

Statement regarding the spiritual work of Living Church for 2020

Interim Moderator

If ever there was a year that established the truth of the old saying 'Man proposes but God disposes' it was 2020. By the end of February all our great plans were in disarray but we know that our heavenly Father's plans weren't. The challenge of 2020 was to let go of what we had planned on doing for the Lord and submit Him in what he wanted to do in us. I suspect we still have much to learn in that area of our individual and corporate life.

COVID-19 has reframed and continues to impact the life of our church community – on-line church, zoom Growth Group meeting became the norm for a while as well as white tape marking out where we could sit in church, which limited our numbers and our interaction. These upheavals test our commitment and resolve, they test our faith.

There is so much we don't know, but acknowledging that we have come to understand our vulnerabilities, we don't know if and when there will be another outbreak, we don't know when the vaccine will be rolled out, we don't know how effective it will be and we don't know when COVID has been brought under control how many people are still part of Living Church.

But what do we know? In this time of change we know that the Lord is still loving and gracious and he uses situation like these to test and refine our faith, we know that we need to be caring for one another in times such as these – God has not abandoned us, He is still Emanuel – God with us! We do know that we are called to live such different lives – caring for each other and being his presence in the world.

In the mean time we need to continue in prayer for our neighbours our church family and the world and we need to keep listening to God's Word. This year we will be looking at Mark's Gospel in first term, Daniel in second, the Sermon on the Mount in third and the fourth term is still to be worked out.

Your Selection Committee continues to serve you, listening to sermons inviting conversations and praying that we will find the pastor for Living Church that the Lord knows we need.

Please pray for the staff team, it is smaller than it has been for a very long time and they are working hard to be slaves of Christ and servants of the Board and you the body of Christ.

Please pray for us as a Board as we seek to shepherd the congregation through these uncertain times.

The preaching in 2020 covered the following: The sermons in January were on Rest, Play, Create, Work. In Terms 1 we completed the 5 part series The Way Home (Luke 19-24). Easter Friday (Darkness) and Good Friday (Light) from Luke 23 and Luke 24. As a response to the uncertainty of COVID-19 restrictions and the unknown impacts, we delivered 5 weeks of Psalms. This was followed by a 8 week series on Jesus "I am" statements from the book of

John. Originally scheduled for term 2 – the Ephesians series (Open the Eyes to Your Heart Eph 1-4:16) was delivered term 3 (It was deemed that this series on church was best done when restrictions allowed to meet in person). The year finished in Term 4 with the Walk in Love Series (Eph 4:17-6:23). Christmas and New Year was taught from the book of Isaiah.

Kids, Youth, Young Adults ministry

It goes without saying that 2020 was a hard year for these ministries, as it was for all. COVID-19 played havoc with programs, relationships and a sense of community. The surprise was actually how resilient many young people were through all the upheaval.

One thing the crisis of COVID enabled the kids & youth teams to double down on the issue of family discipleship that we had been wrestling with for a while. With the help of trainees like Ellen & Celina, we were able to develop a Family Discipleship Guide as our major weekly resource. This resource is in its infancy but we continue to plug it to families. We were able to run some parent workshops to begin the task of building a culture of family discipleship in our church community. It had an encouraging take up, especially from the parents of younger children which is where the long term change will come.

Towards the end of 2020 Tom & Chris worked on building teams for both the Family Discipleship Guide and parenting workshops, and we look forward to how they will enhance both these opportunities to invest in families and kids into 2021. We were very thankful for the chance to invest in Ellen & Celina over the past couple of years. They added a lot of value to the team. Even though they are finishing up their MTN, they will still contribute to our ministries in valuable ways. Both Lucas Tan & Sam Tobin will begin a ministry discipleship year with us in 2021, and while that will be valuable it will be part time alongside their studies. We will spend time intentionally investing in them. Tom & Chris will continue working on the ministries in a focussed way, with Chris contributing to the preaching team. Because of all this there is a need for a conscious shift to focus more on equipping ministry teams into 2021 and beyond.

Kids

COVID meant all programs from Playtime to Kids Church to Kids Connect had a large hiatus in the middle of 2020. But this did not mean that discipling of our kids stopped. Kids Church leaders used ZOOM and other means in line with pandemic restrictions to maintain contact and presence with the kids from their Kids Church growth group. As Kids church came back in stages as a program, the kids church team began using the Family Discipleship Guide as their main curriculum resource in order to continue to enhance the use of this new resource. While we still have some social distancing restrictions Kids Church had to start separate to the adults in the auditorium. We prefer to have families worshipping together for the start of our Sunday services, so we look forward to being able to do that again once restrictions completely lift.

Youth

Our youth ministry was probably hit hardest by COVID. In conjunction with that our youth pastor Matt Mansfield became restless and by the end of 2020 had resigned to start a new position at Central Church, Ipswich. Youth growth groups did soldier on during lockdown and tried using ZOOM for catch ups, but found it was hard to engage youth who were “over it” as this was their mode of schooling at that time also. Once we were able to meet face to face, there was a bounce back of engagement from a number of groups, but some, like our large grade 12 cohort, found it really hard. To combat this, and to help with transitions, we implemented a new grade 12 retreat which seemed to go well, but the results will be seen long term as we see how they transition into young adults.

The youth growth groups also began using the Family Discipleship Guide as their main curriculum resource.

As we look to 2021 there is a sense that youth needs some revitalisation, so Chris has taken this on in the absence of a youth pastor. It will include equipping new teams for Youth Connect and Youth Connect Planning to enable the ministry to begin to flourish again with less staff time.

