

Share Jesus, Grow in Jesus, Serve Jesus.

Vision for this COVID season

2021-?

**Vision of our church:** To be a healthy sustainable community growing in its love for Jesus, each other and the world.

**Values of our church**:

* Focused on Jesus – He is the centre of all we do
* being a warm and welcoming community
* welcoming and flexible for families
* committed to creating a safe environment for the vulnerable
* prayer
* diversity

While the world-wide health pandemic of COVID-19 has thrown many of our plans into disarray, our vision from 2019 remains: We want to be a healthy sustainable community growing in its love for Jesus, each other and the world.

Our values also remain the same. Jesus continues to be the focus and centre of all we do. We want to continue to be a warm and welcoming community, welcoming and flexible for families, creating a safe environment for the vulnerable, perseverant in prayer and valuing diversity.

**Review of Strategic Goals from 2019-2021**

*Strategy 1 - Increase visibility of our church within our local community and maintain the hall space for rental purposes.*

We upgraded the flooring in the church hall, but sadly due to COVID restrictions we have not been able to rent out the space as much as we would like to. Angela has continued to maintain the church website and facebook page, which is providing a vital online presence during these times when much of our lives need to be online rather than in person. In particular, we had several visitors over the Christmas/New Year period who came to our church in-person because they were able to find us online. The Wardens and Parish Council have started discussion about how to maintain and use our buildings strategically for ministry. As part of that process we were recommended by the Bishop to have Ernst & Young conduct a site evaluation for the church and vicarage. This meant we paused on property spending. As we digest the site evaluation we are thinking and dreaming about how our property could help us grow.

*Strategy 2 - Focus on young families*

When government restrictions ease and allow in-person activities, we are finding an increase in the amount of young families interested in joining mainly music. They are so thankful that we are operating in-person and appreciate our efforts to care for them. When restrictions do not allow in-person gathering for mainly music, the children’s worker has been smsing parents, emailing resources and posting out things from time to time, all of which demonstrate our love and care for them and which is appreciated and noticed by the families.

Angela has been running Tuning into Kids parenting course once or twice each year, and each time the course has been full. Parents are joining from church, from mainly music, and from the local community after finding out through word-of-mouth. While not a Christian course, the course demonstrates our care for young families in our local area.

The Children’s Worker (Simone) continued to run programs for children online during 2020 as well as posting out worksheets and activities. During 2021, most of the lockdowns have been shorter, so the focus has been on emailing parents resources for them and their children. Many of our Kingdom Kid leaders have felt wearied and drained by the last 18 months of juggling work and remote learning and lockdowns, leading to reduced leadership capacity. While we had plans and hopes of providing three age-groups for our Kingdom kids (preschoolers, Prep-Year 2, Year 3-6), this has not been able to eventuate and we continue to provide in-person Kingdom Kids programs in various ways as restrictions allow. We welcomed Amanda, a casual paid helper for Kingdom Kids in term 2. It is great to have another set of hands but we still are looking for ways to continue to provide age specific groups with the very limited resources we have.

*Strategy 3 - Create and support opportunities for evangelism*

We have continued running Bigger Questions during our online church services, which have been watched by church members and ‘visitors’ online. Alpha was run twice in-person, and twice online. One of the online Alpha courses continued into an online Bible study through 2020. WE plan to run Alpha again in Term 4 2021. We hope to revisit the BELLS/Surprise the world model of connecting with our community.

*Strategy 4 - Setup sustainable governance structures*

Having a reduced Parish council size has freed people up for different ministry areas. Esther continues to be the point person for our music ministry, Paul Dooley has been instrumental in setting up various A/V systems as needed, Angela coordinates the Bible Study ministry and ensures the Bible study leaders are resourced and supported, Simone continues to coordinate the Kingdom Kids ministry and leaders and Vera continues to coordinate rosters. Parish Council struggles to find a new Treasurer with Sarah Leslie moving to Wangaratta. It is vital that we fill this important role with a person or team as we seek to grow and move forward.

*Strategy 5 - Continue to support Parishioners in personal and corporate prayer*

The E-messenger has now been broken into two different emails to provide more emphasis on prayer and personal spiritual growth. One email is the news about church things, the other email contains daily devotionals and weekly prayer points. Both emails are sent weekly. During 2020 a daily morning Zoom prayer time was available to join, which has continued in 2021 in a weekly format. We are thankful for the work of Rachael Hampton as the Prayer Point person and are looking for a replacement to keep us prayerful!

*Strategy 6 - Create a healthy and safe community*

Simone and Angela continue to ensure people serving in ministry have Police Checks and Working with Children Checks. Several church members have undertaken training in Prevention of Violence against Women and we have a Family Safety Officer (Raff) and a Child Safe Officer (Dina). At the start of each year Simone uses the Kingdom Kids time to talk with the children about what it means to be safe at church and who to talk to when they feel unsafe.

