

## **Balhannah Uniting Church \***

"It is often the case that we know something in theory, but, until we have a personal encounter, it really doesn't touch our hearts." are the words of Rev. Peter Morel, the minister of Balhannah Uniting Church, a church in Balhannah in the Adelaide Hills, about a 40-minute drive east of Adelaide, the capital of South Australia.

Peter continues, " What do I mean by this in terms of the church captioning (CART) in the Balhannah Uniting Church? I certainly knew that there were significant differences between the 'hearing community' and the 'culturally deaf community'. However, until Lyn Beaumont (member of our church) suddenly lost his hearing, I did not understand the degree to which a 'hearing person who has lost their hearing' ended up in no-man's land, caught between two cultures.

"On the one hand, although the Deaf Community would happily welcome any hearing impaired person, it would always be on the basis of needing to learn and use sign language and become a full member of that community. This would mean that someone who has lost their hearing would need to learn how to 'think' and communicate like a 'culturally Deaf' person.

"On the other hand, the Hearing Community has few structures and ability to include and keep a hearing impaired person connected with the life of the hearing community. Therefore, to be able to provide a means of connection and participation for hearing-impaired people is a fantastic opportunity.

"There has been wide acceptance of the church captioning. I don't think anyone could forget the way Lyn's face lit up the first morning we had captioning in Balhannah. In this process, we have discovered many others who are benefiting from the captioning. The use of captioning in the Balhannah Church has also become an encouragement and source of inspiration to other churches to consider ways in which they may meet the needs of people in their communities. I thank God for the lessons he is continually teaching us as we seek to share His love in our community."

This story actually begins, Lyn Beaumont explains, about four years ago when he lost his hearing after a mysterious illness, possibly a viral attack of the inner ear. Despite numerous forms of treatment, including a Cochlear Implant, he was left with no hearing and was forced to face life as a deaf person.

With initiative and support from his wife, Wendy, they held a ten-week Auslan signing course at their home for about twenty friends and relatives in an effort to develop some signing skills as a form of communication, utilising a tutor from the South Australian Deaf Society.

Lyn wanted to maintain his involvement in the family business as a director, but attending Board meetings was a most frustrating experience both for him and for Wendy who tried to scribe or note the discussions longhand. Efforts to use a voice recognition program proved to be of little help.

Wendy decided that there had to be a better way to do this and so began searching for someone who could type fast enough to keep up. She realised that the only way would be to use someone with court reporting or similar skills, and began a search for a person willing to try this. She gathered together a small group of women who worked in this field and found that they were very keen and extremely interested in using their expertise in this way. It was a stunning success, and Board meetings again became accessible for Lyn and enabled him to participate in these meetings.

Wendy also contacted DeafSA to share with them the success of what they had organised and suggested that there may be many other 'late deaf' people who could benefit from such a service. They took up the suggestion and have become 'agents' for a transcription service now being used by organisations, students and others.

During late 2004, while Lyn and Wendy were travelling in Queensland, they happened to be staying near Buderim, a delightful hinterland town near the Sunshine Coast. There they read in the local newspaper an advertisement for the GoodLife Church and that their service that Sunday was to be captioned. These captioned services were instigated and provided for by Liz Evans, one of the church members, and were held once a month.

Lyn and Wendy attended the service, and Lyn was able to follow what was said at worship for the first time in three years! They were very impressed with the service and the captioning and, of course, shared their experience with friends when they returned home.

Some time later, Wendy mentioned to Lyn that they had about ten hearing-impaired people in their congregation, so why not do what GoodLife Church has done and have services captioned for the benefit of both their congregation and others in the community? Her suggestion was reinforced by several out-of-the-blue comments from other members, including the person responsible for putting the words of songs, Bible readings, and 'live' display of prayer points onto the front wall of the church each Sunday.

They began to pray about and examine the major issues of: How could it be done?; Who would do it?; and How could it be funded? All of these issues were addressed with little or no major problems and their prayers were well and truly answered.

Taking advice from Buderim's experiences, the church council and minister were encouraged to carefully address the underlying issue of communicating and discussing the issues with the whole congregation rather than just assuming that everybody would think it was a wonderful idea. They arranged for two senior advisers from DeafSA to come to a service and to talk to the church about key issues in communicating with deaf and hearing-impaired people and helping them to feel welcome within the church family.

They contacted Judy Pevreall, who continues on with the story: "In the days when I learned machine shorthand, the Public Service in South Australia ran their own school, teaching the Herman Miller theory. Of course, in those days there was no such thing as 'computer compatible' shorthand.

"On graduating from the course I then went to the Supreme Court as a trainee and worked there for many years. I resigned in 1982 when I was pregnant with my second child, but then returned to reporting in 1984 on a casual basis before taking up a position on a part-time basis in 1988.

"It was after I started working part-time that computer assisted translation software was introduced and at that time I realised if I wanted to shorten my editing time I needed to rid my shorthand of conflicts. From that time I started working on changing my shorthand. In 1996 the courts in South Australia introduced on-line reporting and in the lead-up to that, much work was done on shorthand to reduce conflicts and word boundary problems that I had. But, as they say, shorthand is a journey not a destination and there is always something that can be improved.

"In the middle of 2004, after becoming a bit jaded and seeking a new direction, I began a pilot program providing CART at one of our universities. The student that the service was provided for had a cochlear implant and he did not use sign language. As one of his lectures was to be video streamed, the use of CART seemed the obvious choice.

"From that beginning, I have now left the courts and set up my own business essentially providing CART in the university setting. For me, after working so many years in the courts and feeling comfortable with my dictionary, I soon realised how inadequate it was when providing CART. Much work has been done to streamline my dictionary and now I have come to appreciate the phonetic dictionary application. Many times something has not been in my dictionary, but due to the use of phonetic translation words seems to magically appear spelled correctly.

"In early 2005 I was approached to provide the service at the Balhannah Uniting Church. I was not a member of that church community, but had been brought up with strong Christian beliefs and the provision of the service in the church setting seemed a great opportunity to provide CART in the wider community.

“One of the challenges for me was to work out shortcuts for lots of Biblical terms. However, Peter Morel, the minister at this church, is great to work with. He provides a copy of his sermon before each service, so there is an opportunity to get any unusual terms or names into the dictionary before each Sunday service. Each Sunday at the front of the church on the right hand side is projected the words of songs of praise and also any prayer points and Bible readings, and on the left hand side is projected the captions for the service.

“The church captioning service was officially launched in June this year, however the provision of the service started in May. Before the first Sunday where CART was provided I spent a Saturday afternoon working with people from Balhannah to work out any glitches we may have had with the equipment.”

In May this year, Lyn says, with a wide publicity and promotion campaign, they began the captioning of all Sunday services at the church. This has already been expanded to include community seminars, including one on Mental Health. The ongoing future of the project has been greatly enhanced by a grant from the Uniting Church's Innovations Fund which saw the project, the first of its kind in South Australia, as a wonderful form of outreach and Mission and hence guaranteed its funding for three years.

*JCR Contributing Editor Pat Gardiner is from Milton, Ontario, Canada. For more information on church captioning go to [www.captioningtheword.com](http://www.captioningtheword.com).*

\* The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on June 22nd, 1977, as a union of three churches: the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia.