

# TOOWOOMBA COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

INTERPRETIVE HISTORY TO DATE

Published May 2015

At TCBC, our desire, with God's help, is to encourage, enable and equip each other to be salt and light at home, in the marketplace, and to the margins.

# An Interpretive History of Toowoomba Community Baptist Church

## How Did We Get Here?

This document is not meant to be a comprehensive chronological history of Toowoomba Community Baptist Church (TCBC). Creating that written history may one day fall to someone far better informed than this writer.

Rather, the purpose of this document is to give those currently involved at TCBC a window into the journey over the years from a "Sabbath School of six teachers and 21 scholars meeting at the Oddfellows Hall in Ruthven Street on April 4th, 1875" (Doc 5) to the church today of over 400, meeting in a multimillion dollar complex – and still seeking how best to fulfil the vision of "At TCBC our desire, with God's help, is to encourage, enable and equip each other to be salt and light at home, in the marketplace, and to the margins." What was the motivation behind decisions that shaped the church and what are the implications for today?

The numbered documents referred to throughout this history include newspaper clippings, church pamphlets, previously published "histories" and records of anecdotal comments. Copies of these documents are held electronically and on paper file in the church office.

## Growth (Docs 2 and 17)

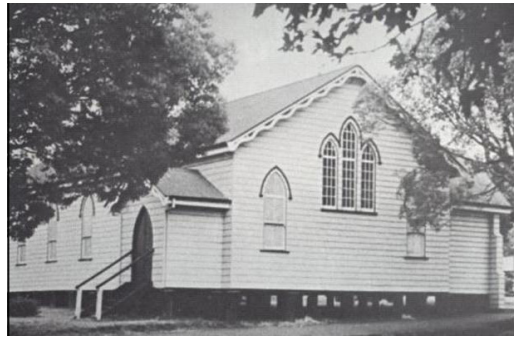
The Toowoomba Baptist Church started with a visit from Rev W Moore in Feb 1875, followed by a meeting held in the home of Deacon David Broadfoot at Harristown. The first baptisms were conducted in "the pond" at Queens' Park in May of the same year and Rev J Macpherson (previously an evangelist in Britain, Ireland and Peru) was invited in July to take oversight. In 1877 a building site in Herries Street was purchased for £70 and the existing cottage for a further £30.

On June 11th, 1887 the fellowship joined the Baptist Association and was formally recognised as "Toowoomba Baptist Church". An article in the Baptist Association magazine in 1881 reported that At Toowoomba, 100 miles from Brisbane, Pastor John Macpherson has been labouring for several years... Years of patient plodding have not been in vain, and now the harvest time seems to have arrived. On every hand the fields look white, and some notorious sinners are enquiring the way to Zion. The township is stirred at last, and the whole neighbourhood seems awakened. The devil is very uneasy about it and has tried to raise a persecution with some success. Not that the persecution has succeeded in staying the tide of blessing: it has rather increased it, and the black prince has had to gnash his teeth

over the loss of some of his staunchest soldiers... Some of the most rowdy of the larrikins sought and found mercy, and many gave their hearts to Jesus.

Rev Macpherson's successor saw a more convenient church building (which later became the church hall) erected on that site at a cost of £450. The deacons had written to C H Spurgeon in London, asking for a pastor, and in 1882, Rev William Higlett arrived. He reported to his friends back in England of this most western of only ten churches in Queensland that it was the vanguard of the Baptists towards the interior ...for over 2000 miles extends the vast "never, never" country. Under Rev Higlett's ministry the debt of the church was paid off, vestries added, and the membership rose from 37 to 84. At that time the population of Toowoomba was between 6000 and 7000.

Yet in 1899 the pastor at the time, Rev J Glover resigned, and the Toowoomba Baptist Church had "fallen into a very low condition", only saved from extinction by the efforts of the Baptist Association and the services of the Preachers' Society. In February, 1900, Rev A G Weller commenced his ministry of 13 years and the church during this time was not only resuscitated, but rose to a congregation of 300, requiring an extension.



Early days.

Services had also been held in the surrounding districts of Gowrie and Highfields. In June of 1879, members residing in Highfields were "dismissed" from TBC to form a separate membership.