**Strategic Goals for this COVID season (2021-2022)**

While many of us had hoped that 2021 would be more of a ‘normal’ year, 2021 has shown us that we will continue to be in and out of lockdowns and various government restrictions for quite some time. We want to continue to uphold our vision for St. Augustine’s:

To be a healthy sustainable community growing in its love for Jesus, each other and the world.

So how can we do this during this COVID season?

Strategy 1 - Connection

1. Connect with God - personal prayer and spiritual growth
2. Connect with Christian community - small groups + church services
3. Connect with your local community and neighbourhood - friendship, support, evangelism

Strategy 2 - Continue to focus on young families

1. Simone on Maternity leave. Find a person to coordinate while Simone on leave.
2. Continued flexibility with mainly music formats when in-person
3. Grow the mainly music leadership team
4. Continued flexibility with Kingdom Kid formats

Strategy 3 – Evangelism

1. Alpha online in Term 4 2021
2. Revisit the BELLS/Surprise the World model of community engagement
3. Sharing of Bigger Questions podcasts and online services

Strategy 4 - Prayer

1. Angela to continue to send out Reflection and prayer devotional emails
2. Continue with Zoom prayer
3. Appoint a prayer point person

Strategy 5 – Steward Property

1. Continue to monitor and plan for when building begins with the approved development at 90 Sydney Rd Coburg (Next door)
2. Strategic discussions with Bishop and Property Committee about our properties in light of the E&Y Report and our current and future needs.

**Focus on Strategy 1: Connection**

Connect with God

*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,**now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:2-3*

Your **personal relationship with Jesus** is vitally important in this time. Taking time regularly to spend praying and reading the Bible in God is an important foundation to being able to weather the rollercoaster of COVID restrictions and grief. Finding time to hear from and talk to God is so vital. There are lots of ways to do it. You can use the weekly church devotional email, you can use a devotional book, a Bible in one year app or book. Put the time in your diary! How are you growing in your relationship with Jesus?

Connect with Christian Community

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,**not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25*

At St Augustine’s our **small groups** are the pastoral and relational hubs of the community. Its in these group that we share our lives and encourage each other. We pray for each other, help each other apply God’s word and care for each other. As the church grows we can’t know every person but we can know and love those in our small group. Are you in a small group? Are you connecting with your group? Sometimes it takes an effort to join a zoom call or put a comment in a whatsapp group but it’s as we connect we are encouraged and encourage others to run the race with perseverance.

Our **Sunday Service** is our large group gathering, even if it happens online! Its where we all come together and have a shared experience of community. We hear from God’s word, we pray, we sing! Turning up and being part of it is a real encouragement to others as well as yourself! Say hi in the chat, ask questions! Come along to the zoom morning tea! I'm happy to make a whole church Whatsapp chat group if that is helpful for sharing photos of us at home watching and getting involved. It's such an encouragement to see the kids taking part, making a joyful noise. I do love getting your feedback on the services and we love hearing from different people in roles such as Bible Reading and Prayer! Sunday services online are difficult, especially for those with kids, but it’s a core part of our life together and as we meet online we do long to gather in person and recommence our Kids ministry!

We will be looking at Jesus words to his disciples from John 13-17 for the rest of third term. It will be great to hear Jesus words to his confused and anxious followers as he headed to cross.

Connect with your community

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20*

This season of restriction and anxiety is a time when some are looking to ask the big questions about life and its meaning. We have the good news! We know the giver of life and purpose. There are opportunities even now to be **gently sharing our faith** with those who don’t know Jesus. You could share a Bigger Questions podcast <https://biggerquestions.org/library/activity/1263> or spend some time thinking through the BELLS idea (Bless, Eat, Learn, Listen Sent) ideas – we looked at them a little while ago <https://www.crossover.org.au/surprise-the-world/> Pray for opportunities to share your hope!

As we navigate this time each of our contexts has its own challenges, and we can easily be overwhelmed one moment and feel alone the next. The anchor of our faith in Christ doesn’t mean we won't have ups and downs but it does mean we have a firm foundation, a God who knows us and loves us and comforts us. In this time look to God, rest in him. Ask God to show you where he is at work in the world, to show you the good. Start small. Think about how you can be like Jesus at home, with your family, with the church community, with your neighbourhood. Take each day at a time, remember Jesus wise words ‘*do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.’ Matthew 6:34*

Be gentle with yourselves, this is a once in a hundred-year event, it's hard, it's unknown! Look to Jesus for your strength when you are weak.