



St Stephen's
WILLOUGHBY

St Stephen's Anglican Church Willoughby

Annual Report 2021

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RECTOR'S REPORT

As we cast our thoughts back over the past year of ministry, our heads spin at the sheer volume of change we have had to undergo. Most of these changes have been the result of COVID-19. I am indebted to the parish and our lay leadership for their willingness to change so we could continue to meet (online and in-person again). I am also indebted to the staff team who worked throughout the year to ensure gospel ministry continued despite the various hurdles. Most of all we give thanks to God for his sustaining grace over the past year.

What follows are some brief reflections on the past year and a look forward to what may come next.

2020 – A year unlike many others

In case you missed it, here are some of the things which happened last year:

1. New rector starts on 13 January 2020.
2. Jonnie Wintle resigned as Youth Minister in February 2020 to take a new position at Seaforth Anglican.
3. COVID-19 struck, so services and many ministries were shutdown from 22 March to 5 July 2020.
4. For the first two months of shutdown staff worked from their respective homes (like the rest of us).
5. Our first livestream service was produced on 15 March and has continued to run since.
6. Our Easter and Good Friday Services were all held online.
7. HPS ministry ran via Zoom throughout Term 2 of 2020. A special mention goes to the group of leaders who continued to serve in that area despite the significant challenges.
8. A parish wide consultation was undertaken through Connect groups throughout Term 2.

We ran a midweek service for those who didn't have internet infrastructure from the middle of June. Prior to this we ran a dial-in

9. service on Sundays and printed a paper 'service' for those who found the dial-in service difficult.
10. Playtime restarted in Term 3 with limited numbers and has 'sold out' every week since.
11. HPS restarted in July and finished the year with 30 students at the Christmas Party.
12. Church Services restarted on 12 July with Vision month in August.
13. We moved our 9:30am service back into the stone building to allow for COVID requirements.
14. We changed the times of both morning services to ensure we could better prepare for livestream requirements.
15. Ben Connelly and Liz Wood both finished up at St Stephen's and we worked through recruitment for Pippie van den Heuvel and Amanda Curby.
16. We ran an outdoor Carols Service attended by 300 people from our local community.
17. Services were again shut down on 20 December and Christmas was eventually run as an in-person event but many were unable to attend due to COVID restrictions. All of our Christmas Services were livestreamed.
18. We ran a new outreach focus throughout summer culminating in the Big Questions and Q&A Events throughout January.

I am sure I have missed other momentous events – it was that kind of year. Even now as I look at this list and reflect back on my calendar, I feel overwhelmed. I suspect we will all have to take time over the coming years to reflect on what it means to have lived through a pandemic.

We have been confronted by the uncertainty of life. Our wealth and prosperity cannot insulate us from our mortality and human limitations. Yet we have been reminded of God's ever-present help. He has remained with us. His promises remain true and his kingdom is coming. He managed to use us despite all the challenges. We have seen new members join and we have seen young people come to faith. The gospel message is unhindered by a pandemic.

2021 and beyond

We must hold lightly to future plans. Yet we must plan for the future.

Despite our resilience through the pandemic the reality is our church remains (at very best) stagnant or (in the more realistic scenario) in decline.

- Our median congregation age is 58yrs while our surrounding area is getting younger by the year (median age of 37). We only have 17 members aged 17-35 while the ABS reports 8,000 people or (38% of the population) in the same demographic for Chatswood.
- Our Sunday attendance has flat-lined and the number of conversion stories is minimal.
- We have not seen an adult convert in the past year and less than half-a-dozen in the five years prior. If our church continues on this path it will be unviable within 15 years.
- The number of people invited to our most recent Alpha course was small (<5).
- Engagement in ministry by lay people is low. Most of our key lay members (with some notable exceptions) come from our older demographics.
- Our ministry to young people is missing key components – including a midweek kids ministry to the 1000s of kids aged 6-10 years old and sufficient SRE teachers.
- Our financial giving base remains reliant on the generosity of a small few with many peripheral members not fully engaged in the financial side of our church life.
- We see few walk-in visitors compared to surrounding Anglican churches.
- Our philosophy for Connect Groups and overall discipleship ministries has lost its clarity and needs to be refined.

This is the sobering reality of our church. We cannot hope to move forward unless we accept these issues remain and need to be addressed in a meaningful way over the coming months and years.

Plans for this year

In 2020, following consultation and reflection on scripture we held before us the vision:

We long to be a church made
beautiful, diverse and large
by the gracious work of Christ.

