

# to be one.

His People  
Our Stories



**“So Christ  
Himself gave the  
apostles, the prophets,  
the evangelists, the pastors  
and teachers, to equip His people  
for works of service, so that the body of  
Christ may be built up until we all reach**

**ἐνότης | oneness | 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.”**

*—Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)*

## **Lord Jesus,**

*You made it clear: your desire for us is to be one as you  
and the Father are one. We crave your ‘oneness’ for  
your Church and for our world.*

*This collection of our stories celebrates glimpses of  
your kingdom arriving through us – broken vessels  
holding your radiance by your grace.*

*Would you give us eyes to see and ears to hear through  
these stories? Could we listen for the familiar timbre  
of your voice, look for your countenance in the face  
and story of another?*

*May these stories draw us to embody your love, your  
mercy, and your justice in this world and play our  
part to build the mature, unified body of Christ.*

**Amen**

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# Our People









# *“Like A Mighty River”*

## Sue Whiteley Farewells The Network

28 AUG 2024

—By Amy Galliford



**After nearly 17 years of service with churches of Christ, Sue Whiteley concluded her time as a staff member in order to focus on supporting her family in the next season.**

**Between her roles in teaching, mentoring, facilitation and discernment, Sue has been a powerful conduit for the voice of God in our network, faithfully ushering us in His direction.**

Many of the key spiritual principles and practices that have come to define the network have their roots in her ministry. I recently spoke with Sue as she reflected on her life's journey and her long walk with churches of Christ.

To begin, Sue recalled the night before her first day at Australian College of Ministries (ACOM) where her involvement with churches of Christ began. “I knew if I didn’t take the opportunity, I would regret it until the end of my days. I was terrified; I had to walk straight into the eye of the terror.”

Now a powerful prophetic voice in the network, those early ventures into leadership required her to muster up enormous courage in the face of her fragile self-confidence. In confronting this sense of inadequacy, she was encouraged by God to look fear in the eye and move forward with His promise of unfailing companionship and guidance.





**“My whole story is a story of bringing my desires to God in prayer, and Him directing and opening the doors. I’ve never had to push; every step has been Him opening doors, and some of them were challenging to walk through.”**

With a background in spiritual mentoring and a Master’s degree in mystics, Sue began with ACOM in 2007, brought on to write curriculum for their spiritual formation units. In 2009, alongside expanding her formation teaching to the churches of Christ network, she pioneered a spiritual mentoring group. This early cohort was the first of 20 that she facilitated between 2009 and 2021. Since 2021, she has held the role of ‘discernmentarian’ on the churches of Christ Conference Executive board, giving attention to the spiritual enrichment of senior leaders.

### **Leadership Via Followship**

Despite all this, ‘leader’ is not a word she rushes to identify with. As Sue says, “I don’t see myself as a traditional leader; you know, the charismatic, up-the-front type. I see myself as a facilitative leader. I lead from the rim; I am one of the group.”

Perhaps a product of her personality, or perhaps a result of negative early messaging about women’s place in the church, self-confidence has been a recurrent wrestle in Sue’s leadership.

**“I don’t see my lack of self-assuredness as a weakness, but partially as a strength. I never gallop ahead and think I’m smarter than I am.”**

Sue finds that as she intently follows the direction of God, a deep assurance establishes her steps.

“If I know God has given me something to say, I can be really confident to give that word. I am at the frontier, not because I know where I’m going, but because God is saying, ‘Come on!’ and I say, ‘Okay, let’s go.’”

Sue’s leadership is inseparable from her followship. While the knowledge that others are following her could be intimidating, her focus is fixed elsewhere. She explains, “All I have to look after is my own formation, my own journey with God; anybody who happens to be following is following my followship of God. I am looking to God, not who’s following.”

A verse that anchors her approach in this is found in Matthew 28, where Jesus instructs the disciples to “form them in the practices and postures that I have taught you.” As Sue sees it, her role is to form others as she is being formed in Christ, to lead as she is led.

Like a true student of the mystics, she references a prayer by St Therese of Lisieux, who she explains was put in charge of the spiritual formation of all the other nuns in her convent at the age of 20. Adapted from its original written form in *A Story of the Soul*, Sue’s own version of the prayer became, “Draw me and, in drawing me towards yourself, draw all others I love towards yourself, like a mighty river dragging everything along with it out into the ocean of yourself.”

God’s presence remains her confidence.

“I don’t have a whole lot to show unless He turns up.”







## Crafting 'The Brew'

Through Sue's teaching, mentoring and facilitation, key principles have worked their way into the DNA of churches of Christ. She has trained more than 250 individuals in leadership, discernment and mentoring, and introduced a treasury of spiritual classics to the network alongside key frameworks for self-knowledge such as Enneagram and Internal Family Systems. Core to her ministry was a focus on the life-long development of intimacy with God and the crucial role of spiritual practices in a thriving disciple. For her, practices such as journalling, harvesting and prayers of examen function as 'dew collectors' – ways of reaping the gifts of heaven in the everyday.

Her pioneering of spiritual mentoring groups in the movement has seen 20 cohorts of individuals undergo deep formation and return to their communities equipped to form others in turn. Sue's concept of 'The Brew' found its origin in these groups.

After observing a pattern in the group formation, Sue uncovered ten key elements, or 'spiritual enzymes', that were catalysing these unique bonds of unity in the cohorts.

Among these enzymes were life story telling, spiritual formation story updating, the cultivation of relational micro-skills, the equalisation of voices in the group and the art of intentional affirmation. These elements were 'The Brew' that created the group conditions for 'Hesed' – an Old Testament Hebrew word that describes the 'loving-kindness' between people and God. The result of this Hesed love within these groups was always spiritual transformation.

As Sue sees it, these kinds of communities are non-negotiables in the Christian walk. "You can't even love, or be kind, or be patient, unless you have others," she says. She goes on to describe the need for such covenantal relationships in ongoing formation.

"I think leaders today need to spend more time with God, seeking to understand their unique vocations. Like Olympic swimming athletes, we need to stop looking across at how we are doing alongside the performance of others. We need to discover through prayerful self-observation what makes each leader unique, and we need community to help us do that. Covenant communities give you enormous confidence and belonging – that is the soil that good leaders need."



All Aboard Dinner 2024.



One of the 20 spiritual mentoring cohorts Sue has facilitated in the past 17 years.





**“It’s beautiful to see the sparkle of God-energy in a leader and point it out and affirm it; breathe life on that little sparkle so that person can believe more of what is inside them already. We need that affirmation like we need oxygen.”**

### Sue’s Parting Words

In reflecting on her journey, and the countless journeys she has watched unfurl in her ministry, Sue reflects with characteristically poetic words,

“There’s a God-given seed put in my soul and everyone’s soul that has all the capacity to become something beautiful. Like a daffodil shoot trying to push through the earth, that calling is trying to erupt in our lives. That’s our whole reason for living.”

As Sue’s calling has intersected with churches of Christ, both parties say farewell deeply changed for the better.

“I’m leaving with a profound sense of gratitude that God has given me this family and community for me to live in for nearly 17 years; 17 years of people I have loved deeply. I’m leaving with a full, warm heart. It’s been the highlight of my life thus far, this work.”



Top images: Sue teaching spiritual mentoring cohort at The Tops.  
Above: With Maree Graham at the Collective book stall.



**“There’s a God-given seed put in my soul and everyone’s soul that has all the capacity to become something beautiful.**

**Like a daffodil shoot trying to push through the earth, *that calling is trying to erupt in our lives. That’s our whole reason for living.*”**

—Sue Whiteley





# Holly Miller: *Tending To Women In Prison*

15 OCT 2024

—By Amy Galliford

**In many ways, Holly Miller's work is just like any other nurse's. One by one, patients file into her clinic room in a health centre for a community of women in NSW. She greets them with a smile, she tends to their needs and she sends them off in a better state than when they entered.**



The difference is that when these women leave, they are returning to prison cells; this community is a women's correctional centre. Holly is the Sexual and Women's Health Nurse in the prison's Health Centre, a role she has held for the past 5 years. With many of these women arriving in prison from highly traumatic circumstances, Holly's first task is building trust.