Young Adults

Young Adults were quite resilient during lockdown, and they had good engagement over methods like ZOOM. The sense of community amongst our young adults is strong and we can thank the leaders of this ministry for the good work they are doing there, and the young adults themselves who own this and contribute in rich ways to this. With a large cohort of grade 12s potentially coming to young adults in 2021 we have recruited some new team members in David & Natalie Lather, and Joel & Celina Fyffe.

Connect, Grow, Serve ministry: 2020 has been a year like to other. Our Connect, Grow and Serve ministries have provided support and care for the members of Living Church in ways that we would never have anticipated, spiritual strengths have been revealed and in other ways, new ways forward have been identified. Stability and opportunities for improvement would be a great summary.

Highlights from 2020 include:

Continuing with our “low key” approach to connecting people into our church. With fewer people walking through our door, Connect has not been as busy. Establishment of the Check-In/Welcoming Team has been a focus and while this might have been motivated by COVID, it has given us the opportunity to build up a new Team of people and with the focus on welcoming people to our church, while meeting the government requirements.

A wonderful addition to our Connect “Tool Kit” is the launch of Christianity Explored (CX) at Living Church. A team of people led by Kristian O’Dempsey examined CX and then developed a plan for Living Church offer this course. COVID restrictions put paid to a multi-person course that had been planned for early 2020 – however, the Team has taken, or will take four people through the course in 2020/21. One of the key outcomes the team has

sort to achieve is the ongoing training of people so that as many people as possible can present the CX content.

During lock-down and into the middle of the year, significant work was undertaken to move forward with a specific evangelism program. Models were examined, ideas considered, possibilities proposed. While so very important, it was clear that the right path forward had not been identified and so, we progress with care and much prayer. People who do not know Jesus are always part of our prayers, thoughts and plans.

Growth Groups. 2020 demonstrated the strength of our Growth Groups. Through the days of lock-down, our Growth Groups, and specifically our Growth Group Leaders, provided contact and care for people when other options were limited or removed. The groups demonstrated agility as they encouraged each other through Zoom meetings, phone calls, texts – continuing to read the Bible, pray together and care for each other in new ways. Then as meeting together has slowly returned to “normal”, Growth Groups have taken every opportunity. It has been tough, but as we look to digging further into spiritual transformation, 2020 has prepared Living Church well.

Once again the Growth Group Coaches have been a mainstay of the Grow ministry. Clear outcomes include the deepening relationship between all the Coaches and the Leaders, ongoing training provided in different formats as is fitting for the Leaders and their circumstances, development of Grow Ministry Policy and resources and ongoing support across a myriad of ministry situations, where experienced people make a difference,

Pastoral Care continues to be a key focus of the Grow ministry. A small but significant number of highly complex matters have been cared for throughout the year. Every year it is possible to see growth in groups and individuals who are, through God’s provision, building understanding of what is needed to pastorally care for people in varying circumstances. The Christian Wholeness Framework continues to inform care provision, however “case” reviews, training, the identification and use of external resources and the Social Work Club are also contributing to pastoral care provision and continuous refinement.

In 2020, Living Church began in earnest to explore Guided Meditations. These have been made available on the Web site and when “traffic” was reported during the year, there were encouraging signs that these were being utilised. A review of this ministry initiative should be undertaken in 2021 to understand how well Guided Meditation are understood and used by Living Church.

Serve has seen the least change in the last twelve months. New Teams have emerged e.g. Disinfecting, teams have worked to meet changed demands e.g. the Media, Music, Kids, Youth, Gardening (to name just a few) and many people have stepped up and continued to serve in 2020 with the purpose of bringing glory to God. It is amazing to reflect on the depth and scope of ministry that is undertaken by people in our church—all member ministry is something that Living Church continues to strive to build. There is, however, much scope for improvement with a church wide review being a wise place to start. Questions such as how do we serve beyond our church, how do we serve well, what role does review play in

ministries, what training is required and how to manage this activity administratively are only the beginning of the work that is required.

Kristian O'Dempsey finished in his position of Connect, Grow, Serve Coordinator at the end of 2020. Kristian cares deeply for God's church. He thinks creatively and fearlessly challenges mores, no matter how long they have been in place. Kristian and his family continue as members at Living Church with Kristian helping out specifically with CX, but in other projects and ministries as they emerge.

City South: The change of venue to Annerley Church of Christ in late December 2019 meant a kick off in 2020 in a new position of financial stability, with a 10:30am service and a fresh energy amongst the community. Over 2020 City South spent much time in building for independence from Living Church with the establishment of a strong working Committee of Management ready to take on the work of a new charge and the congregation engaging in a vision together for the new charge. This came to fruition on December 31 2020. Our thanks to Living Church for the support financially and spiritually in assisting this move.

Springfield: Springfield is continuing to function as a church plant – with continued support from and collaboration with the Living Church Creek Road congregation but with a trajectory towards financial viability and healthy local governance. This has already had a positive effect on the core group at Springfield, where increased responsibility for the health of our ministry has corresponded with greater ownership and 'buy-in' from our key members. There is a genuine desire to see gospel ministry flourish in our community.

The challenges of 2020 did impact the growing momentum that was present at the beginning of 2020, where a small number of new people did not transition with us as we moved church online (via Zoom meetings).

We also faced the challenge of finding a new church venue, since the YMCA community centre was too small for us to meet with social distancing. Our prayers were answered late last year when we began meeting at the Springlake Hotel. We are thankful to God for answered prayer, and his provision for a place for us to meet that is cost effective.

Our goal this year is to continuing growing our core group, to focus on discipleship, and to be with others as Christ is with us – in his love, compassion, and unfailing grace – so that our lives together will express the very heart of Jesus in our Springfield community.
