

# MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: THE HISTORY OF CHRIST CHURCH PAARL

The conception of CCP into a body of believers is as intriguing as a mystery novel. A walk down memory lane directs one to the early 1980s and a handful of devout ladies (Liz Visagie, Shona Gainsford, Jean Retief and Dulcie Thorburn to name a few) who began gathering informally for Bible Study. Their meetings became more structured under the tutelage of Rev. Dave Rhategan who drove through from Stellenbosch. His preaching was augmented by the talents of lay preachers and guest ministers.

Seeking a larger space, the six families which comprised the 'church', found their way to the Scout Hall: a stone's throw from where we worship today! Despite having to expend time and energy on cleaning up the mess after what appeared to be a hectic party in the same venue the night before, the band of believers recharged their spiritual batteries for the working week ahead. After a sojourn ('82-'83) across the street, we relocated to the more suitable premises of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Upper Lady Grey Street.

It was during these formative years that tragedy struck the church a mighty blow on 4 October 1985, with not only the serious injury to Bruce Hancock and others, but the deaths of Clive Minter and three youth group members on a return trip from an outing to the ice rink in Goodwood. Notwithstanding the lifelong trauma of such devastating loss, the congregation consolidated and forged stronger bonds of friendship and love around God's word. Ross (and Lindy) Anderson arrived to shepherd the flock.

After the Andersons had accepted a calling to Somerset West, the congregation was blessed to have the services of outstanding students of the Bible College in Kalk Bay such as Mervyn Eloff, Mark Dickson and Mark Woodgate. Dedicated member Alan Nel served in various capacities and recalls being asked an hour and a half before a morning service to deliver the sermon, which – with God's provision – he duly accomplished. The fledgling church took two bold steps in electing its first council under the chairmanship of Gordon Sutherland and appointing Lee Marshall as the first official pastor. Ably supported by Helen and their daughters and with his down-to-earth sermons and resemblance – and equal genius with a guitar in hand – to the folk rock legend Shawn Phillips, Lee literally held centre stage.

Before he left for St Paul's in Stellenbosch at the end of 1989, Lee had immortalised the saying, 'The devil is at his most active on Sunday mornings between 08:30–09:00'. In an unfortunate turn of events, our lease was terminated when councillor 'Oompie' Noel Pilkington (out of the goodness of his great heart) mowed the lawn on the premises on a Saturday!

CCP owes Ted and Rina Evans a lasting debt of gratitude for offering their home as a 'rectory' for a number of years whilst they were overseas. René Erasmus and Barbara Clarke

deserve gold stars for guiding the footsteps of the 'little people' who attended Sunday School and for being the initiators of the Holiday Club.

Simultaneous to securing the use of the Paarl Girls' High School Hall for morning services – on the condition that we pack out, pack up and stack the chairs – the council secured the services of the formidable Flo Visser, Sally and daughters. There was nothing 'flou' about his handshake; his resilience in overcoming childhood polio and his eagerness to participate in all the fun activities on church outings. Flo's *joie de vivre* remains a beacon of light for all to admire and emulate.

As the gathering of believers increased in number and maturity in the faith, so the idea of a place of worship we could call our home, developed a miraculous dynamism of its own – and the rest is history – or more aptly 'His story'. Months of head scratching; soul searching; meetings with all interested parties (especially our mother church, St James'); a plethora of planning and replanning; juggling of calculations; consideration of every legal cost-saving measure possible and most importantly, seeking God's guidance each step of the way, led us to 72 Bonaparte Avenue in Klein Parys and culminated in the construction of the premises in 1991. The members of the congregation did not stand idly by, but rolled up their sleeves and were actively involved as supervisors, manual labourers and caterers.

During each phase of the project, legendary Springbok rugby player, John Gainsford, made sure the council's train of thought did not derail with the interjection: 'Mr Chairman, on a point of order!' (The main point the children wanted to see on the agenda was that the new church would provide cool drink and cake after Sunday School!) Part of Uncle John's great legacy is his immeasurable generosity and that he always reminded the boys to look the other person in the eye when shaking hands.

