

Documents for Mid-Year Meeting

(26th July 2020)

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Mid-Year Meeting

26th July 2020

(Held via Zoom Meeting)

Agenda

1. Welcome.
2. Members and Guests record attendance.
3. Apologies.
4. Devotion and Prayer.
5. Confirmation of Agenda.
6. Confirmation of Minutes from last Meeting (AGM2 – Sunday 15 March 2020). Vote via Zoom Poll.
7. Finance Report (Neil Evans, Treasurer).
8. Hopefield Report.
9. Senior Pastor's Report.
10. Appointment of Pastoral Selection Committee. Vote via Zoom Poll.
11. Close.

The logo for GBC, consisting of the letters 'GBC' in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid black square.

Gymea Baptist Church

Minutes of AGM 2 - Held 15 March 2020

Date: 15 March 2020
Open: 12:33
Signed in members: 70 @ 12:40 [Total: 71]
Attendees: Please refer to the sign in sheet
Apologies: Please refer to the sign in and apology sheet
Active members: 314
Quorum: 47 – 15% of Active members
Minute taker: Ralph Graham (Secretary)

1. Welcome & Devotion

Marc Rader (MR) opened by asking us to reflect where we see God at work, we got into small groups to discuss. MR wrapped up this discussion in prayer.

2. Apologies

Refer to sign in sheets

3. Set agenda, no changes to set agenda

4. Confirmation of previous minutes (24th Nov 2019 meeting)

Moved by Lawrie Green , Seconded by Rhonda Montgomery
Against – None, taken as accepted

5. Treasurer's Report by Neil Evans (NE)

NE thanked John Lunney for his contribution as previous Treasurer, gave his background (15 years member, retired engineer, loves numbers & solving problems).

NE outlined God's purpose is to grow God's Kingdom, He has given us what we need & we need to give back. Malachi 3:10

2019

Negative Financial Outcomes:

Missed budget by \$39k

Had to withdraw \$100k

Positive Outcomes:

Sold Turner Lodge net \$311k, \$211k into loan and \$100k deposited into operating account to facilitate normal cashflow

Loan is \$150k, substantially paid off

\$227k raised for May Mission Month

Ministry bonds are covering interest

Expenses in line with budget

Overall a positive result

2020 budget is higher than 2019 actual offerings

NE showed graph on operating costs

2020 opportunities:

Our material wealth is beyond most in the world

Church invests in:

Youth & family

Care, connect & growing

Local mission, e.g. SCW, Kids Hope, Scripture, playtime

Global mission, e.g. May Mission Month

Ministry support

Plus:

Good teaching

2020 Scorecard

Offering ahead of budget to Feb

Loan nearly gone, 20 years ahead

Expenditure in line/under with budget

Cash in the bank so we pay bills on time

Still have assets at Turner Lodge and Grays Point to sell

NE closed noting our fortunate position, invest what we have.

Question from Luke Nottage: Are offerings up because people were not away (ref. Jan. bushfires)?

Will absence affect offerings? NE noted offerings fluctuate based on attendance, NE put out challenge to maintain offerings despite challenges (ref. COVID-19) ahead.

6. Senior Pastor's Report

MR referred to compiled Annual Report 2019 "Unfolding".

Patterns of Attendance Survey

Prelim results:

1554 cards filled by 658 people, 64 visitors

91% completion rate (positive outcome)

Avg attendance was 426 (1 very wet day), 455 if normalised

Avg 1.5 visits per month, slightly up

Correlation between involvement (life group and volunteering) and sense of connection.

Avg attendance, 2016 526, 2018 448, 2020 426* (*very wet weather)

No real pattern across attendance from year to year (e.g. 1, 2, 3 visits per month). More people are attending infrequently. Not good or bad, just have to accept the new pattern of attendance, this is our world. Affects preaching series, e.g. hearing all 5 values will not be heard by all. How do we become less Sunday centric, how do we remain a community when we don't always attend in person.

Question Alan Williams: Do we keep record of podcast downloads?

MR called on Sam Headen. Trends down in Nov, now picking up. 2500 downloads per month.

Q. NE – Was bad Sunday included into the week by week trending? MR said yes.

Q. Brianna – asked about asterisk (* next to 2020 data)?

MR explained about the very rainy day.

Q. Can people attend in other ways (e.g. podcast)?

MR referred to on-line services etc, MR said we are exploring other avenues (e.g. webinar with live Q & A session).

Q. Grace – Do we track connect group attendances?

MR said no, attendance patterns differ across connect groups. MR said Kids' groups are tracked but reflect parent's attendance.

Q. Luke Nottage – Life Group attendance over time?

MR replied we track number of life groups over time but not attendance. MR said we have 38 groups, down from about 40. Tracking numbers can be misleading (e.g. how often the groups run).

Q. Jess – Are stats different between Services (AM/PM)? MR said he would ask Janet to break down in future.

General Updates:

Service Coordinator role – Carolyn moved on, looking at five applicants

Sale of Grays Point (contract has been drafted to place on market). We are investigating two areas for proceeds investment: 1. Support for Hopefield to infuse future capacity and 2. Some capital investment in our current facility, e.g. fix roof.

Final report from Cultural Diversity Committee, chaired by Cassi Bourke. Cassi has just given birth (congratulations Cassi & Ben) so report may be delayed.

Safe Church Policy implementation: Appointed Safe Church Team: Matt Willis (staff), Esther Pratten (elder) & Susan Kusch (CLT). Looking to appoint 4th member in future.

Questions: - None

Discipleship, Evangelism, Connect Group Goals for 2020

Want to create Connect Groups to connect Life Groups (2 or 3 Life Groups make up one Connect Group), makes easier to connect to Life Groups. Creates space to be at ease. MR encouraged all to participate.

General Questions – Jan Speckman, is an email coming about the Corona virus? MR said "if" email comes please read it. MR said it has escalated in the last week in the press. MR said we don't know our next move, all our gatherings are less than 500 people. Not sure what it means for communion. MR said we are being measured and responsible.

Luke Nottage – Would Marc like suggestions from the congregation for how to get through this crisis? Is there someone on staff to feed ideas to? MR, maybe? MR said we are getting info from Baptist Association, Fed Govt etc.

Q. Steph Van Hengel - It would be good to know before Wednesday if Sunday services were to be cancelled. MR said he would respond as quick as he can.

MR noted in conclusion that he was pleased about our financial progress and positive steps being taken in other areas of ministry.

MR closed AGM in prayer at 1:35 pm.

Gymea Baptist Church

Mid-Year Finance Report for 30 June 2020

It is not often that a Treasurer gets to give a report like this particularly, in the midst of a pandemic. But praise God he can not only balance the books, but abundantly bless us.

Looking at the Financial Summary below this is a great result for GBC in that as a Church we have:

- Maintained our offering and have in fact exceeded it by \$41k.
- Our total income even without the Turner Lodge Sale and the loss of venue revenue is on budget.
- Reduced or maintained our expenditure in almost all areas except property where we have had some "one offs".
- May Mission Month was a fabulous result. The normalised result for this year was \$233k plus \$15k carrying over from last year. This was \$33k over our target.
- The government has recognised the value of organisations like us and subsidised our income providing an additional \$105k through JobKeeper and PAYG tax refund.
- Reduced our BFS loan by over \$200k and unlike other years we have not needed to dip into our redraw facility. It now stands at \$148k and we hope to pay it off completely soon.
- We have also been able to clear up expenses from last year plus some historical expenses – we are debt free from previous years internal expenses.
- We have cash in the bank.

This is a very positive result

On the negative side:

- We have used much of our cash positive to pay the historical debt and BFS loan.
- Without JobKeeper and PAYG tax refund we would have run out of cash on a couple occasions and required to redraw from our loan.
- JobKeeper and PAYG end in September, so we need to maintain our offering and manage our expenditure.
- We have some unplanned and uninsured repairs to make to the building to keep it watertight. If we don't do this, we will not be insured.

