

EBENEZER UNITING CHURCH



Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter.

Welcome to the Ebenezer Church Christmas Newsletter. This newsletter is for those with whom we have links through our various programs, activities, baptisms, weddings or funerals... and for our local community. It is an opportunity to let you know what is happening and share some reflections to help you think about God, life, hope and Spirituality. Therefore, we offer you these reflections with our prayers for your own spiritual journey through life. Please join us any time you are able, or would like to explore faith more deeply.

Upcoming Events

Twilight Jazz Concert@Ebenezer

We are fundraising to build clean water wells in West Papua – November 27 – from 3:30 pm..... ***To book tickets ring Rebecca on 0439 309 303 or visit our facebook page. Tickets will also be available on the night.***



Carols on the Riverbank Sunday December 11 from 6:30 pm

Devonshire Teas – Open daily between 10am and 3pm (but closed over Christmas 21-27 December). Enjoy the Schoolmaster's House, the Historic Cemetery and the beautiful grounds rolling down to the Hawkesbury River. Take a spiritual pilgrimage walk or a delicious Devonshire Tea – All Welcome

Christmas Day Service – 8.30am. You will be most welcome.

Feel free to invite your friends and family to these events, which are intended to relate to our lives and give us strength, focus and hope in our lives.

Thoughts from Geoff

When our children were younger one of them – I can't remember which one – had a book. It was a book of pictures, drawings that covered a page. The drawings were complex with tiny figures and scenes from football games, circuses, town picnics, cityscapes... Many figures and interwoven elements made up these complex pictures, all brightly coloured. In each one there was a small figure called Wally and he was hidden for the reader to locate. That was part of the interest in the pictures: to find Wally. It often took several sittings before the picture before Wally was found. It took time to uncover his whereabouts, hidden by the layers of detail and colour. There were whole scenes that were interesting and engaging but the ultimate task was find the answer: 'Where's Wally?'



It seems, looking back that 'Where's Wally?' is a metaphor for life as well. Our lives are a complex arrangement of layers and scenes, of people, places, events and tasks to be done. A series of 'Where's Wally?' pictures layered over each other embracing time, place and life lived. These pictures, as I remember, were very busy, with much happening in every scene. There were various elements, stories within the story, as each sub-plot has its own space – a family eating, another playing Frisbee, kids running and others playing football, all in a picnic scene. One can almost imagine the mind of the mother who prepares the picnic lunch on the blanket, ensuring the different food, drink and implements find their place, whilst directing children and adults and keeping an eye on the younger ones, conversing with friends – all simultaneously. The clamour and chaos of our lives is echoed in these strange and complex pictures and all the while, Wally is hidden and seemingly lost to our attention and consciousness.

I am reminded of Christmas in this tight scenario of the complex interplay of life and lives lived. My mind often goes back at this time of year to the days of university breaks when I worked at David Jones in the food hall at Bankstown. We received longer shifts through the busy weeks leading up to Christmas – it was strangely enlightening. Christmas was commercialised and distracted but a little less so than these days. Even-so, I usually sat mildly amused and strangely confused at lunch time. Having been on my feet all morning, I was happy to get some simple food and sit. I sat in the open area of the shopping centre at Bankstown Square and watched. I watched people as they rushed by lugging arms full of bags and purchases. There was little excitement on their faces, only a determined, focussed desperation – or was it despair and resignation. Back at work in the

store, people rushed in and out and breathlessly asked questions about goods they were seeking as if they were life and death acquisitions. When I did not meet their anticipated rush of speed in responding – perhaps because I was up a ladder with goods in hand stocking them away – there was impatience and much looking at their watches and muttering under their breath... Christmas Eve was the worst! As we tried to clear away the last remnants of leftover food stock and other goods, people came rushing in at the last minute wanting ‘something’, ‘anything’ – any gift they could give to the uncle they forgot or the friend who surprisingly turned up with something. There was little left and they rushed in circles of desperate searching.

What were they searching for? What were they looking for in their busy headlong rush towards Christmas? I, sadly, recognise I have succumbed to this busy rush over the years. I have allowed the busy-ness of life and the expectations of a strange and lovely, but skewed world to overwhelm me and distort my living. It's like I'm looking at the picture book but can't remember that the purpose is to find Wally. The picture is great and interesting but also a distraction that hides the central purpose – to find Wally (or Jesus!).

As we head towards Christmas there are many distractions, mostly arriving in the form of busy activity and expectation of a commercialised, searching world. The variety of images that assaults us through the lead up to Christmas often offer themselves as *the* purpose. Parties, gifts, decorations, lights, food, family, carols... are all lovely elements, fun and important but they are also like the many elements, the background, foreground and multilayered elements of a ‘Where's Wally?’ picture. They distract us from the essential reality at the heart of the season – *God with us*. It's as if there is a small baby in a simple manger hidden in the picture book life of our world and the various distractions lead us away from God revealed in Jesus. We yearn for this simple, profound truth to touch our lives and to know the reality of God's love for us but so much busy-ness leads us into other areas of searching and attention. God is ever-present, the reality at the heart of all life, the One in whom we live and move and have our being. God gives us life and sustains us in gracious generosity, inviting us into a simple way of living that is relational, compassionate, just and takes time to look, listen and enjoy the world around us.

