

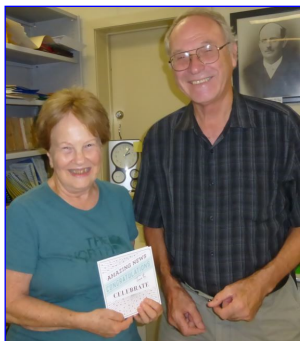


The Queensland Baptist Forum

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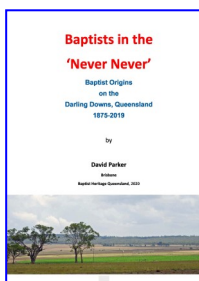
News and Notes



Research Success: Baptist Heritage Qld honours its newest member, Pam Condie, whose Doctor of Ministry dissertation on attitudes of Baptists in Queensland to the ordination of women, has been highly commended by the examiners. Much of the research was carried out with material from the Baptist Church Archives. Dr Condie was congratulated by BHQ Chair, Eric Kopittke at the first meeting for the year (see photo).

The examiners (two local, one overseas, two of whom were women) praised the dissertation for its breadth of research, its overall discussion and for highlighting various important issues about the life and processes of the Baptist denomination in Queensland. As well as a thorough study of the biblical and historical background to the subject, the 350-page document reports on a large number of interviews with Baptists in Queensland and surveys of the views of pastors, members and Baptist Union officials.

Archives Staffing: Mrs Condie, OAM, of Life Point Christian Church, Rothwell, has also been appointed by the QB Board as the new Archivist, as of 31 August 2020. Dr David Parker will continue in the position until then. Mrs Condie has a long history of senior involvement in the Girls' Brigade, and was chairman of the Board of MAFA 2010-15. She also has a background in the WRAAF, and is completing a full term as QB Board member.



New Book: Baptists in the 'Never Never'

Baptist Heritage Qld has published a history of the origins of Baptist work on the Darling Downs, covering more than a dozen churches, from 1875 onwards. The 'print on demand' publication, which has been several years in preparation, focuses especially on the often fascinating stories of the beginnings of Baptist work in this vast area.

The initial special price of the 50,000 word book is \$15 posted. Orders may be placed at archives@qb.org.au or by phoning BHQ Publications 07 3376 4339

BHQ Meetings 2020: 20 June; 26 Oct (AGM) 2pm @The Baptist Archives

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All the Way: 'God's Good Hand

By Rev Dr Stan W Nickerson

This is a further instalment in our occasional series where people tell their personal, family, and ministry experiences, highlighting aspects of spiritual and ministry growth for the interest of our readers and to be stored in the Archives for future reference. This episode features Rev Dr Stan Nickerson, former principal of the Baptist Theological College of Queensland and former President of the Baptist Union of Queensland.



This paper is not an autobiography, as such, but seeks to highlight God's activity in my life over 80 years. It reveals God's good hand in a rainbow of colours, sometimes ordering, sometimes restraining, sometimes providing, sometimes guiding, but always shedding more light on his ways and purposes to enhance my relationship with him and to develop me for more effective Christian service.

The Lord's gracious ordering of my life is no more clearly evident than with regard to the family circle I was born into. One scholar has dubbed these early aspects of life as "sovereign foundations". Since Mum (Pat - Norah Patricia Smith) was a lapsed Catholic and Dad (Bert - Albert Walter Christino Nickerson) a lapsed Anglican, they were married in a civil service at a Registry Office in Brisbane in 1936. Both were quiet, shy, non-gregarious individuals, possibly a reflection of the fact that each had lost a father at a very early age. Mum was a stay-at-home mother and Dad a builder's labourer, always bringing home his pay-cheque. There was never much money to spare but we did not lack any essentials, were loved, and grew up in a stable environment. A working class family we might have been but the principles of honesty, responsibility, and hard work prevailed. These and other honourable qualities were absorbed and became foundational in my life.

Born in 1939, I was the eldest son but second to Keith who had been adopted into our family from his birth in 1933. It was a non-Christian, but not an anti-Christian, home. Mum and Dad both had had a Christian background and believed it was the right thing to do to have one's children baptized. At the time of my birth they were living at West End in Brisbane and took me to the South Brisbane Anglican Church where I was christened. Overly sensitive as a child, Mum had been harshly treated at a Catholic school and as a result declared that she would not try to direct her children in any particular religious direction. I have wondered about the wisdom of this belief of hers but it was to work out very well in my case over the years.

