



NEWS, ARTICLES AND STORIES

FROM

BAPTIST NZ

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SOPHIE BOND

Baptist kids enriching worship in Aotearoa

Sophie Bond is a freelance writer and editor from South West Baptist Church, Ōtautahi (Christchurch) and is a member of the Baptist NZ Editorial Advisory Group.

Who's powerful like 8000 bears? Whose love is like a big fluffy blanket?

According to Christchurch's South West Baptist Church Kids' Band, these are good ways to describe a strong and loving God. Bears and blankets are just some of the refreshingly creative lyrics in four newly released singles from the ten-piece worship band aged between 8 and 14 years old.

Musicians Ally Palmer and Matty Stevenson are part of the South West Baptist Church music team and were instrumental in guiding the Kids' Band through the process of writing, recording and producing the four singles and one music video. Ally says that after releasing a church-wide album (Welcome the Stranger) in 2019, the idea came up to do something similar with the children.

"We're really pumped about locally written songs. There's a lot of kids' music coming from America and Australia, but how cool is it that our tamariki are writing these songs. It's an extra resource for churches of Aotearoa to access."

The church has a history of having a kids' worship band that plays at Sunday School but also leads worship in the main service on occasion. Ally says the children who join the band need to be actively working on their skills and taking music lessons. Once they outgrow the kids' band, many move on to the church's Youth Band, which plays in the Sunday evening service.

Comprising three singers, two synths, three guitars, a drummer



Around the Table is a podcast inspiring us with ways to grow meaningful intergenerational relationships where faith can flourish. You can listen to the audio episodes online: baptist.nz/podcasts

Do you have any stories of gospel renewal in your community?

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Feedback

If you would like to give feedback on this newsletter, write to our Communications Director at the Baptist Support Centre: **P O Box 12 149, Penrose, Auckland 1642, New Zealand.**

and a bass player, the band worked with Ally and Matt to write the songs, with input from the wider Sunday School crew for some of the very fun lyrics. The group has plenty of practice time on Sunday mornings, and Matt says they bring a lot of energy to worship sessions. “Now the kids are jumping around and engaged in singing songs about the fruits of the spirit – it’s pretty cool,” he says. “Our sound guy wants to do sound with the kids because it’s more fun in their space.”

Band member 10-year-old Barnaby Domigan says singing fulfils two of his passions. “I really enjoy music [...] and then doing two things I love - singing to God and [making] music - it’s just really exciting to be in Kids’ Band”.

Ally says the band loves the experience of performing as a group and getting the chance to record. “And now that the songs are out, they are like ‘what, we’re on Spotify!’. We had an EP release day here at church, and everyone heard their songs. Everyone loves seeing the kids worshipping and playing music.”

Along with releasing four singles, the band have also recorded a music video for ‘Gives us Love’, complete with actions and clear, catchy lyrics. Ally and Matt acknowledge the support of the wider church, with recording studio access kindly donated and production paid for by the church. Each song required about 50 hours of work from inception to release on streaming services.

An exciting development has been to have the singles included on Radio Rhema’s Sunday Kids Club show playlist.

Unfailing Love, Trinity, Gives us Love and Wonderful, from South West Songs are available across all streaming services.

Photo: L-R Barnaby, Amelia, George, Evie, Rose, Sophia, Frankie, Ava, Finn & Zeta

CHRISTINE STRIDE

A mechanism to ensure our people and places are safe: Post-Hui update on ‘Big Bite 3’

Christine Stride is Executive Assistant to the National Leader and works at the Baptist National Support Centre in Auckland. She is part of Titirangi Baptist Church.



Of the four ‘Big Bites’ offered at this year’s National Hui, Bite #3 gave us a whole lot to chew on. What follows is a summary of this session at Hui on 4 November 2023 at Manukau City Baptist Church.

Presenter and employment lawyer Geraldine Crudge asked whether Baptist ecclesiology* was fit for purpose in 2023 given the increasing number of complex issues arising within the Baptist Church over the past few years.

Crudge described four scenarios based on real issues she and her law firm have dealt with in recent years while helping the Baptist National Support Centre. Each scenario involved a pastor behaving inappropriately, and raised important questions as to what action the Baptist Union could take to deal with those issues and to prevent similar issues arising. (Find the pre-Hui reading containing the four scenarios here.)

The panel discussion that followed supported the idea of constitutional changes, such as compulsory registration for pastors. However, some of the Hui delegates worried those changes could mean loss of autonomy for churches and, at the extreme, even set them on a slippery slope toward acceptance of un-Christian practices.

Summary of the panel and delegate discussion
On the panel were pastor Steven Goulstone (pastor at Wellington South Baptist Church), Carey Baptist College Principal John Tucker, Northern Association Regional Leader Reti Ah-Voa and Geraldine Crudge.