Overall a great result.

At the AGM I reminded of God's promise to Malachi and to us.

Malachi 3:10, NIV: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."*

God has certainly delivered in this crazy time, lets continue to be faithful.

Financial Result Summary

1. Income

	Actual (\$'000)	Budget (\$'000)	Comments
Offerings	\$447	\$406	Ahead of budget 10.1% (\$41k)
Miscellaneous	\$15	\$11	Camps etc
Missions	\$285	\$221	Carols, MMM and Other
Operational	\$10	\$50	No hire of venue
Turner Lodge	\$312	\$40	\$100k in budget, rest on loan

2. Expenses

Salaries	\$379	\$331	Anomaly of Jobkeeper
Ministries	\$24	\$33	Under spend
Missions	\$252	\$218	Money in money out
Outreach	\$12	\$9	
Operational	\$34	\$25k	Real Estate costs
Finance Costs	\$4	\$12	
Property etc	\$66	\$56	Uninsured repairs
Pastoral	\$7	\$6	

3. Other Income

PAYG Refund	\$23	\$0	COVID - 19 Refund
JobKeeper	\$84		COVID - 19 Payment
A time to build	\$18		

4. In summary

Income	\$1195k	Includes Turner Lodge and MMM
Expenses	\$781k	
Net Income	\$414k	We should be awash with cash

5. Debt

BFS	\$148k
-----	--------

6. Assets

Another Turner Lodge unit and Grays Point Property

7. Cash Position

Cash in bank at 30/6/20 \$82k

Dear GBC team,

Attached is the half yearly update from Hopefield providing an overview of what the team has been up to over the last six months. Whilst we have missed seeing many of your faces, I trust you enjoy reading this report and that it provides a glimpse into the work of Hopefield.

Since preparing this report, however, there have been a few additional updates.

Firstly, we are delighted to announce and celebrate Esther Pratten becoming a registered psychologist who has now also formally joined the Hopefield Clinical Services team.

Secondly, we have also participated with GBC in creating and delivering Hopefield Sessions – a series of in-depth interviews with our resident psychologists on relevant topics. Our first Hopefield Session was on “Stress & Anxiety” and is available to view via the GBC You Tube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CudyALLiipE>), and in the next couple of weeks, the second Hopefield Session on “Building Stronger Families” will also be available. We would love your feedback and thoughts on these as well as future topics of interest.

Finally, the Hopefield team will be going into a cycle of strategic planning over the next few months. Your ongoing prayers for God’s wisdom and guidance would be appreciated, as we seek to discern His will to continue the work of this organisation.

As always, the work of Hopefield would not be possible without your incredible support. We sincerely thank you for continuing to enable this service to operate even through these most challenging times.

God Bless

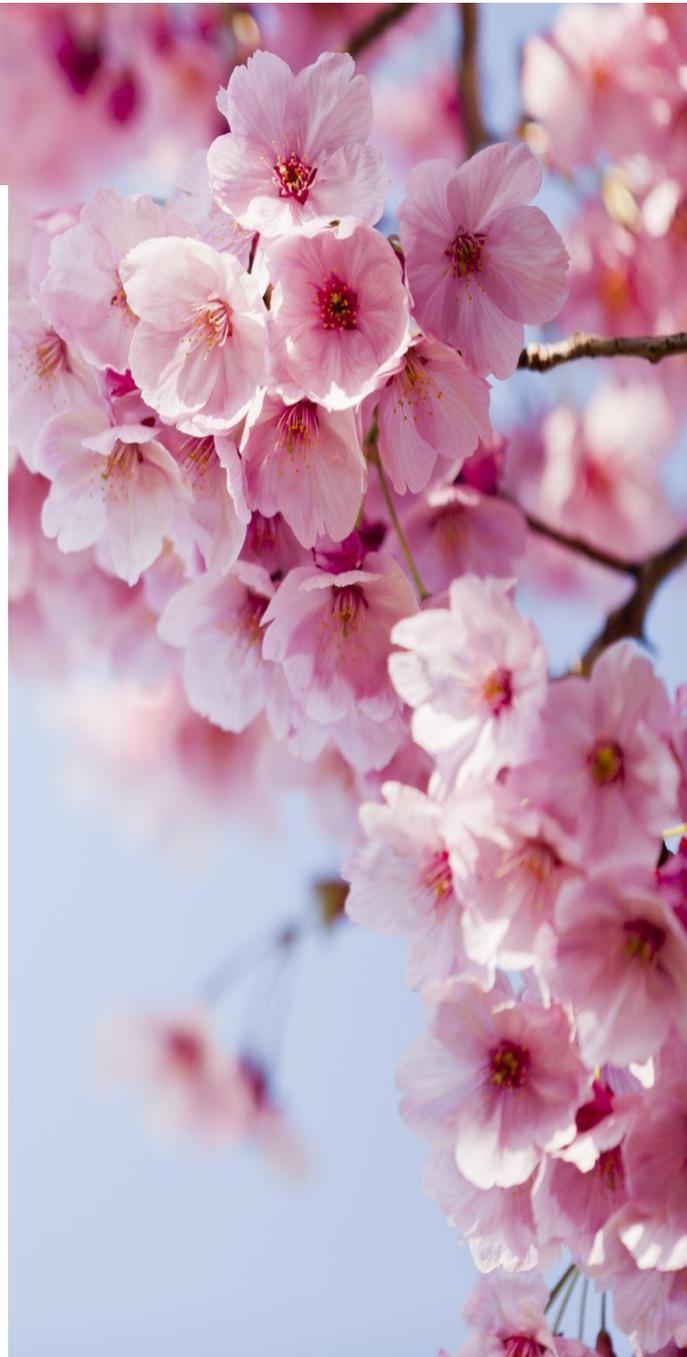
Vicki

Half Yearly Update 2020

Hopefield

JUNE

Hopefield
Vicki Sherry



Flourishing Through Crisis

Dear Hopefield Supporter,

Who would have guessed what 2020 was going to hold! I do not think any amount of planning was ever going to adequately prepare us for all that unfolded as we launched ourselves into a new decade.

In times of such significant disruption, there are always opportunities. Individuals and organisations can respond from a place of fear or a place of flexibility and growth. At Hopefield we often talk about having a ‘growth mindset’. The ability to see what we go through as part of a journey and that we can adapt, change, and respond to our environment. Having the quiet confidence and security in knowing that whilst things may change around us (and perhaps will never be quite the same again) that we can adjust and continue to move forward.

More importantly however, is that we take our community on this journey with us. That our “Flourishing Communities” vision, is a vision for ALL and not dependent on our external circumstances - rather in our ability to be agile and resilient through circumstances.

I’m incredibly humbled by this team’s ability to respond with agility. From introducing telehealth through to establishing a wholesale food co-operative through to making significant strides in our engagement with homelessness. Hopefield in the last few months has not only continued many of the much-needed regular services but has also adapted and responded to new and emerging needs.

Over the next few pages, you will gain insight into some of these projects and outcomes that are only possible because of your faithful and generous support.

Thank you for partnering with Hopefield and making this vision a reality.

God Bless

Vicki

1. Support Services Team Update

The Support Services team had to make several changes to service delivery during the COVID restrictions. Whilst group and community hub events had to go into hibernation, these restrictions did not affect the continuity of care or the number of new people seeking support. The primary mode of service delivery moved to phone-based support during the peak of the restrictions, and this has worked well particularly for our very isolated clients. Face to face support however has also continued as an essential service to community.

“You are Gold! I am so appreciative of the men’s group. I told my solicitor today that the church at Kirrawee caseworkers are all gold!”