To bring this about we sharpened our focus by developing the following mission statement:

“As a church captivated by Christ we commit to:

- I. Praying big prayers shaped by the Gospel;
- II. Bringing friends to faith;
- III. Growing the young in their devotion to God’s word; and
- IV. Celebrating together for the glory of Christ.”

How does this relate to our current circumstances?

To address the issues I have noted and be guided by our vision and mission statements, I think a number of changes and practices need to take place:

1. A desire to see ‘conversions’ not just ‘connections’ with our surrounding community. We are about bringing friends to faith not just our church community.
2. A receptivity in our parish to significant change which aims to minister to and reach the new communities of Willoughby, Artarmon and Chatswood. Small changes will not be sufficient. Each of us will need to accept a level of discomfort.
3. A greater reliance on God through prayer.

4. A clearly articulated strategic plan for our parish which addresses ministry, property and staffing.
5. Greater engagement from our families in the ministry of the church.

2020 seemed like a big year but the future requires we continue to persevere in our task and not relent.

Can we do this? I pray that by God's grace we will do so. He who set his face to Jerusalem has promised us he will not leave us alone. He has the resources to strengthen us for this task. He is committed to his promise to build his church.

Prashanth Colombage
Rector

FINANCE REPORT

The past year (2020)

- (a) The General Fund had a surplus of \$67,000, with the carried forward surplus of \$74,000. Government cash flow and JobKeeper amounted to \$86,000, so without this support the loss would have been \$19,000.
- (b) Other funds are as follows:
 - a. Asset replacement – increased by \$4,000 to \$98,000.
 - b. Commitments – increased by \$21,000 due to two special donations.
 - c. Sinking – has returned to surplus with the surplus carried forward being \$11,000.
 - d. Missions giving was \$39,000 compared to \$52,000 in the prior year, including the parish donation of \$15,000.

Looking Forward

a) What?

Increased costs (both staff and COVID related costs) means that we have set a budget giving increase of 5.0% - the first year of the “555” plan. Even with this increase and a gift day target (November 2021) of \$75,000 we are budgeting the General Fund to have a deficit of \$40,000. The “555” plan asks members to increase their giving by 5% per year for each of the next three years so that we can reduce our reliance on Gift Day to balance our budget. There are no major capital works or repair programs planned so the Commitment and Sinking Funds should increase.

b) How?

The “555” plan was launched on Vision Sunday (7 February 2021) and already a number of church members have increased their giving. We should also set aside funds for Mission Gift Day on 29 August 2021 and the General Fund Gift Day on 7 November 2021.

Niall Henderson
Treasurer

MANAGEMENT REPORT

The past year (2020)

Church Building: Layout for COVID-19 related requirements installed soon after the pandemic was announced. Cabling installed for internet service in the church building. Interior consultant retained to advise on new fans, lighting and possibly heating.

Ministry Centre: NBN service connected via the supply to the Rectory.

Laurel Street: Approval received from Standing Committee for ordinances which will allow the Parish to sell Laurel Street property and purchase two townhouses/apartments in lieu.

General: COVID safe plans were prepared for each activity within the church property. COVID SAFE approval received from NSW Government. Stone pillar on Mowbray Road re-constructed.

Looking forward to 2021

Church Building: Possible implementation of advice on new fans and new lighting within the church building.

Laurel Street: Plan to auction this property following completion of the current lease in September 2021.

Tennis Courts: Following the vacating of the courts by the St Stephens Tennis Club early in 2021, the area will be progressively cleaned up to allow other uses in the short term (eg for children/youth activities).

Rob Cooper
Operations Manager

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY - KIDZONE

The past year

St Stephen's has many programs for kids and youth. These include Switch, Kidzone, Crèche, Senior high bible study, Playtime, Half Past Six (HPS) and SRE.

The last year has seen a lot of changes for these programs . We said goodbye to both Jonnie Wintle in March and Ben Connolly in December. Due to COVID many of the programs met online over zoom or were paused. Despite this crazy time, we saw many encouraging things such as a swift return to meeting face to face, a number of youth becoming Christians at Youth Alpha and Playtime booking out every week.

I started in January, was very warmly welcomed and have started the year off well. We had one playtime family start coming to church on Sunday. As they left one child said, "Mum, can we come back next week?" We give thanks for all God is doing!

Looking forward

Our key objectives for 2021 are to firstly to strengthen leadership teams so they are able to disciple more kids more effectively. We hope to recruit and train three more Kidzone leaders. This will allow us to split Kidzone into lower and upper primary by the middle of the year. We are hoping to train our creche leaders so they can start a new bible based creche program, starting in Term 2. We have recruited five junior leaders for HPS and three new leaders for SRE that we also want to train and equip for these ministries.