**"There's a real art and skill in being deliberate in creating an environment for vulnerability to happen and doing it quickly," she says.**

However, with a background working in emergency departments, sexual health clinics, women's health centres, and plenty of experience providing health care in parlours (the correct term for brothels) as part of the Sex Workers Outreach Program, Holly is no stranger to the art of building trust.

"It's just the basics – the way you talk with them, make eye contact, stay friendly and approachable, you know, moving away from that clinical model.

"I just think of Jesus and how He walked with sex workers and lepers; He loved them for who they were, and He met them where they were at. I try and make people feel I am meeting them where they are at.

"Sometimes it takes three or four visits for women to realise I genuinely care about them and their health. It takes time. It requires a lot of patience and kindness and understanding.



It's not about me or me needing to get what I need achieved; it needs to be about the other person. It's about removing your own ego and focusing on slowly pulling the threads of that person to better understand who they are and what they need."

## Seeing The Story Behind The Label

Where the world is quick to define these women by their imprisonment, hearing the full arc of their stories offers Holly a deeper insight into the realities of their lives.

Most of the women come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, marginalized communities, and a complex history of childhood trauma and abuse. A common pattern involves women turning to drugs and addiction to cope with their trauma, with this addiction in turn leading to crime.

**"From hearing women's stories, I realised that the stereotype of people in prison being bad people was nothing like what I was seeing. The majority of people I meet in prison are just women who have had really traumatic lives."**



From where she is standing, compassion is the only reasonable response to stories such as these.

"When I hear these stories, I just think to myself: one, I am so blessed to have had the life I've had; and two, if I was faced with that kind of adversity with no support, I can see how easy it would have been to turn to all of this.

"So many people don't understand how deeply trauma and abuse impacts the soul of a human being. They can't just 'get over it'. If people don't have a support network or a healthy living environment or financial means, it's so hard to get yourself out of that place."

Holly's own upbringing enables a deeper compassion in her for these women's situations. Having faced difficulties in her home environment in childhood and struggling mentally as a teenager as a result, she has a unique ability to empathise with the challenges her patients are facing.

**"I feel that God has used the circumstances I used to question him about. I now see that God has been able to use my experiences to help me to understand the people I encounter. My adversity has allowed me to minister to other people's adversity. This too was not wasted; God worked it together for good."**

Holly remains mindful of what memories are opened up by these conversations with the women, knowing that they are often returning to a cell on their own.

However, the response she receives time and time again from the women is, "Thank you for listening, I've never shared all of that."

Alluding to the frequent negative experiences these women have with authorities, Holly says, "What they need from me is non-judgement. They need time to talk, and they need to not be discredited or questioned for what they are saying. They need me to believe them."

Holly jokes that she regularly gets comments from prison guards and other nurses saying, "People always come out of your room crying."



## Carrying The Calling

It's no small cross to carry. Sustaining the weight of her work has required Holly to depend heavily on God, especially when things have become heavy.

Vicarious trauma was a challenge that came with the early stages of the job. Holly remembers lying awake with the brutal details of women's stories circling around her head, with no real tools to help her process them. She did a short course in managing this kind of trauma but credits her faith as the ultimate force that got her through this.

"Especially recently, God has given me so much healing in my mind and has helped me to process. He has taught me to see myself as a blessing in this space – I'm there to hear people's stories while understanding that they are not mine to hold."

There are times Holly has doubted her calling to work in the prison. A couple of years ago, when a series of challenges had added weight to the burdens of the work, she began to question whether this was really for her. Twice, she sat at her desk and asked God for direction, and both times the consults that followed were encounters of profound significance with women that desperately needed her compassion.

**"These were times where the women were hurting and needing to share and to have that space of support and understanding. They needed someone to hear them. I could feel God in me saying, 'Holly, this is where I have placed you. This is where I want you to be. This is your ministry.'"**

While it can feel heavy, most of the time Holly's work feels more like a blessing than a burden.



Holly and her family.

"I feel really blessed to have something that feels so fulfilling. Not everyone gets to have the satisfaction in their work of helping people and journeying with people. I feel so blessed by hearing people sharing – it adds to my life too! Sometimes people say, 'Thank you for listening,' and I feel like saying, 'No, thank you!' The work gives back to me."

As she has been faithful in her work, she has been changed by it for the better.

"Because of this work, I have more courage, more mercy, more patience. It has really allowed me to grow more of that biblical patience and to understand that things take time. It's not about fixing people or fixing their lives; it's about sitting with them through their chaos and knowing that it may not change."

As she is transformed by the Holy Spirit in the work that she does, her eyes remain fixed on the image of Jesus – the ultimate healer.

**"My drive and the pull in my heart is to become more Christlike."**



# Graham Blok's New Chapter In Police Chaplaincy

10 APR 2025

—By Garry Sanossian



**In February 2025, Graham Blok accepted the role of Honorary Police Chaplain for Hawkesbury Police Area Command. For Graham, who also serves as a part-time chaplain at Pendle Hill Retirement Community (a Fresh Hope Communities retirement village), this new role represents another significant chapter in his diverse career of service.**

**His decision to take on police chaplaincy stemmed from recognising a vital need.**

**“There are huge needs in the police force, it’s a challenging job. I was aware that it’s a demanding job and I thought, I’m interested in getting involved where there is a need,” he said.**

His approach to this new role is relationship focused. “First and foremost, it’s to develop relationships with the police and the support staff, the administration staff as well as the officers. Once you develop relationships and trust, when they do want to talk about a work issue or an out-of-work issue, they will come to you and you can offer support.

It could be something that is challenging within their everyday job or could be a home or personal issue that’s challenging. I will also get called to critical incidents like serious events as well.”

Before stepping into chaplaincy, Graham built a career shaped by service, leadership and care across several sectors. “Previously I’ve been an educator. I was a teacher for 22 years. I did everything from classroom teacher to principal. Then I worked in the church for four years, and then for 10 years, I would be in workplaces in the transport industry as an emergency response chaplain,” he said.


“I’ve got a real heart to care for people that have been entrusted in my care. 1 Peter 5 talks about care for the flock that has been entrusted in your care. That’s always been my mission.”

Bruce Tindale, Chaplaincy Ministry Leader at churches of Christ, believes Graham is uniquely suited for the position. “Graham’s extremely relational and has a great gift of discernment. He brings a non-anxious presence into just about any situation and I find those very fine qualities of a chaplain.”

What makes these roles vital, is the emotional support chaplains provide to first responders. “These are spaces where people carry deep emotional wounds and moral injuries. Graham is well placed to support and care for them in that context,” Bruce said.








# From Vision To Reality: How A Mother- Daughter Team Created A Retreat Space For *Spiritual Renewal*

18 MAR 2025

—By Garry Sanossian



In a beautiful stone house nestled among five acres of gardens and bushland in Tapitallee, New South Wales, Dr Carol and Tammy Preston have created Hope's View Retreat, a sanctuary where people can step away from the busy-ness of life to reconnect with God.

What makes this ministry unique is not just its peaceful setting or spiritual focus, it's the mother-daughter partnership behind it, a relationship that brings balancing strengths to create something neither could accomplish alone.



## A Long-Held Dream Revived

For over two decades, Dr Carol Preston had a vision of creating a retreat space where people could “sit in silence and reflect and pray and listen for God.” She shared that, as a psychologist who witnessed many people suffering from burnout and trauma, she recognised the profound healing that can come through stillness and spiritual connection.

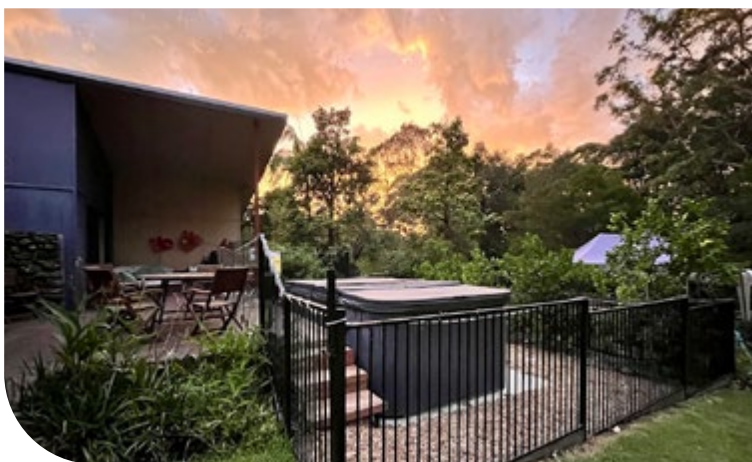
With Carol's life path taking a different direction, she eventually made peace with letting go of her vision. “I'd really thought that it was too late for that to happen,” Carol reflected.

