

Small Group News August 2020



GOOD NEWS!

One of the benefits of gathering in COVID SAFE small groups is that we can relate at deeper levels about real life and share together in how God engages with us through it all.

So, it is great to hear people in our groups reporting that they have felt closer to God and one another in prayer, feel strengthened in faith, and have been spiritually refreshed during the pandemic.

There are least 5 home groups in our parish with about 40 people involved. Plus, groups meeting at the Hub. But what of the rest?

We were all urged to keep in touch, and over these months many will have been supported by family and friends or have grown through at-home worship and devotion times as individuals or couples. This is good news!

REALITY CHECK?

Yet realistically, some may not have felt included in the warmth of community that we hope would characterize being Christ's church. What can we do about this?

One individual wondered if: *"our church needs to once again learn to work together and talk to each other. Maybe we need more Mission in-reach, instead of Mission out-reach."* What do you think?

Exciting Opportunity!
Listening and Responding to God's Voice
workshop led by Ps Michael Dutschke
October date tbc - details soon!

While worship-at-home service orders, as well as on-line, DVD, and print, resources are provided, how do we check if anyone is missing out or can't access them?

When we could gather in groups of 10 and eventually back at the church buildings, did we realize not everyone felt comfortable or

able to go back? Especially some of our more elderly people.

So how are we going at keeping in touch now? Those who worship alone at home still need contact with their church community and to feel loved,

valued, included. **COVID19 has shown us that personal contact means a lot.**

Probably we all think "someone else" has it covered, without really knowing for sure. But support of our elderly and isolated people is not something that we can assume someone else is doing. Likewise care for families and the sick.

In fact, **we all need to feel cared for and included in community. And it is a mutual responsibility which we cannot abdicate to the pastor, the professionals, and other leaders. We are all called, in Christ, to love and serve one another, to prefer the needs of the other, and to love as God loves us. We all need to do our part.**

Thanks to our many carers for your loving service during this time. God bless you!



*For you are the Body of Christ and
each one of you is a part of it*

1Cor 12:27

The pandemic was, and still is, an unforeseen crisis that none of us have dealt with before. But if it has highlighted some strengths then it has also provided an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and be creative in making changes as we move forward, **growing** in faith and **going** in mission. God himself makes the way and his Spirit is our Helper.

PRAYER and ACTION

Taking some immediate practical action to minister to any who are hurting or struggling is vital and **we can all begin to do this**. Consider who you know and have not contacted for a while, or who you have heard might be feeling isolated.

Call on the phone or go and have a cuppa and a prayer with them. Have a time of worship (follow the yellow service order) or invite them round for a meal with a few others. The ball is in all our courts, as well as our leaders'.

We also have opportunity to further develop networking and good communication within all areas of church life. We can continue to build on the extra things we have done during the pandemic like online services and the extra resources that have been emailed and hand delivered. Have you any more ideas?

How could we open up more channels for feedback and information sharing? And encourage everyone to take responsibility for speaking up and keeping in contact with one another, to better ensure people are not being missed, now and in the future?

Also, as a community of faith there is a spiritual opportunity in all of this. Could it be the prompt for us to learn to listen to God for his guidance, rather than just making plans and asking God to bless them?

