

The Courage To Be



Life is a Spiritual Journey
Victor J. Smart

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IS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Victor J. Smart

(Second Edition)

Scriptural references appearing in this work are from the following translations:

KJV=King James Version;
JB=Jerusalem Bible;
NIV=New International Version;
NEB=New English Bible;
GNB=Good News Bible.

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Victor & Winifred

Dedicated...
to my mother,
with fond memories of her example
of courage and endurance:
and
to those with intellectual or
physical disabilities,
whose courage and
humility had
influenced
my life.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The contents of this experience, expressed frankly from the perspective of a spiritual journey, explained at different intervals, are meant to be read with respect for its confidentiality; and the privacy and dignity of others.

Preface

That life is a spiritual journey is not something to be wary of. It does not require a religious inclination or background...nor does it begin with a spiritual conversion; yet it is sacred — sacred because it is your life. It is about time we stopped restricting the grace of God, only to those who go to church! Made in the image of our Creator, the spiritual journey is an experience that transcends the senses and all that is material. Concealed within the sacredness of the womb, it begins the moment we are born.

Maybe it has not seemed like a sacred journey to you. The point is, it does become sacred to you when after all that has happened in your life – the joy and pain, the laughter and tears, the successes and failures that had shaped your life, are discovered to be an integral part of your present experience, giving a deeper meaning and value to your life – for your good and the good of others.

Identifying this with the spirituality of life, adds depth and character to those experiences — creative values that dignify the person.

Being a member of the clergy, does not give me a precedence over the ordinary person. I can identify with those who are getting it rough – imprisoned by their own history – we are all in it together — those with a physical, mental or moral impairment; deprived of the wholeness of life – something we have had to live with. Such persons are not to be deprived of grace and understanding.

God *is* concerned for the dignity of every person!

Such words offer both consolation and encouragement for one to persevere with their life giving consent to questions that may arise both from within and without; facing any doubts that emerge from such questions, for it is from this, that we are able to arrive at truth.

I had sought to pursue the path of truth, and to be just in my dealings with others. Yet my efforts had not always appeared to reflect that pursuit. What truth and justice is to one, is not always regarded as such by others. Like Abraham Lincoln, I stood firm in the face of moral, social and political issues, but of a different nature. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated...yet he won! Persistent and varied attempts for my removal had failed – and eventually I won.

Finally, in my retirement, it has been said; “Your ministry was but a preparation for what you are doing today”.

Some of the advantages that served me well in ministry, included experiences I had gained as a country boy, observing manoeuvres within a blacksmith shop. The smithy’s skill really impressed me. He knew the weight of

his hammer and when to strike the white hot steel, and how to shape it, and when to dip the hot metal into water. Along with this; thirty-three years in industry, twenty years an accredited Lay Preacher, and three valuable years as a Home Missionary before entering theological college, were important preparations for a ministry at that time when the church was facing a deep inner crisis.

Over that period, I could not help but note how the church lacked the “skill of the smithy”.

That I was called into the ministry of the church late in life, was meant to be. With my background; in ministry I was able to face issues that were ‘red-hot’; arising from existing sensitive conditions where others feared to tread. To me, the only effective authority was to be involved with those affected: and, in the words of Casca from Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar”... ‘to set my foot as far as he who goes farthest’. So, I did face those issues – alone; working at times against the most unbelievable odds.

In writing this history of my own life experience; I have changed the names of persons, places, events or circumstances, where necessary, to protect the privacy of others. Such changes are the fruit of my own imagination. Any similarity between any such name and that of others, is purely coincidental.

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To:- the Catholic Priests who, with warm affection and a caring spirit, as real Pastors, reached out to me with compassion, when I had no one to turn to.

To:- those people who, unbeknown to themselves were, by the grace of God, part of the restoration of my dignity, and the 'years the locust had eaten'.

To:- those of other denominations and differing cultures, who have shared with me, the spirit of unity which I pursue.....and especially

To:- Anne Deveson AO without whose encouragement this book would not have been published.

PRELIMINARY WORDS

The interesting and valuable history in my auto biography contains a digest of the first ten years of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia – frankly expressed. I entered my first parish, as an ordinand, in the year of the uniting, 1977. I was among the first ordinands to have been ordained a Minister of the Word and Sacraments of the Uniting Church in Australia, in the New South Wales Synod, Each of my parishes had been poorly and inadequately instructed, with respect to the procedures relative to uniting, and had to be handled ‘with care’.

Bishop John Shelby Spong (USA) has written kindly of my autobiography as being marked by struggle and integrity; expressing also his gladness, in that I had told my story in a public way, that datass courage and a willingness to be vulnerable. I have also received words of grace from the laity who, in reading my book, shared the joy, grief and power of its contents – most clergy shied clear of my book.

You may also be interested to know that my ministry has been rightly expressed in the words of Thomas Merton who wrote;

“Too many Christians are not free because they submit to the domination of other people’s ideas. They submit passively to the opinions of the crowd. For self-protection they hide in the crowd, and run along with the crowd. They are afraid of the aloneness which they would feel apart from the crowd”.

In my ministry I stood firm, alone, hurt and humiliated. Yet in the final analysis I won through.

Thomas Merton continues;

“But the Christian in whom Christ is risen dares to think differently from the crowd. He has ideas of his own, not because he is arrogant, but because he has the humility to stand alone and pay attention to the purpose and grace of God, which are often quite contrary to the purposes and plans of the established human power structure.”

My ministry had born that significance.

Introduction

No place had ever influenced my life like Kinrock, the town where I was born. It had sprung from the 1880 gold rush when thousands of people flocked to the diggings.

As the gold declined and people left the area, Kinrock developed as a prospering wheat growing district and the town became a busy rail centre in the Golden Grain wheat belt. Towns like this begin and grow according to their own natural advantages.

At Kinrock I grew up in surroundings I loved – yet it was not the environment but the child in me; stirred by its completeness, that later influenced my life in ways both known and unknown; concordant with an insight of William Wordsworth, *“The child is the father of the man”*.

It was long after I had retired – through reading and writing, *and* experience; I became aware of the significance of those words and the spirituality of life. This was later confirmed in the words of a hymn I had once sung, quite new to me; *“In my life I see You leading me into my childhood”*.

What I had experienced in life – grief, joy, humour, drama, adventure, humiliation, peace, love and even ‘hell’ itself — these were all part of a pilgrimage – a spiritual journey which began at my birth; no different in principle than the Exodus of God’s people from the land of bondage – and their wilderness experience before reaching the land of promise.

The point is, they had not been aware – in all that happened during their pilgrimage – that God had been both with them and saving them. It wasn’t until centuries later when their real life story had been written up; they became fully aware of this.

That – is my story.

That this book has taken eleven years to develop, I have no doubt – has been commensurate with life and the purpose of God.

Some thirty-one years before entering the ministry, I had worked through a mental illness, only to face the discrimination that showed its

ugly head during the ministry itself; which I faced with courage and endurance.

It wasn't until my retirement, that I began to experience intermittent effects of that same illness, as I grappled with the unresolved discrimination I had experienced in ministry, depriving my wife and myself of our trust in the church.

What a paradox!

Yet no one, who has not experienced a mental illness will ever understand its crippling effect – the sensitive feelings, the grief; and the courage in the one who has – and their loved ones.

Reliving intermittently; experiences of former gruesome phenomena, '*a thorn in the flesh*' (2 Cor 12:7 JB); has put me in touch, in ways not otherwise possible, with those people who are hurting, or indifferent; because of their experience of the church, or some other issue.

The church is not reaching them where they are at in life, because it cannot identify with them; – it is the church that has been out of touch – its language and witness inadvertently creating a stalemate for the marginalised, the outsider, and the imprisoned; who, consequently, cannot move in the direction of God. Please do not lay the blame on those effected ones, they are still God's people – their life is still part of a spiritual journey unique only to themselves. Yet – God is still with them.

Understanding others does have healing qualities.

I hope, in relating this history, that it may reach the total person in others, giving them encouragement, and hope – enabling them to identify with the spirituality of life in the diversity of life's experiences: giving them a starting point whereby they may feel accepted by God; and have a rightful place, as God's people, in this great pilgrimage of life. I hope too that these words may awaken in the church, a respect for the dignity of others, and its significance in bringing into effect reconciliation between individuals, churches and other cultures.

Let your heart

Take Courage

The

Courage

To Be

Chapter 1

In The Beginning

Kinrock was a pretty town!

Its distinction lay in its architectural tastes – the layout of the town, the elegant buildings, the churches and the hotels adorning some of the streets. Yet nothing could reach me more intimately than our home in Jason Street; the place where I was born, a humble weatherboard cottage nestled in the midst of gardens and fruit trees beyond a rickety paling front fence with a picket gate swinging in the centre. This was my ‘Garden of Eden’ – where I was first given a chance in life.

I was one of twins. My twin sister was plump, fair and beautiful. I was slender dark and not so beautiful. During the sixth month of our infancy an outbreak of gastroenteritis hit the town; we both became infected and my twin sister died.

From earliest childhood my environment, the interior ordinariness of our home and the ever-expanding world outside, had made a profound impression on my life.

In the home, two rooms in particular are significant in this respect. The kitchen where mother used to bath me – and adjoining it, the darkroom, given that name because that’s what it was – dark! It had no window, no light; its walls were not lined, and there was no door – only an opening. This room was used to store odds and ends.

My first memory of life, however, is the night I was sitting in a small round galvanised iron bathtub, on the kitchen floor in front of the stove. Hot water for the bath had to be brought in from the fuel copper outside in the yard. It was winter; the water in the bath cooled quickly; and from time to time mother had to top it up with hot water from a black cast iron kettle on the stove. On this particular night, I was sitting in the tub enjoying the warm bathwater – and warmth radiating from the stove.

Mother left the kitchen to go to another room, and closed the door behind her. She had taken the candle – our only source of light apart from

the kerosene lamp on the dining room table. The only light now, in the kitchen, was the glow from the fire in the stove. I loved this cosy atmosphere – but the water in the bath was getting cold! I called out, but mother did not come. I called again and again; still she did not come. The water by now was cold, and I was angry! Then when mother finally returned, it was as though an angel from heaven had entered the room. She went to the stove – lifted the kettle, and poured hot water into the tub.

Another door in the kitchen opened onto a lobby facing the back yard, which stretched right down to the back lane. A wire netting fence across the yard, some forty feet from the house, separated the back yard from the front yard – creating two distinct worlds for me.

My first world was the front yard, which extended from the middle fence to the front street. The area we referred to as ‘out the back’, between the house and the middle fence, was wide and spacious. In this area the fuel copper stood remote from the house; and behind it, the clothesline with a prop in the centre to take up the sag; and some distance beyond that, the privy. There was ample room for dad’s vegetable gardens and bee hives; space for me to ride my trike, to play, and satisfy my imagination.

The rainwater tanks on either side of the house – and fruit trees down each side, were also part of this heritage.

Out the front it was a different set-up. Flower gardens occupied most of the area. Tall Lucerne trees, with sparrow’s nests in their branches overhung the front fence. During the Spring, the Lucerne trees, loaded with white pendulous blossoms swarming with bees, and the brilliant display of colour in the flower beds, were a striking contrast to the dull features of the old blacksmith’s shop next door adjoining our northern boundary.

All these characteristics charmed my life.

Then in the paddock on the opposite side, old farm machines stood rusting along our side fence. A shed clad with upright split logs and open at the front, sheltered an old waggon. And at the far end of the paddock, a muddy dam served its purpose, not only for the garden but for the home as well. Across from the dam, a huge chaff shed bordered the southern boundary of our back yard. The aroma of chaff was really pleasant.

I simply loved my environment.

It was a great experience for me, the day dad took me for a walk to see the animals at Wirth’s Circus. The lions and tigers, and the monkeys – they were great; yet I spent more time watching Jessie-the-Elephant. Her body swayed as she stood, hobbled to a peg in the ground. She had won my affection; for my favourite toy was a grey felt elephant.

This experience did something to me.

At home, under the fruit trees at the side of the house near the paddock, I erected a small circus tent made from a piece of white sheeting mother had given me. What great times I had with my felt elephant – a bright red saddle cloth across its back and a trinket on its forehead: standing in front of the tent it performed, in my imagination, the most spectacular acts.

My external world began to expand – much to my delight, when, one Saturday night dad and mum took me for a walk down the street. Saturday night was late shopping and there were such a lot of people in the Main Street. We wandered along, looking in shop windows – then mum and dad stopped to talk to a friend. I loved it. I just loved being with them. We moved on, and eventually came to a crowd gathered near the Salvation Army standing in a circle just off the footpath in front of Murphy's Store.

I moved to the edge of the footpath to watch the band. Oblivious of the crowd around me I stood enchanted by the music; especially the tuba; and the way one Sally was handling her tambourine: she was great! She really made it tingle. I turned round to point her out to mother, but she wasn't there. I began to bawl!

However, mother was not far away. She heard my cry and quickly brushed through the crowd and took my hand.

Crying ceased and my tears dried.

Kinrock was very dry during the hot summer months. As with every home, we were dependent on rainwater to fill our tanks. Every drop of water was precious. As well as water from the dam; the bath water, and the water we used to wash ourselves each day, was also used to water the gardens, using a jam tin with perforations at the bottom.

To supplement our rainwater storage, a 600-gallon squat corrugated iron tank, open at the top, had been mounted on a stand at the side of the house, not far from the paddock next door. This tank was filled with muddy water from the dam to be used for our bath water; and for mother's washing days – thanks to dad's ingeniousness.

He had made a large funnel from a four-gallon kerosene tin and suspended it from the fence in the paddock. The spout extended at an angle through a gap between the palings, just above a kerosene tin bucket in our yard, Another empty bucket stood beside it. Dad carried water from the dam – a bucket in each hand, and poured it into the funnel. The water flowed into the bucket on the other side. As each bucket filled, one of my

brothers emptied the water into the tank. When the tank was full dad sprinkled fine ash from the kitchen stove, across the surface of the water. Overnight the ash sank to the bottom taking with it, the red mud. Next morning the water was clear – fit for our bath water and mother’s washing.

My immediate world began to enlarge as I became more aware of our back yard. Though it wasn’t really a play area, it became my second world. The first attraction was the fowl yard – a wire netting enclosure, with a chook pen painted with lime; beside the blacksmith’s fence. I sometimes accompanied mother when she went to gather the eggs: she always carried them in her apron.

The chooks, when they were let out each day, loved to scratch under the willows, or the Cedar trees along the back fence. The willows were not large, yet their foliage hung right down, almost to the ground – the coolest spot during the hot summer days.

But the back yard had other characteristics – the chaff shed; adjacent to our side boundary, was used during the Great Depression, by itinerants – good men, on the dole, who tramped from town to town looking for work. The chaff shed offered them shelter and a place to sleep. As one door opened onto our back yard, they sometimes called at our house to have their billycans filled with hot water.

Prominent in the back yard, was a huge woodpile of neatly stacked logs, with a woodhorse nearby, a crisscross trestle on which the logs were sawn into blocks that were to be split for firewood. Blocks of wood lay on the ground near the chopping block, encircled by a scattering of chips – all symbols of dad’s industriousness. At times he had walked many miles to farmer’s properties, carrying a tucker bag over his shoulder, and an axe in his hand to cut up trees that had either been struck by lightning or blown down in a storm. His reward was the logs, which the farmer delivered to our home. The farmer’s reward? – his field had been cleared.

Then, in the mid-twenties when radio broadcast made its debut in the country, a tall, white impressive radio mast was erected in the centre of the back yard. It was held upright by four guy ropes anchored at the four corners of the yard.

All these basics gave the yard character. But the back yard was to become of greater importance to me.

Facing the west it provided a gateway to the railway-yard just across the lane at our back fence.

Dad worked on the railway and often on a Sunday, before church, he would take me for a walk to see his flower garden at his workshop, which

he called “The Humpy” – just across the line from the Railway Station. It was made up of two disused meat vans set at right angles to each other. A wire netting fence completed the square and gave the workshop privacy. His flower garden exhibited a magnificent display of glowing colours. He was very proud of his garden, and I was very proud of him. I simply loved those Sunday walks.

During the week in the late afternoon, I began to wait at the back gate for dad to come home from work. I seemed to know the time – and watched for him to come across the railway-yard, climb over the split log railing fence, then cross the lane – my heart leaped with excitement as he raised the gate latch...he was home.

Those moments in my life were really prime and provided a great deal of satisfaction.

Growing up

One day, I opened the front Gate and ventured outside on my own; and a new world began to open up for me.

Quite often after that I was to be found, standing in front of the blacksmith’s shop next door, looking through the wide door opening, intently watching the smithy at work. I was intrigued by his movements. He manipulated a shaft that operated huge bellows behind the forge. With each calculated movement of the shaft, flames shot up through the coals and the smell of burnt coke reached my nostrils.

It fascinated me.

Then he poked a steel bar into the coals, and sparks scattered. I followed them as they floated upwards and snuffed out as they reached the roof.

Sunlight shining through nail holes in the roof penetrated the haze of smoke, and shone in bright spots on the grey earth floor.

The smithy removed the bar from the fire – checked it, then laid it on the anvil. He brought his hammer down with a thud, striking the white hot metal several blows, and then bounced his hammer on the anvil. It clanged musically; and the sound echoed through the workshop, and then resounded down the street. It was music to my ears.

Playing in the yard one day, out the back, I hopped up on the side fence. From this vantage point, I watched the smithy, at the wheel right’s well, fitting a steel tyre to a wooden cart wheel. The way the tyre was

heated and fitted, then shrunk onto the wheel, by lowering it into the water on a mechanical device, really impressed me. I went across to have a good look – then when I saw frothy clusters of frog’s eggs, floating on the water, clinging to the brickwork my interest changed. From then on, I returned to the well from time to time to watch for the appearance of tadpoles swimming in the clear water; and followed their growth and development into frogs. My patient observations were rewarded, when in the cool of the evening, I listened to superb performances, “Croak! Croak!” – “Croak! Croak!”

By now I had playmates – the kids across the street. We played in the Sunshine harvester in the paddock next door, and on the old waggon standing in the shed, and we caught crayfish in the dam, using a piece of meat tied to a length of cotton, and scooped them out with a net.

From then on my world began to expand rapidly.

Beyond our back yard, across the lane, in the railway-yard – the wheat silos, steam engines, and the movement of rolling stock along the vast network of railway-tracks, had become magnetic, and stirred within me something I had not previously experienced. I was being drawn into another new world of adventure.

I selected a post in the split log railing fence bordering the railway-yard. Perched on top of this post, I watched the shunting engine manoeuvring the rolling stock. The shunting guard standing by – transmitted signals to the engine driver, waving his arms and blowing a whistle. The engine stopped; and the truck it was shunting kept going. I waited for the clash of buffers as it bumped into a row of stationary trucks further down the line; and I listened for the clink of steel as a heavy link was slipped over the coupling hook of the adjoining truck. It was exciting. I asked mother to buy me a whistle, the same as the one the guard was using. She did!

With this prized possession I perched on my favourite post and mimicked every blast that came from the guard’s whistle – that is, until he blew his top and shouted some profane words at me. Needless to say, I did not blow my whistle there again.

My interest switched from there – to the goods trains as they passed through. Long before I could see a train coming, I could identify the engine by its sound, especially the k-lonk, k-lonk of the *D57* and the Garrett engines, which always thrilled me.

Life for me was exciting!

Only once can I ever remember being bored. I went to mother and said, "I don't know what to do".

Mother smiled kindly at me and replied, "Go down to the wood-heap and bring back some chips for the stove".

I did – and boy, did I feel good!

Posters, in various shop windows, advertising Wirth's Circus Season in Kinrock, had aroused a lot of excitement. The arrival of Wirth's Circus each year, was an event the whole town looked forward to.

The circus train had arrived, overnight.

Early next morning, after a hurried breakfast, I raced down to the back gate. Yes, there it was – in front of the wheat silos – the Circus Train; loaded with animal cages, circus equipment and other circus animals.

I hastened across the railway-yard to watch Jessie-the-Elephant shunting the trucks, pushing them along with her head, with such ease. The trucks glided smoothly along the tracks to a siding a little further down the line. There, the cages were off-loaded and towed away by smaller elephants, to the location of the tent site at the northern end of the upper railway-yard.

Great excitement stirred within me as I darted across the lines to watch the circus hands preparing for the erection of the tent. Some were hammering pegs into the ground around the huge tent top spread out on the grass. Others were preparing the principal tent poles for erection. Then came the thrill of seeing the marquee being raised; auxiliary posts being positioned; ropes tightened, and tiered seating being assembled before the side trimmings were attached.

I knew mother could not afford a shilling for me to see the circus, so it was satisfying just to stand and watch the erection of the tent.

Later, the town was due for another exciting event. The Trackless Train was to visit Kinrock. We had never heard of a trackless train, and were eager to have our curiosity satisfied.

The day of its arrival, School children were lined up along the footpath in front of the school, waiting for this mechanical wonder to appear. We heard the clanging of a bell, a constituent of the engine, and then we saw the train. The engine, a real replica of a steam train, was pulling a carriage. Both engine and carriage were green with black trimmings. But there were features that made it different. The wheels had pneumatic rubber tyres; and its driving energy, was a powerful petrol engine. Few motor vehicles were to be seen in the country at this stage of our history, hence the excitement and wonder of it all.

The driver of the train addressed the audience of school children, giving something of the unique history of this mechanical wonder – and, much to our delight, we were invited to inspect the train. Years later; meeting people who lived at Kinrock in that era, I was surprised to learn that they knew nothing of The Trackless Train.

Another very impressive event, was the day Charles Kingsford Smith visited Kinrock in his famous Southern Cross aeroplane. In 1927, he had made history, completing a record-breaking flight around Australia in just 10 days, 5 hours and 15 minutes. He landed on a farmer's property about two miles out of town. His arrival attracted a lot of people: my mates and I were part of that crowd. We raced out to the farm, and when we arrived, huffing and puffing, we were overwhelmed by the sight of this huge aeroplane with a single wing and three propellers. We had only ever seen a small tiger moth plane fly over Kinrock.

Kingsford Smith was offering fifteen minute Joy Flights for five shillings. That was a lot of money in those days: not many could afford it.

The excitement of this event lingered in my mind. Then one day, at home, out the back, I set one of dad's big packing cases upside-down on the ground. Next, I placed a long, narrow wooden box on top of the packing case, and covered it with hessian. I then placed a wooden plank across the top of the box. This contrivance became for me, the famous Southern Cross aeroplane.

After tea that night, wearing a motorbike helmet and a pair of motorbike goggles, I hopped into this box, pulled the hessian over me, and began to fly around the world or wherever my imagination should take me.

No, I was not hooked on sensation. There was so much in Kinrock to satisfy a growing boy – mostly at any rate.

It was fun, collecting empty vinegar bottles to sell. Then when I had sixpence saved up, I was able to go to the 'flicks' – silent movies, with Buster Keaton, Ben Turpin, or Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan – comedy and melodrama, to the accompaniment of piano music, played to emphasise the mood of each scene.

My life too had its drama and suspense, and even a sense of humour.

An old corrugated iron building that had once been a foundry, was standing deserted in the paddock next to the blacksmith's shop – it was in a state of disrepair. The iron cladding was rusting, and loose sheets on the roof squeaked as they flapped up and down in the wind. The machinery had been removed. Yet something about this old building attracted me, though I was never game to venture inside.

However, there was a nail hole in the foundry wall on the Jason Street side. I used to peep through this hole. There was sufficient light for me to see the bits and pieces of rubble, old wheels and cogs, and whatever, lying on the ground. They fascinated me – that is until one day, as I peered through this hole, I saw an old drunk seated on the earth floor, with a bottle of wine in his hand. He was leaning back against a wall, holding a conversation with himself between swigs. His head was swaying and tilted downwards. Slowly he raised his head, and seemed to be looking straight at the tiny hole through which I was peeping, as he said – “...and when I catch you, I am going to *cut* your head off”!

I took to my heels and ran for my life, as fast as I could go, never to peep through that hole again.

While this was a typical, youthful, mini-life-drama, synonymous of the ‘Mark Twain’ era, another much more drastic and unexpected event was about to have a deeper effect on my life – something I was going to have to work through, yet it was to be for my good.



My eldest sister Maida - Victor - and Les,
my third eldest brother.



The wheat silos, directly behind our home, were one of two majestic concrete symbols of the primary industry - source of the town's prosperity; and pride of my life.

Chapter 2

The Great Depression

The country was in the grip of the Great Depression. It was being felt by everyone; even children. The owner of our house committed suicide, and we had to move. Dad was able to get a house down the bottom end of Jason Street, near the railway-dam.

It was thrilling at first; the house had electric lighting, and windows in every room. But our new home could not be identified with railway-tracks, trains shunting, and the wheat silos: I missed them terribly. Sometimes of an evening, I would go to the overhead pedestrian bridge near the steam train loco sheds, and wait for the Mail Train to pass through. At times I wondered if the engine really knew I was there, for as soon as it was directly beneath the bridge, it gave a shrill blast, and I became engulfed in smoke and steam. It was satisfying.

The longing in me for trains increased. Then one day I asked dad what I would have to do to be an engine driver. All he said was, “You will have to be a fireman first”.

Each day after that, on my way home from school, I made sure that I went past the Fire Station where I could stand before the open doors and gaze at the glowing red fire engine, and the highly polished brass helmets hanging from pegs evenly spaced in a long row along the wall. But I was puzzled; I could not identify this kind of set up with becoming an engine driver. The mystery of it all gradually faded as I began to adjust to the new world that had opened up for me down the bottom end of town.

We now had neighbours on either side. I had a playmate next door, and another across the street. They were so different from the kids I used to play with up the other end of Jason Street. The environment was different. I was beginning to like it.

We played on the hill across the street – a great mound of clay that had come from the excavation to the railway-dam. It had been there for many years and had become well hardened and weather beaten. Deep

crevices down the sides of the hill and a few bushes on top, created an ideal setting for our games of Cowboys and Indians. In addition to this, a long gradual slope at one end of the mound, provided fast sport for the wooden sleds we had made for that purpose. At other times, in season, we played cricket on the flat.

The Depression worsened, and I can recall dad having to work two weeks to draw one week's pay. He used to go bush after work and shoot rabbits to provide meat for the table.

He took me with him and allowed me to carry his rifle. He carried the shotgun and a sugar bag slung over his shoulder to hold the rabbits he shot. We walked many miles together. I never seemed to tire. There was nothing I enjoyed more now, than to accompany him on these hunting trips. I developed an intense love for the bush.

At this stage, mother could only afford to use newspaper to cover the table at meal times. The only exception was on Sunday, or when we had a visitor – when she used a starched white damask tablecloth. Later, she was able to buy an oilcloth which served for general use.

Despite tough times, dad always liked to dress neatly on Sundays or when he went shopping on Saturday night. He bought his blue serge suits by Mail Order. They fitted him well. However, as tall and stately as he was, after he had worn his suit for a while his trousers became baggy, and when he walked he looked bow-legged.

Mother always made sure I was well dressed, even if I did wear my Sunday best suit until the sleeves were almost a quarter way up my arms, and the heels of my socks were mostly all darning wool. She also sent me to school neatly dressed. Most other times – for play clothes I wore old clothing and went barefooted. Some of my playmates seemed better off than me – yet I never envied anyone.

Once when my sandshoes had developed a gaping hole in each sole, and mother could not afford a shilling and sixpence to buy me a new pair, I cut cardboard inner soles to protect my feet from stones. The inner soles did not last long and soon had to be replaced with another set.

Wearing these sandshoes one day, running in a relay race at our District School Sporting Carnival, I was in the lead when an inner sole slipped out the hole in one of my shoes. I felt it go and this baulked me. I ran outside the track lane and was disqualified. It was so disappointing. I guess I was never what one could call, a winner. Yet I always kept my shoulders back.

It was school holidays; my brother in the city had arranged for me to go and stay with him at his Boarding House at Gilbarton. He also paid for my train fare.

I had been to the city on two previous occasions. Once when I was just a kid, and a charitable organization in Kinrock had made it possible for mother to take me to the seaside. On a second visit, I had gone with dad in the train. It was cold in the old box carriage and I couldn't sleep. Dad told me to sit with my back to the engine and I wouldn't feel the cold. I changed seats and soon fell asleep. When the train pulled up at Thackery Creek at midnight, I was awakened by the jerk, as the train stopped. Much to my delight, I heard a man's voice outside, calling, "Hot pies"! – "Hot pies"! Dad bought two pies – sixpence each. They were hot and delicious.

Now, on this third occasion, I was to go it alone.

Dad had booked my seat in the middle of the carriage and near a window. As the train began to move I became aware of the click-clack of wheels, which increased as the train picked up speed and was on its way. I was really enjoying the rhythm and soon settled down.

As I gazed through the soot stained window, my heart began to warm to all I was taking in of the beautiful countryside – the wide open spaces, paddocks of stubble, stooks of wheat in the field, hay stacks, patches of shady trees, farm houses and barns.

I was delighted.

The train was heading south now, and from my window I had full view of the setting sun – it was like a huge fireball slipping down behind a distant line of hills. I watched the telephone wires dip then rise again between poles, and listened to the clicking of wheels as they passed over joins in the railway-tracks. The whole rhythm of the sounds that reached me brought to my awareness a dance from the "Nutcracker Suite". I began to hum this tune in my mind, and eventually fell asleep.

Noises in the city next day; the trams and the cooing of doves, were all so different from the sounds I was used to back home. Even the air was different. It lacked the aroma of gum trees and dust – I missed them!

The kids across the street from the boarding house took me down to a nearby creek to play 'Explorers'. It was new territory for me. The scrub along the creek was not like the scrub back home either, it even smelled different. Then, to make matters worse, the kids told me to be careful, as the tea trees were alive with ticks.

When we arrived home that afternoon, I was so sure I was covered with ticks, and I was going to die. I lay on a couch to await the end, and fell

asleep. The landlady put a rug over me, and let me be. I slept right through till she woke me next morning and I sat up, surprised!

“Oo-oo”! I exclaimed – “I didn’t die”!

After this, I played in the small back yard of the boarding house. I felt cramped and lost; until I noticed the flat roof on the garden shed, and let my imagination run wild. I could see the roof as becoming the deck of a ship.

That was it! A stepladder provided access, and a glazed sewer pipe on the flat roof became the funnel.

Next day I had the kids from across the street, come and play with me on the roof of the shed. We sailed the mighty ocean, through storms and calm. It was adventurous! That is, until the landlady noticed a sag in the roof. I received a severe scolding and was not allowed to play on the roof again.

So the neighbours across the street, took us all to the beach. We had a great time, fishing off the jetty, playing in the sand, and splashing around in the water. I was stung by a bluebottle and wasn’t very happy about that.

Then I asked my brother to take me to the pictures. Of course, I had in mind, the old “flickers”. But this was a talkie movie, all about college teams playing American gridiron football – quite foreign to me: rugby league was the game played at Kinrock. The exciting part of this film, however, was the final scene – it was produced in technicolour, the very first time colour was used in a movie film.

It was getting near the end of my holiday.

On Saturday, my brother took me to the beach. I began acting the goat with his mate – he was not happy, and threw me into the water; but I could not swim. My brother, seeing my plight, dashed in and pulled me out.

A little shaken, I determined; when I returned home to Kinrock, I was going to learn to swim, which I did.

Back home, I borrowed water wings belonging to one of my brothers, and hiked out to Mackay’s dam, about a mile out of town. It was only a small dam and about four feet deep. As I waded into the water, I could feel the mud squelch beneath my feet and squeeze through my toes. I was happy; not only because I was back home in my own country environment, but because I now had a goal which I was determined to achieve.

So, I had begun my first self-taught lesson.

I kept going back to this water hole, day after day, until I could swim.

From this effort I became a reasonably good swimmer, and later, enjoyed swimming with my mates, in the water hole or in the creek when on picnic outings.

It was so good to be back home in Kinrock.

Kinrock

One day mother sent me on a message to the butcher's shop to get some meat for tea. The summer heat in Kinrock was intense; the brown earth beneath my feet was so hot, it forced me to run, and seek shelter under the Peppercorn trees. I ran from tree to tree, until I reached the shop awnings. My feet were blistered. Yet I was not troubled by such heat; it was part of our environment, what's more, the shady trees were always friendly and welcoming.

Even farmers, passing one another on a country road, sometimes stopped for a chat beneath the shady Gum trees. When in town, they tethered their horses beneath the Peppercorn trees, then went shopping. My heart often warmed to see their horses standing in the shade; head down, nose in a feedbag, and swishing their tails to keep away the flies – this was characteristic of the country.

Though the age of the automobile had reached Kinrock, with the occasional appearance of motor cars in our main street, this did not mean the devaluation of the horse. Horses were widely used both privately and for business.

They were of special value to the farmer, who could not exist without them. For him, each horse was of more value than gold.

It was a Saturday afternoon; farmer Russell hurried into town in his new Chev car, to see dad. One of his horses had fallen down their well. He asked if dad would come out and help devise some method whereby the horse could be rescued. Dad was very clever; as strong as an ox, and a hard worker. He agreed to go, and took me with him.