Support Services Client

i. Case Management

As might be expected during this time of stress and need in our community, ***demand for case management services remains high***. There are currently 42 clients receiving case management support. Needs range from supporting women in domestic violence, those experiencing homelessness and living in their cars, those in financial distress and unable to afford the essentials, to those trying to rebuild lives through employment or meaningful activities. As usual one of the common threads for those in this program is isolation.

i. Homelessness Programs

In February this year, Hopefield had the opportunity to participate in the Sutherland Shire Council overnight homelessness count. This was a co-ordinated activity with participants from Department of Community & Justice (DCJ), Wesley Mission and Hopefield. The count identified Cronulla as a significant hot-spot, with a higher and disproportionate number of people living either on the streets or in their cars compared to the rest of the Sutherland Shire. The need for a service like Hopefield located in the Cronulla area is clear.



In response to this, a collaborative taskforce, known as the Sutherland Shire and St George Homelessness Assertive-Outreach Collaboration was established. Consisting of key participants from Council, NSW Police, DCJ, NSW Housing, Wesley Mission and Hopefield aimed at quickly identifying, reaching out and supporting those living on the street in a co-ordinated manner.

This has been an incredible venture and has proven to be an effective model that is now being deployed across greater Sydney in response to homelessness. It has been amazing to be a part of this program throughout COVID and to see the Government's response to those who are homeless. The government has been pro-actively supporting homeless people by putting them in hotels around Sydney to keep them safe and off the streets. Many of Hopefield's homeless clients have been able to leverage safe temporary accommodation and we are working with NSW Housing to identify viable ongoing long-term housing solutions. At this stage, long term accommodation for three clients has been found.

ii. Food & Practical Support Services

a. Cronulla Weekly Meal Service

Our weekly Cronulla One Meal food program for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness has operated throughout the COVID restrictions. The program was modified so that meals were available as a takeaway service only and fresh food and groceries were also made available for patrons. This program has been operating since March 2019 and runs weekly every Thursday from Gosport Street Cronulla and has not stopped operating other than a one-day closure on Boxing Day 2019. Over the course of the last 12 months, this program has served approximately 950 meals.

b. Pantry and Fresh Food Supply

The year initially started with a limited supply of pantry food for clients in both Cronulla and Kirrawee locations. Amidst the early stages of COVID panic buying in supermarkets, it seemed unlikely that we would be able to re-stock the pantries and meet the needs of those struggling. ***A request for a food drive was overwhelming and***



heartwarmingly met by our Gymea Baptist Church (GBC) family. This food crisis however, opened us to new ways of thinking about addressing this issue and opened new doors 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 individually.



Community Co-Op Sutherland Shire (CCSS) was birthed from of this. Hopefield, in collaboration with One Meal, Orana and The Salvation Army (Miranda) came together to address the food supply issue through this collaborative project.



Endorsed by Sutherland Shire Council, the project creates a wholesale source of food supply for Sutherland Shire charities and NGOs, to be used as a source of food relief during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Through this initiative, we can scale and secure food supply better than any one of us could on our own. The project has already sourced a weekly supply of fresh fruit and vegetables from Sydney Markets, non-perishable items donated by the public and pre-prepared meals donated by several food suppliers, restaurants, and cafes.

The project largely runs with volunteers, operates 1 day/week and has just completed its 6th week of operation, supplying 13 individual non-profit organisations. The co-op is able to provide ready-made meals, pantry items as well as fresh fruit and vegetables. CCSS is currently distributing just over 300 hampers a week equating to over 900 meals. The next stage is to expand the offering to include protein products such as fresh meat.

We anticipate that in the coming months the financial ramifications of the COVID pandemic will continue to be felt. We have been pleasantly surprised with our collective ability to fast-track the development and deployment of the project as well as the accelerated adoption by NGOs, to support vulnerable individuals and families. If you want to find out more about this initiative, you can visit the co-op Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Community-Co-op-Sutherland-Shire-103706814629925/>



3. Clinical Services Team Update

i. Clinical Services Delivery

The first 6 months for clinical services have been some of the most dynamic and challenging, requiring a flexibility of service provision unprecedented in the life of the service. Hopefield, however, continues to serve and support those on our community to navigate the challenges and stresses of life and relationships, mental health and living skills. The activities and service provision has been dominated by the experience of COVID-19 and its effects not only on the practicalities of living, but on the effects of isolation, financial concerns or just managing home schooling!

Isolation requirements meant shifting to a completely new way of seeing clients and ***over a matter of days the team became experts in tele-health***. Our successful transition was in part due to the flexibility of staff and the digital practice management system that Hopefield deployed in the second half of 2019. Our counsellors and speech pathologist managed to quickly transition from a clinical environment where all cues and nuances of human behaviour are observed, to a two-dimensional interaction where clients are talking into a screen and are at times barely visible. ***The ability to provide telehealth has enabled us to extend our services to Australian's living as far as India and Indonesia.***

It has been remarkable then that not only were the team able to ***provide more than 170 sessions remotely*** via video or phone (telehealth), but feedback indicates these sessions are just as effective as face to face.

From January to mid-June 2020, the clinical team delivered a total of 763 sessions including 50 pro-bono (free) and 257 subsidised sessions (ie 40% client sessions are subsidised). This was only possible with your financial support. Our speech services also continue to grow with 156 sessions so far in 2020 and similarly our NDIS sessions are also growing with 65 sessions year to date. The presenting issues even during this pandemic have remained constant with anxiety, depression and behavioural issues still dominating reasons for seeking counselling support.

ii Digital Engagement

Over the last few months not only has the Hopefield Clinical team delivered over 170 sessions remotely, but they have also pro-actively disseminated empowering messages of hope to the public.

In a program developed by the team in response to the COVID pandemic, a series of targeted messages have been developed and released via social media. The program was designed to offer hope, encouragement, and effective practical tools to foster flourishing even in and through times of crisis. Known as the “Flourishing through Crisis” series, both static images and videos, have been shared and are available on Hopefield’s Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/hopefieldau/> which have been well received.

Hopefield also embarked on a significant partnership with the GBC team to produce “Hopefield Sessions”. These are longer conversational sessions recorded with a host from GBC. Our expert staff addressed current topics such as stress, change and will move into looking at building stronger families and other topics as requested by the GBC community. These interviews are being hosted on GBC’s YouTube channel and can be viewed any time on <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeMn71Dh0QYxwLnv3lg-gVQ>

iii Client Feedback

Over the last 4 weeks Hopefield has also pro-actively sought the feedback of our clinical clients on their experience of the service they received from their counsellor as well as the overall service.

Across all 3 domains (13 questions in total), feedback indicates that 90% of clients highly rated the skills of their counsellor. Specific feedback includes:



Clinical Services Client
May 2020

SERVICES AT HOPEFIELD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY HELPFUL & PROACTIVE. TOOLS ARE GIVEN TO HELP PEOPLE & SITUATIONS IMMEDIATELY WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT I NEED. VERY APPRECIATIVE OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL ETHICS & SUPPORT

Clinical Services Client
May 2020

- 80% of clients strongly agreed that the sessions were helpful in accomplishing their immediate objective(s) and 20% agreed.
- 70% strongly agreed that they felt hopeful and empowered and 30% agreed they felt hopeful and empowered
- Over 90% of clients strongly agreed that their counsellor was knowledgeable and prepared for sessions and 10% agreed

- ***100% of clients rated the Hopefield organisation as amazing!***

These results are not accidental but the result of ***a culture across the organisation of excellence, and a belief that every individual matters.***



3. Community Education & Group Programs

Over the first few months of 2020, Hopefield has delivered six community education events, with over 200 people in attendance. As with all other aspects of the Hopefield service, three of these programs shifted to an online format.