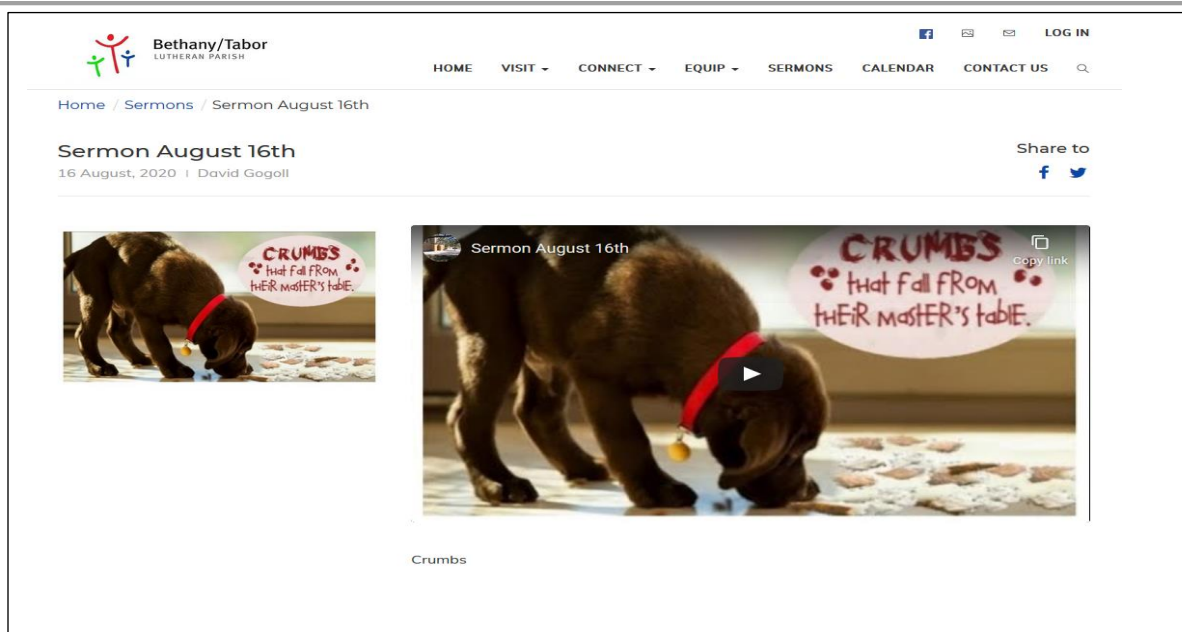
We have opportunity to become a people who firstly pray and listen, to discern God's wisdom and insights about the issues that face us - before we act. A people who look to Jesus to build his church and grow his kingdom in the strange new world in which we find ourselves.

Learning to pray as a two-way conversation in which we not only talk to Jesus but also listen to him, has been part of our direction for spiritual growth this year. Little did we know, how 2020 would develop!



This year now challenges us to adapt and move ahead in new ways, alongside some of the old ways. How that works together and what the future holds is unclear, but our unity in the Spirit and God's love, and our hope in Christ is unshakeable.

So now, more than ever, we need to reaffirm Jesus as our foundation by discerning his 2020 vision to guide our steps forward. The issues that face us need both prayer and action. By grace may we neglect neither.



On-line service Essential

Chris and Dennis report on their group:

Our home group have not met again since the Corona shutdown. We have been keeping in touch lately by phone and visits especially to our more elderly members who are all doing ok.....they have been accessing worship on line from church central and, with some, we have taken discs around, had communion, and watched David's sermons with them. Most indicated they were not comfortable going back to in-house group sessions as yet.

It's amazing how many people have accessed other church services ...on TV, radio etc. which I think is great and possibly a bit liberating!

We are not intending to start up again until this virus thing is a bit more predictable.

Bethanytabor.org

We think the online service is essential into the future especially for the elderly and we have to make the effort to show them how to use it.

Also, that service needs to have more info on it...maybe the bulletin etc though I realise that requires someone to DO it.

If we could collect Email addresses that would help us keep so many more people informed. I hope lots of our people are looking forward to joint worship again and we certainly miss having discussions and fellowship in our home.



Worship at Home for now.....

A participant in the group that meets at Judy and Peter's home reports the following:

In the early lock down stage of the pandemic we met each Sunday for at-home-worship. Initially this was only 4 or 5 of us but we would Skype between our friendship group of 10 every Friday night until numbers allowed in groups increased.

Once the numbers increased to 10, this was a great blessing as **we were able to catch up face to face and in fact, I felt it strengthened our friendships with each other. The weekly topic of discussion seemed to have more meaning as we were all more involved in discussions.**

We felt closer to God in smaller groups as discussions and prayers were more personal and meaningful. Our group are all benefiting by having more involvement in the small group Sunday service.

Changes we see for the Church moving forward will be mainly awareness of hygiene, particularly with communion and probably social distancing. Once a vaccine and number of cases has reduced, we will return to Church. We need to make sure there is not a second wave. **It is a blessing that we have access to the weekly sermon through video and we know that the Church will be there if we require help or support in the future.**

The leaders stated they "are finding it a time of self-care and recharging spiritual batteries." And the group is becoming more comfortable in participating in discussions and taking leader roles in the service."

Food, Faith, and Family stories – 3 Couples Sharing Life Together

In the early lockdown stage, our group members connected with each other via regular phone calls. When we were later allowed to visit each other's homes, we shared plants after individual garden spring cleanings.

We also tried to maintain contact with a few other members of our congregation, mainly through phone calls, or weekly delivering Bulletins and printed Sermons to their letter box.

When eventually we could gather in groups up to 10 we organized for the six of us to meet in one of our homes for a meal, where different courses were prepared by each family. We had lots of personal family stories to share at that time. This has continued once a month on a rotational basis between our homes.