The well was just behind the homestead. He studied the situation thoughtfully. There was only one thing to do – he picked up the mattock and, about twenty-five feet out, began digging a wide trench sloping towards the base of the well. The farmers shovelled away the soil as he dug. When the trench was deep enough, sufficient bricks were removed from the wall to create a cavity large enough for the horse to be led through. Just on dusk, the horse emerged, none the worse for its ordeal.

During the next school holidays, I was invited to spend a week with the Russells on their farm.

It was a real experience for me. I loved the old homestead. It was not a symbol, of wealth and achievement as some homesteads were. The thick walls were made of mud and wattle twigs, and although the verandahs, with rotting floorboards were a sign of age and struggle, the thatched roof gave the home dignity.

The front entrance was never used. Entrance to the house was always through a door into the kitchen, which adjoined the dining room. The dining room was not as large as one might imagine. A tilly lamp suspended from the ceiling, hung over a cedar table with eight dining chairs around it. A tall chiffonier was the only other piece of furniture in the room, yet the large fire place, and a family portrait created a homely atmosphere. The bedrooms were moderate in size, sparsely furnished and without floor coverings, knotholes were visible in the plain floor boards.

Huge Peppercorn trees around the house, and tall gums along the creek, created a picturesque setting for the old homestead. The dairy was about three hundred yards down the track from the front of the home, and beyond that down by the creek – the blacksmith shop. It was another three quarters of a mile to the front gate, and a further seven miles into town.

Farmer Russell's property covered an area of 350 acres; that was a fair sized farm in those days, in our district; and wheat grew up to four feet tall.

The crops had been harvested, bagged and stitched and ready now to be carted to the wheat silos in town.

I got up at dawn with the men each morning, and watched them harness the team of six horses, and then hitch them to the waggon. After breakfast, we moved off, to the rumble of huge waggon wheels, and the rattle of trace chains. It was a thrill for me to be seated on top of the load, actually experiencing what had warmed my heart as I gazed from the train window, on my third trip to the city.

It took three hours to travel eight miles into town. At the wheat silos, we joined a long que of waggons. The late morning heat was pressing down on us – our felt hats, stained with sweat and dust, offered little comfort. The horses stood deathly still, taking the punishing heat without signs of objection. We had a sandwich lunch and a pannikin of cold black tea while we waited. Then by the time our turn came for the wheat to be offloaded and we arrived back at the farm; then took the horses down to the dam for a

drink, and slung another load onto the waggon for the next morning's trip; the day was gone.

The loading of the waggon was achieved by using a unique catapult device, pivoted to a steel frame attached to the waggon and operated by a horse. Each bag weighed about 180 lbs. When a bag had been laid on the sling, the horse, urged by the farmer's yell – "Y-ooop there", pulled with a swift exertion, and the bag went flying through the air onto the waggon. The farmer on top grasped the bag by the ears and eased it into place. Some times a bag hook had to be used to manipulate a bag of wheat into place. As the height of the load increased, a greater effort was required of the horse, which rarely failed.

Back at the homestead, just on dusk, after a good wash in a tin dish, with cold water and Sunlight soap, we sat around the dining table, under the glow of the tilly lamp, to a delicious hot baked dinner followed by hot apple pie and cream. The meals weren't rushed: we talked about many things while we ate. Soon after the evening meal – no wireless or 'television'; we retired to bed.

One night a brown snake slipped through a knothole in the bedroom floor, to keep us company.

At the end of the week, back home – for some reason, I became sensitive to the sociological divisions in the town. Murphy's Hill, where the moneyed people lived – they were a cut above everyone. Parry's Hill, which was mostly briar bushes anyway, where those who were not so well-off lived; and the 'Town', where, by and large, the ordinary people lived. Those who lived on the other side of the railway line were looked down on. That part of the town was called Millborough. Its individuality was related to the industry of that part of the town, the Chaff Mill and the Flour Mill. On the whole, the people in Millborough were nice people; just not so well off, that's all.

We lived in town. There were hooligans and the not so well-off, also in town. I was more inclined to be friend of the poor and the underdog.

Mind you, some of my mates were well dressed, and more refined than others of my mates. But they would never dare go bush with me. They were not allowed. My other mates and I were soul mates. We had an intense love for the bush. There was nothing strange or rough about the bush. It was bush – beautiful, natural and unspoiled. Its beauty was expressed not only in the trees and the scrub, and its natural aroma, but its wonderment – a silence that spoke a language unlike any other.

One day a group of us boys went “bush”. It was bush of a different nature this time – that spoke to us in its own singular language. We wandered across paddocks of dry grass, studded with small white boulders poking just above the ground. We were alert for snakes; but soon forgot about them, when a Ground Lark flew up in front of us and lodged itself in the grass a little further away, as a decoy. We were more interested now, in searching for its nest, but it was well camouflaged and our efforts were fruitless. Yet it was fun – part of the excitement of going bush.

We climbed a wire netting fence and were now in the gold fields among the old diggings. Most of the mines had been filled in, and all that remained were large mounds of clay and rubble. Another voice was now calling me – the fun of running up these mounds and jumping into the saucer like depression at the top where the soil had subsided.

Sighting an extra large mound and feeling the challenge, I called out; “Hey fellers, watch this”!

I began to run, gaining speed as I went, and as I reached the top and was about to jump – ‘something’ held me back! I stood still – and gazed into the raw hole of an open mine.

Lying on my tummy, I eased myself toward the edge: with my mates holding my legs, I looked down into a jagged rocky mine shaft and the blackness beyond.

I lay there – still; and in this stillness, in awe, I became aware of the presence of God. He had protected me from what most surely would have been certain death.

Life was so full for me at Kinrock.

However, this exciting world of friends and adventure was to be brought to an end – dad received word that he was to be transferred to the city.



The Great Depression worsened, and was being felt by everyone. After work, dad used to go bush to shoot rabbits, as meat for the table.



Looking out the train window, I was
taking in the beautiful countryside;
...stooks of wheat in the field...



It was a thrill, for me, seated on top of the load, to actually experience what had warmed my heart as I gazed from the train window.

(Photo by courtesy, Albert Wiencke)

Chapter 3

Transfer To The City

The news of dad's transfer had naturally come as a shock to me. Not because I didn't like the city; it was just that I loved Kinrock, and I felt, my beautiful world was about to crumble.

Dad made a trip to the city and managed to rent a home in the suburb of Greenfield.

I don't remember our move, but I do remember the house we moved into. It was a brick dwelling, with a tiled roof. The back yard was small; the front yard was smaller; and all lawn – buffalo grass they called it. There was no lane at the back, and the front street was narrow. We were not used to lawns and narrow streets, but at least there was a paddock just across the street from the house.

My mother had to get used to cooking with gas. We even had a gas bath heater, and the water laid on. This was amazing!

I went to High School at Hewston. The school was a two-storey building – it had an asphalt playground that had a metallic smell about it. We marched into class to music coming through loudspeakers. It was all so foreign to me – further more, I had to travel by electric train. No! I didn't like school at Hewston.

At Kinrock, it had been different. I liked school – mostly at any rate. At least I didn't hate it. It was the right thing in the country, to go to school and get an education. Most of the teachers were nice. They wanted to teach us, and took an interest in us – though I didn't like the teacher who used to call me “block-head”. Nor did I like Miss Curruthers; she clipped the tip off my tongue with a pair of scissors because I had been talking. And I didn't like old Jock; he had tried too hard to teach us, and when we didn't measure up to his expectations, he became angry and shouted at us until – in his wrath, dribble ran down his chin. He wiped it away with the back of his hand then let fly with the cane. I was one of those fortunate ones who missed the cane. Still, I didn't like him.

At Hewston, the only teacher I liked was Mame de Borget – she possessed good teaching skills. She was my French teacher, and called me Guillaume because there was another boy in my class, with the same name as mine. I liked French and it became my best subject.

School life was only one aspect of city life. There were also my playmates at home in a suburban street environment; so different from the kids I played with at Kinrock. The kids in the city were brazen – it took time to get used to their ways. I was faced with the problem of peer groups. In the city, you either did what they did or you were not accepted. I hadn't experienced this in the country: there we had made our own life. The city swallowed me up!

We played in the streets when we should have been doing our homework. We swam in the clear water of the clay pit. We hiked four miles to the old haunted house in the hills, and then cooked frankfurts in a billy can over a twig fire down by a water hole.

It wasn't long before I had a pirates flag flying from a pole in our back yard.

We used to ride our billy carts until the novelty wore off; and we graduated to scooters. We played hockey in the paddock across the street, using hockey sticks we had made from tree branches. We became "Lolly Boys" at the Picture Theatre, and earned up to two shillings and sixpence a week.

Dad decided to move house again; a little further out of town where the rent was not so high – we were still in the grips of the Great Depression.

This move was to have an impact on my life in ways I would never have anticipated. I joined a youth group at the little church on the hill. The minister was an old bore, yet something kept me there. I think it was my peers. They were different from the mates I had in town.

When I had finished school, we were still in the wake of the Depression. Work was hard to get. I was offered a job for a month or two at a Grocer's Shop. My job was to weigh up one and two pound bags of sugar and flour, and seal them with starch glue. I also had to go around on my pushbike to collect grocery orders. I would simply knock on the door of a home, and call out, "Gro-cer". When the lady came to the door, I would write down her order, and the goods were later delivered to her home. I wasn't cut out for the grocery business. I left when I was offered a job with a builder for one pound a week. This was like jumping from the frying pan

into the fire. My boss was impatient; bad tempered, and foul mouthed. I didn't like him.

At night I travelled to the city to do an industrial course, learning to weld. I followed this up with a more advanced course. It won me a job in industry. My first pay was six pounds eight shillings and fourpence, a week.

I worked hard, and soon became quite skilled at my trade. In fact, it wasn't long before no one could equal the quality of my workmanship, or output. During slack periods, while others were given a week on and a week off work, I had full employment. I loved my work.

Then, when the news was announced that war had been declared; our factory was classified as a Protected Industry, to do work for the war effort.

In the mean time, a new minister had been appointed to our church. He was very much alive, and there was a new awakening in the church. People were getting 'converted'. Some referred to this experience as, 'getting saved'.

I was not one to respond to the influence of the evangelist in the way others were responding – putting up their hand and going out the front to indicate they had made the "big decision". Nevertheless, I had been made to think; but I needed to work through this new approach to life I hadn't heard of before.

Then something happened. I experienced a personal encounter with God; an inner awakening, when God laid His hand on my life – with the words; "*I have a special work for you*". I was young and without experience, and could do no more than keep these words in my heart.

As I went about my normal trend of life, in industry, in the church, and in the world; a new meaning had come into my life that included a strong sense of God. I needed guidance but there was none who understood – they were only interested in people getting 'saved'.

It wasn't until many years later, after much reading and experience, I was to learn that being touched by God, is best described as a mystical experience. It is an action in one's soul, beyond the influence of man, that cannot be explained. It is a mystery of life that involves the interior of a person. Something that accompanies our yearning to discover the deeper meaning and purpose of human life.

As work in the parish began to develop, an Assistant Pastor was appointed. He was an enthusiast, and very narrow-minded at that. And like the Pied Piper, he gained a good following of kids, and youth my own age. He soon had kids wearing witness badges, whether or not they understood

the meaning of what they were wearing. It reached a stage where the wearing of a badge merely indicated that you had ‘joined the club’.

Cliques began to form – narrow-minded cliques. Either you accepted and believed what they believed, or you were not accepted by the group. That meant – in their terms, you were not an ‘out and out Christian’!

I was *not* an out and out Christian, for I had been to see the film “Gone With The Wind”, and was ultimately rejected by the group as a backslider. Even members of the church treated me coolly – except one man: Fred. Each time he saw me coming, he would hasten toward me with his hand outstretched; a smile on his face, to offer a warm handshake and greeting. He welcomed me by name!

Unfortunately, being rejected by others, in such circumstances, reached me as being rejected by God. I developed an intense feeling of guilt, and with it, a terrible fear of punishment. I had never before in my life experienced anything like this. It began to ruin my life. I felt all alone in the world. I wondered why God should cast me off for having gone to see a classic film. What evil had I done?

The diversity of experiences: country life – then city life – street peer groups – narrow-minded church cliques, and subsequent rejection, had a deep effect on my life – it was too much for me: a mental illness developed; gradually resulting in a ‘religious breakdown’. That is to say, I turned against God and the Church. I actually told God to “Go to hell!”

Just as well I did; for that was where He caught up with me some years later.

What I needed really, was understanding and guidance, to enable me to get my bearings and face this spiritual and moral problem in my life. I sought guidance and help from those areas of the Church I thought would be able to offer such assistance. But it just wasn’t to be. Ministers only reacted to my story, and I knew then, that I could not trust them. I was left in a helpless situation.

Without my knowledge or consent, a person known to our family, had made an appointment for me to see a Psychiatrist. I didn’t know what to do. Mum and dad were ordinary, humble, country people and didn’t understand. The war was still raging, and as a nation we were preoccupied.

Anyhow, I followed through with the arrangements, and kept that appointment.

I sat in a chair in the centre of the spacious consulting room. The Psychiatrist sat behind a huge desk set diagonally across one corner of the

room – he seemed so distant. After listening for an hour to what I had to relate regarding my experience and concerns, he said, “You have a compulsion neurosis; I want you to go into hospital”.

He telephoned the hospital, then wrote something on a pad and slipped it into an envelope, which he sealed.

On the envelope, he wrote, “Heatherglen”.

What else could I do? but consent to be admitted.

Heatherglen

The day I was admitted to Heatherglen, mum and dad sat with me in the Administration Office, while particulars were being taken.

They accompanied me through the spacious hospital grounds, to the Male Ward. Dad carried my suitcase. We were quiet. I don’t know what their feelings were; I had no feelings. I was blank. It was all new to me. I went as a lamb; little knowing the consequences.

We mounted the steps to the Male Ward. I was received by the Sister-in-charge, and mum and dad left.

I was alone.

I was admitted to the Observation Ward.

Strangely enough, I can still remember one person in that ward. A young man: he looked so forlorn, and his face was covered with weeping sores. He knelt frequently at his bedside, in the attitude of prayer. Each time he did this, a wardsman came to his side and with gentleness, eased him to his feet. He was reluctant to move; and as he was being eased up he groaned with grief. His wordless reaction reached me as a plea; “Please – don’t stop me”! Was it a compulsion, and he feared punishment if he failed to pray? I felt for him – with compassion, for I had experienced something of those kind of fears.

Later, I was taken up stairs to another ward. It had eight beds, neatly arranged in two rows. The room was well lit, and had tall windows with bars on the outside. The door to the ward was always locked.

It was while I was in this ward; I began to receive Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT). On treatment days, the ECT unit was set up in a larger ward, further down the corridor. A number of beds, each covered with a sheet, were assembled neatly at one end of the ward. Nurses in traditional uniform waited. Doctors in white coats, stood by the machine. Those of us receiving treatment, were not given breakfast. We were assembled in a ward at the far end of the corridor – near to the toilets.

As none of us knew where our name appeared on the list, the suspense was intense and resulted in several trips to the toilet beforehand. When the first name was called and the patient led down the corridor, the tension eased. We waited to hear the first convulsive shriek, and wondered who would be next.

On my first treatment day, my name was last to be called. I was led to the treatment ward where I noticed, scattered beds at the far end. Some patients were ‘out to it’; others were groaning; one was sitting up in his bed and I heard him exclaim, “Where am I”?

The last empty bed had been wheeled to the front of the ECT machine. I was told to lay down – still. A wad of rolled lint was placed between my teeth. I was told to clench my teeth on the pad. A liquid, resembling brine, was swabbed on my temples. Earphone-like electrodes were clamped to my temples. I closed my eyes.

The next thing I could remember, was being given a bowl of barley broth, in my ward.

We were taken down stairs once a week for inspection. There were two doctors – Dr. Johnson; and Dr. McPhee, who was my doctor. He was very official. Dr. Johnson had a pleasant, gentle manner. We stood in a line just like an army parade. The doctors, in their white starched coats, walked along the line, and asked in a professional tone, “How are you today”? We were always glad when the inspection was over.

In the ward I occupied, meals were brought to us. We showered in the bathroom down stairs, and were shaved daily by a hospital wardsmen, who cut our hair when required. We also went down stairs for our medication – potassium bromide or whatever.

Later, I was moved to the ward across the corridor. It was much larger, and had more beds. The door was never locked. We were allowed to go down stairs to the dining room for our meals. We were also taken across to the craft Room each day, and taught various crafts.

The fully prescribed course of ECT had been administered to me. I was now allowed to sleep out on the verandah, and had the freedom of the grounds.

I helped Sister Oliver in her office, rolling lint wads for ECT day. She stitched them as I rolled them.

Sister was very stern – at first, that is. But she soon learned to crack a smile. Gradually, she relaxed and became quite jovial.

So far, in hospital I had been learning to be independent while being dependent on others. Now, I had reached the stage where I was transferred

to an independent ward, where patients enjoyed their autonomy. We dressed in our ordinary clothes and were permitted to shave ourselves. Each day, I played tennis or croquet; spent time in the Craft Room doing hot poker work on trinket boxes made in the Woodwork Shop. Some times I just wandered through the grounds; they were beautiful. I was even asked to do some work in the Matron's garden – a job I performed well.

All was going well.

Then I had an experience that had an adverse affect on my well-being. The experience itself is of little importance, but the way I sought to deal with it, *is* important.

I contemplated ending my life.

No, no, no, I would never have done that; I valued life too much. It was merely a dodge for self-preservation. I was merely bluffing my emotions. It worked. My disquiet eased – the tension went. However, I had inadvertently exposed my bluff, and finished up in a small ward – a “cell” from which I had previously seen a patient ‘taken away’.

I was given ECT.

When I came-to, I saw other patients staring at me through the small thick glass panel in the door, as they had done to the one who had been taken away. I felt angry. They were invading my privacy – the stick-y-beaks! I began thumping the glass panel to drive them away.

I knew that here, was not a young man going insane, but a soul crying out for God. I lay down on the mattress; it was on the floor; and, I broke down and cried.

In this state, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, I felt refreshed; and words spoken by Jesus, penetrated my being’ *“Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you... and when you are converted, strengthen the brethren”* (Lk 22:32,33 KJV). With my background, those words had a lot of meaning for me. I felt reassured.

I was transferred to a smaller ward. It was narrow and long, with a high ceiling. A window, high up in the wall at the far end, transmitted adequate light. The door to the ward had a small glass panel in the centre. It was a “cell”!

But I didn't mind. Somehow I knew I was going to be alright.

I had not been in the cell for long, when I was taken to the Observation Ward, then to a ward upstairs, and in a short space of time, I was allowed to sleep out on the verandah where I had the freedom to be.

One evening, as I lay on my bed on the verandah, relaxed and contemplating, I became conscious of a need that wasn't being met. I wanted to find the meaning and purpose of life. I began to look beyond myself and where I was, to the One who could meet that need – the One whom I had deserted. The One who had been 'praying for me, that my faith would not fail' – the One I needed to find.

Very late one night, after that, I bundled together my clothes and stole away from the hospital, never to return. It was a risk – I knew, for in so doing, I had cut myself off from medical help. But I had carefully considered that. I was not afraid to take the risk – I needed to find God.

But first of all I spent time at home, getting used to life in the world once more. By now, the church had a new assistant pastor – there was more balance in the church, and some very kind and understanding people. I went interstate on a holiday to regain my bearings before returning to work. While I was there, World War II ended. Everyone was relieved of a long sustained tension. I was in the city the day the news was announced. Crowds just leaped and danced in the streets and hugged one another whether we knew one another or not. The news of victory and peace was just so wonderful to hear.

I returned home and began my quest to find God.

In Search of God

My search for God took me into Churches and Cathedrals, but I did not find Him there. Even ministers were no help; they merely betrayed their ignorance.

I went to an evangelistic meeting, but did not find God there. However, as I was leaving, feeling let down, I saw a brochure advertising a Bible School in the city. Maybe I could get help from someone there. I noted the address.

A few nights later, filled with determination, I went to a building in Gow Street; it was very old, and the lift was antiquated, creaky and slow. It stopped with a jerk at the third floor. As I opened the lattice door it rattled. I stepped out and began to walk along a dingy, depressing passageway. How could I ever find God in a place like this? I reasoned. I stopped – pondered the question: then, 'Oh what's the use' – I decided to leave.

As I turned, I stood facing the open doorway into a room where a group of dear old ladies were praying. One of the ladies peeped through her fingers and seeing me, invited me into the room.

Praying ceased!

The lady asked my name; then told the meeting I would speak to them. I hadn't anticipated this.

"Hold it" – I exclaimed; "Ladies, I didn't come here to speak to you, I came searching for God".

Amid exclamations of "Amen" – I told my story.

They wanted me to write it out and have it published. They were so naive.

"Ladies" – I responded, "I haven't time to consider writing about my experiences; I want to find God, and I am looking for a man in this building who might help me".

Without any further ado, they took me to this man.

He had a lovely smile on his face as he listened to my story – I felt comfortable, and knew I could trust him.

I went to him for several weeks, spelling out my woes. Then one day, when I entered his office, he locked the door.

He listened to every argument I could produce as to why God couldn't accept me, and flattened every one of them. "You don't have to try and win God over by being good", he pointed out. "He accepts you as you are – He will do the changing", he assured me. "It is a matter of having faith".

He quoted some words from the Bible, I shall never forget. "*...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21 RSV). Then he added, "Not when you become a better person – now. Do you believe that"?

I wanted to. "Well yes", I replied rather nervously. I was still clinging to my failings; that was all I had!

"What about you kneeling down now, and call on the name of the Lord in your situation", he entreated.

I froze! My feelings had never supported me, and they were not supporting me now; yet I had to make the plunge; alone. I was afraid! The door. Yes – that was it. A way of escape. But I remembered it was locked. I prayed for the floor to open up and swallow me, but nothing happened.

I knelt down, trembling. I tried to pray – it was hard. I didn't know what to say or how to say it. I was being confronted with something I

hadn't experienced before. I was so nervous when I feebly uttered the words; "O God, save me". The deed was done.

I didn't feel any different from when I first walked into the office, but from then on I began to *see* things differently. My feelings had only fostered a guilt complex within me, when all the time I was an innocent person. I had been hoodwinked. The consequences had been cruel and humiliating.

However, feelings were not the important issue now, but healing. I needed to enter the dark night of faith: that part of our existence when we can't see what's ahead of us, yet we have to trust. In my case it meant faith in God – faith in life – faith in myself; believing that what had now begun would ultimately bring about healing and the restoration of my human dignity.

An act of faith does not mean that things will necessarily get right straight away – that is not the guarantee. The guarantee is, that God is given space to be present within us. In the middle of the chaos He now has room to work.

In my case, I had a goal to work toward, which meant becoming involved in the task of grappling with the mystery of my own feelings, conscience, and guilt, and even hell itself! I needed that inner help.

I began to question my feelings, and to question my conscience. What is conscience that makes one feel so guilty when all the time one is innocent? I put it to the test.

When 'conscience' was saying in threatening tones, "*Don't do that*" – I questioned its validity. There was no answer. Then in defiance I went ahead and did it. Likewise, when 'conscience' pressured me, "*Do this – or else...*", I questioned again – "Or else what"? There was no answer. I reasoned again, and defiantly refused to do it.

Each time I defied my feelings – the strong hold this 'threat' had over me – lessened. That is to say, I was learning to handle my feelings; at first by trial and error. I felt pleased when I had made a right decision. On the other hand, if I failed; and I did have my failings, I learned to accept myself and the mistake, and forgive myself. So, I wasn't failing really – I was learning, and in so doing, I was losing the guilt complex and the grief it caused. This exercise went on for three years. It was real 'hell' for me at times, yet I was coming to understand the subtlety of those forces which by now were lessening.

I married, and we went interstate to live, in the town of Moroven where I had been offered a good job.

With a little over a mile to walk to work, it offered time to contemplate and come to grips with my feelings. One morning as I walked contemplating – peace came upon me, such as I had never before experienced – an inner ‘energy’ that was to remain with me even to this day. This energy not only enabled me to combat with confidence, the dwindling forces of ‘threat’ – but in later years, I was able to combat, with courage, the same subtle elements among members of the human species.

What interested me at this point in time, was the noticeable pattern of three-year cycles in my life. Three years later, we moved to the town of Chesterfield. We had two children by now, and I had been offered a more responsible position – not far from our new home.

Our church at Chesterfield was ideal for us – the people there, were much our own age, friendly and had a positive outlook.

I was invited to do lay preaching. I studied to be accredited; passed my exams, and became quite accepted as a preacher. The minister who trained me, said; he believed God was calling me into the ministry. With my background, I doubted that I would ever be accepted.

However, I did apply to enter the full time ministry of the Church as a Home Missionary. I fulfilled the prescribed studies and was given an appointment.

We were given a send off at our church.

Next morning I was summoned to the Home Missions Department, and was told my appointment was off – but no reason was given. I came away bewildered.

For a long time, we had been supportive of Aboriginal work. We had supported the various Aboriginal Missions. It was a challenge, when a Mission offered us a position to work on Rocknest Island as Missionaries among the island Aborigines. We accepted.

This adventure turned out to be a preparation for what we were to experience in later years, as well as a test whereby we were to learn the meaning of sacrifice.

Chapter 4

Going Forward Together

The first step on our mission was a flight in a medium sized aircraft to Crukschank Island. Next day we were to be taken by Mail Boat, to Rocknest Island.

Our departure was free of irregularities. Both the take-off and the flight were smooth. However, on the plane, our eldest child developed a fever and by the time we touched down at Sandy Beach Airport on Crukschank Island, he was very ill. We were transported into town in a small bus. After booking a room in the hotel, we took our child to the doctor. He was very gracious and kind; other people we had met had not been at all friendly.

During the evening meal at the hotel, the local clergyman sat with us. He warned us against going to Rocknest Island, saying, “The natives steal; they are lazy and they are drunkards”. His words were to be proved, utterly wrong!

The skipper of the Mail Boat had sent word to us at the hotel, to say, “If no one has arrived to pick you up by 7.00 am tomorrow, you will know, the seas are too rough to make the crossing”. The Mail Boat actually sailed from Marlin Point; a deep-sea port further along the coast.

We were up early next morning – waiting.

At 7.00 am there was no sign of transport. Our eldest child was really ill, and the two younger children were in tears – it was unlike them. We were strangers in a strange land. Feeling disquieted, we retired to our room.

Some time after 8.00 am there was a light tap on the door. It was the Maid. She called out, “Your car is waiting outside”. It was just as though an angel was on the other side of the door.

We felt relieved to see our transport in front of the hotel. Once we were on our way we began to relax. The journey to Marlin Point was pleasant – the road followed the coastline all the way. We arrived at the port just in time to see the last of our belongings being loaded aboard the

boat; this gave us a good feeling. Then we noticed Dr. Wright, standing at the end of the wharf, gazing pensively across Yogel Sound. He was making his fortnightly visit to Rocknest Island. His presence was reassuring.

The skipper beckoned us to get aboard.

The engine purred as the boat glided from the wharf and entered the straight, then headed west. The sea was calm, and we sat on top of the cabin, taking in the cool refreshing salt air; but this pleasure was to be short lived. A strong wind blew up – the seas became rough, and the boat began to toss. We were instructed to move to a safer position at the stern.

Our eldest child was seasick.

Dr. Wright was leaning against the cabin looking ahead, toward Rocky Point. He began to whistle; and an old hymn tune was carried down wind to where we were sitting. We took comfort in the words the tune conveyed; “My faith looks up to Thee...”.

The boat continued to be tossed in the heavy seas, and despite the spiritual comfort we had received, we too had begun to feel ‘green’.

As the boat approached Rocknest Island, we reached a position where the skipper was able to point to the settlement on a headland which was called, “The Corner”. The buildings appeared no larger than pin’s heads, yet the very sight gave us spirit; and pleasant feelings were aroused within us.

The headland disappeared, and for the next hour, we followed a coastline of unique rock formations, trees and scrubland, and stretches of green pastures. As we passed the Spit, we entered a little bay – it was sheltered from the wind, and the waters were calm. As we drew near to “The Corner”, red and green roofed buildings that notably lined the crest of a grassy slope stretching from the foreshore of a little sandy beach, were a sight to behold.

We became filled with excitement as the boat coasted across the bay, and tied up at the jetty.

We stepped ashore.

Standing on the hillside beyond the jetty, a group of islanders; mostly women dressed on colourful frocks, and wearing red cardigans, watched the arrival of the boat. As we were being escorted along the jetty; calculating eyes followed us until we turned left at the school grounds, where curiosity reached its peak as little children, lining the school fence, watched us pass – their bright eyes following us until we reached a bend in the road at the Community Hall, and turned south.

Moving on, we passed the General Store, and a little further along, a weatherboard church not far from the mission property. We could see the mission house on a rise, back from the road. The house was clad with horizontal corrugated iron sheeting, painted cream; and it had a dark green roof. A crooked path wound its way, through bracken ferns, to the front steps of the house.

It was a cute little cottage. The interior was lined with fibro and Masonite, painted soft blue, and cream. The two bedrooms were small, yet comfortable, and a sunroom at the front of the house, provided extra living space. The kitchen-dining room was reasonably large: and the bathroom/laundry were part of the lobby at the back.

The view from the sunroom warmed our hearts: a rustic path winding its way down to the front gate; the foreshores of the little bay – then in the distance, the high peaks of the mountains on Crukschank Island. The scene was magnificent; surely this was another ‘Garden of Eden’.

After school, on that afternoon, a stream of little visitors came to the house. We invited them inside. Shy and lovely, they looked at us; turned to each other, giggled, then ran off home without saying a word.

That evening I went for a quiet walk down to the jetty. As I drew near, I met a man standing on the roadside; he looked at me with disapproving eyes and said, “We don’t want any missionaries here”! I quickly sensed the reason for his words, but knew they would be short-lived. The islanders would soon find us to be friendly, caring, and ordinary people.

Children began to visit us regularly after school, and their conversation developed from “Yes” and “No”, to very interesting child talk. Parents also began to call in for a chat; or a “skite”, as they called it.

We waved to everyone as they passed by the mission.

Uncle Charlie, an Island Elder, said one day, “Those people must know me, they always wave and say ‘Hello’.”

All was going well, until our eldest child went down with the mumps. While caring for him, my wife went down with the mumps. I cared for them both – and I went down with the mumps. My wife got up to care for me, and had a relapse. I cared for her, and had a relapse. We both cared for each other. What a plight.

To ease our burden, the schoolmaster’s wife took our children into their home and looked after them. She was a trained nurse. During our ordeal, the islanders kept away from the home – it was quarantined.

Once the mumps had cleared, and we returned to normal, we began having children at our home, especially on Thursdays for after-school meetings, when we had a singsong and a story. I used my gift of quick-sketching as a visual aid to tell the stories. The afternoon concluded with a cup of cocoa, scones, and a good chat. The children delighted in those Thursday meetings.

One little boy was so shy, on meeting days he would not come any further than the front gate. I was eventually able to encourage him to the house. He was so delighted; the next meeting day, he brought his grandmother.

I was invited to take religious instruction classes at the school, teaching in the same manner as I had been doing in their little meetings at home.

The adults began calling in home for their usual chat. This paved the way for me to begin holding Sunday Evening Services at the mission house. We were not permitted to use the church. It was used for funerals, officiated only by the school teacher, who was both School Master and Law Officer, and as such, had been designated that role.

Six people attended the first church service. From then on, the numbers doubled each Sunday, until we had no more room to squeeze them in. The services were conducted under the dim light of a kerosene lamp. Eventually we borrowed a tilly lamp to provide better lighting.

The islanders loved to sing the old hymns. Some evenings a number of young ladies, living in the scrub nearby or further up the valley, came to the mission house, just to sing those beautiful old hymns. Other nights, older boys came across with pad and pencil, to spend the evening sketching. The islanders possessed many gifts – they built their own boats, one boat in particular changed ownership three times during its construction. They even made their own guitars; and some even built their own home, with quite a professional touch.

We began a visiting program. It was pleasant walking through the scrubland and open spaces. To the more distant homes, we were taken by horse and cart or by boat. They were mostly farmers with a small run of sheep or cattle. One family had a good-sized market garden. I was able to use my trade experience to assist them and teach them some things in the way of home maintenance.

The islanders took great pride in their homes. They were not all modern – most of them were plain corrugated iron, with an external corrugated iron chimney – others were weatherboard, and brick chimney.

One such home, painted red, with a red roof, was built by an islander less than five feet in height – consequently, the doorways were only five feet in height. I had to stoop to enter the rooms. Yet all the homes were clean and tidy, and well kept. Some had a camp oven; and an earth floor, covered with pine needles that filled the home with a lovely fresh pine aroma.

The islanders were also very proud of their traditions; and despite that we had been strictly warned not to ask questions of them, relating to their traditions, they were very free and open, and even delighted to share their folklore with us – some of which we experienced with them.

Not far along the valley south of the Mission – on the eastern side, part of the long range of hills was studded with white rocks, just above the surface of the ground. This area was very sacred to the islanders, especially the children.