But a year ago, during a simple family meal, everything changed. After Carol's husband passed away, she had come across an ad for a property that reminded her of her old vision. Over lunch with her daughter Tammy, she decided to share about it. “Tammy said, ‘Well, you know what? What if you didn't have to do it on your own and we did it together?’” Carol recalled.

For Tammy, who was going through significant life changes of her own, the idea offered a fresh start.

“God's really been challenging me to start again, to let go of my past situation and be able to start anew,” she said.

What began as a casual conversation quickly gained momentum. Both women sold their homes and, together, bought a property in scenic Tapitallee.



Tammy Preston (left) and Dr. Carol Preston (right).  
Hope's View retreat house.

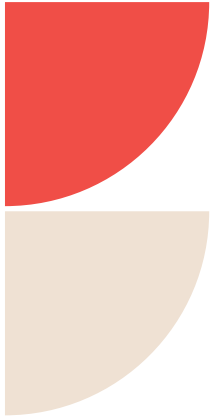
By April last year, Hope's View Retreat was born and the mother-daughter team had moved in and begun their ministry together.

Pastor Jono Prince, from NewDay Church, reflected on his time as an attendee of Hope's View Retreat. Now eager to return with his team for a second time, he gives insight on how Tammy and Carol manage the space: “The atmosphere felt harmonious, with the mother-daughter team creating a welcoming environment. They were attentive to our needs while also giving us the space to feel comfortable and independent.

**“The location provided the perfect balance of seclusion and accessibility, fostering focus and reflection,” Jono Prince explained. “You feel like you're completely away from civilisation, giving you the peace and quiet to reflect, without being hours from everything.”**







Cheryl Clendinning, who has also visited Hope's View Retreat, described her experience as deeply refreshing. "The whole environment is very peaceful, but also very colourful and with lots of birds, which I loved," she shared.

She also noted the special dynamic between Carol and Tammy. "They obviously have a wonderful relationship, which I got to see during the day. Just to watch their interaction was great. It's very welcoming, very inclusive." The retreat provided Cheryl with much-needed renewing as well. "Everything just felt so fresh with the environment and the air."

What makes Carol and Tammy's partnership effective is how their unique personalities and gifts complement each other. "Mum's the introvert, silent, reflective and patient. I'm the extrovert. I make things happen and create new ideas," Tammy shared.

**"Mum's always been my best friend and my spiritual director and I feel very blessed."**

### Creating A Sacred Space

Drawing on her years of ministry experience, Tammy says she focuses on "creating environments where people can enter in and feel safe and led and yet have space for themselves and for their voice, and for them to hear God."

This ministry has also taught Tammy to embrace silence rather than fear it.

"The silence was the places where I sat with my mind and remembered the things that hurt me, the things that I felt like I lost," she said.

**"And I've found that God has met me in those spaces and said, 'It's okay to be in those spaces, and I'm going to meet you there.'"**

### Looking Forward

As Hope's View Retreat approached its first anniversary, Carol and Tammy remained open to wherever God leads their ministry.

**"We're open to whatever ways that God might want to use this place," Carol said.**

Tammy hopes that Hope's View Retreat continues to be a place where people will find new beginnings just as she and Carol have. "At a time when we both faced difficult changes in our lives, God has given us both a sense of hope with this place," she said.

Hope's View Retreat is open to the public and hosts a variety of retreats. You can find out more by visiting their website at [hopesviewretreat.org](http://hopesviewretreat.org)



# Abigail Skelly: *Discovering A Passion For The Inner Life*

19 MAY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian and Josh Gibbon

**In March 2025 beloved member of the Network Resource Team, Abigail Skelly, farewelled the team as she began her new career and ministry as a school counsellor.**

Abi has had a significant impact on our network during her time in ministry with us, finding herself at the heart of many of our network's collaborative ministries.

As she steps into a new chapter of her ministry, she reflected, "I've seen the tender love of Jesus through the people in this network, and I've had the chance to work with some amazing people here! Seeing how people serve Jesus so tenderly in this network has left a mark on me."

Abi's experiences in ministry with the network have played a significant part in her journey towards becoming a qualified counsellor.

**"This movement has really grown my love for the inner life of people and for formation, for people to be truly seen as they are," Abi reflected. "It created space for contemplation and room for God to move in people's lives."**

Abi's journey with the churches of Christ NSW (then Fresh Hope) network began in 2013 through participating in Impart, a year-long spiritual formation program led by John and Marianne Crowther. Impart and the wider Navigate programs were foundational for Abi's spiritual growth and sense of ministry vocation.



"It really grew my heart for discipleship and for coming alongside people," Abi shared.

John Crowther, Director of Mission & Ministry at churches of Christ, who also served as former Director of Navigate, saw how Abi loved to serve others throughout her journey with the network.

"It is not a role she plays. She actually is a follower of Jesus and out of that participation, the overflow seems to impact people right around her, whether they're colleagues or people that she's helping in counselling or formation," he said.

Marianne Crowther, who also led and worked alongside Abi in Navigate recalled, "I saw her mature over those years as a leader as well as a learner."

Abi joined the Fresh Hope Mission & Ministry team officially after several years volunteering and helping with the Navigate programs, later taking on the role of Navigate Programs Coordinator.







Abi's graduation ceremony with family.

**“The more I led formation groups, the more I realised this is what I want to do. I want to come alongside people and journey with them,” Abi said.**

Her passion for spiritual formation grew and found expression in various contexts – playing key roles in coordinating the programs of Collective, Pilgrimage, Drastic Camp, Elders Retreat, and more. This passion for seeing people discover their true identity in Jesus led Abi and her husband Jessie to plant a missional community in Marrickville, Sydney – in collaboration with other leaders in our network.

As Navigate came to a close, Abi became part of the Health and Engagement Team, continuing to be a crucial part of shaping and developing many of our network's collaborative programs and events.

During the COVID pandemic, Abi, Jessie, and their son Chadley moved to be close to family in Tweed Heads, where they joined Tweed Heads Church of Christ (now Living Grace), and have played a key role in recent emergency relief efforts during flooding. Through this experience, Abi also became a trained emergency chaplain with the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, tending to people in a time of grief and shock.

Last year in 2024, Abi officially graduated from her Masters in Counselling, following her desire to listen deeply and journey compassionately with people's stories.



Abi with the Navigate cohort during her year of Impart.

Abi completed her study while balancing working three days a week with the Network Resource Team, completing 200 practicum hours, studying and family life.

In 2024, Abi also became part of the Belly & Bones cohort of women, which was focused on raising up the voice and contribution of female leadership in our network.

Kym Dixon, Ministry Leader in Leader Support & Formation and a facilitator of Belly & Bones, collaborated with Abi in many aspects of network ministry.

“What I really appreciate about Abi is the way that she has held it all with such an ease and joy in a non-anxious way,” Kym said. “She's incredibly skilled at organising events and overseeing programs, but she carries those strengths alongside a genuine love for people and a joyful presence.

“She creates space for everyone else to shine and for people to be received with hospitality and love,” Kym said.

These traits that Abi has honed in her ministry so far have positioned her to be an incredible counsel to children and their families in the future.

In her final week in her role, Abi was part of launching the Belly & Bones Journal, *Taste & See*, in which she contributed a poem and article on the topic of grief. In this written piece, Abi shares vulnerably from her own story and from her learning as a counsellor, bringing together some of the richest aspects of her own learning and journey in spiritual formation.