Our faith was strengthened as we made more effort to think about issues concerning God. All of us made a point of participating in weekly worship in our own home, using the resources provided by Pastor David and others.

Individually we may have grown through these times, but as a church we do not know. We certainly did not connect with many church families and are still not doing so to the present, which is of concern.

The group continues to meet each month in one of our homes for a meal and a Bible Study based on the Insiders book by Valerie Volk. In addition, we gather after 8.30 worship each



Sunday for a morning tea (as there is no morning tea organized in the church hall as yet) for the six of us in one of our homes.

“Our group believes our parish should analyse how better to do God’s work in times of crisis and how to more effectively communicate with our members and the general public. Even the role of our Pastor could be evaluated in these changing times, especially with the imminent change of pastoral leader.”

2 Groups: Warmth & Friendship

“ I was part of a larger Bethany Bible Study group having to suspend our gathering temporarily because of COVID restrictions. I missed not only the Bible Study, and the contributions from everyone, but the contact and social aspect too, not to mention the wine & cheese after!

To be together in a friendly group of other Christians where we can be open and loving, learn from God’s Word and each other is such a blessing and I have grown so much in this loving and inclusive setting.

So to be able to be part of another group (which began during this time) has been a Godsend because I think **we all have an inherent need to belong** and through the cessation of worship in our churches, it has been an amazing opportunity to see “church” in a different light and be creative in our own worship time.

This new group is necessarily very small which has been appealing for its intimacy.

We’ve been able to grow the group with the addition of several others* and the blessings are mutual.

In these trying times it has been wonderful to share our thoughts, emotions, and needs and be assured of God’s presence through prayer and study of His Word.

We have enjoyed using diverse resources, sharing meals, worship time, Holy Communion, and praying and being prayed for, all in a COVID-safe setting beside a nice warm fire!



Our hope is to continue growing this group when restrictions relax further. We hope to explore more options for outreach and diversity, and see God continuing to grow his church.

*This report is from a member of the new group that now meets in Angaston. *The new participants connected with the group after personal invitation by this member.*

The remaining members of the original larger group at Bethany have now resumed their weekly get together. With a welcoming hostess and friendly participants any new members can’t help but feel at home.....



IDEAS

to strengthen our spiritual bond of unity and care in the church through small groups.

BUILD on existing connections

- Families - households/extended family/multi-households
- friends – personal/social/fellowship
- acquaintances - chat/church fringe
- associates - teams/committees
- colleagues – work/study/ministry
- neighbours – your street/community

Look at **who you already know in the church community** and start with one simple new thing to **strengthen your link**:

- Catch up regularly with 2 or 3 others from the church who live nearby.
- Form a small cluster of church friends that meets for a BBQ once a month.
- If you are on a church committee, or ministry team, meet up for a meal.
- Ask some others to join you for an on-line service, even if extra to worship at the church building on Sunday.
- Have a coffee morning or shed night
- Hold a regular group and invite a speaker to share a topic of interest
- Invite an acquaintance to meet you for a cuppa
- Ask your leaders to connect you with others who are looking for a group
- Form a walking group – include one street to pray for each time you walk

Not all groups have to involve Bible study or worship. It could be mostly social. But include a prayer and/or short devotion. Aim to be a channel of communication (not gossip!) amongst yourselves and with the church. Keep one another updated on resources, and activities. **REMEMBER COVID SAFE RULES.**

BE A CIRCLE OF CARE. Ask the group if anyone has a need or prayer request you can help with, or with permission pass on to a leader. Encourage one another as friends in Christ. Maintain respect and confidentiality. Give practical help if needed. **BE COVID CARING.**

BE OPEN TO OTHERS beyond your usual group. As well as including people from the church you already know, try catching up with someone you don't know so well. Or inviting a neighbour who isn't-yet-a Christian, to attend an activity. **STAY COVID SAFE!**

WORK ON A PROJECT TOGETHER Encourage a simple outward looking activity for your group. Look to see if Jesus is showing you where he is active in people's lives in the wider community and if he is prompting you and your group to join in in some way.

KEEP IT SIMPLE. Pray for God's enabling. Seek the support of others in the church. Let the leaders know what you are doing. Ask for help if you need it. Don't be afraid to request training opportunities and resources. *Enjoy!*

*Love from the center of who you are;
don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil;
hold on for dear life to good.
Be good friends who love deeply;
practice playing second fiddle.
Romans 12:9-10 MSG*