

An aerial photograph of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House, with the city skyline in the background. The water is a vibrant blue, and the bridge is a dark steel structure. The Opera House is a white, sail-like structure on a small peninsula. The city skyline is visible in the distance, with many buildings and green spaces.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

SPECIAL EDITION

PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTER

GBC

ISSUE 7

MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR



Welcome to a special edition of our Partnership Newsletter dedicated to our strategic priorities. These five areas – Discipleship, Evangelism, Youth & Families, Leadership Development and Cultural Diversity – will become more and more critical to where we believe the Lord is leading us as a community of faith here at GBC. Since we identified these priorities in 2018 we have been working to define what we mean by each, what we hope to see in each, and the first steps we need to take. In this issue we outline some of our current hopes for each of these priorities. I hope that you are inspired by what you read.

The strategic priorities have been framed in relation to our purpose statement as a community of faith: to courageously participate with God the Father in His plans to renew all things in Christ Jesus through the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit. Central to this purpose is an understanding of our call to partner

with God and each other. Over our front door, as a continual reminder are the words of Jesus from John 20:21, “As the Father sent me, I am sending you.” Even the title of this publication – Partnership Newsletter – was taken from Philippians 1:1-6 where Paul gives thanks for his partnership in the gospel with the fledgling community of faith in Philippi. We are partners together in what God is seeking to do in the world and our desire is that as we partner with God through the Holy Spirit we will see lives changed by Jesus. This is an exciting vision and one that is worth prayerful, intentional preparation and planning. We are hoping to publish a five year strategic plan at the end of this year that will outline where we believe we are being called to participate.

As you read this edition, can I encourage you to do so prayerfully, with an eye to the future God is calling us to, and can I encourage you to consider where God is inviting you to participate. This cannot be an



inspirational document that stays on the page, but is an invitation to all of us to pull together.

