



# Churches of Christ Sunday

4 October, 2015

## 2015 Theme: A Renewal Movement

### Why a Churches of Christ Sunday?

This is not a day that every church in our Movement will take the time to celebrate. However, by designating a Sunday each year to be “Churches of Christ Sunday”, we give our churches an opportunity to focus on some of the key themes that make us Churches of Christ. Many in our congregations may not be sure of our values, emphases and characteristics, especially if they have come from other church backgrounds. Aside from that, it is good to remember that we belong to each other.

### How can we celebrate Churches of Christ Sunday?

We'd encourage you to take some time on October 4 simply to remember that we are part of a Movement, part of a family of churches. You might want to focus part of the service on this, use some aspects of this letter, or mention it in your church newsletter. We think the theme this year is vitally important for our Churches.

### How else might we use this resource?

You may prefer to use this material for small group studies, using the questions as a stimulus for discussion.

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## Introduction

*"Over time every movement wanders from its founding charism (gift of grace) and can only be renewed by returning to it in a fresh way. That return must be both true to the movement's unique calling and innovative in how that calling is lived out"* (Steve Addison, *Movements That Changed the World*, p 61)

Our heritage reveals something about our identity and our calling. It whispers to us about how to live out that calling faithfully. Why did God allow the birth of Churches of Christ, and what is the gift that we bring to the wider Body of Christ? How do we express this faithfully in the early 21st Century?

This resource tells stories of our past, and offers reflections and questions that may inform our present and future. At its best our movement has been fuelled by a burning desire to reach people for Jesus. It has demonstrated a passion for renewal of the church and redemption of the whole world under the Lordship of Christ.

Churches of Christ look to the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801 as one of its founding stories.<sup>1</sup> This story challenges us again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century whether we are open to the Holy Spirit to do new and surprising things in our midst. The Cane Ridge event was perhaps the most dramatic revival that occurred during the Second Great Awakening<sup>2</sup>, and may inspire us that the Spirit of God can bring renewal to a secular society that seems to have lost interest in the Christian message. The Second Great Awakening was preceded by and fuelled by intercessory prayer<sup>3</sup>, and this may speak to us about our need to seek God on our knees anew.

This resource contains stories of Australian Churches of Christ pioneers, and the passion they demonstrated to reach people with the message of Christ. Your own local church may have been founded or impacted by these inspiring pioneers. Their stories challenge us to consider how we might be reaching our communities today with the good news of Christ's love.

Looking at our heritage challenges us to consider what God's Spirit might be doing in the 21st century to renew the church and transform the world. You are invited to reflect on how you and your local congregation might be continually renewed by the Spirit of God "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/revival-at-cane-ridge/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ushistory.org/us/22c.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/one-hundred-year-prayer-meeting/>

History speaks to us. We hear its voice in the rituals of Baptism and Lord's Supper that connect with Christians over 2000 years. We recognise it in buildings that have stood the test of time, in a communion cloth made by faithful hands, and in a local congregation's anniversary celebration. But history also speaks to us in quieter ways. Without our realising it, the voice of history can shape our thinking and our responses and give us a rich vocabulary with which to address the contemporary world. In this way history gives voice to renewal.

Stories of mission and evangelism have always been popular in Churches of Christ in Australia. They appeal to the core of Churches of Christ's identity as a renewal movement. These stories share some common traits: the individuals involved are self-starters, social class and education are no barrier, the church rallies around the individual, the mission is proved to be effective, and the work expands. These trends have shown themselves again and again across the continent. There are several reasons why entrepreneurial styles of evangelism have bubbled up throughout Churches of Christ history. The movement developed in the Industrial Age, and its membership was dominated by small business-operators, skilled trades-people and labourers. The organisational structure, in which congregations worked in cooperation with Conference, meant that local people could respond to local needs without the need for approval by layers of church governance. Individuals could take the initiative, and their stories became the mission stories. The biographies written by Craig and Dennis in this resource represent some of the many Churches of Christ people who initiated mission.