We moved early in my life to Sandgate where we rented a three bedroom, high-stumped worker's cottage.

Childhood was a time of stability with the usual interactions with my four siblings as another son (Jack - John Kevin) and then two daughters (Margaret Jean and Fay Kathleen) were added to the household. Schooling was at the nearby Shorncliffe State School, within easy walking distance. I expect it was due to a shortage of teachers in post World War II conditions that my Grade 2 class was divided into two with the upper half being promoted directly to Grade 4 and the lower segment repeating Grade 2. Having "skipped" Grade 3, I was always a year younger than most other pupils in the education system and did not feel I had caught up until university days. As a well-known Australian actor said about his school days: "I was neither popular nor unpopular - I was just there". I was not an A-1 top level student, unlike a good friend of mine, but was anxious to do well which probably brought on bronchial problems at times of stress like exams. In those days, there was an external "Scholarship" exam in three subjects at the end of primary school which, if you passed, entitled you to free secondary education. Most students however, left school at the end of primary schooling to enter the workforce. I passed with an overall mark of 75% which was regarded as quite respectable and began at Brisbane State High at South Brisbane in 1952.

And so I emerged from childhood a product of some powerful influences over which I had little or no control. I see myself at that stage as an insecure, shy, emotional individual, with an unremarkable personality but possessing a number of beneficial foundational traits from my upbringing. I had some intellectual ability and other positives including a drive to master whatever interested or puzzled me. God had shaped me thus to achieve his purposes for my life. With the clarity of hindsight, I can discern his readying me to respond positively to the claims of Christ; the opportunities to discover strengths I never knew I had; to address areas of weakness; and to show me how he can use individuals despite their inadequacies.

My connection with Christianity was again a case of God's sovereign intervention and how he used committed Christians in their concern for the gospel. I had always believed in God, possibly due to Mum's influence that I imbibed somehow by a kind of osmosis. I must have been about eight when playing on the verandah of our typically Queensland bungalow I saw two friends, Billy and Stuart, walking home with toys in their hands. On enquiring, Mum advised that they had been to a Christmas tree party at the local Baptist Sunday School and these were their Christmas presents. Baptist Sunday School seemed to be

such a good thing that I decided to become a scholar there. Of course, I dragged younger brother Jack along too. So we began attending the Sandgate Baptist Church Sunday School held on Sunday afternoons in those days. This became a regular part of our weekly routine for many years. God was using a boy's greed to bring him under the sound of the gospel.

When I was about thirteen, I decided I was now too old for Sunday School and that it would be more grown-up to attend church. Mum, in true form, opposed nothing I had decided whether stopping going to Sunday School or attending church. I found the church service unfamiliar, unpalatably long, and boring. If that was church, then it was not for me and thinking I was too old for Sunday School, I went nowhere. But God stepped into my life again when a little later my Sunday School teacher, Ron Buchanan, called on me at home and asked me to return. Not wanting to offend, I agreed. In due course I graduated into the young people's Bible Class. The teacher was a Scotsman and former member of the local Brethren Assembly. He had had some disagreement there and started attending the Baptist Church which he described (I think tongue in cheek) as "the best of the worst". I attended regularly and if not every Sunday, then almost every Sunday, he challenged us to accept Jesus as our personal Saviour.

Over months, God strongly convicted me of my need to commit to Christ until one day, at the age of fifteen, I invited the Lord into my life. When I told my Sunday School teacher next Sunday about it, I experienced a euphoric, emotional high and seemed to float home. As he directed, I told Mum what I had done whose only response was that I should "not tell your father". But I did tell Dad when I thought the timing was appropriate. He simply told me that he had been religious too in earlier days and that I would soon get over it. But I've never gotten over it. I have been ever thankful that I made that step of commitment. It was because of it that I found my direction and service for God throughout life.