Each year, on Christmas Eve, as soon as darkness fell, children watched from the windows and doorways of their homes – their eyes fixed on the sacred area of the hillside, known as ‘the white horse’, because of the shape of one white rock jutting just out of the ground. Their hearts were beating with excitement – the atmosphere was tense – minutes seemed like hours. Then, a faint flickering glow appeared among the rocks; it grew brighter, as flames reached up into the darkness of the night.

The children shouted; “Hoorah”... “Santa Clause has arrived”!

In a flash, little boys and girls were in bed, and despite their excitement; were soon fast asleep.

At seven o’clock on Christmas morning, after having been up to see our children open their Christmas stockings, we were just about to crawl back into bed, when there was a light rat-tat-tat, on the front door. As I opened it, three little brown faces peeped in. In a moment they were inside – toys in their hands, new shoes and socks on their feet, and wearing brand new trousers, all of which they proudly showed off. They were very happy and excited. I could not help but feel, how sensible the gifts had been.

On this memorable Christmas morning, however, when I saw one little boy rush outside, I thought immediately of the huge dome of granite rock, not far from the front door; protruding a little over six feet out of the ground, and more than fifteen feet in diameter, with a long slope on one side. The kiddies loved to play on this rock.

I hurried outside after the little fellow, but I was too late. The little scamp was sliding down the rock on his bottom. I was there to meet him at the end of his slide. He was beaming brightly and full of excitement.

“O.K.” I said. “Turn round” – “Bend over”. He did, and it was just as I assumed. There were two gaping holes in the seat of his brand new pants.

Between Christmas and New Year, it was traditional for the Islanders to do their spring-cleaning. They laid fresh pine needles on their floors, and repapered the interior walls of their homes with coloured pages from the “Woman’s Weekly”. This work was done with great artistic skill and was a very pleasing sight, when finished.

Traditionally, on New Year’s Day, the islanders, about 180 in all, held a picnic, two miles down the valley. We joined them and enjoyed the usual picnic lunch, and the various children’s events – then came the concluding event and highlight of the day: the ‘Rocknest Cup’.

Three horses were lined up at the barrier – the jockeys, wearing traditional jockey’s silks; perched on their saddles, worked nervously to steady their mounts. All of a sudden, one horse tossed its rider, and bolted off through the scrub. The jockey up and after him, but the horse was too fast. We saw no more of the horse or rider, that day. The remaining two horses competed in the race. It was an exciting finish – the winning horse won by a nose.

That evening, we attended a social gathering in the Community Hall. Organized by the islanders, it was a most pleasant evening – singing and dancing – real “western” style – they were enjoying every moment of it. Then suddenly, all activities ceased! They began packing their gear – picked up their lanterns and hurried off into the darkness of the night.

This puzzled me, until I learned that news had reached the group, that someone had smuggled some liquor onto the island; they did not want to become any part of it. They were very sensitive about moral issues, and proud of their culture. We felt proud of them.

One day, while out visiting, we called on Uncle Charlie, the Island Elder. He welcomed us into his humble home; and with a smile on his face, he asked, “Would you like to learn something of our history”? He was so eager to share something of his island traditions that were very rich and alive in his heart, Proudly we listened, as he told us about his people, the island; the various ship wrecks and the rum that had been pilfered from the ships. We learned about fishing, and lobster potting – their fears of evil spirits that lurked in the waters of the sea. From what we had learned that day, we loved and respected them all the more.

One of the islanders had died suddenly. I called at the home of the deceased, to pay our respects, and minister to them. During this pastoral visit, I was invited to enter a sacred tradition in relation to death and dying.

Then on the day of the funeral, I walked with them in the cortege, behind the hearse; a horse-drawn cart carrying the coffin made of pine boards, and decorated with a wreath of island brush and flora. A large floral cross was attached to the end of the coffin. It was a mile walk to the cemetery. During the walk, and later, during the Burial Rite officiated by the Law Officer, I was brought into a deeper experience and understanding of their culture in dealing with evil spirits.

Through circumstances that we needed to acknowledge, the time had come for us to leave the island. The islanders appealed to us to stay – “You are the only white people to ever enter our hearts. Other white people had drawn a line and would not cross over it. You have crossed the line and come into our homes and into our hearts”.

Very sadly, we left the island that had been a paradise for our children, and a place of true love and companionship with an indigenous people; to return to the mainland, unaware at that time, of an unseen ‘Hand’ that was guiding us.

Chapter 5

A ‘Call’ To The Ministry

On our return to Chesterfield, we were not surprised to learn, quite by accident, the reason for my rejection from Home Missions. It was the result of one minister who, learning of my appointment, made a discriminating and false claim, and the Church believed him!

Eventually we returned to our own state. I had been offered a position in a shipping related industry, in a supervisory capacity. This position turned out to be a unique experience in an area of the work force far different from the average workshop experience, where I was able to teach the men new skills, and to experience industrial relations relative to water front traditions, and Trade Unions.

The factory where I was to work was in an old residential area in Regent Place, close to the city. The main plumbing branch was on the waterfront.

My work was interesting – the men were rough diamonds and wild. I was their foreman.

They didn't like being straightened out, especially big Hank, who retaliated one day. But I had a way with the men that finally won him over. It opened the way for me, not only to train big Hank, but other men as well. I taught them new tricks of the trade; worked with them on the ships when they were in port, and did my share of hard yakka. I treated them as men, in a way that eventually won them all. This also went for the Trade Union bosses, one of whom came to the factory one day – especially to say, “Thank you for what you are doing for the men”.

It was three years later, that I felt a call to candidate for the ministry of the Church.

I made appropriate inquiries; studied for my exams and passed; but I was knocked back on a medical; the reason for which the Church chose to remain silent.

Because I had sensitive feelings about having received psychiatric treatment, I sought to learn the reason for my rejection; but the Church continued to be tight-lipped. I persisted in my inquiries, and eventually; during a phone call, I was assured. “It wasn’t very much: you will never have a stroke”.

A minister phoned me to say, he had been talking with the Principal of the College: he urged that I should reapply, and I will be accepted.

We had a newly appointed minister at our church; I went to see him, and he was really interested in my quest. “We don’t want physical giants’, he commented; “we want spiritual giants”. He asked me to wait two days while he gets things in motion.

Two nights later, I rang his front door bell. That was as far as I got. The reception was cold and negative. He stood behind a closed flyscreen door and said, “You know, the ministry is a tough job; people knocking on your door; broken homes; it’s a tough job – well I must go”. The door closed – I walked away bewildered, wondering what it was all about. Why did he just brush me off like that?

The real blow came a short while later, quite unexpectedly, when a minister whom I knew came to me out of concern, and related a claim made by a student studying to be a Home Missionary – that I didn’t get into the ministry because I was a bit mental!

This came as a terrible shock to both my wife and myself. It was the beginning of a stigma that was to overshadow my life for many years to come. I became very anxious and angry, and sought from the Church the real reason for my rejection; but the Church was evasive.

I appealed to the Church – and my appeal was given a cold reception. I persisted, and it was said, if I really wanted to know I will be told, But nothing was ever forthcoming.

Having achieved nothing from my appeals, I took the matter up with our Family Doctor. He made arrangements for me to see a Psychiatrist who, after a consultation, reported that he had found me to be quite normal. The Church continued to maintain its silence.

I arranged to get a second opinion. This psychiatrist asked me to count backward from one hundred, by three, holding a piece of paper across my outstretched hands. I thought I had done this pretty well, but when I had finished, he said, “Don’t seek to enter the ministry”. That was his only comment.

When I visited my Family Doctor and told him of this visit, he arranged for me to see the doctor at Heatherglenn Psychiatric Clinic. After a

careful analysis, the psychiatrist stood up, and with a raised voice, said, “Get out of here, there is nothing wrong with you”!

I couldn’t get back to my own doctor quickly enough, to ask why the psychiatrist had spoken in such a gruff manner. The doctor said, “Psychiatrists today, use an aggressive manner to convince some people, there is nothing wrong with them”.

I began to talk with ministers about my sense of ‘call’ into the ministry. One minister took up my case. Then he too became evasive. I confronted him one day, and he told me there was nothing more he could do. He remained tight-lipped.

Still, I pursued my quest and went to yet another minister. Feeling comfortable in his presence, I told him of my sense of call and asked him point blank; “Should I regard this merely as being in my own imagination – or should I treat it for real”?

He was very open and frank: “Treat it for real”!

So, I pursued this quest still further, and inquired of other ministers. Some advised – “You are better out of the ministry”. Others said, “You can serve God just as well in industry”. I seemed to be getting nowhere, so I agreed within myself, to take up this industrial challenge for real, and accept this as a way of serving God, full time.

An Industrial Challenge

This new approach to my work had an immediate effect. I was Production Supervisor in a large industrial enterprise. Most of my men were rough diamonds. But they were men. The interesting thing about my changed outlook was; the men also began to change. The quality of their workmanship improved. I trained a labourer to become a departmental Leading Hand. I could see talent in this man.

Somehow I had a way with the men.

One day we were doing a production run: it also involved two other departments. Things began to go wrong, and one of the departmental managers; in an uncontrolled burst of anger, created panic along the line.

As had sometimes been the practice on other occasions like this, the managers went to the pub, and left the organizing to the supervisors.

I called the production line to a halt.

First of all, I calmed the men down – gave them clear instructions, then asked the operator to repeat them to me. He did. He understood – and production resumed without any further hitch. When the managers returned

and stood on the mezzanine floor, they looked down at a completed production run; with no further mishaps.

Nothing was said, but there were *feelings*.

Sometime later, involved in another production run – this time, guillotining coiled sheet metal to length – the length of the sheets were determined by an electronic eye. We ran into trouble: the lengths began to vary beyond the allowable tolerances. I called the engineer, who sought to correct the errors, making adjustments to the electronic eye. He was not successful, and walked away.

I noticed that sunlight was shining through a nearby window onto the electronic eye; and wondered if this might be the cause of the malfunction. I had one of my men fix a piece of black malthoid material across the window, to blot out the sunlight. We had no further trouble.

I thought no more about it.

However, during the course of discussion at the next monthly management meeting, the Managing Director raised this issue, and asked why it was that the engineer had not discovered the solution to the guillotining problem. It was a pity the engineer had been targeted – yet, I guess it had to be addressed. But from then on, I became aware of a ‘knife in the back’.

That was no problem to me.

My real problem began when the men began to tell me, “You ought to be a minister”.

“No, fellers, you’ve got me all wrong; I belong here, with you”.

Yet they kept saying. “The way you help people, you ought to be in the ministry”

Thirteen years had passed by, since I felt that first call to the ministry, and had been rejected. Was I being confronted with this ‘call’ again?

For almost twelve months, now, I had been involved in a voluntary work with the Handicapped. In this work I met a young lady; her name was Joy. She had cerebral palsy, and was strapped in her wheel chair. She was mute, and her only means of communication was her foot. I became quite skilled at communicating with her. Then one day, through this young lady’s foot, while communicating with her I felt again, God’s call into the ministry. Of course, I didn’t believe it, for I was too old. Yet some months later, at a combined fellowship meeting with the Handicapped, that call came yet again; only this time; “Get ready, I am going to call you out from industry into the full time ministry of the Church”.

From that moment it did begin to happen.

By now, I was a Production Manager. I loved my work, and had been working very hard. One day, during the course of duty, one of the workmen said to me, “You are working harder than any other manager in this place; why don’t you take stock of yourself”. His words stirred my heart, in a way I could not understand.

Driving home from work that evening, along the river front – the only place I had where I could meditate, and work through issues in my life, I experience a stirring deep within: it caused me to say, “God, what are you doing to me? What do you want with my life?”

The mystic response, deep within, was brief: “Contact the Department for Home Missions and offer for service”.

“No way” – I said, “That is a dead end job”. I let the matter drop.

All next day at work I was very restless. No, it did not affect my work; but on the way home that evening, I experienced once again a stirring within.

“God, what DO you want with my life? You know I have agreed to serve you in industry – I am quite happy there. You know the Church does not want me – why are you doing this to me? get it off your chest and let me be”!

I received the same mystic response; ‘Contact the Department for Home Missions and offer for service.

I felt a little annoyed. Then it suddenly struck me: I am too old and the Church won’t want me – O.K. I’ll do it”.

It was just three minutes to five when I arrived home. I telephoned the Department for Home Missions; introduced myself and asked, “How are things going?”

“Pretty good”, came the reply, “We could just do with a man like you, what about coming to see us”.

I knew then, something *was* happening!

I did go and see them, and filled in an application form to enter the full time Ministry of the Church.

The way I looked at this, was; if God really wanted me in the Ministry of the Church, I must go through those people I was aware of who had something to do with my rejection for the ministry some thirteen years previous.

First of all, three references were required of me – two from the clergy, and one from a layperson, which I already had.

I determined that my next reference should come from the Reverend Fred Barker whom I had good reason to believe, had been an obstacle in my path, that led to my rejection in the first place.

I went to his church one evening. At the close of the service I related my purpose in coming, and asked if he would be good enough to provide me with a reference. He became irate and said, rather bluntly, “Meet me at home”.

“So you want to be a Home Missionary”, he snapped, as I stood before him in his study.

“Yes”, I replied, “And I would be pleased if one reference should come from you”.

“Well I won’t give you one”, He said, indignantly. He paused for a moment in thought, then continued, “I’ll send one to the Department for Home Missions”.

“Thank you”. I replied softly, “If you choose”.

“I *do* choose”, he snapped back again.

I went home that evening feeling as though the bottom had fallen out of my world.

My next contact was the Reverend Dr. Jim Moreland: he had been a very close friend; very supportive and encouraging. He was glad to give me a reference.

I was now to go before the Mission Board to go through the prescribed oral examination.

The day before my appointment, I received a letter in the post. It contained a pamphlet from an unknown source. What struck me, were the words of a scriptural text in bold letters at the top of the page, “*Behold I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it...*” (Rev 3:8 KJV).

On my arrival at the Department the next day, one of the Directors was waiting for me at the top of the steps. He hurried towards me and greeted me warmly; “Don’t worry”, he said, “Everything is going to be alright”.

I got through the oral examination, and was then advised; I was to go to see Dr. Leon Jackson for a medical examination – he was the one who had given an unfavourable report in earlier candidature. He was very strict. This would surely be the ‘end of the road’ for me. Yet it was necessary that I should go through this doctor.

The day before the appointment, I received a letter in the post. As I did not have time to read it, I slipped it into my coat pocket and forgot about it.

Next morning, I sat in the Doctor's waiting room – trying to relax. Then I remembered this letter in my pocket. I edged it out and tore it open. Right across the top of the page, in bold letters, was the paraphrased scriptural text, “*Stop dilly-dallying around, go in and possess the land!*” I read those words again, and at that crucial moment the surgery door opened – the Doctor called me in.

I was given a stringent medical examination, at the conclusion of which, the Doctor scratched his head and exclaimed; “Perfect”!

That night the Department for Home Missions phoned me to say I had passed my medical.

The shock came a few days later when I received a further phone call, advising that I was requested to see a Psychiatrist; Dr. Sanderson, the newly appointed Medical Superintendent at Heatherglenn. My wife accompanied me.

After a brief introduction, the doctor asked, “How would you feel if I were not able to pass you to go into the Ministry”?

“Doctor”, I said, “You go right ahead and do as you see fit. But if you don't pass me, all I have ever believed is a sham, my faith has no meaning, and God does not exist”. We talked at length; and after a private conversation with my wife, he called me into the room.

“You know”, he said, “I have a personal interest in you; you are a walking miracle. I would like you to do a special test for me, on Thursday”.

I underwent that test.

It was Friday, and I was anxious to know the result of my test, for on Sunday, we were to be given a send-off at our church.

I phoned Dr. Sanderson. “Doctor”, I began, “I know you are not supposed to give information over the phone; but how did I go”?

“You did very well”, was his brief reply.

The Department for Home Missions phoned me that evening, to advise that *I had been cleared!*

I went to our family doctor to give him our news. He was very angry! “I have been tired of the Church phoning me to check up on your health – you are a very healthy man”, he said. “There is nothing wrong with you”.

“Doctor, I am here to tell you the good news!

Briefly, I told him I had at last been accepted for the full time ministry of the Church. It registered with him, and he wished us both well.

After a third of a century of an exciting industrial experience, I was now ready to pull out – to enter the full time ministry of the Church, that God had called me to.

The men called me down into the works to say farewell. One man broke down as he was making his speech. Another jumped to the platform and continued; “You were a hard man, but you were always fair and just, and we owe what we are today, to you! We just want to say ‘Thank you’ ”.



One day, while communicating with Joy:
through Joy's foot, I felt God's call
into the ministry of the Church.

Chapter 6

Rightly Placed

Having had a lengthy and varied background in the industrial world, I was sent to an industrial region; to the town of Lintenfield; as a Parish Assistant. A Home Missionary has not the initial training of the ordained minister, hence, the limitations to his responsibilities which I respected. My work involved preaching, pastoral work, youth work and teaching.

With my experience, I had much to give.

At the same time, I realized I had much to learn in this new full time work experience. Certainly, I did not come into this work, ‘knowing all things’.

As my ministry developed, it became clear to me that I had a problem. I had made a hit with the industrial world, and the common people of life – but not the clergy.

A meeting of our ministers had been convened.

I was invited to attend, though I had not been informed that it was to be a workshop on group therapy drills.

About fifteen ministers were present. We were given a brief on the procedures, and told that each one would be required to express frankly, his feelings toward his fellow minister. Some ministers favoured the idea, while others felt threatened, and expressed their disapproval. I had no feelings, in that respect, for I hardly knew the ministers; though I held them in respect.

A triangle had been drawn on a board. We were told that we would be required to write our name against the triangle, where we thought it should appear. Next, we were to place the names of other ministers, where we felt they should be. This was asking a bit much for those of us who were assembled with ministers we did not really know.

To me, it looked like a set up.

It also reached me as being an exercise in false humility which does not build good relationships. Actually it becomes an obstacle to spiritual growth.

By the tone of the meeting; in my case, it seemed obvious that I would be expected to place my name at the base of the triangle; yet I didn't know whose name I was expected to place at the top.

It seemed a cunning plot!

I was not surprised when the atmosphere of the meeting grew tense, and resulted in a long silence which was broken, only when I asked if I could express to the meeting my observations.

Permission was readily granted.

I explained how, having come from an industrial world where we worked together as a team, as equals, when even the labourer was made feel important – I could not help but notice how ministers seem to be so reserved and self-conscious, when we ought to be more aware of our true values. Then, pointing to the board I said, “For example, I would place my name at the top of the triangle, for in relation to what God wants with my life – I am the most important person. The same applies to each of you in relation to what God wants with your life. Though mind you”, I concluded, “I am the least among you”.

This is not what the leader expected. He pointed a rigid finger at me, and blurted out, “You wait till we have finished with you. You are over-enthusiastic – I would hate to live with you”!

In response, I pointed out that in my work, I work at the very bottom, in the background, behind the scenes; I am much happier there.

There were signs of members becoming upset – some were in tears. One minister jumped up and explained how he was inclined to agree with what I had been saying.

It was then; the suggestion was made, that the meeting be brought to a close with a prayer for us all.

After this unanticipated event, things seemed to run a little more smoothly for me, except for minor relational problems.

My superior requested me to officiate at a funeral. As it was my very first funeral, I asked for his guidance as to what I should do. His only reply was, “Play it by ear”.

This did not answer my question; I was rather disturbed by his attitude. That evening, I drove to Robindale, to a minister friend, to seek his aid. I told him of my plight. He gave me some helpful guidance which enabled me to face the bereaved next day, with confidence and grace. From here on, I began to develop a caring relationship with those in grief.

I cared also about the children in my school work; grieving because of the abstract lessons presented to them that they could not identify with at

their age. It was no wonder they were hurting. How could I reach their imagination?

I talked to God about it.

The answer was spontaneous. ‘Dig up that talent you buried years ago; get yourself some coloured chalks; build yourself a collapsible drawing board and go into the classes equipped’.

I built up this equipment, and taught the children, using my gift of quick sketching. It was no surprise to me, what was being taken by the children, into their homes, to their parents most of whom were not church-goers.

Through the use of my artistic gift, I was called to officiate at the funeral of a school teacher; father of a little girl in one of my classes. Naturally, it was a very emotional experience, yet it was none the less bright and dignified. Inexperienced as I was, I followed up this grief situation; visited the little girl and her mother, and occasionally wrote a short illustrated letter to my little friend, to assist her in her grief.

Several years later, in another parish, I learned from one of their relatives, how the visits I had made to that home, and the letters I had written, helped the little girl and her mother to cope.

Visiting a home one day, a mother frankly asked, “What are you doing to my son”?

Quite puzzled, I replied, “I am sure I don’t know. Why do you ask”?

Smiling, she continued; “When he comes home from school on Scripture days he relates very vividly, all that you had taught him in the lesson. I am learning such a lot from him. He had never done this before”.

I even took my drawing board into high schools; years one and two. This method of teaching won both students and Principals. One young girl in a high school in an underprivileged area, used to wait for me at the school gate to carry my drawing board to the classroom. It was meeting a need in her life.

Once a month I used to conduct a Service of Worship in a housing estate in that same area. The windows of the church were boarded up with Masonite; the organ was charred, and some of the hymn books burnt – all a result of vandalism.

Whenever I preached in this church, the same High-school girl came and sat on the pipe railing outside, waiting for me to come out at the end of the service. When I finally appeared at the door, she would come to me and say “Hello” – then dart off.

My Superior requested that I officiate at a funeral other ministers had declined from officiating because the deceased was not a churchgoer.

I visited his family, who had very little to say about him. I called on near neighbours, asking if they could tell me something of this man.

“Sorry, no”, was each reply.

As I was leaving the last home, after the same negative response, I was called back. “Hold on – there *is* something – I’ve just remembered”.

The information given me was all I needed.

At the Funeral Service next day: I arranged for it to be in the church; the congregation impressed me as being religious, yet sombre. I could sense something within them appealing to me. How could I handle this situation? After the Introductory Rites, I confessed that I had not known the deceased, then continued; “But I do know this – the day before he died he talked about an ‘Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me’ ”. At this, the whole congregation sat upright; their countenance changed! I invited them to sing the hymn, “Amazing love! How can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me”. They stood up; their faces radiant, and sang those words with zest.

I really loved my work, and was engaged in a lot of home visitation. I became known as the Visiting Padre. Yet, conscious of the need to improve, I enrolled to undertake external theological studies, to better equip myself for my work: I passed my first three exams.

As happy as I was in my work, I felt like a pumpkin in a pickle bottle. It was difficult to expand in conformity with the shape of other’s ideals.

Relief came when, at the end of the year, the Department for Home Missions asked if I would be prepared to go to Errelton. They were having difficulty in getting a minister. I agreed. The move was meant to be – I was equal to the challenge that awaited me. This was confirmed some months later in a letter from the Department for Home Missions, stating that the move was a compliment to my dedication and ability to be able to minister in what had been for a long time, an ordained minister’s appointment.

Early in January, we moved to our new post.

The Challenge at Errelton

At Errelton, the minister’s residence was very old. On our arrival at the place that was to be our home, our hearts literally sank! The task of settling in to this antique lifestyle, proved to be more difficult than the work

that was waiting for us ‘out there’ in the parish. Still we did it. We persevered, arranging the home to our liking – it took several weeks – but we got used to its inconveniences and the antiquity, and began to like it.

While this was going on, I worked the parish, quietly observing the need of each of the four churches to which I was to exercise pastoral care. Each community was different from the others, something I respected and liked.

I shall always remember my first service in the little church on the hill at Jarwood – in sheep grazing country, and wheat fields. It was an afternoon service and after the closing prayer; outside the ladies stood in one group and the men another group; to share the news of the week.

I joined the ladies group first – but when I overheard one of the farmers in the gent’s group, spilling out his woes, in having failed to make a job of a cattle grid he had been building. I asked a few questions then commented, “Your welds were cracking”. He was amazed, for that was what had been happening. Then I explained the reason why they were cracking, and recommended procedures to correct this problem. He followed my instructions. It was the best sermon I could have preached that day; for the next week he came to church beaming brightly; his efforts were successful. I had created an affinity, not only with him, but also with the rest of the farmers.

Many opportunities came, as time went on, for me to share my industrial experience with other farmers – teaching them some new tricks of the trade.

Of course, I did not apply the same principle with all communities; I met each one at their point of need. For example, I had been forewarned of a particular problem in one of the churches – one that no one had been able to define. It did not take me long to discover the problem and its source. And in this case, ‘gently’, I stood firm with the cause until the grip had been broken.

The parish officer called at our home one Saturday afternoon. We wondered what this visit was all about; and were surprised when he said, “We knew there had been a problem out here, but no minister was ever able to identify it. You had not only identified the problem, but you have broken its back. I want to thank you on behalf of the parish”.

The stand I had taken had at first, shaken the people. Yet this was something I had anticipated. The congregation became cold. The people, as they left the church after the service, would not speak to either my wife or myself. This went on for several weeks.

The parish officer, one Saturday, called again to our home, only this time, he said, “I have had a talk with the “boss” and suggested that we get someone to conduct the services of worship in this church for awhile; we don’t want you breaking down.”

“Goodness me”, I exclaimed, “If you do that, you will undo all that I have ever believed and experienced. Give me another three months and see what happens.”

Next morning he was sitting in the back seat of the church. I preached like I had never preached before – I could feel it. It was Holy Communion, and while administering the Sacraments, I experienced something I could not explain.

I had a baptism at my next service, and had to hurry away. The parish officer was waiting for me at the gate. He said, “I wish you all the best”.

Next Sunday I noticed the tensions had been dispelled, and the people, renewed. From that time on, we experienced a beautiful ministry in those churches under my care.

My diary reads; “Despite what people had been saying, ‘Nothing will ever happen here...’, things were happening. “There *is* hope”, I kept telling them – “Have hope, for nothing will ever happen where there is no hope”. Then when it came to the annual meeting of the congregations under my care, recommendations were directed to the Parish Quarterly meeting, that my appointment remain.”

I guess my ministry was a prophetic ministry.

Facing problems seemed to have been my lot.

I was asked to visit a farmer at Orchard Hill; he lived with his three spinster sisters. There was not one man game enough to go near his place; I was told – for fear of being threatened with a gun. When one of his sisters had a stroke, the women in the district were the only ones who dared to go to her aid; and they called the doctor.

I was given instructions on how to get to the farm, and left almost at once. I found the place, and parked my car at the gate; a precautionary measure, in case I needed to make a hasty retreat. It wasn’t very far up to the farmhouse.

The cottage was old, and clad with a fine ribbed corrugated iron that went back to the early nineteen hundreds, or before. I went to the back door and knocked.

The sister, who came to the door, was very gracious, and invited me inside. They were dear ladies, all three of them, and were glad to see me. The sister who had the stroke, was in a wheel chair.

I was shown into the sitting room. It was lined with the same corrugated iron as the exterior. The ceiling in the room was ten feet high. A reed organ standing in one corner of the room, had a headboard that reached almost to the ceiling. The fellowship that afternoon was warm and friendly. We enjoyed a good chat and a laugh over a cup of tea and scones. They were so jovial. Then, as I was about to leave, I said, "Ladies I would also like to visit your brother".

Their countenance changed. They looked at each other and the atmosphere became quite solemn. "I am afraid you will not be able to see him, he - he's across in the packing shed", one of the ladies stammered.

"No trouble", I replied, "I would love to meet him. Please show me how to get to the packing shed".

They couldn't resist this warm request, and directed me to my next point of call.

The shed was not far from the house, and I walked straight through the open door into the packing area.

The farmer was seated before a box of pears. He looked up – his cold steel grey eyes glared at me.

"What do *you* want"? he snarled.

I saw a gun in the corner.

I introduced myself – at the same time taking in my surroundings; noticing at the same time some apple sorting bins at one end of the shed. "Nice set up you've got here", I commented. "I used to make those apple sorting bins when I was in the sheet metal industry".

"That's not sheet metal, that's plumbin' ", he said.

"No, it's sheet metal", I assured him.

"No it's not, it's plumbin' ", he repeated.

"O.K. you win" I concluded, entering his world.

We talked about packing apples, and the conversation became quite interesting. I didn't stay too long. I had won a friend and did not want to lose him. As I was about to go out the door, he called me back.

"Here" – he said, "Take these". He offered me some speck pears.

I was really delighted and said so.

Whether news had travelled or not, I don't know; but I was soon called upon to visit a dear old lady, not far from our home. No one would visit her, for fear of being edged off the property with her shotgun.

My heart warmed.

It didn't take long for me to find her place. I drove down the lane at the front of her home. The odd part about this property was; there were no gates. I pulled up in the side lane and climbed through the barbed wire fence. As I began to walk through the stinging nettles, a lady in overalls appeared. She had no form or comeliness. She stood silently, watching my approach.

I introduced myself, and asked if this was Mrs. Bowen's place. "Yes", she replied. "I'm her daughter".

I explained that I was making a pastoral visit.

She took me to her mother who was standing over an old fuel copper, prodding the clothes with a stick. Standing beside a tree near the copper, an old treadle grinding wheel – well worn from use, looked as though it had been standing there, idle, a long time. On the nearby clothesline, stretched between two posts, linen sheets, along with other linenwear, looked grey.

After introducing myself to Mrs. Bowen, she invited me in to her home. She took me first, to the kitchen. It had an earth floor; the walls were blackened with soot, and a cat lay curled around a warm pot of stew on the table. There was no ceiling in the kitchen. Two possums, crouched timidly on the log rafters, looked down at me. I reached up to pat one, and received a bite instead.

We went into the lounge room. The walls were smoke stained from winter log fires. Tin lids containing cat's food, were placed in various positions on the floor. I had no sooner sat in a lounge chair, when a cat jumped up and snuggled itself on my lap.

I enjoyed a very intelligent conversation with Mrs. Bowen, and asked how she got out of the property to do her shopping. "Oh", she smiled, "I just climb the fence".

Her daughter took me to the spare room on the back verandah, and showed me the relics of her horse riding days. A dusty old saddle slung over a pole; stirrups and bridles and whatever, on the wall. It was a pleasant visit.

The Errelton church was about to celebrate its 100th Anniversary. I extended an invitation to Mrs. Bowen, which she graciously accepted, and turned up wearing a smart black frock, black shoes and an elegant black hat with an attractive wide brim, edged with black lace.

In this ministry at Errelton, I was very much involved in pastoral visitation; something I dearly loved. Meeting people in their homes I learned that many of them had not been visited in years.

I continued with my theological studies and passed three more exams.

My involvement in establishing a youth club, attracted young people, not only from the churches, but also off the street. My diary reads; “We started off with a group of seven reluctant youth – some of whom had given the previous minister a rough time. One pulled out. So we began with six enthusiastic members who gradually began to show signs of new life and outlook – for the simple reason, it came through them. I encouraged them to take office and responsibility – I shared their life as mentor. One 18-year-old young lady from a local family, was encouraged to take a leadership role as club secretary. Today, widowed, and mother of two grown children, she says it was her involvement in the youth club that gave her a place in life.”

I arranged for the youth club, one night, to experience a guided tour of a Cathedral. There were sufficient cars to transport all the club members. They followed my instructions to drive carefully. The condition presented by the Dean of the Cathedral was that we must agree to the forty-five minute tour, followed by a brief devotion in the side chapel to conclude. The youth became so interested in the Dean’s lecture – the Altar, the Icons, and the Liturgical dress and then the devotional in the side chapel, that we were there a full hour and a half.

By way of contrast, we went to the Drive-in Theatre one club night. It rained, and most cars had to use their windscreen wipers – resulting in flat batteries. I did not have to use my wipers for the simple reason I used some newspaper to wipe the windows beforehand. What made the evening, was the fun the youth had after the show, pushing other cars with flat batteries, to get them started.

Later, we joined with another club, and chartered a coach for a weekend in the city. Our members were billeted in private homes. Apart from seeing the city, we took them to the beach, when the same young lady saw the ocean for the first time.

What an experience!

We were later, privileged to invite the youth club we had visited in the city – to spend a weekend with us in the country. They were billeted in the same way as we had been. The highlight for them, was Saturday night –

we took them out to one of the farms where they enjoyed a real Bar-B-Q meal, followed by a Barn Dance in a real barn.

I had been appointed by the Minister's Fraternal, to the role of Industrial Chaplain in a large industrial complex similar to my own industrial background. The appointment was timely, and proved to be an important part of my parish work. It happened during an industrial crisis, when some workers were facing imminent retrenchment and the dole. I had been able to offer guidance and support, enabling them to handle their grief, and face their future.

One morning I was summoned to the General Manager's Office. I was a little nervous. Yet I needn't have been. Both he and the Managing Director expressed their thanks for what I had been doing among both the staff and factory workers.

All was going well in the parish – then something happened I had not been prepared for!

I felt God's call into the ordained ministry.

Chapter 7

Obstacles Defied

The external studies in theology I had been doing were for my own benefit, to better equip me for my work. I had not imagined myself becoming an ordained minister, and was a little taken back at the thought, particularly after previous experiences in this respect. I needed to test this sense of call, and sought guidance from the Church.