Secondly, we also hope to sharpen the vision and mission for each kids and youth program. We hope to have clear sense of the direction and function of each group and how they fit into the wider church's vision.

How

The staff and ministry leaders have been working hard at recruiting. Our aim is to invite a further 10 people to consider leading. We plan to run training sessions before each term for leaders. Our SRE volunteers meet weekly and to discuss lessons and sharpen our skills. We plan on running termly training sessions for our Sunday and Friday ministries.

We aim to sharpen our vision and mission through conducting a swot analysis of each group and meeting with the leadership team of each ministry to formulate SMART goals by the middle of the year. These will then determine the course of action for the rest of the year.

Pippie van den Heuval
Children's and Youth Minister

MISSION REPORT

The past year

In 2020, with the advent of a new rector, my role changed significantly to focus on two areas main areas of church life: Mission (evangelism) and Magnification (9:45am and 5:30pm worship services).

Our primary goals for Mission in 2020 were to 'build mission heat' and develop a pathway for people coming to faith. 'Building mission heat' is about encouraging all our members in their conviction and commitment to personally 'bringing friends to faith'. A mission pathway is a series of opportunities, events and courses that naturally flow into each other, so people can move forward in building relationships and growing in their understanding of the gospel. To do this I reviewed our previous pathway, and determined to try some new evangelistic courses across the year (Simply Christianity and Christianity Explored). These we did online, with 10 unchurched people in the first and a handful in the second. The courses we received well and are now a part of our pathway locked in for 2021. We also strung together a series of events over summer to create opportunities to multiply connections with people and enable them to go deeper if they wished – The online survey, Carols on the grass, our Summer Series Talks which lead into this terms Alpha course. To build mission heat we provided a Mission Workshop in July with 30 people in attendance. I have been greatly assisted by Sandra Harry, Matt Chase, Melissa Gok and Liz Cooper who have each taken some leadership responsibility in our courses.

Looking forward

In 2021, we want to see our missional heat and culture develop, and a larger percentage of people engaging in personal evangelism. We have some focused goals in 2021, including having 10 unchurched people at Christianity explored after Easter and 50 of us join John Lavender in April for training in mission. We want to see more lay leadership in courses and training.

Two significant changes took place in Magnification in early 2020: in January Sandra Harry handed over responsibility for music and, from March, church went online. Overseeing music during COVID was a challenge – the constant changes with restrictions meant thinking through the purpose of music in our time together, and what we could achieve with the limited resources we had. We've been blessed with the addition and tireless efforts of Penny and more recently David who have both taken on additional leadership within this team. A new team was also developed within our church to produce the Livestream – the Production Team. This team worked overtime in the middle of 2020 to bring church home to you! At the moment, it consists of about 10 people and we still need more. Three people are required each Sunday to make it happen, so it's a big effort, and we are indebted to Adam, Garth, Ray, Nicky, Ken, Graeme, Sue and Wai.

How?

In 2021 we want to increase the quality and consistency of our production and livestream. This requires more lay people getting involved and developing their skills. We also want to see steady increase in the quality, consistency and dynamism of Sunday Worship, recruiting more musicians and training together more regularly. We will be running monthly training for our Production and Music teams. Working on recruitment and increasing our lay leadership in these areas. We want to truly and deeply celebrate Christ together every Sunday.

Matt Straw
Senior Associate Minister

SENIORS MINISTRY

Seniors (Encounter and aged care monthly services)

The past year

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, our ministry amongst seniors at St Stephen's in 2020 included only two of our usual once-a-month Encounter meetings; February and December. These meetings are primarily a ministry to seniors (60 plus), providing friendship and fellowship, and intellectual stimulation. It is a means of outreach, an easy day to invite visitors and friends. Morning tea and lunch are normally offered.

Our usual monthly church services held at the nursing homes situated around us, Elizabeth Lodge, Windsor Gardens and BUPA, were also curtailed because of COVID-19 restrictions. These services are normally run by a dedicated group of volunteers and clergy from St Stephen's. All nursing homes were in lock-down from March 2020 and still have some restrictions to the present time, including limited visitors, and visiting by appointment. We were pleased that Elizabeth Lodge made available to its residents our on-line Sunday service.

Isolation has made living more difficult for many members of our congregation; but we also seem more aware of those around us and many are making a great effort to ensure that those who are lonely and afflicted are provided for.

Looking forward

We pray for God's grace and guidance as this ministry continues in the coming year.

Dorothy Laidler