

Huntfield Heights Community: Journeying lead by the Spirit

By Reg Whitely's

The theme of tonight is that of journeying, led by the Spirit. I thought we might start by hearing the history of this community – not of FAME but the community. The beginning of our journey was in July 1994 at the Assembly in Perth; held at St Thomas More College at the University, where an American lady Ruby Cribbins had been brought in as the facilitator; so it was considered that important. The last afternoon the theme was, Where to Now? The South Australian brothers had asked for a new community in South Australia – and the rider they added was: like Girrawheen in the West. Well I was a member of that community at Girrawheen and was delighted to hear this.

Tony Shanahan took up the running, but said time did not allow discussion; so he invited anyone interested in the discussion of this proposal to gather the next morning at Westcourt. Fourteen brothers turned up at a meeting that lasted two hours. We were asked what qualities this community would possess. Much of the discussion in the morning was around that. As the brothers talked I was in awe of what was proposed. It was to be so perfect. To me it reflected the longing in the heart for something new in religious life. During that meeting I was annoyed with the Holy Spirit giving me a dig in the ribs, and found myself thinking that as one who had established the community first at Morley, then at Girrawheen I could make a contribution in setting it up.

I kept the summary of that meeting and you can see for yourselves what was being proposed. I'll just hand out a copy and you can have a look at it.

While we were at the meeting the phone rang and Des answered it. He returned to say that the call was from Adelaide from Sister Meredith Evans asking for the brothers to please consider coming to Hackham to help them in their work there. Her request wasn't given much notice but it was strangely fulfilled later. It was agreed upon that the research into the whole project would begin. My suggestion was not accepted – and I would say unfortunately. I suggested that we rent a place and move into the area straight away and discover the needs as we go, then make decisions. That wasn't even considered. As it was it took two years before we finally came to Honeypot Road.

John McGee was to do the research for the establishment for the most suitable place. He eventually chose Mirra Para in the north. We took it for granted that this was where we were going. A funny thing happened on the way to the Forum. At almost the last moment Andree Brown, who had joined our team of four, said that the northerners were quite suspicious of a new group coming into the area and asking questions about the financing of the project. Would their established schemes be affected? She suggested we go south where we would be so welcomed. The decision was made in one minute to change two years of planning. For me it was a case of *de je vu*. The same thing had happened at the founding of Girrawheen. For eighteen months all the planning for the new Balga community was done from our community at Morley and at the very last meeting with the PLT present when we were finalising the move to Balga, Ollie Pickett told us that that

very day he had met his policeman friend Norm Turkich and when he told him we were heading to Balga, he said to Ollie, "Come with me. I want to drive you around the area." He told Ollie that Balga used to be the crime area and where the gangs gathered but the population had grown up and moved. The centre of crime and gang activities was at Girrawheen where the young people, particularly the Vietnamese, were in deep conflict with the Aboriginals. So 18 months of planning was changed in two minutes. We all agreed on two houses, for there were now five brothers at Girrawheen; but back to Adelaide...

I had been asked to talk around to see if we could get a community of four, so I was pleased when in June 1996 four of us brothers and Onny Brown met for the first time at Thebarton. We brothers were to stay at Thebarton for four months, while trying to find a suitable house. We had also been waiting for Des Howard to finish his sabbatical course and when he arrived, the very next day he took over the search for a house from Phil whose work in that area had reached a stale mate and Des came up with 232 Honeypot Rd, the very first house shown to Phil.

While we were at Thebarton the Mass for the Beatification of Edmund Rice took place in the Entertainment Centre in Adelaide. Bishop Greg O'Kelly was to refer to it years later in his homily at the Mass for Religious. He described exactly what happened. The brothers had gathered beneath the stage in the assembly area, where the many priests were vesting. The brothers were so gloomy and disappointed. Why was there such an event, when the brothers could scarcely show their heads with such a media frenzy going on over the sexual abuse question? As our gloomy procession made its way into the auditorium, 7000 people stood as one to applaud us during our progress to the stage. Everything was okay! In the homily in that Mass, the young priest from Morphett Vale spoke of our new community coming into his area. This community was a real sign that the brothers were not going to hold back on their mission. I was so proud to be part of the community.

