



GEORGES RIVER
LIFE CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



SCOTT MORRISON

Senior Pastors Report

I recall last year (2023) expressing that it felt like we turned the corner after four challenging years previously at GRLC. Last year we were returning to health and this year, health has become flourishing. In what will be my final annual reflection, I'm so delighted to report that it is easy to come by good news! There are all sorts of ways to measure health. Yes, there are the measures of numerical growth, of baptisms, of a significant turnaround in our giving. Each of these expresses something important about where we are at in our discipleship, and we praise God for all this. But also, I see:



- A more prayerful community - This year we've consistently focused on prayer both in our gathering, in prayer events and in how we are equipping people to live more prayerfully through the whole week.
- Return to innovation - This year I've enjoyed seeing new thinking and experimentation take place in ministries and ways of engaging the wider community. For example, our "Being With" course that has run fortnightly during the Peakhurst AM gathering and the new Friday Coffee Connect ministry taking place through Life Care.
- Depth of younger leadership - Across youth ministry, kids' ministry and Kids Connect we have a remarkable cohort of young people growing in their discipleship and eager to walk that out in serving others.
- Increasing favour within the wider community - Life Care under Karen's leadership has gone from strength to strength this year both internally, and as it interacts with other organisations and agencies. Our services continue to flourish and expand in new ways as new opportunities and funding arise and are embraced. And all this whilst remaining deeply integrated into the life of GRLC.
- Greater ethnic diversity in our community - GRLC has always had a strong and sincere welcoming culture but it's a great joy to see that extended far beyond socio economic or ethnic boundaries. I'm delighted to see more people from our Life Care community find belonging in our Life Church community. And I'm delighted to see people from the African, South American and Asian continents finding a home at GRLC. This diversity reflects what is already the case in the local community and I hope that our next step will be to see this expressed on the platform and in our leadership.
- Very healthy staff and governance teams. It's easy to miss this, but the sign of a healthy church is a healthy staff team and governing board. Under Ben's exemplary leadership this year our staff are thriving. Under Margaret Thompson's leadership our CLT is united, prayerful and working brilliantly together.

All in all, I conclude my role as your senior pastor after all these years with a sense of gratefulness at God's faithfulness, thankfulness for the privilege of leading such a church, relief that I'm finishing well and confidence that our church will flourish and bear much fruit in the years ahead for His glory.

We all only play only a small part in the greater work that God is doing. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3.6 "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." I thank God, I thank Jodie and my children, and I thank you for allowing me my small role. But in the end, it is God who deserves all the glory for it is his power at work within us and through us.

So, for one last time, as Paul says in Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

LARA WATSON

Peakhurst Site Pastor's Report

This year has been a year of great strength, unity and so much joy at our Peakhurst site. I am incredibly thankful for our large, dynamic, multi-generational and servant hearted family that is the Peakhurst family. It has been encouraging to see growth, stability and a hunger for God in our people; whether through our hope-filled Sunday celebrations or in our mid-week Small Groups or in the many ways that people have stepped up into ministry or hearing testimonies of people desiring to reveal Jesus in their work and recreational spaces. God has surely been at work in His people, and we give Him all the glory for His faithfulness throughout the year.



We are extremely blessed and grateful to have so many brilliant ministry teams that have been working tirelessly throughout the year, serving those within our church family. Our passionate River Kids and Youth Leadership teams are incredible as they work alongside our families and young people in their discipleship. Our 27 Small Group Leaders have also faithfully served our Peakhurst site with commitment and dedication this year with nearly 60% of our Peakhurst site in Small Groups. We are grateful for all our Sunday teams that serve the Peakhurst community with such love. They include our worship team, stream team, sound, visual and lighting teams, our early bird set up teams, along with our connect team of car park, greeters, ushers, coffee and morning tea teams, communion team, our PM dinner hosts and teams and our new people connectors. We are thankful for MANY that serve the wider body.

Our 'Kids Connect' outreach program was a definite highlight of the year as our whole church came together to serve Jesus and our local community, with many children giving their hearts afresh to Jesus. It was amazing to witness the different generations of our church coming together to serve, with a beautiful reminder that we are certainly stronger and better together.