Highfields Fellowship began with a multicultural outreach. In 1880, C H Spurgeon's son, Thomas, visited Toowoomba and spoke, at the Royal Assembly Rooms, to between 600 and 700 people (about 10% of the town's then population). Referring to the work at Highfields, he had this to say, "Some time ago I held a meeting in the wild bush or scrub, as we call it, at which over 150 people attended, many being Germans. We assembled in the open air at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and held service until dark, when we adjourned to our little chapel, which could only accommodate half the people. Here we stayed and preached and prayed in German and English until 12 o'clock, when I closed the meeting. After some refreshment I returned to the chapel

and found the people as fervent as ever. The Spirit of God began to work mightily, and we continued pointing the anxious to the Saviour till 3 o'clock in the morning." At various times Highfields has been autonomous or connected to the Toowoomba church.

The next "church plant" was at Rockville, in north Toowoomba, where a Sunday school and services commenced in the early 1950s. A church was formed in 1956 and became autonomous in 1970, under Rev Allen Burgess.

Regular services were also conducted in Dalby from 1948 (or 1949), but these were later taken over by the Evangelistic and Home Mission Committees, leading to a church being erected and opened in May, 1954.



The new church building and hall constructed around the existing facilities on the corner of Hume and Herries Streets.



Celebration service at the opening of the new church at the corner of Hume and Herries Street in 1955.

In North Drayton (now Harristown), between 1953 and 1965, attempts by TBC and Rockville were made to plant a new church, finally dwindling due to lack of support.

South Toowoomba Baptist grew from a Sunday School in 1945 to an autonomous church in 1975, led by Pastor Reg Owen (who had previously been an Associate at Toowoomba Central Baptist). A church plant at "Eastern Heights" (in Esther Street, opposite the Toowoomba State High School, Mt. Lofty) had been attempted from 1954 to 1965 by lay preachers and a minister from TBC who, having made little headway, transferred their efforts to South Toowoomba Baptist. The church building was also transferred to South Toowoomba.

As well as being involved in church plants over the years, the church has been able to partner many missionaries in both Australian and international outreach.

As time passed, electric lights, an organ, sewerage, an entrance porch and a platform for the choir and communion table were added to the Herries Street building; Men's Society and Boy Scouts began; further land was purchased to accommodate an All Age Bible School and a manse was acquired to house an associate pastor.

A new church and hall were built around the existing church on the corner of Hume and Herries Streets in 1954/55. Gifts to the 'Toowoomba Central Baptist War Memorial Church' building fund were tax deductible as the church recognised members who had served in the two World Wars. Current members still have links to names on these Honour Boards which are presently located adjacent to the Prayer Room outside the office. The old church was removed to Trinity Lutheran Church, Hume Street South, and to this day continues to be used in their ministry as their church hall.

Rev Ralph Hodgson (1973-82) conducted a vigorous visitation campaign where every member, adherent and prospect had regular visits, giving personal contact with the minister. Numbers continued to swell over the years and under the oversight of a number of pastors (whose photographs can be found in the current "Vision Room" and "Prayer Room").

After many years of service the building on the corner of Hume and Herries Streets was in turn sold, in July 1994. (The church and hall building, together with the house that was the church office, still exist, and are used as commercial offices, Other development has occurred on the remaining part of the property.) Temporary services were held in the Harristown State High School Assembly Hall and in the old RAAF base (now Village Life) on Drayton Road, until the new building on Glenvale Road was completed. The first service on this current site was held on 22nd October, 1995.



Dedication at Glenvale on 30 July 1995.



Glenvale Road building entrance on 22 October 1995

## Change

A newspaper article (Doc 5) in 1994 writes, "The church congregation has been in the process of significant change over the last 10 years. Previously there was a largely older congregation, now there is a vigorous and growing family ministry with a contemporary worship style. The Sunday celebration ministry has been aided by the musical giftings of the fellowship, including a strong choir group which recently performed well at the local eisteddfod." It goes on to mention a bible school of over 90 students, youth program, playgroup, parenting discussion course, "Chat and Do", friendship mornings for over 60s and young adults' program. The church's purpose, stated in the article, is to "glorify God and celebrate His presence, cultivate personal growth, care for and about others, and communicate Christ to the world".

The slogan at the time of moving and building was "On the Move", and this well described the period of relocating from the centre of town to the developing western suburb of Glenvale. At the new site, the church would be known as "Toowoomba Community Baptist Church", reflecting the desire to both impact and support the local community as well as being a community of believers.

But as we know in churches, we would expect that this path from "one room Sunday school" to community complex

has not always been smooth. Behind every major decision were no doubt a number of different opinions, with God's will not always being immediately apparent. There would have been family discussions over the dinner table and no doubt sometimes heated discussion in members' meetings. Sometimes consensus would have been reached easily and sometimes differing points of view would have led to a painful parting of the ways.



The entrance to TCBC.

Certainly this has been the case during the major developments over the last twenty years. Under the leadership and vision of Rev Geoff Cramb and the Church Council of the time, and after an initial vote to purchase and redevelop the Skatehaven site in Ruthven Street was defeated, not everyone felt that the move to Glenvale was the right one – and some chose not to make it. In 1998, a number of people, particularly young adults, chose to join a new fellowship when the senior pastor at the time, Rev Steve Shaw, resigned after a members'

meeting during which a decision had been made to call for Baptist Union assistance in a process of review (to attempt to ascertain why so many people were leaving the fellowship). The youth pastor also resigned within a few months, leaving the leadership and running of the church to the Church Council, administration staff, and other committed members.

Pastor Ray Elvery was appointed six months later, as a short term interim pastor, and ended up staying for seven years (February 1999-2006), bringing much needed peace, collegiality, stability and healing to the fellowship - and significant growth in attendance. In early 2004, the demand for seating space led to a decision to run two morning services.

The decision to build the extension (anticipated in the original building plans) came after much deliberation around the possible options and needs of the growing fellowship. Members' meetings saw many discussion sessions and "writing on white boards" with an advisory committee being formed. Among the ideas considered were suggestions of bringing in demountable buildings and investigating church plants rather than expansion. At the time, Friday night youth group catered for up to 60 teenagers, and it was thought that a "youth-proof concrete box" style extension which could provide a sporting facility would be

ideal. With discussion of how to fund the project came advice that selling the unused southern acres of land would not be economically timely. The vote was taken, pledges for extra financial contributions were once again received, and Baplink agreed to refinance the loan. Crystine Skerman led the team of "project managers" and building of the area now known as "The Court" was commenced. The dividing wall came down in October 2007, creating one large auditorium from the space that had previously encompassed both auditorium and "Function Room". Design developments along the way resulted in the "extra" area underneath the Court being incorporated into the plan. This downstairs space is, at the time of writing, awaiting funding and a vision for its use before being fitted out.

Associate Pastor Stewart Pieper had left to take up the position of Senior Pastor in Gladstone in early 2007, leaving the church in the capable hands of two faithful men who don't understand the word "retirement" - Pastors Frank Hall and Laurie Wallace. During this time Pastor Wallace conducted an "intentional interim", seeking (with a team of twelve nominated members) to understand the fellowship's history, identity and vision for the future, with particular attention to the attributes desirable in the next Senior Pastor.



Between early 1992 and mid 2008, TCBC had been without a senior pastor for six years, relying on the hard work of associate pastors, lay preachers and strong congregational leadership. After much searching and prayerful consideration, the church called Rev Greg and Ruth Peckman as Senior and Associate Pastor respectively. They arrived in August, 2008 and the particular goals they were challenged with were leading the church through the anticipated transition period and rekindling the desire for engaging in the community.

An increasing multicultural representation (reflecting the changing face of Toowoomba) has been an exciting trend in recent years. In late 2011 a team, including Greg and Ruth Peckman, travelled to Southern Sudan to investigate links with the Jonglei Worship Centre. An "Easy English" class was also established during the service on the first Sunday of the month to provide bible study for those for whom English is a second language.

Church planting again became a focus and in 2012 an on-site church plant, known as "Messy Church", began meeting on one Saturday each month. This had a relaxed, family friendly style and was particularly aimed at those who were not ready for a traditional church format. (At the time of writing, Messy Church has been discontinued). Progress was also being made in

establishing a church plant, led by Pastor Neil Parker and his wife Hilda, in the Wyreema district, with Neil currently serving as a chaplain to the local primary school.

The original vision of reaching the community is now articulated as "At TCBC our desire, with God's help, is to encourage, enable and equip each other to be salt and light at home, in the marketplace, and to the margins." We are seeing this happening as we "scatter" to our "frontlines" of home, work, school etc, as well as with involvement in such ministries as Glennon House, Christmas hampers and City Women. In 2015, the renaming of some of our "gathered" ministries, such as "Community Kids", "Community Youth" and "Community Groups" further emphasises our desire to both be a community and to reach the community with the gospel. Early in 2015 TCBC will be joining a number of other churches in working through the "Fruitfulness on the Frontline" series and we look forward to growing from that challenge.