On October 1st that year we made our move from Thebarton to establish this perfect community. At our first gathering that night Des Howard, who was the community leader, announced he was going home the next morning to Whyalla to look after his mother, who had cancer. He would no longer be part of the community. That was devastating news, even from a practical level. Des had ordered such things as the fax cum telephone machine, besides other items, and no one knew how to use them. Added to this, no one was appointed community leader for at least six months. It was chaotic.

On Christmas Eve 1997 I received a fax from Des O'Grady saying that Phil was changed to the West and John was returning to Thebarton to continue his work with the Aboriginals. The perfect community that always wanted to be one was now one! Still the work went on. After a couple of months of being alone, Mark Sweeney was posted here. He was not terribly enthusiastic about it. It was a last minute thing. Mark had just completed the Passover program that took him to Africa. He had agreed with three other brothers on the Passover program to form a community in Africa, where the four wanted

to work. On arrival back in Australia he received the news that on their return home the other three had changed their minds.

Meanwhile, Peter Faulkner came into our community to make a third. He would travel each morning to Adelaide for his Earthcare work, and Mark was to teach at FAME. Another development then took place. Des had rung me to ask if we would make our community available to take a brother on placement on the Passover program. I just said it was impossible as we had no room but Des said anyway he was going to put our community forward as a training place and we could work out all the other stuff later. Shortly after, we were told that Br Philip Ryan from Ireland was to come and stay six months and that Mark would be his mentor. Then John Corbett arrived from NSW looking for a new work to do and then Des, who had resigned from the PLT also arrived. We needed to find new accommodation as we now had *six* brothers; hence Bramley Ct.

John Corbett told us and the PLT, how wrong it was to have our program at 232 and to live there as well. Tony Shanahan put a few suggestions forward about putting in glass doors etc, but Mark who was the community leader was insistent on making a move immediately. His determination really surprised me, for one so usually quiet. We bought a third house, a five-roomed one in Ivy St and moved. Then everyone started to disappear. John Corbett went back to NSW. Peter went to McGill to convalesce and stayed there. Philip Ryan's six-month period ended and he returned to Ireland to start his own FAME over there. Mark was moved from pillar to post, first to Bindoon for a semester, then permanently to Whyalla and that left Des and me here. The brothers did manage to sell Ivy St for \$17,000 more than they paid for it and eventually Honeypot Rd was also sold at a good profit. So here we are, at the end, waiting for one of us to conk out. Bramley Ct will then be sold, being worth now three times what we paid for it.

Once Des had said to me, following Ruby Cribbins teaching, 'You have to have three in a community or else it's not really a community. It is a pair.' The perfect community never came into being. Is there such a thing?

In 1999 the extraordinary Assembly in Perth took place. Prior to this Andree had brought two youth workers, Norelle and Lisa, over from Victoria to work at FAME. Andree was on the planning committee for the Assembly and she went with the two to Perth a day or two before and set up the gymnasium with their famous Café and other meeting places. Onny was very active during the Assembly with so many ideas, as were Norelle and Lisa on the social side. I was quite proud of them. On the last night Andree told the Assembly that we mustn't let go of the impetus created there. In the West they would have a group called the Midwives to help bring this new thing to birth and South Australia would be called the Brokers. Des was appointed to chair the Brokers. I was heavily involved. Among many other things we arranged a concert and then a story-telling time at Belair. Two from the CLT were in Adelaide, Michael Colluswano and Philip Pinto. They were to hear our collective story and then were asked to tell theirs. It was really a wonderful gathering. Over time our group, the Brokers, decided that we had done our job and could do no more, so the Brokers disbanded. One lasting group, formed in Perth at that time did keep going and that was the Associates.

While it is good to see the work of the Spirit in all our stories we also have to ask 'Where to now Edmund?' To think that in spite of the messiness, the mission to the young people in the area has resulted in all our dreams coming true. Over a hundred really marginalised students are being catered for by FAME and SCAEP. I think the brothers have been a gift to the area in spite of the weaknesses of the group. Surely it has been the work of the Spirit!