

Greatly Encouraged: repentance and confidence

'I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds'

So writes the Apostle Paul on behalf of himself and Timothy in the second letter to the church of Corinth (2 Cor 7:4).

The Church in Corinth was at points a basket case and the first letter that was sent from Paul would have been a difficult read for those struggling to work out how to live their lives for Jesus – for not only did they have to come to terms with what it looked like to live out their new faith, they had to let go of many aspects of culture which threatened to overtake their newly discovered relationship with Jesus.

There were divisions, there were leadership challenges, there were sexual practices that embraced many different kinds of immorality, there were lawsuits among believers, idol worship, and debates about tradition and law and giftings and theology. In the face of those troubles Paul had written giving a clear explanation of the gospel (1 Cor 15:3-8) and calling this church to repent and reform. I can not imagine that Paul's rebuke and instruction would have been easy to hear.

And yet Paul, writes 'I take pride in you. I am greatly encouraged.'

This follow-up letter recognises that many changes happened for this church in Corinth. They had displayed a great spiritual maturity. For in hearing the hard word, they had not dismissed it as an offence, but had taken the sting of the rebuke, and reformed, and in doing so brought their lives and their church community more in line with what the gospel asked of them.

No wonder Paul was encouraged and that his joy knows no bounds. Here was a church who not only listened, but acted. They have taken what was hard to hear, or what may have in the first instance sounded abrasive, and they had made changes which were noticeable in those who knew them. Titus, had given his report acknowledging the sorrow that Paul's previous letter had caused, but also the repentance that it had brought in the church of Corinth. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:8:

'If I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led to your to repentance.'

It is a mark of maturity that a person listens not only to that which is pleasant to their ears, but that they might still hear when being admonished or rebuked. This is a quality that is becoming rarer and rarer in the time in which we live – for to cause offence seems to be becoming the greatest sin.

Rector's Report

Politically, we see this, as legislation is being introduced into the NSW Parliament¹ that aims to prevent a person assisting or indeed calling upon another to refrain from particular sexual practices. This new bill will make it an offence to counsel one of our youth to not have sex before marriage, or to challenge a married member to not commit adultery with another person's spouse, or to discourage a homosexual person to be celibate, or to pray with another and ask God for help to stay faithful to what God asks of them.

Our world does not like the gospel message, nor does it like the implications that come from living out that gospel – and to prevent being challenged, legislation is being introduced to ensure that topics which are hard to hear are not even raised.

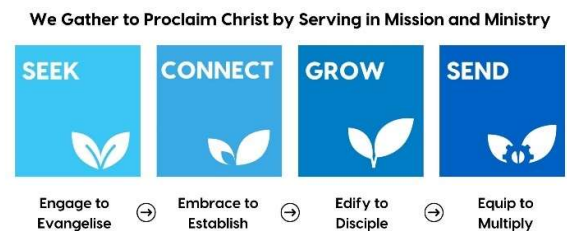
Or closer to home, within our own church family, at times we will say things to one another driven by a call to correct, rebuke or encourage one another to listen to what the Word of God is saying (2 Tim 4:2) – yet we can get hot under the collar for to even hear the challenge can be an affront. The result being that we tiptoe around sensitive topics so that we only speak what our itching ears want to hear – and push back when another challenges us to be godly.

A mark of maturity is that we can listen to some of the hard gospel based things that might be said and recognise that for a friend to say those things, they may indeed be motivated by a love and concern which is grounded in doing what we can to present one another mature in Christ (as we have heard in our recent Bible talk series in Colossians – Col 1:28). *How* we relate to one another must always be in a lovely manner, even if *what* we say may seem to be a hard word.

Paul is encouraged, by the example of this repentant church in Corinth – and instead of seeing relationships damaged, he reports through Titus that their relationships had grown in depth, affection, obedience and in fact confidence.

This was a church that was not just going through the motions – they were doing life together in the good and the bad shaped by what it meant to be the church of Christ.

