

A TALK ON THE MINISTRY WITH
CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP'
WITH THE HANDICAPPED

SALVATION ARMY MEN'S BREAKFAST
2002

Crossroads Christian Fellowship
With The Handicapped

I would like to relate to you briefly, something of a valuable love story – but first let me clarify that statement.

There are three different ways of loving:-

(1) Love that seeks physical gratification.

(2) Love (not of physical origin) that seeks to make one dependent – to dominate them. Fundamentally it is selfish.

(3) Genuine love, is always considerate – it has regard for a person's dignity – it accepts a person as they are, where they are at in life – it stimulates self-respect. In its purest realization, it enables one to reach his/her highest level of awareness – the freedom to be. In scriptural terms that love is *Αγαπε*.

This story begins with an organization called “Crossroads”, which began on the steps of the Newcastle Central Methodist Mission in 1961 – stimulated by an appeal from a handicapped person for the Handicapped to be accepted in the church and in society. From this, the organisation was formed and given the name of Crossroads Christian Fellowship for the Handicapped.

The name “Crossroads” was chosen, because, in Biblical days, when people in their travels met at the crossroads – they stopped for a chat and to share their news and happenings in the East.

Of course, our meeting with people in this day and age, varies dramatically. We can well meet a person in the street – on a train; a bus; at the airport; on a ship, or at some function; and it is amazing how we can meet someone with common interests – who had lived where we used to live – or knows someone we know.

Travelling on the Ghan Train once; at one meal sitting, a Waiter, seeing the crosses on the lapel of my white shirt, came up to me and exclaimed:

“Ah, you work-a for the Lord-a Je-e-sus.”

“Yes, that's right”, I said.

And coming closer to me he said, “He knows-a my bruth-a” – then he whispered – “he work-a for the Mafia”.

Meetings were held for the disabled, in the church hall each week, and each month, a Fellowship Tea, followed by a Service in the Church – also once each month, a bus outing in society.

In these ways the disabled met and made new friends, and especially there were those who came to now Jesus as their friend.

I remember a chorus we used to sing back in those days:

*“I met Jesus at the cross roads
where the two ways meet;
Satan too was standing there,
and he said, come THIS way:
Lots and lots of pleasures
I will give to you today.
But I said, "NO! There's Jesus here,
see what HE offers me;*

*Down here my sins forgiven
up there a home in heaven;
Praise God that's the way for me!"*

In 1967, a branch was formed in Sydney. However, because of Sydney's vast metropolitan area, weekly meetings like Newcastle, could not be held – instead, bi-monthly outings were organized, to meet the social, educational and spiritual needs of the handicapped. These outings also included an afternoon meeting in a church hall, with entertainment, singing, and a devotional message, followed by Afternoon Tea.

The first outing began with one coach, and about thirty-two people – plus helpers. By 1971, when I joined Crossroads, they were running three coaches, with close on 150 people.

A young man, came to our home and invited me to come on an outing with an organization he belonged to. "You will really fit in", he said.

"Oh? What organization"? I asked. He said, "Crossroads, Christian Fellowship for the Handicapped": I froze! For whenever I met a handicapped person, I became a Levite, and passed by on the other side of the road.

While I didn't tell him this – no way would I become involved with handicapped people.

Yet, it was the second Saturday in March 1971: reminded of this outing: and advised where to pick up the coach – out of courtesy, I went along. 'But only this once', I assured myself.

The coach I was to board, was from a Psychiatric Centre. I stepped aboard not knowing what to expect. I was amazed! Hands were outstretched to me, and words from smiling faces; "Hello, what's your name"?

"Why, I'm Victor, what's your name"? – and found myself walking up and down the aisle of the coach, speaking and shaking hands with each person.

Our destination was the Port Kembla Steelworks, for a drive-in inspection. This was followed by lunch in a park at Wollongong. I was told not to worry about bringing my lunch, there would be shops where I could buy a sandwich and whatever.

But there were no shops! Members of the Committee were busy, discussing the afternoon arrangements – and were not even aware that I was there.

Feeling lonely and hungry – I noticed the folk from the Psychiatric Centre, sitting alone – away from the others; so I went over and began to talk with them.

I felt at home. They offered me a sandwich and a piece of block cake. I was deeply moved, and felt how good God was to me. I was falling in love with them.

Lunch over, we boarded the coaches again, and drove to the Corrimal Methodist Church Hall, where we were to be entertained by a choir of intellectually retarded children.

I noticed that a number of the folk from the Psychiatric Centre, remained in their coach. I went over to them and asked, "Aren't you coming in to the meeting?" "No!" they replied; "It's too religious".

Hm! “Oh, it’s not that bad, I’m sure. Look; this is my first day, and I feel lonely, what about coming in with me and keep me company”?

They looked at each other, then, with one accord they said, “O.K.” And we all went in! They enjoyed themselves so much, that they never ever missed a meeting after that.

After the meeting, the Director came to me and asked if I would see the people from the Psychiatric Centre, back home. I agreed; and noticed, as they alighted from the coach, at the Centre, how their faces were blank as they walked back to their wards.

I felt for them! Next outing, I just wanted to come back and meet them at their wards, and walk with them through the grounds to the coach at the gates, which I did; and we talked as we walked.

On our return at the end of the day, I noticed how their faces were no longer blank – they walked upright, and filled with enthusiasm, they asked; “Victor, when is the next Crossroads outing”?