# Our Churches







# Kingdom Love In Action: **Northside Church's Christmas Dinner Brings Hope And Connection To Community**

16 JAN 2025

—By Garry Sanossian



**For many, the festive season is a time of joy and celebration. But for others, it brings deep loneliness and a longing for connection. On December 15, 2024 Northside Church transformed their auditorium into a welcoming banquet hall for a Christmas dinner. The space came alive with laughter, heartfelt conversations and the warmth of community as love and hope overflowed.**

“The idea came when Sam, our senior pastor, met with North Sydney Council,” explained Jordan Westfield, services pastor at Northside Church. “In that meeting, we learned that many in our community struggle with loneliness and isolation, simply lacking opportunities to connect with others.”

This meeting planted a seed in their hearts to host a free Christmas dinner for anyone in need. “While Christmas is often a joyful and beautiful time for many, it can also be a season of sadness and loneliness for others,” Jordan said.

**“We thought, how can we be a church that not only meets that need but also serves as a genuine gift to our community?”**

This event was not about delivering a message from the pulpit. It was about living out Christ's love and care, creating a testimony through action. “People need to know we care for them, with no expectations or conditions, just love. And through that love, they'll see a reflection of Jesus,” he said.

Planning the event was no small task. Jordan highlighted the generous support of a churches of Christ Kingdom Initiatives Grant, which provided \$3,500 to help make the evening possible. Around 200 people attended, filling the room to capacity. “The room was packed with people from our community and almost none of them were from our church,” Jordan said.

The event was made possible by the dedication of over 30 church volunteers and seven from the local community. For some, it was their first time stepping into Northside Church, motivated by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference.

“We had seven people who joined us early in the day, setting everything up, putting everything out,





Entertainment and encouragement on stage at the Northside Christmas lunch.



being with our church volunteers as well,” Jordan said.

As the night concluded, guests were invited to write their wishes for the coming year. Many shared deeply personal hopes, while others remarked that their wish had already been granted.

Jordan recalled, “We had countless people who said, ‘I don’t know what to write as my Christmas wish because you’ve already met my Christmas wish by putting on this dinner for us.’”

Reflecting on the evening, Jordan highlighted how God’s presence was felt in every moment. He shared how the event challenged assumptions, breaking down the idea that the church expects anything in return from those who attend.

**“We saw Him at work in the way people came together, in the seeds of trust planted and in how perceptions of the church shifted,” he said.**

With a heart to serve the community, Northside Church plans to make the Christmas dinner an annual tradition and is already exploring other ways to serve their community.

**“This is just the beginning,” Jordan said. “We want to bring the Kingdom beyond the four walls of the church.”**



13 JAN 2025

—By Garry Sanossian



# **7,000 People Attend Christmas Carols Event Hosted By Connect Church**

On December 14, 2024 over 7,000 people from the community of Engadine gathered at Cooper Street Park for the highly anticipated Engadine Christmas carols. Organised by Connect Church (Engadine Church of Christ) and supported by local sponsors, the event was a festive celebration of Christmas, filled with music, dance, and food stalls.

The evening featured performances by a trio of Singing Angels, a 20-piece concert band from Sutherland PCYC, a local school choir, a young vocalist and three local dance schools. Between performances, the community joined in carol singing, with lyrics displayed on a large screen. Alongside the music, dance, and festive stalls, attendees raised donations for Christmas hampers to support those in need.

When the long-standing Engadine Rotary Club, which organised the Engadine Christmas carols for 30 years, closed its doors earlier this year, the future of this much-loved tradition seemed uncertain. Recognising the importance of this cherished event, Mr Gary Richards, a former Rotary Club President, approached Connect Church with a request to step in and carry the baton forward.

**“This has been such an encouragement for our church to keep serving the broader community around us, as we continue to ‘champion our village with the love of Jesus,’” said Mike McGarrity, Connect Church Team Leader.**

With a history of successfully hosting the well-attended Spring Fair, Connect Church recognised the value of uniting the community and its role in following Christ’s example of love and service. Even with little time to prepare—around three weeks—the team at Connect Church embraced the challenge of organising the Community carols, committing to prayer and trusting in God’s guidance, confident that He would ensure everything went well and allow the tradition to continue.

“Connect had previously run a Spring Fair event for the community for a few years, which had attracted thousands of locals and been a great success. Despite it being late in the year to start to organise such a large event, the team at Connect agreed to give it a go,” he said.





Connect Church's decision to step in aligns with their heart for serving the community. With the combined efforts of over 30 Connect Church volunteers and support from the wider community, the evening became a testament to the power of working together to bring the Christmas message to the community. With Jesus at the heart of the celebration, the evening also included a brief but meaningful message from Mike McGarrity, reminding everyone to keep their focus on Him throughout the Christmas season.

"It meant a commitment for the church to an extra focus on prayer for the event and, in the end, everything came together beautifully," Mike said.

Together, volunteers and sponsors kept this cherished community tradition alive. Connect Church's role in the Engadine carols event is testament to the power of a church being faithfully involved with its local community and championing the love of Jesus over the long haul, remaining ready for anything.

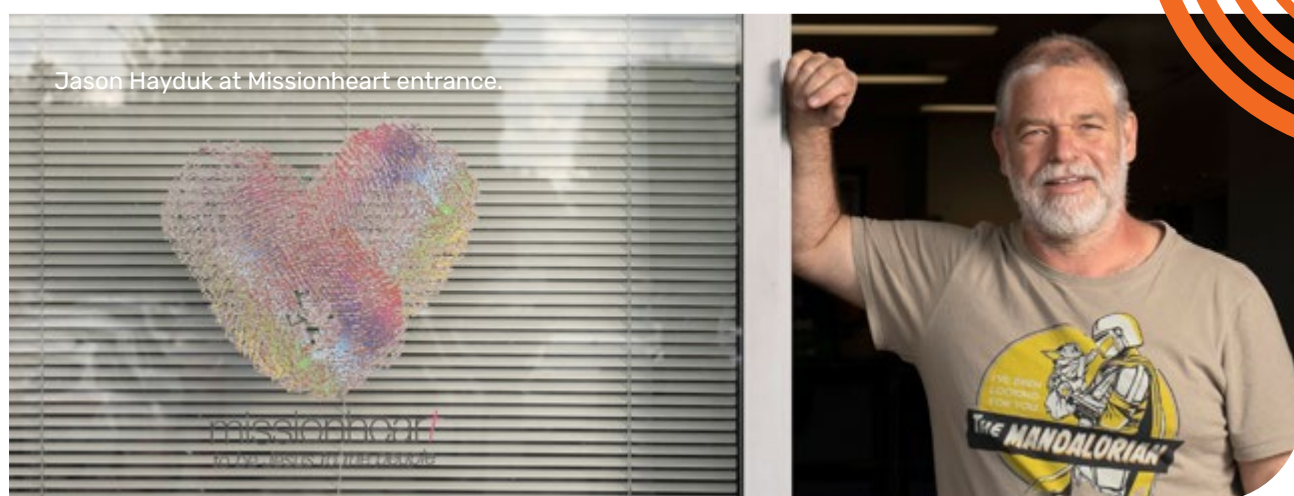


Photos of the expansive crowd and Mike McGarrity bringing a Christmas message.

# Empowering Volunteers: How A Ministry Grant *Transformed Missionheart's* Safe Church Practices

03 MAY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian



**A Ministry Grant from churches of Christ in NSW & ACT has helped Missionheart Church in Canberra enhance its volunteer ministry, providing essential training and updates to policies to ensure a safer and more structured environment.**

“Since we work closely with people experiencing homelessness, addiction and mental health challenges, it was essential to refine our policies and procedures,” said Kelly Hayduk, a member of the Safe Church Team at Missionheart.

With around 50 volunteers involved in diverse outreach programs, ensuring a safe and well-structured environment was a top priority for Missionheart.

“We needed to equip our volunteers with the right training, clarify their roles and reinforce procedures to keep everyone safe,” Kelly added.

The grant allowed Missionheart to review and update their existing policies and modify them where required. This process involved extensive consultation with ministry leaders, collecting volunteer input and ensuring compliance with all legal requirements. Some of the outreach programs rely on the dedication of volunteers who actively take part in initiatives such as The Gathering, an informal service followed by lunch for anyone in need.

