

## “Flowing Together”: The Origins and Early Development of Hillsong Church within Assemblies of God in Australia

*Denise A. Austin*

The history of Hillsong Church is often told from a Hillsong/Houston-centric perspective, missing key aspects of the church ecology from which it arose. The origins and development of Hillsong Church occurred during the tenure of Andrew Evans as General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Australia (AGA)—later renamed Australian Christian Churches (ACC). These pivotal 20 years (1977–1997) saw a substantial growth within AGA from 152 churches and fewer than 10,000 constituents to 826 churches and over 115,000 constituents (Clifton 2009, 150). The number of Australian pentecostals increased from about 15,000 people in 1979 to more than 250,000 in 1999, a growth rate virtually unprecedented anywhere in the world (Author unknown 2000, 19). In fact, by 1996, over 10% of all church attenders in Australia were pentecostal, overtaking Anglicans to become the second highest church attenders behind Roman Catholics

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D.A. Austin (✉)  
Parramatta, Australia

(Kaldor et al. 1999, 16). Regarding the noteworthy expansion of AGA, Evans (1996, 3) explained: “Our belief is still that we flow together in love and unity, not because we are forced to by any rules, but because of the common vision to preach the gospel to this nation and that each church has a right under God to use whatever methods it may choose.” His successor as the movement’s National President (1997–2009), Brian Houston, reaffirmed this sentiment, stating: “The AOG in Australia is the best model I know of churches working together for common vision and purpose” (McQuillan 1997, 4). Through the use of oral interviews with key church leaders, supported by archival research and analysis of secondary sources, this chapter argues that, rather than arising out of a vacuum, denominational forces flowed together to facilitate the emergence of Hillsong Church by: releasing charismatic trans-Tasman expressions of worship; emphasizing “new” pentecostal leadership; smashing the “Cinderella State” syndrome; facilitating church growth; harnessing the energy of young people; and valuing Christian womanhood.

## RELEASING TRANS-TASMAN CHARISMATIC EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP

The historical foundations of Hillsong Church’s freedom of expression in worship emerged out of the trans-Tasman charismatic renewal flowing between New Zealand and Australia. As Mark Hutchinson (2010b, 272) argued, the charismatic Latter Rain movement in New Zealand was “a renewer of renewal,” distinguished by contemporary music and demonstrative worship practices. In 1960, Latter Rain preacher Rob Wheeler of Auckland conducted a campaign in Queensland which profoundly impacted students at AGA’s Commonwealth Bible College in Brisbane, notably Andrew Evans, David Cartledge, and Philip Hills (Hutchinson 2010a). Lloyd Averill, principal of Christian Life Bible College (CLBC 1971–1976) at Lower Hutt in New Zealand and regular guest lecturer at CBC, insisted: “We must be done with ‘pentecostalism’ and its little features, and go for a real Pentecost in all its fullness” (Averill 1964, 5). Understandably, those who had felt the full brunt of ruthless discrimination from mainline Christians for decades felt cautious. Nevertheless, another New Zealand Latter Rain proponent, Robert (Bob) Midgley, also brought renewal teachings across the Tasman

Sea. His 1971 tour greatly impacted David and Marie Cartledge, who were pastoring Calvary Temple in Townsville (Midgley 2013, 73). They did away with the traditional AGA hymnals, switching instead to the New Zealand-based *Scripture in Song* and introduced the radical practices of free worship and dancing (Cartledge 1971, 11; 2000, 125). In 1972, the AGA Commonwealth Executive (following the lead of the Assemblies of God in the United States) stated that: “Dancing before the Lord ... should not be promoted” in assemblies (1973, 5). However, it was such a contentious issue that the 1973 AGA Commonwealth conference was pressed to concede, “that dancing should be neither promoted nor denigrated within our Fellowship but that each Assembly’s position be respected” (Hutchinson 2006). Clearly, renewalists were exerting influence.