National Leader Charles Hewlett opened the discussion by asking for the panel’s reactions to Crudge’s examples.

Their collective response was one of grief and sadness.

John Tucker noted that Deuteronomy talks about protecting the widows, the orphans and the

vulnerable people. “This would grieve [Jesus] and it needs to grieve us.”

Grief was also on Reti Ah-Voa’s mind. “These are the shepherds of the flock. As a Regional Leader it’s been hugely frustrating not to be able to check on a church’s wellbeing and welfare. At what point do we become negligent because we can’t act because we don’t have enough intel?”

Charles Hewlett reiterated the consequences mentioned by Crudge that often arise out of local church freedom: the high expectations on elders; the fact that there is a perception that the Baptist Union can actually do something in a situation when in fact leaders can only influence; that there is no central reporting system; and that power sits with each local church meaning it is sometimes hard for there to be objectivity.

He asked whether the panel felt comfortable with that sort of freedom, and asked again if the constitution did enough in situations like these.

The panel agreed that for a local church ‘freedom’ did not mean ‘unbridled autonomy’, and that Baptists had always recognised the need for and the benefits of associating together. It was more a point of associating well - ensuring pastors and churches were well trained and well-resourced to deal with issues.

Many pastors involved in the issues Crudge described are new to the Union or untrained, and who choose not to associate or attend pastor cluster meetings. They don’t have a good relationship with their Regional Leader, and their church may have a weak or non-existent eldership/board.

Also, Baptist churches can be ‘catcher’ churches with many people coming from other denominations meaning they can include those whose understanding of church practice is informed by their previous churches, which can create vulnerabilities.

A further issue was that of public perception of the Baptist Union. The public believe the Baptist Union has power to take action but according to our constitution all it can do is suspend a church from the Union which is an extreme option.

The public expect justice and believe the church holds itself to a higher moral code, therefore they expect churches to have higher standards than a

secular organisation.

While some people may not like the word ‘compulsory’, as in ‘compulsory registration’ for pastors, a compulsory system looking out for the safety of people is both for those being accused and for the victim.

John Tucker noted that compulsory registration is not a revolutionary idea: most Baptist Unions around the world require registration and certain standards to be met for someone to become a minister in a local Baptist church.

We anticipate the report and recommendations from the New Zealand Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, to be released in March 2024.

One of our college lecturers said abuse and patriarchy often went hand in hand - something the Baptist church should be addressing and which it had the theological tools to address. This comment received applause.

The following statement was shown to delegates:

Our faith community supports the Baptist Union developing a mechanism that might override aspects of our autonomy, in order to help keep our people and places safe.

The panel were all in favour of the statement, however delegate reactions were mixed. Some wanted to make registration compulsory for pastors right now, others desired consultation first, several were completely against it.

Those who supported the statement did so because they saw the need for a safety net – for themselves as well as potential victims.

Another delegate and recently appointed elder said they felt “deeply exposed” in the eldership role and questioned how the church could even expect to attract elders and youth leaders under these current circumstances.

One delegate was concerned about possible centralisation of the churches in the Baptist Union, worrying it could lead to extreme situations. “Registration could create a Trojan horse for many different things. How do we avoid that?”

However, another delegate said there was no perceived breach of independence in compulsory registration or a central reporting or vetting

system. “There is more of a problem if a body outside the [local] church thinks it can dismiss a pastor, because that outside body is not [the pastor’s] employer.”

Another delegate believed weak leaders and depowered congregations were more an issue than loss of autonomy of the local church and spoke against giving the Baptist Union power over pastoral appointments.

There was overwhelming support from the Assembly for the National Support Centre to develop a mechanism to help keep our people and places safe, starting with creation of a Working Group.

This Group has been formed and has begun developing options for Assembly Council to consider.

*Ecclesiology is the study of the church which includes the structures and procedures a church or denomination puts in place to organise itself.

Photo: 'Big Bite 3' panel at the Baptist National Hui 2023. Taken by Morgan Dews

KATIE KUTTRISS

Carey’s SENDing 2023



One aspect of Carey Baptist College life that we value highly is our commitment and calling to train women and men for pastoral leadership. Over a three-year period, our Baptist training pastors commit to a deep, personal and relational journey of formation. They commit to profound life change, to risk-taking, and to faith stretching in service to Jesus and his church.

On 14 October, we celebrated our 2023 graduates of Carey’s Youth Pastoral Leadership & Pastoral Leadership formation programme.

These trained pastors have given themselves – on top of their academics – to personal formation,

mentoring, cohort peer development, and supervised service within their communities and churches.

On behalf of her cohort, Katie Cuttriss had this to say...

Kia ora koutou, Ko Katie tōku ingoa. My name is Katie, and I have the honour of speaking on behalf of our cohort tonight. Thank you all so much for coming to help us celebrate the last three years of our training!