There are a great number of individuals whose stories resonate with renewal. The preacher Henry Earl came to Melbourne in the 1860s at a time when the new Churches of Christ congregations were struggling to retain members. Earl took one look at the rather small meeting venue and declared that 'it would be a waste of time and labor for me to preach in that place'. So the church hired him another hall: 'the largest in the city'. Earl was an evangelist with an entrepreneurial streak. He dreamt large and drew crowds. But he was far from alone as a gospel-minded entrepreneur. In the 1880s David Amos Ewers saw a need to connect people in Churches of Christ so he started up a journal called *The Christian Pioneer*. The title suggests that he knew he was building something for the future. Pioneers, entrepreneurs, prophets like Amos, and leaders like David: all of these require drive and vision.

Antoinette Thurgood was a minister's wife. She could have fulfilled nineteenth-century expectations by attending church, arranging flowers, and making tea. After doing those things she put her entrepreneurial skills into action. She organised the Churches of Christ women on the Ballarat goldfields to come together and work for the poor and needy. In 1885 - a time when women lived quietly in the domestic sphere - she talked her way into having her own column in the *Australian Christian Standard* and she used it to inspire women to step outdoors and collaborate in ministry. She raised her sights again and organised the first women's colonial conference: a public gathering that announced unmistakably that women's ministry had begun.

Lady Gladys Nicholls was an Indigenous leader and activist whose efforts to support Indigenous people exemplified the spirit of gospel-minded entrepreneurialism. Seeing a need and acting upon it, in 1956 she founded a hostel for Indigenous girls (now known as the Lady Gladys Nicholls Hostel). She also established an opportunity shop, the Aboriginal Children's Christmas Giving Tree, and worked collaboratively in co-founding the Women's Auxiliary of the Victorian Aborigines' Advancement

League. Along with her husband, Sir Doug Nicholls, Lady Gladys was motivated by the gospel to take the initiative in integrating practical care with structural change in order to effect renewal in the lives of those around her.

Displaced by the upheaval of World War II, preacher and evangelist Jan Wladysiuk established a Slavic Church of Christ in Geelong in 1952, only a year after arriving in the town. Successive waves of migration from Europe, Asia and Africa have seen culturally and linguistically diverse churches establish and extend networks of care through the community. While Churches of Christ have not been known for their cultural diversity, that picture is changing with the initiative and drive of individuals and the support of established churches.

Entrepreneurial evangelism had other manifestations in Churches of Christ. Like people in business who count their profits, the churches counted baptisms. Modernity demanded that success be measured and, reflecting the surrounding culture, the churches and missions tallied their effectiveness in numbers. Despite giving a nod to ecumenism, many evangelists did not mind too much where those numbers came from. Churches of Christ entrepreneurialism sometimes undermined the work of other denominations and divided Christians. An entrepreneurial streak could also lead to business-minded thinking overtaking theology. Stories from tent missions in the mid-twentieth century reveal that audiences at gospel services were sometimes 'seeded' with people who would loudly offer to give money in order to prompt newcomers to donate. Sometimes a percentage of the tent's chairs were removed before each event so that when the crowds arrived the organisers could whip people up with exclamations about what a big night this was going to be and how they would need more chairs. Sensible sales tactics? Jolly good stagecraft? It was effective - and it manipulated people as if they were gullible purchasers. Such practices are very small examples of good business and bad theology. The ethics of commerce often reflect those of the culture because businesses need to adjust their practices according to what the purchasing public will tolerate. But the gospel is different. The gospel demands that neither the people nor the faith are treated as commodities. The redemption story asserts that Christ's death put an end to the commodification of human life. The price has been paid for all time. All else is grace.