A significant aspect of my conversion was the experience of personal conviction which was to feature prominently in my life at various stages. As a teenager, the decision to become a Christian was a great struggle for me. The challenge to do so was under the pressure of sometimes intense conviction. It was like a heavy weight in my chest that I was convinced was from God. It must have taken the best part of a year before I surrendered to the Lord and became a Christian. A year later, I again came under a strong conviction to be baptized. Mum objected because she worried that being immersed might bring on a nasty chest infection just weeks before I had to face those all-important, external, university entrance exams at the end of one's Senior (now Grade 12) year. In my mind, I objected – shouldn't one obey God rather than man! To my surprise and puzzlement, my revered Bible teacher counselled me to obey my parents and after I sought a second opinion from my pastor, he agreed. After the exams were over, however, Mum could have no objections. Then, years later, when I was wrestling with

whether to apply for the ministry, the same conviction came. But this time I recognized its source from previous experiences and knew that I would have no peace until I surrendered to how God was directing.

High school years were a period of learning in many ways. I found that humour could be very helpful in relating to other people. Then too, God sometimes used my personal leanings and choices for his own ends such as my long-held thoughts of becoming a teacher. One experience in my development in that regard came when I was asked to help out on Sunday afternoons at a government run home for children whose parents were unable to take care of them for a few months. Unlike today, where most things in life are tightly subject to regulations, entrance to this home to conduct Sunday School was open without one question being put to me. I never asked who had commenced this ministry but the one running it handed it over to me. With just two people in charge, we had 20 or 30 children ranged in age from



Faith Baptist Church, Gladstone

five to twelve for an hour with singing, teaching a Bible verse, and story telling. It was quite a challenge but important in developing my teaching ability to hold young people's attention for an extended period.

To entice people into the teaching profession, the Government offered scholarships with the payment of an allowance through Sub-Senior and Senior (Grades 11 and 12) and then just a one year course at Teachers' College in Brisbane. I took up that offer and having passed six Senior subjects with respectable but not outstanding results, I had the possibility of entrance into all university faculties except Arts and Architecture. But I wanted to study Arts subjects and so during the year at Teacher's College I took evening classes in Junior Latin and Senior French, the subjects I lacked for entrance. I was successful in both subjects but with disappointing results. At the end of the Teacher's College course, the government accredited us graduates as teachers and posted us to schools across the State. I was appointed to my old school at Shorncliffe where I taught for three years. Then I was transferred in 1960 to Charleville some 450 miles (750 km.) west of Brisbane when I turned 21. Mum strongly objected in person to losing the support of her eldest son but the Education Department was adamant. For my part I was delighted to spread my wings, spending the year teaching a Scholarship class. During that year I began to wonder if the Lord wanted me in pastoral ministry and if so, I needed to learn to drink tea! I made some progress in that regard.

After just a year at Charleville I applied for high school teaching since the Education Department was in the process of moving the final year of primary school into secondary school and they were trying to find all the teachers they could for the task. So along with others - young teachers and older "Scholarship" teachers - I began at Gladstone High. This was a small school where I predominantly taught English over the 3 years I was there, 1961-63. As a Christian I was well enough accepted but never completely fitted in - my heart and trajectory were elsewhere. All the while (in Brisbane, Charleville, and beyond) I pursued B.A. subjects from the Queensland University through their external studies programme and then a B.Ed. with these degrees being awarded in 1963 and 1967 respectively. I received a B.D. from the Melbourne College of Divinity in 1971. My thirst for knowledge (and qualifications?) led me in this. Thus my leaning towards, and experience in, teaching confirmed my self-understanding that I had the gift of teaching. All this was from God who was guiding me into a role of lecturing at a theological College.

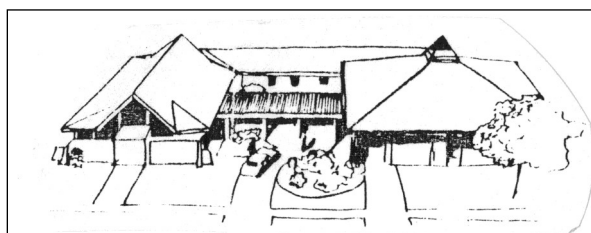
While in Gladstone, God brought into my life two people who were to prove to be importantly influential. The first was an American fundamentalist preacher, the Rev Randy Pike, who had come to establish a Baptist church there since there was none in town. I had been attending and serving in the Salvation Army and Methodist churches but with the establishment of a Baptist congregation, began to attend and serve there with the pastor and his wife becoming good friends. I found his view of things different from my own in many respects but what attracted me was his evangelistic drive, his "passion for souls", his unstinting outreach efforts (despite his legs having been rendered unusable as a result of his back being broken playing football), and his unbounded faith in the power of the gospel.