Through this process, each one of us has been called, welcomed, equipped, cared for, and challenged. Even this week, as we have been led to reflect on the last three years, which produced the 8 of us standing here, I have been taken outside of my comfort zone and into the world of maths.

I’ve taken out my abacus and done some work. By my count, we have spent 132 hours together on Tuesday mornings, 19 days together at intensives, and we’ve had roughly 15 guest lecturers in that time. We have done nine integrated presentations for each other, including one this morning. And we have participated in many, many personality tests, reflective essays, and mid-year and end-of-year reviews.

There have been 13 churches served through our placements, each contributing to our formation. Now, if we all did what we were supposed to, there would have been approximately 144 mentoring sessions and 264 supervision meetings throughout those placements! As a cohort, we’ve journeyed alongside one another through two weddings, one baby, a few job changes and relocations!

It has been a long journey to get to this stage tonight, with twists and turns and lockdowns along the way. The maths I’ve attempted to do has largely focused on what we did to get here, and that, of course, is only part of the equation. It is unquantifiable; it is simply beyond measure to record the support, grace, and encouragement given to us by many in this room and beyond, which has meant the eight can be standing here tonight.

Firstly, we acknowledge our God, our Creator, to whom all honour, glory, and thanksgiving rightly belongs. We have truly been clay in the hands of the potter, shaped beyond our comprehension and provided for in ways that never

fail to amaze.

Second on the list, we want to acknowledge the Baptist Union of New Zealand and National Leader Charles Hewlett (President Ravi Musuku). Thank you for receiving us as freshly certified Pastoral Leaders and for investing in our training from day one. We look forward to our continued walk with God and with one another in the Baptist whānau, the team of 40,000.

We acknowledge Carey Baptist College: our Principal, John Tucker, the staff and the teaching team. We have benefitted immensely from your friendship and investment into us, whether through classroom debates, chats over lunch, library support or yet another assignment extension. Thank you for your valuable insight and guidance in teaching us how the theology of our textbooks applies and integrates into our practice of ministry. We are better off personally and pastorally because of the way you have walked with us.



There are some Carey staff members in particular who need to be thanked. That is our ministry training team. Our fearless leaders holding our hands and, at times, dragging us through. Jonny, your casual and adaptive attitude has been a gift, and we thank you for your ability to dream big for us when we haven't been able to dream for ourselves. We look forward to our ongoing friendship.

Sam, your example of vulnerable and passionate leadership has been inspiring, bringing fun and good times to all you do while also caring deeply and intentionally about the process that forms us.

And the brains behind the operation, Morgan and Jess. The cups of coffee, words of encouragement, chocolate, lollies, and admin skills you have offered us over the years have brought nuance and beauty to our journey.

But of course, all of this training would just be talk if trusting churches from within the Union hadn't boldly taken us students in, putting our theory into practice, to let the rubber meet the road. This is where the gold lies. The learning we have done sitting in pews, in elders' meetings, sitting around the table for Sunday lunch or over a cup of coffee, or playing games with your youth has been invaluable. It has been our joy and privilege to serve as student pastors in the various church congregations and youth groups around the country. Thank you for the trust, opportunities, and stories you have gifted us with. Your collaboration with us and with Carey has equipped and shaped our hearts as we prepare to step out to serve the collective church.

And to our families, friends, and loved ones. We are indebted to you. Thank you for your sacrifice in supporting us and listening to us rehearse our sermons! I managed to fall asleep while Dan was reading one of his drafts to me, so I know some of the toll it may have taken on many of you. Thank you for the allowance you have given us to commit ourselves to this journey of formation, even when it has cost you. Thank you for walking with us and cheering us on while we've pursued this call on our lives.

And to our friends who have been a part of our formation for different seasons along the way. Viv, Ben, Marcus. We look forward to celebrating your own SENDing next year. Caleb, Jono, Neven and Blake, each of you have added to the DNA of who we are as a cohort, and while you're not up here with us tonight, you're still a part of us.

My own journey to formal training began in 2018 when I was leading at Central Easter Camp, and I found myself in Sam Kilpatrick's seminar on discernment. At Queen's Birthday [Leadership Training Weekend] later that year, I accosted Sam with follow-up questions from his talk that I had been thinking about ever since.

Sam, with all his pastoral sensitivity, wisdom and theological expertise... shrugged. Over that Queen's Birthday weekend, Dan and I joined Sam for breakfast to find out about this magical place where people might actually answer these questions and help us press into new ones. And somewhere along the way, through God's faithfulness and

wisdom, we've ended up here – with these beautiful people. Called, equipped, and ready to keep discerning how we might best honour God in whatever the next season holds.

He honore, he kororia ke te Atua.

All honour and glory to God.

Photos provided by Carey Baptist College.