A significant demand exists for educating parents in the support for children experiencing anxiety. This program is therefore being re-scheduled to run twice again over the next month, having already been delivered 5 times.

Dovetailing into these community programs has been the delivery of the 8 week Circle of Security Parenting program and the 10 week Cool Kids program. Feedback from participants across all programs has been very positive with outcomes including a noticeable shift in anxiety levels of children.

The power of digital and online has also meant that the Hopefield audience has broadened. Surprisingly, participants have ranged from as far north as Coffs Harbour, as far south as Wollongong as far west as Perth!

i) Jitters Second Edition

Hopefield has had a long-standing history in assisting children that experience anxiety, having published 3 children's' books on this topic. With the first book published 12 years ago and nearly out of print the time was right to embark on the second edition.

We all know the power of storytelling in explaining teaching new skills and in this second edition, Hopefield is bringing Jitters to life through an on-line animated e-book as well as updated parent notes.

Whilst still in the making, this is the first step in a series of digital programs in the pipeline for supporting children and their carers through the magic of stories.

We look forward to sharing this new edition with you soon.

FEEDBACK

Average participants rating out of 10 were:

How would you rate tonight's information overall? 9.4

How would you rate the presenter of the community education? 9.5

How would you rate the pace of the community education? 9.4



Thank you for your support.

None of this would have been possible without you.

We have many amazing plans for the coming months and would love to share these with you.

Your continued support is vital to our on-going success and I would be happy to talk to you personally about any aspect of our services.

Vicki

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Hopefield

Senior Pastor's Report - Mid-Year Meeting – July 26, 2020

Prepared for the mid-year meeting of Gymea Baptist Church, July 26, 2020.

This report is intended to be accepted as read. In other words, I will not be speaking to each part of the paper, but will assume people have read it. We are encouraging questions raised by the paper be submitted *prior* to the meeting to office@gymeabaptist.org.au. Questions will be accepted during the meeting, but the online forum will run more smoothly if we can capture questions before the meeting. This will also allow us to collate similar questions and answer them all at once.

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Reflections on the year so far

Is there anything left to say about 2020 that hasn't been said? It's been a year like no other. The bushfire crisis of the beginning of the year and the subsequent flooding when the rains came proved to be the opening act for a global pandemic. We looked on with concern and empathy for those affected by the fires, sought to do what we could to alleviate their suffering, and worried about the impact on our climate. We were thankful when the rains came, both for the relief it brought to our firefighters and to our drought-stricken state. And then, after a few weeks of "normal" we began to hear about a novel coronavirus that was sweeping across the globe and, sooner than we could have imagined, we were in lockdown as a country.

As a community of faith we were forced by circumstances to gather online and to consider what it means for us to be the church in a COVID-19 world. Much of this report is taken up with this very topic. I do believe that great challenges provide us with great opportunities and, even more so, that God is at work and inviting us to participate with him in his ongoing plans to renew the world in Jesus Christ. Participation with God is not without risk, but it is too important to remain where we are or to retreat into what is comfortable and known.

This journey we are on as a community of faith, however, did not begin with COVID-19. The pandemic has merely accelerated the process of change and amplified the urgency of discerning the invitation of God.

Late last year I preached a sermon (November 10, 2019 – "Refresh") in which I illustrated the process of change with four chairs and an exercise ball. Two chairs sat on either side of the exercise ball. The two chairs closest to the exercise ball had a wedge under one leg making them unstable, while the two outer chairs were normal. The stable chairs represent the comfort of what is known and, on the other side, the new normal. The two unstable chairs represent the uncertainty that we feel as we leave what is comfortable and known to embark on the process of change and that which we feel as we get closer to the new normal. The exercise ball is the hinge of change and it is the point where we feel most vulnerable and uncertain; the exercise ball of chaos. I suggested then, that as a church, we were about to step out onto the exercise ball. Little did I know that this would be so prophetic!

This journey of change we are on is the natural consequence of following Jesus who sends us to participate in God's redemptive activity in the world. As we have returned (again and again) to John 20:21, "As the Father sent me I am sending you" and its implications we have tried to put words on what we believe God is inviting us into: to see lives changed by Jesus; to invite everyone to follow Jesus everywhere we go and in everything we do; and to do so in an on-purpose, big-hearted, others-focused, whole-life learning, and trust-worthy way.

The trajectory of these changes is this: to place the responsibility for participation with God (what we sometimes call "ministry") in the hands of every follower of Jesus (not just for a special few) and to locate that participation, not in the church building, but in all the homes, neighbourhoods, businesses, and schools where we have been placed. This simple – but profound – invitation was the basis of our theme for 2020: You Are Here. The fact that we have not been meeting face-to-face for months does not change the importance of this theme; wherever you are, God is present and at work, inviting you to participate.

This report seeks to summarise and describe what we as a leadership believe God is inviting us into as a community of faith. I am excited – despite being sooo uncomfortable on the exercise ball – to continue to step into this new season. I hope you feel the same.

Marc Rader
Senior Pastor

GBC during the COVID-19 restrictions

Beginning March 22 we have been meeting online as a community of faith. While this has not been ideal, it has been necessary and there are a number of people who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make our online gatherings as engaging as they can be.

Please join me in thanking the following people (in alphabetical order):

- David Beresford. David was another member of our production team early on, helping with the lighting of a different set that had to be created quickly.
- Mark Coleman. Along with Sam Headen, Mark has taken a key role in our shift to online services. He's worked tirelessly to dot all the I's and cross all the T's each week.
- Alexi Collins. Alexi, one of our worship leaders, has invested a great deal of time, along with Javed Sterrit, to create the worship lyric videos.
- Dylan Eastment. Dylan began the year as a youth intern and, while still in that role, has moved from face-to-face ministry with youth to learning a new skill as a cameraman. Dylan has been flexible and willing to learn and serve wherever he can.
- Sam Headen. Sam is on staff in a communications role and has been instrumental in setting up the church online website. He has been the primary editor for our Sunday services and has played a key role in the online version of youth ministry.
- Martin Johnson. Martin, who is our section leader for our production team, has been a regular part (every week!) of our online production team. He has gone above and beyond what might be reasonably expected from a volunteer and his contribution has been invaluable.
- Paul Sheaffe. Paul helped our production team early on when it was all just a bit overwhelming.
- Javed Sterrit. A member of our worship team, Javed has been primarily responsible for the production of our music videos that we have used to facilitate worship. The fifteen songs that have been produced represent an enormous amount of work, by Javed and the rest of the team – those who are playing in the videos and the voices in the background. It has been so nice to have our own worship team lead us each week.
- Steph Vandenhengel. Our section leader for worship, Steph (married to Javed) has done a great deal of work involving our worship leaders and team in the process of facilitating worship in the online space.

There are also a couple of groups that I'd like to thank:

- The GBC youth team. The whole team has rallied together to provide an online experience of youth for the last term and a half. They've done a great job continuing to engage with our youth during this time with creativity and energy.
- The GBC kids ministry. KidsZone may have been one of the hardest hit ministries due to the importance of face-to-face contact. The memory verse challenge has been a great way to connect in a small way with the kids and continue to encourage their discipleship.
- The worship team. Already mentioned, the worship team have stepped up to do what they can in this strange time. Many of our worship leaders have been involved in our services through song selection and many have been involved in the worship videos we have produced.
- The staff team who have adapted to the new normal and, in ways large and small, really stepped up.

- To all who have read the Bible or lead us in prayer from home – thanks so much for bringing variety and helping lead us as a community of faith.
- All who have continued to support the ministry of the church financially, especially those of you who shifted from giving cash on a Sunday to giving electronically. And to everyone who contributed to our outstanding result for May Mission Month. (For more on finances see the Finance Report.)

