



Historical Society

of the Uniting Church
in South Australia

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NEWSLETTER
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CONTENTS

Editorial	Page 2
Two Coming Events	2
History Walk—by car!	3
New Book release	3
Separation of Church and State in South Australia by Hon Stephen Wade MLC	4
Workshop—How to present the history of your local church	5
Adelaide Youth Convention 1957	6
Book Review— <i>The History of Epworth Building</i>	7
Anyone for tennis?	8

EDITORIAL

People see a fifty year time-span, or multiples of the same, as being worthy of celebration in many areas of life. For example, life together in marriage for fifty years is worthy of Golden Wedding Celebrations. All sorts of organisations – from local churches to sporting clubs – take the opportunity to celebrate 50, 100, 150 years of existence. This is the common thread of quite a number of items in this newsletter.

An important book, *The Paradise of Dissent*, was published fifty years ago in 1957. It told the story of early South Australia in great detail, and so well, that the author, Douglas Pike, received the high honour of D.Litt from the University of Adelaide for his efforts. The book told the story of South Australia from the beginnings to 1857, when Responsible Government was formally established in the colony. In 2007 this event has been remembered again.

One of the chief reasons for seeing South Australia as “Paradise of Dissent” was the hotly debated subject of the relationship between church and State. The Hon. Graham Wade MLC has written about this issue from a 2007 perspective, 150 years after the acceptance of the South Australian Constitution.

The second Australian National Youth Convention was held in Adelaide in 1957. It gained quite an extensive press coverage at the time, and made a significant impact on the Methodist Church. How is it remembered 50 years later?

A centenary of a tennis club that began under the auspices of the Methodist Church has also been celebrated this year. Sporting clubs have had an important place in Church youth activities, especially in the past. What is the present situation?

The subject of Ordination in the Uniting Church has been opened up for discussion again among people in ministry. Some of those who were ordained in 1957 by the Methodist Church have recently celebrated their 50 years of ministry that had been authorised in this way. In what ways have perceptions changed during fifty years? Hopefully that is a topic we will be able to tackle in our next Newsletter.

May such highlights in personal and community life be remembered, and their significance continue to be celebrated appropriately.

Kevin Secomb

TWO COMING EVENTS

- **CHARLES WESLEY TRICENTENARY HYMN FEST**
To be held in Kent Town Uniting Church
On Sunday, 20th May at 4 p.m.
ALL WELCOME!
- **OPEN DAY AT THE HISTORY CENTRE**
As part of History Week, the Centre will be open
WEDNESDAY, 23rd MAY FROM 10 A.M. TO 4 P.M.
When special displays will be featured.

HISTORY WALK, 5th MAY 2007 – BY CAR!

In September 2001, people toured the Gawler Plains, visiting Methodist historic sites. The weather was most unkind. As a result there was not much opportunity to examine many of the sites with any more than a fleeting look.

Another expedition is planned for Saturday 5th May. (Note the date because there has been some confusion). While we are all hoping for drought-breaking rain, we hope it will not be on that particular day!

The leader will again be Rev Ted Curnow, who has made a study of early Methodist Church life in the area, especially that of Burton Primitive Methodist Church.

People making the tour are asked to gather at the Burton Pioneer Cemetery, Bolivar Road, Paralowie. Time of departure is 1.30 sharp, so punctuality is a matter of top priority. The tour will be completed by 4.30 – 5 pm. If you wish, you can enjoy your own picnic lunch before the tour commences.

Enclosed is a notice which can be placed on your local church noticeboard.

Separation of Church and State in South Australia

By Hon Stephen Wade MLC

In this year when South Australia celebrates the 150th anniversary of responsible government, Liberal MLC Stephen Wade reflects on one of the achievements of the pioneers of our State.

In 1851, South Australia was the first part of the British Empire to separate Church and State.

Our forebears were solid in their commitment to build a Christian society in the colony, but they differed markedly on how that could be done. Some saw the church as fundamental to growing a civilised society and thereby worthy of state support—what was called state aid for religion. For others, financial support for religious purposes compromised the respective roles of the state and the church. These people promoted what was called the voluntary principle.

Let me sketch for you the history of this development. The Act which established the colony of South Australia in 1836 made provision for the appointment of chaplains, although this clause was repealed in 1838. During Governor Gawler's term of office between 1838 and 1841, he failed to convince ministers from various denominations to support his proposals to heavily reduce the price of land if purchased for the support and maintenance of religion.

Governor Robe wanted religion to be supported out of the local revenues of South Australia. In his address to the Legislative Council on 24 June 1846 he said:

South Australia is the most backward of all the colonies of the British Empire in providing from its public revenues for the means of worshipping. Let it no longer be a reproach upon the government of the province having control over

the public finances.