CHRIS BERRY

Update: The sale of our college



Following our update on 31 July 2023, this is an update on the successful sale of the properties.

For some years, our theological and pastoral leadership training college, Carey Baptist College, has been exploring how it might invest or develop its campus at 473/475 Great South Road, Penrose (Auckland). The primary objective is to generate significant new income streams to support the ongoing work of Carey in training leaders for our faith communities. Over time, it has become apparent that the best course of action is to sell the current campus and move to another site.

We can now confirm that the campus and offices at 473 and 475 Great South Road have been sold. The process was a competitive one with a number of offers made on the property. After negotiation, the offer that was accepted was from the City Impact Church – this will become the new site of their Central/Southern campus. They will occupy the neighbouring site, and eventually the college site, within the next two years. We will be remaining on the site for up to two years, giving us ample opportunity to identify a new site and complete any fit-out that might be required.

The current site of Carey was formally opened in June 1994 after moving from Victoria Avenue, Remuera, where the college had been located since 1954. This next step marks the beginning of

another chapter in the unfolding story of our college and our commitment to ministry training and formation. If the history of this story interests you, you can read about it in *An unfolding story: a history of Carey Baptist College*, by Martin Sutherland and Laurie Guy (2014), available for purchase online here:

baptistresearch.org.nz/archer-press-store

A relocation and investment project of this size could be enhanced with financial support from within the Baptist family of churches. If you would like to explore how you might invest or contribute, or if you have any questions about this project, please email Chris Berry: chris.berry@carey.ac.nz or phone +64 9 525 4017.

GREG KNOWLES

Hui 2023: Election results



Here are the 2023 election results for those re-elected or elected to President roles, Assembly Council, Mission Council, Carey Baptist College Board, and the Baptist Women's Board. Votes were submitted at the Baptist National Hui (2-4 November 2023) by voting delegates representing our Baptist churches.

Thank you to all those people who were willing to be nominated, willing to serve our union of churches in these ways.

President

(Presidential term 2023/24)

The President has a valuable role to play as a representative of our movement. They participate at a governance level on the Assembly Council and Mission Council. As they visit regions around the country, they encourage and exhort our pastors and support the ministry of our Union of churches through encouragement and prayer. What they actually do is shaped each year by the skills and

experience each individual President brings to the role.



Susan Osborne

Susan is a member of Trinity Baptist Church, Titahi Bay and was nominated as President by Assembly Council.

“I see this as another opportunity to serve the Baptists of New Zealand and I will bring a strong cross cultural emphasis in any contribution I can make.”

Susan has had a long history with the Baptist movement. She has served overseas as an NZBMS global worker for many years and worked in the national office of NZBMS. She is pastoral, caring and a person who looks around for what needs doing and does it.

Susan has a deep love of God, a passion for seeing people changed by Jesus, knowledge of what it means to be Baptist, Biblical wisdom, history of the Baptist movement and people, good listening skills, and compassion for people.



Vice President

(Presidential term 2023/24)

Allan Taylor

Allan is a member of Eastgate Christian Centre and was nominated by Andy Shudall.

“I’m passionate about seeing our Baptist Churches thrive – bringing gospel renewal to people and places in their local neighbourhoods. I resonate strongly with our National Leader’s vision that our churches be characterised by robust leadership, growing disciples, authentic worship, and heathy resources”.

Assembly Council

Our Assembly Council acts in a governance role. It is responsible for establishing policies and practices consistent with both the determinations of the annual Assembly of the churches (our National Hui each November) and in between Assembly/Hui for the wellbeing of our movement of faith communities and churches.



Greg Motu

Greg is a member of Hosanna Dannevirke Baptist Church and was nominated by Hosanna Dannevirke.

“I love the diversity of the Baptist family and am keen that voices from minority and mainstream communities, big and small churches, country churches and urban churches, are heard and help shape our future”.



Rachelle Martin

Rachelle is a member of Ilam Baptist Church and was nominated by the Ilam Baptist Church Governance Team.

“To this role, I would bring more than 30 years’ experience of leadership in both church and non-church contexts, an ability to work collaboratively, a desire to work as an active ally of the marginalised, and a commitment to listen to, serve and partner with people of diverse faith perspectives and experiences”.



Das Premadas

Das is a member of Ōtāhuhu Community Baptist Church and was nominated by Ōtāhuhu Community Baptist Church.

“I can count on the many years of experience I have been at governance tables at Church, at a local school and also on Assembly Council”.



Sarah Beisly

Sarah is a member of Paeroa Baptist Church and was nominated by Bryce Millar.

“I am a good fit for this role, as I bring a passion for and commitment to gospel renewal with people and places, which would further strengthen Assembly Council’s governance, to ensure the Baptist Union achieves this strategic goal”.