GBC COVID-19 Survey & Focus Groups

At the beginning of June we surveyed our congregations about their experience of church online and to gather some feedback on where we, as a leadership, felt God was leading us. This included an online survey and several focus groups. For a full report you can read *GBC COVID-19 Survey Report* and the *GBC Focus Groups June 2020 Report*, both prepared for the CLT and included at the end of this report. These reports contributed to the formulation of our Next Steps.

In general, the online services have been very favourably received given the circumstances though there is a certain weariness of the online space and a desire for face-to-face connection. There was also a fair amount of interest in continuing the online services even when we return to face-to-face gatherings. It is our intention to continue the online space in the future (see The Continuation of GBC Online below).

Next Steps: A Big Leap Towards Life Groups (and Connect Groups)

Background

As I stated at the beginning of this paper COVID-19 has accelerated our movement towards a new normal where the primary responsibility for ministry is in the hands of every follower of Jesus (rather than a special few) and located in the homes, neighbourhoods, businesses, and schools where every follower of Jesus has been sent.

COVID-19 has also amplified the dissonance between this trajectory and some of our current practice. Our current practice places a great deal of emphasis on Sunday services. While gathered worship on Sundays is important and valuable it, unwittingly, places a great deal of responsibility on staff to focus on running ministry rather than on discipling, equipping, and resourcing others to participate.

While we have been developing systems that will facilitate growth and have quite a few people in Life Groups, neither our systems or our Life Groups have been as effective as they can be to focus on the invitation of God. Once our ability to meet together face-to-face was taken away these things became clearer.

We have been moving towards a greater emphasis on Life Groups for a while and were hoping to launch Connect Groups (social gatherings of four or five Life Groups with a purpose to help people connect with a slightly larger group of people and provide an easier way into Life Groups) early in the year until COVID restrictions put a hold on them.

The trajectory of change along with the fragility of a permanent return to face-to-face gatherings on Sunday (see *GBC Reopening Strategy* [p. 19] for a more detailed discussion of this) means that we need to find other ways to facilitate the connection, care, and discipleship that we have often sought to accomplish in our Sunday services. The obvious place to focus our attention is on Life Groups (and Connect Groups).

Life Groups (and Connect Groups)

Life Groups provide a ready-made space for us to focus our attention as a community of faith. This goes well beyond the fact that Life Groups are less impacted by COVID-19 restrictions (which is, of course, a huge benefit). Life Groups, small gatherings of people, facilitate a sense of connection with others, provide a framework for providing care, and a place where the practical implications of following Jesus can be worked out. This was true before COVID, but Life Groups as a primary focus of GBC makes much more sense in a COVID-19 world.

The shift is from a centrally focused church with Life Groups to a network of centrally resourced Life Groups and is more radical than it might sound. Instead of being a church with Life Groups, we would become a church of Life Groups. This shift has several profound benefits.

- Life Groups provide a space for deep relational connection

As already stated, Life Groups provide a space for deep relational connection. Connect Groups, groups of four to five Life Groups provide another space for connection (and a natural way for people to find their way into a Life Group). Connect Groups would meet once every six weeks primarily for social interaction (with a purpose).

Sunday services function as a good place to begin relationships but depth of relationship must move beyond a chat over a cup of coffee or tea. Life Groups provide a solution to the desire for greater connection as raised in the survey.

- Life Groups provide a framework for care.

One of the difficulties churches of our size (400+) face in providing care for people is creating effective mechanisms for communicating needs. This tends to be word-of-mouth and, even with complementary systems such as GBC Cares, requires people to self-identify.

In a smaller group it is easier and more natural for people to let others know when they are in need and for the group to marshal the resources of the church if the situation is beyond their capacity.

- Life Groups provide an important context for discipleship.

While our Sunday gatherings contribute to discipleship, small groups have some decided advantages. Preaching on Sundays must, because the sermons are delivered to four hundred people, be general in application. Life Groups provide a space where the specifics can be explored and where we can be supported, encouraged, and held accountable.

Beyond these benefits, which are obvious to all, Life Groups align to our purpose as a community of faith to participate in the renewing work of God everywhere we go so that lives are changed by Jesus.

- Life Groups focus our discipleship externally.

A shift to a church of Life Groups subtly focuses us outward. If our primary place of connection, care, and discipleship is our midweek Life Group we are reinforcing that participation with God is not primary in the building on a Sunday but in our homes and neighbourhoods during the week. This addresses the desire expressed in the survey to “get out there”.

- Life Groups facilitate evangelism.

Life Groups also make an easier entry point for those who we know who may be on the journey of faith. It is easier to invite people into our lives than to invite them to Sunday services. There is much that we do when we gather together that creates obstacles for those who are unchurched (by which we really mean un-Sunday-serviced). Things like corporate singing or prayer, sermons, communion, or some of the language we use (in corporate singing, prayers, and sermons). In Life Groups we are less “Sunday-centric” and, of course, we have a stronger relational connection.

A greater focus on Life Groups as the primary location of connection, care, and discipleship has some important implications for leadership. For example, there will be a shift to disciple, equip, and resource Life Group leaders who will no longer be leaders of a Life Group but leaders of GBC. The role of the pastoral staff, in particular, will need to shift to more purposeful, deliberate discipling, equipping, and resourcing of leaders who will do the same until we all “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13).

The Plan

It is imperative that we move quickly to make this shift to Life Groups as the primary location of connection, care, and discipleship. There are a few critical things that we will be doing to facilitate this.

- Deliberately free up Mark Coleman and Brett Robinson to focus more time on Life Groups. This will involve shifting some of their current responsibilities to others in order to ensure that they can spend time on the development of our Life Group ministry and, especially, to

focus on the discipling, equipping, and resourcing of Connect Group leaders (those who lead will disciple, equip, and resource Life Group leaders).

- Launching Connect Groups. This was on the cards before the restrictions were imposed, and now that restrictions have lifted to allow larger groups to meet, we hope to launch these groups.
- Recruitment and training of Life Group leaders. This is critical. If, as it is hoped, many more people seek to join a Life Group we will need to create many more Life Groups and this requires leaders. We are looking for people who are committed to the vision, purpose, and values of GBC who are willing to be discipled, equipped, and resourced to lead a Life Group.
- The creation of more Life Groups. This will need to include groups for different demographics (and with the possibility of intergenerational groups) and at different times during the week. The one thing that we want all groups to do is to meet weekly. This will be important for connection, care, and discipleship.
- The release of an easy way to get involved. Not only will people be able to join Life Groups through participating in a Connect Group, but we will soon be launching a Groups page on GBC Links that simplifies the process of getting involved in a Life Group.
- The development of a library of teaching resources. This will be a one-stop shop of material for Life Group leaders to use in the groups. It will eventually include a wide range of custom-made GBC teaching as well as curated material for us in Life Groups. The plan is to untether most of the Life Group teaching from our Sunday services, but create specific material for Life Groups.

This shift to Life Groups facilitates a closer alignment with our God-given invitation to participate with him. As a leadership we are committed to leaning into this space and hope that this captures your imagination as it has captured ours.

Other Business

Safe Church Policies

The restrictions associated with COVID-19 have put many ministries on pause, but we have been doing some important work to become safe church compliant. Matt Willis and Brett Robinson have done some great work in helping us prepare to comply to our new policies.

It is important to note that these changes are a result of the Royal Commission and are being rolled out across all churches in the Baptist Association. We have carefully thought through how we can merge these new requirements with our existing structures and processes.

Consequently, the process to volunteer at GBC has changed and will now involve a two-step process:

- Eligibility via a “Safe Church Screening Questionnaire”. This is designed to meet the Safe Church, insurance, and legal requirements, but also aligns with our values as a community of faith of being Trust-Worthy and Others-Focused.
- Suitability based on gifts, skills, talents, passion, etc. This will be facilitated by the creation (where necessary) of role descriptions and an interview process. This is also in line with our values of being On-Purpose and Whole-Life Learners.

