

AUSSIE MISSION
Strategy Proposal for New Church Plant
Wollongong, Australia
Summer 2008

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1. THE TEAM

The Aussie Mission Team is comprised of the Griffith, Mullins, and Whaley families. The three families met while taking classes at Harding University Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee. All three families have committed to moving to Wollongong, Australia in the summer of 2008.

2. THE VISION

Our dream is big. We dream beyond five years, beyond ten. We dream beyond the city of Wollongong. Our dream is both local and global. It is not possible for us to touch every corner of this city. But through our relationships, and the people we touch, we hope to be both planters and senders of the Word. Imagine the global affect in a multi-national, multi-ethnic city like Wollongong! We pray that because of God's power, Wollongong and its people will never be the same. This is our vision of Christians beginning to scatter seeds of the Gospel throughout Wollongong, Australia.

Being Sent

We see congregations sending our team to represent Christ to the people of Wollongong, Australia. We will arrive and quickly begin engaging in friendships, primarily with people in the Dapto and Horsley neighborhoods. Through these relationships, God will use us to demonstrate our Christian faith by using our various spiritual gifts to serve him and empower unbelievers to do the same, to become who they were created to be.

Planting, Making Disciples

Pursuing ways to bring the church to our neighbors and friends, our informal outreach groups will engage the community with the Gospel—the story of God's actions from beginning to end. These groups are a place where people can share their lives with others, where they can pray, laugh, learn, be loved, and most importantly, encounter the character of God.

Watering, Feeding Sheep

Through encounters in these dynamic outreach groups, individuals and groups of friends will come face to face with the Word of God and many will become Christian family through the womb of baptism. They will join us in the mission of God and begin meeting together weekly with other Christians in Sunday groups. These are small communities of Christians that meet together for communion, encouragement, accountability, and discipleship in the way of Christ. It is in the Sunday groups that the future leaders of the church in Wollongong will practice, grow, and mature for the sake of God's lost people.

Multipling

As we grow, we will reproduce. As new saints are born by God's grace, they will begin gathering friends in their own homes to share in times of worship and encouragement. They will tell the story of God, confess sins, share struggles and thanksgivings, and pray for one another.

Permeating

Outreach groups form pockets where God's Reign permeates the subcultures within the larger community with his love and holiness. Sunday groups share communion and devote themselves to teaching one another.

Celebrating

Larger gatherings help the house churches and the public community to witness the universal reality of God's worth in monthly celebration worship services. We are part of something bigger than ourselves. Celebration services remind us that we are all servants of God scattered throughout the city and the world.

Training Leaders

The networks that share leadership across the different discipleship groups will form a unifying structure, a place where leaders gather for fresh input, spiritual retreats, and theological education. New leaders will train each other as they share encouragement and pray for new leaders.

Sending Again

As the outreach groups grow and gather into newer Sunday groups, and as new leaders emerge, God will encourage and empower those leaders to reach into newer circles of the community. Eventually, the whole network will find it compelling to send new ambassadors into newer communities so that through them, God might make his appeal for those new people to be reconciled to him.

3. MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to help the people of Wollongong become who they were created to be.

4. DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS

We believe God works in the lives of all people. We are all God's children, even those who are lost, but God works to draw us into fellowship and service. God pursues us for a purpose. He works to reconcile and transform relationships in the lives of all people. (Luke 15; Ruth; Jonah-Ninevites; John 4)

We believe God forms His people into catalysts that creatively and distinctively engage the world for the sake of its transformation. The world is not yet right, but God uses His people as agents of righteous change. Through organizing His people, God breathes new life into them. (Ezekiel 37:1-10; Psalm 104:29-30)

We believe God empowers His people by the power of His indwelling Spirit. He empowers us to take the light of the good news into lives in darkness, to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. God's power is at work within us. (Joshua 1:7-9; John 16; Ephesians 3:14-21)

5. CORE VALUES

We will be known for these values. When people join us in the adventure of becoming who they were created to be, these values become a part of their lives. And when they say, "This is *our church*," it will be because they value *wonder, transformation, authenticity, empowerment, and compassion*. Our time and money will be spent expressing these values and these values will drive our mission so that we might realize the vision that God has given us.