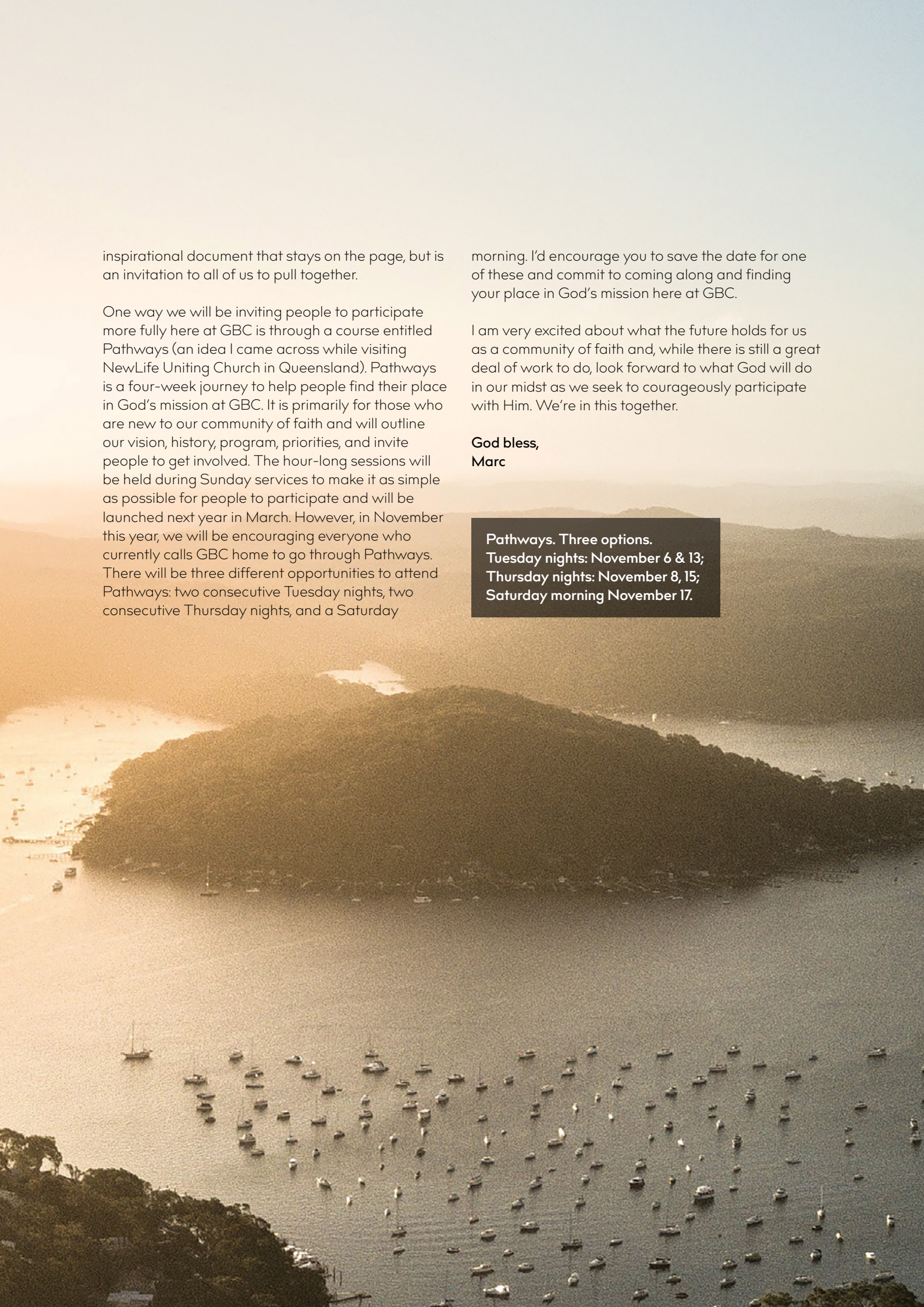
One way we will be inviting people to participate more fully here at GBC is through a course entitled Pathways (an idea I came across while visiting NewLife Uniting Church in Queensland). Pathways is a four-week journey to help people find their place in God's mission at GBC. It is primarily for those who are new to our community of faith and will outline our vision, history, program, priorities, and invite people to get involved. The hour-long sessions will be held during Sunday services to make it as simple as possible for people to participate and will be launched next year in March. However, in November this year, we will be encouraging everyone who currently calls GBC home to go through Pathways. There will be three different opportunities to attend Pathways: two consecutive Tuesday nights, two consecutive Thursday nights, and a Saturday

morning. I'd encourage you to save the date for one of these and commit to coming along and finding your place in God's mission here at GBC.

I am very excited about what the future holds for us as a community of faith and, while there is still a great deal of work to do, look forward to what God will do in our midst as we seek to courageously participate with Him. We're in this together.

God bless,
Marc

Pathways. Three options.
Tuesday nights: November 6 & 13;
Thursday nights: November 8, 15;
Saturday morning November 17.



DISCIPLESHIP

TO NURTURE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN GOD'S MISSION

At its heart, being a Christian is about following Jesus and therefore, discipleship is the essential task of faith. Earlier this year we preached through the Gospel of Matthew in which we returned repeatedly to the premise that Jesus seeks followers, not just believers. This is reflected in the simple fact that Jesus invited the disciples to follow Him before they understood who He was or believed in Him. Belief in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour is not the end of the line, but the beginning of a new stage of following Him. We are first and foremost followers of Jesus.

As a community of faith we have always known the priority of following Jesus but have tended to take a DIY approach to how it happens. While we don't want to approach discipleship with a cookie-cutter mentality where everyone has to look, act, and sound the same, we would benefit from a bit more intentionality about how we help each other follow Jesus.

Our intention then is to nurture followers of Jesus who are active participants in God's mission. We will nurture the work of God in people's lives as they seek to follow Jesus.

To facilitate this intention there are a few things we hope to do. First, to talk about and celebrate our journey of being changed by Jesus. When we were thinking about this strategic priority we tossed around words like bearing witness or giving testimony, but

both of these terms were too churchy. We chose a more day-to-day term: talk, because we want our following of Jesus to be part of our everyday lives like anything else we might talk about.