My friends, I have now been with you for five years. And I can say that I am greatly encouraged. For in this church family there are repentant members who are willing to shape their lives by what Christ asks of them. As we have gathered to proclaim Christ in all our mission activities and ministry endeavours we have seen members step-up to serve Jesus because they have been shaped by Jesus – not only because of what they *know about* him, or even by what they *believe in* him, but because they have *obeyed what* Jesus asks of them, and in doing so, have come to both *love like and be loved by* Christ.



I am greatly encouraged by those who are living repentant lives of confident faith – and doing that with others around them in mind. My joy knows no bounds.

¹ The NSW Government introduced the *Conversion Practices Ban Bill 2024* on the 13th March 2024 to be debated on Wednesday 20th March 2024.

Rector's Report

And my prayer, like we see in 2 Corinthians, is that the example set by the members of LMAP will be known well beyond the parish boundaries such that when people talk about the LMAP family, we will be known as a people who are real and honest with one another and driven by what it means to proclaim Jesus in word and deed to the glory of God.

Mission & Ministry Encouragement

This **Awesome Gathering of Members** (AGM) is the only occasion in our church calendar when members from all sides of our church come together in the one physical space and when we don't have visitors or strangers overhearing.

So, allow me the opportunity to greatly encourage you – and report on some of the mission activities that God has led us through over this past year. And alongside the encouragements perhaps suggest some aspects that we should be thinking about to help us in the way that we serve Jesus together.

Our **Sunday Gatherings** are our largest front door. Numbers are not as important as the people that those numbers represent – but we can see that 2023 was a good year. Every one of our Sunday gatherings on average grew in size – in kids, youth and adults.

I am so thankful for the many new people who have joined this church – many coming from other churches as they move into the area or been recommended to LMAP for some reason, some joining us because they have responded to the gospel and have decided to join a family who wants to live for Jesus. Many because they have been personally invited by the existing members of this church. And many have been welcomed well, when existing members have been able to see our welcome from a new person's perspective.



Best of all, last year 23 people were baptised – that is, they stood up and declared Jesus as their Lord. I love that folk are declaring their faith in him before a church family who can support them.

And whilst it is thrilling to have new members, I am also so thankful for our existing church members who have served in ministries (some for many years) - always adapting to the pressures that come with the growth that we have seen.

An aspect that we could give more attention to is the way that we look beyond our own concerns towards the concerns of those of our community. I think that we have long and established friendships and that there are patterns to the ways that that we do what we do – so often those friendships are on display as we pastorally care for one another and do life together.

Yet sometimes those friendships do not have space for anyone new. And sometimes the patterns to what we do, which makes so much sense to our membership, seem to be strange, confusing and dare I say unwelcoming to the newcomer.

Rector's Report

My encouragement is to work out ways to invite people into our busy lives with the aim that we might make the most of every opportunity that God puts before us.

And friends this includes embracing and those who live with disabilities including mental, physical, neurodiverse factors which need some attention in order for a person to feel less exposed and more like they belong.

Please take note of the *Christians – Connecting, Communicating and Caring* workshop on Saturday 6th April that will be held at LMAP Blaxland soon. There are flyers at each location. You can register on our website and there is a gift bag for those who take part!



As a church family – we need to keep our focus on Jesus, and our eye on the stranger (that is any person whose name we don't know), while we embrace one another in church life.

So much of the growth we have seen has come through the **Mission Activities and Ministry Endeavours** that have been aimed at the *Kids, Youth and Young Adults* space – not only does this embrace our young people, but their families as well.

- **Junior Jivers** has continued to pick up speed.
- **Holiday Club** went into orbit (helped by its space theme).
- **Kids Church** on Sundays expanded including Mt Riv growing so quickly that we now have a split program each Sunday – and a need to do something quickly to create more space (you will hear more about the Mt Riv redevelopment in the AGM).



- **Friday Kids** commenced and now appears to be a fixture on Friday afternoons.
- **Playgroup** now averages over 100 people each week for the first time in its history.
- **Friday Youth, Youth Camp** and **Discipleship Cafe** all grew - and this was with Year 12's taken out.
- **Young Adults Hub** was started and seems to be

well supported by a wonderful group of young adults from year 12 to the early years of Uni (many of their parents are still coming to terms with Bible studies that meet mid-week!)