Our PM service has been flourishing this year! There's been great engagement and a real leaning in to worship and prayer. The new service leader team has been fantastic stepping into their role, and we've seen quite a few people coming forward for prayer in response to the messages. The connection times before and after the service have been beautiful. There's been an average of 40 people staying for monthly dinners at the church and around 30 people heading to the off-site dinners the other weeks. The PM Small Groups are healthy and well-attended. A highlight for the young adults was a camp held in late March which was a fabulous time of enjoying the presence of Jesus and each other's company.

Other highlights throughout the year at our Peakhurst site were...

- Welcoming just over 50 new adults & 27 children/teens into our Peakhurst church family
- 10 people being baptised at Carss Park - so powerful and our windiest day on record!
- A week-long prayer event, praying 24/7.
- Men's and women's socials throughout the year - thank you to those who hosted so beautifully.
- Our healthy and ever-growing partnership with Life Care and the many volunteers that serve in these vital ministries to our local community, which continues to go from strength to strength!

A sincere thank you for your ongoing support, encouragement and prayer. It continues to be an absolute privilege and joy to serve you in this role. A very big thank you to ALL our staff, key leaders and volunteers for your tireless work throughout this year.

As we look to 2025 and beyond, our heart's desire is that we continue to prioritise Discipleship, Mission and Prayer. I am excited and expectant as to what God will continue to do with people who are whole heartedly surrendered to Him.

MATT GRAY

Chipping Norton Site Pastor's Report

2024 has been a significant year for our Chipping Norton Site, and, as always, it has been an immense privilege and a great joy to be the Site Pastor! This year marks the end of our first 5 years and the beginning of the next 5 years as a site. I have felt God highlighting the significance of this moment, and we have spent Term 4 focusing on "The Church He's Building" - seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance on how to manoeuvre, grow and ready ourselves for what he wants to keep doing in our community.



A significant event this year was our transition from Moorebank High to Nuwarra Public School as our gathering venue. This has been both missionally and pragmatically an important shift. Missionally, we are now more prominent and central in the community. God has been opening doors for us to develop a strong relationship with the school, giving us more opportunities to be present, visible, and serve the local community. Practically, the addition of a kitchen space and a classroom for River Kids has been an immensely beneficial gift from God!

Our ongoing partnership with Life Care continues to be the heartbeat of our mission in the community. It is such a strength to partner together through Community Connect and we have begun to see how this is providing an avenue for people to integrate into the life of our church. Additionally, our inaugural Care For a Walk fundraiser was a significant opportunity for our site to continue to bless our community and deepen our roots, all while raising important funds for Life Care. Thank you so much to the Chipping Norton Life Care team, especially Karen, Danyela and Hazel for your tireless work this year!

Our team has continued to serve God faithfully this year. It has been a joy to see Katelyn Baker step up into leadership, filling Ellen's maternity leave role as River Kids Leader for most of this year. River Kids is integral to our site being a disciple-making community, and Katelyn has done a great job building relationships with our young people, and nurturing their relationship with Jesus this year! Thank you to Malcolm Campbell for continuing to lead our site in Pastoral Care and Integration, Alison Rusin for continuing to faithfully lead us in worship, our hospitality team for

facilitating deep connection through food, our Small Group Leaders for walking alongside our site, and our congregation for continuing to chip in and enable all that we do to happen seamlessly!

Our mission and vision continue into the new year - that we would continue to prioritise discipleship, mission and prayer individually and together as a site; this is our core business! As we look to 2025 our major prayer is that God would build and grow His church. We continue to review what we are doing to ensure that everything we do enables us to fruitfully love, live and reveal Jesus. This is our part, and as we persevere in this, we are entirely dependent on God to do His part: to open the hearts of people in our community and draw them to His church.

KAREN POWER

Life Care CEO's Report

It's difficult to comprehend that we are already reflecting on 2024. An indication of the pace at which Life Care continues to respond to the needs of our vulnerable communities.