Relevant application forms were sent to me. I discussed them with my Superior, and he explained; by the time I had fulfilled all the requirements of the Church, I would be too old and the Church would not want me.

Disappointed, I arranged to see the State Executive and get a second opinion. My meeting with him was brief. He could scarcely spare the time, other than to say, “You are too old and you might get sick and break down”.

Communications in the church were very poor and far from encouraging – nor did they engender any incentive of trust. Then, to top it all off, I learned that the Reverend Fred Barker had claimed that I would *never* stand the psychological strain of the ministry.

I wrote to a minister I knew, of another denomination, and related my story. I wanted an outside opinion. He wrote back to say he had made an appointment for me to see the three top men of his church: the State Chairman, the Principal of the Theological College and the State Executive, for the purpose of guiding me on the right track.

Beginning with the State Chairman, I had three separate interviews. Each man heard me for an hour, and each man concluded with; “*I have no doubt, God is calling you into the ordained ministry*”.

On returning to Errelton I talked further with my Superior who once again told me I was too old and it will be a waste of time. Further more, he added. “You might get sick and break down”.

When I arrived home, I was so angry; I tore up my application forms.

My current ministry was not affected by this setback. I was very happy in my work, and full of vitality.

All had been going well for me until early next year – when this same sense of call was repeated, only this time it was much stronger. I became angry, and said, “God, what *are* you doing to me? Why are you calling me when you know the Church does not want me? Please let me be a good Home Missionary”.

There came to my mind, a blind girl who, unbeknown to herself had had a profound influence on my life. Actually it happened four years previous – the night we went to church at Devondale. There had been no connection at all between where we lived and Devondale – it was out of the way. Yet, I said to my wife, “I would like to go to church at Devondale this evening”. I didn’t know why.

We went.

There was nothing different about the service – that is, until a young blind girl was led out to front, and read the Scripture lesson in brail. My heart *burned* within me!!!

Now, here – in a mini crisis in my life, the influence of that night returned and was very strong – it was just as though this blind girl was leading me – encouraging me.

If only I could meet her and tell her of my experience.

One day I was talking with a Home Missionary at a retreat. I related this experience to him, concluding, “If only I knew where to find her”. “She is my daughter”, he replied eagerly. I was invited to his home where I was to meet her. Kate was her name. By now, she was a young lady. We had her come and stay with us at Errelton. There was a special reason; but first, we wanted her to experience a little of country life. We drove her round the country, describing the area – she understood. She was adventurous herself. One day, with me, she climbed the ladder in the barn up into the hayloft. We sat with our legs dangling over the opening through which hay bales were loaded. The cows in the field across the way were bellowing. I explained that they were grieving because their calves had been taken from them. I described the little country school opposite – she was enjoying herself.

Then on Sunday we took her to the Glenora Church where I was to conduct a Special Youth Service.

The pipe organ began to play, then to the sound of the trumpet and the loud sounding cymbals in the gallery – the youth marched down the aisle singing Psalm 150 “Praise ye the Lord...praise him with the sound of

the trumpet...”; Kate’s hand was resting on my arm, as we followed. Then at an appropriate part of the service, she read the Scripture lesson from her brail Bible. A feeling of awe came upon us all. I knew then that the ‘Call’ to the ordained ministry was for real.

I phoned the Reverend Dr. Jim Moreland and told him about the repeat of this strong sense of call. He said he had already written to the State Executive about me, and suggested that I also write. He also said that he had asked for Application Forms to be forwarded to me.

In the mean time – one day, at the Glenora school, waiting to take a Religious Instruction class, I talked with another teacher. During the conversation, she said, “You ought to be in the ministry”.

“Don’t give me that”, I said. “I have felt the call to the ministry and made application; but the Church keeps telling me ‘You are too old, and you might get sick and break down’ ”.

My brother is on a Ministerial Selection Committee in my church; why don’t you go and have a talk with him

She gave me his phone number.

I arranged an appointment, and drove sixty-five miles to speak with him. He listened to me for an hour, and after a number of questions he said; “I have no doubt God is calling you into the ordained ministry, and the pendulum is swinging toward your own Church”.

That evening I phoned Dr. Jim Moreland and related this experience to him. He said he had received word from the State Executive, suggesting that I make application to the ministry under paragraph 49-2 of the Book of Law, and my case will be heard.

I went to my Superior, and asked him to nominate me to candidate for the ministry, under paragraph 49-2 of the Book of Law. “On what grounds”, he asked curtly, “What is your sense of call”? I had been through this with him before; but I went through it all again – fifteen minutes it took, but he showed no signs of being interested.

It was painful. However, to keep the ‘iron hot’, I asked, “In view of my medical history, may I undergo the prescribed initial medical examinations before the next Parish Council Meeting”? He agreed to those arrangements – he could do no other.

The examination was carried out locally. X-rays showed that my heart was normal in size and contour, and my lungs, clear. Further medical examinations with other appointed doctors including a Psychiatrist, were to be arranged by the Candidates Committee.

I had no idea what was happening – until the day before the parish Council meeting, when I was told, I would be required to give my testimony and sense of call.

At that meeting, my Superior nominated me as a candidate for the Ministry, and called on me to give an account of my conversion and sense of call. I told the truth. The meeting voted unanimously in my favour. At the end of the meeting I thanked my Superior for nominating me.

“Oh, it’s hardly likely you will get in”, he replied.

The people of the parish were very excited and supported me all along the way in my quest to become a man of the cloth’.

I conducted a Trial Service at Uralon, the summing up of which was to be presented to the District Church Council at Quondong, where I was to appear before the Council and give an account of my conversion and sense of call.

The parish officer at Glenora had urged that I tell it exactly as I had done at the Parish meeting. Then he said, “Don’t water it down”!

I gave my testimony of my sense of call and was tested further by way of an Oral Examination. The Chairman – my Superior, then invited me to wait outside while the meeting considered my case; “You will be called back shortly”, he advised.

Three quarters of an hour later, I was still standing outside; darkness had fallen, and I could see the outline of people leaving the church. I walked across to the church. It was empty, but for one person. I asked what was happening. “You had better see the Chairman”, I was told.

I found the Chairman and asked what was happening. He stammered; “Er - we have broken up for dinner”.

I was kept on ice all that evening.

Next day, no one spoke to me at the Council meetings, or at lunch. Then just before dinner that evening, a young minister came to me and asked if the Chairman had seen me.

“No”, I replied, “I am still up in the air”.

“Well, we wish to talk with you in committee, after the Service this evening”, he advised.

The preacher for the Evening Service had been my hearer at the Trial Service I conducted at Uralon. Whereas his assessment was quite good, he did comment on how he thought I read my notes too much.

Had he asked for an explanation, I would have told him I was wearing new glasses with a faulty prescription – the pulpit was low, and I

had to stoop to focus on my notes, when normally I stood upright and glanced at my notes unnoticed.

The humorous side of this was; when my hearer preached at the service that evening, he leaned over the pulpit on his left forearm; his other hand perched on his hip, and in a relaxed manner, he read his sermon. The three “cardinal sins” of preaching. It just shows; you can get away with anything if you are ‘one of the boys’.

After the service that evening I sat in a small room at the rear of the church, with a committee of three men; the Chairman, the District Executive, and a young minister.

The Executive opened up by saying, “When you gave your testimony at the meeting yesterday, I said to myself, ‘Here he goes again on another ego trip’ ”!

Another ego trip?

In a split second my mind went back to the day I had been called before my Superior, to be chastened. He had received a complaint from a minister a few days after a meeting of District ministers, held in our parish. It was my first meeting of this nature.

The complaint was; ‘I had introduced myself to some ministers over a cup of tea, and made them welcome’. The reprimand was, “You had no right to push yourself onto others”! But I was never told who lodged the complaint.

I wondered if I was sitting before him now?

In response to the Executives words, I told how I had read a devotional book recently. In it, the writer stressed how, ‘...the faults we see in others are but a reflection of the same faults in us’.

“If that’s the case, the whole Council are egotists”, he snapped back.

“Well, there could be something in that”, I replied.

I was asked a number of other questions, to which I responded, “Those questions should have been asked of me yesterday when you were given the opportunity. Still. I will answer them.”

The Executive said he would not vote for me.

“Don’t worry, I know where I am going. You vote how you choose”, I replied.

The young minister broke the short silence that followed, raising such questions as, studies and finance. We dealt with them frankly.

The Chairman then raised an issue; “In your testimony you said that some people had been obstacles in your quest to enter the ministry: has anyone here been an obstacle”?

“Yes, you Sir”, I responded softly.

The executive quickly called the meeting to an end.

Next morning I received a unanimous vote of support; and was told “...the meeting is right behind you and is supporting you with their prayers”.

I had the prescribed medical examinations, including an interview with a Psychiatrist; a Dr. Rogerson.

In the back of my mind, I wanted to know the Psychiatrist’s diagnosis. The Secretary of the Candidates Committee had agreed to provide that information, in view of the trouble I had experienced in relation to my medical history.

When the report eventually became available, he wrote to me, providing the very information I was looking for which read “...no frank psychiatric illness could be found in him”.

It is the policy of the Church to test fully, the call of every candidate for its ministry. I had now, to go through the third stage, where my application was to be dealt with at a meeting of the State Council.

I had already appeared before two panels, now came the ‘big wait’; the hearing and assessment of all reports on my application, and the final vote.

The Director of the Department for Home Missions met me in the corridor and said, “I cannot help but feel that this is not a matter of the Church putting you to the test; but you, testing the Church”.

When it came to a vote, I understand that out of two hundred or more members of the State Church Council, there were only three or four who voted against me: they were members of the Theological College Staff.

I found my Superior and asked how I got on. He informed me that I had been accepted; but that was all he said. He showed no signs of joy, nor did he congratulate me, or give me any further directions.

It was while I was waiting at a bus stop, excited yet dejected, that a minister standing nearby, offered his congratulations and asked what was happening for me.

All I could say was, “I have been accepted, but I know nothing more than that”.

His wife, standing nearby said, “You have been given two years to Ordination, and you may be placed in a parish while doing your studies”. I preferred to go into Theological College full time; I needed to, particularly for the experience of study, academic training, and fellowship with fellow students.

But why wasn't all this told me by my Superior? He seemed to have resented the fact that I had been accepted.

An interview had been arranged for me to talk with the Principal of the college: he indicated that I might get a scholarship, and suggested that I talk with the college Financial Adviser. In a further interview with the Deputy Principal, he took a less positive view, and suggested that I remain a Home Missionary where I would have an assured income.

"No way"! I said, objecting. "I have been called into the ministry and I intend to face it". He then requested that I make a statement of our financial situation and send it to the Principal.

On our arrival home at Errelton, we were inundated with telephone calls – people asking how I got on. Excited with the news, congratulations flowed freely.

The thought of financial insecurity while doing studies presented a challenge to us. This was obviously something we would have to work through.

There were other things that needed attention.

As it was official that I had been accepted for the ministry, and was to enter theological college, my term of ministry at Errelton was to be brought to a close.

We began packing, waiting at the same time for formal notification of the uplift date for our furniture and belongings, and confirmation of a forwarding address. Single students were billeted in dormitories within the college, while married students were allocated a unit in the college flats.

I received, instead, a letter from the college regarding our financial statement.

We were thrown into a state of shock!

We felt the 'wind go out of our sails'!

What we experienced was an absurdity. It was unbelievable.

We had reached an anticlimax.

An Anticlimax

The letter stated that my candidature for the ministry could not proceed any further because of our financial situation; and advised that a letter to this effect had been sent to the State Chairman.

A week later he wrote a sympathetic letter to me, inviting me to call and see him.

I had already written a letter to the State Executive asking for the removalist uplift sheets. However, in view of a request from the State Chairman to see him personally, I decided, while I was there, to call first and see the State Executive.

He asked if I had received a letter from the college.

“Yes”, I affirmed, “It suggested that I resign, but I have no intentions of resigning”.

“Hm! Our lines must be crossed”, he returned rather nonchalantly. “If you telephone the Principal, you will get the answer you are looking for”.

Instead, I arranged a meeting with the State Chairman who outlined some facts about my candidature that were not correct. Someone had made the statement, that I had dictated to the Church the terms on which I would enter the ministry. I defended myself, stating that he had been wrongly informed. Then explaining what had really taken place, I asked who had made this personal statement on my behalf.

“It was the Chairman of the District Church Council”, he stammered, mentioning also the District Executive – the ones who had assured me that, ‘the meeting was right behind me, supporting me with their prayers’.

“This is serious”, I said. “He had no right to make a statement like that without me being able to defend it”.

I began to explain to the State Chairman what had been happening to me in my quest to enter the ministry. I stressed that what has happened to me has driven men out of the Church.

He jumped up and shouted, “I won’t have this. It has got to stop”!

“No Mr Chairman”, I continued firmly, “You have asked for it and you are going to get it. What has driven other men out of the Church, has driven me into the Church. I love my Church and I love my people. I will not resign”!

The Chairman sat down. “I can see that you *are* called into the ministry, and I want to say, if you accept the challenge I will do all in my power to help you”.

My wife and I decided to get right away from this intrigue and work through our situation.

We went to a Holiday Resort.

Seated on a bench seat down the street one day, eating a sandwich, we discussed our situation frankly, and agreed that while we could not trust

the Church executives, we could trust God. We decided to go through with the challenge of not having any foreseeable means of support.

On our return, I phoned the State Chairman and told him of our decision. He was thrilled, and said he would see what he could do to get us accommodation.

Not long after we returned home, a letter arrived on the post, advising that our belongings would be uplifted in a fortnight; but we received no news about accommodation.

It was Saturday when I phoned the State Chairman and asked about it. He seemed embarrassed and suggested that I phone the college. I told him that I had already done that. He became curt and non-committal.

I asked if he had received my letter. He said, "No".

"A letter is already on the way to you", I affirmed, and reiterated something I had written.

"Yes, I have already read it; er - I have just been handed the letter, it arrived half an hour ago, I am reading it now", he stammered.

I was angry! It was Saturday afternoon and there were no mail deliveries on a Saturday. I turned to my wife and said, "What are they trying to do to me, put me in a psychiatric hospital, or something"!

The emotional stress was almost unbearable; yet we would not give in.

Come Monday, the removalist's sheets arrived in the post. I phoned the college manager and asked if there was a place where we could store our household belongings.

"Work that out yourself", he replied.

The people in our parish were furious at what was going on. Some offered to store our belongings at Glenora. Others urged me to pull out and get a secular job. They even had a home picked out for us, that we could rent.

My response to the various offers of goodwill was, "No! This is something we must work through – thank you all the same".

It was five days before the removalist was due to arrive, and we still had nowhere to live and no place to store our household belongings while in college.

Once again, I telephoned the college manager, and asked for an appointment to see him. He was at first non-committal and said, "That's your decision". Then he changed his attitude and arranged an appointment for 9.00 am, just three days before the uplift of our furniture and belongings.

We arrived at the college right on time and asked first, about the flats for married students. The manager said, “There are twelve flats and thirteen people to place in them. Two flats are already occupied by taxi drivers, and a third, by a lady whose son is in hospital”. We were taken to that flat first and introduced to the lady. She wanted to talk to the manager in private.

We noticed a boy in one of the rooms.

We had a look over the flat while they were talking. Finally when we left, the manager told us the lady’s son was alright and she wanted to vacate.

“Does that mean we have a flat”? I queried.

“No it doesn’t”, he replied. “Phone me in the morning”.

Full of hope, we drove home to Errelton. It was a long way. Our hope was rewarded next morning when we were advised that the flat was ours. It had two bedrooms and we could use one room to store our belongings.

We drove to Glenora for the day, just to get away from it all. Down the street, we met a retired minister who had been a former State Chairman. He knew more about me than I knew about him. He invited us to join him for a cup of tea at a nearby restaurant. He asked how we were, then commented; “The Church has not treated you fairly”.

What could we say? We knew the Church had been treating us unfairly – yet we were going to see our calling through.

The big day arrived. Our furniture was uplifted in the early morning, and we spent the remainder of the day cleaning and vacuuming the residence.

It was late afternoon when we finished and I phoned my Superior. He was out, but his wife answered the phone.

“We’ve cleaned the house thoroughly, and I’ve left the house keys with Mrs. Thompson”; then having said “Good bye”, I concluded with “See you again”.

“Oh its hardly likely”, she replied rather curtly.

With that, we drove away. The bitter and the sweet accompanied me.

Next day we took up residence in our flat, and settled in without any further problems. It was great to feel we had a roof over our heads, and a place to store our belongings.

Within a week, my wife went job hunting: but with the current recession, jobs were hard to get. She received so many knock-backs.

I commented, “Why don’t you try the company you worked for before we were married”.

She phoned the company and was told there were no job opportunities, however, they invited her to come for an interview. Before the interview was ended, the employment officer asked her if she could start work on Monday.

We had a home to live in, a place to store our belongings, and the opportunity of a regular income.

Chapter 8

The College Experience

It was almost forty years since the day I left school – I hadn't been a good scholar – it wasn't until I entered the industrial world, and could use my hands as well as my head, that I began to learn. I was not troubled as I began to orientate myself to a new life-style in theological college.

My wife had started work as a cashier with the company she had worked for during her single days. She was away from home almost thirteen hours each day, after leaving for work at 5.45 am. During those hours, I was either studying, attending lectures or doing research work in the library. Then there were the hours after the evening meal of study or writing assignments.

The Principal asked me one day how many lectures I attended. "Fifteen", I replied, "But I am examined only on thirteen subjects". The normal course of other students was eleven.

Each student was allotted a parish as a preaching place, under the supervision of the minister of that parish. I was appointed to the Gresham Parish which had two churches. I was expected to conduct a Service of worship in one of the churches each Sunday. The Reverend Bob Cornwall was my supervisor. How fortunate for me. Bob had been an engineer in his industrial days. We both talked the same language. That was a relief, for ministers at the college were out of touch with the world.

Early in my first year at college, I received a letter in the post from a friend in my previous parish. It told how people there had been strengthened by my ministry. On the other hand, the letter continued; my apparent popularity had given rise in some areas, to jealousy and lies, to my detriment. I felt nauseated.

Never mind, it was short lived, for I was heartened by information passed on to me by the Deputy Principal, that people in the Gresham Parish were being strengthened by my ministry. New faces were showing up in

both congregations. I reflected on those words that came to me in that psychiatric cell “...*strengthen the brethren*”.

An interesting part of college life was, I had been stripped of everything but my clothes. A good way to begin learning. I was twenty to thirty years older than most students, and older than most lecturers.

I could tell that I was under surveillance of the college staff. Later it was made clear to me, that they *had* been watching me closely, for any signs of breaking down. I don't know why! I had no fears of breaking down.

A test came that was to prove this; the day Dr. Gray conveyed to me, the news that Reverend Bob Cornwall had suffered a heart attack and was in hospital. He lowered his voice; and with an expression of concern said, “This will place an extra load on you”.

“Don't worry”, I replied, “I shine in practical crises”. What seemed to have been a concern for him; was a challenge to me which I knew I could handle.

Lecturers certainly knew how to load students with assignments. Most of the students complained. Yet I could see the purpose of assignments as testing how well we were grasping the relevant subjects. This was a challenge. Then it was quite obvious to me that assignments were also meant as an exercise in developing writing skills, particularly for the delivery of sermons or lectures.

On the whole the lecturers were constructive in their comments on our assignments. Dr. Aldridge, however, was inclined to be unduly critical. For example, I had arranged to discuss with him, comments he had made on one of my assignments. I asked what he meant by his comments.

“Well, that is *you*”, he replied curtly.

“Sir”, I responded quietly, “I came here to be trained as a Minister, not criticised sarcastically, which after all, is the lowest form of wit. I would appreciate something more constructive in future assignments”. His face reddened, but he did change his approach, much to my benefit.

Some time after Bob Cornwall had returned to parish life, I was requested to conduct a Service of Worship in the Gresham Church, with Dr. Gray present as my hearer. At the conclusion of the service, members of the congregation were invited to meet in the adjoining parish hall, where the service was to be assessed, followed by a luncheon. A goodly number of people attended.

The assessment began when Dr. Gray asked the question, whether or not I was a bit of an actor. He received a unanimous response; “No”!!!

He asked further questions about my prayers and the sermon, and received a number of positive responses, the most encouraging of which was; “If someone came in off the street and heard that sermon, they would want to come again”. Actually I had already experienced this at Gresham.

Then he asked whether my sermon should have had more light and shade. “No, don’t change him”, they called back in unison.

A few days later I was called to be interviewed by Dr. Gray. He expressed his delight at the way members of the congregation had responded to his questions; this gave me a certain feeling of achievement.

Despite the happy times in my parish work, I was dispirited by relational problems with some lecturers and other members of the college staff.

We were in group discussion one afternoon, when a supervisor came and asked if there were any comments we would like to make for his report to the college Board of Management. Silence followed. It was broken when I put up my hand and said, “Yes Sir, I would like supervisors to be more human and treat us as persons”.

“What do you mean”? he queried sharply.

“Well sir, two days ago I had an appointment with you to unburden myself, as we all need to do at times. I was with you no more than two minutes, when you began to look at your watch”.

“The trouble is, you took too long to get to the point”,

“No sir”, I corrected, “The point is, you were not listening”.

At this, there was an uproar among the students, some of whom were in tears saying, “He is right; when we have a need to unburden ourselves, you will not listen to us”. There were numerous responses of hurt feelings.

The supervisor excused himself and walked away.

When he had gone, the students said, “Thank you for saying what you did, we hadn’t the courage but you paved the way for us to speak up”.

I still carried the stigma of a mental illness, sustained in my earlier candidature; it was being accentuated by the concern held among college staff and church executives over my medical background. I talked to Dr. Gray about it. He said that he could not pass on to me what the Candidates committee had discussed about my mental health but he did say, it created quite a concern in the District Church Council, who had dealt with my candidature. This did not surprise me after the negative attitudes I had experienced in some of them.

I explained that while other ministers had adopted a negative attitude, I had reason to be glad and enthusiastic at what I had worked through in my life, by the grace of God.

Dr. Gray did say that when I first came to see him, he was concerned, and wondered just how long I would last in college. “But”, he continued, “You have shown me that you have been able to get your work done, and have done it meticulously well and have stood up to the strain of college life throughout the year”.

“It had not been without my anxious moments”, I added.

He was surprised and said, “You didn’t show it”.

At that stage, I learned that the college would be looking for a student to undertake Chaplaincy Training at a Psychiatric Hospital next year. When it was officially announced in class, the lecturer looked at me. I knew someone else had already indicated his interest; yet I put up my hand and was accepted.

I passed my exams, and this surprised the Chairman of the District Church Council whom I contacted about renewing my association next year with Reverend Bob Cornwall, in the Gresham Parish, while at the same time doing Psychiatric Chaplaincy studies. Approval was given.

I had something to really look forward to.

Resentment began to develop among students and some lecturers; they were not happy at me being given only two years in college; though this had been the decision of the State Council. I felt their acrimony.

My diary reveals the intensity of the emotional battle I had sweated through during the year, not in fighting for survival, but doing what I believed was right.

Dr. Gray came to me at the commencement of my second year and said, “I see you passed all your exams last year”.

“Yes”, I said, “I was given a rough time, but I didn’t break down because I have a resurrection faith”.

Maybe I had said the right thing at the wrong time, for the pressure was intensified during the second year. I had to rewrite a number of assignments, doubling my workload. Lecturers became non-communicative and cold; the Principal was on edge with me; the reason unknown. Another lecturer was inclined to argue rather than plain talk; other lecturers became evasive and seemed to derive a lot of satisfaction out of dropping hints as to faults in my personality.

It is no wonder I felt upset when a lecturer, for two consecutive weeks, presented lectures, laying emphasis on psychotic illness. He then

gave me a book to read, 'Poems of a Psychotic'. Pieces of paper between some pages, marked selected words of a paranoid; others about despair and suicide, and words of panic. I could not identify with any of them. The way he spoke, I felt categorized as a psychotic; and challenged him on that point. He didn't appreciate it.

Yes, I do have a sensitive sixth sense which has never interfered with my work or attitude toward others – even if the senses were threatening. I had developed a philosophy of life – to wait; to trust in 'Life' and 'Truth', and not lean on my own understanding; and to acknowledge that "Energy", that transcends mine, that will direct my path.

In college life, the most felt problem for me was; the college staff did not know how to handle me, at my age and with my background. Yet, despite the tension and frustration, I remained enthusiastic and energetic.

However, I did carry the hurt of 'psychotic' for several years. It was finally released by the words of a Psychiatrist during a lecture while undertaking special studies in a city hospital.

A Paradox

I enjoyed playing a little game.

There was something about me, it seemed, that some of the students and college staff simply had to find out. When their curiosity was aroused they became quite friendly toward me; put on nice smiles, then began asking questions. But, when I declined from satisfying their inquisitiveness, they became on edge and evasive.

I couldn't trust any of them; but I could trust my parish supervisor, the Reverend Bob Cornwall. He had been a great support during the year. I could talk to him about what was going on and share my feelings with him. By the same token, I had also been a support to him. One day I found him in a very depressed state. He talked about death. So I shared with him, my experiences and feelings about "death". He brightened up and became his old self.

"You know"? He said, "I talked with a prominent minister of the church about my feelings. He could not offer any help or understanding. Why is it that some of these qualified men have not got the integrity or courage to admit that they suffer those common feelings I have been suffering; and you have admitted? It makes a difference to know someone else has experienced those same feelings".

Work in the Gresham Parish under the supervision of Reverend Bob Cornwall, continued to be exciting. At the same time, my work at the Psychiatric Hospital was also exciting: I was attached to the Geriatric Ward – my own choice.

The Reverend Will Browne was my college supervisor for the hospital work. He was a very sombre person, and very negative. It showed in his disposition. Indeed, a young Catholic student commented one day; he was much stricter with me than with any of the other students. I had certainly found him unduly critical in his comments and reports.

One day I had words with him about his sarcasm; and said, “Please, don’t try to squeeze me into a mould – please let me be me! That is the only way I can minister to these people effectively”. He agreed to ‘lay off’.

Three months later, in a session with him he said, “Since you have been in that ward, there has been a marked change in some patients”.

I was glad he had observed this, for I was also aware of this.

I simply loved going to the hospital ward each week.

Big Ted had me in a bear hug one day. I stood perfectly still; his arms wrapped round me. I talked with him quietly during the ordeal. Fifteen minutes later, he began to slacken his grip. I invited him to lie down on the nearby couch. He did. It was then, that a nurse came up to me and said, “You have a lot of patience; if it had been me, I would have groined him”.

A few weeks later, Big Ted was terribly disturbed. He was having a tiff with a male nurse who was not treating him kindly. I went outside and walked around the courtyard to get my bearings. On returning I went to him and said, “Ted, I’m the minister” (he used to call me ‘The minister’). I’ve come to visit you”, I said kindly. We sat down together: I was facing him; we talked about his football days when he played with a team in district competitions. Then his conversation moved to his war experience as pilot of a Catalina aircraft, in Timor during the War. He was quite detailed, responding to my questions.

When it was time for me to go; and I said “Good bye”, his face *shone* – “Good bye”, he said softly.

I went straight to the Public Library and checked the information he related to me. He was spot on. I was able to pass this information on to the hospital, who were delighted: they did not know he had been in the Air force. They were glad of this information.

Peter, another patient, was blind. I used to sit and talk with him. One day, the nursing sister had the patients playing a little game – trying to bite

an apple floating in a basin of water. I described the activity to Peter, then took him over to the bowl and let him feel the apple floating in the water – then I guided his hands to the edge of the bowl. He ran his hands over and around its surface. When he returned to where he was sitting, he said, “Thank you, I had never known what a bowl was like, or that an apple could float.”

While talking with the Sister-in-charge, one day, a lady came up to me and asked if she could play the piano. I gave the Sister an appealing look, and said, “You’re the one in charge”.

“Oh alright”, she said – reluctantly.

The lady went to the piano – sat down; partly rolled up her sleeves, flexed her hands and played, Beethoven, with professional skill.

“Well”! the Sister exclaimed – surprised, “We never knew she had a musical gift”.

Things happened so spontaneously.

Len came to me one day – he told me he had written a poem, and asked if I would like to listen to him recite it. I thought it a great idea. With one hand behind his back, and the other hand across his chest; standing stately, he recited his poem, “The Hill Of Calvary”.

Flo met me one day. “When you come here”, she said, “You put me in touch with God; may I go to your church one Sunday”? In a flash, an idea came to my mind.

“Flo, I’ll ask the Sister-in-Charge”.

The next time I was preaching at the church nearest the hospital, permission was given me to take both Flo and Len to my service. The congregation welcomed them.

I had invited Len to recite his poem, and he agreed.

While he was reciting, there was not a dry eye to be seen in the congregation.

It became a regular event for Len and Flo, or sometimes another, to attend worship with me when I was preaching. The hospital staff were very happy about this.

The day, a Devotional Service was to be held in the Geriatric Ward, the chaplain did not turn up, nor could he be contacted. The Sister-in-charge, having failed to contact the chaplain, asked if I would take the devotional service. As a group had already assembled in the room, I agreed to take the service.

I told them a story about Jesus, both in word and in song, and how His gifts reached others. I looked beyond their mental illness; their incapacities, their nothingness; to the real person – to the gifts they had.

“I wonder what gifts you may have?” I asked.

One fellow, sitting with his sweetheart, put up his hand and said, “I can sing”.

“Would you like to sing for us?” I asked.

He went all coy, and with his head down, he began singing softly, ‘Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do...’.

“Well – that was fine”, I commented when he had finished; and we all clapped.

“Has anyone else a gift you would like to tell about or demonstrate?”

One lady put up her hand, and eagerly responded, “I would like to sing, ‘O come all ye faithful’ ”.

She sang it beautifully! I complimented her; and we all clapped.

Respecting their dignity – the spirituality of their life – a half hour of grace was spent, together with them. Gifts were brought out, given expression and acknowledged.

How I dearly loved being with these people. There was something of an affinity between us.

But back at the college – students and staff, still anxious to know what they imagined I was holding back from them, decided to use Reverend Will Browne as a decoy in a clever ploy to try and coax this information out from me. It began to happen during one session with Will, at the hospital. I was rather astounded to notice how he had lost his sombre countenance. He was exceptionally friendly and bright! The reason was soon to become evident.

Very enticingly, he asked, “Are there things you would like to share with me”?

I got the message; and did share with him a few insignificant issues I didn’t mind talking about. How could I help but do this while he was in such a pleasant frame of mind: but I didn’t give anything away.

Then in a voice that was so smoo-ooth and pa-atronising, he asked, “Is there anything else you want to say”?

“Yes, there is something I could say”, I assured him; “But I am not ready yet”. At this, his countenance changed and he resumed his former sombreness.

He had been a phoney.

Some days later, I invited Dr. Aldridge to our flat, to talk over a few things with him – taking this situation a little further. He too was so friendly I could hardly believe it. I told him some personal things I wanted to off load, anyway – I didn't want to take them with me. He listened very intently.

When I had finished; over a cup of tea, he asked point blank, “Are you sure there is not something more you want to tell me”?

“Nothing”! I replied. It was all I wished to say.

Suddenly he jumped up; “*Hoo-ray*” he ejaculated abruptly, and without any forewarning, disappeared quickly down the stairs.

It was my turn to conduct a Service of Worship in the College chapel; before the Principal, lecturers, students and visitors. It was a morning service.

After lunch that same day; walking in the college grounds, Reverend Will Browne accosted me. He mentioned the service at the chapel and asked point blank, “Have you had anything to do with the Rosicrucians”?

“Who are they”? I queried.

“Never mind”, he replied, and hurried off.

This was rather odd, for Will had not been present at that service. Someone had put him up to something which, I had no doubt, would come out sooner or later.

I didn't have to wait long; just a few days.

Dr. Aldridge was lecturing. It became very noticeable how he kept hinting at something; yet he wasn't getting to the point. I began to sense what he was aiming at, and decided to draw him out. I put up my hand and asked if I may say something. He responded eagerly, “Yes - go ahead”!

“Sir” – I began – “After my service in the chapel on Friday, I was confronted by a college supervisor. He hadn't been at the service, yet he made reference to that service. Then point blank, he asked if I had anything to do with the Rosicrucians. I asked, ‘Who are they’? – He said, ‘Never mind’; and hurried off. Well sir, I was rather puzzled by the nature of his approach, and I went straight home, to read up on the Rosicrucians in an encyclopedia. I smiled when I learned that they apply the term ‘substance’ in their teaching. The point is, Sir, I used the word ‘substance’ in my chapel sermon, for the simple reason, it was something Dr. Cooke had taught us in theology class”.

Well – the whole class broke into laughter. Dr. Aldridge could say no more. The scheme, whatever it may have been, had been brought to nought.

End of term exams were drawing near, and it was time to conclude my work at the Psychiatric Hospital. I had already conveyed this information to the patients, so that when I went to say goodbye, it would not come as a shock; for we had been close.

The responses on the last day were very warm. Those who had not outwardly acknowledged my presence on those occasions when I sat with them during my visits; slipped their hand into mine, a warm gesture of farewell. Big Ted had the sparkle of tears in his eyes. Flo gave me a big hug. Blind Peter expressed his good wishes. Len – was so very grateful.

