



## From the mines in South Africa to the city in Perth

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My wife Gwendoline and I moved to Perth from South Africa with our two children Hazel and Timothy at the end of 1996. In South Africa, we lived on the West Rand in the city Roodepoort - west of Johannesburg and north of Soweto. It was here that the world's richest gold reef was discovered in 1885, which attracted the interest of Europeans who came to settle forming the city of Johannesburg. It's interesting to note that this was at the same time as the gold rush to Kalgoorlie. Roodepoort is a spiritual centre with a good number of evangelical churches. It was a springboard for ministry into Soweto. In the late 80s after pastoring a church in a predominantly Muslim area, we met Stuart Burns of Christian Mission to Miners (CMM). Stuart was a member of our local church and over weekends we got to visit mine hostels and hospitals together, ministering to the people we met.

South African gold mines are very labour intensive underground. Between five and ten thousand mineworkers go underground in any one day. Conditions are hot, harsh and dangerous reaching levels of 4000 metres below the surface. There were no restrictions on getting into a minesite and sharing the gospel with workers. The country shares in the current global mining boom, which has attracted more than 400 thousand migrant workers from within South Africa and states to the north. We see this as an incredible opportunity of service for our evangelists along with ministering to the needs of AIDS victims. SA minesites are one of the worst transmission points for the virus due to prostitution and hostel-style living. There are more to minister to with the boom, but we find prosperity is taking its toll on receptivity to the gospel.

Today we have an IMMSA (International Miners Mission South Africa) committee who have seven evangelists active in the field, visiting gold mines in the West Rand and platinum mines in the North West at Rustenburg. Stuart and his family moved to the USA in 1991 to start up an IMM committee there. IMMUSA flourished in the USA, and then in fields in South America - Bolivia, Peru and Chile.

I myself have had a combination of serving in missions and working fulltime in the mining industry as a mechanical/piping designer. In 2000 while on a business trip to the USA, I met up with Stuart in North Carolina and was subsequently introduced to Tom Gilliam and the USA committee. IMM had representation on all other continents except the Pacific Rim, and I was asked to consider setting up an Australian committee. Today we have an Aussie committee consisting of myself, Bill Rowlands and Stuart Fraser.

What a contrast we have found between Australian and South African mining operations! In SA they are deep, designed for long life (25years +), labour intensive and far less safe. In Australia they are generally open pit or shallow underground, mechanised thus requiring far less labour, and designed for shorter life. Safety is also a much bigger factor. There is thus a difference in the way in which one approaches reaching Australian miners with the gospel. I cherish the fellowship I have had with Out of the Pit and Mine Chaplaincy Inc.

I invite any who live in the Perth area to join us for a monthly time of prayer and fellowship for miner's ministry in Australia and around the world.

Peter Robertson, November 2007.