

Selfie Sunday Background information

My eyes fell upon the page of the book, and something stirred within me. Do you know that feeling when a ripple of excitement washes over you? When a picture forms in your mind, and a dream begins to form? When new questions suddenly captivate your attention?



My feeling that day led to a flurry of ideas, and a number of conversations, especially with those passionate about Churches of Christ history and heritage. These conversations led to a proposal. The proposal was endorsed by Churches of Christ in Australia and the State bodies it represents.

And so the idea of Selfie Sunday was born, a snapshot of all Churches of Christ in 2016.

So what was the book that triggered this rather audacious idea?

It was the *Jubilee Pictorial History of Churches of Christ in Australasia* (AB Maston, 1903). The author made a photographic record of Church of Christ in Australia and New Zealand, and wrote up the story of each congregation.

I later learned the *Jubilee Pictorial History* is an unusual book. Other Christian traditions documenting their histories in this era told the stories of key leaders. This was a book of the people; of ordinary congregations. It captured images of men, women, children, and

even the occasional dog. It was wildly popular. The Jubilee Pictorial History was a unifying force for Churches of Christ in Australia. It was a major stimulus for the first Federal Conference of Churches of Christ in Australia in 1906. This Conference led to the formation of the College of the Bible (now Stirling College) in the following year. Establishing a bible college was highly significant in providing trained ministers for Churches of Christ. Aside from some short-term local efforts, before this time aspiring ministers travelled to the United States for a theological education. Very few of these Australian trainees ever returned to our shores. The formation of the college paved the way for significant growth and consolidation of Churches of Christ in the decades that followed.

Maston noted in his book's introduction:

*"It occurred to me... that a splendid opportunity presented itself of gathering together the great leading facts of our movement and placing them in this permanent form, first of all as a matter of record; secondly, for the encouragement of those who at the present are engaged in the stupendous effort of calling the world's attention to the simple plea of New Testament Christianity; and lastly, because of the **unifying power** of such a book among those who are engaged in this great work. I have frequently indulged in the fond hope that this book might serve the useful purpose of bringing closer together all the loose ends of our influence in this new land of ours" -*

Some questions stirred in me as I read Maston's words, and then flicked through the images in his book:

- What would happen if we did a 21st century version of such a project?
- Might it encourage our churches today?
- Might this foster unity? Inspire collaborative projects?
- What new things might God release as we learn from and about one another?

Many have expressed warmth and interest about Selfie Sunday to date. Some like the idea of celebrating the life of their church, and plan to have a celebratory lunch together on this day. Some hope they'll gain fresh inspiration from the mission activities of other churches. Some resonate with the idea of expressing unity, and fostering a sense of being part of a big church family. Some value the opportunity to preserve their heritage, knowing that 20, 50, and 100 years from now the story of their church now can be retold.

I don't what the fruit of Selfie Sunday will be. But I do hope your church will take part in this act of collective witness. Who knows what God might do in and through us as a result?

May God bless you and your church community,

Janet Woodlock

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selfiesunday.org

