



What Others Say About Us

My encounter with the Waiters Union

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When I read Dave Andrews' book, *Can You Hear the Heartbeat*, in 1997, I immediately decided to visit the Waiters Union. In December of that year I spent 2 weeks in Brisbane's West End, where I encountered Christ in the everyday life of this community of dedicated, diverse people who are passionate about their faith and serving the marginalised.

My encounter with the Waiters Union was significant, even faith-saving. After years of pondering what authentic faith-in-community might look like in post-modern Australia, I had come to the conclusion that such an entity only existed in the book of Acts; or in the monasteries of the Franciscans; or in the fantasies of the best Christian minds; or in the exclusive Christian sects whose integrity, discipline and lifestyle were as compelling as they were off-putting. Was it possible to experience faith-in-community, where people's first priority was to serve Jesus by serving their local community, living simply, sharing their possessions and reaching the hidden and forgotten – without the conformity, control and manipulation that I had seen in other groups?

The Waiters Union provided evidence that such a community was not beyond the reach of the twenty-first century Christian. And so I was provided with a workable, flexible, yet profoundly Biblical model of radical, Christ-like involvement in local community. As a result, my encounter with the Waiters Union affirmed my commitment to living as Christ in my local community, both here and in Armenia, by putting first those who are considered least and constantly evaluating all that I do in the light of Christ's life.

I have heard that hundreds, if not thousands, of others, both Christian and non-Christian, have been inspired by the model of the Waiters Union. Many have been inspired to emulate the principles of this community in their own localities. I know of one person who made the decision to work part-time and move into a needy district of Sydney to work among the homeless as a result of a visit to the Waiters Union. I know of several others who have created partial community-living arrangements with their friends in response to what they had seen at West End. And, more recently, one of my students at the Macquarie Christian Studies Institute in Sydney shared how his reading of *Can You Hear the Heartbeat* and his encounter with Dave have been life changing for him. As a result, this student has re-dedicated himself to serving the marginalised, the forgotten and those on the periphery of the church.

What would be lost if the Waiters Union did *not* exist? The answer lies in the testimonies of those, including myself, whose lives have been changed through the Waiters Union. The Waiters Union is one of the few Christian 'frontier' initiatives in Australia where the difficult issues of faith and life are grappled with, and where

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biblical answers are found, implemented and constantly re-evaluated in the light of the Spirit of Christ. Without it, we would be missing out on an important part of what God is saying to the churches today.

The Waiters Union is an excellent example

Stephen Forward
Church Worker

My awareness and appreciation of the ministry of the Waiters Union goes back many years. In my early twenties, I found many of the answers to the questions I was asking myself about "real life" faith and ministry in the stories, examples, relationships and opportunities that were provided by the various ministries of the Waiters Union. I would say that some of the key aspects of my current ministry framework came to me through this contact, and I have taken and developed that framework through work as a social worker, school chaplain, trainer of other youth workers and in my youth and community role with the church. I believe that the many people I have ministered to and with over the past 15 years have benefited from the influence of the Waiters Union in my life in numerous ways.

Over the years, at least two of the young people from our church moved into West End and became a committed part of the Waiters Union community for a number of years. There they lived a model of Christian community and ministry that, I believe, is not available to be experienced in any other setting in Brisbane – or possibly even in Queensland or Australia. I really appreciate that the Waiters Union was there to open up the possibility of this deep Christian lifestyle experience to these young people of ours. I can see that it has made a significant, deep and lasting impression on them.

We are currently exploring alternative models of communities of faith in our own community on behalf of our church congregation. The small group of people we have begun this journey with call themselves 'the greenspace' and are committed to being a meaningful Christian network that will make more sense to people in our community who have no connection to churches. I find in developing this model, that I am using the examples of the Waiters Union, time and time again, to do those things that will be the most useful and have the greatest impact to those outside of established church communities.

The Christian community desperately needs unique models of ministry such as this to continually challenge it toward meaningful engagement in the community on behalf of the gospel. The Waiter Union is an excellent example of such a model.

A Waiters-Union-Inspired Movement

Geoff Westlake
Team Leader, Cheers

As a co-founder of Cheers, it's my pleasure to report that the Waiters Union in Brisbane has been the most significant single source of formation for our movement.

The example of the Waiters Union, clarified for us our own mission in this neighbourhood, plus gave us ways to do it effectively - and without unnecessary offence.

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Cheers is now in its third year and has already become an effective holistic Christ-based mission in this community. Recently the residents' association president (not a believer) said, "There's no way Banksia Grove would be the community it is today if it weren't for Cheers." Cheers is yeast in the dough here, growing in favour with the common people, salty.

Not only that, but the Waiters-Union-inspired Cheers story is in turn inspiring *other movements* here in WA (and interstate) through the Forge and Reframe networks. Now we are assisting *new plants* based on similar grounds as the Waiters Union. Further, we are consulting with *existing churches* to help them reconfigure their outreaches along similar lines.

From time to time people ask where they can learn more of "this stuff" and I invariably point them to the Waiters Union and their resources. Besides their great body of input, their continued existence over 25 years shows that such a work is sustainable.

Last week, Forge held its first national summit, and 630 registrants representing hundreds of missions in Australia testify to the current rise of this kind of ministry. NCLS (National Church Life Survey) is currently researching the "emerging church" phenomenon, recognising its growing role in the future of the Australian church. David Barrett's research in the World Christian Encyclopaedia even suggests that such movements will be the future of the worldwide church, the predominant practice within 20 years.

Clearly the current surge of interest in Cheers and in the Waiters Union is because Dave's ministry was before its time but now that time has come. We are now clearly in a post-Christian time, and a more postmodern culture. A cross-cultural missionary practice is now needed. The Waiters Union offers one of the very few effective, replicable, genuine missional models of church in Australia.