Both camps were active. A number of petitions were presented to council, including one containing nearly 2,000 signatures which opposed state aid. Only half the council was elected at this stage and the Governor had the casting vote. Robe's measure was carried and allocations were made to Christians and Jews.

In response to this decision, the League for the Preservation of Religious Freedom was revived. This group highlights the key point that the campaign against state aid for religion was not motivated by opposition to religion—religious people saw the dangers of state-run religion. The League's manifesto was published in 1849 and was signed by 19 non-conformist churchmen. It read, in part:

The evils involved in the principle of state support to religion have been sufficiently obvious to most, if not all, of you in the Mother Country. It has impeded the spread of Christian principle by requiring mere outward observations as though they were essential and all-important. It has corrupted religion by making it formal, and weakened the state by compelling it to persecute, and wherever carried out to its legitimate consequences it has proved an effectual bar to the advance of the community in any of the paths of social or material progress. Judged by its fruit it is condemned by the voices of experience from the first moment of its adoption to the present time.

In January 1951 a new Constitution for the province arrived in South Australia and two-thirds of the council by this time was nominated by the colonists. For the first time the colony had an

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election, and state aid to religion was a central issue in the 1851 election. Supporters of the voluntary principle were well supported, and in late 1851 the Legislative Council defeated Governor Robe's State Support to Religion Bill by a majority of three. The full debate was published in the *Adelaide Times* newspaper of 30 August 1851.

South Australia has set a noble example to the other colonies of this southern empire and it is one, we trust, they will not be slow to follow.

South Australia was the first British colony to achieve the separation of church and state—an issue that is still debated in the Mother Country 150 years later. Having said that, both the church and the state evolve and South Australia needs to strive to maintain an appropriate relationship between the church and the state.

From my perspective one of the greatest threats to an appropriate

balance is from those who deny the legitimacy of religious-based views in public debate. The principle of separation of church and state is not the separation of religion from politics.

Other matters that highlight the contemporary relevance of this issue include the Commonwealth's proposal to provide chaplains in schools, church opposition to the Iraq war, government contracting for welfare and employment services, and the *Equal Opportunity Act* currently before the Parliament.

Mutual respect and cooperation, yet with separation, are important for the health of both the church and the state.

WORKSHOP: HOW TO PRESENT THE HISTORY OF YOUR LOCAL CHURCH.

WHEN: Saturday morning September 15th, 10.00 – 12.30

WHERE: UNITING CHURCH HISTORY CENTRE
44a East Avenue, Black Forest.

LEADER: Rev Dr Dean Eland (an experienced local church historian)
And

TEAM He will be assisted by a panel of speakers who will share how they have gone about producing the history of their own congregations. Plenty of opportunity to ask questions and to discover the resources available through the History Centre.

PARTICIPANTS: People involved in planning special celebrations, eg Reunions Anniversaries, Final Services.
People who have the task of producing books or booklets of local church histories.
People concerned about the need to conserve the history of the local churches within the context of the wider church.

ENROLMENT (and queries)

Dean Eland: email; info@urbannetwork.org.au;
phone 8172 2133
by 8th September if possible

THE ADELAIDE YOUTH CONVENTION 1957

By common consent the Second National Christian Youth Convention held in Adelaide, January 6-13, 1957, was a great success. From all quarters and from all age-groups have come words of strong approval and deep gratitude for an event which has been an inspiration to thousands of people and the turning-point in the lives of many.

These words were written by Rev C T Symons, Director of the Methodist Young People's Department in South Australia a month after the event.

After fifty years, does that summing up still ring true?

The Convention attracted more than 2000 young people from Australia and overseas countries such as Papua New Guinea, New Zealand as well as people from Pacific islands and South-East Asia. In addition the week-night meetings were completely augmented by Adelaide people, thus completely filling the Showgrounds Centennial Hall with more than 5000 people. On the Saturday night a spectacular "Cavalcade of Christian Youth" was staged at Norwood Oval in association with the Mission to the Nation campaign, as Australia-wide movement which had been sponsored by the Australasian Methodist General Conference a few years prior to the Convention.

The final Service of Thanksgiving was held in Centennial Hall on Sunday, January 13th. By the end of the week some 400 young people had made their commitment to the cause of Christ and his Church. What had impressed people so deeply?

The choice of the main speaker was of utmost importance to the whole process. It soon became obvious

that the Rev William Gowland, a British Methodist, was not only a fine speaker but a man of action as well. The fact that he practised what he preached made a big impression on all who attended. He came as the man who had initiated the work of industrial chaplaincy on behalf of the Methodist Church in the United Kingdom. As the founder of the Luton Industrial Mission he had a great deal of first-hand knowledge which authenticated his challenging message. In addition, a book recently written by Gowland was made available to delegates in paperback format at a very modest price to all who wanted more background information.

