

## **2020 Vision** (As shared at National Pastors' Conference, February 2010)

*\*Published in The Australian Wesleyan, Issue 1, 2010*

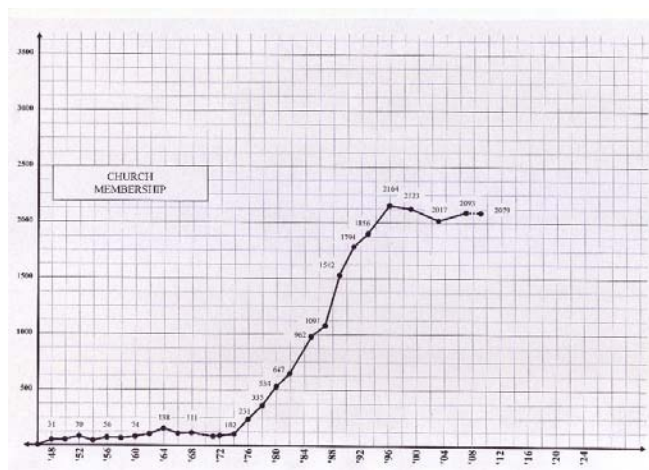
In John 4 we read of Jesus' interaction with a woman at a well outside Sychar. The disciples were shocked that Jesus would speak to this Samaritan woman. Jesus responded to them, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Today we can be similarly slow in recognising what God is doing in our generation: the ripened harvest and the needy souls around us. Jesus goes on to say, "Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour." It is good for us to note the hard work of others and the opportunities that are ours as a result.

### **A Glance over the Shoulder**

Rev Kingsley Ridgway founded the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australia. Before World War One he had served as a missionary in Egypt with the Standard Church (based out of Canada), and then during the war he had served as a chaplain in the Australian military. While a chaplain he came into contact with, and was greatly impressed by, Wesleyan Methodist soldiers. After the war Kingsley made the decision to contact the Wesleyan Methodists rather than his former Standard connections. Kingsley was approved as the Wesleyan Methodist representative in 1945 and the denomination was launched in Melbourne in 1946.

In Kingsley's report to the first annual conference, held in 1947, Kingsley outlined the vision of a church raised up to teach full salvation - that is, the abundant life that comes from being saved and sanctified. In 1947 the Glenroy property was purchased and a bible college was commenced to train preachers with a holiness emphasis. This same commission remains upon us today; the Wesleyan Methodist Church exists to promote the dual truths of salvation and holiness. In 2009 the national church leadership adopted National Priorities of an Undivided Heart, Community Engagement and Prayer and Fasting, but the message of an undivided heart is not a new message. It is simply restating the message of full salvation passed down to us through Kingsley Ridgway, John Wesley and the New Testament writers.

A graph of our early years offers us an insight into the growth and losses of the early work. In the first 25 years a thriving missionary outreach was established in Papua New Guinea, drawing the energies of some key leaders; Kingsley College was established and briefly closed; and despite the vigorous efforts of Australian personnel, churches were started and lost in Tasmania, Adelaide and Sydney. Nonetheless, the presence of the Wesleyan Methodist Church was established and we were prepared for the growth that came in the 1970s. Indeed, the hard work of those who went before us prepared us for a time of reaping. Church membership grew 21 fold in 22 years between 1974 and 1996.



### **A Look at the Present**

In the more recent decades we have experienced a second period of slowing, and yet we are conscious of a growing movement of God in our midst. Pastoral training has faltered, but in

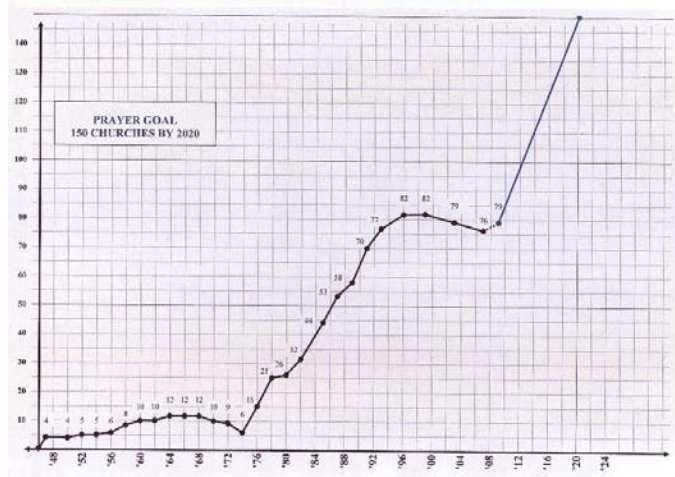
the first semester of 2010 we have 112 Wesleyan Methodist students on record, studying at various institutions across Australia. Surely God is preparing us for a fresh time of outreach.

In 2009 the Wesleyan Methodist Church was accepted as a full member of the World Methodist Council. Again, this represents the movement of God. A growing number of our people come from Methodist backgrounds in Asia and the Pacific. Today we are the largest Methodist denomination in Australia (excluding the Salvation Army), and we should respond to the opportunity that God has given us in this nation. Methodism need no longer be tied to a worship style, a liturgy, or a list of rules. It is again finding its true roots in the Bible and in the holiness message.

A third phenomenon is evident to those who have their eyes opened. There is a new generation in Australia that is not fearful of the Gospel - perhaps even the opposite. Today young adults freely and proudly announce their faith on national television through shows like *Australian Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*. There is a harvest of souls ripening before our eyes; a generation that seeks real meaning and a genuine experience of Christ. This is a good time to be armed with the message of full salvation!

### A Vision for the Future

In 2009 the Wesleyan Methodist Church recorded 79 churches across Australia. Surely, we have a lot of work to do if we are to be truly ready to participate in the harvest God is preparing. With new ministerial candidates in preparation and with a renewed emphasis on prayer and fasting, we are seeking an expanded presence in Australia and the South Pacific. Pray and fast that God would expand our presence to 150 churches by 2020. Pray for even more!



In 1 Kings 18 we read of Elijah's great victory over Ahab's false prophets. A pitiful time of false religion came to an end in one climactic day. Yet, after the victory, Elijah did not relax and celebrate. Ahab was sent to eat but the prophet Elijah went to pray and fast (v.42). Likewise, you and I are called to prayer and fasting in a day of harvest. The world may be unaware of the power and presence of God in our generation, but you and I are without excuse.

As Elijah prayed, a small cloud came over the horizon and Elijah, with eyes open to God's movement, recognised the coming flood. Surely this is a challenge for us too. As Jesus called his disciples to open their eyes, so Elijah calls us too. See what God is doing, tuck up your cloak, and prepare for the run of a lifetime.

2020 vision is not just natural sight; it is spiritual sight. It is recognising what God is already doing and, in faith, imagining what He is preparing to do over the coming years. It is a call to harvest and a call for workers. It is God's call to you and to me.