

Dear Reader,

### **The Day We Needed a Sports Chaplain.**

I was President of the Wickliffe / Lake Bolac Football - Netball Club for the 2010 season. The club was going along well, enjoying good social times and having moved up the ladder to be sitting just outside the top five.

Our momentum and good times were shattered when at about 2 o'clock on the morning of July 2nd we received news through the CFA of a car accident about 10 minutes from home. My son-in-law Fraggie and I got up and went to see if we could help. On arriving at the accident scene it was cold, wet and raining. The car was upside down in a creek with water more than halfway up the sides. We recognized the car as one of our footballers and he had 3 passengers with him - and we feared they may all be dead. It was about 4.30 in the morning before SES volunteers were able to get 3 of the boys out safely - but tragically the fourth had died.

All the 4 young men in the accident were players in our senior team; the 3 survivors were taken to hospital. We couldn't get the news of the accident and the death of David out to the rest of the players, supporters and the community until after 7 o'clock in the morning.

Everyone was I shocked and distressed at the news.

As this was a Friday we decided that it would be in the players and supporters best interest if the Saturday games were called off. No one, players or support staff, were in a fit mental state to play a game of football or netball. We thought it would be better if all the players and supporters could get together rather than being in little groups in different places. So we let the players all know there would be a BBQ on at the club rooms at lunch time that we wanted as many as possible to come along.

We weren't sure how to deal with the situation, we knew everyone would be struggling emotionally, struggling to talk and convey their feelings to each other - but it would be better off if we were together to start the grieving process.

Fraggie suggested we get a Sports Chaplain to come to the group. I was somewhat hesitant, thinking they would come pushing the religious barrow too heavily that this would have the reverse effect on a group of footballers and netballers. However, he assured me this bloke was very good and didn't work that way. So John Russell (a Sports Chaplain) was contacted. We were very fortunate that he could come.

Most of the players and supporters were able to come along sometime during the afternoon it was very quiet for the start, tears were shed, handshakes and hugs were everywhere. We all moved into the social room and John talked to us. He talked about grief, how people would have different ways of dealing with grief. There are different stages you will go through.

His talk with us was excellent, he had copies of literature dealing with grief and coping with loss available for everyone.

A sub group of "mini chaplains" was set up - a leadership group that players could approach - and if they couldn't answer the questions or help they could refer onto John.

After John talked, others stood up and spoke including David's brother Matthew, it wasn't easy but it was a huge step. With John's help the Club I took a huge step forward in dealing with their grief and tragic loss of David.

John was available for anyone to talk with. He talked with the 3 players who survived the accident and some of their family members. He has been available for any of us to contact since the accident He was at David's funeral to support us and the survivors of the accident.

We were out of our depth in knowing how to deal with this trauma but with John coming along with his knowledge, experience and down to earth approach we a club and community benefited hugely.

At the start I said we needed a Sports Chaplain for a Day - we needed John for more than a day and he was always available. We called on him in one of our most troubled times, and he came. We cannot thank him I enough.

I think clubs and communities would benefit if we had Sports Chaplains involved not just in the tough times but in the good times as well.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. M. Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Ross Stewart**