The April 1977 AGA Commonwealth conference at Dallas Brookes Hall in Melbourne was the turning point that ultimately led to the emergence of Hillsong Church. Guest preacher, David (Paul) Yonggi Cho of Yoidi Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, although reportedly surprised at the dancing during worship, did not condemn it (Duncan 1978). Indeed, Cho threatened to leave when attempts were made to suppress this public display of joy (Hutchinson 2006). After much heated debate surrounding charismatic practices, eventually Andrew Evans was elected as the new AGA General Superintendent (Austin 2017, 113). Andrew and Lorraine Evans had pastored at Flinders Park and Elizabeth in South Australia, before serving in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for seven years, then taking on Klemzig (later renamed Paradise Community Church) in Adelaide. Under their leadership, the church grew from 200 to 4000 attendees (Evans 2012). As Shane Clifton (2006) points out, Paradise was one of several rapidly growing assemblies that enjoyed an influx of charismatic “switchers” from mainline denominations. Through the church’s television broadcast, Evans was preaching to over 10,000 people a week. Utilizing this important medium, Evans (1981, 4) wrote: “So often we have had an inferiority about the media. We have been thinking we aren’t good enough. But God can use you!” This reflects the global impulse of charismatics to penetrate the media through television, radio, movies, literature, and mass evangelistic campaigns (Barrett 1988, 119). Evans’ enthusiastic endorsement of contemporary worship practices, gleaned from New Zealand Latter Rain preachers, led the AGA to embrace a freedom in worship that later encapsulated Hillsong Church.

### EMPHASIZING “NEW” PENTECOSTAL LEADERSHIP

A crucial factor that opened the way for Hillsong Church was the emphasis on “new” pentecostal leadership. As Shane Clifton (2007, 231) found, growing local assemblies morphed from democratized Congregational ecclesiology to Presbyterian structures with vested governmental authority in the senior pastor and church board/eldership. Pro-renewal AGA pastors, such as David Cartledge in Townsville, Andrew Evans in Adelaide, Philip Hills in Melbourne, and Reginald (Reg) Klimionok in Brisbane were already being influenced by the teachings of Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner at the Institute of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California who promoted pastor-led structures (Clifton 2009, 147). So, just as the turbulent 1977 conference was winding up, inspired by Cho’s faith messages, the newly elected Vice-General Superintendent Philip Hills suggested that, for the first time ever, a faith goal be set of 50% membership increase by the next conference. This was a bold move considering, over its 40-year history, AGA had only seen a new church open every 97 days (Bartholomew 1985, 7) and the previous conference period growth rate had been just 5% (Evans 1987, 26). To add impetus to the vision, the Cartledges arranged for 240 AGA pastors to travel to Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul and to Jerusalem in July 1977 (Evans 2016). By the next biennial conference, the AGA had grown by 68% and then 128% the following period, continuing on a distinct upward trajectory (Addison 2008). Having gained a mandate in the 1977 Commonwealth conference, these new leaders forged ahead.

In order to facilitate this growth, Evans completely transformed the AGA national and state leadership structure, encouraging visionary rather than administrative leadership. The Commonwealth Executive was reduced to seven members and the secretary/treasurer became the only full-time position (Smith and Smith 1987, 62). As a lynchpin in “new” pentecostal leadership, Cartledge joined the Commonwealth Executive and became one of its longest serving members (1977–2003). He comments: “This move to an apostolic model cut out the crossing t’s and dotting i’s, and every bit of nonsense you can imagine ... literally a blockbusting, shattering re-alignment of the church, and the whole pentecostal movement in Australia has profited...” (Brookes 2000, 54). In Townsville, Cartledge’s further progressive initiatives included: moving the Sunday service time from 11 am to 9 am; more relaxed dress

codes; de-emphasis on holiness; shorter faith-based preaching with an altar call; developing a Yoido-style cell group system; employing pastoral care pastors; recording church attendance; appointing a full-time female church secretary; publishing *Destiny* magazine; pioneering welfare programs for the homeless; founding Rhema Bible College, the very first AGA Bible College outside of CBC (1978); launching the first of the new Christian schools (1978) in Queensland; and opening a 92 acre church campus facility (1979)—the largest evangelical church building in Australia at that time. During the next 10 years, over 4000 people were saved in the church, of whom David Cartledge personally baptized 2200. Little wonder that Mark Hutchinson (2006) stated: “What was later seen at Hillsong and Paradise was first seen at Townsville.” The emphasis on senior pastor-driven leadership allowed for the emergence of charismatic leaders of Australian megachurches.