Given the consumerism of Australian society, tempering the excesses of entrepreneurial evangelism is a challenge. Churches may be tempted to buy into the commercial spirit of this age. However, there is another recurring theme that bubbles up through Churches of Christ history and it may aid resistance. Churches of Christ are inheritors of the English Nonconformist tradition that has sought to stand apart from the powers-that-be and locate their authority in the gospel. In the 1600s this meant Nonconformist resistance to the state control of religion and a return to early church practices. In the 1800s it meant that Churches of Christ opposed government financing of churches and church schools. In the 1900s significant numbers of Churches of Christ people resisted the militarisation of society and the conscription of young men into the armed services. In the contemporary world this same Nonconformist impulse might lead the church to resist the huge influence of commercial practices and consumerism on faith.

Churches of Christ's historical traits inform its contemporary mission. Entrepreneurial evangelism means that drive and enterprise and the initiatives of individuals are part of the culture of Churches of Christ. So too is resistance to forces that 'separate us from the love of God'. History does not define the church's future, but it can reveal recurring patterns in the contemporary church and inform how

the church engages in renewal. So how does your congregation live out entrepreneurial evangelism? And how does your congregation resist the commodification of life and faith?

*Kerrie Handasyde is the Adjunct Lecturer in Churches of Christ History for Stirling Theological College (University of Divinity).*

## Questions for discussion

- What things speak to you from the stories Kerrie retells? How else does history speak to you?
- Where has your congregation been “entrepreneurial” in mission? What innovative new ideas might God be birthing amongst you to reach your local community? Are there entrepreneurs in your midst you might support and release?
- “Churches of Christ sought to stand apart from the powers that be and locate their authority in the gospel.” What ideas and forces in society today need to be ‘resisted’ by those who follow Christ? How might we do this together?
- “An entrepreneurial streak could also lead to business-minded thinking overtaking theology.” In what ways might your congregation have been unhelpfully tainted by business-minding thinking? Are we ever manipulative? Are we characterised by grace?
- Antoinette Thurgood inspired people to “come together and work for the poor and needy.” “Lady Gladys was motivated by the gospel to take the initiative in integrating practical care with structural change.” Churches of Christ historically integrated evangelism and social action (part of this legacy includes Community Care organisations). How is “loving your neighbour as yourself” expressed in action through your local church? How well are evangelism and care integrated? Are there issues in your community that call for “holy activism”?

## David Amos Ewers (1853 – 1915): A Christian Pioneer

By Craig Brown

When talking about early evangelists in Churches of Christ in Australia, the name Stephen Cheek is inevitably raised. Cheek was an outstanding pioneer evangelist in Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland, where he is accredited with starting the Movement before he died in February 1883. Cheek, however, had been in Queensland for just over 6 months. Some of the churches he had established were only a month old when he died from typhoid fever.

The question is – what happened next?

Part of the answer is a man named D A Ewers. Ewers was born in Enfield, South Australia, and upon marrying Emily Redman in 1878, set out under the auspices of the South Australian Conference to plant a church north of Adelaide, and then moved to Murtoa, in Western Victoria, where he served as a wheelwright while also planting a church community.<sup>4</sup> He was a man able to speak to just about anybody, guiding everyday conversations into deeper, Gospel courses. He would eventually have an Australia wide ministry, and everywhere he went he either planted or grew churches.

With the untimely death of Stephen Cheek in February 1883, James Johnson turned to his connections in Victoria, via the now well-known telegram sent to Frederick Troy which simply said, “Send for Sparks”. “Sparks” was the name by which the Queensland readers of *The Christian Pioneer* knew David Ewers<sup>5</sup>, based on his series, “Sparks from the Forge.” Ewers, Emily and their young family arrived in Queensland on 26 April 1883, staying on until September 1887. During that time, Ewers, Frederick Troy and Ed Bagley (among others) built on the foundation that Cheek had laid.