Numbers began to increase rapidly, as members from the various Sheltered Workshops and Catholic Centres joined us. We now had eleven coaches, with up to 500 Crossroaders to cope with. Of course, there were other helpers. The work was demanding, and I asked for a Nursing Sister to accompany us.

It was a great ecumenical feeling, working alongside Catholic Sisters in the same ministry of love wherever we went – to meet Skippy the TV star; or to experience the lions in Warragamba Lion Park.

In places like this we were allowed free entry. At lunch we enjoyed a sausage sizzle. I almost missed out on lunch, as I wandered around 500 people meeting them personally – being there for others.

I invited my wife to come with me on an outing; she was reluctant, but came, and she too, fell in love with them. She had a special way with them.

Not only did we accompany our friends on each bi-monthly outing, but we now, visited them at the Psychiatric Centre on a Saturday, and shared with them their institutional life or, on Sunday, we accompanied them to morning chapel, and after Morning Tea with them, we went to our own church. We had a quiet way of seeing them as ordinary people.

Our ministry extended to some who lived in a Hostel; part of a Sheltered Workshop Complex. You see – among others there was this young lady who was to influence my life. Her name was Joy.

It was actually on my second outing that I met Joy: strapped in her wheelchair, she suffered cerebral palsy. She could not speak, and her only means of communication was her foot.

On my first meeting with Joy, she waved her foot to me. Of course, I responded with; “Joy; what nice shoes you are wearing”. Ugh! Ugh! You’ve got it all wrong mister. There was a tap on my shoulder – it was her mother: “Joy is not showing you her shoes, she’s saying “Jesus loves me, and I love Jesus”.

Well, that reached me in a way I shall never forget. “Joy, I love Jesus too”, I responded. From that moment on – I learned to communicate well with Joy, and others like her.

One day, while visiting her in her home it was a weekend; with her foot she spelled out on her board, “I’m worried”! “Hm! Would you like to tell me about it”? Yes she would – and she began to spell out her grief on her ABC board.

She didn’t have to spell the entire words – I could follow her. I looked at her and she smiled. Then she began to spell a word I couldn’t work out. I looked at her. She frowned! She continued – and I got it – she smiled. Her woes – they were for real. There was only one cure...

I picked up her alphabet board, and spelled out the words: “I- L-O-V-E- Y-O-U”. She smiled. There were healing qualities in those words.

There was this young lady from the Psychiatric Centre. Let’s call her Faye. She had a hearing problem and was requested to have an operation to correct it. Faye was having a traumatic experience, trying to decide whether or not, to have this operation.

To add to her trauma; one day at an outing, she was being aggravated by some male members of her group. I could see she was terribly upset – so I went to her and asked; “Faye, what’s the trouble”?

“Ah!” she exploded, pointing to the male group – “Those bastards are laughing at me, ‘cos I’m deaf” – everybody’s laughing at me”.

“Faye, am I laughing at you”? – Am I making fun of you”?

“No”, she, replied, and paused. Then, pointing upwards, she shouted, “That Feller up there, He made me deaf”!

“Faye”, I responded, “You are very beautifully and wonderfully made”.

She fell into silence, which was broken by a member of her group who shouted, “There! That’s shut you up, hasn’t it”!

I could feel her hurt, and said, “Faye, I have a hearing problem”.

“Hey!” she shouted, “Are you deaf too”?

“Yes, Faye, I have a hearing deficiency” ...she threw her arms around me and began to hug me.

“My hearing has been damaged through many years in a noisy industry. Her hug tightened – and I put my arms around her.

“I know what it is like, not to hear correctly and to have people laugh at me. – I know what it is like to feel embarrassed”...her hug tightened so much, I thought my ribs would break.

“I know what it is like to hurt...”

That was as far as I got. She let go her grip, pulled away from me, and called out, “Hey! That Feller up there is not so bad after all”! She darted off; then turned around and called back, “I’m going to have that operation”. She did, and it was successful.

Through love a person is able to discover their own freedom and respond to life in ways undreamed of.

Well now, communicating with Joy, one day, something happened in my life. Through Joy’s foot, God called me into the ministry. Of course, I couldn’t believe it I was too old.

Yet, at a combined meeting with the Disabled, in the Newcastle Methodist Mission, God called me again – “Get ready, I am going to call you out from industry into the full time ministry of the church”. My heart burned within: and from that very moment it began to happen.

So it was on 17th January 1972, after thirty-three years in industry, I entered the ministry as a Home Missionary: they sent an industrial man to an industrial region.

God called me into the ministry through a young lady who could not speak, and led me, using a young lady who was blind.

Twelve months later I was sent to the country. Joy, and this blind young lady come to stay with us. The blind girl read the scripture lesson for me in brail, one Sunday at a special Youth Service.

During that year, God called me into the Ordained ministry of the Church. Many obstacles were placed in my way: “You are too old and you might get sick and break down”! Yet I won through!

While in theological college; one day, I received a phone call from the Sheltered Workshop, to come and minister to the disabled – they were hurting. I went straight away.

A room was provided – and I listened to their grief on ABC boards or broken language. Their cry had reached a peak; “People don’t understand us because we are Handicapped”.

I looked at them and said – “God loves you, and I love you”! A great calm came into this room. There was healing in love.

In retirement, I became State Chairman, and during the 30th Anniversary of Crossroads; I was invited to deliver a lecture at the Stockton Hospital, on “Communicating with the Handicapped” and to preach at an Ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving in the Christchurch Cathedral Newcastle.