



Revival Fellowship Celebrates 20 Years

This month of August 2003 marks the 20th anniversary of the beginnings of the Revival Fellowship in Coober Pedy. Pastor Deane Clee, the establishing founder of the work, remains the Pastor of the group to this day. The circumstances surrounding the church are a part of the interesting history of our town. They unfolded as follows:

Deane practiced as a Chartered Accountant in Adelaide. In October 1971 one of his clients, the late George Papadopoulos - a colourful identity of the town, flew him to Coober Pedy in George's single-engine Piper Cherokee to resolve some issues with the management of his Golden Fleece Service Station and the Acropolis Restaurant. This began a very much 'hands on' involvement with the town. Deane was introduced to other individuals and business people in town and commenced conducting accounting and taxation services for them. For the next twelve years he regularly travelled up and down the road (approx.600 kms of dirt from Port Augusta to Coober Pedy) many times to service his clients here whilst still operating from his offices in Adelaide.

In 1983 one man invited him to come for lunch. He asked "What is it about you? I have been watching you for these last twelve years, and don't see you drinking alcohol (unusual in Coober Pedy 30 years ago), swearing, raging or being 'sharp' in your business practices. What's going on?" Deane explained to him his story of being challenged in his deeply held Catholic faith (his aunt was the Mother Superior of an order of nuns, the Little Sisters of the Poor) by the teachings of the Bible, and subsequent Baptism in February 1971. The man was in tears, acknowledging the shortcomings in his life, and asked to be baptized by full immersion as Jesus Christ was. That was arranged for the same evening when the man, his wife and three other adults were baptized at a gathering of about 30 people to witness the events. That was the beginnings of the Coober Pedy Revival Fellowship.

In 1984 Deane traveled from Adelaide to Coober Pedy 15 times to minister to the people and conduct his accounting work. He and his wife, Valerie, purchased a small dugout as a home on Tom Cat Hill and excavated a large lounge room to be used as a meeting hall for the small but growing group. They moved to reside permanently in Coober Pedy and meetings were held there 3 or 4 times a week from 1985 to 1991. An old abandoned mine property became available in Crowders Gully road and Deane and Valerie sold their home in Adelaide to acquire the property and develop it as the new meeting hall. The property was derelict, without power and water, Crowders Gully road in those days being just a dirt track that meandered down the gully around old dumps. The members of the Fellowship assisted in clearing, cleaning, development and establishment of the 18m by 8m old mining ballroom as the hall where church meetings have been held 3 times weekly from July 1991 to the present.

In December 1991 four elderly women from the Pitjantjatjara lands were baptized. Of these four, 2 are regular meeting attendees to this day, 1 has passed away as a faithful member, and 1 resides on the AP lands. This began an involvement with Aboriginal folk and since then over 200 Aboriginal people have been baptized. Deane and Valerie now have open access permits to visit many of these people on the AP lands, others have moved to Coober Pedy permanently to attend Fellowship meetings.

The Fellowship is Bible-based, and associated with the world wide "Revival Fellowship". In Coober Pedy the involvement has been fourfold: (i) Coober Pedy residents, (ii) Aboriginal folk, (iii) many visitors from around Australia and world wide, and (iv) visitors from other fellowships.

After 20 years the motto is still the bible text "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever", and Deane remains as Pastor of the group. The hall is open every day, and people are welcome to come in and look around. Meetings are held twice on Sundays and each Wednesday, with meeting times shown in the "Revival Report" articles published monthly in the Coober Pedy Regional Times. Pastor Deane has written these articles regularly since 1987. In a changing world it is comforting to consider the stability that this Fellowship has shown in and to the people of Coober Pedy for 20 years.

The members extend a welcome to any that would like to know more about their Fellowship.

(extract from "Coober Pedy Regional Times", August 2003.)