

A journey between the red and yellow flags

By Dony Johnson



My name is Don Johnson, no not the movie star, the Senior Pastor at KawanaLife Baptist Church and Chaplain at Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. My friends call me Dony, yes one "n". You see, I grew up in a housing commission area in Mt Gravatt East and we could only afford the one "n". But enough of that story. How did I get here and what do I get up to as a Community/Sports Chaplain at Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club?

It all started many years ago when I felt the Lord call me into ministry, so I quickly said, "Here am I, send me". After Bible college (maybe during), I started in ministry as a Youth Pastor. Best call in the world. I was incredibly blessed to do it for 17 years and I thought I would do it forever but alas, I turned 40 and a new door opened. As a Youth Pastor in three different churches in three different denominations, I learnt very quickly that young people are not worried about the badge you wear, just that you care. I was blessed that all three churches allowed me to go where the young people were. During the week, that was school. Before Scripture Union were doing School Chaplaincy, my young wife and I were in the schools being Chaplains. This gave us the incredible opportunity of being on the front line and being where the young people were to connect. It also wired in a deep understanding that the "Church" is to be in the community, not hidden away from it.

In 2004, we moved to the Sunshine Coast to take on a new role as Associate Pastor at Kawana Waters Baptist Church (now KawanaLife). The senior pastor was Brian Willersdorf. We had thirty people with us at that time and the schools all had Chaplains, so what would we do? We walked and prayed and walked some more, and then we saw the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. We made

some enquiries and after a 12-18 month journey, I started as a Lifesaving Chaplain under Lifesaving Chaplaincy Australia and Sports Chaplaincy Australia. Twelve years later, I am still the Chaplain. In that time, I have also become the Peer Support Officer, Grievance Officer, First Aid Qualified Officer, Radio Operator and a patrolling member of the club. I do my regular Patrol as well as being there to say "Hi" each weekend and as often as I can at events, at the social club, at nippers and at training.

What does a Surf Lifesaving Chaplain do? In those twelve years I have done three weddings, four funerals/memorial, one infant dedication, 101 BBQ's and 1001 "chats" on the beach, in the clubhouse and at the coffee shop. I could fill the pages of a book with the amazing stories, God-given appointments, and answered prayers. It certainly helps that I love the beach, but the main thing is to love God and to sincerely love the people. I see Chaplaincy just like First Aid. Most of the time it is not needed but when it is, it is invaluable. Being a Chaplain at the Club has become my happy place, I

love it there and I love the people.

So how can you get involved, I hear you ask? Well, Sports Chaplaincy Australia (SCA) has requests in hundreds of clubs in a variety of sports for Chaplains. They just do not have enough people who are prepared to say, "Here am I, send me". The first step is to get in touch with Sports Chaplaincy Australia, do your training and say "Here am I, send me". Is it that easy? Well, yes and no. It can be a journey, but one worth taking. You could be sitting there saying: "I do not like sport". I must admit it will certainly help if you do like the sport or in my case the beach, but the number one thing is to love God and then love one another, and Chaplaincy is an incredible way of making that happen.

As a follower of Jesus who is prepared to pick up their cross and deny themselves daily, becoming a Sports Chaplain is that easy.

Remember when at the beach always swim between the red and yellow flags.

