



**Churches
of Christ**
in Western Australia Inc

ON MISSION JOURNAL

MINI EDITION #3



ON MISSION

This year has seen churches do an incredible job in adapting to the world around us. Not in the sense of ‘confirming to society,’ but in the sense of continuing to meet and share the Word in creative ways.

In this ‘country churches’ edition, we read some inspiring stories about the local church stepping up and shining bright with the love of Jesus in their community.

‘Connect Before Content’ has played a major part in this season. It still is. While WA is coming out of restrictions quicker than most places, COVID-19 is still far from over. If you have thoughts and reflections to share about your experience during this time, we’d love to share your story. Please email admin@cocwa.com.au



UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

Don Marshall- Harvey Church

One could be excused for thinking that the word “unprecedented” has just been unearthed by the media. It would appear that almost every natural disaster or unusual weather event these days requires this colourful adjective to be a mandatory addition. Coronavirus is “unprecedented”, the recent “storm of the century” was “unprecedented”, the economic woes, absolutely unprecedented, people fighting over toilet rolls...yes you guessed it...“unprecedented”. Why I just spent an hour browsing the shelves at Koorong...the coffee shop has been shut down and there were no chairs to sit on and ponder my purchases...unprecedented!

I’m not sure that those examples are totally accurate in regards to being “unprecedented” but what I do know, that is definitely unprecedented, is that the doors of the Harvey Church of Christ are closed. Now before I explain why that is unprecedented and what are the ramifications of such “unprecedentedness”, having used unprecedented 11 times in two paragraphs, I promise not to use it again.

Now I wasn’t there when the old original weather-board Harvey Church of Christ Chapel was opened in 1916, but I was there for the opening of the current Church building in 1957, albeit it, I was very young. Let me stress that again...I was VERY young. However as far as I can remember, the doors have always been open. The only two occasions where I’m not totally confident of that, were the floods in 1964 when we were evacuated to the High School and the fires of 2016 when again, the town was evacuated. As far as the floods go, we were evacuated on a Monday night so I reckon we would have had Church the day before and certainly on the following Sunday as the evacuation was only for a few days. I was in the USA during the fires and so I actually don’t know if services continued or not. Given that history, I’m going to go out on a limb and use the mandatory adjective... “unitsneverhappenedbefore”.

Our last service was on 22nd March this year. It was a beautiful service for those who came. We had "social-distanced" the chairs and Diana Thomas shared her amazing testimony about her time as an aid worker in Afghanistan in 2001 when her and 7 other aid workers were arrested by the Taliban. About half the usual congregation (we are a fellowship of around 80-100) came, and we were truly blessed by Diana's ministry and with the opportunity to worship together.

I have to say that there was a short moment of panic when we realized, that would be our final meeting for "who knows how long" and the doors were closed. However, God had other ideas. Our focus was very quickly changed from being predominately "inward" to that of an intentional decision to be more community focused. Given the initial projections that those "in the know" were making about possible catastrophic results of this pandemic, our leadership team turned their attentions to how we could be of service to the wider community but still remain connected to those in the fellowship.

Two of our ladies had previously created a Facebook page called "Free Meals with Love". The idea being that it was to be community based where, if you had cooked a meal and had "extra", simply list it on the Facebook page and someone who may be in need that day could accept what was offered. With fridges not being used in the Church building, this service was able to be ramped up and has in the past few months blessed many of our Harvey residents. An arrangement was also reached with a local bakery whereby we are able to give out free bread, on a weekly basis, in the park across from the Church every Saturday.

We purchased an upright freezer (it's affectionately known as our COVID fridge) and have stocked it to bursting point with meals. These were prepared in a commercial kitchen owned by one of our members who just happens to be a chef. Connections were made with the local Shire and the Community Resource Centre so that people within the community could access these meals...free.

Through these connections we have been able to give financial assistance in the form of free fuel to a resident who was in a desperate situation requiring on-going health treatments in Bunbury.

By far the most significant ministry that God has led us into, given the presence of COVID 19, has been the use of technology to reach "spiritually" into our community. We started small with the intention of offering "church" to those in our fellowship via a pre-recorded communion message on our Facebook page. The idea being that we would get someone to give a greeting, a children's story, a worship song

and then someone to take communion...just trying to give some sense of normality to those in "lock-down". Talk about 5 loaves and two fish...God took our small offering and made it accessible to literally thousands.