David Ewer’s impact in Queensland is worth considering, as he not only sought to plant churches (of which he had a major role in planting eleven), but also assisted in the maintenance of existing churches, such as Zillmere and Toowoomba, and had an impact in regards to the formation of disciples in those places. Ewers was also a capable organiser, and it was at his initiation that the Queensland Churches of Christ Conference was formed in August 1883 in Toowoomba. He was also a pioneer in terms of using the available media to spread the Churches of Christ message. When he came to Queensland, not only did he plant churches and help form disciples, he restarted the *Christian Pioneer* in August 1883<sup>6</sup>, and in 1898 would start *The Australian Christian*. A B Maston, writing in the *Jubilee History*, comments that the writings of Ewers made significant gains for the cause of Churches of Christ in Queensland: “the brethren here, as elsewhere, owe a debt of deepest gratitude.”<sup>7</sup>

David Ewers was a genial man, with a good sense of humor – both with others and about himself. It was said of him that he couldn’t sing a note, and one day broke up a meeting of a German Baptist church service by simply joining them in singing!<sup>8</sup> A down to earth man, Ewers had a focus on the souls of the people he ministered among. It is probably that trait which explains how he could have successful ministries in different contexts and settings, from planting churches north of Adelaide, and in the gold fields of Queensland (Gympie and Charters Towers), to ministering in established churches

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<sup>4</sup> Elliott, Allen G, *D A Ewers* pg 15 ed. By David Hammer, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Elliott, Allen G, *D A Ewers* pg 12 ed. By David Hammer, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20080609211255/http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/gchapman/nof/NOF3E.HTM#Sec2>

<sup>7</sup> Jubilee Pictorial History, 107

<sup>8</sup> Elliott, Allen G, *D A Ewers* pg 20 ed. By David Hammer, 1978.

in Doncaster (Victoria), Petersham (NSW) and Lake Street (WA). Both his preaching and his personality had a profound impact: “the secret of his success in leadership was his ability to mix with everyone and his readiness to do whatever had to be done.”<sup>9</sup>

Too often we forget that the ‘secret’ to the success of many of the early evangelists, like Ewers, was that they simply loved the people in their community.

*Craig Brown is Vic/Tas mission mobiliser and communications director for Global Mission Partners. He is coauthor of “The Church From the Paddock”, and some of this material will appear in the revised edition of this book*

## Questions for discussion

- What is it about Ewer’s legacy that most stands out to you?
- How do you go at turning everyday conversations to deeper spiritual issues? What are the barriers? What might help?
- I John 4:7 – 8 “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Do we “simply love the people” in our community? Do we love one another? How should we pray, and what should we do, to grow in love?
- Who are the “unreached” groups in your world? What might it take to form Christian communities in these groups?

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<sup>9</sup> Elliott, pg 13

## George Walden: A Man with a World-Wide Vision

By Dennis Nutt

Churches of Christ have grown out of an intense desire for Christian unity. Their forebears in Great Britain, America and Australia desired to restore the original unity of the New Testament church. The passionate urge for unity drove the pioneers back to the New Testament, as the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. It drove them to emphasise that the Plea of Churches of Christ for unity, fearlessly advocated for well over a century throughout Australia, is not any kind of unity, but a unity that is essentially scriptural, a unity on the basis of the “*restoration*” of New Testament Christianity. It drove them to evangelise; to preach the New Testament gospel with a passion to win people for God’s kingdom. One such evangelist was George Walden.

Walden was born at Newtown, Sydney. His mother died when he was five and his father when he was seven. His aunt from Adelaide took charge of him and he grew up in the Grote Street church. There he came under the influence of the redoubtable T.J. Gore and William Hindle, an English evangelist. He worked as a carpenter until aged 21 when he left for the College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, USA, in 1883.

He returned home in November 1888 and began a three and a half year ministry as evangelist of the Lygon Street church, Melbourne. In that period the church made wonderful progress and Walden baptised 200 people.

On receiving an invitation to the West London Tabernacle he accepted and commenced in June 1892. He did a good work there for four years. Climate conditions did not suit members of the family, so he decided to return to Australia.