### SMASHING THE “CINDERELLA STATE” SYNDROME

Another key to the rise of Hillsong Church was that the pentecostal “Cinderella state” of New South Wales (NSW) (McFarlane 2004), with Sydney as a fortress for conservative Anglican evangelicalism (Hutchinson 1994, 1), was transformed into a pentecostal epi-center. In July 1977, three months after Evans was installed as AGA leader, Frank and Hazel Houston moved to Sydney to establish Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre (Houston 1982, 12). Given the later exposure of his predatory paedophilia (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2014), Frank Houston’s long and successful ministry career is now difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, the facts remain. Having pastored Lower Hutt assembly (1959–1976), founded CLBC (1967) and led as AGNZ National Superintendent (1966–1977), Frank Houston was already a well-known preacher in Australia. A total of 14 people attended the first meeting, in the Double Bay home of CLBC alumni Chris and Beverley Aiton, where Frank Houston announced his grand vision that the church would have thousands of people and attract the best musicians in Australia (Aiton 2016). He believed his church would “put God on the main street of Sydney” (“A Man Sent by God” 1978, 26). This claim was also recapitulated within the vision of his son, Brian, of: “A church so large in size that the city and the nation cannot ignore it...” (Houston 2003, 2). Frank Houston’s motto was “church is all about God and people,” also later adopted as the mantra of Hillsong

Church (McFarlane 2004). The following week, Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre commenced officially with 30 people, renting Sherbrook Hall, Double Bay for \$15 each Sunday and within six months attendance was over 150. By the time Brian and Roberta (Bobbie) Houston arrived from New Zealand, in 1978, to join the ministry team, the church had already outgrown two locations and soon the renamed Sydney Christian Life Centre (Sydney CLC) joined the AGA (Aiton 2016). While some AGA leaders still harboured suspicions regarding the Latter Rain vestiges of Sydney CLC as a “movement within a movement,” Frank Houston was elected to the AGA Commonwealth Executive and became NSW State Superintendent (McFarlane 2004). In fact, according to Cartledge (2002), Sydney CLC became “the church to visit” if travelling through Sydney. In 1980, Sydney CLC leased a 13,000 square foot premises at 200 Goulburn Street in the semi-industrial inner city Darlinghurst and completed a \$48,000 renovation (Assemblies of God in Australia 1980, 12). Evans led the dedicatory prayer before a congregation of 750. Although now a disgraced figure, evidence demonstrates that through his leadership of Sydney CLC and AGA in NSW, Frank Houston was key in transforming the state into a new nucleus of Australian pentecostalism.

Contemporary worship music and effective leadership were signature trademarks of Sydney CLC. Confirming Frank Houston’s original vision of attracting the best musicians in Australia, the long-haired Trevor King of the Andy Gibb Band apparently walked into the church wearing a pair of board shorts and a singlet—and was converted the very first night (McArdle 2005). He was soon appointed as worship pastor. Other professional musicians involved in the church included: David Moyes, lead guitarist for Top Ten pop group, Air Supply; Jeff Beacham from hard core New Zealand band, Black Feather; Peter Kelly who had studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music; and George McArdle from the world renowned Little River Band. McArdle recalls: “we didn’t talk about the music industry much at all. There was such a move of God going on ... that all [we] could talk about was Jesus” (Austin 2009, 123). Sydney CLC grew rapidly with charismatic pastoral leaders such as Paul De Jong, Sean Stanton, and David Johnston; well over 1000 people each Sunday; around 50 home groups; a 40-strong choir; an active deaf ministry; a full-time printing department; street evangelism programs; Sunday evening meetings in the Sydney Town Hall; nine outreach churches, including a Chinese congregation led by Gordon and Susannah

Lee; and Sunday services aired on national television (Houston 1982, 12; Author unknown 1983, 8). As with most “new” pentecostal leaders, Frank Houston preferred the more corporate form of governance, vesting sole authority in his eldership, with the senior pastor holding decisive influence regarding church mission and vision (Tangen 2012, 54). In January 1987, the church purchased a converted warehouse at 188 Young Street, Waterloo for \$1 million (On the House 2016). In 1990, Robert Fergusson (2016), formerly of Christian Centre Nottingham, migrated with his family to Australia to become the principal of Sydney CLC’s International Institute of Creative Ministries (IICM—later Aquila College of Ministries), also serving as a church elder. Now a part of the core leadership team at Hillsong Church, Fergusson’s teaching ministry has attracted international acclaim. People from all walks of life found salvation at Sydney CLC, including Melbourne Cup winning jockey, Darren Beadman (1998, 50). Duncan Corby (2016), later Hillsong International Leadership College Academic Dean, describes how, as a sceptical university student atheist, he was converted the very first night he attended Sydney CLC, being deeply impressed by the earnestness of the believers. He decided: “If whatever Christianity was on about was true then this is what I figured church should look like.” Through directive leadership, dramatic conversions and the nurturing of high profile professional musicians, Sydney CLC smashed the NSW Cinderella stigma and provided an opening through which Hillsong Church emerged.