Ravanetta (Maiava) Sititi

Ravanetta is a member of Hosanna Lighthouse Baptist Church and was nominated by Hosanna Lighthouse Baptist Church.

“My heart has always been for our Samoan Baptist churches to excel in the things of the Lord and I believe that my knowledge of our culture and my ability to work with people of all ages and backgrounds will allow for our Samoan Baptist churches to break traditional barriers and stereotypes and bring a breakthrough that I know God has for our Pasifika people”.

Assembly Council members halfway through their two-year term:

Blue Bradley, Angus Budge, Rod Robson

Mission Council

Mission Council supports and helps to guide the work of Arotahi (our global mission arm). They are the encouragers and inspirers of hand-carved mission across our Baptist whānau. Kelly Enright at Arotahi said, *“We are proud of the different skills and identities that are represented on our Council and are thankful for those who are committing to stand again in this season of change and stepping into the new”.*



Bradley Nicolson

Bradley is a member of Oxford Terrace Baptist Church and was nominated by the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church Elders. *“I bring skills in strategic*

thinking, governance, finance & project management but it is my love for the Bible and Jesus that stirs me to be radical in my love for God’s people and places”.

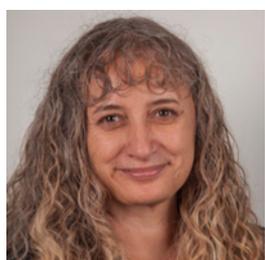


Eduardo Mendonca

Eduardo is a member of New Generation Church and was nominated by the New Generation Church Elders.

“I am passionate about

missions and have always felt God drawing me to contribute to this ministry. I firmly believe that my experience, South American roots, and current involvement in pastoring a multicultural church are unique characteristics that will add value to the Mission Council Board”.



Denny Wilson-Takaanini

Denny is a member of Māngere Baptist Church and was nominated by John Catmur.

“Working within community

organisations governance and iwi trust structures for over thirty years gives you good ears, and hands, and an understanding of the rhythms required to work together in a manner that creates and encourages regular miracles for the organisation and people you are serving as a board member of Mission Council.

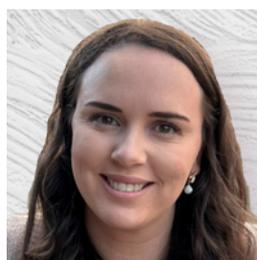
This joy of undertaking your best steps alongside of others with different gifts and achieving or strengthening the joint vision – the joint dance, is the blessing of serving in the centre of Gods will each day gives us all. This intergenerational service is an honour”.



Ravi Musuku

Ravi is a member of Balmoral Community Baptist Church in Auckland and was nominated by Devasundara Das Premadas.

“I have a deep passion for mission and a good grasp and understanding of mission to Asian and Islamic countries”.



Katie Kingsthaite

Katie is a member of South West Baptist Church in Christchurch and was nominated by South West Baptist Church.

“I have personal and professional experience alongside a deep passion for the mahi of mutual transformation. A commitment to supporting the shaping of Arotahi and the wider baptist movement to reflect on our legacy, live meaningfully in our present and courageously dream for our future”.

Mission Council members halfway through their two-year term:

Susan Barrett, Stu Hastings, Brian Cochran, Ruby Duncan.

Carey Baptist College Board

The Carey Board is responsible for the governance of our theological College. This board needs members who will help the College align its life and programmes with its mission and strategic plan.



Grant Harris

Grant is a member of Windsor Park Baptist Church in Auckland and was nominated by Windsor Park Baptist Church.

“I’ve been part of the Carey board for 20 years, so bring strong institutional knowledge to the table”.



Mark Powell

Mark is a member of Whangaparāoa Baptist Church and was nominated by Whangaparāoa Baptist Church.

“My business experience combined with my mix of pastoral theological experience adds a helpful dimension to the Carey board”.



Santhosh George

Santhosh is a member of Ormiston Community Baptist Church and is nominated by Ormiston Community Baptist Church.

“My cross-disciplinary background and strategic thinking skills will be useful in bringing a unique perspective to the table”.

Carey Baptist College Board members halfway through their two-year term:

Chris Beales-White, Adrienne Cleland, Clifford Thompson.

Baptist Women’s Board

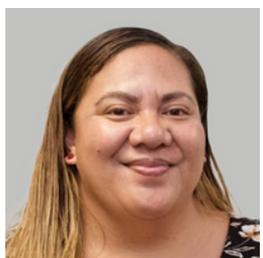
The Baptist Women’s Board is passionate about seeing women grow in leadership skills and changing structures so that they have equal opportunities to serve in their calling on a local church and national level.



Roi Nu Maran

Roi Nu is a member of Windsor Park Baptist Church in Auckland and was nominated by Windsor Park Baptist Church.

“I have a strong passion to help and support women who come from different backgrounds and cultures, and I hope that my own experience will help them to see the big picture of God’s plan for lives”.