- We trialed a monthly **All-Age, All-in Gathering** at Blaxland which helped us learn a lot about the willingness of our Blaxland congregation to try new things to reach those moving into the area – stay tuned for a 'Sparks' group to begin in the coming term.



Thinking what has been done to reach and serve *Adults and Seniors* we have also seen some encouraging growth in a few areas:

- Across the year we saw new **Growth Groups** started - we now have around 30 Adult Growth Group with around 280 of our members meeting to explore the Bible regularly.



- Last year there were several events run by the amazing **Women's Events team** – including the sold-out King's Coronation Event, the Women's Retreat and the 'HeART of Christmas' Event.

- And one of the exciting things that we have noticed about our **Christmas and Easter events** is that we

are now seeing folk coming along who have been invited to some of the outreach things we do across the year. It is wonderful to see that the hard work that is put into outreach ministries like Let's Go (JesusCLUB), Playgroup, Junior Jivers or the Spring Fair is leading to folk checking us out on these big weekends where we talk so openly about Jesus' birth, death and resurrection.

- I am looking forward to seeing more and more Easter signs appearing on fences all around our neighbourhoods in the next week.



My prayer is that we will do a better job of helping those we meet to meet Jesus through things like JesusWORKS – we have to be talking Jesus in order for people to know him (Rom 10).

A concern, which is also an opportunity, is that we need **more leaders**. Each year as mission and ministry opportunities grow we need to bring on new leaders – and I am so thankful for those leaders who have served for many years and for those who have stepped up this year.

This is especially pressing in our Childrens ministry areas and in our Sunday gatherings. Please do not assume that because we are a big church that we have plenty of people resources - or that others would be better suited. If we want the next generation to be following Jesus, then this generation needs to be teaching them.

So many of our young adults are serving in children's ministry in the morning and then coming to be fed at Evening Church. Let me encourage our church family at large to follow their example and perhaps serve in a ministry that happens before or after your core gathering on a Sunday. And I say this as much to the Dads as I say it to the Mums!

Finances to support Mission and Ministry

Another area where we can be very encouraged under God, is our church finances. 2023 was not an easy year financially. Cost of living pressures made life difficult for many and we spent most of the year trying the find ways to reduce spending and increase giving to cover our pastoral care or property needs.

I am so thankful for the way that our church family responded with *pledges* for this year which has enabled our Parish Council to make decisions which will mean mission activities and ministry endeavours can be supported and that we can have the staff to work with our members to help us gather each day around the Word of God. Thanks for making and keeping the pledges that you have offered.

I am also thankful for those who have given to the *Growth Fund* which has helped us with staffing, trainees and with the planning of Phase I of the Mt Riv Redevelopment. Without those gospel-minded generous individuals we would not be in the position that we are now to progress the development before us.



Seeking
Connecting
Growing
Sending

Leaders
Finance

Mission Partners and Missionaries

Our Mission and Ministry Partners



Let me speak about the eight mission partners whom we work alongside – each giving focus to an area of mission which should be our wider church concern.

Our Parish Council have picked a suite of organisations to reflect those concerns:

Anglicare – to see those most vulnerable in our society cared for in Christ.

Thanks to those who have week in and out brought food times to donate to the *Mobile Food Pantries* to help those in need – I can not tell you how many food pickups have happened this year thanks to what folk at Blaxland, Mt Riv and Glenbrook have given.

And thanks to those many *Anglicare Disaster Recovery* volunteers from our church who train and ready themselves to jump to community aid in times of emergency. We got through this year, for first time since I have been here, without having to respond to an emergency.

Bush Church Aid (BCA) – to bring Jesus to those living in the country.

Rector's Report

Compassion – offering Christ-Focused, Church-based, Child-Centred provision for children and families in underprivileged communities.

Fusion Blue Mountains – who care and connect school students (who often don't have terrific family lives) to local churches. Breakfast clubs are a sight to behold and I know there are many in our church family who have helped Josh and Anneliese Schroder in this space.

Moore Theological College – who are training up the next generation of men and women for vocational mission and ministry.

Mountains Anglican Refugees Support (MARS) – helping to welcome refugees to our neighbourhood and perhaps show them some Christian love.