### FACILITATING CHURCH PLANTING

One of the most revolutionary post-1977 AGA transformations was intentional facilitation of church planting, which provided Hillsong Church with the opportunity and flexibility of self-creation. The 1979 AGA Commonwealth conference endorsed a substantially revised constitution (Evans 1997, 3). The by-laws were rewritten to ensure “the right of the local Church to full sovereignty of its affairs in all matters local, and not subject to limitation or interference from any outside bodies with respect except where it affect the united Fellowship” (Bartholomew 1979, 15). Previous territorial restrictions were lifted, allowing new church plants “anywhere, anyplace, at any time” (Evans 2016). The AGA catchcry, “a church planted in every Australian town of over 1000 people,” saw such a tremendous response that, between 1982 and 1983 alone, an AGA church was started somewhere in Australia every nine days

(Bartholomew 1983, 2). In June 1983, Reg Klimionok's new 2000-seat Garden City Christian Church (later Hillsong Brisbane campus) auditorium and extensive property were opened (Author unknown July 1983, 11–13). CBC, which had relocated from Brisbane to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains (Austin 2013, 128), prepared many faculty members and students to build AGA churches across Sydney, including Tony Hallo, John Spinella, Pasquale (Pat) Mesiti, and John Iuliano (Iuliano 2012). International Church Growth Seminars (1980, 11–12) were held with guest speakers, such as Yonggi Cho and Don Teck of Haggai Institute. This promoted fashionable North American pentecostal megachurch role models like Bill Hybels and Rick Warren (Eagle 2015, 589). David Cartledge (1994, 39) also developed a national church planting strategy that fostered “church planting churches” as centers of influence. Evans (1987, 25) asserted: “We are a fellowship of churches and not a denomination. We believe very strongly in the autonomy of the local church.” This laissez-faire approach cemented Evans' leadership position, being re-elected unopposed for an unmatched 20 years.

Amid this culture of expansion, Brian and Bobbie Houston were released from, although not financially supported by, Sydney CLC to pioneer Hills Christian Life Centre (Hills CLC) in 1983. One of the well-documented defining moments came during the first month of meetings when Brian Houston swung out on a Baulkham Hills High School Hall gym rope while preaching. His energetic style resonated with the local young people and “a revival of passion” saw scores more join the church (Houston 2015, 64). Each week, CBC student Darko Culjak travelled down from the Katoomba campus to lead the Hills CLC youth group, called Powerhouse, and it grew rapidly to around 120 during the first five years (Austin 2013, 157; Crouch 2016). The first music pastor, Geoff Bullock, received support and training from Sydney CLC staff (Riches and Wagner 2012, 22). Hills CLC was also involved in pioneering or supporting other CLC churches during this time, including Central Coast, Liverpool, St. Mary's, and Vineyard (Crouch 2016). The rapid expansion of Hills CLC was not an anomaly at this time. Between 1976 and 1981, pentecostalism grew a remarkable 87% and, by 1985, AGA was the fastest growing Christian denomination in Australia (McQuillan 1985, 20). Reporting on Evans' 3000-seat Paradise Assembly of God, built in 1982 and paid off in just one year, a newspaper columnist writes: “Thousands of South Australians are swinging away from conservative church worship to a new ‘born again’ revival which is changing the face of religion in the State” (ibid.). In fact, between 1980



and 1986, AGA was planting a church in Queensland every 13 days—the longest sustained church planting effort of any denomination in Australian history (Peterson 2012). Although Hillsong Church later chose to follow the American multisite model (Frye 2011, 54), initiated in Australia, in 1994, by New Zealanders Phil and Christine Pringle of Christian City Church (C3) (Jagelman 2016), the strong AGA church planting drive facilitated the early origins of Hills CLC.