CHILDREN STORIES THAT WERE USUALLY PRESENTED TO ABOUT 20 KIDS WERE SUDDENLY REACHING 7, 8, 900 (YES "HUNDRED") CHILDREN.

Communion messages were being viewed by over a 1000, greetings seen by 250+ and worship songs 2000+. In all the years I've been involved in the Harvey CofC I have never seen so many people reached with the gospel in our town, with so little effort, by so few involved. It has been an absolute "wake up" call from God.

As I write this, we have just been notified by the powers that be, that as of this coming Sunday we can go back to church. "Back"...that word scares me...will we, as we go "back", let go of the opportunity that I believe God has given us? We have been humbled, as we are made aware of how the Holy Spirit is touching lives through this ministry, as we read the "comments" that filter back to us on a regular basis.

I firmly believe that God wants connection rather than content in our ministry here in Harvey and to that end, my prayer is that we will never "go back", that the Holy Spirit will touch everyone of us and continue to take us "forward" and "outward"... forward into closer relationship with Jesus and outward...beyond self...and into the community with a ministry that meets needs and a message that touches hearts. Watch this space...watch this town. With God in it, it may just become 'unprecedented.'



RUNNING TOWARDS THE BATTLE

Kym Edwards- Bridgeley Church

'Life's pretty straight without Twisties' is the slogan of one of our favourite treats and it pretty accurately denotes how things are going within our lives at the moment. Without the impact of COVID-19 it would seem that we were living quite basic and uneventful lives. For us here in Northam, WA it has certainly been anything but a straight road. I am certain that all of you are facing challenges that you have never encountered before as we are. In many situations it might in fact be easy to want to hide away and let it blow over. I know that I for one have had many moments where I thought I might just go and hide.

When the news began to drop that this virus was going to do some damage I found myself daunted by the notion of having to close the doors of Bridgeley with regards to our normal church activities. However, it wasn't too long before a sense of optimism swept over me as I began to notice a shift in the climate of our town. There was a growing shift that God was calling us to run towards the battle brewing and not away from it.

Northam has always been a place where people in need come looking for help. Being a small regional hub in the Wheatbelt we find that people facing challenges of all kinds end up here at some point. In the early days of our states lockdown measures, we saw panic and fear widespread with many businesses and agencies immediately close down. This led to a significant increase in need within our community and no one to really turn to. It was astonishing to see large Welfare Agencies close down for fear of COVID-19. Yet in the midst of this fear and anxiety we sensed God calling us to remain open.

At a Senior Leadership Meeting on the 1st of March our Eldership agreed that despite our loss of income and growing expenses, the Holy Spirit was challenging us to remain open and invest intentionally into the growing crisis. We agreed to mobilise

our staff who would be otherwise without a job to establish a 'Social Call Centre' where they call people within our community to inquire how they are and if they have any needs. Also, we expanded our community relief services through food, hygiene and baby needs supplies so that those in self isolation, requiring emergency assistance or quarantine would have their needs met.

At an emergency meeting with the shire and local agencies in the first week of March, our church was identified as the only service who was still open to provide assistance for those in critical need. This set about a chain of events that saw Bridgeley (Northam Church of Christ) thrust into the picture to take a leading role with supporting our community through the coming months. With this came a renewed partnership with our local shire to establish the 'Neighbour Assist' program which aims to provide every resident with the ability to seek out assistance. Additionally, it has provided us with the chance to allow our church volunteers to connect with others in the community to provide assistance where necessary. With the growing risk of COVID-19 all around us, steps were taken to keep people safe with contactless deliveries and phone calls a priority.

In the midst of this incredible and unprecedented situation we have seen God do the miraculous by bringing those who are in need to our doorstep. It has led to our church community being able to shine the very presence of Jesus into hopeless situations and bring the love of Christ to many homes in Northam. We continue to grow this ministry as God continues to open the doors for us to walk through.

I pray that whatever your context that you would encounter our Almighty God at work in and through you and that you would see this situation not as a death sentence but as a chance to see the Holy Spirit at work in a new and powerful way.