Wonder

We are in awe and wonder at the vastness of God's Kingdom and the dramatic life He has revealed. God amazes us; he is above all, yet close and personal. Who God is and what God does is often beyond our comprehension, but we know His character of grace and truth. Since God has sought relationship with us and given us His promise in the Scriptures, we accept God as Father and Lord with a great sense of wonder. We desire to be part of His drama which He is still directing and in which He invites all creation to take part. We hope that our daily worship and lifestyle communicate this thirst we have for God and demonstrate the adventure that it is to follow His Son. (Isaiah 6:1-5; Psalm 104:31-35; Ecclesiastes 3:10-15; 5:18-20; 7:13-14; 9:1-10; James 1:17-18)

Transformation

We strive to walk alongside the Holy Spirit on His journey to transform our community and ourselves into the image of Jesus. Through the power of God we believe our life and those we meet will continually and increasingly honor God. We certainly live in an ever-changing culture, but we want our lives to change so that they reflect those earliest Christian communities who were close to Jesus. We hope our conversion, communion, and worship reveals God's character and His guidance in our lives. Our goal is to grow in Christ-likeness by receiving His nourishment and direction through spiritual disciplines practiced in our Christian community. (Matthew 5:13-48; Romans 12; Matthew 6:10; 1 Peter 1:17-25, 2:9-11)

Authenticity

God is open and honest with us. He bore His heart through His Son and continues to bare it out to us through the indwelling of His Spirit. So, desiring to be authentic, we bare our hearts to Him and to each other. We recognize God's character and confess the sin in our lives that His word and deed bring to light. We make it our goal to listen to each other with acceptance, mercy, and support. We make it our goal to apologize sincerely when we sin and we forgive thoroughly when someone sins against us. We value trusting relationships that foster confession and accountability in the presence of God. (1 John 1:5-10; Psalm 51; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; 7:16-18, 29; Isaiah 6:6-7; Luke 18:9-14; Ephesians 4:25; James 4:11-12; 5:15-16; Daniel 9:3-19)

Empowerment

In Jesus, God sent the good news of His favor and power over death. Now, people in bondage are released and people who are weak, God makes strong. We too were in bondage and weak, but God has empowered us, so we empower others. Not that we are perfect, but we want to be the pen which God uses to write the story of multitudes in

Wollongong being freed and strengthened and in turn becoming instruments themselves. We believe God empowers through learning so we teach and encourage each other. (Joshua 1:7-9; Ephesians 3:20; 4:7-16; 2 Corinthians 4:1, 10-12, 16)

Compassion

We believe that God's ways tend to turn our power structures upside-down. God's dramatic kingdom seems upside down to nations that love possessions, but we submit to His reign over us by giving to others. In this submission, we show mercy to the least before the greatest because that is the way of Jesus. We strive to follow the humble way of Jesus by sharing life with the humble and by learning humility from them. We don't give from guilty motives, but out of gratitude and thankfulness. God created us all to be in the drama together. It's who we were created to be. (Luke 10:25-37)

6. THE PEOPLE

Christianity in Australia is declining. According to surveys done by the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), the percentage of Australians attending church at least monthly was as follows:¹

- 1960 – 41%
- 1980 – 25%
- 2000 – 20%

NCLS surveys also showed the percentage of Australians attending church weekly dropped in just a five-year period from 9.9% in 1996 to 8.8% in 2001.² What these numbers show is that Australia is following a pattern that has been observed in many Western countries over the past fifty years—they are transitioning into a Post-Christian secular society. Clearly Christianity is not doing well in Australia.

The Restoration Movement in Australia is a small movement of approximately 40,000 members. A cappella churches of Christ make up a minority of that number with less than 3,000 members.³ Despite their small numbers, there is vitality in the movement. The same survey cited above showed that Restoration Movement churches had a higher percentage of members attending weekly services than any other group—74%, (Where as the two largest Australian denominations (Catholic and Anglican) were 15% and 5%). Most of the a cappella churches exist as the result of a wave of American missionary activity in the 1960s and 1970s. The churches of Christ have not sent a mission team to Australia since 1983.