Volunteers also support a weekday drop-in centre in the city, providing food and assisting in operating a mobile mission bus, which visits government housing complexes to connect with residents.

Beyond that, they contribute to Missionhouse, a discipleship community for individuals seeking extra support in their faith journey.



Volunteers are also involved in prayer groups, home groups and monthly fundraising BBQs at Bunnings, ensuring the ministry can continue reaching those in need. “We have three part-time employees, and the rest are volunteers who take part in these programs. It’s important that they receive proper training and understand both their own safety and the safety of those they serve,” Kelly said.

Ross Stewart, Safe Ministry Practices Leader at churches of Christ, emphasised the importance of such grants to the churches. “Compliance with regards to child protection and harm prevention are very important. It’s a message to the community that they serve, that the church takes safety and well-being seriously and wants to do what’s best for the interests of all people,” he said. The benefits of these improvements extend far beyond paperwork and compliance.

**“The volunteers are the backbone of what we do,” Kelly shared.**

“Volunteers and those who serve are more confident in their roles now, so they actually perform better. Our new friends who come along and enjoy our activities are getting better care.”

The grant enabled the development of a comprehensive volunteer management system, streamlining processes such as applications, confidentiality agreements, code of conduct commitments, reference checks and interviews for new volunteers. It also ensured that all volunteers obtained Working with Vulnerable People cards while enhancing the volunteer database to better track training completion and certifications.

The church updated its ‘workers guidelines’ (volunteer policies and procedures) and created a volunteer database to maintain accurate records. Training was a major focus, with sessions in Creating Safe Spaces, First Aid, Sharps Removal, Safe Food Handling and Accidental Counsellor Training. The whole church was involved in updating the guidelines and volunteers gave feedback throughout.

This collaborative approach raised awareness of safe church practices, led to meaningful changes and left volunteers feeling more confident and equipped to train others.

Missionheart volunteers gather together.



Through this Ministry Grant, Missionheart has built a stronger foundation for their volunteer ministry that benefits everyone involved, from the leadership team to volunteers to those they serve. “The benefits of receiving this grant cannot be underestimated. Our community grew in their confidence in their volunteer roles and became very attuned to safe church practice,” Kelly said.

**“It means that everybody feels safer,” Kelly explained. “It means any adult, child, or anyone who comes along finds that they feel safe. It also means that our volunteers feel safe. It’s safety across the board.”**



# ***Education As Mission:*** **Coast Community Church Expand Their Vision**

23 MAY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian and Heidi Wright



**Education as mission has been at the heart of Coast Community Church's vision for the past 25 years.**

According to Mission Capacity Manager at Coast Community Church, Matt Johnston, their mission focus has proved a testimony of how the gospel changes lives.

**“We’ve seen kids choose Jesus, want to follow Jesus. We’ve seen families give their lives to Jesus,” he said.**

In early May the church celebrated 25 years since launching Coast Christian School, now a thriving primary school offering high-quality Christian education to about 240 children and a place of connection for their families. The ongoing growth and success of this school over the years has led the church to dream bigger, seeking to find ways to offer more children and families quality Christian education as part of their vision to see a renewed Central Coast.

Ultimately, the dream is to offer families a complete Christian education pathway from pre-school through to graduation, and the Coast Community School team are currently working to expand the primary school into a high school by 2027. While this expansion is a longer-term project, God has opened the door for the church to step into early childhood education, supporting children and their families from an even earlier age.

This opportunity emerged in 2019, when church leadership was approached by Berkeley Vale Church of Christ to adopt their congregation and preschool, Noah's Ark.

“One of the cool things that they had was a preschool,” Matt explained. “That was their main missional expression into the community in which they were placed and when we adopted Berkeley Church we took on that preschool as well.”

A few years into this journey now, Coast Community have expanded the preschool into two sites, now known as Coast Community Preschool, supporting 100 local families. In this ministry, Coast are bringing the same heart for families, conviction for the need for Christian education, and vision that they've carried in building Coast Community School.





## Why Christian Education Matters

The concept driving Coast's education ministry is captured in their vision statement about building a 'Foundation for Life'.

"For us, that foundation is Jesus. Part of why our education spaces operate is to introduce people to Jesus who is the foundation for life," Matt said.

The Coast Christian school team draws inspiration from *Matthew 7:24-27* which speaks of building a house on solid rock, meaning the preschool is established on a firm foundation rooted in God's word. This approach aims to help children understand who Jesus is and to recognise their identity in Him through biblical teaching and Christian values.

For the church, education also provides a natural pathway to build meaningful relationships with families who might otherwise never connect with a church. Matt pointed to Coast's broader vision to explain the emphasis on relationships. "We believe that God's promise is that He's making all things new.

"So, our response to that promise - our calling - is to contend for the renewal of the Central Coast."

"We believe the best way to do that is by loving others with the love of Christ, which is all about relationship," he said."

**"Within community, people are known so there's a sense of belonging. When it comes to most things in terms of the Kingdom, it's done through relationship," Matt said.**

**"[For us] it's about building trust with families: showing them that we are responsible and committed. It's about demonstrating integrity in the way we act and speak."**

Through a strategic lens, this missional focus also meets a growing demand. "The data indicates that the demand for Christian schooling, not just on the Central Coast but across the state, is increasing," Matt Johnston shared. "Parents wouldn't necessarily characterise it as Christian schooling or Christian education. They would probably call it values-based or morals-based education."



Coast Christian School beginnings.



Coast Christian School today.



Coast Christian School celebrates its 25th birthday.



Outdoor learning at Coast Community Preschool.

## The Formative Years

With over 30 years' experience in family and children's ministry, Nicole Briggs, Children's Ministry Pastor at Coast Community Church in Bensville, emphasises the strategic importance of early childhood education.

**"We know that the first five years are the most formative in a child's life. When we can actually build a good foundation in kids that's centred on who they are in Jesus, we actually set them up for a win," she said.**

As an aspect of the preschool's educational aims, children are taught about the importance of having a relationship with God.

Coast Community Church team member and parent Stephanie Gibbs highlighted how this approach is nurturing spiritual awareness in her three-year old daughter who attends the preschool. She said, "she's often talking about needing to go away and have some quiet time with God.

"I'm not sure she fully understands what that means yet, but children naturally work out their faith as they grow," she added.

The preschool is quickly becoming a focus and passion of Coast Community's vision for contending for the renewal of the Central Coast, as they see families hungry for what they have to offer.

Nicole said, "Schools and preschools are growing exponentially as far as people seeking out safe places for kids. It's just a huge opportunity to meet families face to face and openly be all about Jesus."

For churches considering similar ministry avenues, the Coast Community Church experience serves as inspiration that this ministry avenue can have significant local impact.