### HARNESSING THE ENERGY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Arguably one of the most strategic AGA initiatives that opened the way for the Hillsong story was harnessing the energy of young people in a national movement. Rather than being locked into their denominational heritage, young people had begun to “shop around” for the right congregation in which they felt comfortable (Kaldor et al. 1994, 225). In 1986, the same year that the first Hillsong conference was held with 150 people in attendance (Price 2004), the antiquated AGA youth ministry, Christ’s Ambassadors, was rebranded into the more upbeat Youth Alive. Mal Fletcher, the National Director and Victorian State Director, focused on large, exciting, performance-based rock worship concerts with evangelistic preaching and multimedia presentations. Clearly supportive, Evans (1986, 1) wrote:

For years our youth movement ... seemed to be very much in the doldrums around our nation. However, God is placing His hands upon young people in a new way and there is a new surge of youth enthusiasm that has resulted in the formation of “Youth Alive.” Thousands of young people are gathering at rallies in the major cities with many being saved and baptised in the Holy Spirit. It’s exciting to see God fulfil Joel Chapter 2 with the outpouring of His Spirit upon the young men and women of our assemblies.

Danny Guglielmucci, youth pastor at Paradise Community Church and South Australian Youth Alive State Director noted: “It’s all up-tempo, entertaining stuff” (Author unknown 1989, 6). Wayne Alcorn (1994, 30), Queensland State Director for Youth Alive (and later ACC National President, 2009-current), explained: “Our ‘shop window’ is undoubtedly our rallies ... highly professional and delivered with lots of energy and colour.” The strategy was so successful that in just one decade, Youth Alive grew from a few hundred to over 40,000 young people attending

nationwide rallies (Alcorn 1994, 30). Youth Alive provided a model for large performance-based conferences and the culture of harnessing the energy of young people to build a national movement.

Hills CLC worked closely with Youth Alive, providing musicians for both state and national rallies. Pat Mesiti (1987, 16) who was an itinerant evangelist, part-time NSW State Director for Youth Alive and Hills CLC adherent, wrote: “Christ called us to a battlefield not a playground ... Let’s ... use the media, hold more youth rallies and great crusades...” Youth Alive’s major annual conference included internationally renowned guest speakers, attracted young people from across Australia, and aimed at “mobilising effective youth ministries.” There were daily sessions, evening rallies, and practical workshops dealing with topics such as street evangelism, leading in worship, home groups, leadership development, programming, and promotions. Advertising for the 1987 national Youth Alive conference at Stanwell Tops described guest speaker Brian Houston as: “a dynamic young man with a message to young men and women in our nation” (“Shake This Nation” 1987, 9). One attendee at that conference, Donna Crouch (née *Quinn*), had converted to Christ in 1982 through a ministry of Sydney CLC and had been assistant youth leader at Hills CLC since 1985. She was called to the altar by Fletcher who prayed: “Lord you know what’s ahead for her. Anoint her for it” (Crouch 2016). A week later Brian Houston appointed her as full-time youth pastor. Geoff Bullock convened the Hillsong Conference in 1987, where he acted both as Hills CLC’s worship pastor and Youth Alive NSW’s music director (Assemblies of God in Australia 1994, 22). Youth Alive NSW also released several albums through Hillsong Music Australia (HMA). By 1995, Hills CLC had grown to around 4000 people in the hired Hills Entertainment Centre with five services across the day in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Filipino. Hills CLC featured a wide variety of activities, largely aimed at young adults, including home groups, creative ministries, visitation teams, prayer groups, marriage counselling, youth, sports teams, and sign language—even a Star Trekkers club—as well as a thriving men’s ministry led by Sydney CLC convert Michael Murphy (Author unknown 1995, 45). The mutually beneficial relationship between Hills CLC and Youth Alive helped propel Brian Houston to prominence across the AGA movement and fashioned the concept of a major annual conference to reach an audience of thousands.