All of the information and the compulsory Safe Church Screening Questionnaire is now live on GBC Links and every person who currently serves at GBC will be required to complete it in order that we can verify it to facilitate continued service. This needs to be completed by September 30 and any volunteer who has not completed the process by that date will not be eligible to serve at GBC until the process is completed.

All of our current volunteers will be sent an email with a link to the Safe Church Screening Questionnaire on GBC Links. If you do not receive an email you can access the questionnaire under the Serve Central page on GBC Links.

If you receive the email and no longer serve or no longer wish to serve at GBC there will be a link to notify the church leadership of this decision.

Once the Eligibility questionnaire has been processed, you will receive a link to an induction video as well as a Code of Conduct that will need to be signed and returned. The complete Safe Church Policies are available on the Resource page on GBC Links.

Membership

As of July 8 our membership sits at 312 active members (+3).

On the Horizon

There are a few strategic activities that we will be working on as a leadership in the second half of the year.

The Continuation of GBC Online

One of the reasons we were able to shift so quickly to the online platform is that we had actually begun laying the groundwork earlier in the year. We had set up the GBC Online platform and explored some of the obstacles to creating and maintaining an online community of faith prior to the need to jump to this platform in March.

From the very beginning of the restrictions we have sought to create online content that will be sustainable into the future. The feedback from the GBC COVID-19 Survey affirmed that continuing an online forum is desirable.

We hope to use the next six weeks to finalise our plans moving forward. While we are exclusively meeting online we will continue to host services at our regular service times. Once we are able to return to face-to-face meetings we will most likely only host one service on a Sunday. This service will contain pre-recorded material designed with the online community in mind. This would include pre-recorded worship videos (due to the technicalities of streaming music live) but the sermon from another service (though these details need to be worked out and may change).

There are quite a few details to work out and we will seek to communicate these as we figure them out and as they are necessary (e.g., once restrictions are lifted). There are, however, some principles that we are using to think this through including:

- The desire that the online community of faith feel like a genuine community of faith rather than a group of people watching what happens on-site. As we have learned, online engagement is different from face-to-face engagement but is equally legitimate.
- Those who join GBC via our online forum must be able to feel connected, cared for, and disciplined in the same way as those who attend physically.
- The creation of a sustainable ministry to an online community. This will become critical once we are holding face-to-face services again. The additional resources required to maintain an online service will need to be manageable.

Capital Works Strategic Discussion

This is a continuing discussion at a leadership level. We still have an old facility attached to a relatively new one and it continues to be in need of some work. We have had a couple of rounds of discussion about what this might look like and will be continuing to have these discussions as the year unfolds. The Grays Point property has been put on the market and an offer accepted. This will put us in a good financial position from which to consider our plans moving forward.

Cultural Diversity Committee Report

The final report from this committee will be presented at the next Church Leadership Team meeting and we will be working through the recommendations from this Committee.

The Appointment of Additional Elders

In line with our constitution we will be appointing additional elders to join the elders team at the end of this year. We will be seeking to appoint a minimum of two elders at our AGM in November. The work of recommending nominees to the church membership is done by a Pastoral Selection Committee made up of six people: two members of the pastoral team (pastors or elders), two members of the diaconate (Church Leadership Team), and two members in good-standing. The proposed members of this team will be accepted at the mid-year meeting by digital ballot.

The proposed team is:

Nathan Beresford (member)

Leanne Carter (elder)

Mark Coleman (pastor)

Neil Evans (deacon)

Erin Forster (deacon)

Sheena Hind (member)

GBC COVID-19 Survey

A nine question survey was sent to all those on the GBC Links database in June 2020. The survey was open for a little over a week. Over that period of time 174 people completed the survey. These are the results. The aim was to get a feel for how our congregations have fared during the COVID-91 restrictions and to gauge where the community of faith feels we need to move in the future.

Demographics

The demographic question was the last question and reveals simply that a larger percentage of our older congregants contributed to the survey rather than our younger families, young adults, or youth. This is broadly in line with our NCLS demographic (55.6).

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Under 20	4.09% 7
21-30	5.85% 10
31-40	11.11% 19
41-50	22.81% 39
51-60	19.88% 34
61-70	20.47% 35
Over 70	15.79% 27
TOTAL	171

1. How satisfied have you been with the following aspects of church life during the COVID-19 restrictions?

	VERY SATISFIED	(NO LABEL)	SATISFIED	(NO LABEL)	NEUTRAL	(NO LABEL)	DISSATISFIED	(NO LABEL)	VERY DISSATISFIED	N/A
The experience of meeting online	28.90% 50	12.14% 21	33.53% 58	5.78% 10	12.14% 21	1.73% 3	4.05% 7	1.16% 2	0.58% 1	0.00% 0
Our communication strategies	31.21% 54	17.34% 30	36.99% 64	4.05% 7	5.20% 9	1.73% 3	2.31% 4	0.58% 1	0.58% 1	0.00% 0
Congregational Care	11.18% 19	5.88% 10	20.59% 35	2.35% 4	38.24% 65	0.59% 1	3.53% 6	1.76% 3	3.53% 6	12.35% 21
Life Groups	17.44% 30	6.40% 11	15.70% 27	3.49% 6	18.60% 32	2.33% 4	3.49% 6	0.00% 0	1.16% 2	31.40% 54
Youth ministry activities	8.33% 14	2.98% 5	4.76% 8	0.60% 1	18.45% 31	0.60% 1	0.00% 0	1.19% 2	0.00% 0	63.10% 106
Kids ministry activities	12.43% 21	8.88% 15	8.88% 15	1.18% 2	17.16% 29	0.00% 0	1.18% 2	0.59% 1	0.59% 1	49.11% 83

Commentary

In general, there has been a very high level of satisfaction with church life during COVID-19 restriction. Given the demographics of this survey it is not surprising that the number of respondents for whom youth and kids ministry is not applicable. It is also noteworthy that 31% responded that Life Groups were also not applicable.

The comments (57) were reflective of the general satisfaction. A few themes emerged with the most significant being what I might call a general weariness of the on-line medium (even though the effort and quality has been very appreciated).

Two meta-themes (themes that are not necessarily prominent in this question but which show up elsewhere in the survey through the comments) were: an interest in continuing on-line services and concerns about congregational care.

2. How would you rate the following aspects of our online services?

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VERY GOOD	EXCELLENT	N/A	TOTAL
Overall quality of the services	0.00% 0	4.07% 7	20.93% 36	31.40% 54	43.02% 74	0.58% 1	172
Worship	0.00% 0	12.79% 22	28.49% 49	33.72% 58	23.84% 41	1.16% 2	172
Sermon	0.00% 0	8.24% 14	18.24% 31	30.59% 52	42.94% 73	0.00% 0	170
Kidzhome	1.20% 2	2.41% 4	10.24% 17	24.10% 40	42.17% 70	19.88% 33	166
Prayer at Home	2.38% 4	15.48% 26	33.93% 57	25.60% 43	14.88% 25	7.74% 13	168
Reading the Bible Together (pm only)	0.00% 0	3.14% 5	6.92% 11	13.84% 22	6.29% 10	69.81% 111	159
May Mission Month interviews	0.00% 0	2.34% 4	24.56% 42	39.18% 67	26.90% 46	7.02% 12	171
My Story interviews	0.59% 1	5.33% 9	30.77% 52	34.32% 58	21.30% 36	7.69% 13	169
The accessibility of the services	1.75% 3	8.77% 15	12.87% 22	25.15% 43	49.71% 85	1.75% 3	171

Commentary

As in Q.1. the quality of the on-line services was rated highly. We were particularly interested in the accessibility of the services and were pleased that the vast majority of people found them accessible (though we didn't really drill into why those who found it Poor responded that way).