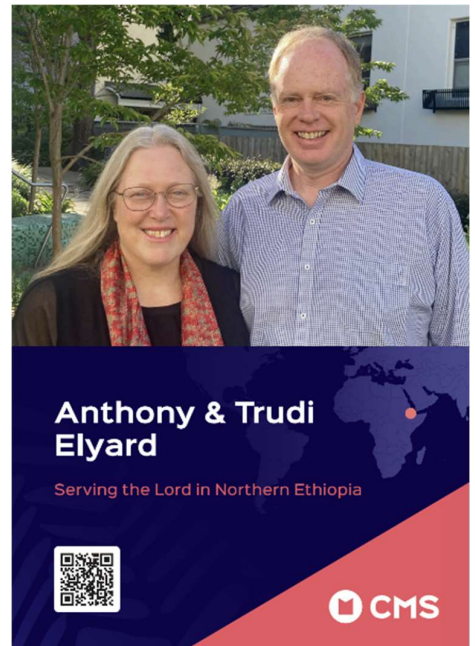
SRE Generate – which assists us in ensuring that Jesus is proclaimed in our local state schools. And thanks to those from our church who serve as scripture teachers – and those students from our church who run lunch time Bible groups.

Church Missionary Society (CMS) – to see a world that knows Jesus.

At the end of 2023 we closed off our long partnership with **Kate and Bijaya** who had been serving in Nepal and are now working out how to plant a church for Nepalese somewhere in Sydney.

And we began a new partnership with **Anthony and Trudi Elyard** who will be serving in Northern Ethiopia in rural development and theological education. We will meet them in May when they join us for deputation.

This past year we have prayed missionally – at our *Mission Partner Prayer Nights* and our *Seek & Send Nights*. What a joy it has been to join with brothers and sisters to pray for brothers and sisters serving Jesus around our neighbourhood, our nation, and around the World.



My encouragement - our missional prayer times need more attention. Every month there is something that calls our church family together to prayer for our mission partners and missionaries – and compared to the size of our church, these prayer opportunities are poorly supported. We need to be praying outside of ourselves.

Ministry Team and Parish Council

Finally allow me to say something about our Ministry Team and then outgoing Parish Council. And on our collective behalf, thank them.

In 2023 we were served well by a diverse and gifted **Ministry Team** – including our Senior Staff, Trainees and Administry.

To them (and their patient and understanding families) may I say on behalf of our whole church – thanks for serving Jesus and helping this church to gather to proclaim Christ.

Our Ministry Team



Ken Noakes
Church + Connect



David Swan
Families + Seek



Gary Haddon
Grown + Send



Nick Lindeback
Youth + Young Adults



Rachael Connor
Children + SRE



Trevor Oakley
Seniors + Pastoral Care

To get in touch say 'Hello' or email - firstname.lastname@LMAP.org.au

Trevor, Nick, Rachael, Gary, Dave – I feel very blessed getting to work by your side. This past year, pastorally, has had its challenges – or 'Christ-us-es' as we have come to say. Under God you have risen to the many challenges.

Dave and Liz, we wish you the very best for a relaxing and well-deserved Long Service Leave. Travel well and enjoy the UK and we will look forward to seeing you back again in early May. Please come back.

Gary, you sort of leave us after Easter, as you get elevated into Venerable status. We are thankful to God for you and send you with the prayer that you will keep the main thing the main thing and point many more to Jesus. We know you will shine in your new role.

We will look forward to your *Thankyou Lunch on Sunday the 7th April.*

For those who are wondering how the search for a new minister is going – I can tell you this:

- 34 people were contacted to encourage interest - including 18 women.
- Of those who applied (all men), 9 were given a first interview.
- 5 Panel interviews have been held which were completed on Thursday this past week.
- 2 are possible, and if the Parish Council gives me permission – I will be offering the role to someone tomorrow.
- So, stay tuned for an announcement.
- My hope is that they will start on the 1st July.