¹ Peter Kaldor et. al. *Build My Church: Trends and Possibilities for Australian Churches* (Sydney: Openbook, 1999), 22.

² Based on a sample of 435,000 church attenders from over 7,000 parishes in 19 denominations. See <http://www.ncls.org.au/>.

³ Graeme Chapman, "The Movement in Australia," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas Foster et. al., eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 47-53.

The city of Wollongong lies on the East Coast of Australia, about 52 miles south of Sydney. With a metropolitan population of approximately 275,000 people, Wollongong ranks as the third largest city in the state of New South Wales (NSW), and the tenth largest city in the nation. The city lies on a narrow coastal plain, bordered on the east by the Pacific Ocean and on the west by a sandstone mountain range. Wollongong, meaning 'Sound of the Sea', is the central city of the Illawara region. Information gathered by the team on a survey trip to Wollongong indicates that the national average for church involvement holds true for the city. Meaning somewhere between 80 and 90 percent of the population of Wollongong is unchurched. There are currently ten to fifteen people that have moved to Wollongong who are associated with the churches of Christ.

"We are one, but we are many. And from all the worlds on earth we've come . . ."

The spirit of this Australian folk song echoes in the voices of the people that make up Wollongong. A high percentage of residents have southern European ancestries. Many from Macedonia, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, have made their home in Wollongong. Recent years have shown an increase in immigrants from Vietnam, Lebanon, Iran, Portugal, Spain, Africa, South America, and Bosnia. And even more recently, there has been a large influx of people, especially young families, moving from Sydney. These 'commuter families' are drawn by lower real estate prices, less traffic congestion, and the peacefulness and beauty of Wollongong. The University of Wollongong is a major university that brings both local and international students to the area.⁴

Wollongong has not escaped the problems that grieve many of our cities – depression, high suicide rates, broken homes, and religious apathy. In addition to these, and others, Wollongong ranks as having one of Australia's highest unemployment rates and drug dependency rates. Thousands of people do not know their Creator. 'Religion' is typically reserved for birth, marriage and death. A relationship with God is simply not on their radar. We, however, have a message of hope, of sustenance, of truth, and of reconciliation. Perhaps they don't know it, but we believe that the city of Wollongong *needs* Christians to live and work among the people and penetrate this spiritual darkness. We believe that God's power *can* and *will* transform families, neighborhoods, cities, states, and nations. And we intend to be catalysts who uncover the reality of God's Kingdom in their midst. We believe people will be transformed as they begin to perceive God's intended purpose for their lives.

Focus People

We want to focus our initial relationships on a more specific group of people. We intend to plant a church in zip code 2530, a five-kilometer radius comprising the neighborhoods of Horsley and Dapto. This is the fastest growing area of the city, with new families moving in daily. These are our people.

We intend to focus on relationships with young professionals (single and families) ages 18-40. Our people are multi-cultural and cross-sectional (economic) peers. They may include live-at-home college students or transitional people moving in to start having

⁴ Note that over 15,000 students attend the Illawara Institute in Wollongong for technical and further education.
http://www.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au/corp_info/TAFE_Illawarra_AR_2005_web.pdf

children. We expect multi-ethnic/cultural people to be living within our greater target, and we will be attentive to how God is working among them. Though our group evangelistic efforts will allow people in the same specific ethnic group to come to faith in Christ, we expect the discipleship groups to be diverse and multi-ethnic. We will focus on the people involved in community through sports, school, and service.

