



Project Hope

'Planting Seeds In The Grounds For Despair'

The Vision of Project Hope

The vision for a Project Hope was developed in 1996 when a few of us reflected on the number of individuals we knew from around Brisbane who were asking for help and support as they sought to respond to the needs and problems in their communities. Some of these people had attended training courses with us and wanted to go back to their localities to work out their faith in practical ways. Others were people who had heard about our work in the West End area and wanted to keep in touch for their encouragement and inspiration.

We rang around and a number of people expressed interest in occasional gatherings. We set a date and waited to see what would happen. A roomful of people from around Brisbane turned up, expressing a strong need for regular contact and encouragement. We decided to meet once every six weeks on a Saturday morning - when people didn't generally have other community meetings on.

The Aims of Project Hope

The aims that the Project Hope network has set for itself are:

- to encourage each other to integrate Christian faith and community life
- to help us each develop a healthy balance between our inner and outer lives – a congruence between our personal spirituality and our public activities
- to challenge each other to move out of our obsessions with 'self' and into practical 'others-orientated' Christianity
- to think of how we can sustain ourselves long term in the service of Christ rather than being crippled by despair and discouragement
- to uphold the examples and stories of people around Brisbane who are grappling with the complexities of life with Christ in their localities

Meetings

The first couple of years went by with a small group of adherents attending. By 1999 the meetings were averaging 15 and in 2000 the lowest attendance was 22. Usually now between 25 to 35 people attend on any given Saturday.

The people who attend Project Hope come from a spectrum of Baptist, Anglican Brethren, Church of Christ and Uniting Church traditions. Some are actively part of committed churches and others are struggling to find a place in their local fellowships.

The Waiters Union

About Us

Many participants are involved in frontline situations in their localities – responding to isolated people, street people, people involved with drugs and graffiti, people experiencing psychiatric trauma, struggling families, the youth, the elderly and so on. Many are trying to work through coalitions with churches, schools, agencies, police, and anyone who is willing to be involved in responding to complex local situations

Our gatherings, usually facilitated by Neil Barringham, consists of a reflection, a time for mixing and mingling, someone's story and a workshop around a relevant topic.

We have sought to follow the example of the early Christian churches which took time to workshop together about how the gospel related to issues of slavery, eating meat sacrificed to idols and whether to share the gospel message with gentiles. We have had discussions about how the gospel relates to the reconciliation movement, to the plight of refugees, to homeless people and to mental and emotional health needs.

A significant development has been the commencement of another gathering, coordinated by Neil Hockey, which meets in Logan and caters for people from the south of Brisbane

Helen Smith has shared her experience earlier this year, of resurrecting a tuck shop at a suburban school in a disadvantaged area. All her many years of training in church contexts have prepared her for this work, she says, as she interacts with many struggling women who are desperate for affection, for friendship, and for hope.

Stories such as these, where people are willing to work in their communities, in frontier situations - interacting with complex social situations and seeking to demonstrate something of the love of Christ - are really appreciated at Project Hope.

Retreats

A further highlight has been the weekend retreats that have been run. Over thirty people have gathered for songs, prayers, studies, discussions and networking.

At our last retreat Maddie Anlezark led some workshops on how we could use the Psalms to draw into a deeper experience of God, while Frank and Val Garlick from Nundah Baptist led sessions on how we can hang in through difficulties in life.

Reflections

Project Hope has continued to function as a network of support for people who are working at building connections between their faith and their communities.

Frequently, participants affirm two primary aspects of Project Hope gatherings:

- 1) the sense of support they receive from being able to gather with people who are willing to grapple with difficult issues in a safe atmosphere; and
- 2) the fact they can meet with people who are 'hands-on' in their communities and talk about the difficult issues with people who are grappling with them.