

## Revival does not come without prayer.

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The South Pacific Convention, held at Phillip Island from January 13-17, 2008 was a significant event for the growing Wesleyan connection of the South Pacific and specifically for the members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia. This edition of the Australian Wesleyan is dedicated to bringing some of the camaraderie and enthusiasm of the convention to you, wherever you are reading today. I would like to make mention of two lasting impressions that I brought away from the convention.

The South Pacific Convention marked a milestone in the life of the Wesleyan Methodist Church with the conclusion of Rev. Stan Baker's service as National Superintendent. There were a number of presentations made to Stan, including a specially made conference didgeridoo, and I want to take this opportunity to write a few words of tribute to Stan. I write these words as his successor, but also as a young man who was brought to Christ under Stan's ministry in Nanango twenty-five years ago. It is hard to imagine more fitting ambassadors for the holiness message than Stan and Coral Baker. Their humility and faithfulness have been evidenced in a lifetime of service, and especially illustrated during Stan's eleven years in the office of National Superintendent (1997 to 2008). Those who attended the '97 conference will be aware that Stan certainly never sought this office, but took on the mantle of leadership at the repeated request of the conference delegates. Those who have now served beside him through eleven years of national church leadership will likewise bear testimony that Stan has given everything in honouring that responsibility. Throughout these years, Coral faithfully shared the burdens, hosted visitors, and radiated the love of Christ. We celebrate Stan and Coral's ministry and look forward to their friendship through many more years of local church ministry and church family gatherings.

The second abiding impression that I carried away from the South Pacific Convention was the sense of multi-ethnic family. More than ever we were reminded that we are a blend of peoples from many cultures, brought together by the blood of Jesus and born of His Spirit. As we sang and celebrated together our hearts were united. It is wonderful to be part of the family of God! I was reminded of the Heavenly City, where "the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it." (Revelation 21:26)

Since the convention, I have been reflecting upon the gift of cross-ethnic unity that we enjoyed. I believe that we should be sensitive to what the Spirit is doing in our midst – to the calling and commission that he has placed upon us as Wesleyan Methodists. Our bond is our heritage; not just as born-again believers but as Wesleyans. I believe that it is time for the Wesleyan Methodists to make a more visible claim to the mantle of Methodism in Australia, for the sake of our own identity and as a ministry to the greater body of Methodists across the South Pacific. We can do more to be recognized as the custodians of Methodist doctrine and history, and we should do this in partnership with our South Pacific family.

These thoughts about our heritage lead us to a growing vision for the coming decades. While I feel that it would be unwise to speculate on specific goals at this stage, it does seem as if God is already showing us some of the larger picture:

- 1) The heritage of Wesleyan Methodists is a powerful resource. The early Methodists grew exponentially; harvesting souls, planting churches and sending missionaries. In the past century we seem to have lost some of that early effectiveness, and at times, fallen into a form of godliness that lacks power. (2 Timothy 3:5) Our forefathers were in no doubt

where the power came from, though, and we needn't be either. It comes from the Spirit of God, stirred to action by the glorious doctrines of salvation and Scriptural holiness. Whatever words we employ as we rephrase these truths in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important that we reignite the powerful message of the purified heart.

- 2) In proclaiming our doctrine, the Wesleyan Methodist Church must also draw upon the motivation of our denominational history. That does not mean that we should adopt old forms of worship, but it does mean that every Wesleyan should be fully aware of the rich and powerful heritage that we share as Methodists. We must allow the stories of the Wesley brothers, of Orange Scott and Kingsley Ridgway, and of South Pacific missionary outreach to fill us with an expectation that God can do it again in our own generation. God commanded the Hebrews to rehearse their heritage, and I think He expects the same of us.

Perhaps there are some who desire a more specific vision though – something that we can begin to implement now. To you I offer just one challenge. Revival does not come without prayer. We hunger for the power of the Spirit in our congregations and we desperately need to be more effective in church growth and church planting. The starting point is prayer.

There is a “catch 22” of prayer. The Holy Spirit comes in power when we pray, but in truth, we cannot pray much without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. When we know the intimacy of Christ's presence, our time in prayer is no labour at all. However, we enjoy that intimacy because we have already been in His presence. Prayer starts with revival and revival starts with prayer. Fortunately, this cycle of experience is not so difficult to break into. God's grace goes ahead of us at all stages of our Christian experience, including in the call to prayer. His Spirit calls us to prayer and then empowers that same prayer.

I am convinced of the power of prayer. My journey has taught me that when I consistently bring a need to God, He moves on my behalf and answers the prayer. It often surprises me how quickly He responds! Now, if that is true for individuals, how much more should this truth be in operation if we as a people, in unison, pray? Dare we neglect this most powerful and fundamental ministry. Surely it is our shame that many of us, who enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus, are relatively ineffective in prayer. When was the last time that we saw God specifically reverse an impossible situation in answer to prayer? I feel that it is time to be reminded of our need to pray, and it is time to respond to the challenge.

What should we, as a people, ask of God? What can we ask in unison and with confidence, knowing that we seek that which is the will of God? Furthermore, what can we ask of God that is not limited to our own denominational aspirations? What blessing would we see poured out upon us; not only on the Wesleyan Methodist Church, but upon every Christian fellowship in Australia and the South Pacific?

- Pray that we would be drawn to prayer.
- Pray that the Spirit of God would come upon our congregations in power.
- Pray for our local churches to adopt strategies of outreach to the local community.
- Pray that God would call our sons and daughters into fulltime Christian service.
- Pray that God would grant us effective options for pastoral training.
- Pray that God would grant us vision, unity and leadership.

Let us dare to believe that God is still the God of Revival!  
*Scriptural holiness across the land* ... in our generation.