The second principal person God directed me to was Mary Guy who was to become my wife and the most impactful influence in my life. The way it came about was through Ron Maycock, a travelling salesman from Rockhampton, who somehow heard I was a Christian teacher. He came to Gladstone High to meet me and invite me to lead a primary school children's camp at Emu Park. The local Baptist Association owned a camp property there located some distance out of Rockhampton. The girls' leader was to be Mary Guy, sister-in-law to Ron Maycock. From that time on, our relationship grew and in December 1963 we were married by the Rev Noel Charles at the Rockhampton Baptist Tabernacle. Like most married couples we knew only a little about each other at marriage but in the ups and downs of life I came to greatly appreciate what a gem God had led me to. It is difficult to quantify how influential Mary has been in the development of my personality, character, and ministry but by any measure her impact has been enormous. In many respects I am a different person now than I was in my twenties.

Soon after marriage I was posted to Mackay to the brand new high school at north Mackay. During our two years there, our first child, Philip, was born. It was also there that God's call to apply for the ministry became too

insistent to be denied. In fact, it was a difficult decision to make. It meant I had to quit my role as Sunday School superintendent which I believed was fulfilling an important function in the church. More importantly, I had to face up to undertaking more study - the five year course at the Baptist College; I had been continuously studying part-time for ten years after high school. The fact that my salary as a Home Missionary would drop to something close to half our current income did not seem to worry Mary or me. Others had made it and so could we. But after much prayer we surrendered to the Lord's call on our lives. What had concerned Mary was the question of how she would function as a minister's wife. In those days there were settled expectations of what the minister's wife's role was, including leading the women's work. As a young woman, still in her early twenties and inexperienced in leading older women, how would she cope? But cope she did, with one or two worrying hiccups, and gained confidence in delivering devotionals that was to lead to years of service as a speaker under the banner of the Christian Women's movement.

We were accepted into the Baptist Home Mission and drove from Mackay. We had with us our infant son, Philip, and took up the pastorates at both Tarragindi and Sunnybank churches in February 1966. This was



A sketch of Stafford North Baptist Church

"Decimal Currency Year", so called because the change over from the pounds sterling system of currency to that of dollars and cents took place that year. Except for having to prepare only one sermon per week (preached in the morning at one church and in the evening at the other), there was double of everything else - weekly, two Religious Instruction classes in State schools, two prayer meetings; and monthly, two deacon's meetings, two Sunday School teachers meetings; plus pastoral visitation and other sundry duties. I saw myself as a Bible teacher and apparently came across in the pulpit as if I were in the classroom.

I went into the Baptist College, very conservative theologically and black and white in outlook. For two and a half days per week I had to attend lectures at West End about 30 minutes' drive away. These were stressful years for us on a number of fronts but delightful in other ways and we made some life-long friends. It was during this time we welcomed our adopted daughter, Joanne, from the Southport Hospital into our home circle. The Lord had directed in the matter of our Home Mission appointment where we learnt many of the basics and ups and downs of pastoral service but it was arguably at our leaving that the Lord's hand figured most clearly.

We were obliged to serve five years as Home Missionaries before being free to move to a self-

supporting church if an invitation should come. By the end of 1969 we had served four years pastoring the two churches together and with them separating at that time we spent our fifth year solely at Tarragindi. The Home Mission Superintendent, the Rev Vic Bowring, asked us to consider moving to the Brighton H.M. church in Brisbane. Asking the Lord for guidance, we decided we would accept this offer by mid-morning Friday if God did not direct otherwise. Early Friday morning, Graham Lane, secretary of the Stafford North Church knocked on our door proffering the pastorate of his church. At their pastoral search committee meeting the night before, when our name was being considered, it was felt that they should not delay but make the offer forthwith. So Graham drove across town early in the morning to deliver the invitation. As we spoke to Graham, we were in no doubt that this was the Lord's guidance we had asked for. We began at the Stafford North church in January 1971 and in September that year I was ordained by the Baptist Union. We served at Stafford for four happy and fruitful years. At the end of that time we felt the Lord was leading us to other responsibilities but needed some more clear direction from him.