The impact of William Gowland's visit was not confined to the Convention site. He took the opportunity to meet workers in the local factories as well as union leaders. By the middle of the week William Gowland and the Convention had attracted considerable media attention.

His visit came at the time when South Australia was embracing major developments in industry at places like Elizabeth and Whyalla, during the Playford era of Government. Gowland's message was therefore very relevant in such an era.

In addition, he challenged the Church to rid itself of its complacency. The time had come to recast the Gospel message and move outside the conventional boundaries of church life. That was what Gowland himself was doing, and he was inviting his listeners to join him. There were those who undoubtedly responded. How have they carried through with their resolve from 1957 to 2007?

It is hoped that some attention can be given to this question during this 50th year by means of a reunion event that is presently being planned.

The organiser of the Con-

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vention 50 years ago (Rev George Martin) would like to hear from anyone who was involved in those days so that information can be collated regarding the Convention and its contribution to personal and Church life over the years.

Martin by email:
freeman1@chariot.net.au

Contact may be made with George

BOOK REVIEW

The History of Epworth Building (Unley, SA, Media Com, 2006) Hardback

Number 33 Pirie Street, was an address firmly etched in the minds of many Methodists for generations. It was the site of Epworth Building, the home of Methodist Church offices and, more importantly for those of us who are avid readers, the Epworth Book Depot.

In 2003, the building was put up for sale and was bought by Mr. George Charitopoulos. The exterior of the building has so far remained unchanged, so those who still remember many visits to it can refresh their memories every time they pass by on their way to the Uniting Church building much further along Pirie Street.

Jim Everett, a former Secretary of the Epworth Building Board, has tackled the huge pile of materials relating to the history of the site and the various buildings it has had over 142 years. He has reduced it all to a very readable narrative. The names of those most closely associated with the Epworth Building and its construction and management have been carefully recorded from the time the idea was first mooted in 1924 to the farewell function on Sunday, 28th September 2003.

In a very real sense, Epworth Building will continue to serve the Church through the sale proceeds being directed into a new body, Epworth Trust (SA) Incorporated. Meanwhile the period when Epworth Building served the Church well has been well documented by Jim Everett.

As Peter Rumbelow, last Chairman of Epworth Building Inc. writes in the Foreword to the book:

This book has been commissioned by the Trust to ensure that the important part played by the building in the life of our church is preserved, and the dedication of those who served as Board members or staff is recognised.

We are grateful to Jim Everett for his painstaking research and empathy with the building. I am sure that all who read it will gain an insight into the role the building played in our history.

I heartily endorse those sentiments.

Kevin Secomb.

ANYONE FOR TENNIS?

The John Wesley Tennis Club has just celebrated its centenary. It is the biggest and most successful tennis club in Strathalbyn, a country town south of Adelaide.

Although the club may have had its start in 1905, by 1907 it was definitely up and running as a fully-fledged organization. In those days it was part of the Methodist Church, with two courts next to the church building. Over the years other churches in the town also sponsored tennis clubs for varying periods of time. But it is the John Wesley Tennis Club that has gone the distance, and is still strong today.

It started out as the Methodist Tennis Club and for many years regularly fielded teams in the district Tennis Association. Then came Church Union in 1977. The decision was made for the Uniting Church to base its activities at the Presbyterian property. This involved the sale of the Methodist property, including the land that had been used by the tennis club.

The members of the club at that time refused to let it simply go out of existence. They sought alternative ways of continuing, sharing courts with other clubs in the district through annual temporary arrangements.

Through sheer persistence the club survived. Much of it was due to the efforts of one man. He joined the Methodist Church in 1958 during the ministry of Rev Ray Nixon. Being in his late twenties he needed to find an alternative to a previous rather aimless life of driving around in cars with his mates and spending a lot of time at the pub. He decided to try his hand at tennis. It was hard work mastering the necessary skills but he persevered. In his mid-seventies today he is still playing tennis and encouraging young people of the area to do the same.

The breakthrough for the club came when an agreement was forged with the winter netball club to share facilities. With eight courts available over summer the John Wesley Tennis Club now has a membership of sixty adults and sixty juniors with teams in all available grades.

The club is no longer church-related, except that some members still attend regularly. The Church's contribution was the back-stop netting from the old courts.

Sports teams were a regular feature of local church life in the past, but are much rarer today. Perhaps an historian will take a much closer look at the subject one of these days.

Meanwhile, the John Wesley Tennis Club continues in full swing at Strathalbyn. Perhaps John Wesley, who said, "The world is my parish" would not have minded his name being associated with it after all.

**UNITING CHURCH HISTORY CENTRE
44a EAST AVENUE, BLACK FOREST, 5035
Open to public: Wednesdays, 1—4 p.m.**