Our greatest privilege at Life Care as a staff and volunteer team is to walk alongside people experiencing significant disadvantage and to see them flourish and their life get a little easier through a simple food hamper, help with a household bill, and feeling empowered and supported through our casework team and legal support clinic - thanks to Steve Frost at Horizons Family Law.

The greatest gift of all is the opportunities via Community Connect, Artslife and our new program Café Connect, to build meaningful connections and give the gift of time to listen; the most powerful way we can help people feel seen, feel valued and feel a sense of dignity.

There is a lot to celebrate in 2024.

1. Securing funds for the **purchase of a commercial food rescue vehicle** which will enable us to scale and sustain our food hamper service to more people and meet demand
2. Our **most successful Sleeping Rough** event with fundraising exceeding \$70,000
3. We launched a **new fundraising event, Care for A Walk**, at our Chipping Norton site through some great external partnerships
4. **Planned upgrades of our Relief Centre**, including a cool room and storage facilities that will enable us to uplift our food rescue capabilities - with over **4000 hampers already distributed this year**
5. Opening a safe and inclusive cafe space for our community on Friday mornings - **encouraging connection, togetherness and mutual support**
6. Successfully supporting clients in **back-to-work pathways leading to employment**
7. Enabling us to support hundreds of families impacted by family and domestic violence through our **incredible casework team and legal support service** (Horizons Family Law - Steve Frost)



8. Expanding our Artslife creative arts programs for kids to include a **new percussion workshop** and, more recently, an **Acro Dance workshop**
9. We developed a **new strategic plan** that is complementary to the 5-year Church Discipleship Strategy and aligns Life Care and the church perfectly as we move into the next season
10. **New partnerships** with Big Sister Foundation, Hennessy Coffee, Golden Pavillion Chinese Restaurant, and Nuwarra Public School in Moorebank

We also had a lot of fun! Fundraising at football games, Westfield Heroes, Chamber Chat nights, community fairs, visits from Federal and state and local members, and St George Leagues players.

We remain humbled and strengthened to steward these wins well so that we continue to meet the needs of our growing client base experiencing significant crisis, to give them the best chance for transformation.

The transition of CEO has been a particularly challenging and rewarding season for me. I have enjoyed growing into this role and have appreciated the support and encouragement from the Life Care Board, Church Leadership Team and church staff. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to be part of the Arrow Executive Non-Profit Leadership Development Program this year, which has been an incredible source of wisdom, growth and encouragement.

Our staff team have experienced some significant changes this year and continues to experience the day-to-day challenges of working in an ever-changing environment. I deeply admire their resilience and passion and the way we encourage and support each other.

Lastly, we simply couldn't do what we do at Life Care without the support of our church family, both financially and, in particular, through wonderful volunteers living out their discipleship practically through our services and programs. We have such a great team of dedicated, committed people who go above and beyond, week after week, to support our community. This year, in particular, our volunteers have really stepped up, meeting the demands of increased need and exploring new ways of keeping our service dignified and connection-focused.

At Life Care, we remain committed into 2025 to bringing caring and compassionate services to our community and seeing lives transformed through hope, strength and joy.

MARGARET THOMPSON

CLT Chairperson's Report

As we reflect on this year, it is evident that we were on the cusp of something new. We began with a renewed 3-5-year strategy focussed on our Mission and Vision (what we are pursuing), our values (who we are called to be), and our principles (how we are to operate). This included a thorough review of the process of planting the Chipping Norton Site, providing key insights that will guide us for future site expansion.



A Call to Prayer and Discipleship

This has been a year where prayer was our response and our calling. We prayed for world leaders, our nation, church leaders, our mission partners, our team, and each other. We pressed deeper in discipleship, praying on the mountain tops and praying in the valleys, embracing a holy discontent with the status quo. The Church Leadership Team (CLT) has been encouraged by the way the church has embraced this call, evidenced in the testimonies shared.