Second, we will foster a faith that engages with our culture. One of our most popular sermon series is our January series Jesus and the Sydney Morning Herald where we consider contemporary events in the light of the Bible and theology. We want to do this more because God is seeking to renew our whole world and we need informed action to participate with this work.

Third, we will engage in transformative Christian spiritual practices as a heart response to God. While this is quite a mouthful it is our best attempt at saying that we will, as part of our nurture of followers of Jesus, encourage Christian disciplines (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, attending church) as more than duties and in a way that helps connect our heart to our actions.

We hope that in the not-too-distant future we will have a flexible, relational pathway for nurturing followers of Jesus at whatever stage they are at. We hope to have a strong and growing culture of talking about and celebrating answers to prayer, lives changed by Jesus, and of participating with God in his renewing work. We hope to be more culturally engaged; thinking and acting theologically in the public square.



EVANGELISM

TO CULTIVATE SPACE FOR FAITH IN JESUS TO GROW



If following Jesus can begin before faith in Him (see Discipleship) then part of our evangelistic work is to cultivate space in people's lives for faith to grow. The work of evangelism then, begins long before someone actually places their faith in Jesus and, to some degree continues into what we might call discipleship. They are overlapping aspects of one spectrum: that of following Jesus.

For instance, there are many people in our local community who do not trust the Church at all. They are very unlikely to respond to a presentation of the gospel that calls for a decision of faith. Our evangelistic endeavour in this case is to be trustworthy. In this regard, our policies surrounding the safety of the vulnerable in our community: the very young, the very old, and those who have disabilities, are evangelistic. Others may be curious about Christianity, others may be open to change in their lives, and others may be open to God.

This is a shift from how we have usually thought about and engaged in evangelism which has focused on decisions of faith. This is not wrong, since this is ultimately what we hope to see, but could be more nuanced to take into account our culture and to

help us identify God's work in someone's life before conversion.

To facilitate this we want to be on the look out for what God is doing in people's lives and to partner with Him in helping people take the next faithful step in their journey. We will also seek to love and serve our community without condition. In other words, we will not demand that they come to believe to receive from us. Instead, we will love them as God loves us without apologising for being followers of Jesus, but being sensitive to their needs.

Some of our most evangelistic programs are those that serve our community: Kids Hope, COACH, Playtime, and even Carols in the Park. We don't call for conversions through these events, but it is clear that we are Christians and we hope and pray that as we partner with God in love and service faith will have space to grow.

We hope to see people consistently coming to faith in Jesus; making decisions to trust Him and follow Him as believers. And we hope that this happens through our participation with God in his work in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and community groups; in everyday interactions.

YOUTH & FAMILIES

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE OWN THEIR FAITH AND PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S MISSION

The community of faith that would become Gynea Baptist Church began in 1940 as a Sunday School held in hosed out chicken sheds. Ministry to children, youth, and families is an important part of our heritage as a church.

Of course, the world is a very different place now. The pressures and expectations placed on young people in particular have changed radically. Adolescence – biological and cultural – begins earlier but the traditional marks of reaching adulthood – marriage and moving out of the home – are happening late. Add to this the hyper-connectivity to new ideas and trends around the world, increasing secular nature of our community and the challenges facing young people to own their faith become clear. Research indicates that close to 50% of young people drift away from faith after high school.

As a community of faith we see young people (and their families) not as the future of the church, but as its present. If we treat young people like the future instead of the present we risk watching them lose their way. Our intention is to help young people own their faith and participate in God's mission now. This does not guarantee that they will not drift away but will be a significant safeguard against it.

In order to facilitate this process we will collaborate with young people to create meaningful expressions

of faith, service, and leadership. We have tended to be a bit tokenistic in the involvement of young people in the life of the church rather than being intentional and collaborative. This will take some effort on our part and will likely bring some significant changes to how we do things and while I don't know exactly what this will look like I'm excited about the journey.

We also seek to foster intergenerational connections in our community of faith. We have tended to segregate our ministries by age groups and while there are benefits to this approach we also recognise that following Jesus is a universal challenge and we can all learn from each other.