CHRIST'S CALLING IN COVID

Darryn Windolf- Harvey Church

What an incredible time and what an incredible God! There's the good and the bad that comes with every season of life, yet through the hard times we can know divine peace.

One year ago, before all this COVID upheaval, my wife and I were praying into God's direction for our future, knowing He was stirring us for adventure in Him. I was working on a build site on the Gold Coast in Queensland when God made it very clear that we were to move to Western Australia. We packed our bags and came over with nothing more than what fitted in our suitcases. My wife had work, I'd left my job and we landed here in October last year. No work for me, yet God was working.

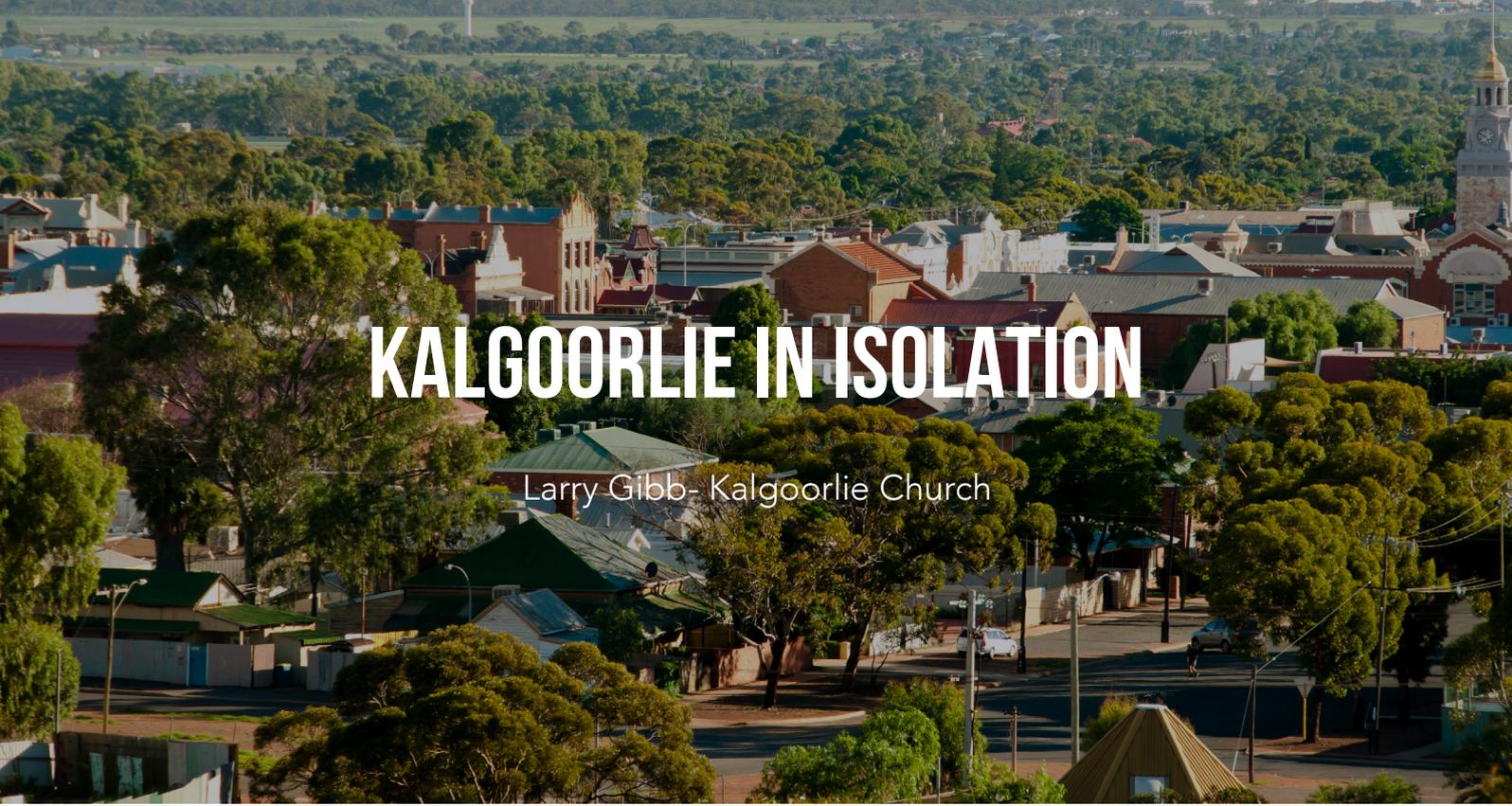
Doors continued to close for working opportunities as God was leading us in His direction. I'd been a Pastor in years gone by but fell into a deep hole of burnout, anxiety and depression, which the mighty and powerful hand of God pulled me from as I yielded in surrender to Him. God was wanting to put me back in the saddle of pastoring and He was giving me time. Time to look at my relationship with Him and His desire to use all the events of my life to work it together for His good, for His purposes.