Our move to South Australia came about from a contact at an evangelistic training meeting I attended in Melbourne. There I met the Rev Alan Tinsley who also served on the board of the Bible College of South Australia. He remembered my name from Dr Ted Gibson who had mentioned me as a possible Old Testament lecturer for BCSA. In due course I received an invitation to consider meeting the board. After flying to Adelaide for a tea meeting with the board, I subsequently received a firm invitation to fill the position. It became a difficult matter to think about taking up the offer – residing in South Australia and leaving behind all our contacts with family and friends. Earnest prayer brought no enlightenment or relief. Then one Sunday night after the service I met two young women who had been in attendance. They said they were not Baptists but driving past the church that afternoon, decided to attend the evening service. I puzzled to know if this was some indication from the Lord concerning the BCSA situation. Arriving home, as I opened the door of the manse, I suddenly suspected that Mary, who had stayed at home with the children, was somehow behind it all. As I related the night's events, she explained, "This afternoon I asked the Lord to have someone speak to you about BCSA tonight but I didn't expect him to send people from the Bible College to do it!". God had probably been speaking to us all along but we were too deaf to hear it, so he had to make it unmistakably plain. So in late 1974 with our two children we drove the long journey to the seaside town of Victor Harbor.

Our four years time at Stafford North (1971-1974) had been very hectic, the last three months especially so, when I was out every night of the week. On one occasion, Mary accompanied me on a trip to the dump just so "we could spend some time together". BCSA proved to be a much-needed recuperative time – work

hours were essentially nine to five; there were no evening meetings to attend; weekends were free with few preaching responsibilities; and ample family time. I lectured mainly in Old Testament subjects and Mary took up part-time office work at the College. Our nine-year old son attended the local school and developed a liking for Australian Rules football. We loved living on the coast with its interesting shoreline.

Relatives and friends took the opportunity to visit us and see some of South Australia. Our holidays involved a lot of driving – we went to Western Australia, Wilpena Pound, the Barossa Valley, the snow fields, and saw much of local areas such as the Adelaide Hills. From many points of view we would have been happy to stay at the College for much longer but for a long time I had felt my place was lecturing at the Baptist Theological College of Queensland. When the current Principal of BCSA, Dr Bryan Hardman, began talking of me being installed as Deputy Principal there, I felt uneasy with the way things were going and after three years at the College decided to resign.

We had a sense that our future under God was in Queensland but with nothing definite ahead and no money to meet the heavy costs of transporting our goods back to Queensland, we felt we were launching into the unknown. Normally in the past, we had only moved when we had something definite to move to but in this instance, not knowing what the future held, brought a stirring feeling of dependence on God. Nonetheless, convinced that the Lord was leading, I resigned and we simply put the matter in his hands. Then not long after, the Lord gave his blessing to this move in an overt way. It came through an old friend, not aware of our particular needs in this regard, who unexpectedly sent us a cheque which covered the costs involved. We rejoiced in the assurance that God was guiding again.

I had written to the Bible College of Queensland and two churches which I knew were without a pastor, offering my services in exchange for accommodation. Rosalie Baptist took up the offer and in 1978 we found ourselves living in their manse. Mary managed to find basic work at the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB) through the good graces of an old friend who worked there. To pursue higher academic qualifications, in 1978 I undertook a University of Queensland Master's Qualifying course which was restricted to one year on the basis of previous studies completed. I had to pass four Honours subjects at the Department of Studies in Religion at a satisfactory level during the first semester and produce a 10,000 word thesis in second semester. This was on top of preaching at two services per week, running the Wednesday night prayer meeting, and attending to any necessary pastoral matters. Our son Philip began his high school studies at Kenmore High while daughter Joanne went in the first instance to Rainworth school but shortly had to change to Milton because of transport difficulties. On many fronts, both Mary and I found 1978 to be a heavy and stressful year. I successfully applied for one of the two advertised lecturing positions at the Baptist Theological

College of Queensland and after a very demanding year, we were glad to be going to the Brookfield College in 1979.

We lived on the Brookfield campus in a staff house for 23 years. We were happy enough there except that the house lacked privacy, being too close to student accommodation. Mary found she needed relief from living constantly in a Christian community and found work with the Blue Nurses in their office and later as Administrator at Resthaven retirement village less than a kilometre from our home. Our daughter Joanne enrolled at the local Brookfield primary school and Phil continued at Kenmore High. Annual holidays became all important family time. When I was appointed Principal, another house was built for us more than 100 m. from the main College complex on recently acquired land and that gave us a greater degree of privacy.

