

A story of leadership

I first met Greg in 1981. We had little in common. He was a 16-year-old 'surfie'. I was a few years older, as zealous and intense as he was casual and layback. Under ordinary circumstances it is unlikely that our paths would have converged. But these were extraordinary times, when the Spirit was moving powerfully through a Catholic youth movement in Australia called Antioch. It was through Antioch that Greg and I became friends.

Now, you have to understand that in the early eighties Antioch was a radically new phenomenon in Australia, raising enthusiasms and suspicions, spreading like wildfire and 'speaking' to youth on a significant scale. And, while his name will never make the church history books, Greg Meagher was one of the people at the heart of the action.

Greg was a regular bloke: board shorts and T-shirt, more at home with his mates on the beach or in the pub than in the parish church. He had a solid masculine presence, a great sense of humour and a talent for rewriting 'Elvis' songs on the spur of the moment to fit any occasion. Greg was no angel. He could drive a teacher mad and was not your model student; but within the 'rebellious teenager' was a depth of goodness and a genuine faith that demanded straight-talk and saw through any religious façade. Greg never

pretended to be other than who he was, and it was exactly as he was that God used him to persuasively present the gospel message among his peers.

Within a few short years I saw Greg, directly and indirectly, draw thousands of young Australians into the Church. He led gatherings and gave talks about Christ that held his peers spellbound. He turned boring hymns into local hits that are still sung with gusto. With other teenagers he travelled thousands of kilometres to help start up new Antioch communities around Australia. Through his natural leadership gifts he showed his peers that it was possible to be Catholic without having to deny the human delights and struggles of being young. All this and more from 'the boy next door' who allowed God to use his natural gifts. In short, Greg – and others like him – gave credibility to the Church in a way which no adult could have done for youth.

To this day, it makes me smile when I hear adults (like myself!) discussing the latest theological article or ecclesiastical statement as if the future of the Church depends on it. That the issues are important I have no doubt. It's just that I know what the Holy Spirit can do through an unknown 16-year-old 'surfie'. And it makes me chuckle, and at other times weep, to sense the preoccupation of so many people with the role of popes and bishops—as if they must possess some kind of 'magic' that will fix up the church and bring young people

flooding back. There is 'magic' and leadership in our young and the starting point for any attempt to catch the attention of young Catholics is for you and I to take seriously God's gifts in the youth who are part of our own lives. •