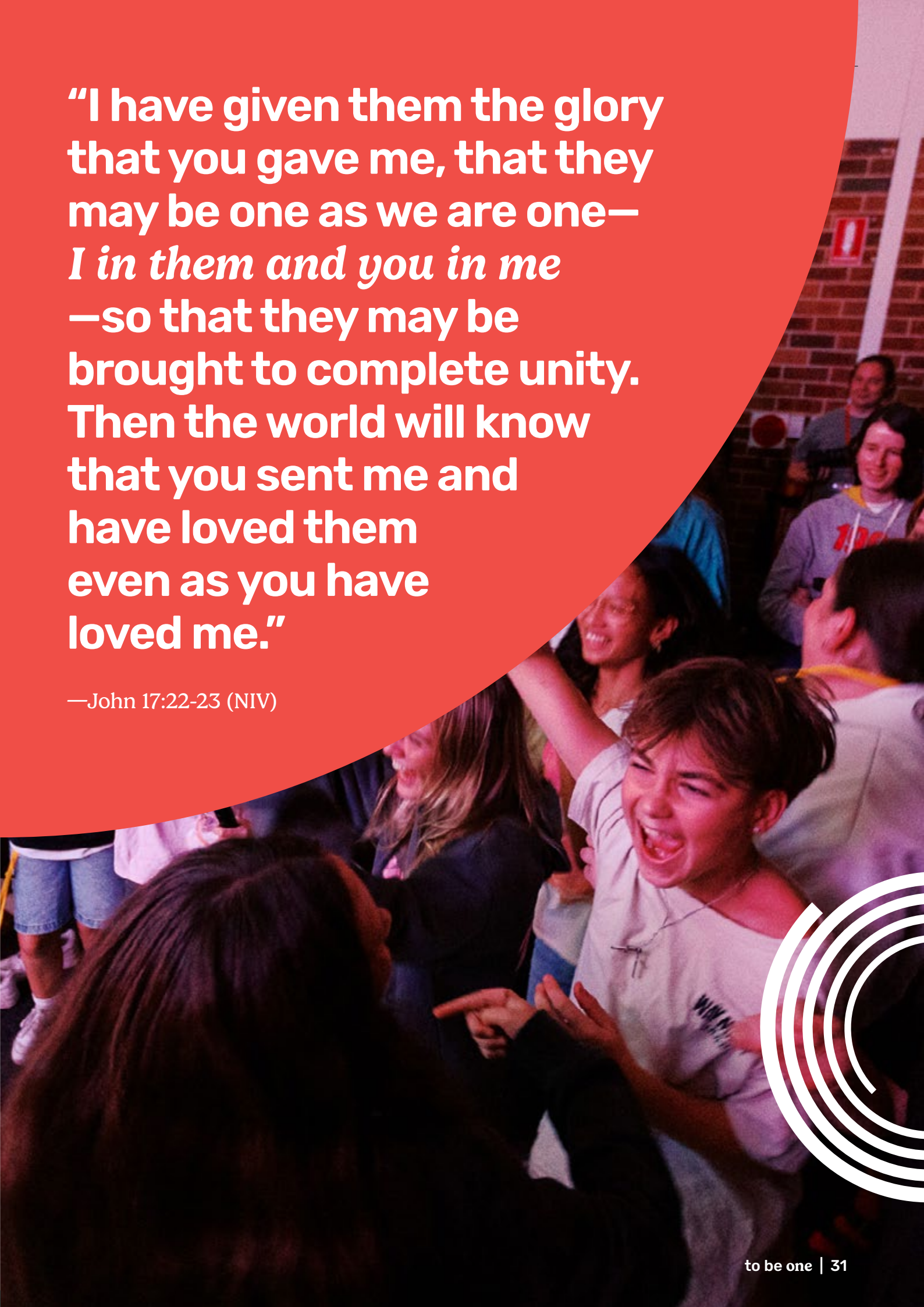
**"They (education spaces) are vehicles for the church to demonstrate the love of Jesus. These education spaces are in themselves environments of spiritual formation." Matt Johnston said.**





**“I have given them the glory  
that you gave me, that they  
may be one as we are one—  
*I in them and you in me*  
—so that they may be  
brought to complete unity.  
Then the world will know  
that you sent me and  
have loved them  
even as you have  
loved me.”**

—John 17:22-23 (NIV)





# Heartbeat Church Joins Our Network

21 MAY 2025

—By Josh Gibbon and Garry Sanossian

**Network delegates voted unanimously on the affiliation of Heartbeat Church; welcoming them as one of our own at the churches of Christ in NSW & ACT 2025 Special General Meeting on 20 May.**

Heartbeat Church, a vibrant and growing multi-campus community with locations in Sydney, Melbourne, and the Gold Coast; has spent the last several years exploring a deeper connection with our network. Their journey has been marked by shared values, a passion for practical discipleship, and a vision for simple, Christ-centred community life.

Founded a decade ago in a Strathfield restaurant with just a few families, Heartbeat has grown into a network of approximately 17 house churches across three cities. Led by Pastors Joshua and Yoonah Choi, the church centres its ministry on small, home-based gatherings led by trained lay leaders known as 'shepherds.' These house churches are the bread and butter of the community, while larger Sunday gatherings offer a space for corporate worship and teaching.

**"We identify the church not just as a Sunday thing, but church as doing life together," said Pastor Joshua. "Church, not as a building, but church as the people of God."**





This emphasis on simplicity, community, and the priesthood of all believers resonated strongly with the ethos of churches of Christ. When Joshua was introduced to the network by long-time friend Stephen Cha, pastor of The Chapel Sydney, he quickly sensed a natural alignment.

“When I met the churches of Christ leaders, I sensed a strong kind of similarity,” Joshua said. “The whole value is exactly the same, which is first-century church. Everything they talked about is exactly what we’ve been doing.”

Heartbeat Church's story of connection with the network includes participation in events like Collective and Pilgrimage, where they had the opportunity to build relationships and connect with other churches with a similar heart for mission and discipleship. Their official journey toward affiliation was supported by The Chapel Sydney as their sponsoring church.

As Anne Simpson, Head of Network Relationships, explains, “When a new church affiliates with our network—it is first and foremost affiliating with our churches. It’s not about joining an organisation—it’s about becoming part of a family of churches with shared purpose and vision.”

Heartbeat's journey has also included practical support from the network. In 2023, when the Sydney campus suddenly lost its meeting space, churches of Christ helped connect them to a newly renovated property in Merrylands. What began as a pragmatic solution became a gift to the local community.

As they were moving in, Pastor Joshua met a local man whose father had built the church 70 years ago. The man was moved to hear a church would be coming alive in the building again. “My father built this church 70 years ago.



Joshua Choi with the Heartbeat community in the Merrylands building.

I got baptised here 50 years ago. We moved away because the church diminished, but every time we pass by, we were praying that this church might come alive again.”

Since moving in, Heartbeat has hosted community events and celebrated baptisms in the building's long unused baptistry.

Heartbeat's affiliation is a meaningful step forward – not only for the church but for our network, as they open their homes in Merrylands, wider Sydney, Melbourne, and the Gold Coast, reaching young people and families, growing multi-ethnic communities, and living out the gospel through everyday relationships.

**As Pastor Stephen Cha put it, “We’re excited about Heartbeat joining our network of churches. This partnership is a way to further the Kingdom of God together.”**



# Our Network









# A Time To Break Ground: Collective 24



21 MAY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian and Josh Gibbon

**Over 220 ministering leaders, chaplains, elders, and staff from our network gathered at The Tops Conference Centre on 13 to 15 November 2024 for Collective, the annual gathering of churches of Christ in NSW & ACT.**

The theme of the week was ‘Breaking Ground’ – a galvanising of our members to raise discussions around the convening question:

**“How might we cultivate the soil of our network so that the life of God can flourish among us into the future?”**

The first evening was set aside for worship, communion, and reflection together, as delegates were led through a ‘Breaking Ground’ pathway curated by creatives from our churches.

Their artworks invited delegates to consider how God was inviting us personally and collectively to break new ground.

As the auditorium was filled that evening with the chorus, “Like a mighty storm, stir within my soul. Lord have your way, Lord have your way in me,” a storm broke out over Stanwell Tops, with thunder cracking and heavy rain beating on the corrugated iron roof. This moment struck many as a powerful experience of God’s presence.



Top: Exploring the ‘Breaking Ground’ pathway.  
Below: A time of connection over dinner and worship.





Panel discussions at Collective 2024.

Thursday morning began with a panel titled, “The Art of Conversation,” which explored and modelled the need for open, authentic, respectful dialogue and conversation in this age.

Later that afternoon, facilitator Michael Wood framed how to participate in Open Space Conversations. He outlined the principles, purpose and process of Open Space Technology and opened the floor for delegates to raise topics of conversation that mattered to them and post these on a wall for others to join in small groups.

The energy in the room was palpable as delegates were invited to lead and join conversations that they were passionate about.

Barry Tramacchi, Pastor of Northside Turramurra Campus, participated in these conversations and reflected, “The surprise for me was that every voice could be heard. That’s not something you get everywhere.”





First-time Collective attendee Clinton Waters, from Dareton Youth and Community Centre, reflected on how the conversations created an empowering space for himself as a new-comer.

“Open Space Technology placed everyone on a level playing field. I ended up leading a conversation on ‘Restoring Struggling Churches,’” he said. “Open Space Technology gave me the permission and encouragement to take a chance at starting a conversation where we were each able to learn something and encourage one another.”

During discussions, all ‘yarners’ were equals, as convenors of conversations were instructed to facilitate contributions from around the circle to foster meaningful and authentic dialogue.