The variety of responses to prayer at home may be explained by a handful of comments on prayers praying with their eyes open. There has been a very positive response to Kidzhome (though there seems to be an age limit on its appeal). The general weariness to the on-line medium is reflected in a desire for more variety in the services as a whole.

Here too, there were a couple of comments made towards continuing on-line services.

3. How would you rate your sense of belonging to GBC during this period?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Growing	10.47%	18
▼ About the same as it was pre-COVID	58.14%	100
▼ Decreasing	30.81%	53
TOTAL		172

Commentary

The responses are not surprising, but are a bit worrisome nonetheless. The demographics of those who felt their sense of belonging is decreasing is about the same across the board (e.g., 50% of those over 50) rather than located in one particular group.

The comments (62) were overwhelmingly about a lack of face-to-face contact (37 of 62). There were also a few comments about Life Groups (4 of 62) (as sources of connection or of wanting to be in one) and a lack of contact with the leadership of the church (3 of 62). Twelve of the comments were from those who said their sense of belonging has grown. A few of these comments reflected on the value of the on-line space (e.g., speaking to more people on-line than in person).

4. What have you missed most about church pre-COVID? Why?

Commentary

The comments (159) were broadly divided into two main categories: the energy of meeting together in worship (43) and the social aspect (88). The next highest category was not being able to use skill and gifts in service (5).

While there wasn't a great deal of explanation of the answers given it would be interesting to identify some interpretive rationale for the social aspect in particular. For instance, is it a reflection of a corporate extroversion? Is it a reflection of relational weakness outside of services?

5. Hypothetically, if restrictions were lifted so that we were able to meet face-to-face, how likely would you be to attend?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ Very likely	71.10%	123
▼ Likely	16.18%	28
▼ Neither likely nor unlikely	6.94%	12
▼ Unlikely	4.05%	7
▼ Very unlikely	1.73%	3
TOTAL		173

Commentary

This question was too broad to be truly valuable. In hindsight it needed to provide a timeframe for return (e.g., how likely would you be to attend immediately?). However, the overwhelming preference would be to return with very few indicating they would not return.

The comments (37) were varied with quite a few answers reflecting on the desire to be together face-to-face. There were also quite few comments on the difficulty of doing so (e.g., social distancing, the impact on the elderly) or the unwillingness to return given the wider context and, again, a comment about a desire to continue meet on-line in conjunction with face-to-face meetings.

6. Thinking of GBC before the restrictions: How effective have the following activities of GBC (rather than private activities) been in equipping you to participate in God's mission in the world?

	VERY EFFECTIVE	(NO LABEL)	CAPABLE AND EFFECTIVE	(NO LABEL)	NEUTRAL	(NO LABEL)	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	(NO LABEL)	NOT EFFECTIVE	N/A
▼ Sermons	29.52% 49	13.86% 23	33.13% 55	4.22% 7	6.02% 10	1.20% 2	8.43% 14	1.81% 3	1.20% 2	0.60% 1
▼ Participating in a Life Group	18.71% 32	9.94% 17	17.54% 30	2.92% 5	6.43% 11	0.58% 1	4.68% 8	1.75% 3	2.34% 4	35.09% 60
▼ Involvement in a ministry area as a participant	17.54% 30	6.43% 11	30.41% 52	3.51% 6	14.04% 24	1.17% 2	5.26% 9	2.34% 4	2.34% 4	16.96% 29
▼ Worship	25.00% 43	9.88% 17	33.72% 58	6.98% 12	8.72% 15	1.74% 3	8.14% 14	0.58% 1	2.91% 5	2.33% 4
▼ Receiving prayer	19.88% 34	8.77% 15	26.32% 45	8.77% 15	18.71% 32	0.00% 0	4.68% 8	1.75% 3	2.34% 4	8.77% 15
▼ Serving or leading in a ministry area	17.54% 30	10.53% 18	21.05% 36	2.92% 5	13.45% 23	0.00% 0	4.09% 7	0.58% 1	4.68% 8	25.15% 43

Commentary

In general, the things we have done have been rated as quite effective. The largest numbers of respondents who indicated that the option was Not Applicable were in being in a Life Group (60) and serving or leading in a ministry (43).

There were also 19 comments in which there were no clear themes apart from an expressed desire for different sermons (though with a variety of what that might mean; e.g., more evangelistic, more motivating, or less repetitive) and a desire to be in a Life Group.

7. Our purpose as a church is to participate with what God is doing in our world so that lives are changed by Jesus. What one or two things would be most helpful in equipping you to do this?

Commentary

There were a few themes in the comments (132). The most prominent of them was for more life application in teaching (42), followed by what I might call "connection" (20 – including Life Groups, mentors, and general connection), "getting out there" (16), and "discipleship" (11).

There were also a few calls for greater pastoral care (3) and on-line services (2) and while these were quite limited, they present one of the meta-themes of the survey as a whole.

8. In the future, as restrictions are lifted, our church will look different to what it did before COVID-19. However, our vision to see lives changed by Jesus remains the same. What is the one area you believe we need to address to do this more effectively than we have in the past?

Commentary

The comments (136) fell into two large themes. On the one hand there was the desire for greater fellowship (24) and on the other a desire to engage in our community (25). A greater focus on pastoral care (16) and a continuation of on-line services (11) made up the other two in the top four.

Conclusions

There are a few things that stand out in this survey.

First, it would appear from the small, yet consistent voices for a continuation of our on-line services makes our plans to continue them something that will be important to communicate.

Second, the biggest perceived loss during the COVID-19 restrictions is, not surprisingly, the social aspect. This is a broad category that includes the value of Life Groups and concerns around congregational care.

Third, the desire for more practical teaching/preaching moving forward was noticeable.

Fourth, moving forward there are two “competing” desires. On the one hand there is a desire for more connection, care, and fellowship; what might be called an internal concern. On the other is a desire to get out in the community; what might be called an external concern. While these are certainly not mutually exclusive, they do present two very different orientations for becoming more on-purpose in relation to our vision, mission, and purpose.

GBC Focus Groups – June, 2020

These six groups were created from respondents to the GBC COVID-19 Survey who indicated a willingness to participate along with additional people to increase the range of people who were involved. More specifically, these groups were asked to interact with four statements about GBC: the role of staff, the significance of Sunday services, our processes, and Life Groups. The statements and the rationale behind them was sent to the participants in a briefing paper. They were asked how accurately they felt the statements were and then to speak to their response. The conversations, over 75 minutes, were wide-ranging and covered a fair amount of ground. In general, we didn't get to the question of "why" these statement may or may not have been true.

The four statements were:

- A great deal of our ministry is generated by the staff.
- Our services carry a great deal of the load for connection, relationships, discipleship, evangelism, care, and communication.
- Our processes are system-strong, but people-weak.
- Our life groups are an under-utilised resource.

These statements reflected our analysis of what life during COVID-19 restrictions had revealed about us as a community of faith.

The groups were mixed with the exception of the first in which a deliberate attempt was made to include those who had been part of the church for less than two years. All up there were twenty-three people who participated. The largest group was five, the smallest three. Four couples participated with two doing so separately and two participating at the same time. Three people were retired or semi-retired. Five were part of our pm service and two were under twenty.