With only a small faculty, Principal Ted Gibson needed each of us to assume responsibility for matters other than our regular lecturing and to lecture in subjects that we did not consider to be in our particular area of interest or expertise. My main responsibility was in Old Testament subjects but of the other subjects I found myself enjoying Church History and history in general. This interest was to become significant in later writing that I was to do. I had the sense that in going to the Brookfield College in 1979 I had finally arrived at what the Lord had been grooming me for all these years.

In 1979 too, I enrolled as a part-time M.A. student in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland. However, the preparation of new College lecture material and other demands (such as preaching on Sundays and taking studies at weekend church camps) left so little time for research that for years I did little more towards the degree than reading in the area. Progress was only made when I was granted six months' study leave in the second half of 1985. Prof Ian Andersen, head of the Religion Department, suggested I switch my focus from an analysis of Jeremiah's "Confessions" to a study of Jeremiah 23. This was to prove to be a positive move. I was allocated a room at the university where I sat day by day making significant progress. In 1987 I was awarded the degree of M.A. for my thesis, *Jeremiah 23:9-40: A Study in True and False Prophecy*.

After I had spent four years at the College, Principal Gibson retired. Although I had previously been appointed Vice-Principal this was not meant to be an automatic stepping stone to the Principalship. In reality, I did not hanker for the position and wrote to the relevant committee that the current Principal of the New Zealand Bible College would be a good choice. However, he was rejected because he had not been ordained and I received an invitation to apply. I was quite reluctant to do so until I heard that a fellow lecturer had also been contacted. It was then that I sent in an application since I thought he was distinctly unsuitable for the job. I was nominated and voted in as Principal to commence in 1983. This was clearly God's

next step for me. My colleague was quite unhappy with the outcome and over the years made his opposition known. Being just 44, quite inexperienced, and lacking in a number of areas, I entered upon a steep learning curve.

If the first few College years were times of pressure, the demands of the Principalship only increased them further. As Principal I became an *ex officio* member of a number of Baptist Union committees including the monthly meetings of the Executive and the Ministerial panels; in addition, there was always some demand on my time whether it were from the denomination or the College or the churches. Through it all, I continued as Old Testament lecturer. On the home front, Mary and I lived mostly separate lives. She found satisfaction at work and in a long association with the Christian Women's movement as a featured speaker at camps and the like.

Once our daughter went to high school, she went through a rebellious stage as she tried to work out her identity and place in life, chafing under the all-too strict demands of her parents. This added to our stress levels. I have often wondered if what our children were subjected to with respect to frequent changes in location and schooling had an unacceptable impact on them. We parents had been narrowly focused on pursuing what we perceived to be God's direction for us. Our son seemed to handle the issues well enough, going on to complete two bachelor's degrees in business at the Queensland University of Technology, the first majoring in communication in 1987 and the second in accountancy ten years later. He worked for newspapers and then with the Government. In 1994 I had the pleasure of officiating at his marriage to a Christian girl with whom we have formed a loving relationship. After high school, our daughter found work with the Queensland Medical Laboratory (QML). Over time it has been a happy release to surrender the rigidity of our parenting controls and to enjoy a close relationship with both our children. And through it all, God's gracious and enabling hand sustained us.

God's support and assurance became particularly apparent during a stressful time that arose when an *ad hoc* Structural and Spiritual Research and Review Committee (SSRRC) recommended changes to the College's operation with these matters to be discussed at the Half Yearly Assembly the following year in 1989. Wanting to strengthen the practical side of the College, they proposed the creation of two schools, a Biblical/Theological School and a Ministry School. I was to head up the first, a dean to be appointed for the second, and a part-time President to be over all. I took this to be an expression of lack of confidence in me, but was content to leave the matter in God's hands - the Lord was in charge and would accomplish his purposes. At the meeting in 1989 prominent educationists firmly objected to the governance proposal concerning changes of leadership structure. The meeting's proceedings were halted while the SSRRC discussed matters on the

platform. Then something unusual took place - the committee withdrew their motion, leaving leadership arrangements as they were. I took it that the Lord had intervened, wanting me to continue on as before.