What delighted me was the greetings they asked me to convey to my wife. They still remembered her; having met her just once in their ward, one Sunday when I called to take Len and Flo to church.

I passed all my exams, except one paper for Dr. Gray, which I considered to have been my best. I was sure I had done well, yet it was knocked back. I had to do a second paper after arriving in my new parish.

During my college years, I was blessed with three graces that had deep significance for my life.

First – a senior lecturer in theology, and the Principal himself, each unwittingly introduced me to the Catholic Faith, and my heart warmed.

A second grace came from a very gracious minister, who knew what I had been going through. Out of real concern, and with deep emotion, and compassion, he said to me one day, “I hope I am not betraying the Church; but the Church will not do anything for you. It will not recognize your gifts. Get the idea of justice right out of your head – you will not find justice in the church”.

He wasn't betraying the Church, for he was merely confirming what I had already experienced, and was to be borne, even further, in later experiences.

The third grace, was the Sunday we visited our friends in the Psychiatric Clinic at Hewston where, we had been involved in a ministry with the disabled before entering the ministry. On this particular morning, we accompanied them to chapel, as we used to do. It was after the service, while talking with the Hospital Chaplain; he told me that he had received a phone call from a Doctor Cummins at Heatherglen, who asked his opinion as to my behaviour. He said he explained to the doctor what I had been doing in my ministry with patients at the clinic. The doctor thanked him for his confidence, saying how this confirmed *his* findings, that there was nothing psychiatric about me. This brought a lot of peace to me, for I was

well aware of and felt the indignity of the nature of a degrading undercurrent that existed in the church toward me.

Further more, for a Doctor to make such an inquiry about me, is a clear indication that someone from within the church, subject to hearsay, had been checking up on me – and in their ignorance they would not give up! I was being judged without being given a chance to defend myself.

I received an appointment to the Urinderran Parish which; it was said by a number of people, was the toughest parish in the State – if I could work this parish for three years, I would handle any other parish.

The removalist picked up our furniture and belongings.

We tidied the flat, and drove off, leaving behind – our college life to enter another ‘unknown’.

CHAPTER 9

Towards Ordination

A pleasant morning greeted us as we drove into Urinderran just before ten o'clock. The whole environment – the clear blue sky and the clean fresh air, aroused within us vibrations of sheer joy.

The short main street gave some indication of the size of the town. Verandah posts on most buildings; Peppercorn trees along the streets, and wheat silos almost within rifle shot, were welcoming signs characteristic of a real country town.

However, they betrayed nothing of the sinister nature of what really lay within the beautiful environs we had just entered.

We followed the directions given us, as to where we would find the minister's residence. An ecclesial sign on the house and a small group of people standing at the front gate, confirmed that we had arrived at the right place.

As we stepped from our car, we too were recognized as minister and wife and were given a warm welcome.

The small welcoming party escorted us to a neighbour's home for a chat over a cup of tea and refreshments. We were made feel at home. Later when we were taken back to the minister's residence, we were shown over the house and enlightened about those things we needed to know to make our settling in, a little easier.

The house at first, seemed terribly small. However, over the weeks that followed we became quite comfortable and settled in.

Following my Induction Service, we had no trouble adjusting once again to parish life.

We loved our churches – four in all; especially the one in the corner of a wheat field, where my first service turned out to be an eventful one.

The organ would not play.

I asked for a screwdriver, and one appeared in a man's hand as if by magic. He handed it to me. I removed the back panel of the organ, and was

not a bit surprised at what I saw. I pointed to a huge mouse nest of chewed up hymn book pages!

All I needed now was the organ reed puller – but it could not be found.

I asked for a piece of eight gauge fencing wire. Two farmers hurried away – they knew just where to get it. I went to my car to get a hammer and a steel block which I always carried in the boot for such an emergency.

The men returned with the very piece of wire I needed.

The whole congregation gathered round and watched eagerly as I laid the piece of wire on the steel block and began pounding it with my hammer. A short while later, with a feeling of satisfaction, I walked into the church holding the newly formed reed puller in my hand.

The congregation followed on behind.

One at a time I withdrew the reeds from their slots; blew out the particles of paper and dust, and returned each reed to its rightful place. I replaced the panel, and the service began. Throughout the service, during the singing, I detected a few dud notes coming from the organ, so I arranged to come again at a more convenient time; to clean all the reeds and restore the organ to its full capacity.

This, was a simple task.

My first major task was a funeral, in the Urinderran church – one of many funerals. The church was crowded, and over one hundred and sixty people stood outside.

At the cemetery, the heat was intense. The ground was parched and the grass – as tinder dry as the stubble in the adjacent field. I stood under a Yellow box gum tree – locusts were hopping around me. It was just like home.

I was conscious of two emotions; grief and joy.

At the end of three months, the novelty of having a new minister had just about worn off. True colours were beginning to show – both loyal and mischievous.

Doug Jones commented on more than one occasion, how glad he was that we had come to Urinderran. But one day, point blank, he said – “You are in for a big responsibility in this place. I hope your ticker is O.K.”

I knew what Doug was getting at. However, without being naive, I was not troubled, for I was aware, in coming into the ministry; I was to enter a world of two extremes; peace and love – mischief and gossip.

Church services were well attended and well received – not only by adults. One Sunday morning as he was coming out of the church, a little boy looked up at me and said, “God bless you Mr. Minister”.

On another occasion, a young girl shook my hand and commented, “You are the first minister I have listened to who has a stretch of imagination”. Hadn’t our Lord used His imagination to get the message across?

Religious Education in schools was the most difficult and time consuming of all my work. Many hours were spent in preparation, when only ten percent of a class showed any real interest. I tried several methods of reaching them. Then one day, the Principal at one school said to me, “You may think you are not getting through to these young people; but you are”! Still, I was looking for a more effective way of reaching them at their level. Then one day I found the answer. A young schoolgirl, during the Scripture lesson, asked if I would visit her home after school.

“Yes”, I responded gladly. “And I would like to have a cup of tea in your cubby house” – supposing, of course, that she had a cubby house at her home.

“Do you really me-ean it”? she called back – her eyes wide open with surprise.

“Why, of course”, I assured her. She was elated!

Her mother answered the door when I arrived. She was expecting me, and invited me in – apologising that her daughter was still preparing the cubby house: “She will call you as soon as the cubby is ready”. In the mean time, as we sat and talked, a family relationship was in the process of being established.

Half an hour later, I was escorted to the cubby house. It was an A-frame structure, set on floorboards. I had to stoop to enter. The windows had lace curtains; the table was covered with a neat white cloth; in the centre, a vase of flowers and lighted candle spelled – welcome. I sat on a small chair at the table. We enjoyed a cup of tea, a piece of cake, and an interesting chat. It was creative – and so different from a classroom environment.

What this visit did for this young lass, and the family, could never have been achieved in any other way.

From that time on, I spent more time visiting young people in home and family situations – becoming involved in their interests and life-style. It was wholesome; building family relationships.

Religious Education in High Schools was conducted on a seminar basis. On one occasion, it was decided to have the students assemble in the church of their denomination, to learn something of the Sacraments.

One particular lad in my church group began playing up – he seemed bored. At the end of the session, as the students were leaving the church, I went to him and said, “I would like to visit you out at the farm this afternoon; would that be alright”?

“Yes, that will be alright”, he replied, and seemed excited. We arranged a time for 4.30.

I drove out to the farm, and arrived right on time. The lad was waiting for me at the gate, with a football under his arm. I didn’t drive up to the house – rather, I hopped out of the car right there, and began kicking the football with him. My wife walked up to the home.

He took me to see his pet dog; then, his budgerigars – next he took me inside, to his bedroom, to show me his trout fishing rods and fancy gear; and demonstrated to me, how to fish for trout. He showed me his books on soldiers and military tanks and said, one day he wanted to be a soldier.

His mother told me he had been waiting at the front gate since 3.30 – he was so excited. She invited us to stay for tea. This was the beginning of a deep family relationship which had far reaching effects. After finishing school studies, he went overseas; did theological studies, and became a lecturer in theology.

Being a visiting padre was a rewarding ministry.

I visited both homes and hospitals: the sick, the aged, the dying – the grieving – the joyous ones. But there were occasions when people came to me. People who had a deep inner need.

Late one night, the front door bell rang. As I opened the door, I faced an anxious young mother. She wanted to talk to me. I sensed a note of urgency in her voice and invited her inside. She introduced herself, and then pleaded with me to baptize her child. She was angry and showed it as she continued to say “And don’t you start preaching at me about what I have to believe – both my husband and I believe in God...”.

I listened intently to the vehemence that spilled out from the inner depths of her being, as she unveiled an experience that had brought such grief to her heart.

It was well past midnight when she came to the end of her story. She had not been accepted by the town’s people – she gave the reasons. Then, to top it all off, a former minister had refused to baptize her child – she was

hurting! In reality, she was an outcast and was being made feel it, by the church – in social circles – and the town in general. It was no wonder she could not accept herself and walked with her head down when in public.

No, I didn't try to convert her. But I was able to help her win a losing battle – to discover her own true worth – to accept herself and even love herself, as the person God had made and loves.

Much to her surprise, with the discovery of her dignity, she discovered God in a new way.

How can people be fully human, when all the time they are being told they are wrong! This young mother walked away from my study in a different frame of mind – her head held high.

The enrichment of her child's baptism, some time later, stemmed from a courageous mother's new-found experience of God and herself.

Pastoral work – the Sacraments, and preaching were my strong points. I enjoyed organizing – and administration, I liked: but finance – I was not good at, and was fortunate to have officers who possessed a marked degree of experience and fidelity in this field. There were, however, those who admitted they were still under the influence of my predecessor, and they didn't like being organized. Then there were those who questioned the right of the hierarchy to tell them what to do.

It did not surprise me when a member from the Collong congregation made the statement – “Collong does not want a minister, all they want is a figurehead who will do what they tell him”.

By and large they were a very sensitive people, and at the same time willful and proud. I didn't mind this, but how to handle them was another thing. I was more concerned, however, about the indifference on the part of the District Church Council officers, in regard to their responsibility to an Ordinand in his first parish. When I sought from them, guidance and support, it was just not there.

I was to have an appointed supervisor while doing my ordination thesis. For months, I had been working on it alone; nevertheless, I was managing, putting a lot of time and effort into the work.

Then one day, the Reverend Reg McKinney from the Mandooran church, called to see me, and presented me with some reading material for my thesis.

“How come, *you* brought this material to me”, I asked.

“Hadn't the District Church Council advised you that I have been appointed your supervisor”? He queried.

“No”, I responded; “Not a word”.

He assured me that he would have something to say about it to the secretary.

On entering parish life once again, I thought I could put behind me all I had experienced in my candidature and college training. Now I found I was being tormented all over again.

Reg was a good supervisor, but time was now running out for me. He called one day and urged, “Get this thesis finished”!!!

For six months I had worked hard on my thesis; now, at last it was finished – bound, and despatched via Overnight Express Delivery.

It was returned in good time; marked, and awarded a favourable pass. I was delighted.

The District Executive had established a date for my ordination; to be held in the Murrumbimbi Church.

Everything was running smoothly – that is, until Lucy Goldsmith from the Collong church phoned me, requesting that I change the ordination date as it clashed with an annual social event of theirs, the date of which had already been established. I explained that it was not my prerogative to make such changes.

She phoned the District Executive. He declined her request.

Collong was just a small town but it had big ideas, mainly from the few. They did things quietly, providing it was done their way – of course they were always right, even when they were wrong.

At a meeting of the Parish Council, a notice of motion was submitted by the Collong group, ‘that a letter be sent to the District Executive, requesting him to change the date of my ordination’. When I explained the reason for establishing that date, the motion was withdrawn – but this was not accepted by the Collong group. Another phone call was made to the District Executive, pressing to have their request acknowledged.

It was declined.

I felt burdened by the repercussion of this obstinate request – having pursued my quest, studied to become a minister, written a thesis required by the Church for my ordination – it was almost the ‘last straw’.

People in the parish were terribly upset.

It was the evening of my ordination. I was in the vestry with other participating ministers. As we were putting on our robes, the District Executive came to me and advised that I would not be invited to give my testimony, as the service was to be cut short. I had never heard anything like this before.

The Reverend Jeff Logan raised an objection to this, reminding the Executive that it was the traditional right of an ordinand to be invited to give his testimony during the Ordination Service. As we were filing into the church, Jeff was nearby and said, “Everything is O.K., you will be invited to give your testimony”.

The Ordination Service was a beautiful experience. People from throughout the district and from various denominations were there. Many of my friends who had accepted my invitation were present; people of both low and high degree; some of whom had travelled five hundred miles to attend this service. This was a great honour for me.

I told my story from beginning to end.

One lady from Collong, as she greeted me at the door after the service, said, “We are proud to have you as our minister”.

The celebration over, we drove home. I felt really exhausted and heaved a heavy sigh which contains all I have written so far, about the Urinderran Parish.

A Test Of Skills

I could well understand why the Urinderran Parish had been identified as the toughest parish in the state. My ordination began a calendar of over two years of unprecedented threats that, in the long term served to strengthen my ministry.

Tom Druin, a Leader in the Collong congregation, was a very quiet and devout person, except for those times when he was used by others, particularly members of the clique, to fire the ‘bullets’ they had prepared.

Perhaps he thought he was doing the right thing, being spokesman for others; but unfortunately he acted without first testing the information given him. This became evident the night he invited me to his home; something that mostly I had enjoyed.

On this particular night, I was startled when, without any introduction, Tom began accusing me of having spoken offensively to three ladies from the Collong group, whom he named – one of whom was his wife, who was now sitting by a door, opening to an adjoining room – listening.

He made it clear that he had talked with two other church Leaders, who agreed that some strong action should be taken, and a recommendation made to the parish Council for my removal.

Tom's words were very strong! Yet I knew I had not spoken offensively to anyone. But there was no way in the world I could convince him. His mind was made up.

Actually, I knew what the problem was.

The Ladies' group at Collong had taken a very foolish and unwise step which could have had serious implications. I explained to them, that the matter should have first been presented to the Parish Council and their guidance or approval sought. But of course, what right had the Parish Council to interfere with what *they* wanted to do!

I had invited their leader, Mrs. Bonner, to my home that afternoon, and explained to her the full implications of their action. She was rather surprised, and admitted they had been in the wrong; and apologised.

Yet, here at Tom's place that very evening, just a few hours later, I was being accused, and I wondered if the whole thing had blown up when he continued enforcing his incriminating words. Time went on and it was now late – he wouldn't let up. I was tired. He had gone too far.

I said to Tom, "What you have been saying to me, has been bordering on defamation of character; in which case, the ball is now in my court".

Tom's reaction was sudden! He called for prayer.

It was well past midnight: I was driving home, feeling tired and despondent, for next morning I was to arrange for a funeral in the Collong church. How could I ever do this with such a threat hanging over my head? The infamy of it all was humiliating.

Before I visited the bereaved family next day, I decided to go to Tom and express how I felt about ministering to the bereaved, in the light of his judgement!

I knocked on his door. His wife answered my knock, and invited me into the room where Tom was sitting at a table, handling some paper work.

I was about to address him; but before I could speak, his wife said, "Let me have something to say first".

She paused, then told how she had been in touch with the other ladies, and each one had said they had not been hurt by my words.

"Further more", she continued, "the whole town knows about our minister's meeting with Mrs. Bonner which, she said, was m-a-a-r-velous – the ladies realized they had been wrong, and apologised".

I left Tom's place, to minister to the bereaved and arranged a Funeral Service in the Collong church.

After this, I adopted a policy I had learned as a kid at Kinrock; ‘Keep sawing wood’.

It had been my chore as a boy at Kinrock, to saw the logs from the woodpile into blocks to be chopped for firewood. It was a laborious task, and one that seemed endless because I kept looking at the woodpile which did not seem to be getting any smaller. It was when I shifted my glance from the woodpile, to the work I had been assigned to do, and kept it there, that I was rewarded by the sight of the blocks piling up. It was exciting. I kept sawing wood.

After this experience with Tom, I kept my mind on my daily parish responsibilities – not the ‘wood pile’.

Yet, Tom was not beaten. He raised the issue again, at a meeting of the church Leaders. I challenged his accusations. It was obvious that members of the meeting were becoming unsettled. One member jumped to his feet and said, “I move a vote of confidence in our minister”. Tom apologized. The vote was unanimous.

I phoned the District Chairman who showed no interest and referred me to the District Executive, who in turn, said, “Forget it”.

At a meeting of the District Church Council, some of the ministers began prying into my situation at Collong. I gave them no satisfaction. They walked away – except one member who said, “I have something to pass on to you”.

He proceeded to tell how a member of the Collong church, who had lost his faith, began to turn against ministers, and sought to take it out on them.

He went on to say, “He has grown to appreciate your ministry; and believed things were happening in the parish that were never thought possible. The parish is beginning to take shape under your ministry”.

One day, the Principal of a country school, phoned me to say, “There is a lady here who would like to talk with you, can you come? By the way, she is an atheist”.

I drove to Bottle Creek straight away. The Principal introduced me to the lady – excused himself, and left.

Without any further ado, she said, “I’m an atheist”.

“I’m and atheist too”, I returned spontaneously.

My response knocked the ‘wind out of her sails’.

Before she could recover I continued, “I don’t believe in the God you don’t believe in”.

“You mean to say, you don’t believe in a God who points his finger at you and is going to punish you”? She asked – her eyes wide open with hope.

“That’s right”, I responded, “The only God I know, is a God of love, who accepts us just as we are”.

“Can my daughter go to your Scripture Classes”? she appealed.

“Why, of course”, I assured her.

What followed, gave me an opportunity to visit her home and assist the whole family in undoing a misconception that had caused deep grief and concern. They recovered their lost human dignity, and discovered God in a new way.

A committee meeting of the District Church Council had been convened, to deal with matters relating to ministers in their first appointment who were entitled to move next year. Being in my third year, I had already applied on the appropriate application form and posted it to the Chairman.

I heard no more about it.

Some time later, we called on a minister in a neighbouring parish. He asked how the parish had taken the news of my move next year.

“I beg your pardon”. I exclaimed, “What news”?

He seemed a little taken back, and went on to tell how he had been appointed acting secretary at a meeting of the District Church Council. “Your application had been dealt with and approved”, he concluded.

“Sorry, I know nothing about it” I said, not showing my anger at the breakdown again, in communications.

Several days later, a letter arrived from the Chairman, confirming the Council’s approval.

Concerned at the continual lack of pastoral support and the breakdown in communications on the part of the District Church Council executives – for an ordinand in his first parish, I arranged an appointment, to talk with the District Executive to discuss my concerns. He said that he could not spare me much time – still, I drove that long distance, because of an inner need; and he was obligated to listen.

On my arrival, he asked, “What can I do for you”?

He showed interest when I talked briefly about achievements in the parish; however, when I came to my own needs and concerns he clammed tight – that is to say, he became non communicative. It was painful. Still, I continued to relate the nature of my concerns with the Church, from the

pastoral point of view; and concluded saying, “As there is no one I have been able to trust, I turn to you”.

“Hm”, he muttered, “I would like to sleep on that one”.

My diary reveals how he just sat in prolonged silence – it was embarrassing. Eventually I stood up and broke the silence, saying, “Well, if you choose to remain silent, God bless you; I have done my part”.

“Hm”, he muttered, “I would like to sleep on this one”.

As my spiritual need was not being met, I made to leave. He followed me to the gate.

“Hm”, he muttered, “I would like to sleep on it”.

I drove home in disgust; ashamed of one I had trusted.

A fortnight later, I phoned the executive and asked the outcome of his deliberations on my recent visit.

“What visit”? he asked casually. I gave him a reminder of my visit, and said, “I am looking for an answer”.

He became silent, and held that silence!

It was so humiliating. Helpless, I placed the receiver down – I could do no other.

In the mean time, an impending mini-crisis, quite unexposed at the time, was about to show itself. New faces began to appear in the parish, two of whom were teachers. They found a comfortable niche in one of the cliques. They were very gifted and soon became figureheads. They were fundamental and soon began to want things their way.

News began to spread that the clique decided – “We don’t need a minister now”.

I ‘kept sawing wood’, and smiled when one day, a member of the Collong church, having summed up the situation, declared, “You can’t teach a teacher anything”.

I let this situation ride for the time being – then at an appropriate time, I wrote to the Parish Officer advising of my application to move – and the confirmation of its approval by the District Church Council.

The letter was dealt with at the next meeting of the Parish Council.

There was no need for it to have been made public. Very quickly news began to get around that I had resigned! The reason; it was claimed, I had been hurt or the work proved too much.

I let the rumours spread – then one Sunday; from the pulpit, I made a statement shattering the mischievous gossip – then watched a number of people hang their heads.

One member, out of concern asked later, “Is the strain of the work really affecting you”?

“No”, I replied, “it is not – nor is it preventing me from doing what is expected of me in the parish. It is just preventing me from doing what I could do for the parish. But I am sure it is the parish who is at loss – not me”.

To this, she commented kindly, “You have so much to give – we are just not prepared to receive it”.

Maybe she was right – as the saying goes, “My blood was too rich for their blood”.

There was another uprising. Mrs. Bonner decided to take things into her own hands and usurp the minister’s role. She thought I would follow meekly. However, I spoke to her, reminding her that she had stepped out of line, consequently as from now she would have to shoulder the responsibility without my support.

She had not expected this.

Mrs. Goldsmith was soon on the phone – “You can’t *do* this”! she complained.

“Well I have done it”, I returned.

“But it is your duty”! – she thought she had me nailed.

“Yes, it was my duty”, I acknowledged – “that is until such times as you people decided you knew better”.

I received a visit from Ton Druin. He began to challenge me on behalf of the ladies. I flattened every one of his arguments; and he admitted that I was right. He had lost his ‘punch’, and concluded, saying, “Mrs Goldsmith said, you owe her an apology.”

“No I don’t”, I assured him, “She’s the one who owes me an apology. But I’ll tell you what; I will go and apologize to her, providing she is prepared to apologize to me”.

I knew very well that my words would be conveyed to her promptly.

Next day, I phoned Mrs. Goldsmith. “I would like to make an appointment to come and apologize to you to your face”.

Mrs Goldsmith, stammered, “Well - er, you know, I am very busy”.

The District Chairman phoned me to say that the Urinderran Parish has been taken off the priority list for a minister... “Will you please convey this information to the Parish Council”!

I conveyed the information at the next meeting. The members were both stunned and hurt.

“They can’t do that to us – we need a minister”!

“Do you”? I questioned!

The Chairman of the Galviston District Church Council phoned me, to ask if I would be interested in going to the Julian Parish. I had not at that time, been made aware that it was a tough situation. I expressed my interest.

I was invited first of all to meet with a committee of the District Church Council at Galviston. It turned out to be a ‘third degree’ experience, the reason for which I was to better understand later.

In the mean time, the State Executive phoned to say he wanted to see me at his office. I drove to the city. My wife joined me in the interview that followed. I gave him an outline of the Urinderran Parish in response to his questions, and explained the nature of the problems I encountered. “My biggest problem,” I explained, “has been the indifference on the part of officers of the District Church Council”.

He didn’t like that, and said – “The trouble with you is, you are so enthusiastic you won’t listen”.

“Oh”? I queried. “Won’t listen to whom? – won’t listen to what”? The ones who should have guided and supported me in my first appointment as an ordinand, were silent when I needed them”.

My wife supported me here and stressed that my enthusiasm has really helped a lot of people.

We returned to Urinderran feeling that the meeting had been a waste of time.

The District Chairman at Galviston phoned me and asked if I would go to Julian for an interview. I agreed, and my wife accompanied me.

My first impression about the parish was, it was a ‘valley of dry bones’ – lifeless.

When I met the incumbent minister he was under stress and in tears. The attitude of the people was negative. I can’t say I enjoyed the flow of pessimistic views that they spilled out, yet, as I drove away from the parish to return home, I had the feeling – “I liked it”.

When the Chairman phoned me later, he asked my impressions. I was honest in my appraisal, but affirmed that the challenge impressed me and I would be prepared to go to the parish for three years.

“In three years”, I assured him, “I will get the parish on its feet so that it will be ready for someone with a wider experience of ministry, to take over”. It was agreed upon.

Opposition from the cliques in the Urinderran Parish increased. Like the ugly sisters of the Cinderella story, they prided their 'beauty while in their hearts they were ungracious and hurtful.

People in the parish were commenting – “What has been happening to you has not been good for the parish”. Yet the work still went on. Services of worship were well attended and bright, except for those who hung their guilty heads. One lady coming from a service one Sunday, said – “You are the most charismatic uncharismatic minister I have ever met”.

Tom Druin decided to leave the Collong church, and go elsewhere. He finished up leaving the district a broken man.

The sergeant of Police phoned me, to advise that a Greg Thornton had threatened to commit suicide, and was missing. I knew Greg well – he had a problem and had been to see me on a number of occasions.

The sergeant phoned me again, a short while later, to say that Greg had been found on the roadside, unconscious, and had been taken to Abingdon Hospital.

I drove to the hospital immediately and was instructed to go to Intensive Care. Full information about him, was not available. Fortunately my closeness to Greg for some time enabled me to fill in the gaps. The Sister in charge of Intensive Care, took me to him.

“Yes, that is Greg Thornton”, I assured.

The Sister called out to Greg, “Here’s a friend to see you”. She moved back to allow me to come closer to him.

“Hi, Buddy, it’s your pal here”, and as soon as I mentioned my name, his eyes partly opened, as if he was trying to focus his attention on me.

A Doctor came and stood with the Sister, then left.

I didn’t stay long.

As I was leaving, I went to the Sister to say. “Thank you”, she commented on how his body responded to my presence.

A few days later, Greg had responded sufficiently enough for him to be taken to the Thackery Creek Hospital.

I was to lose track of him for the next eleven years, until a letter of his, finally found me. It read – “I want to thank you. I will never forget the day you spoke to me in Intensive Care”. Then he told me of his remarkable recovery. I have since received other letters from him.

My ministry in the Urinderran Parish had come to an end. A send-off had been arranged following an evening service. It was well represented by ministers, priests, pastors and lay people from all denominations. At the send-off that followed, comments were made on how the parish had been lifted right up.

In a personal comment later, one person said, “A former minister here, kept telling us in his sermons, what nice people we were, and we grew tired of listening to him. You had challenged us and made us think”.

Another person confessed to having gone along with all I had tried to do, but he could not offer any support for fear of offending members of the Collong congregation.

Then, I was really amused at another comment coming from some members of the Collong congregation – they had been greatly impressed at the way I could get the Handicapped people to respond to me.

Each year, at Easter, I held a Special Service for the Handicapped. They came in coaches from the city, and were billeted in dormitories at a private boarding school.

On the Saturday, I arranged a picnic outing, and had the parish involved. Then on Sunday, each of my four churches combined in worship to celebrate Easter with my Handicapped friends.

It was a joyful time!

However, the question from the Collong folk, that humoured me was, “Why couldn’t he get us to respond in the same way as he did, the handicapped”?

The day came for us to move. Our furniture and belongings had been uplifted from the minister’s residence – we tidied the place before we left, and drove away from Urinderran, having attained all that I had set out to achieve in what had been claimed; ‘the toughest parish in the State’.

Chapter 10

A Moral Encounter

A cool breeze accompanied us as we drove into the grounds of the Minister's Residence at Julan – right on time.

There was no one there to meet us; and the house was locked.

We sat in the car for awhile – walked about – waited! Still no one turned up.

We walked down town and came to a Grocer's Shop – it had an open front; and we noticed a young man stacking cartons near the entrance.

"Excuse me", I called out. The young man turned.

"Say, you must be the new minister", he exclaimed – his face beaming.

"Yes, that's right", I admitted, and explained how we could not get into the minister's residence. "Can you tell us where we might get the keys"?

He scribbled a name on a piece of paper and handed it to me. "You'll find the name in the phone book. Give *them* a ring".

"Thanks", I replied, and meant it – yet at the same time I was angry! What a state to be in.

At the Post Office, we were thankful to have some small change. We looked up the address in the phone book, and dialled the number. A feminine voice answered.

I introduced myself and asked nicely, "Had you been advised that we would be arriving at 10.15 this morning"?

"Yes, we had", she responded nonchalantly.

"We arrived on time", I assured her. "However there was no one there to meet us – the house was locked and we could not get in".

"I have the keys; would you like to come round and get them", she continued with indifference.

I tried not to betray my feelings when I explained that we did not know our way around Julian; and asked if she would be good enough to bring the keys to us.

We walked back to the house.

It was 11.15 when a small car pulled up at the minister's residence. A lady scrambled out of the car and introduced herself. "I'm Winnie Young" she said, and handed me the keys. After a few words, she excused herself and drove off.

Our hearts sank when we entered the house. It was unclean. The refrigerator had an inch and a half lean sideways, and the laundry floor was uneven. The bath was filthy and the wall cabinet was heavily coated with mould. It seemed as though nothing had been done to clean the place. I felt as though I had been hit 'below the belt'!

We walked from room to room; and entering the main bedroom, a feeling of helplessness came over us. Our beautiful brand new bedroom suite was almost a total wreck.

To offset our grief and shock, we unloaded our picnic gear from the car, and made ourselves a cup of tea.

I phoned the Parish Officer and told her of our plight. She could not understand why there had not been someone there to meet us; for a welcoming party had been arranged.

About mid afternoon, Winnie and George Young made their official welcome visit.

"We knew you were to arrive at 10.15", Winnie said. "However", she quite casually concluded, "after our experience with the previous minister who was to have arrived at 1.30 pm, but did not arrive until 7.30 pm, we decided that we would not be caught a second time"!

They didn't stay long; and no sooner had they gone, when the Parish Officer arrived with two other ladies. We showed them through the house, then enjoyed a chat over a cup of tea, and learned a little about the parish.

I was given the phone number of Paul Fracus, a Leader in the Dothan church, and was requested to phone him. I did – that evening; and he explained the reason for the strong silence on our arrival.

"People were not sure what they should do", he said. "We were not sure whether you were on holidays and did not wish to be disturbed. It had not been explained to us".

"No, I am not on holidays", I assured him; "Just in the twilight zone between the conclusion of one ministry and preparing for the next. Of

course, I cannot do anything until such times as I have been inducted”, I explained.

Paul continued: “The Parish Officer was terribly upset over the state of the house when you arrived, and has promised a working-bee to help tidy up the place.”

That night it rained; I was awakened by the sound of water dripping onto the lounge room carpet. I placed a bucket on the floor to catch the drips.

The task of settling in was tiring – mainly, I think, from the shock we received on our arrival, with no one there to meet us, and then, the state of the house when we finally entered. It took several days to clean the place, scrub the cupboards with disinfectant; get rid of the mould from the bathroom, scour the bath – a two-hour job, and have the place looking presentable.

There had been no sign of a working-bee! We finished up doing it alone.

My wife was terribly upset. She went to stay with our daughter for a week to get over the shock of it all.

They say there’s a silver lining behind every cloud: well it showed itself one day. I was tired when a couple came to see about a wedding. But this turned out to be the bright spot in my day; for I learned how the town had been moved by my visit to the Hotel. All I did was simply to call in; introduce myself to the manager, and say, “You won’t find me unfriendly”.

A fellow leaning on the bar alongside me, called out – “Good on yer mate”!

I was further relieved when the Parish officer phoned to say, “Your Induction Service will be next Tuesday evening in the Dothan church”.

On Sunday I decided to attend evening worship in the Julian church. Ron Parsins, a lay preacher, conducted the service. I was startled to hear what he had to say.

The following Tuesday, at the Dothan church; as I was preparing for the Induction Service, the Chairman of the District Church Council, officiating at the service, wanted to speak to me. He told me that he had attended a service of worship in one of my churches, that was conducted by a lay preacher. He expressed his concern at what the preacher had to say. “He had no right to occupy the pulpit”, the Chairman remarked.

The preacher he referred to, was the one I had listened to last Sunday – I had already checked the preaching plan. This problem was a delicate one: I knew it had to be dealt with, however, this was not the time or place

to raise such an issue – I had not yet been inducted, and was not yet, officially, minister of the parish. He could have been more tactful. I let the problem slip from my mind.

With the Induction Service behind me, my first task was to call together, the Leaders of the parish. I wanted to get to know them – to listen to them – to discover their needs and learn their expectations of me, as their minister. They outlined three points of concern: pastoral care, the Sacraments, and pastoral visitation. They were very pleased when I informed them that these were already my priority, they offered their support, but I soon found that it was only verbal. However, I was placed in a better position to assess the parish as I currently experienced it.

The parish was drastically run down – it was on rock bottom. People seemed to have lost heart. They were sensitive, easily hurt, and pessimistic. There was not only a social problem between the northern and southern sections of the parish, but the parish itself was lacking in leadership and identity.

I had come into the ministry at a time when the Church was facing a great challenge that involved a radical change which had already shaken the foundations and faith of lay people and ministers alike. Many had resigned.

People in this parish had not been adequately informed, and the parish had become an ‘open house’ for those wanting to do their own thing – particularly members of other denominations who had become members of our church. I could see my task as assisting the parish to regain its rightful identity.