## VALUING CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD

The final important feature of the 20-year ascendancy of AGA, which enabled Hillsong Church to flourish, was the valuing of Christian womanhood. As Bobbie Houston (2016, 23) rightly noted: “legendary women ... had given heart and soul to break down barriers ... and we cannot forget the suffragettes ... who gave their all for women to emerge from the shadows which contained them.” There had always been localized AGA women’s groups focused predominantly on raising money for mission. However, at the request of the AGA Commonwealth Executive, in 1985, Marie Cartledge created a National Women’s Ministry Department and her vision was to equip women for leadership (Cartledge 2016). In 1988, the very first AGA women’s conference was held at Sydney CLC, with guest speakers such as Marie Cartledge, Margaret Court, Lorraine Evans, Ruth Harvey, Edith Averill, Jackie Leesment, and Wendy Mighchelse (Austin and Grey 2016, 216). With 1500 women in attendance, it was an immediate success and became a bi-annual event, hosted across each state. Marie Cartledge stated: “Women’s Ministries for Christ shall be recognized as an integral part of the fellowship” (AGA Commonwealth Conference 1991, 5). A champion for female ordination, she challenged senior pastors to promote more women into “areas of dynamic reconciliatory ministry” (AGA Women’s Ministries 1993, 8). This was at a time when all 22 AGA national and state positions were held by men, excepting Marie Cartledge and also Betty Greaves who managed AGA General Insurance (Evans 1994, 3). Seminars and retreats were held at state and local levels “to inspire, challenge and teach our women” (Cartledge 1994, 35). AGA Women’s Ministries became known for “colourful” advertising; donating millions of dollars to missions; establishing a Crisis Prayer Chain; developing a Bible study series; and publishing a quarterly *Women with Impact* magazine. As strong advocates of the tremendous social force of Christian women, Cartledge and others forged a path for the next generation to follow.

The AGA celebrated pentecostal womanhood and opened an opportunity for the Colour Conference phenomenon. The 1994 Women’s Ministries conference was held at Merroo Christian Retreat Centre, Kurrajong, NSW. Marilyn Hickey’s preaching was reportedly “accompanied by outstanding signs and wonders” and Marie Cartledge spoke about being “the kind of women who will touch this nation, overcomers, believers in miracles, deliverers, risk takers and those who have touched

Jesus” (Neale 1994, 32). The following year, an experienced church pastor Wendy Megchelse, became full-time National Director of AGA Women’s Ministries, funded from pledges raised at the national conference (Cartledge 2016). She gathered around 3500 attendees for the conference in Adelaide, South Australia (Author unknown 1996, 4). The conferences continued to make an impact, raising \$18,000 for Youth Alive and honoring Queensland attorney general, Denver Beanland, for his stand against pornography. In an article entitled, “The River Will Flow,” Queensland State Director of AGA Women’s Ministries, Joy Graetz (1998, 21), enthused: “The Women’s Ministries department has never existed for frivolous reasons, and never will! We are about the king’s business and will continue to rise and advance in his anointing which resides in each of us, for his glory.” Bobbie Houston’s first Colour Conference, in March 1997, was advertized as “an initiative of Hills Christian Life Centre women” and mostly featured Hills CLC women (Hills Christian Life Centre Women 1997, 1). However, she was soon promoted to National Director of AGA Women’s Ministries and Colour Conference became the denomination’s national women’s event (Houston 2014, 14). Despite the blinkered approach of some scholars who criticize Hillsong Church’s stance on the empowerment of women (Maddox 2013, 16), as Shane Clifton (2016, 312) argues, Hillsong Church has promoted the value of womanhood and provided avenues for social contribution. Donna Crouch (2016), long-term Hillsong Church pastor and now member of the ACC National Executive, notes that of the approximately 3200 ordained ACC pastors, at least 225 are within Hillsong Church, including a strong representation of women. Several Hillsong pastors, such as Darlene Zschech, Christine Caine, Lucinda Dole, and others, now lead significant global ministries. The “suffragettes” of the 1977–1997 era turned the tide on male dominance within AGA and pioneered a large annual women’s conference that unapologetically promoted the value of womanhood.

## CONCLUSION

The 20 years of Andrew Evans’ leadership of Assemblies of God in Australia reveals the continuous denominational flows in which Hillsong Church emerged and developed. Out of the early inspiration of charismatic preachers from New Zealand, freedom in expression of worship became a hallmark for which Hillsong is now famous. The 1977 tipping point saw Andrew Evans installed as AGA General Superintendent

and the introduction of innovative practices. With the launch of Sydney CLC, NSW became a new drawcard for many pentecostals. Key structural changes within AGA at national and state levels saw a rapid expansion of autonomous local church plants, including Hills CLC. Finally, the reinvigoration of youth and women's ministries injected new energy and life, forming two of the most important foundations for the Hillsong network.

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