

About 'The Gathering of the District'.

The concept of a District Gathering emerged prior to the NSW District Convention in 2013. At that time there was a crisis of morale in the District due to a number of factors. These included financial stress in congregations, falling membership and worship numbers, concerns over Warrambui, congregations in tension, and a sense of isolation and alienation in this far-flung District. There were questions over the viability of the District *per se*.

The idea was to plan an event which would give inspiration and hope to our people. We would not accept decline as inevitable. We would gather the District together, with representatives from all parishes. We would seek funding to enable all to attend free-of charge. Our aim was to build / rebuild / recover / strengthen our particular identity as the NSW District. People would have opportunity to give voice to local concerns. We would provide clear biblical teaching, and opportunity for prayer. There would be space for positive testimony. We would give ourselves permission to explore alternative ways of 'doing church'. Electives would focus on perceived needs. Worship was critical, and every song or hymn sung during that weekend would be Jesus Christ-centred and engage 'we' rather than 'I', and 'us' rather than 'me'. An intercessory prayer team was put together long before the event.

Did we achieve our goals? In the main the answer was, "Yes". Of course, there were lessons to be learned. Also, we probably tried to do too much. However, the marvellous thing flowing from that weekend in October 2013, as we celebrated the Lord Jesus Christ and his promises, was the awareness of ourselves having a common faith, hope, joy and purpose together. A number of attendees wrote afterwards of the hope generated by seeing themselves, in the bigger picture, as part of 'Team NSW'. What was also enormously appreciated by many who attended that first Gathering was that there was an emphasis on pastoral care and healing of heart, soul, mind and spirit.

The Gathering organising team met just before Christmas, with Bishop Mark, to review and plan ahead. It was agreed to plan for another Gathering in 2014 (date confirmed August 22-24, 2014) It was also agreed that we respond to an inquiry as to the possibility of a Regional Gathering in the Riverina. (Subsequently, 3 Regional Gatherings are planned for NSW in 2014, as well as the District-wide Gathering in August. Locations are Tuggeranong May 9-11, Walla Walla May 24, and Temora late July / early August.