



United we kneel

Pastor John Hobbs tells of the long road to Braidwood

MY JOURNEY into the ministry probably starts a couple of centuries ago, in the time of John Wesley. I have traced my ancestors back and one the earliest I found, in England in Kent, was ordained by John Wesley himself into the Wesleyan church which became the Methodist church.

He baptised him and his seven sons, five of whom became preachers on the Preaching circuit. Out of that came my family and down through my family's generations there has always been somebody in the ministry.

So I go back that far. As a child I was brought up in a Christian home, went to Sunday school and did all that. It wasn't until later that I felt a call to go into some sort of Christian ministry. By that time I was married, had the first child on the way, so I ended up working for World Vision in New Zealand for nearly seven years.

Out of that came a further calling, but not realised until much later, to go into pastoral care — the pastoral ministry. First I went into a career in sales and that sort of thing, real estate business and building business. I had my own

real estate company at one stage, but there was always this great desire to serve God in some capacity so my work at that point was more just a means to an end.

I used to go to real estate conferences and I'd hear the speakers saying: "to be in this business you've got to love this business". I thought: "well I don't love this business, it is a means to an end". I also thought those people should 'get a life' but that's another story.

How did I end up in Braidwood? Well, that is a bit of a long story. I had been pastoring for about seven years in Sydney, then essentially I retired. During that retirement I went to a Uniting Church in Sydney virtually to have a rest. It's really not good protocol for a minister to retire in the church where he has been a pastor, because it is too hard on the next person, so I went to a lovely Uniting Church. They welcomed me and I rested for a little while. But then I started working in that church and also preaching around in a whole lot of neighbourhood Uniting Churches in Sydney.

So I thought, "well I am not really retired yet — I think it would probably be a good opportunity for me to go back into the church". But I only wanted to go part time, and also at that time, I decided to go back and complete my studies.

I enrolled in a Master's of theology, so the opportunity to come to Braidwood would be that I could minister part of the week and I could complete my studies in the second half of the week. I'd also get the benefits of living in the country which I wanted to do.

The Uniting Church, is an amalgamation of three denominations, formed in 1977, of the Presbyterian, the Methodist and Congregational churches.

I was married in the Presbyterian stream way back, but my ancestors were in the Methodist stream, so I am ecumenical. I think some people will get a big surprise in Heaven one day when they find that there are other people there they didn't expect to be there.

The Uniting church is a good denomination, because it is broad enough to accept quite a lot of thinking in theology, so that it allows me to come and hear from a Presbyterian point of view ministering the church. This church here in Braidwood is originally a Presbyterian church and in some ways that's reflected in the style of the building and in people's attitude in that building.

We have a lovely congregation — it's amazed me in the short time I have been here, how many people are doing so much in the community. Each one seems to be involved somewhere, from visiting the sick and the old people to just being involved in various groups like running Seniors' activities and things like that. It is amazing, that this little group of people here do so much in their community.

I think the serving comes out of their meeting as a congregation. I think they want to join together with others to worship God. And I think that out of that worship then comes the service, because Jesus told them and His disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel — and that's what these people are doing.

They might not be standing up like Billy Graham, but when they go out into the community, just being themselves, to me that is preaching the Gospel. They are just communicating the love of God through their lifestyle, by example, by just being there. In any town, big or small, there are people who are lonely and separated a little bit from society. Maybe the only contact they have is that one person coming in and saying hello, or bringing them some scones, and just being a friend.

BWD: Do you think the Church should get involved in politics in the sense that it should be preaching from the pulpit. Where is the division between getting involved in day-to-day politics and pastoral care?

The Church has a whole range of things it should be thinking about, not just preaching them once a week from the pulpit. The Church has a responsibility before God to be the prophetic voice to the nation. We should be the ones calling the nation to ethical standards, right ways of living, better politics and things like that — we should be the prophetic ones.

We have a right, and down through the centuries we have always had a right, to stand and call people to account. We have lost that voice, in my opinion, because we have been compromised in all sorts of areas like accepting government money which means we can not speak out now against anybody, or against the government by calling them to a account.

A hundred years ago most of the social welfare programs run in this country were generated by the Church. We started the hospitals, we started the childcare, we started many programs which are now taken over by the government and it has moved out of

AMEN TO THAT

our hands a little bit. Because we have said, "your money is good" and taken money from the government, and money from the government always comes with conditions — and one of those is that it stops us from being prophetic. It's a worry for me.

BWD: Getting back to Genesis. If the world was created and put into existence by God and one of our prime responsibilities as people is to oversee its health and wellbeing, certainly not to do anything that would inflict a disastrous future for all of the rest of God's creatures, then surely the Church should say: "Look, this direction we are going in doesn't seem to be the right one."

That is exactly true. Genesis does teach us that, our role is to care for this world, and not only Christians as individuals, but as an organisation, yes, we've got to say things. I think the church is saying that we've got to care for this world. The church here in Australia has been saying that strongly, but it has also been saying, on an international level too, that it's important that the Church worldwide says these things. I think the Church in places is doing that, perhaps not as well as we could, but it is certainly an important issue.

BWD: To invite people into your church — when should they turn up, what do you want them to do and who can come?

The nice thing about the Uniting Church is that it's the table of the Lord

and community services are open to all. There is a service every Sunday morning at 10am — exactly like that. It's open to anybody who would like to attend.

People are probably wondering, "what do you do in there"? But just think of it as a family that wants to celebrate together the love of the Lord Jesus Christ with anybody we can.

The morning service is just a worship service, it's a time we set aside and we just spend time with God. I think that's a terrific way to have church. Afterwards we have the best time because we have our morning tea together — and that's where I think the Church really carries on into the fellowship with each other. It's a great time on Sunday mornings, yeah terrific. Just come, and you'll be very welcome — if only for morning tea.

Sunday morning is the only church service we run here, but there are other meetings we do from time to time and we have had some meals here in the manse, for the congregation, just to be together. That's all part of being a church.

We also have the op-shop which is a terrific outreaching to Braidwood. It is open Wednesdays and Fridays and we get a good lot of people coming through it. We are not in the business of making money, so most things in the place are no more than two dollars, but it is a good contact point for us to minister into the wider needs of Braidwood people.