Themes of the discussion

Staff

There was a high degree of agreement with this statement. A number of themes appeared consistently in the groups, including:

- That the current environment has indeed made this more prominent, but that the expertise of the staff, along with the size of the church, make this a bit more inevitable.
- The accuracy of this statement was considered higher in services but it was perceived that this was not as true in ministries that take place outside of Sundays.
- Several conversations turned to volunteers. There was a sense that high staff involvement was a subtle criticism of a lack of involvement. The comments about volunteerism revolved around the lack of involvement. A number of issues were raised (e.g., the expertise of the staff, the 'obstacle' of systems, or the 'intimidation' of involvement) but the underlying issue was the perception that no help was needed. This was a very prominent theme with several people commenting on this lack of communication (though that wasn't their language) about the need or the way to get involved.
- A couple of comments were made about how nice it is that things run so smoothly and how nice it was, especially as young parents, to just attend. However, another commented that they are seeing the sense of complacency in their kids since they are not seeing everyone involved like in a smaller church.

One potential underlying reason for this was the outsourcing culture which is willing to pay for others to do the work (e.g., paying someone to coach a soccer team) rather than volunteer themselves.

Services

The discussion around the load-bearing nature of our services was as wide-ranging as the others, but once again several themes were prominent.

- The value of services was affirmed. This was most often seen in the first place where relationships began (though it was equally possible to remain “invisible” at services) and of being encouraged for the week to come.
- Services are, so to speak, self-contained units of ministry. In other words, there is very little information about what else the church is doing apart from what is done in the service. This focuses attention on the services rather than the wider ministry of the church.
- There were quite a few comments related to Life Groups as complementary to services for relationships and discipleship in particular.

Processes

There was more disagreement about the accuracy of this statement, especially the contrast between people and systems. However, the discussion revealed some common themes about how the processes are perceived.

- The value of the systems we have developed (e.g., Connect Point, Pathways, GBC Links) was affirmed. This was particularly true of those who have joined our community of faith more recently. Others who have been around longer also noted the amount of work that has gone into the systems.
- There does need to be a desire to get involved and without the passion the systems may be a barrier rather than a help.
- Another prominent theme was the opaque nature of the systems from the perspective of the pew. The systems are there but the “why” of the system and, more significantly, the “how” is left up to people. One person commented that the Connect Point was mentioned each week but no one took them to it. Someone else put it this way, “Systems are only as strong as people’s awareness of how to use them.” Even some of our more “obvious” systems do not have a clear communication of why or the supporting behaviour (e.g., kids check-in where no “why” is given and the codes are never checked). Someone else noted that there is no “face” for many of the systems. The systems may be strong but are not effective.
- There was also some perception that the systems were a bit rigid or that there was little space for new ideas.

In relation to people getting involved the tall-poppy syndrome was noted as a potential issue for us as people are less likely to self-nominate or self-identify as leaders.

Life Groups

This was the statement with the highest degree of agreement. It was generally agreed that Life Groups are an under utilised resource. It is worth noting that quite a few people acknowledged they are not in a Life Group at the moment. The themes of this discussion include:

- The potential for Life Groups to assist discipleship and connection in particular but also to motivate to ministry and outreach. The breadth of activities that Life Groups could be involved in was affirmed but no real discussion occurred around to manage the variety.
- The importance of supporting leaders was affirmed.

- Improving and strengthening the ease with which people can join Life Groups was another common theme.

Conclusions

Communication is a critical area for us to develop. Communication of other ministries, of opportunities to serve, of the “face” of a systems, of the “why” and “how” of our processes, etc.

There appears to be an appetite to shift to a greater focus on Life Groups.

GBC Reopening Strategy

Background

Since 22 March, in line with the government guidelines, we have been meeting online and have limited the number of people who have access to the building to essential personnel. With the recent lifting of government restrictions on meeting size and more on the horizon, it is necessary for us to formulate a reopening strategy. This strategy includes both practical steps to take towards reopening, but also the rationale for our approach.

It is also worth noting that a number of well-documented cases exist of where congregations became 'super-spreaders' of the virus. There are several common traits of 'super-spreader' events including being indoors, with large gatherings of people, in close proximity, and for an extended period of time. Public singing has also been identified as a potential 'super-spreader' activity as voice projection, especially without face covering, can disperse droplets further than the recommended 1.5 m.

At the time of writing (July 8) the border with Victoria has been closed and restrictions have been reinforced in Melbourne. This demonstrates how fragile the situation remains.

Current Restrictions

The latest advice from the NSW government (effective July 1) places several restrictions on any place of worship.

- The upper limit of those who may attend a worship service is limited only by the size of the building and the number of people per 4m². (There are different restrictions on funerals and weddings.)
- Physical distancing of 1.5m continues to be recommended where possible with the exception of those who are in the same household.
- Corporate singing is not allowed due to its 'super-spreader' capacity. Individuals (e.g., members of the worship team) can sing in public but must maintain 3m distance.
- Records of all participants (name and email address or phone number) must be recorded and kept for a minimum of four weeks.
- Multiple gatherings can be held in the building, but they must be completely separate (e.g., no mingling between two services).
- A COVID-Safe plan must be in place before reopening. This plan will include the above along with conditions of entry, and a plan for things like communion, the offering, and activities after the service among others.

What This Means for GBC

Practically speaking these restrictions place some significant obstacles in the path of reopening.

- The most significant of these is the number of people per 4m². The floor space of our auditorium allows us to host a maximum of just under 100 people (plus staff and other essential volunteers). This number is a bit misleading as it would mean people sitting in the corners of the room and all the way to the walls.
 - As a follow on, we would not be able to host everyone in a service for morning tea because our lounge and atrium would be limited to 60 people.

- The flow on of this is that we would need to multiple our services or find some way to roster people to facilitate everyone who is part of our community of faith. There are two aspects that make this particularly difficult.
 - First, our average attendance before we moved to online services was 420 adults per Sunday. To facilitate that number (to which we must add another 100 children) we would need five services on a Sunday.
 - Second, our Patterns of Attendance Survey that we completed in February of this year indicated that over 700 people attended a service over that month. This increases the number of services we'd have to run to eight or we would have to find some way to roster people. This might include those whose surname begins with A-E attend on the first Sunday of the month, etc., or some sort of ticketing for each service. The obvious implication is that any reopening would not look or feel like it was in March.
- A simple, scalable way to collect contact details creates an administrative challenge.
- The practicalities of seating that is 4m² create another set of obstacles. Families would not be allowed to pull their seats closer together (for the simple reason that it might leave others in a huge isolated circle).
 - I must also admit to a certain apprehension about the need to police the moving of chairs and of physical distancing before and after services. I am dubious that requests to leave chairs where they are or to maintain physical distance made by staff or volunteers will be met with cheerful acquiescence but with questions about the rationale or passive refusal to comply.
- Not being able to sing together would put additional constraints on our gatherings. This is perhaps the least significant obstacle for, while it would be lovely to be able to sing together, there are other ways that we can worship corporately.
- There is also the simple fact, demonstrated by the current situation in Victoria, that the situation with COVID-19 is still fluid. If there were an outbreak of cases in NSW we might be thrust right back to meeting exclusively online again.
- Closer to home, if there were a positive case at one of our gatherings we would need to shut down for two weeks, deep clean the building (potentially impacting the work of Hopefield), return to the online forum, and manage the reputational hit we might take in the community as the source of an outbreak.

Conclusions

The current fluidity of the situation in Australia cautions against a quick return to worship-as-usual. More significantly, while the obstacles to reopening are not impossible to overcome, the amount of resources that would need to be dedicated to enable us to meet together - even in a truncated form - make an early return to face-to-face meeting untenable. Until the 4m² restriction is lifted or reduced, thus increasing the number of people we can safely host, we will not be returning to face-to-face meetings. The earliest we would return (assuming that the 4m² restriction is lifted or reduced) would be August 31.

With a return to face-to-face services at least two months away, and with no guarantee a return will not be reversed should we experience a second wave of COVID-19 cases, we need to find other ways to facilitate the connection, discipleship, and care that we usually found in our services. This is the opportunity that we need to lean more fully into as we seek to be the church in a COVID-19 world.