PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 14



A MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

Whatever else happens in 2020 this will always be the year of COVID-19. The global pandemic has turned the world upside-down; shutting down whole countries as governments and health officials seek to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Nearly every aspect of our lives has been affected and there is good reason to believe that things will never be the same.

And what is true for businesses, schools, and restaurants is equally true for churches. For the first time in our 70-year history as a church we closed our doors as nearly all of our ministries were put on hold. After the initial scramble to move on-line there has been the inevitable, "Now what?"

To be honest, I'm not precisely sure what's next, but in the midst of all the uncertainty I believe that we can be absolutely certain that God is still at work. It's going to take a lot more than a global pandemic to stop God's plans to renew the world! And if God's still at work then the Holy Spirit is also still inviting us to participate.

As a community of faith there are certainly challenges for us to face in the future as we move into a post-COVID world, but we also have an incredible opportunity to join in with what God is doing in these extraordinary times.

God bless, Marc



The decision to move to online services, and the prayer and preparation that went into filming our first one, all happened within four days of our Government's announcement that indoor gatherings over 100 individuals were banned until further notice. The implications of a global pandemic rapidly refocused a team of committed staff and key volunteers, into a season of deep creativity and even deeper dependence upon God.

Whilst the restrictions on the embodied people of God, gathering as the embodied community of God has obviously brought a number of challenges, and most significantly for us, the opportunity to reassess what it means to be the church and communicate the life changing good news of Jesus. GBC Online has provided a virtual touchpoint for our ungathered community to still engage in the discipleship practices of worship and prayer, as well as exploring God's word together. More than that, it has also become a digital stepping-stone into a community of faith for some who have previously found physically attending a church too big a leap.

Beyond the sermons and the inspirational KidzHome segment, technological barriers have been overcome each week to involve more faces in GBC Online. It's been great to have members of our Worship, Youth, Prayer and Bible Reading teams meaningfully contribute in this space. Special mention must go to Martin Johnson, Javed Sterrit, Alexi Collins, Steph VandenHengel, Dave Beresford and Paul Sheaffe, as well as the many members of the teams mentioned before, who have

given of their time and skills to bring God glory and bless all who have joined in with us online.

As well as our services, GBC Online has provided a platform to start filming this year's newest podcast, The Big 3. Taking time to discuss three questions that arise from our Sunday sermons, The Big 3 was initially targeted at our PM congregation, but has now been opened up to our whole church. If you haven't taken the opportunity to check it out, you can find past episodes on our YouTube Channel, and watch new episodes at 7pm, Wednesdays on gbconline.org.au.

It has been an exciting journey learning to be 'On-Purpose' and 'Others-Focused' in an entirely new way for us as a community following Jesus, and we're looking forward to where the creative inspiration of the Holy Spirit will lead us through this season and beyond.











KIDZHOME & PLAYTIME

KidZone has become KidzHome featuring puppet friends who have become quite popular (and not just with kids), we hope you've met Scottish Mac and Irish-ish Mrs Mac, Vlad the Vulture and surprisingly, there are many positives and advantages to church online.

We are thankful for the opportunity for intergenerational connection and Whole-Life Learning in families at home. Parents have the God-given responsibility to teach their children about the Lord, and KidzHome helps parents by supporting them, not supplanting them. With a child-friendly spot and printable activity sheets, we want families to worship together, grow strong in the Lord, and also grow closer together. A weekly KidzHome spot during the services gives an opportunity for everyone at GBC to recognise and celebrate children and young people among us. It's so important for children's faith to know they are a valued part of the wider church. They belong here. It also builds upon our strategic priority of Youth and Families, and the importance of intergenerational ministry.

Our KidzHome team have been making and distributing fun Memory Verse Monday videos - a weekly Memory Verse challenge for the whole family to learn together. We hope that if your family have learned the verse of the week, you might celebrate

together! You can find these each Monday at our website, on our YouTube channel and our @gymeabaptistkids Instagram.