We will partner with and equip parents and care-givers to raise their children in such a way that they might come to own their faith. It takes a village to raise a child and we are the village of faith.

We hope that in the not-too-distant future we will have identified a practical philosophy of ministry to young people and their families to guide our ministry decisions but mostly we hope more young people successfully transition from high school to young adulthood with their faith intact. We plan for better facilities for these ministries (see Capital Works) and that we will continue to grow young as a church even as we seek to nurture followers of Jesus at all stages of life.





LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

TO DEVELOP AND RELEASE LEADERS INTO
THE MISSION GOD IS CALLING THEM TO

A central aspect of our purpose as a church to participate with God, is that we are all invited, and more than that, called, to participate. As more of us find our place in the mission of God here at GBC and beyond there will be an increased need to develop and release leaders.

The church at large has often been a great incubator of leadership. There are many ways to be involved in significant leadership in the church and lessons learned in ministry are largely transferable to nearly any other context. At GBC we have seen many, many people step into leadership roles in the church that have led them to much more significant roles in other churches or in other organisations. We want to build on this heritage and see more and more people released into key leadership roles where they can participate with God in His mission.

As we seek to do this we want to be early advocates of leadership in our community of faith. In other words, we want to call out leadership potential and help people discover the gifts and call that God may

have placed in their lives. We will therefore, speak of leadership (as with all gifts) as an extension of discipleship and the enabling of the Spirit. We do not simply wish to develop and release leaders, but to develop and release leaders who know their place in God's mission.

We will also develop leaders at all stages of life and all areas of life. If leadership is seen as part of our participation with God and we are all called to participate: the young and the old, then we will develop leadership wherever we find it. We also recognise that while some leadership will be exercised within the church, that our schools, companies, and other workplaces are part of God's wider mission and godly leadership is necessary there too.

We hope that in the not-too-distant future we will have a stronger culture of leadership development with full teams of Section Leaders and Team Leaders in our ministries, with several people preparing for ministry, and people released into leadership in all areas of life.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

TO BE A COMMUNITY OF FAITH FOR OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY



Our world is changing and one significant way we see this is in an increasing cultural diversity in our local community. In some parts of Sydney this has been a reality for a long time, but in the Sutherland Shire it has been a slower change. However, every year our local community becomes more and more diverse. This is of course, an invitation to participate in God's mission by welcoming those of every tongue and tribe and nation to follow Jesus. This will however, also bring the challenges that diversity always brings.

Of all our strategic priorities this one is quite dependent on changes in our local community and our need to respond to what is happening in our wider community. How might we respond if a large community of Koreans were to move to this area? Or a large community of Nigerians? We do not control migration patterns, but we can be prayerfully preparing for whatever happens. We believe that God is sovereignly aware of patterns that we couldn't hope to understand and we are participating with Him and hope to be as ready as we can be for who the Lord brings into our community.

Our church is more culturally diverse than we were even ten years ago, but is still more Anglo-

Saxon than our local community. Our desire to be a community of faith for our local community will be supported by behaviours that we will be seeking to develop.

First, we will make it simple for people from diverse backgrounds to join us on their own faith journey. We want to identify and remove as many obstacles as we can to people from different cultures joining us. This will require, second, that we listen to and learn from those who are different from us. Third, it may also mean that we may have to address our own discrimination and racism when it comes to light. We have been brought into the multicultural kingdom of God but are not immune from racism and must be willing to own this, confess it, and allow Jesus to change us.

We hope that in the not-too-distant future we will be more in-line with our local community in terms of cultural diversity, and maybe even a bit ahead of it! We want to be a community of faith where cultural diversity is reflected in our ministry teams and leadership positions and have a simple, well-developed pathway for people to find their place in God's mission at GBC.