At the beginning of the year we saw an advert for a pastoring position at Harvey. We travelled down one Sunday to 'check out' the fellowship incognito in seeking God's direction. Our attempts to be unnoticed didn't work and a new journey began. As important as it was for us to know God's leading, it was important for me to know that God was leading the fellowship in the same direction. There's a risk accepting a call just as there is for a church calling a pastor, but God takes out the risk. Perhaps the church had the greater risk accepting a "Baptist Banana Bender" from the East.

Events were moving forward in God's timing. We were invited down to take a service where we would be 'checked out'. All was moving along wonderfully, then along came COVID-19. Before a recommendation could be brought by the leadership to the church members, group restrictions fell into place which meant no large gatherings and no services. At a time when many were losing work, the church was being asked to employ someone for a position that had much of the role set aside. The fellowship couldn't meet for a vote and so a postal vote was sent out. In all the uncertainty and seeming chaos of the time, God is faithful, never leaving and never forsaking.

I was accepted to a part time role, which has been perfect for the time. Pastoral visits to meet people outside of the usual Sunday morning context has been wonderful. I have to admit, the first Sunday after commencing, having no fellowship gathering was the strangest of feelings, as a result, my welcome has been on a personal level as I've visited homes and enjoyed the Harvey country hospitality.

Through it all, our eyes have been turned to Jesus, our Lord, our rock, our salvation. What an awesome Saviour. We are primed for a fresh start, a new beginning, with eyes on Him and hearts set to know our amazing God who dwells within. Desiring intimacy of relationship and fullness of presence, we can know the dynamic of identity in our living Christ.



KALGOORLIE IN ISOLATION

Larry Gibb - Kalgoorlie Church

Living in Kalgoorlie means isolation is part of life even before the COVID-19 Restrictions. With that said these new restrictions took us to a new level.

Personally, I coped well with having to work from home, it took me back 30 years to when my office was at home. It has been an opportunity to reflect on how I react to the unknown and I'm glad to say that my trust in God has kept fear from my door. I have an anticipation waiting to see what God has for me and the Church.

I am very thankful for technology. It enabled me to access resources online when my library was in "isolation" at the Church Office.

Technology enabled me to keep in touch with others. I have been emailing the Congregation weekly keeping them informed of current restrictions and adding an encouraging word.

I learned to Zoom for times with my children and Grandchildren, Connect meetings, Board meetings and Prayer meetings. Praying by zoom is certainly an interesting experience.

Years ago, a wise Mentor told me that all of life is a preparation for the unexpected. So my devotional life hasn't changed in this season except for the addition of prayer points for the Nation and those affected by the virus.

The Elders and Leaders have been keeping in regular contact with the people. The Kidsmin Team have dropped off packs for Easter and drive by birthdays.

Sunday services, XLR8 Youth and Kidsmin are livestreamed weekly. Our intention in these days of uncertainty is to keep some certainty in the familiar, so the Sunday morning service is livestreamed from the Auditorium.

On Sunday 24th May the last service was held on the Egan Street property. The Church has been on this site for 120 years. Unfortunately because of restrictions most of the congregation had to watch the service from a distance which was hard for some people.

Throughout this time the new building has progressed and is nearing completion. We are waiting in anticipation for restrictions to lift so we can worship in this new building.

During this time, the Congregation, myself included, have learned to trust God even more.

Joshua 3:3-4 has gained a new significance, when it says, "giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.

Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."