The Playtime team are thankful for new ways to be Others-Focused at this time. Playtime@Home is available online and learning about this term's theme: numbers. We make craft, sing songs and join in activities via a fun and interactive video presented by one of our Playtime Leaders. Anyone is welcome to join in with this, and it's a great chance to connect your friends with a church activity with no pressure! Request to join the Gymea Baptist Church Playtime group on Facebook or contact Meddwyn our Playtime Coordinator.

This year our normal Easter Playtime visit to church for a puppet show and egg hunt was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. However we wanted to be Big-Hearted so we packaged up and mailed a fun Easter Package to each of our 58 current Playtime families with Easter crafts, the Bible Society Easter book and a link to a video of "Mac's Big Adventure" featuring Mac, Roxy and Meddwyn. Families loved the Playtime package, and we received comments like "We have had a great morning making Easter hats" and "I was looking for a book to explain Easter to the kids and that one was perfect. Very much appreciated."

GBC YOUTH

As everything started to close down in the wake of COVID-19, our incredible youth leadership team were rallying together and getting creative in order to maintain a sense of community and connection for our young people. Our goal was clear, we wanted to be the constant for our youth as the world around them drastically changed. So with the technology we had at our fingertips, we worked to move our GBC YOUTH community online. Thankfully, this generation of digital natives was more than ready for what was to come.

Only a week after the social distancing restrictions saw all youth ministries around the country close down, GBC YOUTH launched its very first online program. Each Friday night, our youth tune in to watch our online stream, which shows our leadership team sharing stories of where God has been at work, setting challenges for the youth to attempt during isolation, and most importantly, opening up the word and hearing God's message. After this, the youth and leaders all break off into smaller discussion groups through zoom. Here we are able to dive deeper together into God's word, support one another through this tricky time and pray together. It has been so encouraging to see how responsive and engaged our

youth have been in this new mode of ministry. Each week has seen between 30 and 40 young people login into our zoom groups to connect with their leaders and peers.

However, being aware that so many points of connection were now closed, we wanted to do more to ensure that social distancing wasn't isolating our young people. Through social media our GBC YOUTH community has been having daily devotions together. Each day, the youth have a scripture to read and questions to get them thinking, as well as a recorded reflection on the passage from our Youth Coordinator, Matt Willis. Reading the bible together each day has just been another way in which we have continued to unite as a community.

It is clear that God continues to work in the lives of our young people. We hear it each week, as we log into our online chat groups, in the stories our youth share, in the prayers they pray, and in the lessons they are learning. As excited as we are to get back to normal youth ministry, we cannot deny that this experience has strengthen the GBC YOUTH family, in both faith and community.





MAY MISSION MONTH 2020

At GBC, we believe the mission of God is to restore and renew all things in Jesus Christ. Our heart is to live into our values of being On-Purpose, Others-Focused and Big-Hearted and to join where God's already at work.

Our target this year is \$190,000 and while that feels big in this current COVID-19 world, our heart turns towards those for whom this situation is devastating. We invite you to be prayerful and consider how God might be inviting you to participate in what He is doing through MMM. The projects, organisations and people we are supporting this year include:



Mother's Heart Organisation, Cambodia: Mother's Heart is the first and only pregnancy support centre in Cambodia. It is a Christian organisation that empowers, and equips women through counselling, child development and parenting skills training, medical care and community integration, such as housing and vocational support. This project will support 65 women, from vulnerable and exploited backgrounds, who often have very little support or options in such a challenging time. This project seeks to enable clients to choose the best future for them and their babies. This is the second year we have supported Mother's Heart and this project.



Bible Society Australia:

Over 100+ Aboriginal languages are spoken in Australia today and there is only one complete Bible translation in an Aboriginal Language. Over three years, we are partnering to create oral bible translations of the book of Luke in four languages spoken in the Kimberley region, plus the online platforms and listening devices for accessible engagement. This is the first oral bible translation project for an indigenous language in Australia. To enable the ongoing translation of the Bible into indigenous languages, we're supporting the Diploma of Bible Translation at Nungalinya College in Darwin to train up the next generation of translators to ensure the future of their language and continued translation work.



