

## 150 Years of Community of Christ in Australia

In the 1840s the English Mission of the early Church sent their first missionaries to Australia from the United Kingdom. Newly baptized and ordained 17 year old William James Barrett arrived in South Australia in July 1840, where it is claimed he baptized one known convert. A year later Andrew Anderson, his wife and three children sailed from Scotland and arrived in Sydney on 6 October 1841. They settled at Montefiore in the Wellington area of NSW. By the end of 1844 Andrew Anderson had organized a branch of nine members.

Charles Wandell was first sent to Australia from Utah. He arrived in Sydney Australia on 21 October 1851 with John Murdock. They organized a branch of the Utah Church there soon after. The following year Wandell sailed to Port Philip in Victoria where he established the Melbourne Branch in November in 1852.

Developments in the church in America were reported in Australian newspapers during 1852. They created much confusion among members of the church here. Wandell left Australia, travelled to Utah, and withdrew from the church because of what he found there. He joined the Reorganization and was ordained a seventy on 22 August 1873.

On his second voyage to Australia Charles Wandell was accompanied by Glauod Rodger, arriving in Sydney on Thursday 22 January 1874 - this time as a seventy for the Reorganization. The two missionaries immediately reached out to those who had become members of the Church twenty years earlier, as a result of the ministry by missionaries sent from Utah. They began to create a foundation for the work of the Reorganization in Australia.

The two seventies organized the Australasian Mission on 5 April 1874. Three weeks later Rodger left Sydney and travelled to the Newcastle area where he contacted Latter Day Saint immigrants from the British Isles and established the Hunter River Branch in 1875.

Advancing age and ill health resulted in Wandell's death in St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney on 2 March, 1875, a little over 13 months after he had arrived in Australia. He was buried in the Leichhardt Cemetery, which is now a Pioneer Memorial Park. A portion of his grave marker can be found in the wall of the downstairs foyer of the Drummoyne Church.

After Wandell's death Rodger wrote to church leaders in America telling them that he longed to go home yet he would like to stay in Australia and continue his ministry. Rodger did stay for over four more years and continued his missionary work alone. And, because he stayed, the work of the Church was begun in many places that might have been without the restored gospel for many years to come. He visited Queensferry and Hastings on Western Port Bay, Victoria in 1878 and began the work there on which others were to build. Before he left Australia he had organized a total five branches, in addition to the Sydney Branch:

**Hunter River Branch** which later became the **Wallsend** and **Hamilton Branches**  
**Port Stephens Branch**  
**Bungwahl Branch** on the Myall Lake

## **Bungay Branch on the Manning River – in 1877**

Eventually Glaud Rodger returned home to the USA in May 1879.

*"The original appointment of [Wandell & Rodger] was for three years. Not only was no reinforcement sent after Wandell's death but no replacement was supplied for Rodger at the end of his appointed time. The 1877 fall Conference requested him to remain until a successor could be appointed. This he nobly agreed to do. He continued on until 1879 when he sailed for home, arriving in May that year, after five and a half years' unbroken absence.*

*The blood, sweat, and tears of that first mission of the Reorganized Church in Australia laid the keel for a sturdy, thriving overseas mission in the following years.*

*J.W. Gillen was the next seventy appointed to Australia. The April Conference of 1879 commissioned him, and he arrived in June following Rodger's departure. He completed three years of the same type of work which Rodger had done. Then for the next two and a half years the mission was left to fend for itself until the family of Seventy Joseph F. Burton arrived in December 1884. During their very fruitful four-year term, the work was further augmented by the apostolic assistance of T.W. Smith and his wife, who stayed more than a year. With the Burton's return to the USA the hard pioneering era in this mission drew to an end.*

*Later appointees made their own distinctive contributions, but they built upon the foundations for the most part already well laid and were not strangers in a strange land in the same way those earlier zealots for Christ had been...*

*In time the outpouring of American personnel, time, and treasure was surpassed by the local contribution. Appointee ministry began to be homegrown with the opening of the twentieth century. The next three decades saw the mission entirely self-sustaining in this respect.*

*The strength of the church anywhere any time can be measured by the strength of its priesthood members and their dependable ministry. Australia checks high by this criterion among many others. It has contributed to the World Church apostles, seventies, high priests, bishops (including presiding bishop), and patriarchs, besides hundreds of elders, priests, teachers and deacons.*

*Behind these have been and are thousands of members who have fed upon the traditions of the idealistic, sensitive, and self-effacing courage and devotion of the pioneers and later missionaries.*

*A stable, sizeable mission was established in this "land down under." 1970s Saints built on the past and, because of it, sensed the possibility of an even better future to come.*

Congregational participation in our younger years have been spiritually formative. Participating in weekly Sunday services, including when evening services were held, were not only instructive in the ways of Christ and an introduction to a relationship with God; it was a place of community, prayer, sharing and opportunities to participate in a public way. Congregations also reached out to their communities in providing relief to those in need. The congregation provided a spiritual home.

The church conducted international youth events and encouraged participation. Australia was a foundational partner in holding Celebration '96, and Celebration 2007 hosting youth and leaders from French Polynesia, Philippines, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Hawaii, Fiji, USA and Canada. The Australia church provided the main leadership at these events and the leadership for the Celebration '99 event held in Tahiti. Australia also participated in the various international youth forums known as IYF, which often included a trip to the Temple in Independence, Missouri USA and the youth event known as Spectacular which combined worship, celebration and sports as a way to connect with youth.

Locally, the church encouraged and held retreats and camps for children, youth, young people and all generations at Reunions and other gatherings. There were also Women's retreats, priesthood life and participate in sacred ways; in learning of the ways of Christ and growing in our relationship with God in sacred community. We also held retreats to provide opportunities for training in leadership and theological training. These camps and retreats were our strength.

Australia was an important partner with the volunteer program for World Service Corps which provided an opportunity for young people, and later all ages, to be ambassadors for peace and provide ministry in a variety of ways in countries overseas. Australia hosted WSC volunteers and also sent our own young people to countries such as India to offer their gifts and talents to bring ministry internationally.

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century many opportunities have been provided for participation in community and spiritual growth in our relationship with God as we continue to build on the past and look forward with hope to the future.