The church at Enmore, Sydney, called him and in June, 1896, he took up his ministry there. For over sixteen years he did a monumental work. Possessing a commanding presence, a genial manner, a voice coveted by many preachers and an almost faultless memory for detail, he was genuinely loved and exercised an extensive influence on the community. In his day, Enmore Tabernacle was usually crowded. A great church was built up—great in numbers and spiritual influence. The place was a hive of spiritual industry. His work among the men was outstanding. He fostered a cricket club and established an Adelpian Society to train the men for service in the church. A number he trained went into the ministry themselves.

When he began the membership was 351; when he left it was nearly a thousand. According to Conference returns, 1,308 persons were immersed during his ministry. He was farewelled in June, 1912. 600 broke bread on the last Sunday he was there, while for the evening service hundreds were turned away. There was no standing room in the building half an hour before the service began, and 16 confessed Christ as Lord.

He returned to Adelaide and commenced a ministry of 18 months with the Unley church, but in 1914 he moved to the Mosman church, Sydney. When the Great War broke out (1914-1918) he enlisted as a chaplain and went overseas. He experienced Gallipoli and the Somme. He rose to the rank of Lieut. Colonel-Chaplain and oversaw the demobilisation of troops in Europe. King George V awarded him the OBE.

The year 1889 saw the first Federal Conference, and George Walden was among those who carried the resolution which really marked the beginning of our overseas work. During the subsequent 50

years his influence was great, and no one watched with keener interest our entry into the various fields. Even in the earliest years he had close contact with the missionaries. On his way home from the Great War Walden visited the Indian mission field, and great was the welcome accorded to him when he returned in 1931 to be present at the Silver Jubilee of the Australian station. His early association with the overseas work was valuable, but his chief work for the Foreign Missions cause came after his appointment as Federal secretary in 1920 of the Foreign Mission Board as it was then known; an appointment that was hailed with delight. He had a broad missionary outlook, and for fourteen years his work was greatly blessed.

He was known throughout the churches of Australia; his one passion was to preach Christ, to make his Saviour known. His outlook can be seen in the following: "Let us get near to God's heart that we may understand how he feels when he sees hundreds of millions who have never heard that he 'so loved the world that he gave his only Son to die for it.'"

Walden was a progressive preacher in that he sought to keep abreast of the times in which he lived as far as knowledge was concerned. His College and University course served only as a foundation on which he sought to build. The Holy Spirit kept him ever true to the gospel. He had a special gift to make out of the simple details of surrounding circumstances of life, valuable lessons for his hearers, and he was an attractive preacher. He was a great soul-winner. Of a genial disposition and a sympathetic nature, he proved to be a good pastor. As a social worker among the poor and needy he was the Good Samaritan.

His success was largely due to powerful (expository) preaching, prayer, a deep love for people and pastoral care.

*Dennis Nutt graduated from Woolwich Bible College in 1966 and has had ministries in New South Wales. He is formerly both Senior Lecturer in Church History within the Sydney College of Divinity and Academic Dean of the Australian College of Ministries. Dennis is the State historian and archivist for the Churches of Christ in NSW.*

## Questions for discussion

- What are the strongest impressions you have about the life and ministry of George Walden?
- Walden urged: “Let us get near to God’s heart.” What might stop us from doing that? What might help?
- The cricket club and the Adelpian society at Enmore are examples of an outreach ministry and a discipleship ministry. What are the current outreach and discipleship of ministries of your local congregation? Are they working well? How might they be adapted to be more effective?
- Walden “sought to keep abreast of the times”. Are we sufficiently in touch with our communities to be effective as local missionaries? How might we do this better? Who do we need to hear from?

## Thomas Hagger: a Burning Flame

By Dennis Nutt

Thomas (“Tommy”) Hagger was identified with Churches of Christ in Australia for over sixty years. For more than fifty of those years he was a preacher. He had an ideal to fulfil and a vision to realise. His preaching left no doubt as to where he stood concerning God’s word and the movement with which he was identified. His love and zeal for God’s kingdom drove him. His record of unselfish service is written in churches he established in most of the States of the Commonwealth.