The current pastoral team (as of April 2015) consists of Sam Jackson, who took over from Rev Greg Peckman as Senior Pastor in April 2014, after being Associate Pastor since January 2011, and Care Co-ordinator, Bronwyn Marsh, who took over from Shirley Challoner in mid 2011. Dr Neil Parker rejoined the TCBC pastoral team in 2012, working

in a voluntary capacity. They are ably assisted by the dedicated ancillary staff of Office Manager (Jill Williams), Book Keeper (Allison Jeffery) and Communications Officer (Lorri Teepa). It is hoped that the near future will see the staff team grow, in alignment with the vision of the church.

## **Building**

Achieving our current facility under today's by-laws and legislation would have been almost impossible. Rezoning would have ruled out this kind of use of the land and the additional costs following on from building regulations may have added hundreds of thousands of dollars to the total cost. We can be thankful for God's provision over these years of building and expansion.

There have been examples of co-incident that we might call "God incidents". The church land was not on the market when Kevin Skerman drove past, thought of the possibility and approached the owner (who had no intention of selling to the major land developer of the time) and opened up the possibility of purchasing more land than the original brief of at least eight acres. The children's playground equipment was bought from Glenvale State School on an almost ridiculously low tender (offered following prayer by the Church Council at the time) after Allison Jeffery saw it advertised in the

school newsletter, with the condition that the buyer be able to remove it from the school site. The Church had few funds but it did have willing workers, some expertise and access to the right equipment.

"Stepping out in faith" has not always been unanimous (or even harmonious) and finding the funds to finance the dreams has never been easy. At one point, before the move to Glenvale, the (then) Church Council was asked in a meeting if they believed in the project enough to mortgage their homes to make payments. In making the last payment on the land, a hard decision to sell the Herries Street property was finally made, eating into the anticipated funds to be realised from selling the old property, which had been earmarked to pay for building on the new site.

## What You See Now

As a visitor drives into the car park of TCBC they would notice the gardens - especially in Spring. These were designed by Dean Mengel and planted by homegroups during a "one morning blitz" shortly after the building was completed. On the rise to the east of the entrance stands the "Shed". This is not a thing of beauty but has served a number of roles over the years - as storage, home to the teenage Bible School group, "Shed People" and home of the current "Shed Men". The rose garden on the western slope was planted (and nurtured through the drought with bucket watering) by Doug and Judith Hudson, members of the Toowoomba Rose Society.

The covered portico and large (at the time of building) foyer were designed to facilitate before and after worship conversation and mingling, seen as an important aspect of fellowship. The silk paintings that hang high in the foyer are on loan from the artist, Cecile Arndt, who felt they would look just right on the brick walls, while the stained glass (which once graced the baptistry) and timber pew were "rescued" from the old Herries Street building.

The offices to the right of the entry have been expanded over time to accommodate the increasing staff and the room adjoining the Prayer Room was originally called the

"Vision Room" because of the plans and charts once displayed on the boards. It now also displays the photographs of all our pastors of previous years. In the Prayer Room itself hangs a painting by Ruth Elvery (wife of previous pastor, Ray Elvery) which depicts features of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. This painting was bought by Ben and Cynthia Hardy at an auction to raise funds for the Church, and they loaned it back to the Church.



Fellowship games night in The Court.

The Kitchen has a story to tell, with its fittings having been bought at an auction for a remarkably small cost. At least one member found himself swinging precariously beside a large piece of stainless steel as the fit out was moved to its new home. Even the Ladies' Rest Room shows the contribution of a member of the fellowship, as the decorative wall tiles were hand painted by Lynne Ashford.

The area beside the kitchen which now serves as a walk through and "Info Hub" was once the meeting place for the Bible School (Community Kids), Years 3-7, while the western third of the auditorium was the hall or "Function Room" prior to the building of "The Court". The latter space had also once accommodated Bible school classes. The flooring of The Court was made possible by a single, anonymous and generous donation, enabling it to be multipurpose.

