

*The LCA's executive officer Trevor Ruthenberg has been urging us to be the church 'where love comes to life'. And if that means working in mud and slime all day, that's what you do.*

## **After the rains, LOVE REIGNS**

by Linda Macqueen

**Trevor's alarm woke him at 5.30 am on 15 January. He said a quick prayer for the day ahead, got out of bed and into his work cloths. It was a Saturday but he wouldn't be working around his house. Today he and some mates were heading into Brisbane to see if they could help flood victims.**

His wife Gaye made him a coffee while he hooked the trailer to the car and loaded it with wheelbarrows, spades, shovels, brooms, boots, spare clothes, old towels and sheets, and 40 litres of water and petrol. Then he and his neighbour headed off to a mate's house, where they loaded up a couple high-pressure hoses, a generator and more spades, brooms and power cords. Finally they drove to the homes of the remaining crew members — another two men and two teenage boys — and together they drove to Fairfield on the south side of Brisbane. After registering as volunteers with the North Point Brisbane City Church, they were assigned a street and a house.

'That's when we got our first view and smell of the devastation', Trevor said. 'The smell hit you first, like when you were mucking out a dairy after milking or cleaning a piggery.'

'This was quickly followed by the visual assault of pure devastation. The roads were black with wet, slippery mud the consistency of frozen Coke, or like cake mix before it's baked ... and it stuck to everything.'

'Household furniture, white goods and black carpet were piled up on both sides of the street, three metres high.'

'"What the heck happened here?" I heard Leon asking.'

They parked their car and started getting their equipment out. They walked over to the house and said, 'Hey, we're here to help', and got stuck into cleaning the outside of the house with the pressure cleaners and moving debris to the footpath.

'Now the God stuff starts. I didn't have a plan for this day, but God sure did', Trevor grins. 'Blow me down, if Pastor Stephen Nuske from St Andrew's in the city wasn't at the same house! It belonged to a retired couple who worship at St Andrew's, and the members had gathered to help them out.'

Like many people living near the river, the couple hadn't been able to get flood insurance.

'So we did our best to salvage what we could', Trevor said. 'But, frankly, just about everything had to be thrown out.'

How do these Aussie battlers recover from something like this?

'But I was pleased that their spirits were high. They were glad that they had their clothes and their lives. They said that others were worse off than they were — but I don't know how.'

About lunchtime Trevor and his mates moved two houses up the street to help out there. The home owners had been holidaying in Thailand during the flood, and had lost everything, including their two cars.

Trevor reflects, 'Imagine going on holidays, locking up the house that you'd just finished renovating and fitting out with new furniture, and hearing about the floods on CNN and not being able to do anything.'

The couple's daughter let them in. Trevor went out to the street and said in a loud voice (and if you've ever met Trevor, you'll know he would have been heard), 'We need some help here please'.

Within minutes, 30 people were working there. Over the next three hours they stripped the home back to framing and concrete floors.

‘I prayed for those people that day and have many times since’, Trevor said.

He wants to emphasise the support he and his mates received.

‘We were working alongside people from all over Brisbane, all saying the same thing, “We just want to help”.

All day long we got offers of food, cold water and muffins from people walking or driving by just for that purpose.

A local church had set up a sausage sizzle and their people were handing out sausages and bread — as were our own people from St Andrew’s at the first house we helped at.

‘I was proud to be an Australian that day and was impressed with the deep community spirit displayed. I will be interested to see how that holds up, as it will take years for some flood-affected parts of Australia to get back to normal.’

At around 4.00 pm Trevor and his mates packed up and headed home via Yeronga, which is closer to the river.

‘We were not ready for what we saw as we drove through the mud. It was even thicker than where we’d come from. House after house was stripped bare and was just framework, walls and roofs. The refuse was piled high on top of a metre or more of black sludge.

‘All of us were silent as we drove home.’

‘We’re planning to go back next Saturday to see what else we can do. We pray that in our small way we are making a difference.’

## **SIDE STORY**

From my perspective as executive officer of the church, I acknowledge the great work that occurs for God within his church. I know that many good things happen in his name but I firmly believe it could be so much better; we could do so much more with what we have to offer.

I pray that we will get our heads around how to give in service to the community in a more organised way, in the way I saw some other churches operating where we were working on Saturday. Some of these churches moved their worship services to Sunday night, so that in the morning their members could support their communities, the victims of the flood and the army of volunteers.

I pray that as we reflect on our past and focus on the future of God’s church, we will focus on those outside our faith community by simply caring for them in the way we care for our own.

My prayer continues to be that **people will come to know the Lutheran Church as the place ‘where love comes to life’, and that they will be able to say to each other with confidence, ‘Go to the Lutherans; they will find a way to help you’.**

I pray that in all this destruction and mayhem, somehow God will be praised and glorified and that his name will be spoken and praised in our communities.

**Trevor Ruthenberg**