However, the proposition to give greater emphasis to practical training was accepted, including a plan to have each lecturer spend one third of his time in a church but retaining the same salary level. One lecturer, Mr Swincer, took exception to this because he would lose out financially since the payment he received as part-time pastor of a church was in addition to his College salary. Relationships between Mr Swincer and the Baptist Union leadership deteriorated, becoming acrimonious and public, dragging on for years. This led to a loss of confidence in the College by Baptists at large and a consequent fall in student numbers. The Baptist Union eventually dropped their demands for the



The Queensland Baptist College of Ministries, Brookfield, formerly Baptist Theological College of Queensland

faculty to spend part of their time in churches. Finally, in 1992 a special Assembly was called to dismiss Mr Swincer but at this unpleasant meeting he resigned. I found the long, drawn out process particularly draining.

As it turned out, the Lord had his own spectacular way of attending to the College's needs which were the restoring of confidence in the College and the provision of new staff. This all came together in 1995 in a remarkable set of measures from the Lord. At that time, we believed the restoration of confidence in the College would be through a new field work system for students at the local church level. The Lord's first step in achieving this did not initially appear to have anything to do with it but it grew out of the College Registrar's confidential advice to me in late 1994 of his intention to resign.

Out of the blue, the Rev Ron Hansard at the City Tabernacle Church, not knowing our need, rang to say that a retired banker in his congregation was being lured to serve at the Tahlee Bible College and "wouldn't it be a shame to lose him from Queensland?" I sensed that this was from God and could be his provision for our current need. And so it turned out to be - ex-banker, Brian Thomas, was installed as Registrar in February 1995. At the same time, a former student, Stephen Ball with a wealth of experience in education circles, felt that God wanted him at the College, but as Vice Principal at

Mueller Christian College, he could not come until 1996 - Mueller was currently in the midst of an extensive building programme. Brian's availability for 1995 fitted in perfectly with those constraints and in 1996 Stephen became Registrar and Field Work Director with Brian's title changed to Bursar.

The final piece in the production of a rejuvenated field work programme came when a friend of many years standing, Bill Gynther, came to visit me on his first day of retirement from the Queensland Department of Education. Here was the very person we needed. Bill agreed to develop an entirely new field work training scheme. I was not aware at the time that Bill had had years of experience in designing and delivering adult education to serving teachers. Working with replies from pastors to a mail-out looking for skills that field work students should acquire, Bill organized the responses into five broad areas along with levels of competence and produced a 136 page Field Education Manual. The first training session for pastors in the new field work programme was held at the end of 1995 with Stephen Ball overseeing its implementation once he was at the College.

The other College need was for re-invigorated academic standing. Sometime in mid-1995, New Testament lecturer, Geoff Sunstrom, advised that he felt he had to resign to care for his ageing parents in South Australia. We would need a replacement lecturer at the beginning of 1996. The Lord again stepped in and prompted an old friend, Dr Les Ball, not aware of Geoff's decision, to visit me the very next day. He said that he had resigned his position at the Bible College of Queensland but despite attractive opportunities in New South Wales believed his place was in Queensland. What clearer indication could I have from the Lord that Geoff's replacement was in front of me? The question of whether our College could only employ ordained people proved to be no obstacle, clearing Les to be nominated as lecturer. The denomination voted him in as New Testament Lecturer and Academic Dean to commence in 1996. His impact on the College was to be enormous.

All these events took place in a short period of time in 1995 and were to greatly contribute to a rejuvenated College. College stocks in the constituency were greatly enhanced while the new field work programme was so effective that the Church of the Nazarene bought the rights to use it world-wide for \$20,000. Academic standards rose and through Les' efforts we were accredited to run our own bachelor's degree course for years until events made it simpler to link again with the Australian College of Theology for their degree offerings. Enrolments reached record levels. The good hand of God could not have been more plainly evident.

Previously, when things became too pressured at the College, (now it can be told), I would absent myself unannounced and research the life of the first Principal of the College, the Rev T.J. Malyon. I had long been interested in finding out all I could about him. This interest was to be the catalyst for writing a Ph.D.

dissertation on the history of the College from its earliest days to the beginning of my Principalship. Taking steps to earn a doctorate was a combination of personal ambition and expectations from the Australian College of Theology that lecturers possess the highest academic qualifications. Enrolling as a part-time Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of Queensland in 1991, I was awarded a scholarship that waived any due fees. When the Baptist Union granted me six months' study leave, I was able to work full-time on the project in the second half of 1993. The research involved seeking information from overseas as well as locally and required me to travel to Adelaide and to Sydney on more than one occasion. It took a number of years to complete the thesis, *Baptist Theological College of Queensland, 1904 – 1982*, and finally in 1996 I was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the age of 57. Two years later, simply out of personal interest, I produced a biography of the Rev B.G. Wilson, founding father of Baptist work in Queensland.

Over the years both Mary and I had significant health issues that thankfully were dealt with successfully. Of these, arguably it was my heart operation that most clearly showed God's good hand at work. When the cardiologist ordered a mitral valve repair, I was operated on in May 2000 on a Wednesday. By that weekend I was desperately ill but no-one knew why. Mary stood by my side watching me die. On the Sunday, friends came to the hospital to stand with her and pray for us both. One of them rang the General Superintendent of the Baptist Union asking him if he could get out an urgent prayer request to the churches. Quite unsure how it could be done, he managed to email that request – the first time that facility had been used by the Union office.

The result was that widespread prayer throughout the churches was made for my situation. One example was that a senior member of our home church who was not at church that night, received the request, took it to the evening service, and prayer was incorporated in the service. The Lord then answered those prayers in a remarkable way. When the situation looked hopeless, three medical specialists, my cardiologist, the surgeon, and a specialist physician, walked into the coronary unit together. They thought there was probably a build up of blood around the heart preventing it from pumping properly. They were right. After draining 600 mls of blood from the heart sac, I was whisked back from the point of death and began to recover almost immediately. Some 20 years later, I still wonder at God's gracious ordering of it all.

For some time I had thought of retiring from the Principalship. A short time after my heart operation and far from fully recovered, I foolishly accepted the invitation to become next year's President of the Baptist Union. I found it a struggle to adequately fulfil a President's duties but it did confirm me in my decision to resign from the College. A pleasant farewell function was held in October 2001 with the conclusion of duties coming at the end of December. I emerged from the

"university of life" under the Lord's guiding tutelage a broader and wiser disciple.

Cessation as Principal meant having to leave our College accommodation and buy our own house. With an incredible spike in house prices pushing the cost up on a daily basis, we found ourselves travelling further and further away from the College to find a house we could afford. Finally, after a hot, draining Saturday of fruitless searching, we spied a shopping centre unknown to us where we hoped to get a drink. That's when the Lord stepped in. It turned out that there was a real estate office in the centre. On looking at the properties advertized in the window, we saw a woman in the office although it was closed. She enquired if she could help us, disclosing that she had just been discharged from hospital and went to the office to reacquaint herself with the property situation. She showed us a property that had newly come onto the market. The short story is that it suited us with respect to features, location, and price. The Lord was again graciously proving to be our provider.

Retirement actually came by degrees. Since the College needed to find someone to lecture in the Old Testament, I filled that need, at first with a three-quarter full-time load in 2002, and then with a lighter commitment until 2005. Mary kept working at Brookfield for another two and a half years until mid-2004. We undertook interim ministries at four churches, each for some months, that for various reasons needed pastoral leadership. I also preached at other churches as the need arose. I had time for writing - co-writing the centenary history of the College for 2004 and contributing to the sesquicentenary history of the denomination for 2005. As well, in 2009 I produced a biography of my great-grandfather, bringing him out of the shadows of history to emerge as a real person.

Increasingly, we found that with the extra years given after my heart operation, God blessed us in retirement with a torrent of good things. Arguably, the best of all has been that Mary and I have spent time together instead of living virtually separate lives. We have had the pleasure of being involved in the lives of our adult children and four grandchildren - helping out when necessary, attending award nights, celebrating birthdays and Christmas, tracking them through their school days and university, and a host of other enjoyable experiences such as officiating at my daughter's wedding and attending the awarding of her bachelor's degree in veterinary technology at the University of Queensland in 2017. And so much more.

God has been good beyond all telling during these years. Our journey through life can be summed up in the words of a song by Bonnie Low in an early *Scripture in Song* publication:

*He has brought us this far by his grace
He has led us by fire and by cloud
He will bring us to Zion to look on his face
O blessed! O blessed be God!*