



Letter # 24

27 August 2020

Hello! Last week we spoke a little about Language! I thought I might continue that trend a little and chat about Culture! Culture is essentially the accepted 'norms' that drive the what, when, where, how and why of our behaviours. Families have their culture, communities have their culture, and churches have their culture! And while many cultural expectations vary from place to place, there is one aspect of culture that is almost universally accepted and that is: culture once entrenched into society, becomes extremely difficult to change. Perhaps that is because society deems our 'accepted' practices.

At the Bible Society AGM last week, I was loaned a copy of a new communication from this great organisation. It's a magazine that endeavours to encapsulate the strengths of 3 magazines that have been a part of Bible Society's 'culture' for years. Some of us get "The Sower". Most of us would be aware of and have read various editions of "Eternity" and many would receive 'Koorong' publications promoting a vast array of Christian resources. Each of these have been quality productions in their own right but COVID, amongst other things, has changed some of their thinking. Essentially it is three in one. To quote Grant Thomson – CEO – "This time of isolation seemed exactly the right time to introduce our beloved supporters to a combined publication". Admittedly it is a trial but I suspect that it is their hope that people will accept the change. One wonders what feedback they might receive. If general cultural change experience is anything to go by there will be those who embrace it, those who reject it, and a whole bunch who choose to just go along with it – perhaps they don't really care.

We all know that Jesus radically upset the people – including the religious leaders - of his day by challenging their culture. Jesus' summary of His new way of being – Matthew 5 – called the Beattitudes – was then and continues to be today a different set of norms to what many were and are accustomed. What would Jesus want us to be changing today? Much of church culture has morphed over the years by man's (woman's) ideas. Why do we sit in rows? Why do we stand when we sing? Where did worship being confined to an hour come from?

Certainly these last 6 months have forced us into doing things very differently. The whole 'online' space has messed with our heads if we are honest but that's what a cultural shift does – at least for a time. Some argue it is the new norm. Others contend that nothing can replace the face to face experience. Maybe, as I often reflect – it's a case of both and, not either or. Did you know that almost a third of those who identify as 'having no religion' are very open to discuss faith online. Does our culture need revisiting?

COVID-19

A number of new cases over these last few days in and around Brisbane. As of yesterday (Wednesday), there were still some folk connected with the Youth Detention Centre that hadn't been found and tested. I guess until that search is completed and the process satisfied, there is still uncertainty around what may or may not happen re the possible re-introduction of tighter restrictions yet again. Currently of course gathering in homes and in public places is now limited to 30 but fortunately this does not impact upon such gatherings as churches, provided they have opted into a Covid Safe Plan. I am regularly hearing now sentiments like, "I'm over it" and "when will this end?" Many suggest that we will be in this space, in some degree, for 12 months or more. No-one really knows for sure though, and again we need to be resolute in our focus on Jesus.

The wearing of masks has become compulsory in public places like shopping centres for folk in the south and western parts of Brisbane as well as aged care centres etc. While we are free from this here, it could be that in the future it may become desirable. Indeed, Uniting Care in its hospitals has moved to this being a standard approach. And they have extended this to all staff providing care in hospitals, Blue Care aged care facilities and community service environments, and Family and Disability Services (SIL, OOH, Homelessness, and Domestic Family Violence Residential) across the state.

Despite all this, we are so much better off than our southern neighbours. I spoke to a guy who is working from home in the middle of Melbourne. I asked him how things were going for him given their continued lock down. There was a pause for a few seconds and as he began to get teary (or that's how he sounded) he told me how difficult it was and is and that in some 4 months now, working from home, no-one had asked him how he was. He thanked me. He said, "you didn't have to say anything or even ask the question – you rang on business and yet of all my friends and colleagues down here – I get cared for by a guy I've never met from another state – you've made my day." Can you pray for that guy – his name is Paul. Thank you!