'Oompie' Noel put his vast and unique professional negotiating skills to excellent use for the benefit of the church by acquiring the antique oak pews, pulpit and kitchenware from the defunct NG Church in Woodstock at a bargain price. (The manner in which the long pews were transported to Paarl is another fireside story.) Bishop Frank Retief graciously inaugurated Christ Church Paarl on 30 January 1993. Over the years, improvements have been made with additional structures and facilities – capped by the congregation facing in a new direction!

After Flo's departure to bolster the staff at St James', Kenilworth, the council prayerfully considered its options and after an amicable meeting with Dave Rhategan, felt led to call him to lead the flock once again. With the unconditional love and support of Anrea and daughters – and his sincere, uncomplicated, Father Christmas-like persona – Dave cemented his place in the hearts of the church family. It was with great sorrow, but immense gratitude for his devotion to his calling that we learnt of his passing some years after his retirement.

The CCP baton was passed on to Colin Banfield (along with Alison and son and daughter) without a glitch in 1995. He epitomised the expression 'dynamite comes in small packages'. In his unassuming manner, Colin could deliver a sermon with a powerful punchline. Over and above the food for thought he offered the congregation, he left some wondering why he rolled his piece of communion bread into a tiny ball before partaking. Pieter de Villiers

deserves a standing ovation for fulfilling a variety of key roles in the life of the church for more than a decade.

In the meanwhile, Quentin van Rooyen's journey took him, Anneldi, Amy and Lara on a multitude of adventurous twists and turns: remarkable student at George Whitefield College; Youth Pastor at CCP; missionary family in Mozambique; mentor of the SCA/VCSV at La Rochelle Girls' High School; ordained pastor at CCP and courageously church planter in Parow. Present members of the congregation may be aware that the complex circle has been completed with the appointment of Michael and Lara Feldtman to run the youth and children's ministry.

A sizeable bump in the road was overcome when the church welcomed Trevor, Jill and Emma Wecke to the 'hot seat' in Paarl. Not only did Trevor lead with compassion and commitment, but he became the longest-serving (hopefully not longest-suffering) pastor, clocking up an unprecedented 16 years in the pulpit (2006–2022). Trevor and Jill exemplified the progress we as pilgrims make on our spiritual journeys and empathised with the pain of searing loss on a deeply personal level.

Trevor never missed an opportunity to acknowledge Jill as his right-hand woman who kept him on the correct course, or to tell a 'tall tale' involving yachts. His sermons, after the 'Exodus' of the children to Sunday School – followed by his quip that he must have said something wrong to warrant such a reaction – fearlessly tackled contentious issues from a biblical perspective and provided practical fatherly advice. Trevor's 'keep the main thing the main thing' reverberates to this day.

In order to alleviate Trevor's burden during and in the aftermath of COVID, Solanga Mkiva, together with Lungile and sons, answered the call with a crystalline voice. As a dynamic, erudite and gifted speaker, singer and guitarist, Solanga brought energy and passion and challenged the congregation to enter the fray wearing 'the full armour of God'.

With the double blow of Trevor's retirement and Solanga's departure, the church was fortunate to have biblical history expert, William King, within its own ranks and willing visiting pastors to bridge the gap until the appointment of REACH-SA stalwart, Gary Bedderson, in April 2023.

Gary and Velma have not only steadied the ship, but are steering us on an innovative, exciting and enjoyable voyage of discovery of the complexity and camaraderie of being on this spiritual journey as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In overview, CCP has been blessed beyond measure with the nine ministers and their families who have served so faithfully during its 40+ existence, supplemented by the sound teaching of CESA/REACH-SA/GWC icons such as Bishop Stephen Bradley, Bishop Frank Retief, Dr John Newby, Principal David Seccombe, Bishop Glenn Lyons and Presiding Bishop Siegfried Ngubane.

Joerg Neethling