There were obvious repercussions from those who, in the mean time, had been ‘ruling the roost’.

Ron Parsons, for example, held some stringent views that were not in keeping with the teachings of our church. I learned how he had upset a parish meeting one evening, claiming that our Church was all wrong, and it must do something about it. The people were perturbed – they didn’t know how to handle this situation.

He came to me one day, concerned at what people were saying about him behind his back, and wanted me to hear his views from his own lips. I listened carefully to what he had to say, and was careful in my reply; “I am not criticising you, nor am I condemning you, however, what you have been saying, is contrary to the teachings of our Church. On this basis, and as I understand you are not a member of our Church, you have no right to be preaching from our pulpits. This is a matter that will need to be dealt

with by the church; I would therefore like you to present your statement to a meeting of the Leaders of our parish. They will decide”.

He agreed to this.

I informed the Parish Officer on what had transpired, and instructed her to convene a meeting of the parish Leaders. At this meeting I briefed them on the teachings of our church in the light of its national change. I could see that they had not been adequately schooled to meet this change. I made sure that they understood their role, and instructed them on the procedures they would follow, keeping in mind the dignity of the lay preacher concerned.

They handled the situation well – listened to his statement, asked questions, then in private, considered his words. Their recommendation was, ‘that his name be removed from the preaching roster, since he is not a member of our Church. However, should he wish to become a member, his application will be considered, providing he pays special attention to the conditions of membership’. He accepted this decision.

Paul Fracus was very tense! He was hiding something, and I wondered how long before he would show his colours.

The Leaders felt relieved that the matter, which had long been a parish concern, had been brought out into the open and dealt with once and for all.

The Parish Council ratified the recommendation of the meeting of the Parish Leaders, and commended the manner in which they had handled such a sensitive issue. I was glad for their sakes.

However, another problem emerged. The parish books had not been audited for over two years. We had no idea as to the financial state of the parish.

So began another program of support.

It took several months to get the books right.

People in the parish began to say, “We are so glad you are here; this is what we had been longing for”.

I didn’t take this seriously – I was well aware that periods of uncertainty and unrest will stimulate longings in people, especially for some kind of a ‘hero’ to appear, who will restore order. Our Lord had been a hero – a radical one at that, and the people finished up killing Him.

One problem I had suspected had now become apparent. The parish was beginning to regain some of its rightful image. Paul Fracus was not happy about this. He wanted the church to be undenominational. He had already challenged me on this point, in words that had not been pleasant. I

stood my ground: I had learned that up till the time of my arrival, he had been an unchallenged influence in the parish and had been ‘running the show’ his own way. Now he was working under-cover to achieve his own ends. He saw me as a threat to his scheme and showed it in his ill-feelings.

The parish was steeped in problems – those who didn’t want change, and those who were trying to face the change in the Church, but wanted to cling to “old traditions”.

They were not prepared to brace the new style of the Church, for the simple reason there had not been at first, an inner change – a willingness to allow the change to happen. They lacked the courage to become a new people.

There was tension and strong resistance coming from both ministers and lay people, making it so hard for those who wanted to do the right thing. I even began to wonder, as a minister myself, if I should be like other ministers, and ‘let the parish be’! Yet I chose to do the right thing and lead them through the threat of change, into the world of new realities that change has to offer. Anyhow we never lose our past; it is renewed and enriched by change. What change does – it enables us to see life in a new way.

My philosophy of life had always been to prepare the way for the next person, for the sake of the future. In this, I found my work in preparing this parish for a more adept minister – no easy task. There were so many problems, yet it was still a nice place to be, and a great opportunity.

It was not surprising what tensions will bring out in a person – that need healing. This was evident the day I received a phone call from Faye Burke. “I’m resigning”! That was all she said. She was under deep stress. I drove more than forty miles to listen to her story. I could understand why she was upset. She was on a committee handling a real estate project within the parish, that was not being handled well by our Head Office. – there had been a lot of bungling and ‘passing the buck’. I was able to offer caring and support; and she resumed her role.

Then there was Joe, another Leader – he had been so persistent in upsetting our meetings; and I could never understand why.

Very tense; he came to me one day and said, “I’m resigning, I shouldn’t be a Leader in your church”.

He explained how he was told to write his name in the membership roll, and then during a church service one Sunday, the minister said to him, from the pulpit, “I appoint you as a Leader”. This was not the right thing

for a minister to have done – it should have gone through the appropriate channels of the church.

Joe was distressed; and showed great concern, as he continued – “I am not even a member of your church”.

I asked him if he would like to talk about his dilemma.

He spelled out how he belonged to another denomination – his family ties had brought him to worship in our church, where he became very active. However, despite his active involvements, he did not feel comfortable with the teachings of our church. He could not see his roots taking root in our culture.

He later moved from the district.

Bill Slivers, a member of the Newton congregation, belonged to another denomination. For a long time he had been chairman of the congregational meetings and apparently, had been conducting these meetings according to his own rigid ideals, regardless of the policies of the church.

I was present at one such meeting where he came to an item, to which he applied a principle that was just-not-right! It was one of those prejudices that had been breaking down the parish life and identity.

I asked if I might be given permission to explain the Church Regulations to this particular item.

Permission was granted.

Bill strongly objected to the explanation. He stood up and threw down his books. I kept my peace. Then he left the meeting in a flurry of verbal fireworks.

Without the law, the Church, or any organization for that matter, is a sitting duck for any person or group from outside who might unwittingly incapacitate it. I could see this happening in this parish.

People came to me after the meeting – “Thank you”, they said, “We have been under his thumb for many years”.

I was not looking for this kind of acknowledgement. My role was to maintain faith and order within the parish. Order means laws; without them we would never exist.

From then on, this congregation began to enjoy a liberty they had not previously experienced. By the end of the year they knew what renewal was all about. Not so the Dothan church – a smaller congregation that had displayed a different disposition.

Followed Through

One Sunday, members of the Dothan congregation, including the Parish Officer, decided not to turn up for church. It was a strange feeling – standing alone with my wife in an empty church. Something was in the wind.

The same members failed to attend the subsequent Parish Council meeting. They gave no apology, and maintained a strong silence. This community was singular in disposition – inclined to be fickle; and secretive, which left one, feeling uncomfortable at times. Yet this did not trouble me – I had been able to break through some of those barriers and maintain a warm relationship. However the problem now, remained a mystery – unsolved.

At the meeting of the Parish Council, members decided to lay charges against the Parish Officer. I defended her on the basis that, when she had been nominated for that position, at a time when no one else was prepared to accept the role – confessing her own weakness; she was willing to take on the responsibility – with help.

The charge was dropped. She kept her position and her dignity.

Tension in this parish was intense and elusive. Quite different from what I had encountered in the Urinderran Parish. It was having an affect on my wife – physically, as well as her self-esteem. I sent her away for a holiday.

In the mean time I applied for permission to undertake Pastoral Studies for the benefit of my ministry. The parish approved and sent their recommendation to the District Church Council who, in acknowledging this request, wrote to me wanting to know what right I had at my age, to undertake such studies. Then it was made clear that an available scholarship would *not* be granted.

As studies would be done on my days off, I was not concerned about a scholarship; nor, their negative attitude regarding undertaking studies at my age – one is never too old to learn. Anyway, it was not only for my benefit, but that of the Church.

I was advised by the course supervisor that, due to last minute changes in the agenda, the Orientation Course, now had to be taken over five consecutive days at one hospital. The main course; on my days off – was to be spread over the remainder of the year, in five different hospitals and a prison. This was all explained to the Parish Officer, who was also

aware that I would have long distances to drive after my Sunday Services; each requiring an overnight stop.

It was during study at a Psychiatric Clinic – as part of the course; that a Psychiatrist, in his lecture, freed me from the imposed stigma of ‘psychotic’, and I felt the release of a heavy burden.

I completed the course, and gained the relevant certificates.

It was unfortunate that my wife was present the day the Parish Officer confronted me with a charge made by a group from the Dothan Congregation whom, she claimed, had asked for my removal.

Of course, this was out of order.

I could have explained to the Parish Officer the correct procedures in such a situation. However, because of the nature of the accusations as it had been related to me, I chose to fight fire with fire.

The charge was – “You had neglected the parish in the five days you had taken to do the Orientation Course”.

My response was – “Does the parish consider I am neglecting them in working at least seventeen hours a day six days a week”?

The Parish Officer responded, “Hm-m-m-m”!

I continued – “The five consecutive days required to do the Orientation Course, I confirmed with you – yet, I am quite prepared to take them off my annual leave entitlement”.

“That will not be necessary”, she replied.

From my experience of some members of the Dothan congregation, I was not at all surprised at the nature of the charges they had laid against me. However it broke my wife and she asked for a separation.

“I can’t stand it any longer”, she sobbed. “My body can’t stand it. The way the Church has been treating you, I fear for our future. I fear for our retirement, that you will be blacklisted”.

I could not help but agree with her. I too was aware of the indifference in members of the parish, and executives of the Church; however, I would not grant her a separation. I believed that divorce or separation was something that needed to be worked through. Yet in her anguish she persisted with her plea; but later said, “Let’s try again”. She gained a lot of strength in having worked through those depraving emotions. I sent her away for a really good break, and continued to work in the parish at the same pace and with the same zeal, enthusiasm, and quality of service.

I found a lot of comfort and compassion in a friendship with the Catholic priest.

At one of my services, a member of the Theological College staff was present. It was a Service of Holy Communion. At the close of the service, he said to me, “There was a lot of quality in that service, and in your sermon”.

His words came as a healing balm. I had always known I had a lot to give, and put a lot into preparation of my work. None of us can give what we haven’t got.

My heaviest burden was the concern I held, that the district Church Council at Galviston were out of touch with the parish life here, and the progress we were experiencing; they seemed to show little interest.

I therefore requested that a District Church Council representative come to the parish – stay with us, and let me explain the cultural background of the people, diverse in itself – the geographics of the parish – the problems and how they were being dealt with.

The Reverend Perry Grant agreed to come.

Being systematic. I gave a step-by-step description of the various aspects of the parish, parish life, and its people – as it effected a ministry here.

I felt sure I had got through to him.

We went for a walk round parts of Julian. He was becoming quite interested – that is until he made the comment, “We would like you to stay another two years”.

“Oh? On what basis do you say this”? I queried.

“It’s political”, he replied.

As he had not been explicit about the politics he was referring to: I knew the reason; I said, “Sorry, politics don’t reach me”.

I reminded him that we had agreed that I should work the parish for three years, and in that time, I would have the parish ready for a minister of wider experience. He will reap the benefit of my preparatory work, and be in a better position to consolidate the work within the parish. “I am a sower not a reaper”. I assured him.

We walked on in silence. He spoke very little after that. The atmosphere became cool and tense. I had achieved nothing.

There were still unsolved problems in the parish. Jerry and Irene Matthews persisted in creating tension in parish meetings. I persisted in standing firm. Then came the news; they were going back to their own church!

Some time later, I met their minister, down the street. He shrugged his shoulders; “You can have them back”, he said in dismay.

A Japanese Buddhist came to our service at Dothan, one Sunday evening. I enjoyed talking with her afterwards. Aware of the common elements in our beliefs – our conversation was quite open, with a feeling of oneness. Paul Fracus, however, had been eavesdropping at a distance. He created a to-do when he came across to us, and interrupting, said to me, “You are desecrating the name of Christ”. Indeed it was humiliating.

He later left the church, and joined up with an interdenominational organization.

We were due to move at the end of the year. The Reverend Tony Endell had been invited to take my place. This was in keeping with the current policy of the Church.

We had already begun packing.

So far, there had been no indication of another parish becoming available.

Then a phone call came; I was asked to go to the Willmena Parish, they were wanting a minister. We arranged to visit the parish.

It was common knowledge, that some ministers looked for a “blue ribbon” parish. Others put conditions on a parish – agreeing to come on the proviso that those conditions were first of all met. I did not place any stipulations on any parish; I went because of the challenge.

I had made this clear to the Church.

In accepting the invitation to the Julian Parish, despite the state the parish was in; the minister’s residence, and no place to garage my car, I had not placed any conditions on them. I responded to that inner challenge.

The Willmena Parish lacked that ‘challenge’, and I declined the invitation. This is something the Church accepted in others – but not in me.

The concern over the lack of the Church’s understanding, and guile in their human relations with us, weighed heavily on both my wife and myself. We sought to arrange a consultation with the State Chairman, together with the Reverend Fred Murray. We took our daughter with us, as a family member, to share and understand our burden, which affected the whole family.

We longed for some relief, and expressed the concerns we held for our future.

The State Chairman was out of touch, and told the usual story of the man with a terminal illness, who asked, “Why me”? His attitude eventually changed to the positive, “Why not me”?

The point is, I had never ever adopted the attitude, ‘why me’? Nor did I wish to make the change to ‘why not me’ – that would simply be

condoning the evil way the Church had been treating us, and give them an open go to continue as such.

I put the question to them, frankly; “Why does the Church continue to hold my medical; history against me”?

The Reverend Fred Murray responded briskly – it was rather startling – but more disturbing was the statement he made; “The Church has to be very careful with anyone who has had a psychiatric illness – there is always the possibility of a recurrence”.

The question I could have asked, but out of shock; failed to ask, was, “A recurrence of what”? I was really stunned to a numbness – I felt helpless.

It was hard, trusting God, when the psychiatric illness I had almost forty years ago, was still being flung back at me.

We went away, low in spirit – though I must say, after twenty-three years, I had at last been given an insight into the mind of the Church.

One of the prominent ministers in the Church, concerned for my well-being, phoned me. His concern was an appointment the Church was considering for me which, he explained, was merely a way of getting me out of the ministry. Fortunately it never eventuated.

The Church had already tried one ploy. I could see through their cunning and played along with them, then cut it off at the roots. Their ruse failed.

The State Executive had been a “thorn in my side”. On the phone he was always rather brusque. Yet in this particular day when he phoned me – he was in a different frame of mind – in fact he was quite pleasant and polite. He even told me a lot of nice things about myself and my ministry – the special gifts I possessed. How subtle could he be!!! I wondered what all this buttering up was all about.

I was to soon learn.

He wanted me to go and have a look at the Easterbrook Parish; a problem parish. That part was alright – but when I commented nicely, “This would put me under the jurisdiction of the Reverend Arthur Marsden (a former Superior when I was in Home Missions)”, his manner changed abruptly; and from then on he became quite curt.

I did the right thing, however, and we went to the Easterbrook Parish – but like the Willmena Parish it did not present an “inner challenge”. I declined their invitation, yet understanding their situation, I spoke very encouragingly to them, explaining my side. They really appreciated this.

At the close of the year it was no comfort to know that we had no parish to go to.

Was it circumstantial or destiny?

We did not know.

Yet, we faced the reality of it, aware of powerful forces within us that would guide us. We strove to become attuned to those forces.

We were given a rousing send-off from the Parish. My final service contained the same zeal, brightness, grace and love I had always given.

People said, "We hope others will help you the same as you have helped us".

We left the Julian parish, to stay with our daughter. Our furniture and belongings went into storage.

CHAPTER 11

The Dole

What we hoped would never happen, had become a reality. I had joined the ranks of the unemployed.

At the Department of Social Security I stood in the long cue of people registering for the dole. Along with many others I was hurting, feeling both degraded and humiliated – I had lost all sense of dignity.

I went to the Commonwealth Employment Services and began seeking employment.

“You are too old” – “You’re too qualified” – “You’re a minister and when a parish comes up, you will leave” – “You haven’t a place of permanent residence” – “Sorry no!” – were the kind of responses that reached my ears day after day. Each day I came home tired; yet I never once questioned, “Why me”?

The Reverend Fred Murray requested that we come and see him. We went to his home. As we sat with him in his study we hoped that, surely, this time he would show some compassion. But he didn’t.

“It is all in the mind”, he said, “All in the mind”!

“It is your own fault that you are on the dole”, he said accusingly. “You should not have left the last parish – the Church’s policy is, that you stay in a parish until you get a new appointment”.

“One correction, please”, I said. “The Church changed its policy *after* a new minister had been appointed to my last parish – it is *not* my fault that I am on the dole”.

He tried to be caring – or made it look as though he was – but he was not reaching us. We wanted to leave.

As we were making our way to the door, his whole mannerism changed – he became cool and indifferent.

I had an appointment with the Chairman of the District Church council – he was not one I could relate to. Indeed, I felt uneasy – perhaps it

was because I was tired of having to relive such discriminating experiences all over again.

“What are your weaknesses”? he asked promptly.

That was a stock question – but what a time to ask it. What did he think he would achieve? I felt uneasy and could not trust myself to him.

“My weaknesses usually turn out to be my strengths”, I assured him. He was flawed – he should have known that – but he didn’t have an answer.

“What are your strengths”? he continued hastily.

Actually, my strengths were preaching and pastoral work – but as my weaknesses in this current crisis were being used to help strengthen others, I had reason to be enthusiastic. So, in response to that question, I began; “Enthusiasm” – but I wasn’t permitted to continue – I was cut off.

“That’s all I wanted to know”, he said hastily. He jumped out of his chair, and showed me to the door.

Along with other ministers, secure in their clerical piety, yet out of touch with the grief and humiliation felt by those in that degrading experience of being ‘on the dole’, he, like other ministers who rely on text book counselling, was out of touch with the reality and intensity of *our* grief – consequently he showed no feeling – and this only intensified our hurt.

Yet there *was* one caring minister – just one!

Through him, with my training, I was given an opportunity to become engaged in a voluntary work as an assistant chaplain in two suburban hospitals – among people who were disabled.

An official identity card was provided.

Life took on a new dimension as I began meeting people, some of whom were carrying deep-seated hurts and feelings of anger – a result of their disability. I was able to penetrate their anger. We got on well together; and a workable relationship developed.

I was visiting a hospice for those who had a terminal illness and were in reprieve – one lady used to greet me brightly each time I visited her. I became sensitive to hidden feelings within her. So, one morning, after her usual bright greeting; I paused, and very softly, asked, “What are you really wanting to say to me? – I mean, how does your situation affect your relationship with your family? – your friends? – and other people here?”

Her countenance changed. Dismayed, she said, “No one has ever given me an opportunity to express my feelings”.

“Would you like to express them now”? I asked.

“Yes I would”, she replied.

I listened intently as she frankly unburdened her heart. The distress, evident in her face at the beginning, gave way to serenity.

I was shocked to learn that the State Executive was not happy about me doing this work. Then, when someone else pointed out one day, “If only you could get past the State Executive, you would have a fulfilling ministry”, I was stunned to silence. Yet I believed that God was still in control.

I received a phone call from the Reverend Alby Short, asking if I would be prepared to relieve in the Jameston Parish for about six months. I was assured that the parish rated high in warmth, caring and understanding.

Though I dearly loved the chaplaincy work – I had a responsibility to get off the dole. I agreed to go.

The minister’s residence was at Merrybrook. It was a large four-bedroom house – unfurnished. Members of the parish rallied to put in, a bed and wardrobe – a couple of lounge chairs and a black and white TV, a kitchen table and chairs, and some cooking utensils. The cutlery and crockery came from the church cupboard. Blankets and linen; we had to take out of storage.

It was almost unbelievable that such a parish could exist. The people were so kind, and friendly, and docile – we worked together as a team. I was able to teach them many things, and assist them in achieving many of their goals. We gave a lot, but also received a lot in return. Everything we had been assured of about the parish was true – very true!

I shall always remember the morning a stranger walked into a morning service at Jameston. He was well dressed – and wore dark sun glasses that concealed a black eye. At the end of the service, he was greeted with friendliness that was genuinely warm.

Two days ‘later, I received a letter in the post. It was from this same person – his name was Bill.

“...I feel that I must say thank you for the fellowship extended to my lonely heart this morning, both by yourself and other members of the congregation”, he wrote. “I received both comfort and instruction from your message...”; his letter read.

I noted his address, and my wife and I went to visit him. We discovered a man who was well out of his territory. Why he should have come to this part of the world, he said; he didn’t know! Why he should walk into my service on Sunday morning; he didn’t know! He told us his

story; a man who had fallen from the uppermost to the nethermost. He had lost all sense of dignity.

Our visit to him that day, began an about turn in his life which led to him finding himself: and recovering a lost dignity, he found God in a new way.

For several years, he kept in touch with me by way of a phone call – late at night. Then came the message, that he had passed away, and I had the privilege of officiating at his funeral – an oriental experience.

The chairman of the District Church Council phoned me one day conveying information from a committee meeting of the State Church Council. His words only brought grief. “We agonized over you”, he said *unconvincingly*, then mentioned a number of parishes that were wanting ministers – but I was offered nothing – a subtle beginning of a sequence of ploys, set to break me down.

Some weeks later, he phoned me again. “There are fifteen parishes coming up”, he said; then, he continued, “And seventeen ministers to fill them”. He used these words, merely as a dodge – to enforce what he really intended to say: “Where the Church sends you, that is God’s will”.

In our Church it was a current policy, for a minister to test out a ‘call’ issued to him. I had signed an agreement to this effect. I felt angry with the Chairman when he made that statement. In its context, his words were merely a restated authority, drawn from a worn out tradition, backed by the belief that it really and truly articulated God’s will.

“As a minister I have a right to test out a parish – it is a policy of the Church, which I signed”, I stated. I had been sent to two parishes which – to have accepted either of them would have been catastrophic”. I could have added a truth; ‘it is not always man that selects the job – but the job that selects the man’. Rather, I held my peace.

In his anger, he said, “If you don’t go the way of the State Church Council committee, we have nothing for you”. His threat had no effect, for I assured him; I was prepared to test any parish, but I needed the assurance it was God’s will that I should accept it.

He began to calm down.

He suggested that I attend the forthcoming State Church Council Annual Conference – especially for the benefit of the fellowship in being with other ministers. I went; accompanied by my wife.

Fellowship?

There was no fellowship! – only inquisitive ministers and deceiving information about available parishes. It was sickening. Even more sickening when I was invited to attend one meeting and sit with Reverend Tony Endell – the one who succeeded me in the Julian Parish.

At this meeting, he was asked to give an account of his work in the Julian parish. Here was another ploy, for this was not the usual procedure. Tony stood up where he was and gave a report, concluding with the words, “...I could not have achieved what I have been able to do, had it not been for the preparatory work of my predecessor the Reverend...”; that was as far as he got, for as soon as he mentioned my name, the Chairman cut him off...

“Well - er, you may sit down”, the chairman said; completely out of order.

Immediately there came into my mind, words the greatest teacher of all time spoke to His disciples:

*“I sent you to reap what you had not worked for.
Others have done the hard work, and you have
reaped the benefits of their labour”* (John 4:38 NIV).

The truth of those words were not being recognized by the chairman in this conference hall.

That was the last straw!

No – it didn’t break the camel’s back; I just felt within me, the need to leave the conference behind and go back to the Jameston Parish, away from such intrigue, – to where we were at least respected.

Once again, it was meant to be!

A Timely Return

Soon after arriving home, I received a phone call. It was from a neighbouring Minister’s Fraternal – an invitation to attend a Prayer Rally in the township of Mangalo. The whole town was thrown into confusion by the sudden closure of a long established industry, throwing 130 local residents out of work, and onto the dole.

They were hurting badly.

Members of the clergy had arranged this rally to support the local community in this current crisis.

The rally was held in the grounds of the local football club. A good crowd was in attendance. Some had brought collapsible chairs; some sat on rugs, others squatted on the grass, and some just leaned on the fence railing.

An amplifying system had been installed, with a microphone on a stand on the back of a motor lorry.

I listened to two members of the clergy, each of whom read from the Scriptures, then delivered a brief message, relevant to the readings, but out of touch with the need of those grieving at that time. I felt hurt!

An invitation was extended to me to lead in a prayer.

I went to the microphone; glanced around the crowd, and began; "There is something I would like to share with you before I pray". I went on to tell them my own experience, as an ordained minister, out of work and on the dole. I continued – "I share your humiliation and pain – the indignity, and your loneliness. I am just relieving here. In a few weeks I will be returning to the arena of the unemployed. How can we pray to God in such overwhelming situations, where the human element seems to be more powerful than God? I think it will do us good to talk to God about it". I began to pray, speaking in a language that they could identify with – it was for real!

"God, we are hurting – real bad! We feel depressed and insecure...though the concern shown by others does not solve our problems, we are nevertheless grateful...yet, when we meet those who have no feelings and are insensitive to our grief, it makes it hard for us to cope...in deep grief we turn to You for strength to face the reality of what the future holds...in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

It was the Catholic priest who came to me after the service, and said, "You spoke the right words, to the right people, in the right place and at the right time".

With only weeks to go, nothing was happening for me. Parishes had been named as wanting to negotiate with me, but no contact had been made. The Church was deliberately holding back – I was not given the opportunity to test any of them – nor they me.

The Reverend Fred Mullins phoned me; he asked if I had any future plans. "No", I replied, "We are not in a position to make plans".

"Has the Church given you any clear plans as to what will happen if your name does not come up at the next committee meeting"? he probed.

"No – someone told me there was nothing for me, then suggested that I apply for a job with Home Missions".

Fred wanted to write to the State Executive about it.

"No"! I begged, "He will only make it tough for me".

"Has there been any pastoral care or guidance given you"? he questioned further.

“No”, I replied. “None except that the chairman told me – if I do what they tell me, that will be God’s will. I have always respected the authority of the Church – and am entitled to my rights, as has been with other ministers, to learn God’s will in my life”.

Nothing had been achieved in that phone call.

I continued my work in the Jameston Parish; a work I dearly loved, which I knew must soon come to an end; the church services in the parish, the youth work, ministering to families, the aged, and the grieving.

I had been involved in numerous grief situations and officiated at a number of funerals in the parish. This seemed to have caused the Chairman some concern. He wondered if it was too much for me. No. It wasn’t too much. I shone brightly when I was involved with grief. Being thrown into grief all along the line, I could identify with those who were grieving. It was so important that I should be with them.

I received a phone call from the chairman on his return from a meeting of the appointments committee, only to say once again; “There is nothing for you”.

I had natural gifts, but they were not recognized. I studied to improve my gifts, but they were still not recognized. The Church seemed to deliberately ignore me, apart from what they presumed of me.

The State Executive phoned me to inform that he had recommended me to the Templeton Parish. He told me it had a problem.

When I asked what the problem was, he refused to tell me. I stressed that I have a right to know about it. He hesitated; then reluctantly admitted what the problem was.

We came to the end of a relieving ministry in the Jameston Parish. The parish gave us the warmest and most loving send-off. We had never experienced anything like it. “You have put quality into our worship”, they said, “and into our lives”.

We drove away from Merrybrook with a lot of joy in our hearts, leaving behind an experience of a lifetime.

I rejoined the ranks of the unemployed, and registered again for the Dole. I was faced once again with the scandalous questions that I had to answer each fortnight; “Have you been genuinely seeking work”?

It was humiliating, and it was hurting! Yet I continued to live one day at a time.

We visited the Templeton Parish; cautious, after the way it had been presented to me. The secrecy; the deceit; the manipulation – poor communications and a number of verbal promises I could neither believe

nor accept. It was startling the way the whole thing was being handled. I was stunned when I learned that moves had already been made for me to start in the parish as soon as possible. It was another ploy. I felt devastated; and declined the appointment on sixteen points of concern.

Years later, I was to learn that my assessment and decision had been spot on.

The State Executive phoned again, and recommended the Yarrenderra Parish. He claimed it was just the parish for me. The minister had just resigned. I agreed to go.

In the mean time the Reverend Fred Mullins phoned me, ‘Apparently, like other people, he was under the impression that I was going to the Templeton Parish. He was surprised when he learned that I was to visit the Yarrenderra Parish, and exclaimed; “You will be the right man for that parish; it needs reshaping”. His words reached me. My heart warmed – yet for some reason; that sixth sense was there. I let the intuition rest.

Arrangements had been made for me to preach in the Yarrenderra Church at a service of morning worship. It was an enjoyable experience. The people were bright – their singing was bright – I felt a lot of freedom. At the close of the service it was pleasant also, meeting the people at the door as they were leaving. Some drew close and whispered, “We need you here”.

I sat with a committee, to learn something about the parish, and what they would expect of me if I were to be their minister. They became very quiet and non-committal. I had to ask them questions to draw them out. They did not seem to want to ask questions of me, nor was I able to learn a great deal from them. I learned sufficient, to be careful. Yet, I felt that inner challenge.

We were shown over the minister’s residence. It was noticeably small, and we wondered if our bedroom suite would fit into the main bedroom.

In the mean time the committee had met and an invitation was issued for us to minister to the Yarrenderra Parish. It was a unanimous vote.

We accepted the invitation.

The ladies had decided to have some renovations done to the house. We were asked to wait until the renovations had been completed, before we moved in.

In the mean time, after some bungling at the head departments, confirmation of our appointment was received by both parties.

We were advised the moment the renovations had been completed, and it was with a sense of excitement that we arranged for the uplift of our furniture and belongings from storage, and our move on the set date.

I was rather shocked, the next day, to receive a phone call from the Parish Officer at Yarrenderra, requesting that we defer our move till the end of the month. They did not wish to pay a month's stipend when I would only have been in the parish a fortnight.

I explained the church system to him, that it was the usual thing for a minister to move into the parish in the middle of the month. The stipend is calculated on an annual basis.

He would not accept this, and it took a letter from the Secretariat to steer him in a right direction.

I don't think he ever forgot that.

At least we were given an idea as to what we were headed for – unaware that even worse was yet to come.

We moved to Yarrenderra on the arranged date.

The State Chairman was due to retire: but decided to defer his retirement for the time being.

Chapter 12

Unbelievable Odds

The day we arrived at the minister's residence at Yarrenderra, we were moved with delight. The ladies had done a marvellous job – they had made new curtains for all the rooms. The men had painted the kitchen cupboards a very pleasant colour over the gaudy orange that they had been. Carpets had been laid in the kitchen and the sunroom.

We had not expected this – it was a real uplift.

I called a meeting of the Leaders in order to get to know them, and learn from them their hopes and aspirations. At this stage, I discovered, the parish had been drifting along without any clear goals.

The meeting had been pleasing, but its pleasantness was overshadowed when one member came to me as others were leaving, and made a threatening remark – “The people of Yarrenderra are warm and kind-hearted, but – if a person makes one bad mistake, he is never forgiven”.

I felt uncomfortable with the front he put on, though I did not show it. He had made an impact – not in what he said, but the way he said it. What interested me was, there was something wry about this person. The irony of it was; I was to learn later, he was a friend of the State Executive; the one who had been making it tough for me. This was interesting to me, for my sixth sense was now beginning to show true. It became even more interesting when, in his more cynical moments, he came out with the expression; “I got this from the ‘Top’ ”.

He was the member of a group from another denomination who had been enticed by a former minister, with a number of baseless promises, to come across to our church. They finally came over and *took over*.

The parish had become passive recipients of an autonomous group.

In a plea to me from members of the parish, they said, “For seven years, we have been under their thumb”.

I could understand their concern, from what I had already observed – for this group was strong, well organised, fundamental – and functioned as wheels within wheels. It seemed by their actions, that they had not been concerned about the Church and what it stands for, but for their own ideals. Information from various sources indicated the strength and persistency of the group in this respect. They had given my two predecessors a rough time. The more recent one resigned. I had obviously come into another problem parish and could do nothing except take every thing in its stride.

“I cannot solve your problems”, I told members of the parish, as they related their concerns to me; “This is something that should have been done by the District Church Council, who had obviously been aware of the problem before I came, though I had not been told about it”.

I could not plan my approach from allegations, as consistent as they had been. I took time to make my own discoveries. I waited: assessed the parish, and informed the District Church Council of my assessment.

The ‘group’, as they called themselves, met for fellowship in the private home of one of its members. My wife and I were invited to come to one of their gatherings. We went, and no one spoke to us, other than direct us to where others were sitting. Nor were we offered any refreshments. As we moved around, we eventually found just one person who was a little sociable – and had a brief conversation with him. We left before the meeting was finished.

It became clear to me, that the parish was not a concrete body, working together in keeping with the vision of the church. It was divided. Even at business meetings there were strong divisions and tension. I did not mind this so much. My concern was, to get the core of the parish to stand on its own feet with a feeling of equality. It meant keeping a tight rein.

My work was to become a battle against great odds. It was apparent that little meetings were being held on the footpath following business meetings. Then, one evening I received a visit from one member of the ‘group’ after one such meeting. His words were few and simple – “If you keep drawing a hard line, the ‘group’ will get tough”!

It was real sinister talk.

I began teaching the congregation the policies of the Church which, as I had previously mentioned, was passing through a stage of radical change. I wanted to strengthen and encourage them. The teaching was welcomed; but not by the ‘group’, they didn’t like me talking about our church.

Resignations on the part of ministers and laypersons, over the national change in the church's structure – were lessening. Still, what was happening in the Yarrenderra Parish was the consequence of this change.

The whole church was aware of these consequences, yet did not seem to know how to handle them. In my situation, I certainly could not ignore the problem, and I reminded the District Church Council that it should not be expected of me to come into the parish and solve its problems without their support. I was given their assurance that I will have their support.