Born in London in 1874, he went to live with his parents in New York. He was nine when they moved to Australia in 1886 and settled in Williamstown, Victoria. There he met David Macallister, a member of Churches of Christ. At the age of fifteen Hagger was baptised and brought into the fellowship of the Churches of Christ. In his youth he showed the same zeal for Christ that he maintained throughout his life. Even then he was a burning flame. The family moved to Prahran and then to South Yarra where they were among the founding members.

Hagger received his secular education at Laing College and his biblical and theological education in a training class at the hands of W.C. Morro, an American evangelist, who was minister of the Lygon Street church. Morro was a graduate of the College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, and took an interest in training young men for practical Christian service. He followed the curriculum of the Lexington College of the Bible, so Thomas Hagger received a good training. As he said himself, he had to get his training the hard way, and he wished “he had had the opportunities now offered young men at Bible colleges.”

He became a Home Mission preacher in 1895 when he was sent as a full-time preacher at Echuca with the commission to work in a large district in which there were eight small house churches. Soon five other household congregations were added to the circuit. In this ministry he travelled hundreds of miles by horse and buggy, and afterwards on pushbike. The gospel was preached in the open air, in farm houses, in barns, in hired halls, in chapels, and wherever a few could be gathered. Within twenty-six months 100 people confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. “Those were great days,” he wrote, “and loyal and faithful were many of those who were found in the church.”

In August 1898 he commenced as evangelist with the church at North Richmond which had a membership of 87 at the time. In 1903 it had 370 members and the chapel was too small. There was a Sunday school of 350 scholars and 30 teachers. The morning service was one of the largest in Melbourne and North Richmond was one of the most successful of Churches of Christ in Victoria.

However, in mid-1902 Hagger had moved to Western Australia where he became State evangelist and engaged in tent mission work. During 1902-1903 there was a net increase of 198 members in Western Australia. The following year showed substantial increases with 212 added by Faith and Baptism bringing the membership to 1,282 by Conference 1904. These splendid results were due in large measure to Hagger’s preaching as State evangelist. Renowned for his work around the Commonwealth, he proved himself a tower of strength in Western Australia. David Ewers, writing of the tent mission at Perth, reported that, on Sunday nights, 500 people crowded into the tent. There were over forty confessions. At Subiaco 100 decided for Christ in two months. He was again successful at Fremantle church where he became resident evangelist. During this ministry the membership was raised to 305.

He had an effective ministry in New South Wales (1906-1909) as State evangelist during which time he served as Conference President (1907-1908). In 1909 he attended the Centenary Celebrations of the Restoration Movement in Pittsburg, USA. On his way home he conducted several tent missions in Great Britain, and on his arrival in Victoria was invited to take charge of home missions and to conduct tent missions. Associated with him in the latter task was the esteemed Will Clay whom he had met in Sydney while conducting a mission at the Auburn church.

After a period of intense tent mission preaching (1909-1917) Hagger commenced a period of settled ministries in city churches, first at Grote Street, Adelaide, for five years and then at Lake Street, Perth (1922-1927). He also involved himself in the broader general activities of Churches of Christ. He was Federal Conference secretary in 1926.

Returning to the active work associated with home missions, he went to New South Wales as organiser. He remained there for nine years, before attending the World Convention of Churches of Christ at Leicester, England. He was away from Australia for two years during which time he visited America and conducted missions throughout New Zealand. Called to take up the work at Gardiner, Victoria, he responded with his usual enthusiasm, and for nine years he gave of his best, besides enriching other churches with brief missions.

Looking towards retirement, he sought a smaller field, but his restless nature would not allow him to be idle. He became a home mission preacher at Frankston. Always a pioneer, he saw opportunities in the Mornington Peninsula; isolated members were organised into a church at Moorooduc, and scattered members at Mornington linked into the fellowship of the circuit of churches in that area.