The auditorium itself has held worship services, concerts, film screenings, bush dances, training events and more. The large quilt, hung initially in 1995 was designed by one of our members, Robyn Ginn, OAM, an internationally acclaimed Quilter. She co-ordinated the handcrafting of the fourteen other women of the church to depict the four areas of activity that were the focus at the time of moving to the new site – Celebration, Communication (evangelism), Cultivation (teaching and nurture) and Care. Some features remembered by those who contributed include the "prayer" points used to cover the mistakes and crystals symbolising tears. At various times, Sharon Roberts (an artist in our fellowship) has created paintings, such as the works on glass ("Saviour" and "Lord") which currently hang in the auditorium.



Gather and scatter, attendees in the TCBC foyer after service.

From the windows of the auditorium we have one of the finest views to the west, but can also see the playground which was moved (at very little cost but considerable effort) from the local primary school. Reassembling the pieces to their current position was described by one participant as "playing with giant lego".

And, of course, beyond the playground lie the six acres of land that were considered a God given bonus at the time of purchase. These acres, together with the undeveloped space underneath "The Court", remain a point for prayer, as the fellowship waits for both funds and vision to develop them for ministry or income, or, in the case of the land, a possible decision to sell. A Property Development Team is currently working on presenting some well-informed options to the Members.

Any resulting decisions will require further debate and prayerful consideration. What lessons might we be able to learn from the past?

### **The Cost**

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At each point during the church's history of expansion – whether it be in building, church planting or beginning a new ministry or mission – there has been a cost to be met. Rarely is the cost only financial, for “kingdom” work involves personal commitment.

When the “On the Move” project called for pledges, these were added to the “New Property and Building Fund” which had been started with a legacy known as “the Manchester Fund”, together with rollovers from the “New Kitchen Fund” and “Property Maintenance Fund”. This pool of funds later formed the basis for the \$70 000 deposit on the land (contract completed 30/8/1991). A further three payments of \$150 000 each were required to complete the purchase by August, 1994.

The original pledges to meet these payments were made by 43 families, being \$55 810 for Year 1, \$48 510 for Year 2 and \$50 510 for Year 3. By the end of 1991, the number of pledges had increased to 66 families or individuals. (Doc 3). The purchase funds were met through pledges, fund raising (using various talents such as house building, handcrafting and aerobics instructing),

the sale of the Cedar Street manse for \$104 895 and part of the sale price of the Hume and Herries Street site.

Despite generosity, hard work, seeking the Lord's guidance and the best of intentions, there have been times when the costs have been problematic. It was originally expected that the initial building expense would be met by the sale proceeds from the old building, but the eventual reality was a loan for \$400 000, to be paid out in ten years. A small additional loan (Doc 4) was taken out in January 1999 to pay for Council works, and the loan was further extended to approximately \$1 100 000 by the time the “The Court” extension was completed. Projected figures for income and attendance indicated that we could service the larger loan required, but those estimations have proved inaccurate, resulting (at the time of writing) in difficulty in meeting our current budget.

Still, we remember and give thanks that side by side with financial records are stories of both individual and corporate faithfulness and sacrifice; of answered prayer and God's grace to us. We can be encouraged by the effort and creativity shown in market days, book fairs, State of Origin nights, working bees, “50+ Mission Table” and other endeavours which enable ministry and meet needs.

## Final Words

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This “history” is being written at the same time as we work out what it means to live out our vision of “At TCBC our desire, with God’s help, is to encourage, enable and equip each other to be salt and light at home, in the marketplace, and to the margins.” While times and situations have changed, we can still be challenged by this excerpt from a baptismal certificate from 1907, reproduced below (from annual report of the Baptist Church 1907.08).

“Obligations of a Church Member (as contained in a Baptismal certificate from Toowoomba Baptist Church dated 1907)

1. To remember each day my Church, its Minister and Officers at The Throne of Grace.
2. To be in my place in the Sanctuary in good time on Lord’s Day. To make a special point of being there at Morning Service, to prove my loyalty to “Christ and the Church”, and to encourage others.
3. To be present at the Sacrement of the Lord’s Supper. Carelessness or trivial excuse for non-attendance, indicating contempt for the Lord’s precepts.
4. To be willing to do and give anything and everything for Jesus, both by regular weekly contribution and personal service.
5. To live ever as in the sight of God.”

“In all your ways  
acknowledge  
Him and He  
will direct your  
paths.”

~ Proverbs 3:6

## Notes

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Toowoomba Community  
Baptist Church

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