastor Geoff became available for helping out with preaching in other towns by invitation. With the attendance of two young families who expressed the desire for weekly services, preaching fortnightly in Dalwallinu came to an end and services began to be held weekly in Wongan Hills. At this time a Sunday School was also started with 5 children attending.

## **A Sudden Pause**

The beginning of 2011 witnessed a dramatic change in the work. Pastor Geoff required spinal surgery for a severe prolapsed disc which became complicated two weeks later with a staph infection of the disc (*discitis*). This proved very painful and debilitating with most of that year finding him unable to work. By the end of 2012 he had been able to return to 4 days a week work and was hoping to go to full time at the beginning of 2013.

While in hospital the WCF services in Wongan Hills lost both young families, one moved back to Queensland due to life threatening illness and the need to be near to family; the other was transferred 100km south for work. Services in Wongan Hills were suspended through to the beginning of 2012. The Wongan Hills part of the mission was back to providing services for just 5 local Uniting Church people.

A 2011 planned door knock of the town to introduce the ministry further had to be put on hold indefinitely until the stop-start nature of the walking involved could be physically sustained by Pastor Geoff. The idea had been to gather an interested group of people never before associated with the Christian Church, forming an "Enquiry" group from which a core group of long term locals could be established to build into the future.

In all of what took place, the WCF kept its focus on this ministry as a work of the Lord. In his report submitted to the leadership of the CRC Perth, Pastor Geoff wrote in January 2012:

*As I scan the report as to what happened in 2011 I stand amazed at the progress in spite of my sudden illness and long lasting disability. Indeed, I am humbled to see again how the reality is this is not a work of the van Schies, nor of the CRC Perth, but all along, the Lord has called us to come alongside Him where He is working, and join Him in the task of building His kingdom. While I have been restricted in my mental and physical ability to work, the Lord has not been idle and progress has been made nonetheless.*

## **Resumption of the Work in Dalwallinu**

Not being able to cope with the organization of full services, as required in Wongan Hills, Pastor Geoff resumed preaching in Dalwallinu at the Baptist Church in October 2012.



There he was required to just preach *Dalwallinu Baptist Church Service – Children listen to object lesson* organizing the rest of the service. On resumption of preaching it was agreed he would now preach at the Dalwallinu Baptist Church fortnightly - *first and third Sundays of the month.*

This relationship between the WCF and Baptist Church became so strong, the Baptist congregation decided to support the WCF ministry with the provision of a generous amount of financial support to help cover expenses. The WCF was also asked by the Baptist Church leadership to become a partner with them and supply pastoral care within and outside the Church for one and a half days a week. The generous financial support of the WCF ministry was not conditional on the supply of this pastoral work. This was agreed to by the WCF ministry and pastoral work began at the end of July 2012.



With a weekly presence on the ground, the work in Dalwallinu quickly escalated with the following developments taking place in quick

- ✓ Pre-baptism classes for two attendees of the Baptist Church - both teachers at the local school (August 2012)
- ✓ Start up of teaching of 2 Scripture classes at the local school - one teacher had been teaching all primary grades on her own and this meant with Pastor Geoff's help, the load would be somewhat eased. - (October 2012)
- ✓ First 2 baptisms at the Baptist Church since April 2006. – (November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
- ✓ Many visits to both Baptist Church members, attendees and others within the wider community

***Baptism at Dalwallinu Baptist Church – November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012***



## Services Resume in Wongan Hills

Back in Wongan Hills, services resumed on Sunday January 22nd and continued on the 2nd Sunday of each month with a second service on the 4th Sunday of the month when that was feasible. By year's end the second service per month was set to become regular.

## YouthCARE impact

Throughout 2011 Pastor Geoff remained chairperson of the local YouthCARE District Council. This is the committee that supports the work of the local school chaplain as well as that of the Scripture teaching in a number of the schools in the local shire.

In spite of his being confined in hospital because of the staph infection in April 2011, the local District YouthCARE Council was



able with the training previously provided, combined with past experience, to run the Easter Community Family Festival and did so again later that year in November for the Spring Festival.

*YouthCARE DC meeting in the home of Pastor Geoff – August 2011*

In 2012 Pastor Geoff was able to resume his involvement in the YouthCARE Festivals and in December 2011 was able to organize the YouthCARE Community Carols by Candle Light and bring a brief Gospel message at that event.

Having to miss teaching his two Scripture classes in the Wongan Hills District School during 2011, Pastor Geoff was able to resume that part of the ministry in the second term of 2012.

The importance of the YouthCARE work as to the WCF ministry can be further explored via the Photo Galley page under the heading 'Community Involvement'.

## **On Their Turf**

Realizing the incapacity to do the door knocking of the local town (*some 500 residences*), led to taking up tractor driving instruction so as to become 'useful' to farmers and be enabled to meet them in their own 'paddock'.



***David Hood demonstrating calibration***

This led to paddocks mid 2012 under the tuition of a deacon and farmer of the Baptist Church, David Hood. This took place on the family farms in Ballidu - half way between Dalwallinu and Wongan Hills.

Farmers in Australia remain a high risk group as to suicide. The WCF initiative as to Pastor Geoff being available for farm help by God's grace is planned to be a means to a non threatening way of befriending farmers while at the same time helping them on the land. Over time it is hoped that with God's blessing, genuine trusting friendships will be developed through which the farmers will find it possible to share confidentially any stresses that threaten to



overwhelm them. It is also hoped it will provide them with opportunities to observe a life lived out of Christ and should they desire, be able to ask Gospel questions.

In the second half of 2012 Pastor Geoff attended two full day workshops on suicide prevention which were held in Wongan Hills. Valuable resources were received as well as very helpful information as to the level at which to operate in an effort to support those in danger of suicidal thoughts or worse.

## **Progress through Rotary**

Although much went on hold in 2011 in Wongan Hills, in His grace and mercy the Lord used this time for Pastor Geoff to become more connected with the Wongan Hills community through the local Rotary Club.

In December 2011 he was elected to be president elect of the local club and while he was not due to take up his office till July 2012, with the early retirement of the current president, was asked to begin serving in that capacity from April 2012. He was again elected for another term (2013-2014) in August 2012, prior to the visit of the Rotary District Governor of WA when it was expected that position



would be announced. Further information on the work through Rotary can be seen via the Galley page and then select the heading 'Community Involvement'.

***Pastor Geoff Inducted as President of Rotary Club – June 2012***



## New Logo



Meanwhile in November 2012, a new easily recognizable logo was designed. Magnetic signs were quickly produced and placed upon the "Troopie" which now promotes this ministry far and wide.

## Looking to the future

In March 2012, the following conclusion was given to the report to the CRC leadership:

*As we press onwards we do so ever mindful of the reality expressed by Paul as to where the power and glory lies in such a mission:*

***“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20–21)***