Thomas Hagger and his wife were honoured in 1949 for their years of outstanding service so humbly rendered to Christ. On the occasion of his fiftieth anniversary in the full-time ministry, he said, "If I were to have these fifty years over again, and know as much as I know now, I would again be a preacher." We can thank God for "Tommy" Hagger, and pray that many like him will be raised to continue to advocate the claims of Churches of Christ as ably and as successfully as he did.

## Questions for discussion

- What stands out to you from Thomas Hagger's life and ministry?
- "The gospel was preached in the open air, in farm houses, in barns, in hired halls, in chapels, and wherever a few could be gathered." How serious are we about trying to communicate the gospel today? (Consider your church, small group, yourself). What holds us back? How might we do this more effectively?
- Has your church ever planted a new church? Might it do so in the future? What would be the next step if so?
- What do you know about the founding story of your church? How might that inform the mission you are called to today and into the future?

In the small book *The Great Emergence*, author Phyllis Tickle dialogues with the notion that “about every five hundred years the people of God feel compelled to hold a giant rummage or garage sale. And...we are living in and through one of those five-hundred-year sales.” Between those reviews and renewals, roughly every 500 years, smaller garage cleaning happens too. The 19th Century origins of the Restoration or Stone Campbell movement, particularly on the American mid-western frontier is one of those. A simple, uncluttered New Testament Christianity resulted from a dissatisfaction with a formal European ‘religion’ that had been initially imposed on the first cities of America—Boston, New York, Philadelphia etc.—and then on those in the wild frontier. These are our roots: frontier, pioneering, radical, maybe a little rebellious and innovative.

True to our movement DNA, we seek to be in constant renewal. Thus we have periodic reviews, leading to personal and corporate renewal, as the Spirit leads. The following is adapted from a blogpost I wrote in 2010:

“Often the global collection of churches of which we are a part is known as the Restoration Movement. It’s an interesting concept. But an important question is what are we restoring?”

One of the underlying feelings expressed way back at the 2010 Churches of Christ Vic/Tas Dreaming Day conversations was that of refreshment and renewal; that God is up to something in Churches of Christ.

Renewal is a good word actually. Maybe Churches of Christ could better be seen as a ‘renewal’ movement rather than a ‘restoration’ movement.

It seems that the purpose of ‘restoration’ for the founders of Churches of Christ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to facilitate renewal within the church, as it sought to be a group of God’s people living out and proclaiming God’s Kingdom in a changing mission context. Historically this renewal seemed to have as much to do with church governance, as it did with doctrine and practice. A goal of that renewal was the formation of alive and dynamic, simple and uncluttered, reasonable and spirit-led communities led by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as described in the scriptures (and in particular the New Testament) rather than organisations being confined by the systems and the traditions of the ‘denominations’ from which the movement emerged.

The five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11-16 became central, as God’s Spirit released all people into ministry and mission, not only those who were paid to do it. This shook up old power and political structures, in the same way that the events of Pentecost did. The Good News of Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world was once again in the hearts and minds and mouths of the ‘common people’, out in the streets and lanes and town squares, and out of ‘Temple’ and ‘synagogue’. It became a faith of and for the road, rather than a faith found in a building visited on holy-days or holidays.

This is a renewal we need God to continue doing among us.

The emphasis then was on the direct renewal of the Christian church by God. This had great relevance on the frontiers of the mid-west of the US in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and it has resonance with us, as we continue to work out what it means to follow Jesus on the ‘crazy’, constantly changing frontiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Then as now, old language and old ways that were relevant for another culture and another time have been marginalised and caricatured. Then as now, renewal must come from God; it must be an action of the Spirit rather than a scheme or conspiracy of man.

To repeat, this is a renewal we need God to continue doing among us.”<sup>10</sup>

Churches of Christ aspire to be a Kingdom movement.

“A Kingdom movement is a community of disciples who passionately seek the expansion of God’s reign here on earth through the reproduction of disciples, seeking the transformation of whatever places they inhabit.”