7. THE STRUCTURE

In America, many people *go to church*. For most of us this means driving to a church building on Sunday, but in Australia, most people don't *go to church*, not even if they believe in Jesus. For most Australians the idea of going to church is associated with being part of an irrelevant institution that is out of touch with real life. And for many others, church is associated with a corrupt institution that is just trying to get money or power. This attitude results in a population of people that is de-churched, un-churched, and anti-church. Because of this, many believers are disconnected from any kind of faith community, resulting in spiritual isolation, and many more that have no faith at all, resulting in cynicism and despair. *We believe that, in spite of the darkness, God is at work calling his people to get involved in the lives of the people of Australia—calling on them to join in the adventure of becoming who they were created to be.* Our mission is to bring the gospel to Australia in a way that breaks down the wall that has been erected between the church and the people of Australia. This means that instead of expecting people to *go to church*, we must pursue ways to bring the church to them.

The Front Door

One medium that we will use is a network of informal, home-based groups throughout the community.⁵ These outreach groups will meet on weeknights in people's homes and will allow people from the community to form relationships with Christians in a non-threatening atmosphere where people don't feel they have to be perfect to belong. These groups will be a place where people can share their lives with others, where they can pray, laugh, learn, be loved, and most importantly, encounter the character of God. These groups will, in effect, be the front door to the Church, where the people of Australia meet the people of God. Home group leaders will mentor their members, and encourage those that become disciples to start their own groups. This does not mean that the new group leaders must leave their original group; instead, they start their group on a different night of the week so they can continue to meet with the original group they formed relationships with, and continue to be encouraged and mentored by their group leader.

The House Church

We believe that through the encounters that people have in the outreach groups many will want to join with us in the mission of God. Those that make this decision will continue to meet with their weeknight home group, but they will also need mentoring and support from more mature disciples. They will receive this by meeting together on Sundays with other Christians in slightly larger Sunday groups. A Sunday group will be a community of Christians that meets together for communion, edification, accountability, and

⁵ We will use the term "outreach" or occasionally "mission" to describe these kind of groups.

discipleship in the way of Christ.⁶ It is in the Sunday groups that the future leaders of the Church in Australia will grow and mature. The ultimate goal for the group is to become a mature body of believers that is ready to send out committed disciples to plant new churches in new places for new people.

Celebration Service & Unifying Structure

As the church grows into multiple Sunday groups, we will need a network to keep the groups connected. The groups will be networked in two ways. The first way is the celebration service. The celebration service will be a monthly (or quarterly) meeting of all the Sunday groups for a time of praise, worship, and encouragement. The church will most likely meet at a park or a rented building for this event. The second way that the church will be networked is a unifying structure. A unifying structure is something that the various groups will operate in common which will facilitate greater flow of information between them, as well as the training of new leaders. One possible unifying structure would be to have a ministry house that the house churches could use for such things as marriage seminars, leadership classes, and retreats. Whatever the unifying structure is, it must fit the culture and lifestyle of Australians, it must be self operated, and (eventually) self supported. This is so the network of house churches can continue to grow and thrive after the initial church planting team has left. Because the unifying structure will be adapted to the local culture, we cannot be certain what form it will take until the emerging Australian leadership of our Sunday groups gets involved in its planning.

8. THE STRATEGY

Evangelism

We plan to take a multifaceted approach to evangelism. The foundation of our evangelistic method is the command, “love your neighbor.” This starts with showing our new friends and neighbors basic hospitality through sharing meals, hosting barbecues, and sharing many “cups o’ tea.”

Since we will be looking for people who already care about their community and are involved in serving others, volunteer work will also be a major point of contact for the team. Each of the full-time members of our team will do some sort of community service activity (e.g. Wollongong Youth Services, etc.) on a weekly basis.

We will also use hobby/interest groups (e.g. clubs and organizations) as a way to meet people from the community. It is through these groups that we hope to reach into the various friend networks that make up the subcultures of our neighborhoods. Which groups the team gets involved with will depend on the different interests of individual team members (some that have come up so far: adventure sports, soccer club, discussion groups, sewing clubs, and book clubs).

Given the large immigrant population in Wollongong, it is likely that some of the team members will also use Let’s Start Talking, or other ESL curriculum to meet people

⁶ This is what most of us would call “church.” But since the word church has a lot of negative baggage in Australia, we use the term Sunday group instead.

from these communities. Out of these contacts we envision house churches starting within multiple ethnic communities.