Tanya Lameta

Tanya is a member of Hosanna Lighthouse Baptist Church in Auckland and was nominated by Hosanna Lighthouse Baptist Church.

“It is time for Pasifika women to see a

representation of themselves in leadership spaces, where they can confidently trust that their voices are being spoken for with confidence and courage. I will bring this confidence and courage to the role”.



Jane Cong Ye

Jane is a member of Oxford Terrace Baptist Church and was nominated by Carron Stevenson.

“I think the gifts and the experiences I have may bring something new to the team. I will bring the way God leading me of serving the body of Christ to role”.



Robyn Bloomfield

Robyn is a member of Avonhead Baptist Church in Christchurch and was nominated by Martin Sutherland.

“I think I would be good for this role because I have a passion to see women flourish, and because I could bring my varied experiences and my organisational skills to the role”.



Jan Ozanne

Jan is a member of Otūmoetai Baptist Church and was nominated by Scott Muspratt.

“I am a great communicator, provider of resources, encourager, and a team player who is passionate about helping our Baptist women to thrive and be all that God has called them to be”.

Existing Baptist Women's Board members:

Iunisi Katoa, Nicole Viljoen, Olwyn Dickson, Merita Lau Young, Andrea Page, Beulah Wood.

Thank you to all these members of our New Zealand Baptist whānau serving in these roles. We appreciate you.

Cover photo: Susan Osborne with our former Baptist President, Ravi Musuku. Taken by Morgan Dews.



Please recycle or pass on this newsletter.

ROD ROBSON

Assembly Council Meeting December 2023



Rod Robson, the Chair of Assembly Council, brings you this update from the recent Assembly Council meeting held last week (7 December 2023).

Hi peeps,

Your 2024 Assembly Council met for the first time last week. We began with a pōwhiri from Te Whāriki welcoming people to the Assembly Council table. Newbies include Allan Taylor (East Auckland; Vice-President), Greg Motu (Dannevirke), Sarah Beisly (Paeroa), Ravanetta Sititi (South Auckland), Rachelle Martin (Christchurch), Susan Osborne (Porirua; President).

We have a breadth of experience, cultures, genders, generations, and geographic locations. As a council with a lot of new faces we need to get to know each other well. Since the meeting, the council has also had an informal gathering over zoom (we are spread from Auckland in the north to Christchurch in the south).

The Assembly Council represents the Baptist movement of 240 churches at a governance level. We are your board, elected by delegates from our faith communities at the National Hui. The things we discuss are wide and varied, and the decisions we make are on your behalf as we together shape our future as Baptists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

At our first meeting, we spent some time orientating ourselves to the structures of the Union. This time of 'induction' was especially helpful for new members and included an overview of core documents such as The Baptist Union of New Zealand Incorporation Act 1923, the Constitution, structure diagrams that show how all of our boards are linked, and even the Assembly

Council Charter which guides how the council operates. It's a lot to take in!

At each meeting the council receives reports from senior leadership, such as the National Leader and the Operations and Finance Director, and from Carey Baptist College and Arotahi (our global missions organisation). We had an update from the National Hui 'Big Bites', the first step of which is creating a working group looking at Big Bite 3, a mechanism for keeping our people and places safe. The kōrero at National Hui is already shaping our future, with more to come in 2024.

Some of the decisions that we made during the December meeting include things like confirming the date for the 2024 National Hui, which will be held from 7 – 9 November 2024 at Rangiora Baptist Church. We also discussed correspondence received by the council and what responses might be required from us. We made appointments to subgroups that are helping the council to oversee the welfare of the Union, such as the Audit, Finance and Risk Committee that ensures that risks across the movement are being identified and managed proactively. We value expert support.

I'm looking forward to 2024. I think Assembly Council is in a strong position, alongside the National Leader and the many working groups and boards, to work toward the things we discussed together as a Baptist whānau at National Hui. We'll see you all again at National Hui 2024 in Rangiora when we will gather again as a whānau to discuss some of this work. Until then, we will continue to meet as a council and work on your behalf as we shape our future.

GAYLE VAN HOFFEN

Empowering children during divorce and separation



Gayle van Hoffen goes to Windsor Park Baptist Church and is the Family Care Manager for the Windsor Park Lifecare Trust. She shares their faith-based course designed to support children through the tumultuous changes they experience during divorce and separation. This article is reproduced from the New Zealand Baptist Children and Families November 2023 eConnect newsletter.

As a Children's Ministry worker, I often longed to have more time to care pastorally for families. We were so busy working on the teaching for each Sunday and upcoming family events that we only seemed to have time to deal with the families in acute crisis: hospital visits, illness, accidents, grief packs for the loss of a loved one or pet. Divorce and separation was a more difficult one. Yet, the number of families going through this specific type of grief was growing. The families I did get to work with were in a place of such intense pain, and more often than not, one or other of the parents stopped attending church, and we would lose touch with the children at the very time they needed support the most. From my own personal experience in childhood, I felt challenged to do something about it. There had to be a better way!

