

READING 2: LANYON VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

by Rev. Bernie Hughes

A Report given to the New South Wales Synod

Lanyon Community Church is in the southern suburbs of Canberra. We are a daughter church of Tuggeranong Uniting which was the only Uniting Church in a region of about 90,000 people. The vision for establishing a Uniting Church presence in the Lanyon Valley first came from people who saw new suburbs being developed and thousands of houses being built. The area quickly became known as 'nappy valley' because of the number of young families who moved in. There is currently a population of around 15,000 and we are heading for around 20,000.

As a surfer, I never planned on moving to Canberra when I first heard about the opportunity to start a new congregation there. But when I knew God wanted me to go, the fact that a Synod Mission Resource Grant and Presbytery funding had not yet been approved was a secondary issue. My wife, my two young children and I moved to Canberra to rent a new house in a new street for \$220 per week, with a vision to start an outreaching church relevant to a people who do not go to church. With the help of God and the support of friends and people from the Parish and Presbytery, our rent was always paid and when money was running low we would receive a cheque or some food to help us keep going. The funding and settlement that was later provided by the Synod and Presbytery were a confirmation that God had really called us to this work.

What would you look for in a church?

After forming a prayer base I began surveying hundreds of people in the area who did not go to church, asking about what they saw as the needs in the area, why most people don't go to church, what they would look for in a church and what advice they would give to a new church wanting to help people in the area. This is something of what they said.

What advice would you give to a new church that really wants to help people in this area?

- Be family oriented
- Have children's activities - run Playgroups
- Be modern - not old fashioned
- Be friendly and informal
- Run community building events
- Don't have early Sunday activities
- Have family events - BBQ's, Sports Have You Seen These People?

Following my survey, I put together a description of the type of people we believed God wanted us to reach. I call them "Lanyon, Len and Lyn".

The Vision

My vision was to start a church based on small groups and that has developed into being a Cell based church made up of a network of House Churches who currently meet for Celebrations every month. We are currently applying to become one of the first faith communities in the Synod.

Community Connections

One of the first things we did after forming a core group to start the work was to begin serving the community's needs as a way of earning the right to share the Gospel through things like 'Christianity Explained'. We started several playgroups and we held high profile community events to help bring the residents together in fun ways. A pram race and a removalist relay were some ways to relate to people's life experiences. As were the Eight legged race, Bush Dance, Kite Flying Day and Christmas Card Distribution. Each year we aim to personally give out 5000 Christmas cards to homes in our area with a Christmas message and an invitation to our Carols by Candlelight.

Positive Parenting - Everything we did was related to the needs of the people we believed God had called us to reach, whether it was through a positive parenting course or the Junk for Life Sale to raise money for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of the hospital.

We also use banners, saying "Welcome Home -from Lanyon Community Church " and "Happy Mothers Day". These were beside the main road to show people we care.

Citizenship Certificate

One of the biggest events we are becoming well known for is our Australia Day Festival where we give out unofficial Citizenship Certificates for all the people who have been born or moved into the area in the last year. We have a whole lot of free activities plus Aussie food, like dampers, billy tea and roo burgers for sale.

Eight Legged Race

It is a great family event that gets good coverage in the papers, and this year the local sports club sponsored a huge fireworks display to end the night with a bang.

After the Australia Day Festival I received a phone message that said, "Thank you and your church for the beautiful evening last night. I think it's very very wonderful that the church is going into the community, because this is where it is needed. Not just sitting in a church every Sunday, but to get in amongst the people; and congratulations. Wish you all the best".