From top image down: Thursday morning ‘yarn’.  
Daz Farrell’s keynote speech.  
Conference Executive.  
communion by candlelight.







A few simple principles guided this time, including that delegates were free to leave and join conversations as they pleased, seeking out conversations that stimulated them most.

Jacinta Kang, a children's ministry leader at Harvest Indonesian Church of Christ Auburn, shared that for her, the OST discussions revealed the potential for meaningful change in our network and communities.

"Open Space Technology discussions brought out what we really care about for the church," she said. "It's not just talk. It's about finding ways to make a difference."

Naomi Giles, Ministry Team Leader at NationsHeart Christian Community in Canberra, enjoyed the freedom and creativity encouraged by these conversations.

**"There was a chance to hear a much broader range of ideas and voices, that truly gave insight to the diversity of thought and practice across our network of churches and ministries," Naomi said.**

Thursday evening was the Network Celebration Night, which focused on the leaders, churches and entities of our network, recognising their incredible contributions and celebrating how God is using us all together. During the evening, the network welcomed three new Conference Executive board members and became acquainted with the newest church to seek affiliation: Heartbeat Church.

On Friday morning, open space conversations reconvened, allowing participants to continue exploring topics of conversation, and, finally, to create action groups for next steps and new initiatives.

The conversations of Collective 2024 aimed to reveal what is stirring in our network's 'soil'. As action groups take these conversations forward, we prayerfully anticipate that the ground broken together at Collective 2024 will reap more fruit in the year and years to come.




Open Space Technology leader, Michael Wood and discussion time.



From top image down:  
Children having fun in the kids program.  
The wall of topics for conversation.  
Ongoing group discussions.





A live music performance on a stage. Three musicians are seated on wooden chairs. The musician on the left is wearing a green shirt and playing an acoustic guitar. The musician in the center is wearing a dark shirt and playing a keyboard. The musician on the right is wearing a grey t-shirt and playing an acoustic guitar. A large screen in the background displays the lyrics of the song. The stage is lit with warm lights, and there are orange fabric decorations hanging from the ceiling.

**"Sow for yourselves  
righteousness;  
Reap in mercy;  
Break up your  
fallow ground,  
For *it is* time  
to seek the Lord,  
Till He comes  
and rains  
righteousness  
on you."**

—Hosea 10:12 (NKJV)





# Seen, Known, Loved: Young Adults Retreat 2025

29 JANUARY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian

**A network young adults retreat in January 2025 brought together 60 young adults from 16 different churches across our network and beyond for a weekend of renewal, connection and spiritual growth.**

Held at The Tops Conference Centre, the retreat called “El Roi: The God Who Sees Me” created an intentional space for attendees to unpack life’s challenges, rediscover their identity in Christ, and form lasting connections with one another.

Led by Peter and Brianna Sargent of Connect Church Engadine, the retreat was designed to equip young adults for their God-given purpose. Rooted in the truth that they are fully known and seen by El Roi (‘the God who sees us’); the sessions guided attendees on a journey of reflection and hope. From looking back on their past to embracing their future in Christ, the themes included: “The God Who Sees Who I Was,” “Who I Am,” “Who I Will Be,” and “The God Who Sees How I’ll Get There.”

“At its heart, the retreat was a journey: from the God who sees our past, to the God who knows who we are now, and then into the hope of the God who has a plan for who we will become,” Peter said.

**“We wanted this retreat to be more than an event, it was a chance for young adults to rediscover who they are in Christ, to hear Him say, ‘I see you, I know you, and I have a purpose for you.’”**

For Jai Phillips, 22, the retreat became a transformative moment of reassurance and belonging. Reflecting on his experience, he shared “The retreat reminded me that God sees me exactly as I am in every moment. It was a powerful reminder that I’m never alone, because I have God and an amazing community around me to lean on.”



**"I realised I don't have to rely on myself to get everything done. The retreat helped me see that God knows me fully, and I don't have to carry the weight of life alone."**

The retreat featured practical workshops led by panel speakers with expertise in different fields, adding depth and real-world application to the experience. "We wanted to equip young adults practically too. Through workshops on finances, mental health, relationships, and ministry, we aimed to show them that God's love speaks into every aspect of their lives," Peter said.

The retreat laid a powerful foundation for young adults to step into their God-given purpose, reassured that they are deeply seen, fully known and loved by God. This pilot program united a community of believers who are committed to walking alongside one another in faith, fostering connection, hope and a renewed sense of their identity in Christ.



Top: Worshipping together.  
Bottom: Peter Sargent sharing.



# Uprising 2025: *Flourishing In Faith & Rooted In Christ*

29 JANUARY 2025

—By Garry Sanossian

## **A record 70 young people gathered at The Tops Conference Centre in April for Uprising 2025, a three-day youth discipleship camp.**

This year's theme, Flourish, encouraged young people to build stronger foundations of faith and discover their identity in Christ. Run by the State Youth Team and a team of emerging and seasoned leaders, Uprising created space for spiritual growth and reflection for young people in year 7-12.

"If we want to have a relationship with God that flourishes, we need to be spending time with God preparing the soil and watering it," said State Youth Team member Tina Phillips (Northside, North Turrumurra campus) who, along with Brianna and Peter Sargent, (Connect Church, Engadine) provided key oversight for the event.

"[Exploring the theme] 'Flourish' is looking at the fact that we can have a relationship with God that not only grows, but flourishes" she said.

The camp program included input sessions, small group discussions, adventure activities and workshops: all designed to guide young people as they took their own spiritual journey through the week.

Brianna Sargent explained, "we journeyed through the idea of having soil, being able to water that soil, having a good firm foundation, weeding out all the things that are putting up barriers, and then guarding our garden"

Throughout the event, young people experienced meaningful worship and teaching designed to offer spiritual and practical pathways to deepen the spiritual lives of the young people gathered.

Workshops, run by youth leaders from the CCNSWACT network, covered a range of topics. Sessions titled "Rooted in Christ" and "Kingdom Impact" focused on spiritual foundation and mission-minded service. "Seasons of Growth" and "Flourishing in Prayer" explored different life stages and prayer. The topic "Generational Flourishing" focused on mentorship and creating nurturing environments, and "Thriving in Leadership" addressed sustainable ministry rhythms and avoiding burnout.

Reflecting on the atmosphere, participant Lily shared how the experience was shaping her faith journey.

**"I love worshipping and learning about Jesus. It's amazing to be surrounded by so many Christians who are all just great."**

For Harry, another participant, a standout moment came during a workshop session.

"I enjoyed what Georgia said the other night. I really liked how she used flowers as a metaphor, saying how if they're not in the ground they're going to die and wither away, which is kind of like your relationship with God," he recalled.





The camp featured a visual representation of spiritual transformation through a 'testimony tree' where campers documented their experiences. "The testimony tree started the week bare... bone dry... just a bunch of branches. But throughout the week, we saw leaves appear: each one a young person's testimony," Leader, Peter Sargent explained.

These testimonies reflected significant spiritual moments.

**"Amazing testimonies have already come out," Brianna Sargent said. "Kids have felt safe here and have asked Jesus into their lives. The soil's been prepared and seeds are starting to grow."**

With the highest attendance at an Uprising Camp so far, the event represented a significant milestone for the network.

"Seeing our churches come together for Uprising has, for us, been what the network is all about. We have people that have come from Perth and Victoria to come to this camp," Peter said. "I'm just so excited to see that as a movement we're growing, especially in our youth stream."

Leaders believe the spiritual momentum built during Uprising will continue to bear fruit as participants return to their local congregations. "We're excited for what God will do – not only here at camp – but what He will continue to do across the local churches," Brianna said.



"As part of our initiative to support and uplift our young people, we engaged in a meaningful activity where campers created a pot plant together to be sent back to their local churches. These living gifts serve as both a reminder and a symbol—encouraging ongoing prayer and support for our youth, while also representing the act of releasing them back into their church communities to grow, thrive, and continue their faith journeys."

"We know and have confirmation that the seeds have been planted in good soil, which is exciting."