Windsor Park Baptist Church has been supporting children with our faith-based divorce/separation recovery course for more than ten years now. We are humbled by the feedback we get from the children, their parents and the community organisations that refer them. Feedback has shown that children who attend the course exhibit more confidence and a more positive sense of well-being. This overflows to better relationships within the family, improved school performance and resilience skills.

The good news is that although divorce is a painful journey for all involved, we can lessen its impact on children. Research has shown us that the first two years are the most difficult and that with support and parents who reduce conflict and provide the stability and love needed, there is so much hope.

We have developed and written this eight-week course to be multicultural and relevant to our children and community. It seeks to address the needs the children are facing due to the tumultuous changes they are experiencing. It is now available

for other churches and organisations to purchase.

We have named the course **PowerUP**, a gaming term that refers to gains that empower you to go to the next level of the game. This is our hope and prayer for the children who attend: that they will be empowered with new strategies that help them not only cope but thrive as they move forward with their lives.

The stories we have written and the characters we have created are designed to model situations children navigating divorce may experience. These stories help the children explore what is happening in their own lives from a comfortable distance. The group situation helps them understand they are not the only ones experiencing this change. The course is both fun and positive, and we have never had a child who didn't want to come back!

We believe time and resources channelled to this area are so very necessary and so very valuable. These precious children are the up-and-coming generation, our next leaders and future sets of parents. If we want to prepare them for their future, we need to help them adequately process their present reality.



Photo: Sarah Clark, Windsor Park Lifecare trust Manager, and Gayle van Hoffen, Family Care Manager.

What an awesome privilege and opportunity we have to partner with other churches to support children at this time. We recognise that we all have different resources and operate in different contexts. We invite you to contact us to chat about how PowerUP could work for you in your community. We invite you to have a look at our

website: powerupcourse.org.

This verse is so special to me, particularly in the light of my own personal story. It comes from Genesis 50 vs 20. It says, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done.”

How liberating it is to know that our past does not have to determine our future. Now that is freedom, thank you Lord!

Photos provided by Gayle van Hoffen.

ALAN JAMIESON

Help! We need your heart!



Alan Jamieson, General Director of Arotahi (NZBMS), calls for a continuation of our 137-year partnership with our Bengali whānau and reflects on the command to ‘go!’ in Luke 10:1-3...

Help! We need your heart!

Not literally. But... almost.

We need you to open your heart to the possibility of going to Bangladesh. We see enormous need and wonderful opportunity for Aotearoa New Zealand Baptists to live alongside our Bengali whānau. This is urgent, important, and hugely significant. We want to see a continuation of a partnership that has been 137 years long; we want people to consider giving a chapter of their lives to be part of a larger story unfolding. We need your prayers that competent people with a deep heart for Jesus’ gospel will hear this call and be willing to go!

Recently, I’ve been reflecting on Luke 10:1-3 - “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am

sending you out like lambs among wolves.”

There is so much in these three verses. So much that remains true today. It’s as if Jesus were speaking in 2023 to exactly our context and situation. What stood out for me particularly was Jesus’ call for us to pray for workers. That need is just as big now as it was 2000 years ago. This is the crucial issue. The deciding issue is not whether people are ready for the gospel – they are! But whether there are enough workers.

This morning, I drove past thousands of acres of paddy fields. The rice has either just been harvested or is ready to be harvested. The unharvested rice plants are clear to see. But as I drove by, the number of workers was very few. In Bangladesh, Christians make up 0.31% of the population. We have been working with the church there for 138 years, forming strong friendships and deep working relationships. The local church wants us. We have open visa slots gifted from the Bangladesh government that are ready to be filled. The harvest is waiting! Please pray that God will send NZ Baptists to go and work *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face to face) with the leaders of churches, hostels, schools, development projects, and discipleship training places in Bangladesh.

Notice, too, that Jesus is speaking to more than just the inner core (James, John and Peter) or even the twelve named disciples. Here, he is speaking to a wider audience. I wonder if there were women leaders in this group sent out by Jesus? I wonder if there was a range of ages, abilities, and giftings? Whatever the make-up of this 72, we clearly see Jesus is sending a big grouping. “Going” is not restricted to an elite few or those who have great discipleship and training. Being sent is for the ordinary, everyday followers who hear the call and say yes.

