

A Colleague's Eulogy for The Revd Gordon Hargreaves

Funeral Service, Rowville & Ferntree Gully Anglican Church 9 April 2015

The Reverend Gordon Hargreaves was my brother in Christ, friend and colleague in ministry and in mission, while we were both serving in Glen Waverley over the eleven years 1989-2000.

Initially, Gordon and I served as vicars of our respective parishes, St Andrew's and St Paul's Glen Waverley. When our parishes, along with St James' Syndal, were amalgamated into St Barnabas, Glen Waverley Anglican Church (GWAC), we ministered together for 5 years, Gordon serving as my deputy.

That Gordon willingly became deputy to a man who was his junior, both in age and experience, speaks of Gordon's character. Like his Lord, Gordon did not grasp at his due status, his seniority, or count himself above others. Moreover, where his role as vicar of St Andrew's gave him security of employment, the deputy role in the amalgamated parish did not carry job security. Gordon unhesitatingly put security and status aside in order to serve God's people where God had called him.

It is indeed fitting that Gordon should die on Good Friday, when we recall our Lord's death for us: *"Christ Jesus who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient unto death – even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:5-9)

We all benefited from Gordon's humility. Gordon's self-effacing service allowed all of us to play to our strengths. Gordon allowed me, and all the members of this new church team, to flourish.

I could not have asked for a better partner in leadership, given the complexity of merging three parishes in tandem with a major \$3 million building program.

Gordon's eye for detail was legendary. When, standing on the site where the new church was to be built, Esther Cox enquired, "Where is the front of the church?" Gordon explained the building layout. Esther continued, "Where are the front pews going to be?" Gordon carefully indicated, whereupon Esther carefully placed her picnic chair and declared, "This is where I'll sit!" Gordon thought it was marvellous. I don't know how many times I heard him tell that story. It told as much about him as it did about dear Esther!

Gordon had an eye for detail and a heart for people. The worship service sheets noted in brackets the time allocated for each section. Why was this detail important to Gordon? It was important because he had a high view of the pastoral and liturgical duties that he had taken on. The scheduling skills he had applied in his engineering days were applied to bring out the best in our time of gathering for worship.

Do you know Gordon's nickname? Yes, it was 'Abe Lincoln'! You can picture him, can't you? Tall, slim of frame, slightly stooped, bearded. All Gordon needed was a stove pipe hat! Like Abraham Lincoln, Gordon was a leader, a man of vision, of dedication, of carefully chosen words—of the people and for the people.

Gordon had a sense of occasion but did not stand on occasion. He was understated, softly spoken, not theatrical. When things got tough, Gordon held his composure. He was a dignified man. Not for him stifling formality or rigidity, but rather dignity. He respected the traditions and ways of other people. Hence he robed for the 8am Worship Service.

Gordon had an engineer's eye for process and precision, which identified needed improvements in our performance. Interestingly, his desire to keep good relationships with people led at times to indirect ways of saying things. In our own relationship, he was always loyal but in private he never held back. I benefited from his incisive observations and wise counsel. Some of these conversations were held at Macca's Glen Waverley at midnight, when we were free of our parish work and the additional work created by the amalgamation. They were special times in our friendship.

Gordon was a pastor. One parishioner observed, "Gordon was always just quietly there: caring, not interfering, interested in people." Another recalled her family's distress at losing contact with a teenager, and Gordon "sitting with the family, quietly, gently – a compassionate presence."

Gordon was thoroughly Christian in his love for and trust in God. This was transparent in his prayers. A parishioner commented, "Gordon was a great one for praying. He would say, 'keep you prayers simple. Don't waffle on! Just a couple of points and keep it focussed.'"

Gordon was a great one for jokes. He had a dry wit and had an innate capacity to link a sermon to a recently heard joke. The link was at times tenuous (to say the least) but at other times was quite clear. At a wedding, Gordon recounted how in the Garden of Eden, Adam was talking to God and complained that he was very lonely. God asked what he would like and Adam said, "Someone who was beautiful, highly intelligent, compassionate and a good cook." When God replied that such a request would cost an arm and a leg, Adam asked, "What can I get for a rib, then?" – I can only say that we men admired Gordon for his courage in publically telling that particular joke!

Speaking of married life, we cannot speak of Gordon without speaking of Gordon and Ann! Their married life was one based on love: their love for each other and for God, and God's love for them. Gordon never tired of telling me of Ann's care for him and their children, Elizabeth and Brad. I thank God for Gordon's unabashed love for his bride. I thank God for Ann's unabashed love in her care for Gordon, especially over these past eighteen months. Truly her wedding vow "to have and to hold ... in sickness and in health ... till death do us part" was lovingly kept. Thank you, Ann, from all of us for what you did for Gordon — and the loving example it is to us all.

Ann and Gordon had a shared calling to serve God through bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to men and women and boys and girls. They served in Parishes in Ferntree Gully, Healesville and Glen Waverley (Victoria) and in Paraburdoo (Western Australia) as Bush Church Aid (BCA) Missioners. Their commitment and creativity shone forth in their myriad ministries.

Creativity was part and parcel of their shared ministry. I vividly recall one Good Friday morning being startled by a large procession carrying three large crosses to the top of the amphitheatre behind the church building. I asked Gordon, "What's going on?" He languidly relied, "It's Good Friday morning and we're getting the crosses ready, up on a hill far away." You had to love the guy!

On our last visit with Gordon and Ann, I asked Gordon what he would like us to pray for him. He replied, "A good ending."

After the completion and opening of the Glen Waverley Anglican Church (GWAC) building, Gordon was interviewed [Church Scene, December 5, 1997, page 5] and said,

"At the end we were weary perhaps, but also deeply grateful to God for his amazing goodness in so many ways."

Dear family and friends gathered here today, I suggest that,

At the end Gordon was weary, but also deeply grateful to God for his amazing goodness in so many ways.

Moreover, today,

We may be weary, but also deeply grateful to God for his amazing goodness in so many ways, in and through the life and ministry of a good, godly and loving man: Gordon Hargreaves.

Today, we thank God, and (looking at Gordon's coffin), Gordon, we thank you, dear brother.

John Harrower
Bishop of Tasmania