The parish began to show signs of development, though, perhaps not in every area!

Following morning worship one Sunday, a young mother confronted me about 'preaching at' one of her friends "You showed up all her faults" she claimed; on her friend's behalf.

"Oh", I replied, "I didn't know she had any faults".

Of course, there are people who don't like anything that is thought provoking, or significant.

A visitor, unaware of the confrontation, came up to me, Excuse me", she said, "Thank you for your message this morning, it was just what I needed".

"Well", my accuser responded in a rather surprised tone, "One man's meat is another man's poison". She excused herself and went.

I had been missing the little kindergarten children in services of morning worship. Members of the congregation began expressing the same concern, and asked me could I do something about it.

I made discreet inquiries from some of the Leaders and learned how, when the 'group' had come into the Sunday School, they took over; changed practices and objected to the children going into the Church services.

I assured the congregation, that the decision of children in worship was one for the congregation to decide, not just a few people.

"If you want the children in church; present a motion to this effect at the next meeting of the congregation, and it will be debated – but you must speak up".

The motion was presented at a subsequent meeting of the congregation. It was given a fair debate, with equal opportunity to express, "for" or "against" – it won on a vast majority vote.

From then on, little children joined in the first fifteen minutes of the morning worship, taking an active part in the service. The presence of

children was an enrichment to the services. Parents also came along *with* their children, and this beautified the service. Some teachers resigned – yet others stepped in to take their place.

I had met with members of the ‘group’, as they had called themselves. Their concern was, they still did not like me talking about our church. Some members of the ‘group’, who had been invited to come across into our church, felt that they had been hoodwinked – it wasn’t what they had been led to expect. I explained to them, the need to educate about our church, for there was an apparent lack of understanding. Try as I may, I was not able to get close to them – there seemed to be a high wall separating us. The group’ further commented that they thought I should always be placid.

No man can play soft all his life, that is if he is a real man. There are times when he has to be firm; especially to take such pressure as this group could exert. Different situations in life affect different aspects of one’s personality where he cannot be the same. Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated this.

The pressure continued to be measured out. I hardly had time to learn to be nice. I seemed to have been so much on guard against treachery. The stress began to effect my wife. I felt concerned – for her sake. She loved her work and was much loved by the people.

As there had been no visible support from the District Church Council, I arranged a meeting with the Reverend Reginald Selbie, to talk about the problem in the parish. He had the Reverend John Thompson join him. I had a Leader from our congregation to accompany me.

John Thompson seemed to want to hold the floor. He claimed he was not aware that the problem had been in the parish before I came, and asked a number of irrelevant questions, directing attention away from the real problem, and tried hard to make me believe that it was a created problem, of my own doing. Yet the interesting part about this was, I learned later; before I came, John Thompson had been called to the Yarrenderra Parish to *deal* with the very *same* problem – and came away saying, “The problem will always be there”!

This did not surprise me.

We achieved nothing at that meeting.

What concerned me most out of this meeting was – there were issues surrounding this parish – complex issues that others did not seem to want to admit. They certainly did not grow up, over night; or since my appointment to the parish – they were too deep rooted.

Bob Willmot, the one who confronted me after my first meeting with the church Leaders, and one of the contributors to the unanimous vote inviting me to the parish, was talking with one of the Leaders one day. He complained about me being the minister of the parish. To substantiate his claim, he declared that I only came here because I couldn't get another parish.

"No", the Leader defended, "he is here because we invited him".

"No, he is here because he couldn't get another parish – I got that from the "Top" ", Bob affirmed.

During a subsequent meeting of the Parish Council, Bob Willmot continued to rubbish the minister, saying he is not a suitable minister for this parish – claiming once again, that he got this from the "Top". My wife, a member of the parish council, was terribly upset. She left, the meeting and sent in her resignation.

The matter was again referred to the District Church Council – they began to look for a way for me to retire.

"That would be catastrophic", I exclaimed. "How foolish to run away from tough situations"!

Word began to spread around that the 'group' was now claiming – I was ruining the church; driving people away; driving children away, and – I am not a suitable person for the parish.

I realized I was in an invidious position. Yet I had been aware; on coming into the ministry, I was entering a world of two contrasts – peace and love – mischief and gossip. It was made so hard for me at times, to determine the path of wisdom and of truth.

All I could do was persevere.

Under this kind of stress, I continued to exercise a caring ministry with the same integrity and enthusiasm. Services were constantly bright and meaningful, and well attended. Funeral Services, which were many, were always dignified – full of grace. There was a lot of satisfaction in dealing with people in their grief; supporting them.

The next thing I learned was, members of the 'group' had decided to stop their financial giving to the church in order to drive me out of the ministry.

Hate is a powerful poisoning agent; it eats into the heart of a person and kills their ability to reason.

Their last move stirred the Leaders of the parish. They began to rally round in support of my ministry; for the general opinion was – the parish is moving forward progressively.

The four claims made against me, were dealt with at a meeting of the parish Leaders. The first three claims, they concluded, were invalid; and they pledged their support. Then, in response to the fourth claim, they affirmed my suitability as minister of the parish.

The Council then decided to deal with the situation in a meeting of the congregations and all concerned.

The Yarrenderra church was packed; including prominent members of the local community who were supporting me. The meeting was poorly conducted. One member of the ‘group’ read a fundamental charge. Another member of the ‘group’ made a weak verbal charge.

Then members of the core of the church, spoke up in force, and with enthusiasm. The meeting achieved nothing other than to strengthen the parish.

The Reverend Reginald Selbie, representing the District Church Council, made contact with me to say, as an individual and acting alone, there was little he could do, and suggested that I be counselled by a *professional* counsellor.

I don’t know why, I was managing alright and in control.

However, I was requested to meet the Reverend Michael Swinton and the Reverend Hugh Talbot, members of the District Church Council – to be counselled.

Beyond All Reason

The counselling session was to be held in the home of Reverend Michael Swinton. My wife accompanied me. Reverend Hugh Talbot was also present.

Notebooks were out. I objected.

Michael Swinton was not happy about this – Hugh Talbot accepted. Notebooks were put away.

I raised the point that the District Church Council had known about the situation at Yarrenderra before we came.

This they denied.

I pressed the issue further.

They then *admitted* that it *had been known!*

At a subsequent meeting of the Leaders of the Parish, members, at last began to speak up. This forced Michael Swinton, our ‘*professional*’ counsellor, to beat around the bush. We were terribly disappointed at the

way the District Church Council representatives had been handling the situation.

Michael Swinton's next requested that my wife and I, meet with him in his home, only this time, in private.

There was no notebook, but I did wonder if our conversation was being 'bugged'. For a whole three hours he used manipulative tactics on us – and achieved nothing. As far as we were concerned, he was a quack!

It was threatening, not counselling.

We came away from his home, washed out.

The 'group' started circulating a petition, demanding my resignation.

The matter was brought up at a meeting of the parish Leaders. Bob Willmot, in an angry tone of voice, claimed I had said something that hurt him.

"Without disputing your claim", I said, "I am going to apologise to you for whatever you claim I had said".

He was asked if he accepted that apology.

With some reluctance, and in a sulky voice he sheepishly replied, "Only if it is genuine".

Later, in a phone call that I felt was most threatening, Michael Swinton claimed that the District Church Council had begun receiving numerous letters from the parish, asking for my removal. He gave me an ultimatum to make amends (he did not say for what); or the District Church Council will have no alternative but to remove me, and I will have no parish. That was a threat – *fine counselling*.

I was stunned when he continued – saying, my personality was not the right one for this parish.

"If I have such a bad personality, how come in the first place, I was urged by the State Executive, and others, to come to this parish?" I queried.

"Oh – but they didn't know you then", he replied in defence.

"I am still the same person I had been in any other parish; why are you making me out to be so bad now? If you want to put my wife and I out on the street, go ahead and do it, we feel so helpless, but I will tell you this; I will not resign".

My wife was terribly upset. "Here I am being judged without being able to defend myself", she cried.

Next thing I was aware of, she was gone. I phoned Michael Swinton and told him what happened. I then phoned and related our experience to some of the parish Leaders. They were horrified. My wife returned later. She had gone out to walk it off. Michael Swinton phoned back near

midnight, to ask how my wife was. He recommended that we come and see him again, to be counselled – oh boy!!

If the District Church Council are going to throw us out on the street, there is no point in us going to see you”, I replied.

Next day after having received a phone call from the Reverend Reginald Selbie, one of our church Leaders phoned me, to say, “He was so-o-nice; he told me, the District Church Council could not remove you from the parish”. But the Church did nothing to call off their intimidating ‘professional’ counsellor.

He still wanted to see us. He claimed it was the only way he could deal with the situation. He didn’t have a clue. We reluctantly agreed to go – I was duty bound – and kept the appointment, but what was the use, we were being harassed and intimidated by his devious tactics. We were no longer human.

Because of his ‘counselling’, we arranged to see a professional counsellor. He understood the cultural problem of the district. His counselling methods gained our respect, and trust, not only in him, but also in ourselves. We began to regain our bearings and to feel human again.

I informed the District Church Council of the steps we had taken. I declined from giving the name of the counsellor or any details of our visits, in order to maintain our privacy.

Michael Swinton was not happy about this, and phoned me, to arrange another appointment to be counselled by him.

I refused his request.

He informed the District Church Council. They in turn issued an official instruction to present myself to Michael Swinton for counselling – or else. There was an ultimatum attached to this instruction.

Michael Swinton contacted me to arrange a further appointment. I agreed only on the basis of being permitted a Legal representative. He failed to acknowledge my request.

Next day he contacted me again, requesting that I present myself to him to be counselled. I declined.

During those threatening moments I spent with him in his study, or on the phone, something within me was always denying defeat – a hidden strength supporting me.

My nerves were never at breaking point.

Members of my congregation came to me, asking, “How can you go up into the pulpit each Sunday, and with a smile on your face, and with a

big voice, say ‘Good morning everyone’, when we know what is happening to you”?

“Because I love my church and I love my people”, I replied.

Of course, they were only curious – for not one of them ever came to me to see if they could minister to me.

It was a Catholic priest who called on me one day, and seeing the state I was in, asked “Can I minister to you”?

He showed compassion.

“Yes, you can”, I returned gladly.

He went to his car, and returned with his stole, a vial of oil and his little book. I received the Anointing of Oil.

The renewal I experienced at that moment was beyond all that I could have imagined. I felt so grateful that someone cared.

The situation reached a climax when the District Church Council lodged a complaint to the State Executive; I was summoned to appear before a committee of the State Church Council, with the State Executive as chairman. This horrified the parish, who thought it was the end of the road for me.

Some leaders began criticising me. “You should have allowed yourself to be counselled by the Reverend Michael Swinton”, they advised – and from then on they gave me the ‘cold shoulder’.

Being called of God, does imply being open to rejection, but, that does not mean to say the rejection has God’s blessing.

It was a lonely road for my wife and myself; yet, desperation gave us strength beyond the usual.

We sat quietly before the committee of the State Church Council. The State Executive – the thorn in my side – sat silently. The committee, however, was very understanding and open-minded. My wife was also given an opportunity to express her side of the story; and having listened to what she had to say, one of the committee urged, “Don’t give up”!

We were both requested to be counselled by a lecturer from the Theological College, who was a member of the committee. Much to our surprise, he seemed to be understanding and warm-hearted. He showed a genuine concern. We could not believe that he could be so caring.

He arranged a further appointment, something we wish had never happened, for in our second visit, he had lost touch. He reverted to textbook counselling; and was not caring, he failed to reach us. This second counselling session had no feeling. I could see through his methods; we

were getting nowhere: we wanted to leave. He ended the session and we left feeling hurt and let down.

But things began to happen in the parish! Some of the group' left the church and went elsewhere to a denomination more in keeping with their life-style.

The State Executive went into retirement. And the parish regained its rightful identity.

At last they had found peace.

A number of timid members of the parish became inspired, and, with a new found confidence, became actively involved in roles that had not previously considered. Those who had felt they were not gifted, suddenly discovered they possessed gifts that were needed, and began to use them. Successful projects for fund raising were undertaken. The Parish began to get on its feet. The people were brought together in the spirit of unity.

Then, something I had not anticipated, happened!

Winding up

We received an invitation from one of my former parishes. I had been invited to speak at the 75th Anniversary Service in the little church at Jarwood on the crest of a hill, overlooking acres of wheat fields and grazing land.

We stayed a few days on a farm; and it was while we were there, we saw a home advertised for sale at Brookford.

Brookford was the last place in the world that we ever wanted to live. Yet it was not that far away from the farm, and the home did look appealing. Out of interest we went to have a look at this attractive little cottage on the outskirts of the town. We fell in love with it.

Outside on the patio, we simply adored the view; it was magnetic. Ash trees, Elm trees and gums. Green fields and cattle. English willows along a river that followed the line of hills and down through the low country.

We considered our financial position along with those improvements we might like to make to the property. We considered further what amenities the town was able to provide, especially for people in their senior years. We also considered the extent to which we could make our retirement creative. The town had everything to offer, and the price being asked for the property was exactly what we had saved for our retirement.

We decided to buy, and keep our transaction private.

Though we now had a sense of independence; after we returned, it did not affect our current ministry in the parish. Attendances at worship began to increase. Youth work developed, and in this we incorporated some leadership from those members of the ‘group’ who had remained in the parish.

The parish had been freed from a brooding evil, and was now standing on its own two feet.

What surprised us now, was, a few leaders and other members of the parish began to ‘bight the hand that had fed them’. We were being slighted. Maybe they had a sixth sense, and felt that now, we were going to move on.

I wasn’t greatly troubled by this change in attitude, for there were those in majority, in the parish, who remained both grateful and faithful in their support.

I ministered to both.

It wasn’t easy, mind you. The load was heavy, yet I remained upright.

When we bought our home at Brookford, the former owners remained on a short-term lease. In this, the property was being cared for. Then we received notice that they were ready to move.

The parish was functioning well.

Then the day came, when we realised it was time now to retire – I had long passed the retirement age – despite the words that had been drummed into me, ‘You might get sick and break down’; and the words of the State Executive, ‘You will have had it by the time you retire’. We had fought the good fight to the end; and run the straight race, to the finish; and kept the faith, through what had been beyond all reason.

Many in our congregations felt the impact of our announcement, yet our relationships deepened.

On the other hand, those who had already slighted us, remained cool and indifferent.

What brought our ministry to a happy ending, was the dedication of my final service to the Disabled, who for sixteen years had been our ‘special friends’ – the ones through whom I had been called into the ministry of the church; the deaf, the mute, the blind, the lame, the poor in spirit. They came in buses from both near and far.

The choir sang, “Lo! Here is felawschippe”, and the hymn, “God be with you till we meet again”.

The presence of the disabled – the highest honour; and the warm and affectionate response from members of the parish and the youth of the church – came as a healing balm, an experience we shall never forget. The memory accompanied us as we moved from our residence at Yarrenderra, to begin our retirement at Brookford.

Chapter 13

Retirement

It was a glorious morning when we arrived at Brookford to await the arrival of the removalist's van – the sky was deep blue and crystal clear. We were both happy and excited. It was so pleasantly new to breath the fresh country air once again – to enjoy the trees, the ash, the elms, the gums; and the English willows bordering the river, and the green rolling hills.

The removalists were industrious, and we were soon left to ourselves to spend the day unpacking, especially the main essentials to assure us of a comfortable night.

The night was unprecedentedly enchanting, crisp and pitch black. Stars sparkled with express brightness in an atmosphere of complete quietness; except for the occasional bellowing of cattle, or the distant rattle of the goods trains passing through.

We felt renewed.

It would not be right for me to say we had come upon this home by chance. We attributed it to divine Providence, that same grace and energy that had supported us throughout the years of our lives, and years in ministry. We felt so grateful for our new home and environment, and what's more, a good neighbour.

It was not long before I was invited to join a club for retired businessmen and professionals. Club members soon became curious to learn how a person in my position who had spent most of his life in industry, should step out from an industrial career to become a minister of religion. They could not see a valid connection between the two.

Some months later when a guest speaker; at the last minute, advised that he would not be able to come; I was asked if I would give the talk.

Members wanted me to speak about my experience on becoming a minister.

At first I was rather apprehensive. I had some reservations about speaking in public on the subject of my experience in ministry – I suppose because of what I had encountered in my quest to become a ‘man of the cloth’.

Yet, I did speak!

Much to my surprise, a number of club members came to me afterwards, to tell me how they had been moved by what I had to say, and suggested that I write a book about my experiences. But their words did not impress me.

However, when another club member came to me a few days later and urged; “Write a book on your experiences” – I was moved by his words, though I felt uneasy.

“But I am not a writer”. I returned.

He was not put off by my excuse and vigorously drove his point home; “Tell it like it is”! That was all he said.

I could identify with those words, and an inner warmth surged through me. I felt the urge to write.

I could hardly believe it; I had never felt this way before.

I began reflecting on the idea of writing, but this awakened in me something I had not been prepared for. Experiences I had left behind on entering retirement began to show their ugly heads. Thoughts and memories of the past disturbed my peace of mind and sense of security. They were overwhelming; I daren’t write about them – still, they were real life experiences – part of that whole venture of becoming a minister of religion.

The only thing I could do; was face those issues and write about them as they actually happened – I had a complete detailed diary. It was a risk; I knew, yet a risk I had to take if I were to break those haunting memories that were a threat to my dignity and well-being.

I did face up to them. Day after day – week after week. Whenever they surfaced, I worked through them, one by one as they became perceptible. I felt so vulnerable, yet I continued to write.

During this ordeal – I received an invitation to relieve in the Glenora Parish with a co-relieving minister, while the parish minister was away on leave. Something interested me one day; it happened during a committee meeting; when the relieving associate, quite out of context, used the word ‘psychiatric’ – this puzzled me, for I had felt a strained relationship, on his part. This did not trouble me – I had a work to do, and was enjoying it – yet I still wondered.

Then one day, while visiting in the parish, I met the former parish officer who had been such an encouragement to me during my candidature. I asked him point blank why it was, in ministry, I had so much trouble with the church, to get a parish appointment. With a stark frankness he told me: “The Church was treating you as ‘sick’ ”!

Some months later, drawn by the respect and companionship of Catholic priests and Sisters during my ministry, I decided not to do any more relieving. Instead, I began attending Catholic Mass.

Our churches were near one another, and the services much about the same time. I parked my car in the Main Street. My wife, with certain tensions about the Catholic Church, continued on to our church: I went to Mass, something I felt a deep need to pursue. Yet I knew she was hurting, and this was hurting me.

Attending Mass was a strange experience for me at first – indeed, it was an ordeal. I felt vulnerable and out of place. Sitting in the back seat, I was lonely. No one spoke to me. Then one Sunday, after Mass, standing alone in the church, longing to talk with someone – one man, seeing me, bellowed out, “When is someone going to convert this man”? I was hurt.

Then, as I was leaving, I saw a person whom I recognized, standing on the footpath.

“Good morning”, I called out cheerfully.

“Oh, you’re one of the opposition”, he replied in return.

I shrank away to almost nothing.

I saw a little old lady edging her way through the crowd. She came up to me and said, “I just want to make you welcome”.

I suddenly felt about seven feet tall!

But not for long.

I was soon reminded, “You are not one of us yet; you haven’t come right through”. So, worship became an ordeal for me – yet, within this tension I was conscious of a deep inner need that wasn’t being met by my own church.

Sunday after Sunday, I sat in the back seat at the Mass; nervous and lonely, I felt an occasional tear roll down my cheek. Then one Sunday, a person coming into Mass, rested their hand on my shoulder, and then walked on. I felt a warm surge go through me. This was the beginning of a new awakening.

One morning, later – there was a knock at our front door. I was invited to attend a renew study group. I went along, and week after week,

my heart warmed to the beauty, the wonder and the power of the faith of Catholics.

Their witness spoke of the presence of the holy – they were human, and provided a safe atmosphere for me to work through my faith that had been so powerfully challenged throughout my candidature and ministry. That they were truly human, also enabled me to work through those aspects of the Catholic faith I respected, yet did not understand – those areas of their faith that had been so discredited by others.

I was befriended by another Catholic who invited me to join him in support of a group of country ladies who, isolated by distance, met in a farm cottage for their renew group meetings. My heart warmed at the first sight of this old farmhouse down a country lane. It was surrounded by Silver birch and Elm trees. The fellowship in this humble cottage was equally as warm and beautiful.

One Friday evening following the conclusion of the renew groups, my wife joined me at an evening Mass, followed by a family dinner to celebrate the occasion. A bond of friendship and understanding began to develop. Then she came with me to visit the ladies out at the farm where our study group had met. During this visit, the spirit of Christian love and unity began to blossom.

Later, I learned of the anger being vented by members of my own church, at my involvement with the Catholic Church, while still preaching in our parish. They took proceedings against me – however, I challenged their move, and it fell through.

I decided after this, to devote more time developing my own life; which I chose to do within the fellowship of the Catholic community that was reaching me in ways like no other.

While I was serving in the Yarrenderra parish, I had undertaken studies with a Catholic Academy as part of continuing education studies, prescribed by our church. I was impressed by the spirituality of the Catholics, so I now began doing further external academic studies with the Catholic Church, during which I gained a sense of purpose, direction, and meaning; necessary for my life's journey through retirement. As well, I attended a number of Spirituality Workshops at a Catholic Convent. Such involvements reached me, deep within, especially the workshop on "Basic Ecclesial Communities". My heart warmed.

I continued to write, and face up to those experiences relating to my candidature, and years in ministry that were still hurting. Then, for some reason, my thoughts drifted back to the days of my childhood at Kinrock.

They were happy days – a part of my life I could always accept, and loved to think about.

Renewed memories of those days began to temper my present understanding of life. I was able to view life from a different perspective: I could see clearly now, how each experience in my life, from the moment I was conceived and brought into this world; is part of the history of my life. Even the people in my life – places and events; though they do not belong to me, what I have experienced of them is still part of my history. Nothing is left out. From that moment, my history became important to me. All of it.

Both the beautiful, the joyful, and the sorrowed past do have contemporary values. They are actually part of the framework within which my present life was being reshaped, to my betterment, and the good of others. Such shaping had been taking place without me realizing it – not so much when all was going well; but in those moments of grief when I had been humiliated and hurting, and considered myself a failure.

Surely, the hand of God had been on my life all along.

This new experience awakened within me a desire to visit, under normal circumstances, those places significant to my life and ministry.

Down Memory's Lane

Long before I had been given an incentive to write, I revisited Heatherglen, to confront the experience that had resulted in so much humiliation and grief in my life. It was important that I should make the visit alone – which I did; without any preconceived sentiments.

I went first, to the Administration Office and introduced myself, then related my purpose in coming. The response to my request was warm and gracious; and I was given every encouragement to revisit the Male Ward.

The reception there, however, was less cordial.

When I introduced myself to the Sister-in-Charge, and related my purpose in coming, she became quite curt, and I was refused entry. I felt the impact of her rebuff, but I was not ruffled. On entering the building, I had already walked past the 'Observation Ward' and the 'Cell' before I met the Sister, standing in the doorway of the office where I had rolled lint wads for Sister Oliver to stitch. What I had seen, was sufficient to renew a multitude of memories that were no longer hurtful.

I retraced my footsteps from the office and passed through the entrance door; down the flight of eight steps I had mounted on the day I

had been admitted years before, and strolled across the spacious grounds towards the exit gate. Within me was a deep feeling of satisfaction.

Now, after having relived and dealt with other real life experiences, resulting in a new self-discovery, I longed to return to Kinrock. No other place has had such a profound influence on my life.

I wanted to relive some of those memories.

The opportunity came when I received an invitation to attend a Kinrock High School Reunion, and officiate at the Thanksgiving Service to be held in the Memorial Park, as a part of the celebrations. My wife joined me.

We went first to the school to register. It still looked the same, except that the playground had been bitumened; the Oleander tree at the front was not there; the play shed had gone, and so had the horizontal bars in the back corner of the playground.

We drove round to Jason Street to see if the old home was still standing. Yes, it was – but it had been remodelled and modernised. The Lucerne trees were no longer there. The old paling front fence had been replaced with a cyclone wire fence; and the front gardens were replaced by a lawn. The corrugated iron tanks, and all the fruit trees no longer existed.

The blacksmith shop that once hugged the northern boundary had collapsed and was removed. A storm water drain now ran alongside the boundary fence. Near to the drain, a circular outline of the old wheel right's well was visible in the long grass. That part was exciting.

The dam in the paddock on the other side of the house, had been filled in – the old farm machines – the shelter shed and the chaff shed had been removed; industrial buildings stood in their stead. What had given character to the rustic atmosphere of the place where I was born, no longer existed.

Beyond the house – in the background, the wheat silos stood majestically tall. Yet when I drove to the Railway Station, everything about the place was so bare. There were no trains, and no workmen, except one man who handled the signals and track points for the goods trains that passed through. The goods shed was vacant – the goods yard overgrown with weeds, and the railway-tracks rusted.

The steam loco shed had a ghostly appearance and was in a state of disrepair. The locomotive turntable had rusted and weeds grew out of the cracks in the concrete pit. The long bank of neatly stacked coal, where I used to get eggs from the sparrow's nests no longer existed; and the platform from which the coal was stacked, had been demolished. The

overhead bridge on which I used to wait for the Mail Train to pass beneath, had been removed, and lay rusting in the park of another country town.

The exciting blast of the steam train whistle had given way to the modern synthesised burst of the diesel trains passing through.

I visited the cemetery to try and find my twin sister's grave, but the area had been all levelled out. I could not find the grave.

No! My dreams had not been crushed. Memories of my boyhood days were still very much alive within me. They were creative. Such memories; like yeast, had permeated my entire history – experiences that had a great deal of character; and had no doubt supported me within, throughout those discriminating years during ministry, where I had to trust God, when what was happening was saying, 'you can't trust God'.

During those times I had been continually reminded of the text, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path*" (Proverbs 3:5,6 KJV). Those words never ever let me down.

Next, I wanted to go to the city to see the old building in Gow Street. It had been demolished and a new building stood in its place. Yet, old memories were still fresh and vivifying.

The Cathedrals and churches were still standing reminding me of my search for God within their walls. The despair I had experienced during that pursuit had now become superimposed by memories of my recovery, and those real life adventures during which God had been preparing me for a ministry that was to come.

I had no desire to visit the theological college, but I did have yearnings to visit the parish I had been sent to straight from college – the one that had been claimed as being the 'toughest parish in the state'.

It was several years later, while passing through Urinderran, we stopped at the roadside to have a spell. A senior member of the church, seeing us, recognised us and came across. "Since you left", he said, "The church has gone down hill". I did not take this as a compliment – rather, it was a disappointment.

Some years later, when we were to pass through Urinderran again, we decided to stay overnight in the Motel there. Next morning we attended the service of morning worship in our church. It was a shock. What has happened to the church? The words of that senior member, who met us at the roadside, rang true.

We were given a cordial welcome in the service, and were greeted warmly outside after the service. We learned then, that after we had moved, the trouble-makers left the church and went elsewhere.

It was very significant, that, while passing through Yarrenderra one Sunday, we should attend their morning service of worship. By and large we were given a warm welcome both in the service and outside – though there were those who gave us the cold shoulder. We were not surprised at that. What we did learn however, was; all the families of the ‘group’ had finally left the district.

The church had maintained its true identity, and seemed to be functioning reasonably well.

The varied experiences in travelling down memory’s lane, revisiting those places relative to my life and ministry had been very rewarding, and had brought a great deal of satisfaction and fulfillment both to myself and my wife.

But that is not the end of the story.

In the mean time we moved from Brookford and went to live at Tulwalla, in the region of Warrigaroo – another act of divine Providence.

Chapter 14

Reflections

I can only describe this move as an incredible experience. In terms of contemporary values it was as though we had entered a ‘new world’ – among people of all walks of life, and mostly of our own age group, active and with common interests befitting of our own life-style.

Together, my wife and I became involved in this community. In this, we were rewarded with a new lease of life.

I maintained a schedule of reading and writing, which kept me abreast with ancient and modern thought. I also found myself reflecting on experiences both past and present. What prompted them, I don’t know; they just came and went. Some like the final distant rumble of thunder at the end of a storm. Others were like rain on parched earth. And others, like rays of sunshine breaking through banks of rolling clouds.

Thinking back on some of my experiences in Home Missions, I could not help but feel startled at how inadequately prepared I had been for what was required of me. Apart from the annual retreats for Home Missionaries, and what I had learned and practiced in secular life – a good background, mind you, I was given nothing. My superiors had not possessed the gift of instructing.

While, in general, I had been making a hit with the industrial world and the common people of life, which seemed to be resented by the clergy – I had found, in ministry, that Catholic priests were the only ones who demonstrated a rich example of grace.

I recalled the day the Director of the Department for Home Missions, sensitive to my situation, said to me, “You have had an intense experience”.

His empathy embraced my psychiatric experience; the indifference on the part of the Church because of it, and its subsequent effect on my ministry: that is, the vigour with which I devoted myself to life and

ministry – an energy which was misunderstood by both the hierarchy and my colleagues. The Church despised my enthusiasm.

How could I be humble – if that’s what they were looking for in me – while all the time I was being humbled? I knew I had had an intense experience that others knew so little about – even on the “grapevine”; but it was the spirit of enthusiasm that kept me going. In their ignorance, the pious and self-righteous seemed bent on wanting to quench the real me. Yet I remained vibrant.

What had aided me through my ministry was a philosophy I adopted when I learned the wisdom of an elderly minister of a church of five hundred people. He was asked one day, how he got on with his congregation. “Well”, he said, “I have five-hundred for me and five-hundred against me”.

I had been studying the works of some Christian mystical writers. From these, I gained an appreciation of the spiritual values of my experiences; especially the psychiatric phenomenon I had worked through.

There had been many things I could not remedy myself while passing through that experience; things I had to bear until such times as God, who respected the dignity of my person, should ordain otherwise. Though God had been with me right through that “trial by fire”, it was in the Psychiatric Hospital where He actually encountered me.

After I had discharged myself from the hospital – and ministers of the Church from whom I had sought help, only left me stranded – God visited me again through an ordinary layman whom He used, to prepare me for the road to recovery. This man gave me some magazines to read. They were light reading, and interesting, and there was no threat in reading them. I enjoyed them.

From then on, I began reading books on life and adventure, by prominent, inspired authors, whose writings reached me deep within, and toned my life with pleasant things. Among them was the life story of Ned Kelly, the well-known Australian Bushranger whom I felt – though not all would agree – had been driven to crime by the constabulary of that day and age, and as a result, was later condemned and executed. My heart warmed toward him. I also read about our Aborigines, and how they had been dehumanized and exploited by early and later settlers. My heart warmed toward them.

I began to think through my own real life battle against compulsion neurosis, a journey I had to face alone. And how I had gained strength from

the Scriptural text, *‘God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind’* (2 Timothy 1:7 KJV).

The long inner conflict I endured, had strengthened me and enabled me to finally win over my inner self, and centre my affection on God. In the final analysis, it was true; *‘God’s grace is sufficient’*.

The peace that came to me at the end of that battle – the mystical writers described as divine consolation. A peace that would enable me to handle better; and bear other adversities that would convey feelings that God had withdrawn Himself. Such experiences one writer said, would be grievous as hell itself.

The conflict I experienced within the Church, bore this significance.

Endangered and threatened by such pious ‘bullies’, I gradually lost all sense of human worth. It reached a stage where, in my humiliation it was a struggle for me to face anyone. The only way I could develop a sense of dignity and worth, was to stand firm in the face of threat, and with the virtue of courage – refuse to abandon my post.

How could I have won through a psychiatric experience, had I not first of all faced the challenge in that old building in Gow Street, where I sought to escape, but the door was locked – then I prayed for the floor to open up and swallow me, but it didn’t. I had to face the challenge alone – yet I was not alone – God was with me.

How could I ever have faced all that was to happen to me, candidating for the ministry; and then in ministry itself during a crisis in the Church – an experience that almost destroyed my wife, but for her own faith, courage and endurance; had I not won through that psychiatric experience which was the beginning of all the trouble.

How could my wife and I have survived the cynical pressure of the ‘group’, and the demoralizing experience of the ‘professional’ counselling of the Reverend Michael Swinton that was destroying our lives – but for the grace of God? There was no such one as a Bishop in our Church to shepherd us – we felt all alone.

The time I had given to reflection; up to this point, had proved rewarding and befitting of the exhortation given by St. Paul...*“So far you have faced no trial beyond what man can bear. God keeps faith and He will not allow you to be tested above your powers, but when the test comes He will at the same time provide a way out, by enabling you to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10:13 NEB).

Aware of the indignity and prolonged grief my wife and I had been carrying, almost unbearable at times; which I knew, had shaped our life;

and which we tried to face in grace – I longed that this humiliating burden, wrought by the indifference of the Church, might be lifted. Yet to deal with such an issue, spread over such a long period, seemed an impossibility.

Sequence

There was just one Church Executive whom, at that time, I felt I could trust. I wrote to him and frankly spelled out the pain of the indignity I had carried over those years, from my earliest, and second candidature – subsequent ministry, and now – in retirement. It was the first time I had ever felt the freedom to unburden myself this way. I concluded my letter expressing my hope that what I had related had not been offensive.

The executive's reply, though avoiding the real issue, showed signs of grace – the *first* I had ever experienced from a Church executive. The hurt had at least been acknowledged – if not completely – sufficient enough to promote relief. Someone had at least listened to me. The thorn was removed – I felt it go, and this amazed me, for the wound was still there, yet there was no more pain!

But not for long – it was not all over yet. This experience of amazing grace was to be overshadowed by a further impropriety in our local church – an indignity we carried for over two years before it was finally brought to a head.

When we first moved to the Warrigaroo district I began attending Catholic Mass each Sunday, after which I took my wife to our own church. One Sunday, my wife came to Mass with me.

I was open and forthright, and wrote to our local Parish Council advising of my ecumenical affiliation with the Catholic Church. My wife and I delivered the letter to the Secretary, in person. I had also written a similar letter to the State Executive. Whereas this letter received a friendly acknowledgement, my letter to the Parish Council was never acknowledged. Rather, we were now being slighted.

Then one Sunday, at church, quite unexpectedly two prominent members came to me and made a real fuss over me. I wondered what this inflated attention was all about, for nothing like this had ever happened here. The reason soon became evident. I had been assisting in the parish – preaching. Now, to my surprise, I discovered my name had been removed from the list of preachers on the parish preaching plan. I felt there was something deeper behind all this, that needed to come out into the open.

It did!

One evening, some weeks later, a Leader of that congregation, telephoned me and gravely confessed, out of a sheer sense of guilt, that I had been ‘scrubbed’.

The reason was one of disrespect.

No – I was not hurt, nor was I surprised. Rather, I felt relieved to know the truth. Yet I *was* surprised that I had not been notified officially. But of course, they had not dared.

Worship in our own church in this parish, had much to be desired – yet out of commitment, we kept attending. Then, one Sunday – after a Service of Holy Communion that had sadly lacked significance – we longed for communion with God. Several others expressed the same need. It was while we were driving home, my wife said quietly, “I would like to go to Catholic Mass”.

From then on, together, we humbly began worshipping in the Catholic Church. This was a sacred moment in our life. Life itself is sacred. It is even sacred to write about it, relating experiences that have a ‘spiritual’ significance to both writer and reader, particularly when the experience conveyed, stimulates thoughts that lead to a reshaping or enrichment of one’s inner life.

Then one day, a member of our retired clergy, called on us at our home. “A pastoral visit”, he said when I opened the door. As soon as he entered, he asked point blank, “Where do you worship now”?

“In the Catholic Church”, I replied, “Ecumenically”.

He reacted, making a critical comment about the Catholic Church, which he tried to retract but failed. He finished up leaving – abruptly, and left us nonplussed.

Fellowship in the Catholic Church was prime. My wife said one day, “It reaches the total person”. Prior to this we had experienced fellowship at such depth only in our ministry with the Disabled.

The move had been very timely, for we had not expected what was about to happen.

My wife had been advised that she was to undergo major surgery. We were thrown into a state of grief such as we had never experienced. Yet it was the love of members of the Catholic community, and the caring of the priest who visited her – and her own positive attitude, the Specialist said, that enabled her to make an amazing recovery.

What we were experiencing in the Catholic Church was something we valued. A strong witness of spirituality and grace – in symbolism – the

ministry of the Word and Sacraments – love and companionship with people who were both human and holy; so different from the clerical superiority, and aloofness and political duress, alien to the Church’s nature, that we had experienced for so many years in our own church. Yet those elements bore a spiritual significance, of working together for our good in the long run.

I wrote to the Church Executive, assuring, that though my wife and I were attending Catholic Mass regularly now – we held no grudges against anyone – no malice, and will always show respect where respect is due.

I was not being implacable – though the silence of the Church as to why they had treated me so poorly over the years, without explanation, still weighed heavily on my mind. There was no sign of reconciliation – except in the integrity of just one such minister who, in ministry had treated me poorly. He had retired after preaching the Good News of Jesus for forty years.

Seeing me in the street one day he came up to me – looked me straight in the face, and addressing me by name, said, “In my retirement I have found Jesus”. That was all he said. Then he turned and continued on his way. Somehow I sensed what he was silently confessing in those humble words. My heart warmed, and as I watched him go I forgave him then and there.

As for those others who had treated me poorly – while writing this book, overshadowed at times by memories of a treatment that had brought deep grief to both my wife and myself, I could only pray, “Father forgive them, they did not know what they were doing”.

So, we were both happily involved in the Catholic Church, in worship and group activities, sharing the common life of the Catholic in an ecumenical spirit. This element had been a strong characteristic in me ever since my industrial days when, as a layman, I worked alongside Catholic Sisters in a ministry with the Handicapped. We were of different cultures, yet sharing in the same ministry of love. My heart stirred.

From then on, and throughout my ministry I was conscious of a deep yearning in my heart for unity between the churches. Later in retirement, I sensed this same yearning in the hearts of many Catholics. Yet there was no visible movement – it was just a longing.

Then a new Bishop was appointed to the diocese, and the spirit of ecumenism actually began to move. This movement involved, for me, lectures, seminars, and further formal studies which marked the beginning

of a transitional period in my life – a modification that was to prove both joyful, yet sorrowful before it reached a final stage of renewal.

Up till this point in time, in worshipping with the Catholic community I had felt comfortable, I was enjoying it. But now, on entering deeper into this fellowship, I felt there was so much more to be learned in this life. I was so far behind – and for some reason I was hurting!

Had I been born too late?

I was tested further, the day I was told, “Your name has been included on the list of those, rostered to read the Scripture lessons at the Mass”. That was alright, but I had not been given any instructions as to the formalities. I had to read the next day, and believe me I was nervous. I telephoned a friend, who gave the necessary instructions over the phone. As a Protestant minister, I was skilled in reading the Scriptures; yet, much to my surprise now, I began to come undone.

On the Sunday, during the entrance procession, holding the lectionary high before me, I began to feel nervous. Then later, standing at the lectern, doing what I had been skilled at doing in my own church – in the presence of the priest, I began to feel a nobody. It was unnerving. I had never felt this way before, yet I read; and many of the Catholics afterwards, expressed their appreciation.

I continued as a reader. There were the few who objected, because I was not a Catholic; but on the whole, I became quite accepted as a reader.

Yet I still had not gained my self-esteem.

What a predicament to be in.

The only possibility of renewal, as I could see it, was to follow the principle of the ‘grain of wheat’. Unless it falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it falls to the ground and dies, it brings forth much fruit. This seemed to also fit in with Jesus’ teaching, to ‘lose my life that I might find it’ – to ‘lay down my life that I may take it up again’. But it didn’t seem to be working out that way. I needed reshaping; without losing my identity – but how”?

It seemed to be an impossibility. Yet it did begin to happen, but in a most extraordinary way.

A lady came to me one day – I didn’t know her – but she said, “I did appreciate your reading last Sunday – you *preached a good sermon*”. I could identify with those words – there was healing in them.

What I needed now, more than anything – was *someone* I could identify *with* – someone who had been grappling with the same

‘something’ I had been grappling with – someone who could identify with my feelings.

In my affliction, I cried out to God. He heard me.

And in a way I would never have dreamed, He delivered me from my distress.

Restoration

That evening the telephone rang.

It was a friend whom I had once supported during a hurtful experience in his life, when he had been rejected by others who had sorely lacked understanding.

He asked if I would like to go to an evening of Spirituality in a Pub – a mission of the Catholic Church to promote open exchange among those in the community of believers, conscious of cultural differences and the diversity of expression of our faith. He said he would take me.

My heart stirred, I could identify with that environment – and I felt comfortable about it.

“Yes, I *would* like to go”, I replied eagerly – little knowing what awaited me.

I shall never forget that night at the Pub – how in a truly human situation I experienced a miracle of healing in my life.

One speaker, unaware of the burden on my heart; had been relating a personal experience of having grappled with the same ‘something’ that I had been grappling with. The speaker was nervous and spoke in a soft tone – the public address system had more to be desired, and I was unable to pick up all that was being said. Yet I heard sufficient, for me to identify and feel my burden lift.

But not only that – more important still – the inner healing I experienced was something I thought could never happen. While this was in no way related to what the speaker was saying, it was at the precise moment when my burden was lifted; those years of discrimination, depriving injustice, imposed grief, and low esteem, were eclipsed by the sovereignty of God that radiated the communion of grace in my heart.

I had at last found that which my life for over thirty-eight years had been deprived of – dignity’.

An inner grace and calm was taking over my life. The mystery and holiness of the presence of God in my own life, were dignified.

In the calm that accompanied this renewal – words from the prophecy of Joel, that had been a close companion to me during the latter part of my ministry, came to me again, only this time, as personal; “*I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten*” (Joel 2:25 KJV). Those words were consoling and offered a sense of security.

This experience permitted space for me to work through my life – and time to reflect. And this – enabled me to get my perspectives right.

The affliction I had sustained during those challenging years in ministry, I could see, had far deeper implications, embracing healing – and I had needed healing.

There is no doubt in my mind that throughout Jesus’ ministry, his healing miracles implied forgiveness, and forgiveness implies ‘sin’ – but of a different nature than the faults we look for in others: “*Sin*”; initiated by Satan – that ruins human lives and destroys relationships.

So the cause of my grief had been something *more* than of human origin. Behind it were those spiritual forces of evil introduced by Satan – principalities and powers – universal sin, that pervades our world and infiltrates our human nature, and the Church.

I had prayed; ‘*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me*’.

Healing and forgiveness did come to me that night at the Pub – the work of God, active in this world of spiritual and moral imperfections, as He had been doing since the ‘fall of Adam’ – working in imperfect human situations to execute His saving grace:

“...ours were the sufferings He bore; ours the sorrows He carried... and through His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5 JB).

Ever since that experience of healing and renewal, things began to happen in my life.

What a statement to make!

Things had been happening in my life ever since I was born – ever since that God encounter on the brink of what turned out to be a dangerous mine shaft – all that happened following my conversion – and in that reassuring moment in a psychiatric ‘cell’; then later, the call of God into the ministry, and subsequent implications.

And now, God, having dealt with that grief of the past that had sorely afflicted me, that involved others – was about to begin an ongoing process of restoration, involving the “child” in *my* life. Ongoing because there will always be spiritual and emotional conflicts in my life that require healing

and restoration. These had been a challenge to me – testing my faith in God, in myself and in life – molding my life to something better.

Yet there was one emotional experience that had been a source of annoyance; not all the time, but when it did show itself, it bothered me. I began to blame myself and my feelings. And this is where I received my first insight.

Those feelings were not something I had created. Feelings are not created; they are caused by other factors.

If *only* I knew what those factors were!

It was then I learned that there was a connection between this troublesome sensation, and my childhood. I discovered that the very “child” of the past who has accompanied me through life, and influenced my love of life and the environment – my love for the poor and the underdog – my enthusiasm and the spirituality of life; had another ‘side to the coin’. The same child who beautified my life – I discovered, had also been misleading me.

While grappling one day with this bothersome emotion that had been hampering my progress, I ventured back into childhood, searching for an experience that related to it.

I found it, and identified it with the problem. And as I acknowledged it, peace came to me.

From then on, I applied the same principle to other feelings or situations that drew a negative response from me. It did not take long to relate them to hang-ups. As soon as I identified them, they lost their power and I was able to release them for something creative.

I could not help but acknowledge the gentle way God had been dealing with my life, and the richness of His grace. In such grace, I ceased from struggling and let God take over my life and my affairs, and asked quietly “What do you want with my life”? – and left myself open to Him.

Chapter 15

A Crisis – Then Blessing

There is no question that my affiliation with the Catholic Church for almost a decade; of learning, study and fellowship – had been Providentially guided for the healing and restoration in my life. Yet, as much as I dearly love the tradition of the Catholic Church, its message; the beauty of the Missal – the fellowship – the power of the Mass and the sacrificial element of the Eucharist, there had always been a feeling of discomfort, something that separated us.

I could accept the priest and the laity who, with regard for my clerical role, urged me to become a Catholic, so that I could receive Holy Communion – and those who regarded me as an “outcast”; bless them – or had seen me as a “prodigal” and had begged me to come home: or the one who identified me with the “Rich young Ruler” and pleaded with me, to “sell all that I have...and take up my cross and follow Jesus”, and become a Catholic.

I had done formal studies on the Catholic Religion, which I enjoyed. They were efficacious – though manipulative in parts: but they had not influenced me entirely.

Longing for the Spirit of unity, I attended a Bishopric lecture on “Reconciliation”. My heart warmed as I listened to truths so familiar to me – unfold. Yet when it came to God’s grace and unity in the Eucharist – it was only for the Catholic. The lecture concluded with words reminding me of the law that does not permit a priest to serve Holy Communion to the Protestant.

While I acknowledge this law – it is not that law, but the transcendent image of the Catholic that is too much: it has created a feeling of inequality – “We have the truth but you haven’t”. It prevents a closer relationship with Protestants. There is a *spiritual* uneasiness about our differences – though we are all a part of the one Church – not to be identified as a building, or denomination, but as Christ’s body on earth, of

which we are all a part – a vibrant people – following His example as servants to others.

When I read the scriptures – the Old and New Testaments and the Apocryphal writings, I can see the faith and practice of the Catholic and it thrills me – it really does. I cannot help but love the Catholic.

Still, as much as I dearly love their expression of faith, I could not become a Catholic – I do not have the soul of the Catholic. My life has been shaped in the Protestant world – in family life, the old Gospel hymns, evangelization among the various denominations and other Christian communities – not just one tradition.

Grieving over the division between the Catholic and the Protestant, I felt torn between two loves, and longed for my divided love to become unified.

It did happen.

But how it came about is beyond any imagination.

Late one night, in a state of shock, I dialled *000*. An ambulance came. And the outcome was – *emergency cardiac surgery!* That part was alright – I was unconscious for more than twenty-four hours.

But I had not been prepared for the psychological after effects – the night I was drawn into a sea of darkness – a psychic trauma which I could not fully explain. The darkness that swallowed me was terrifying. The uncanny feeling of the absence of God was overwhelming.

I felt abandoned and afraid.

Yet, when morning light came I was conscious of life – the life granted me at my birth – by God. I pondered – the thought of God, whose Spirit ‘In the beginning’ had brooded over a ‘formless void’ – God, whose divine energy penetrated that ‘primeval darkness’ and brought the world into being, created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*; and how through the words of the Creator, divine energy brought forth light – and *all* creation; and from the very same matter of the earth itself, *mankind* was divinely created – and was given life through the breath of that same divine energy.

All these wonders flashed through my mind.

Still, I needed help; and a counsellor came.

Her empathy, logic and grace, permitted space and freedom that enabled me to relate my experience: an event that changed my life.

In the light of that moment, I knew God had not abandoned me. The presence of God *had* brooded over the darkness that had engulfed me, and from that nothingness a new creation emerged – my divided love had become One love.

Never before had I had such an experience.

In this new life given me, I could see no space in the heart of God for denominationalism, sectarianism, or racism: only LOVE (1 John 4:8). Love that never changes – love that creates a sense of equality – oneness, despite our traditional, theological and cultural differences – love that signifies *unity* – the unity that exists in the trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To explore this insight further, I went back in time, to that era when the seed of evangelism had first been sown in my life during a spiritual revival – when an Interdenominational Christian Movement fostering the spirit of unity between the churches, brought us together as Christians.

Once a quarter, on a Saturday, we rallied together in districts, meeting in one of the churches for an evangelical service. Then once each year, we joined together – some two thousand people, or more – in the great City Hall, for a State Evangelistic Rally.

It was just the few denominations that declined.

Then Christians, moved by the spirit of unity; to share this experience of oneness, extended this witness to open-air evangelistic meetings in the city market place; on a Friday night, witnessing to the Good News of Jesus which is for all people of all cultures. Each night, those meetings attracted a large street audience.

Later, I became involved with an interdenominational group specializing in this type of open-air witness. The meetings I attended were held on a street corner in a city slum area.

One night while the meeting was in progress, I had a feeling that there might be someone in need – out there, in the night. I stole away; and, venturing down an alleyway, I came across a man leaning against a brick wall. He was wearing an army greatcoat – a bottle of wine jutting out of each pocket. Wine trickled from each side of his mouth and down his chin. He was drunk.

Entering into dialogue with him, I learned his history.

He had been a man of means, and diligent. Now, he was no more than a derelict; a failure in life. Hurting and humiliated, he had sought refuge in the slums.

I invited him to join me at the Gospel meeting. He came – and he attended other meetings. Some weeks later, at a reunion dinner in the city, this man walked in; wearing an army greatcoat – dignified – a new person with a testimony to the saving grace of Christ.

It was this ministry of grace, the influence of the old hymns, and the basic principles of evangelism in men like Charles Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody, Charles Finney, and the Wesleys – that had shaped my life.

I have the soul of the Protestant – *their* feelings – *their* vision – *their* faith and hope – the scope of the Protestant, which the Catholic does not seem to understand. We seem to be regarded as another caste. This – is what seems to hurt the Protestant most.

Then, the emphasis the Catholic places on becoming converted to Catholicism, only aggravates this hurt.

So, I began to move, ecumenically, among other churches and Christian assemblies. Those for whom the Creeds and Confessions form a basis of their faith – those whose life and witness is based on a Mission Statement; and others whose witness is based on Christian principles of life. It became evident that in both Catholic and Protestant traditions; despite our differences, a basic unity does exist.

But something else became evident: there is not *one church* or *tradition*, that can meet the need of every person.

There are those within the church – including the marginal, deep within whose lives there are sensitive issues and grief that has scarred both mind and soul, that may never be healed because of the distance created by the church’s institutional boundaries that make only some people comfortable; consequently there are those for whom, Jesus remains a stranger (Luke 24:13-16). It rests upon us to identify that “stranger” for others, by living the Good News of Jesus – showing it in our lives.

Dwight L. Moody once said, “Out of every hundred people, only one reads the Bible; the other ninety-nine read the Christian”. In living the Good News, we communicate to others a language they can relate to, whatever culture – they receive grace that gives their own life meaning; and their life becomes sacred to them.

It is in this area that I am deeply moved by the work of the Salvation Army. And this raises another issue.

A Catholic commented one day, “I missed you at Mass last Sunday”. “We attended a service at the Salvation Army”, I explained.

“But they don’t observe the sacraments of Baptism or Holy Communion – that is not scriptural”; he said. He was correct; and this raised another issue – indeed a paradox.

In almost ten years affiliated with the Catholic Church, though involved in other ways with them, I have not been permitted to receive

Holy Communion. That is not scriptural. The two Sacraments, commissioned by Jesus, are not law – they are gifts of grace.

One of the first teachings I was given in theological studies was; ‘*A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace*’. In this, I see in the life and witness of the Salvation Army, a sacramental life as commissioned by Jesus – an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, going into all the world – to the sinner and the outcast – the sick – the poor and the underdog – to those in prison, in order to bring grace and a restored dignity. Their whole life and mission identifies with Jesus’ *inasmuch* statement that undoes our own self-appraisal (Matt 25:31-46) – a principle that is meant to be a natural expression of every life, whatever our tradition – not something that is tacked on.

Meeting up with different traditions, aware of the various organized systems and protected traditional teachings, embracing history, culture, theology, or principles of life: where emphasis is placed on ‘conscience’ in relation to membership and obligations, I can understand how these elements have become a strong influence, not only effecting the unchurched and the marginalized, but creating the divisions that exist between the churches, Christians, and other traditions.

Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher of the 6th century BC, did not have the spiritual enlightenment that we have – yet among other fundamental laws, of life and the universe – he believed that “*unity was the law of God*”.

In our self-created divisions, we transgress that law.

The apostle Paul was right after all: writing, “*There is none righteous, not even one*” (Romans 3:10 NIV); which he further qualified – saying, “*...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Romans 10:23 NIV). This is hard to take, yet it is here, in this reality, that we share uniformity, and the state of equality exists; though each person and each tradition differs from the other. How then can this state be transformed into the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21 JB) – unity, that reflects equality – oneness.

It may be seen in the spectrum as it appears in the rainbow; two fundamentals of which, are important in this respect.

Isaac Newton discovered that, when white light passes through a prism it is broken into a phenomenon of colours like those of the rainbow, called the spectrum: the primary colours of which, differ from those of the artist’s paint; which is red, yellow and blue; and when blended, the artist can make any colour. On the other hand, the three primary colours of the spectrum are red, green and blue. Tests have shown that these three colours

of light, when combined in equal parts, produce a white light (The World Book Encyclopedia 1973, Vols Ci-Z, 658-661; L248-250; N 307).

This phenomenon bears the significance of the mystery surrounding the life of Jesus; the time He took Peter, James and John up into a high mountain where they could be alone. *“There in their presence He was transfigured; His face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light”* (Matt 17:2).

The equality that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creates an energy that transmits a radiance that we are yet to experience – the mystery of which is concealed in the Light of God (1 John 1:5). Light; white, an energy of the sun created by God, bears the significance of the Trinity.

When Jesus addressed a crowd after He had set the woman taken in adultery, free from the disparagement heaped upon her by her accusers – He said, *“I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness; [but] will have the light of life”* (John 8:12 JB).

Then again, the day He was about to restore sight to a man who was born blind; He said, *“While I am in the world I am the light of the world”* (John 9:5), and He performed the miracle. Light shines in the darkness. Darkness cannot banish light.

Here then, is the first fundamental.

But what has that got to do with us?

Quite a lot!

On another occasion addressing the large crowd listening to Him as He delivered His ‘Sermon on the mount’, He said, *“You are the light of the world”* (Matt 5:14).

What is the effect of light, in relation to our human experience?

Light expels the darkness, thus removing any feeling of insecurity, anxiety, fear or loneliness. It releases in one, a feeling of comfort, and well-being. It allows one to gain a sense of direction, and the freedom to be: all essential qualities of life.

Jesus’ words have brought the mystery of the divine principle of light, within the scope of our understanding – as something we *can* relate to.

Here now, is the second fundamental as seen in the rainbow – unity, radiance and openness.

Colours of the rainbow, like our life and traditions, are singular, there is no equality between them – one colour cannot be another colour. Equality and harmony is reached when they appear together in unity to form the rainbow, created by the white light of sunlight passing through

raindrops; each colour blending into the one next to it; yet maintaining its own identity – a sign of the new covenant.

So then, because of the individuality of each life and tradition – we must respect the special bonds people have with those of their own blood, their history and culture.

They must maintain their *own* identity. Unity is seen in our acceptance of each other as such – showing an understanding and compassion in relation to our differences – living in harmony as “*children of light*” (Eph 5:8-10; 1 Thes 5:5 JB); yet as different parts of the one Body of Christ in the world, that is; those who believe, who are called the ‘Church’.

When, eventually, we are brought together as one body; through the action of the light of God upon us – blended to each other like the colours in the rainbow; each maintaining our own identity; the glory of God will be displayed in us, and we will emit a radiance whereby others will *know* that we *are* Jesus’ disciples – and they will be able to say, “See these Christians – how they love one another”.

Our togetherness will bring peace – and peace will bring an end to suffering between Christians and non-Christians and those hurting – on the fringe.

God is not distant from this world – nor from any individual...
He is only as distant as we make Him.

Chapter 16

Finale

Having reached my 80th year, and looking back over those years that had shaped my life; the hand of God had certainly been on the life of an ‘insignificant country boy’.

Life for me had become sacred – all of it. Still, I was hurting over the discrimination the Church had measured out – treating me as “sick”, because of a mental illness I had overcome; yet I could not defend myself.

Grieving; my thoughts turned back to my candidature for the ministry, and the day I stood before the Ministerial Session of the District Church Council. When I was requested to give an account of my life; my conversion, and sense of call, I spoke frankly and honestly: *“It is not easy for me to say what I have to say...”*, my diary reads. *“I can only say what I have experienced, hoping you may see the hand of God that has been on my life and guided me to this day. What is it that moves a man of my age to candidate for the ministry? I am the least among you; in myself I am not worthy of this high calling”*.

I told of my conversion, then continued... *“But something went wrong, details of which I can give you if you will but ask questions of me later...”*.

I related briefly, my psychiatric experience.

Then; my diary reads, I appealed to them; *“I beg of you to ask questions on these points, in order that they might be cleared of any misunderstanding”*.

I told of my sense of call; then concluded, *“I stand before you, I can do no other; I have nothing to offer but myself, so help me God”*.

Questions relating to my statement were not asked; not even at a specially convened committee meeting the next evening; except some general questions, and others less relevant which I answered positively and frankly. One question provided an opening for me to request that they *respect* my life. But the atmosphere was not grace-full: rather, it was tense and more inclined to be critical. Such ungrace accompanied me throughout my ministry.

Ironically the next day, the Church Council voted unanimously, for me to proceed; and with their prayers.

Men of grace had tried to prevent me from candidating; but the Church gave its approval.

After having been finally accepted, men of grace, within the church, then sought ways of deterring me from proceeding any further.

Mind you, I am well aware of those issues that lay behind the cynical movement that eventually wrought damage to two lives: a human weakness within the Church. Yet God used that weakness to put me where He wanted me.

How thankful I am for the guidance God had given me, when He directed my attention to the words of the wisdom writer, which I quote:-

*“My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord
prepare yourself for an ordeal.
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.
Cling to Him and do not leave Him, so that
you may be honoured at the end of your days.
Whatever happens to you, accept it,
and in the uncertainties of your humble state,
be patient, since gold is tested by fire,
and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation.
Trust him and he will uphold you,
follow a straight path and hope in him...”*

(Ecclesiasticus 2:1-11 JB).

It was said to me later, “You were too honest”!
If I had set my sights high – that’s just me.
That I have been honest, points to integrity.
No! I am not ‘pointing the finger’ at anyone;
nor am I hurting or angry any more;
I FORGIVE THEM ALL!
Forgiveness is to remember the past;
that it may be forgiven.
Maybe one day I will receive full grace
from the Church;
if not – not to worry...
“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your
Kingdom”.

Those obstacles strewn across my path, even my own failings, had neither discouraged God, His love for me as I am; nor had it prevented His power from protecting me. An “*Energy*”, greater than all other depriving forces, had supported me – enabling me to win through, for the sake of others. And it is for the sake of others, deprived of their dignity; hurting or indifferent because of their experience of the Church or some other life issue; that I write:-

Words To Ponder Over

The ordinary person can relate to such experiences as anger – betrayal – conflict – disappointment – envy – frustration – grief – hatred – humiliation – injustice – jealousy – pain – and even joy. They are characteristic of human life; and also evident in the church. But such words as salvation, redemption, reconciliation and even spirituality, or spiritual journey, are abstract: so – one ‘turns off’ – naturally.

How then, can such people discover that life *is* a spiritual journey that is fully human?

The Psalmist of old had discovered that God *is* involved in our life, for he wrote. “*You created every part of me and put me together in my mother’s womb*”: then he discovered that God is all around him, protecting him (Psalm 139) – don’t worry, God is protecting you too – you are still here! Centuries later, his words were expressed in a different way, by the apostle Paul; “*In Him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28).

But again, all this is abstract. Who *is* God, anyway? Where is He? Why doesn’t He do something?

God was prepared for those sort of questions; and before the beginning of time, made provision to come at an appropriate time, into our world, in Jesus Christ, the One we celebrate at Christmas – born into our human existence which for centuries had been going through a development in preparation for this very cosmic event (Gal 4:14).

In Jesus, who was truly human, God was present to us; “*For the full content of divine nature lives in Christ, in His humanity...*” (Colossians 2:9 GNB); so then, in Him, God’s unapproachableness became approachable: what we could not understand of God, we begin to understand – for Jesus was reflecting the being of God! (John 1:1-14).

But there is more to it than that – God humbled Himself to become *involved* in the drama of our life, in Jesus, who talked and ate; He walked or sailed; He worked, and grew tired, and slept; and He suffered what we have suffered – He did this for our sakes. We can identify with all that; and

what's more He understands us when others don't. But God has been made impersonal to us, by injustice, hearsay, and the discrimination of others.

Jesus was sent to put things right for us, in the long term; and what urged Him on, was His experience when He was led into the wilderness where His life was tested in no different a manner than our testings. The subtle power of Satan confronted Him; determined to put Him on the wrong track. He faced this manipulating force, and won through: He felt weakened; and angels came and ministered to Him (Matt 4:1-11, Mk 1:13). After this gruelling experience – stirred within, He set His face against injustice, self-righteousness and discrimination.

To meet the need of ordinary people, He chose to stick His neck out; and, as essential as the 'institutional Church', which He respected and attended, He got away from the church boundaries; beyond limiting human influences, and went to meet the need of those deprived of their dignity and well-being, with varied disabilities; to establish relationships in the world, in the streets or the market place; in the fields or on a hillside; or by the sea. His ministry brought a new dimension to the Jewish faith they were not happy about – healing, hope, and comfort, to those not being reached by the 'Church'. Resentment began to generate in their hearts – and they looked for ways to dispose of Him.

So, we have the incarnation – the embodiment of God in Jesus Christ, as the beginning of the long-term restoration of mankind from the destructive forces of evil that bring suffering and divisions. Yet there is something more in this than at first reaches our human understanding.

Our suffering; physical, mental, moral, psychological or spiritual, has a potential energy of an *ascensional* nature that is understood in Christ's own suffering and death; His resurrection, and ascension. Jesus took upon Himself our limitations. "*For a little while [He] was made a little lower than the angels, so that through God's grace He should die for everyone*", "*...that through His death He might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death*". (Heb 2:9,14 GNB).

You see; what Jesus suffered, was our suffering; His death was our death, but it doesn't stop there; His resurrection is to be our resurrection; His ascension in His humanity is to become our ascension, to the "*New heaven and the new earth... where God will dwell with mankind... He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain*" (Rev 21:1-4); or *disabilities* (Isaiah 35:4-6). This will mark the completion of His plan "*...to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment*" (Eph 1:9,10).

As one who, had suffered a mental illness and won through; my heart warms to those, vulnerable to hearsay, or “the grapevine” which is no more than a cover up for gossip; and have become victims of discrimination – who feel like the nation of Israel in captivity. Yet the immeasurable grace of God that brought salvation to them, applies also to you and me, wherever we are, whatever we do; and God declares, because of this, “*My people will therefore know my name: in that day they will understand...*”.

“How beautiful are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, and brings happiness and proclaims salvation...” (Isa 52: 6-8 JB).

The Scriptures tell us, “*Jesus is able now and always, to save those who come to God through Him*” (Heb 7:25 GNB), and He will be there to meet us at the end when “*He will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are waiting for Him*” (Heb 9:28 GNB).

Simple isn't it?

There is no catch in it – it's for free – no manipulation – no pressure applied; only one condition – “believe”; as Jesus said, “*...everyone who believes in Him shall not die, but shall have eternal life*” (John 3: 16).

We must never feel that our life is too ordinary or too messed up for us to be able to experience a relationship with God.

My heart is therefore glad for you, my spirit rejoices: may your mind and body rest in hope!

I can only conclude, that the spirituality of life makes life holy; that is, the continuity of God with us, as we are and where we are – and the holiness of life, *human*.

Maybe it is not so hard after all, for the ordinary person – the marginal, those who are up against a wall, at the bottom of the barrel, at the end of their tether – to respond to the Good News of Jesus; and know that you *are* a child of God – that God *does* accept you, as you are and where you are.

This may be the beginning you have been looking for.

Maybe this is something the ordinary person is able to

identify with – without turning off;

and acknowledge;

‘*Life is a spiritual journey*’.

“Courage! Do not be afraid”.

Chapter 17

Epilogue

I cannot conclude this written work, embracing my years of ministry and beyond, without making special mention of my wife – different though we were from each other, we were in it together. Together we embarked on a journey of faith, in a ministry of being there for others. We were both involved, each in our own proper way. At times it seemed a lost cause as we struggled against such unbelievable odds – evil and prejudice in the Church. Yet by the time this ministry was finally wrapped up – we had scaled the highest of mountains and won through.

The ultimate reward in our retirement, and now, in the fifty-sixth year of our marriage – has been the triumph of the human spirit; and the quality of life, the result of a life of experiences – the prize of the ‘*courage to be*’.

The words of an 18th century hymn writer

1. How firm a foundation, you people of God,
is laid for your faith in His excellent word;
what more can He say that to you He has said,
to all who for refuge to Jesus has fled?
2. Fear not, He is with you, O be not dismayed,
for He is your God and will still give you aid:
He'll strengthen you, help you, cause you to stand,
upheld by His righteous, omnipotent hand.
3. When through the deep waters He calls you to go,
the rivers of grief shall not you overflow;
the Lord will be with you in trouble to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.
4. When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie
His grace all-sufficient shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you, His only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.
5. The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose
He will not, He cannot, desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
He never will leave you, He will never forsake.

Richard Keen (t 1787) alt.
Australian Hymn Book 491

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* * *

As you read and follow the author's journey through life, from his earliest childhood to his eightieth year —

It will make you glad,
It will make you sad,
It will make you smile,
It will make you grieve,
And in the final analysis,
It will give you cause to...

Rejoice!

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