And perhaps the best part is that Jesus doesn’t send us alone. He sent people out in pairs so they always had a companion. This remains so important for encouragement, shared wisdom, accountability, safety and friendship. Apparently (according to a mission report I read recently), teams that are diverse in ethnicity, gender, family situation and age form the strongest mode of global mission. The very presence of such teams points to the truth of the gospel. I wonder if Jesus

sent a zealot and a pharisee, a Samaritan and a Jew, a fisherman and a tax collector? **If he did, then their relationship spoke of the gospel as much as their words and healings.**

Then there is the sending – go! And the asking – for the Lord of the harvest to send more workers. And finally, the sobering sentence – “Go! I (Jesus) am sending you out like lambs among wolves.” I have to move. I have to go, leave the comfort of the known and the safe, and be where the wolves are. That is demanding, fearful stuff. It causes anxiety because I don’t really like being among wolves, and I certainly would rather go as a hunter or a lion... not a lamb. Going as a lamb speaks of vulnerability and powerlessness. I don’t think Jesus is simply talking about wild animals but instead of malicious intent through people, as well as governmental and spiritual powers. The good news is that Jesus has already gone ahead of us into every town and every place. Jesus is already at work, and wherever we are called to go – we are assured that Jesus is already there and working. I am so thankful for everyone who has heard Jesus’ call and is going now into places where Jesus is calling from.

There has been a challenge in this for me, too. The challenge is for me to hear the ‘Go!’ and to make it an everyday thing. To keep on going. To discern the personal call that this is a day-by-day going! To sense where I am being called to and where God has placed me to be a worker. But also the need to ask God to send out workers. Jesus said, ‘Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’. For me, this is a call to much more prayer.

Photo: By Mike Crudge

CHARLES HEWLETT

An angel sits on top of our Christmas Tree

Charles Hewlett is National Leader of the Baptist Churches of New Zealand.

An angel sits on top of our Christmas Tree. It has a cardboard body, and its face is a photo of our daughter Janelle, taken when she was around 11. She died a year later of brain cancer. It’s both comforting and sad to have her there,

looking down on us each year. Our Christmas angel reminds us of Janelle’s beautiful strawberry-blond hair, her smooth porcelain skin and her cheeky personality.



For many, Christmas is purely a time of celebration and fun; for some, it’s also a time of intense awareness of loss. It can be a time when we remember sadness and difficulties, not only in our own lives but in the wider world around us – the consequences of wars, climate change, the results of injustice, selfishness, and greed. And just as with personal loss, there often comes the question: “How could a good God allow suffering?” or the assumption: “If there really were a God, there wouldn’t be suffering in the world.”

I guess these are comments I have never really understood. Maybe I am just too naïve, too trusting, but I don’t see why the evil and suffering in our world need to be seen as God’s fault. Isn’t it us humans who have brought these things upon ourselves?

I’ve always believed Janelle’s cancer occurred because she lived in a world that has been damaged by sin – not that she has committed a specific sin in her life, but rather, she is a human being living in a damaged world. The world we live in is quite different from the one God intended; when God created the world, everything was good – no sickness, no suffering, no evil, no death. These things aren’t from God but rather the consequence of humanity’s rejection of him.

Some people assume that because I believe in God, he should take care of me; he should prevent my suffering or take it away. And they wonder why I don’t reject a God who doesn’t act in this way.

But my faith in God doesn't excuse me from difficulty. I never expected it to. Pain and suffering are an intrinsic part of our planet, and no one is exempt. The Bible tells us that the result of human sin is death – so I guess we all have to die from something. For Janelle, it was cancer.

So, if I'm going to cry out about anything or hate anything, it should be sin, not God, because it's sin that damaged my daughter and caused her so much suffering.

But God is angry about sin, too. And he has done something about our broken world. He hasn't just turned his back on humanity and said, "Well, they had their chance, and they've blown it – they can endure the consequences." God has a deep concern for our pain and suffering.

Christmas is a time when we can remember and celebrate God's concern and love for us in action. On the first Christmas, 2000 years ago, he came to our world as a baby called Jesus. When he grew to be a man, he died a painful death on our behalf and, by coming alive again, defeated the power of evil and death. Sure, he hasn't stopped sickness and death right now, and he hasn't prevented suffering. But we know in the future when Jesus returns, the fullness of his victory over evil will be seen. The Bible describes this as a time when there will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. I have been sustained by faith in this great hope. And when it hurts, I can remind myself that God has intervened and, indeed, endured a substantial amount of suffering himself to put things right.

But how does this help us now? Sure, we can have the future hope of heaven, but that doesn't help us deal with the practical problem of suffering now. In the now, I believe God's answer is not to remove the problems but to help us within them. And while my grief doesn't seem to go away, I can experience God's help and comfort.

This Christmas, I want you to know that God does exist. I want you to know that he loves you very deeply. I want you to know that he is close to the broken-hearted and can bring comfort and peace. I want you to know that by sending Jesus, he has actively intervened so we can have a certain hope for a future where there is healing and no more pain.

Photo supplied: Charles' Christmas tree

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