Christmas is perhaps the season in which we are brought most closely into the story of God and God's grace in our lives. The elements are all there and we have only to stop and look, listen and embrace this story with its deep truth. The story is told in so many

ways but we rush on by and miss its simple, profound offering. Perhaps it is too simple and we look for more complex offerings that promise much but ultimately offer little fulfilment? The reality of Christmas also enters human life in other ways and times, most particularly when we are brought into the place of deep pain and struggle. When we are confronted by the deep darkness of life, we tend to stop and ask questions, demand answers and pause to wait for answers. It is in these moments that the reality of a simple hope that *God is with us* in the mess, a power beyond us who will sustain us, lead us, hold us, and love us is special, meaningful and comforting. In joyful moments, times of peace and quietness and when in a community in which we can belong and feel accepted, Christmas grace is present because God is there and when we stop to look, listen and ponder we will be surprised by the beautiful reality before our eyes and in our spirits, the presence of God!

Grace and Peace,
Geoff

***For any support, questions, comments, please visit
or contact us ...***

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Mazda MX-5 President's Picnic

Participants in this event in Ebenezer Church grounds came from an area bounded by Newcastle and Canberra. Our church members catered for 176 lunches!



Children's Activities

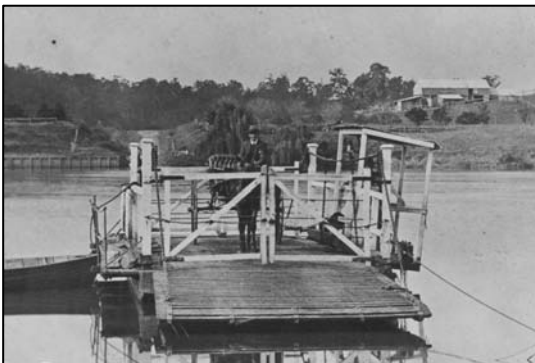


Merry Christmas

How many smaller words can you make
from the letters above?

Did you know ...

- A ferry service is known to have operated across the river at Sackville since at least 1883, and possibly the 1870s. In 1929 Cr Lowe called Council's attention to the working of the Sackville Ferry. He reported ... 'At one function he had counted over 50 sulkies, numerous saddle horses, bicycles and motors crossing, and the work was altogether too much for the ferryman to cope with as a day's work.' The photo is of Ebenezer Church minister Rev. Robert Edgar on the ferry about 1905.
- For its first 20 years Ebenezer Church was not aligned to one denomination. There were Presbyterians, Calvinists, Catholics, Congregationalists, Church of England, ... a church of common Christianity. It became a Presbyterian Church in 1824 and a Uniting Church in 1977.
- The Bible doesn't actually mention a specific date for Jesus' birth. In fact as the Bible mentions shepherds herding animals while the birth of Christ, historians believe he was probably born in spring. Christmas has many names including but not limited to Bada Din in India, Sheng Tan Kuai Loh in China and Joyeux Noel.



Spring Fair

A large crowd attended the Spring Fair at Ebenezer Church on its traditional date - the Saturday of the October long weekend

Bet You Didn't Know....

- In Tokyo, a bicycle is faster than a car for most trips of less than 50 minutes!
- Should there be a crash, Prince Charles and Prince William never travel on the same aeroplane as a precaution!
- Your body is creating and killing 15 million red blood cells per second!
- The king of hearts is the only king without a moustache on a standard playing card!
- There are no clocks in Las Vegas gambling casinos! There is one slot machine in Las Vegas for every eight inhabitants!
- The Mona Lisa has no eyebrows. It was the fashion in Renaissance Florence to shave them off.
- The most popular first name in the world is Muhammad!
- Tablecloths were originally meant to be served as towels with which dinner guests could wipe their hands and faces after eating!
- Tourists visiting Iceland should know that tipping at a restaurant is considered an insult!
- The names of Popeye's four nephews are Pipeye, Peepeye, Pupeye, and Poopeye!
- Until the nineteenth century, solid blocks of tea were used as money in Siberia!
- The Nobel Peace Prize medal depicts three naked men with their hands on each other's shoulders!
- When glass breaks, the cracks move faster than 3,000 miles per hour. To photograph the event, a camera must shoot at a millionth of a second!
- A Boeing 747 airliner holds 57,285 gallons of fuel!
- A car uses 50 ml of fuel idling for one minute. 15 ml is used to start the average car!
- The Philadelphia mint produces 26 million pennies per day!
- A lightning bolt generates temperatures five times hotter than those found at the sun's surface!
- A violin contains about 70 separate pieces of wood!

Where's Jesus???