Financial Stewardship

A main focus this year has been on our finances. Facing another deficit year, we issued a mid-year call-to-action, and we thank God for His provision and for your faithfulness in response. Katharine Montoya will present the financial report and share the good news. We also want to honour Katharine for her years of dedicated service to Georges River Life Church and Life Care. She has faithfully served as Operations Manager, setting a strong foundation for her successor as she transitions from this role in mid-February. Katharine will be deeply missed, and we are grateful she remains in our church community.

Growth and Impact of Life Care

Under Karen Power's leadership, Life Care continues to thrive, with a five-year strategy aligned with Georges River Life Church. Their focus includes increasing social impact, organisational sustainability, and raising their profile and awareness. It is inspiring to see the connections forming between our local community and the church through Life Care's activities.

Transition in Senior Leadership

In August, our Senior Pastor, Scott Morrison, shared his intent to step down next year, formally resigning in September. Scott's 24 years of leadership mark a defining chapter for Georges River Life Church. As we step into this significant transition to a new Senior Pastor, we are confident that God is in our midst, and that He is and will continue to lead us through this season and beyond.

Thank you seems such a small word when you consider how far Georges River Life Church has come under Scott's leadership. We give our sincerest thanks and pray for God's direction and blessings on Scott, Jodie, and their children in this next season. We are thankful they plan to remain in our church community.

Church Leadership Team Update

This year's CLT includes Scott Morrison, Alison Dye, Bruce Stevenson, David Seeto, Jan Reardon, Karen Hewitt, Margaret Thompson, Nik Karanikas, and Peter Abrahams - and Ben Rusin as a guest attendee. We especially thank Alison for her service as a CLT representative and our representative on the Life Care board as she completed her term. I am very thankful for everyone on our team. We

can see how God has brought us all together for such a time as this. We each represent unique parts of Georges River Life Church and recognise how important this is at this time in the church history.

Give Thanks

We truly give thanks to God. We acknowledge God's presence and guidance. We trust in Him, not leaning on our own understanding, but seeking His will in each step. The Lord is our God, and we put our faith in Him, and He will show us the right path forward.

ERIKA MATRUGLIO

Mission Report

This year has been an exciting one for mission and the team is grateful for God's faithfulness. Mission Month was a great success, and we were able to hear from many of our mission partners in person either at church or via Zoom. The church donated \$15,000 dollars above our mission month target of \$110,000, which has enabled us to expand our contributions to our partners. We expanded our support of Zoe to contribute to the work that Zoe is doing in Australia in addition to the contribution we already make to Thailand. We also sent some extra funds to the Sunshine Hostel to make urgent repairs to the boy's dorm, which had a wall falling down.



This year has also seen significant developments in the building of the new girl's dormitory at the Sunshine Hostel which is at the last stage in the building contract and is almost complete. In 2023, the church approved an advance of \$40,000 (that is, the funds for Sunshine Hostel from four years of mission month fundraising) to fund the building of the new girl's dormitory because the old one is a significant safety hazard. This work began in late 2023 and has experienced significant delays, including time needed to fill the plot and let the fill settle and subsequently the rains and flooding that are going on in Northern Thailand. We hope that the building will be completed soon, and the girls will be able to move out of their old dorm and into their new one. We were also able to contribute an extra \$5,000 from mission month to pay down the advance and so following mission month the advance is currently at \$25,000.

The team would also like to gratefully acknowledge Terry and Robyn McKeown's service on the Mission Committee over a number of years. Both have recently retired from the mission committee and will be missed. Terry had formerly chaired the Mission Committee, and both Terry and Robyn's heart for mission has been an inspiration to the team over the years. Thank you, Terry and Robyn!

Committee Members: Marbuen Diaz, Karen Hewitt, Erika Matruglio, Jan Reardon, Ben Rusin, Julie Stevenson, Alan Thompson,

Mission Partners: Baptist Mission Australia (Muana and Villi & Dema and Carolyn), Gus and Audrey Chan, Lahu Evangelical Baptist Convention & Sunshine Hostel, Fairfield Evangelical Association of Scripture Teaching FEAST (James Lane), PASS (Peakhurst Scripture Board), Zoe, Baptist World Aid Australia, Moorebank HS Chaplain.