With these gifts in mind, Tina echoed this sentiment, "Our prayer is that Uprising Camp has helped equip and inspire the young people to return home and continue to stay connected to God, to keep putting into practice the things they have learned and that they will continue to grow and flourish in their local churches."



**B&B**

taste and see





# *From Ache To Courage:* **The Story And Launch Of Creative Journal *Taste And See***

06 FEB 2025

—By Garry Sanossian and Heidi Wright



**In this season, our network has made it a priority to recover the voices and value of women. One of the first fruits of this intention, is the formation of a creative cohort of twelve women known as Belly & Bones. For a year, this cohort has shared stories, engaged in creative journeys, and walked together through layers of healing and empowerment.**

A major part of their journey was about engaging with first-nations culture. Through this, they created space for deep listening to the stirrings of the Spirit, connection with country and the stories of each other, as well as exploring their unique giftings.

Between the 'Bellies' (as they're now known), a collection of creative expression began to naturally take shape – eventually becoming a journal of collected works of art, poetry and prose.

The journal, titled *Taste and See*, presents a journey of experiences and reflections that give voice to “ache”, “story”, “wonder”, “hope” and “courage”.

## **The Journey Towards *Taste And See***

The Belly & Bones journey began in March 2024, as the Bellies gathered for their first retreat at Bundeena House, wondering what God might draw out of them. Rooted in the *Jeremiah 20:9* (NLT) description of a “fire in their belly” and the “burning in their bones,” this retreat offered a sacred space to reflect, connect with God and explore spiritual and creative callings. Women were invited to share their stories, nurture each other's creative gifts and cultivate a vibrant group of faith and artistry together.

At that first gathering, the Bellies encountered both the courage and vulnerability of belonging. Meeting new faces carried a natural hesitancy, but the atmosphere quickly became one of peace and connection.

“Meeting new people always comes with a bit of vulnerability,” Vicki Keogh, one of the Bellies, shared.

When they met up again in Dalby, Queensland, this bond deepened, not just among themselves but with the wider community. This on-country experience hosted by First Nations guides became an immersion into a shared purpose where they found themselves embraced as family.

“It was just such a blessing,” Vicki reflected. “I felt truly privileged to be part of this journey. There was such a deep sense of care for everyone and it was evident that every person mattered.”

For the Bellies, their time at Dalby became a pathway of discovery, learning from First Nations wisdom, permaculture principles and bringing country and kin into dialogue with the creative pieces they were working on.

**“At the beginning, I wouldn’t have called myself a creative person,” Vicki reflected. “But through this journey, I’ve come to see that we’re all creative because God, our Creator, has made us that way.”**

Vicki soon realised that writing became a powerful way to understand her spiritual journey. Putting thoughts into words turned reflection into revelation, shedding light on how God is at work in her life.

“By writing, I really unpacked my journey more,” Vicki explained.

**“Putting my thoughts into words made it come alive. It helped me recognise what God has been doing, especially in this last season of my life.”**

“I’ve seen so much growth, not just in myself, but in all of us.”

Between the Bellies, a collection of their creative expressions began to take shape – eventually becoming the journal *Taste and See*.

Vicki believes this journal carries more than just words or art on a page, it holds the potential to stir hearts and open eyes to how God is moving.

“I know God is going to use everything within the journal,” Vicki said. “Each person who reads it will experience it in a different way, but my hope, my faith, is that it will be life changing. That as people taste and see our journeys, they might also glimpse what their own journey with God looks like.”

Out of this deeply formative journey, the Bellies believe this journal has a unique and significant role to play in hope-sharing with our network. Bellies member, Loani Falconer shared, “I hope that something in them (the readers) may be drawn to attend to what God is stirring in their hearts, to not only read the journal but to have conversations about the various ways they experience God and walk their own journey.”



The Bellies cohort at retreat.



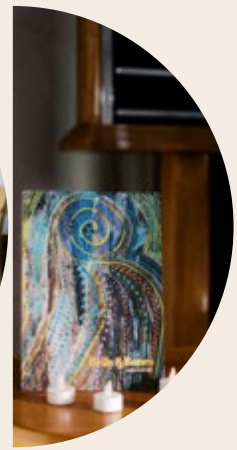




The vibrant launch crowd.



The Bellies gathered at the launch.



## ***Taste And See Journal Launch: A Prophetic Gift For The Church***

The journal was officially launched in March 2025. A vibrant crowd gathered to get the first look and hear first-hand from the Bellies who brought it to life.

One attendee, Di from Connect Church Engadine, shared how she felt after the launch. “I was in total awe of the gifts that God has given to different people and I was so thankful that it was given a platform where they could share what they were given from God to share with us. That just blew me away.”

Nick Wight from Global Mission Partners, who has closely followed the Belly & Bones project, agreed it was inspiring.

**“When somebody shares a bit of their story with you, it’s a deeply sacred act and it calls us to respond in a similar way.”**

Billy ‘Jangala’ Williams, who offered an Acknowledgement of Country on the day, was a very special guest. As part of the dhiiyaan mob, Billy and his wife Vicki hosted the Bellies on retreat last year at Bethel Farm in Dalby. His face lit up as he spoke about what was shared at the launch and the process behind *Taste and See*.

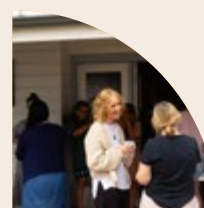
He said, “What we saw today and what we had the privilege at Bethel to see unfolding, is each of these women giving of themselves into what they were producing.

There’s the creative side of that, but it’s [also] that deeply spiritual act of putting a bit of yourself in it.”

**After hearing the story of how *Taste and See* came together, guests relished the opportunity to see inside the journal for the first time.**

Guest, Pauline, said, “It’s a very rich piece of work that you could just pick up and read over and over again. It’s everyday people with their pain and their struggles and yet they love God through it all and they can express that in such a beautiful way.”

Jacqueline Chin, from SeeChange Community Church felt connected to the project after hearing the Bellies talk about their journey ‘from ache to courage’. She said, “One of the things that I particularly love about this was the journey, the process of it ‘from ache to courage’. For me, one of the things I’m looking forward to about this journal is to go through it in that process and feel it... just ride it, ride that wave.”





Naomi Giles sharing at the launch event.



Graphic designer Ben Taylor and contributor Carly Cassidy hold copies of *Taste and See*.

## What's Stirring Now?

The journal carries deeply personal expressions from each of the Bellies and, as member Carly Cassidy explained, that sharing is designed to stir something more in the reader. "We really hope that it inspires people to listen to their spirit and to find what's burning in their belly and their bones and then hopefully we get to hear the stories come back."

"The journal is an expression of our mission and a witness to how God is moving through the creativity in our network," said Jo Huntington, one of the Bellies and Network Pioneering Coordinator.

**"It's not just a collection of art and prose but a platform for storytelling, inspiration and empowerment."**



The cover of *Taste and See*.

Reflecting on her desire to see this journal come to life and be shared, Kym Dixon (the Network Resource Team's Health Support and Formation Leader) said, "I was drawn to the Bible, where God chose women to be the first messengers of resurrection life, having a sense that in this season of change for the church, stirring inside women - in their bellies and bones, was prophetic insight to influence the way we (the Church) show up for the next season. So, this journal also becomes a witness statement to how the Spirit is moving in this time and place."

Billy left us with a powerful statement at the launch:

**"I think it's a prophetic piece to the broader body."**



To view *Taste and See* online, visit [ccnswact.org.au/belly-and-bones](https://ccnswact.org.au/belly-and-bones) or scan the QR code.

Limited copies of the journal have been gifted to each of the network's churches. If you would like to enquire about your own copy, please contact [hello@ccnswact.org.au](mailto:hello@ccnswact.org.au) for more information.







Sunset Dam  
at Bethel Farm, Dalby  
—by Tanya Tindale.

**“For a change is coming  
so prepare for the flood;  
*There’s a fire in my belly  
and a burning in my bones.*  
Set a light for new beginnings  
and a turning of the soil.  
Cry for justice and redemption  
in a world defined by hurt;  
give me courage yet to speak  
and yet be humble to receive it.”**

—Lyrics from “Belly & Bones”  
written and performed by Sarah Su.



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