Our outreach groups will be the primary way that the contacts we make through neighbors, volunteer work, hobby groups, and ESL classes plug into the faith community. They are the front door to our church. It is in the home groups that we will develop deeper relationships with those we meet. To help facilitate this, we will use discussion curriculum that is specially designed to get Christians and non-Christians involved in conversation on spiritual subjects in a non-threatening way (e.g. H2O videos, Alpha courses, etc.).⁷ It may work better for some groups to use Scripture as the center of dialogue, reading it and simply asking the questions, “What does this reveal about God? What does this reveal about humanity’s intended purpose?”

Discipleship

As people come to Christ through the weeknight home groups, they will need to be plugged into a community of Christians where they can grow and mature in their faith. This is where the Sunday groups come in. These groups will meet every Sunday for a time of worship, encouragement, and instruction.

The worship service will be kept informal and in the vernacular of unbelievers so that it can be the most meaningful and authentic worship possible for our new brothers and sisters. The story of God in Scripture will hold a place of primacy in our worship, whether through song, dialogue, communion, story, or prayer (Colossians 3:16).

Members will be taught the various spiritual disciplines, especially prayer and scripture reading, and encouraged to practice them at home. Members will also be encouraged to join with other disciples of the same gender in small accountability groups.

Leadership training

There are several levels of leadership in any movement, and a church planting movement is no exception. Therefore, a major part of our work will be leadership training.

The first level of leadership is the responsibility of performing particular tasks at a weekly outreach group or discipleship group. This type of leader can be trained through modeling. Modeling is a four-step process: I do it, you watch; I do it, you help; you do it, I help; you do it, I watch.

The second level of leadership is the responsibility of leading an outreach group. Those disciples that show interest and aptitude for this type of leadership will be mentored, trained, and prepared by their outreach group leader to facilitate a group by themselves. This type of leader can be trained through modeling and informal curriculum. We will be developing a curriculum to help facilitate this process.

The third level of leadership includes the responsibility of leading a Sunday group. This level of leadership requires not only interest and aptitude, but also spiritual maturity,

⁷ <http://www.h2ojourney.com>; <http://www.alphaconferences.org>; <http://www.lst.org>.

and a strong knowledge of Scripture. This type of leader will need to have experience leading an outreach group, and will most likely require some semi-formal training in the form of short courses, leadership seminars, etc. Some financial costs may be involved in training. Part-time support would be a likely need. We would encourage this level of leader to be chosen by the members of the Sunday group before time and money are invested in their training and support.

The fourth level of leadership includes the responsibilities of teaching, training, guiding, and mentoring Sunday group leaders. This is a shepherding leadership position that would be performed through, but not limited by, the unifying structure. It would involve various types of oversight, as well as teaching and conducting seminars. This level of leadership most likely would not only require experience leading a Sunday group, but also formal training and part-time to full-time support.⁸ Long-term members of the original team may initially fill these positions of leadership.

9. PHASES AND TIMELINE FOR YEARS 1-4

Phase 1 (0-6 months)

Arrival, settling in, meeting people in the community, begin meeting together on Sunday for worship (initial discipleship group).

Phase 2 (6-24 months)

At around the 9 Month mark, each couple will start hosting a group in their homes on a weeknight. The primary focus for each couple over the following year and a half will be growing their outreach group. As people are led to Christ in the outreach groups they will also begin meeting with the Sunday group.

Phase 3 (24-36 months)

The primary focus over the third year will be to train and prepare Sunday group members to start new Sunday groups.

Phase 4 (36-48 months)

Original Sunday group reaches point of needing to divide into multiple Sunday groups. The 36-48 month mark is only a projection. Our primary goal is not to conform to a timeline, but to make disciples. We desire to use our time efficiently and do as much as we can in the time that we have. However, each stage will depend on the readiness of the church—and new endeavors will only happen after much prayer and preparation.

Phase 5 (48 months and beyond)

Repeat process: Meet people, Host outreach groups, Empower new groups/emerging leaders, Birth new Sunday groups.

⁸ This support would naturally come from local Christians in Australia.