“Missionary movements communicate the truth about God and salvation to others. They teach followers a new way of life that accords with that truth. The purpose of a missionary movement is that people accept the message, begin to follow Jesus, share him with others, and form new communities of faith that become partners in the spread of the gospel.”

Movements are started when there is *dissatisfaction* with the current state of play; a *dissident* (or group of dissidents) emerge who imagine another way; they *declare* that new way through a statement or manifesto which becomes the new *message and method* for the dissident group; and a *movement* coalesces around this new thinking and practices. Intentional care and action must be taken to ensure that over time the movement doesn’t lose its way, suffer mission drift, become moribund, and solidify into a **monument** to past dreams and past dreamers.

Church planter and movement theorist Steve Addison suggests there are several key characteristics of a movement<sup>11</sup>. They are each evident in the commencement, continuation, and renewal of a movement: White hot faith, commitment to a cause, contagious relationships, rapid mobilisation, and adaptive methods. Periodic reviews will be a way of examining how, as a Renewal Movement we are living out these key characteristics; forming an integral part of the renewal we need God to continue doing among us...

*Paul Cameron is Executive Officer of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania.*

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from ‘Changing the Conversation’ for the CCVT Renewal Challenge Regional Conversations in August 2015

<sup>11</sup> Movements that Change the World, IVP, 2011

## Questions for discussion

- Paul describes a goal of Churches of Christ in its early days as “the formation of alive and dynamic, simple and uncluttered, reasonable and spirit-led communities led by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as described in the scriptures.” What might such communities look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?<sup>12</sup>
- Reflect on Mark 2 and the metaphor of ‘new wineskins’. What might need to change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century church? What needs to be retained?
- “The five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4:11-16 became central as God’s Spirit released all people into ministry and mission.” Read this passage together, and discuss what stands out to you. How is your congregation doing at mobilising all people? How might it be more effective?
- “Renewal must come from God; it must be an action of the Spirit rather than a scheme or conspiracy of man.” How can we attune well to the Spirit? What is the place of prayer in renewal? What might God be saying to our congregation? To our movement more broadly? To me?
- Steve Addison claims movements are characterised by “white hot faith, commitment to a cause, contagious relationships, rapid mobilisation, and adaptive methods.” Does your congregation feel and behave like it is part of a movement? What might be its weakest area out of these five? Strongest?

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<sup>12</sup> A multiplicity of models of “church” (missional communities) are emerging at present. It may be that one model eventually dominates. Perhaps the result of Phyllis Tickle’s “rummage sale” analogy is a “mixed market” of church styles, that reflect the different kinds of communities we are called to reach as the people of God. A number of organisations that are experimenting with forms of church and mission can be seen in the links here. There are of course many more!  
<http://freshexpressionsus.org/> <http://www.newparish.org/> <http://wearesoma.com/> <http://www.3dmovements.com/>  
<http://www.messychurch.org.uk/> <http://www.dpci.org/> <http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/>

Thank you for interest in “Churches of Christ as a Renewal Movement”. We trust the stories told and questions raised will trigger ongoing interest in the Churches of Christ heritage, and deepen your discernment around God’s calling for our church family today.

*“Don’t despise history, for without it there will be no anchor for our present and no compass for our future” (Bagandan proverb)*

*Remember the days of old;  
consider the generations long past.  
Ask your father and he will tell you,  
your elders, and they will explain to you.  
Deuteronomy 32:7*

*Look to the LORD and his strength;  
seek his face always.  
12 Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.  
I Chronicles 16:11 – 12*



**Churches of Christ in Australia**

1st Floor, 582 Heidelberg Road

Fairfield Vic 3078

T | 03 9488 8800 F | 03 9481 8543

W | [www.cofcaustralia.org](http://www.cofcaustralia.org)

FB | [www.facebook.com/churchesof.christnational](http://www.facebook.com/churchesof.christnational)

More background on Churches of Christ and resources for mission can be found at [cofcaustralia.org](http://cofcaustralia.org) and on the Church of Christ website of your state.