GBC Frontline Missionaries

There are nine workers ministering in local and global contexts, who are sent and supported by a variety of different mission agencies and organisations. We as a church support this work through their respective organisations

For further information or to donate: www.gymeabaptist.org.au and click on the May Mission Month image, or call our GBC Office: (02) 9521 4611.

LIFEGROUPS

Humanity has been designed by God to live in relationship with Him and with each other, as social beings. In the current season of physical distancing that we are living in, not only have our daily routines been inconvenienced, it has placed pressure on our ability to enjoy the company of family and friends. The landscape for our LifeGroups, which are an integral part of our discipleship in following Jesus and building friendships with others, has changed dramatically. All our LifeGroups have remained connected in one way or another and many have overcome technological challenges to begin having virtual gatherings via Zoom. While there have been hiccups along the way, our LifeGroups have shown resilience and camaraderie to remain connected to one another.

In our endeavour to ensure no one in our LifeGroups space has been left behind, we have fast-tracked the implementation of some changes that we have been working on in the background. The first was the addition of LifeGroups into GBC Links. Each GBC LifeGroup has its own group on GBC Links, where LifeGroup leaders can add or remove people from their groups, ensuring that everyone who is associated with a LifeGroup can be identified. There is also the capability of keeping an attendance record.

The process to record LifeGroup attendance is very easy and helps us to fulfil our Safe Church practice requirements. Attendance records have been in use across KidZone and Youth for some time now and extending this to our LifeGroup space helps us to be Others-Focused by incorporating best practice to keep people safe.

The second implementation has been the formation of ConnectGroups and Pods. ConnectGroups, when operating in a non-isolating world, are clusters of LifeGroups that will meet intermittently to help nurture relationships across our congregation and will be a helpful space for new people to join a LifeGroup. Pods are the cluster of LifeGroup leaders who are within each ConnectGroup. Forming the structure of our Pods now, during physical distancing, has helped to create easy communication lines with our LifeGroup leaders, as we check-up on the welfare of each LifeGroup. While these new changes have come with some natural teething problems, we have been greatly encouraged by all our LifeGroup and Pod leaders who have been willing to embrace new changes during this challenging season.





WHAT'S NEXT?

GBC in a post-COVID world.

As restrictions begin to lift, we face the challenges of imagining church in a post-COVID world. What seems clear is that we will not be able to simply return to ministry-as-usual. Until there is a vaccine – a matter for prayer – great care will need to be taken to ensure a second (or third) wave of infections doesn't set us back. Physical distancing, careful use of space, and attention to good hygiene and "deep" cleaning will be with us for a long while.

As a leadership we are beginning to grapple with what it looks like for us to reopen some ministries, especially when we enter Stage 2 of the government's reopening plan and groups of 20 are allowed to meet. This will allow our Life Groups, in particular, to return to meeting together physically. Playtime may also be able to go back in Stage 2. Once we enter Stage 3, Youth ministry along with Connect Groups (2-3 Life Groups), will be able to meet. We will still need to be careful about how often the building is used, but other appropriately sized groups (less than 100) may also be able to return to meeting together.

The real challenge for us as we look forward is what to do with our Sunday services once we enter Stage 3; a limit of 100 people does not allow our services to return without some significant challenges being overcome. For instance, we may need to multiply the number of services we hold to accommodate several smaller congregations, recruit a cleaning team to disinfect the building after each service, etc. Thankfully, while we want to be thinking these issues through, we don't need to solve these problems immediately!

As we face an uncertain future, we are being presented with an opportunity to reimagine what it means to be a community of faith. How we meet together will likely change significantly as will how we foster a sense of connection with one another in one community of faith. This will be challenging for us all – not only to reimagine church but also in how we implement this together.

