

ACTS OF KINDNESS TURN FREEMANTLE DOWN SIDE UP

We have received a number of requests from folk who read our report earlier this year on the very special initiative undertaken by the Churches of Fremantle at Easter to minister to the needy of their city to write another story covering the results achieved by the programme. This report given by the Australian Prayer Network representative in Western Australia provides most exciting reading.

"In a previous report the question was asked: "What would it be like if all the churches in a city banded together and said they would raise money to pay off the debts of people in their city who were in desperate need?" That report outlined how God had birthed a vision in the heart of Julie Hollett, Team Leader with her husband Wayne, of a church known as New Life Christian Community, Fremantle, Western Australia.

The report shared how the Mayor of the City of Fremantle, Peter Tagliaferri, had enthusiastically "come on board" to endorse the project, and how a number of the pastors of the city joined the leaders of New Life Christian Community to make it a city-wide effort of the churches in unity.

The vision was: "To apply the Biblical concept of Jubilee in the Fremantle Community, through extraordinary, radical and generous acts of kindness that reveal the extravagant and unconditional love of God." In a leaflet setting out some of the principles of the Fremantle Jubilee it was stated: "God's extravagant and unconditional love has been expressed to us through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. With His blood, Jesus completely cancelled all of our sins; a debt we could never repay. We want to reveal a glimpse of God's love and truth in Fremantle by paying outstanding monetary debts for households at Easter time."

I. The Result:

The Jubilee Festival ran from April 13 - 20th (Easter Sunday). It was a week of blessing the community with radical and extravagant acts of kindness. Churches, Youth, Businesses, Welfare Agencies and other groups were involved. Every act of kindness was administered in the name of Jesus Christ. Debts were cancelled during the festival. Contrary to what was reported earlier, it was not possible to have an Easter Sunday "March for Jesus" because of other events in the city. Instead, the Jubilee celebrations were launched at the City Esplanade on the Palm Sunday afternoon prior to Easter which was seen as a significant opportunity to welcome the Lord Jesus into the city at the commencement of the week of Jubilee.

The visit of Dr. Kim Tan, a Chinese Christian businessman from the UK, who teaches on the concept of Jubilee all over the world, made a significant contribution to the Jubilee Festival. He is currently the Director of Jubilee Action in the UK. He arrived on the Friday prior to the launch of the Festival and on the Saturday held a one day seminar on the principles of Jubilee as found in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and their application to today. He also shared in the Launch on the Sunday afternoon. He came at this own expense to be a part of the celebrations.

It was amazing to see how business leaders, leaders of corporations, charities, churches, the Mayor of Fremantle, and even the local State and Federal members of Parliament, all played their part to endorse and support this Year of Jubilee. Meetings were held with the Operations Managers (or their equivalent) of the Electricity, Gas and Water Corporations, as well as the State Government Housing Authority known as "HomesWest". It was these facilities who actually administered the payment of the debts of people who, unable to pay their bills, had either had their electricity or gas supplies cut off, or their water flow reduced to a trickle. In the case of HomesWest, people who had received eviction notices had their rent arrears paid and so were able to stay in their homes. Thus the debt cancellations were completely confidential in that the Jubilee committee did not know who the recipients of these actions were.

Each recipient received a card which stated that what they had received was "a gift of kindness because God Loves You and is for you." The card also asked if we could pray for them, and gave contact details. Some of these people, out of gratitude for what they had received, have since contacted the Jubilee office resulting, in some cases, in spiritual and emotional counselling being given.

What are some of the figures for what was involved?

- 76 homes re-connected to power;
- 74 homes re- connected to gas;
- 26 homes restored to full flow of water (legal action against some has been stopped);
- 36 households prevented from home eviction through payment of arrears.
- \$123,000 in cash donations received from churches, individual Christians, businesses etc. In some cases churches outside the city of Fremantle contributed as well.
- \$30,000 approx. in goods and services donated by businesses, corporations etc.
- Other use of money included purchase of white goods (5 fridges and 5 washing machines),
- 10 000 Jubilee water bottles given away;and
- \$10,000 worth of Food Vouchers (extra!) distributed through Welfare Agencies in the Jubilee Festival Week.

Here is a list of some of the "Acts of Kindness" which were done during the week:

- Easter egg giveaways, free food, band and drama at High Schools; free dental packs for patients, Op shop giveaways, food hampers, windscreen washing and chocolate giveaway at a petrol station, Coles supermarket voucher giveaways.
- Newspapers, water bottles and travel packs were given away at the railway station, free flowers to restaurant patrons, free hot drinks and hot cross buns at government housing flats, games and free lollies to school children, freshly made fruit juices, water bottles, coffee and fridge magnets at Fremantle Hospital.
- One Home Group cooked and served dinner at a Men's home, flowers were given for homebound people, coffee vouchers, easter eggs, sausage sizzles and hot cross buns in St John's (City) Square, free bread, cakes and clothes, games and free lollies for school children; a pack of water bottle, mars bar and fruit given to truckies; people's parking costs met; essential packs for needy people; free flowers to restaurant patrons.

II. The Flow-On:

Has the Jubilee been simply a "flash in the pan" after which things have returned to what they were before? Definitely not! There were numerous newspaper articles, radio interviews (with the ABC and Sonshine FM) and even Television opportunities which have all been gifts from God to raise the awareness of the community (and the city of Perth) to the reality of God's love. Unchurched people who received an "Act of Kindness" continue to make contact with the Jubilee office for various reasons and needs.

Very good relationships have been established with the local State and Federal Members of Parliament which in turn promise to lead to other significant connections to members of Parliament. Significant relationship with the Mayor has led to ongoing opportunities and an open invitation to the Churches to "raise the bar of Christianity in the city!"

God has given the Church some amazing networking opportunities with all kinds of groups and institutions. One of the other participating churches, Port Community Church, has seen doors open as the result of Jubilee. [They had attempted to network (unsuccessfully) with the Migrant Resource Centre for some months. Because of Jubilee, the Migrant Centre actually approached them and now they are working together!] God has lifted the Church to a place of influence and authority in the city that otherwise could have taken years to realise.

The Jubilee has not only affected people and churches in the City of Fremantle. Many contacts from other shires and municipalities in the City of Perth and beyond, even to the Eastern States and overseas have sought information and guidance about what has taken place in Fremantle as they long to know the mind of God for their particular situation.

Last week it became official that a large City in the Southwest region (Bunbury), will experience the blessing of 'Jubilee' this Christmas. An Anglican pastor who saw the TV report on Fremantle's Jubilee was deeply moved by the vision and after several weeks, presented the concept to a group of 14 Pastors in the Bunbury City. They unanimously agreed to move forward together, inspired to express God's love in this way in their city at Christmas time.

We believe that principles have been put into action which will continue to grow and expand in their influence and effectiveness. We have a sense that God is imparting fresh understanding of 'patterns' for Christian Community that will see a re-kindling of early Church passion and power. Flowing from this, our efforts to reach out to people in need will be unlimited and impacting: What if we were able to help people with low interest loans through the establishment of a community bank? What if? What if. Only God knows what will eventuate, for we are confident that since He initiated Fremantle's Jubilee He will faithfully and purposefully direct us in the future.

To Him alone we give the Glory!

Further information may be obtained from the Jubilee website:www.fremantlejubilee.asn.au

Source: Bob Burton W.A. Rep. Australian Prayer Network