CHURCH

Your Leadership team met last Tuesday night. Here are some of the highlights:

- There was lots of discussion re our first service 'come-back' on Sunday 6th September. Of course, this is Father's Day so we will be finding a way to treasure our Dad's in some small way as we re-gather. There is no issue with the starting of an early service – although post the meeting – we are aware that 8am is going to be hard for some. Jim and I are thinking that through. What are the options for a change of time? How does this impact on the second service? Should we consider a change of time for the second one as well? What are the difficulties in maintaining an association with the other two churches for a contemporary look service for a while longer? These are some of the issues discussed without any clear answers just yet. What was decided is that we will review the second service in particular at our next meeting – we have no idea who may be coming back?? We may be seeking feedback over the next few days to help us understand what could be the best way forward.
- As specified last week – due to the maximum number of people allowed in the church - 45 - we will need to have any interested in coming, to register their intent by phoning Cherylie in the office each Thursday on 5482 2985 between the hours of 8.30 am and 3pm. Thank you in advance for your attention to this.
- With Sandy and I leaving at the end of the year, it is necessary for a Congregation Profile to be completed and ultimately accepted by the congregation. Several people have been asked to give input into a first cut over the next 2 weeks and eventually it is proposed that a recommended Profile will be made available for endorsement. We don't have a lot of time to fall in line with Synod and Presbytery responsibilities, so we will need to be calling a Congregation meeting of some sort soon. Watch this space. The Profile lets prospective Ministers know something of the life and witness – the culture of the Congregation. So its important that we put in there who we are wanting to become not just who we may be now.
- Similarly a JNC (Joint Nominating Committee) will need to be appointed / elected as soon as possible. Again the Leadership Team will submit its recommendation – 6 names from across all three worshipping communities.
- Synod are doing a lot of work at the moment in the Child Care space. It is likely that, by early next year, the Board / Committee' mandate will be substantially changed. It will be much more missional in its approach instead of being managers. Much of the administration will be centralised and there is a push for Congregations like ours to become much more intentional and focused in connecting with the staff and the kids and parents – particularly in our Child Care Centre. Of course Family Day Care is different in its format and approach but changes are also imminent in relation to how their service will continue. Again watch this space.

GARDEN - Next time you drive past the church – **notice the new garden**. Thanks to Joan for her ‘Green Thumb’ and greatly enhancing the look at the front.

PRAYER - As mentioned last week, our corporate prayer has recommenced. **8am – 8.45 ish every Thursday morning in the CE Room**. We are COVID minded and distanced but the time in prayer, and the Word, with the sharing each week in Communion is very special. We would love to have more come and join us. You don’t have to be there for the whole time – come when you can and leave when you must. Prayer is so important as we seek to hear and know the Spirit’s voice for our direction going forward.

BLOKES SHED – **Saturday night 12th September! 6.30pm**. \$10.00. Men – you won’t be disappointed. A covid safe plan will be in place.

SHOE BOXES – We are collecting items for the Samaritan’s Purse Christmas Shoeboxes until the end of September. If you’re unsure what you might be able to donate, give Helen Ward a call (5484 3143) or contact the office. We continue to seek monetary donations towards the cost of freight (which is \$10 per box) – if you’re able to help, please identify your donation as such. Thank you for your wonderful support to date.

OASIS – This week is the 5th Sunday and OASIS continues, albeit done differently. 9.30am in the CCC Stan Baker Hall. Children’s ministry! **Special guest preacher – Pastor Ken Legg**. Many will remember Ken from the family camp several years ago. An excellent preacher, and acclaimed author. If you can’t be there in person – would love to see more of us UC folk there – tune into Gympie.church online and watch it at your leisure. It will be great!

SAD LOSS – Bruce Heyer – a man who did a whole lot of work in and around our Church facility in years gone by died last Wednesday afternoon. A resident in Grevillea for the last few years, he will be deeply missed by wife Janine and their extended family. Our prayers are with each one during this time of grief and loss.

GIVING

Offerings received this week - \$2551.00. A little down this week on recent weeks. Nevertheless, we continue to thank God for His faithfulness – and each one for your continued support

PERSONAL

I received my Jury Service Summons letter last week. I have to ring the Magistrates Court after 5pm each work day starting Friday 4th September to see if I am needed the following working day? We’ll see!

Sandy and I are likely going to list our home of the last 7 years for sale! If any of you know anyone looking for a great home at a realistic price maybe you could put them in touch with us.

SCRIPTURES Acts 8: 4 ♦ Matt. 5: 11 & 12 ♦ Psalm 30: 10 – 12 ♦ Jeremiah 31: 33

Be Blessed!

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