Please join me in praying for a clear sense of God's leading in this time, unity as we seek to discern God's leading, and for lives to be transformed by Jesus as we participate with Him in a post-COVID world.



When we undertook our planning for 2020, none of us could have predicted the situation we find ourselves in now. As we began to fathom some of the implications of a pandemic, there was an initial period of fear. However, almost immediately we surrendered these fears over to God, He faithfully provided for Hopefield in ways we could not have imagined and showed us that disruption opens doors for new opportunities!

An opportunity that emerged from a significant, immediate need was food supply. Our pantries in both Cronulla and Kirrawee were almost bare. Presentations at Hopefield included clients experiencing distress or concerns about upcoming financial strain and financial uncertainty. Food requests also increased. We were delighted and incredibly grateful for the provision from GBC that re-stocked our pantry. However, this challenge opened a new door of opportunity. It became apparent that food supply issues were being experienced by several charities across the Shire and each of us were trying to address this.

Community Co-Op Sutherland Shire was birthed out of this. Hopefield, One Meal, Orana and Salvation Army (Miranda) came together to address the food supply issue. Endorsed by Sutherland Shire Council, the project creates a source of food supply for Sutherland Shire charities and NGOs, to be used during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The project has already sourced a weekly supply of fresh fruit and vegetables from Sydney Markets, nonperishable items donated by the public and pre-prepared meals donated by several food suppliers, restaurants, and cafes.

The project operates one day per week and has just completed its second week. We were amazed that with relatively little promotion, we have distributed more than 500 food packages in just over two days. We are excited by what the future holds for this project and our collective ability to support vulnerable individuals and families, particularly during uncertain times. If you want to find out more about this initiative, you can visit the Co-op's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/Community-Co-op-Sutherland-Shire-103706814629925/

We are excited to introduce our telehealth services and a new digital program called "Flourishing through Crisis". This program, aims to create resources to educate and empower people during periods of stress, change and uncertainty. It brings simple short messages that are practical and hope-filled to the community. Our first few messages have started to appear on Hopefield's Facebook page. We are also particularly thrilled to be producing a series of messages to support the GBC community during this period. We're looking forward to being able to share a whole range of resources on topics like anxiety and stress, home schooling, loneliness and a raft of challenges that we are seeing across the community.

We are continually thankful to God for all that we have been able to do and for His provision. We are grateful that when we take our eyes off our situation we are able to see God at work more clearly. We are particularly grateful to our GBC family, for your prayer, encouragement, and support. Even though there is much uncertainty, we are excited about what the future holds.

FINANCES

In these uncertain times there is an amazing opportunity to reimagine what it means to be a community of faith. I suspect that what we look like post-COVID will be remarkably different from what we did before it. This will require a redeployment of our resources to take advantage of the opportunities that are appearing. As we begin to lean into these opportunities, I am very thankful for the Lord's provision. I am thankful for Neil Evans (Treasurer), Beryl Davenport (Book Keeper), and Brett Robinson (Operations Manager) for their hard work in managing our finances and accessing the government support made available to us (for which I am also thankful). I am thankful for the good stewardship of our loan that has set us years ahead in repayments and reduced the loan to a fraction of the original debt. And I am thankful for the ongoing financial support of our community of faith. A big thank you to those who have begun to give online.

While there is a long way to go and many changing variables, we find ourselves currently in a positive financial position where we are not discussing

layoffs or where we are constrained from strategic discussions by a significant deficit. I am thankful to the Lord for his provision that precedes his plans.

If you would like to respond to the invitation of God to participate through financial support of GBC, you can find out more on GBC Links under the Give tab and on our website. Our bank details are below.

Thank you so much for partnering with us as we seek to join in with God's work in transforming lives through Jesus.

More details on how to begin giving are available on GBC Links. We encourage electronic giving.

Bank: Baptist Financial Services **Account:** Gymea Baptist Church

BSB No: 704 922

Account No: 100 006 024