SOUTHERN COMMUNITY WELFARE

SERVING OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

For more than twenty years Southern Community Welfare (SCW) has functioned as a ministry of GBC. Over that time, as SCW has grown and developed, the partnership between us has grown and developed as well. While SCW has its own governance structure that enables them to be externally accredited, we have sought to strengthen the relationship between us. This takes many forms including the provision of their offices and counselling rooms rent free, shared administrative facilities (e.g., phones, internet, and accounting software), and other financial support for particular programs. More recently, I have invited Vicki Sherry, who leads SCW to join the senior staff. This small group is made up of myself, Mark Coleman, Roxane Lawler, and Jodene Watling and has as its function, the leadership of GBC as we seek to fulfil our God-given purpose. Vicki's involvement on this team has been incredibly valuable, not only for her gifts and commitment to GBC, but also to deepen the connections between the two organisations.

As we have been developing our strategic priorities as a church, Southern Community Welfare has also been developing their strategy for the future and we have been working on aligning our strategies wherever possible. For example, in September this year we will be seeking to raise funds to appoint a counsellor who

specialises in Domestic Violence which is one of our social justice issues. Another place where we hope to develop our partnership is in our capital works. One of SCW's strategic plans is to create a community hub; something that we would love to facilitate because it's part of what we hope to do as a church.

Another strategic plan is to establish a social enterprise that would be able to fund the development of SCW. Late last year they launched an op-shop trial called Southern Grace that functioned out of our old auditorium. The trial proved successful but the logistics meant that it was put on the shelf until premises could be found. We see it as the providence of God that premises have come available at Cronulla Baptist Church and Southern Grace will hopefully open before the end of the year. There is also an opportunity to provide some professional services out of these premises which is very exciting. The future may be dual-site, but this does not change our partnership or commitment to the work of God through SCW. We praise God for His provision (and there are many more stories to tell of His provision) and for what we feel is an exciting way forward together to participate in what God is doing in our wider community.



CAPITAL WORKS

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

On Sunday July 1 at our mid-year meeting our membership voted overwhelmingly to explore the redevelopment of our old facilities. This is a significant strategic decision that will impact our ability to serve our community and to participate in God's mission.

One important possibility we will be exploring is the opportunity to integrate the work of Southern Community Welfare into the new developments along with significant resources devoted to children and youth ministry. At the time of printing we have conducted a needs assessment with the staff and SCW and have held an initial conversation with an architect. A small group has also been identified to begin to meet to lead this exploration phase.

This strategic decision to build is another in a long list of similar decisions made by GBC. From a chicken shed in the 40s to an auditorium in the early 60s to a Christian Education building several years later, and the most recent decision to build the auditorium. In each case, the decisions were made with kingdom outcomes in mind; to reach the local community with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While times have changed, and the kind of facilities required have changed the heart of why we choose to do this have not. We are committed to seeing lives changed by Jesus and this drives our decisions about programs, budgets, staffing, ministries, and buildings.

The decision to redevelop our facilities is, therefore, an exciting one that will have tremendous impact on our ability to participate with God in His plans.



FINANCES

RESOURCING THE VISION

Our partnership with God in His plans to renew the world takes many forms. Throughout this issue we have explored some of the ways we believe we are being invited to do so. Another way in which we are invited to participate is through our financial support of the vision to see lives changed by Jesus. When we begin to see our financial stewardship in the light of God's mission it changes the way we think about giving. Our giving is not a matter of duty, but a response to what we believe God is doing in the world. Giving out of duty results in legalism where we give to meet some sort of external standard. When we give out of a sense of mission we are free to give with true generosity.

I trust that this issue of the Partnership Newsletter has inspired you about our purpose together as the people of God at GBC and that this would encourage you to consider how you will respond to the invitation to support this mission through your finances and to do so generously.

If you are committed to finding your place in God's mission here at GBC giving is a good way to do so. We encourage people to give electronically and the details to do this are below. There is also more information on ways to give on GBC Links on the Give page. Giving electronically ensures that we can give regularly rather than depending on our attendance at church and remembering to bring our gifts. Giving electronically also provides an opportunity to prayerfully consider what you will give.

The vision we have requires all of us to be involved in all kinds of ways; in prayer, in service, and in giving.

Bank: Baptist Financial Services
Account: Gymea Baptist Church
BSB No: 704 922
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