After Easter, the Rev Gary Haddon will move from the senior assistant minister's position at Lower Mountains Anglican Parish to become assistant to Bishop Gary Koo (Western Region) and Bishop Peter Lin (South West Region). Prior to his work at Lower Mountains, Mr Haddon and his family lived in Chile for several years, where he served at the Centro de Estudios Pastorales (Centre for Pastoral Studies) in Santiago. He says that he'd been in discussions with Bishop Koo about his passion for the work he had done in Chile, "which was mentoring – not only our new graduates, but also those who had been in ministry for a number of years. "And so, I was planning to give the Diocese one day a month to catch up with some people that Gary might like me to catch up with," he adds. "But Gary eventually got back to me and said, 'How about you do that kind of thing full time, not just as a service on top of your role at Lower Mountains?' And I said, 'Sure!'" As an assistant to two regional bishops with the combined oversight of about 100 parishes in Sydney, Mr Haddon will be busy with a range of issues – but he hopes he can spend a good portion of his time caring for assistant ministers, freeing them to better care for their rector's. "My heart's really in pastorally caring for those in ministry, just to be a part of the formation of leaders for leadership and to love and serve God and his people well," he says. "I've been an assistant and a rector myself. I've been in a wonderful parish in the western suburbs and an assistant twice and been involved in the formation of Christian leaders for Latin America. God uses all those different things to help form you for the next stage of your ministry. Nothing's ever wasted!" "I'm most excited about getting alongside the people that God has raised to serve him and love his people." Mr Haddon replaces the retired Archdeacon Neil Atwood in the Western Region, and the Rev James Davidson in the South West – who will continue as honorary assistant minister at Fairfield with Bossley Park.

Rector's Report

To our *Trainees* – Josh Schroder, Jared Bartlett, Connor Green, as well as Jared Lidgerwood and Jake Evans who have finished their training at LMAP, I for one have enjoyed watching you serve Jesus and try new things in mission and ministry. I am excited to see what God might do through you in the coming years.

And to our *Administry Team* – this past year we have been served by Helen Brown, Jerome Gardiner and Bec Carter who have each brought their own gifts and personality to the way admin has happened in our church – which in this year has seen lots of change in processes and branding. Thank you.

Our Ministry Team



Helen Brown
Special Projects



Bec Carter
Administry



Jerome Gardiner
Administry

Bec Carter, particularly as you finish up with us soon, we wish you all the best as you continue with your studies and hopefully as you continue to serve with Friday Youth.

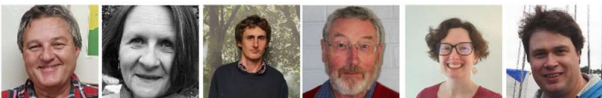
For those wondering what will happen admin wise, I am thankful that Luke Brush will be returning until the end of May to help us out while we look for a new permanent administry person in the office.

Liz Thornton, Mat Oakey, Peter Clarke, Su Lowe, Fil Mackay, Naree Peeters, Ken Phillips, Nikki Hawkins, Ally McDonald, Jean-Luc Stevens and Howard Whitehouse, you all play key roles in an honorary capacity to serve in our church on a weekly basis. Thank you.

Parish Council and Synod Rep's



Ken Noakes Senior Minister
Howard Whitehouse Treasurer / GB
John McConville Mt. Riv
Daniel Gordon Glenbrook
Kevin Dodds Blaxland
Wendy Allison Mt. Riv



Stephen Tolhurst Mt. Riv
Glen Taylor Blaxland
Luke Tolhurst Glenbrook
John Hargreaves Blaxland
Olivia Bush Synod Rep
Jeremy Freeman Synod Rep

And to our outgoing **Parish Council** – Howard, Glen, John McConville and Hargreaves, Luke, Wendy, Dan, Stephen, Kevin and Helen - you have looked after all things Policy, Property, Finance and Staffing. Thanks for the wisdom and energy you have given to this church. And thanks for the way you have used your varied gifts to get things done around here.

If I might single out John Hargreaves who is stepping back after ten years, Wendy Allison stepping back after 5 years and Dan Gordon who is stepping back after 2 years here (and many many more at a previous church) – thanks for serving.

Friends, I thank God for the privilege it has been to serve Jesus by your side.

Not that I am an apostle, but stealing from Paul – 'I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.'