

Inspire

I Love the Church

God has given us a number of things to empower, equip and encourage us.

Firstly – he has given us Jesus (John 3:16) and with Him every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms—salvation, baptism, deliverance, eternal life, healing, our identity and more. (Ephesians 1:3 and Romans 8:32). **Are we living in Him?**

Secondly – He has given us His Word that is full of His precious promises. (2Timothy 3:16 and Acts 20:32.) **Are we reading it?**

Thirdly – He has given us His spirit. (John 14:15, John 16:7 and Acts 1:8) to counsel, comfort, guide, convict, empower and teach us. **Are we embracing Him?**

Fourthly – He has given us His church (Matthew 16:18) to equip us, encourage us and to be the vehicle that reaches the world. So we must ask ourselves: **“Am I committed to my local church?”**

Because He is, Jesus declared that He will build the church and hell would not stop it. When Jesus said this, the only church in operation had 12 very committed leaders, 72 workers and thousands of spectators and receivers.

Today there is an astonishing 3.7 million churches around the world and that number is growing at a rate of 50,000 new congregations every year. And there are currently 67,000 different denominations. Now two-sevenths of the world’s population comprise today’s church. Jesus’ bold declaration is certainly coming to pass!

The Bible uses the word ‘church’ 114 times. Over 100 times it is in reference to the local church—the church you and I are a part of. So we have no doubt of God’s commitment to the local church. Let’s get back to that question: **“Am I committed to my local church?”**

I ask that question because we live in a world that lacks a sense of commitment, responsibility and

accountability. We have just had a bit of an exodus at our church and I know that can happen, but the way some people left absolutely baffled and bewildered me. There is certainly a change of values taking place in people’s lives. Twenty years ago commitment, giving, serving and leaving, meant something totally different than it does today.

Some reasons for lack of commitment to the local church

If I don’t cover your reason I’ll leave a space at the end for you to fill it in.

1. Some are there only for what they can get out of it and not what they can put into it.

When anything becomes a ‘one-way street’, where we always make withdrawals and no deposits, we eventually lose interest...just like with a bank!

Friends, we can’t exist just for ourselves. Each of us has to live for the bigger cause to which we contribute back, because where we put our treasure, time and talent there our heart will be also. David had this sort of attitude (Psalm 69:9, 1Chronicles 29:1-9, Psalm 42:4) and so did the sons of Korah (Psalm 84:10).

2. Some people never embrace the vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish;” Proverbs 29:18

People perish...or could I say leave for another parish (church).

Think about it. We don’t catch a bus or a plane because of the company, colour or its driver. No, we catch it because of where it is going...its destination. It should be no different in a church. We shouldn’t join a church because of its seating, programs, music, or its style or ministry but for where it is going, i.e. that the church is going in a direction that aligns itself to the direction God has placed on your own heart. If that is the case, then:

- Get on board
- Get involved, start giving and
- Get going!

People that never embrace vision are wanderers. People that embrace

vision are followers. People that partake in and share with others about the vision are leaders, workers and doers. **Which one are you?**

Tell me and I will probably forget.

Show me and I may remember

Involve me and I’ll be committed.

3. Some people never get connected

If church is just a meeting, a message, a time of worship or a program and there is not meaningful fellowship, people won’t last. Every church must have meaningful fellowship, as we see in Acts 2:47: *“praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

This is a twofold challenge—a challenge for newcomers to connect in and a challenge for leadership and established folk to embrace.

A person who left our church asked me if I felt “pastoral care” was lacking in the church. I admitted I wasn’t big on the whole traditional pastoral care idea. I don’t really care if I know everyone as long as everyone is known by someone. That to me is real church.

I went on to ask him if he was part of one of our 20 connect groups. He said: “No.” I then asked him if he ever stayed back for lunch on a Sunday where we serve low-cost meals every week. He replied: “No.” I also asked if he had ever been to any social events that the church had held. Again he replied: “No.”

Well, what can I say? As much as I am not big on the old style pastoral care thing (i.e. my visiting the people) I have created a church where people can find meaningful fellowship and friendship.

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"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25.

4. **Running from conviction, challenge and responsibility**

People change churches, moving from one to the other. That's life. It happens and it always will. Sometimes it is a good thing and a God thing but sometimes it is just people not facing up to their responsibilities, challenges and conviction. The truth is, if we are forever bucking, avoiding and dodging these things we will never grow up. Church is meant to be a place of challenge, change, responsibility, discomfort and conviction as well as a place for us to enjoy the things we get out of it.

When people are under conviction, they will either gravitate to people that will agree with them or they will isolate themselves from others that disagree.

"An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment. A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions." Proverbs 18:1-2

5. **So you have been offended!**

Well grab a ticket and get in line or, as a mate of mine used to say to me, if you've got an offence build a gate and let yourself out. They both sound like tough statements but let's be honest with each other. Being hurt in life is not an option, but taking an offence is. We choose whether we will forgive or not. We choose whether we will live in the valley of offence or on the mountain of victory, no matter what church we join. Getting hurt, let down and disappointed is a part of life! You can move from church every time you get hurt but eventually you will run out of churches to attend. The key to a satisfying church life is learning to forgive and to let go.

6. **Loss of hunger for God**

When people stop reading the Bible, serving, sharing their faith and attend church infrequently, their hunger for God diminishes. It is in these things that my faith is fuelled and fired up. It is the activity of my faith, the outworking of my faith that pumps and builds up my faith. That is why Paul said in Philemon 1:6 *"I pray that you may be active in expressing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."*

It is the ingredients of prayer, the Word, church, witness, service and giving that keeps our faith alive and growing.

7. **We don't have a biblical revelation of church**

Church is not just some social group that you can take or leave or just have on the side, like some casual fling.

The church is the body of Christ.

- It is the hope of the world
- It is the family of God
- It is the bride of Christ
- It is the house of God
- It is the mountain of the Lord
- It is the storehouse

It is important to realize that the church is God's invention—a spiritual community, not just some natural organization. It is God's Plan A (not Plan B) to touch the world and bring it to Himself!

Throughout the ages God has been downloading Himself through God-fearing people to express to the world the wisdom, power, brilliance and awesomeness of the Almighty...

- Through Joseph He expressed to the Egyptian world, the foresight and administrative ability of God.
- Through Daniel He expressed to the Babylonian world the insight and wisdom of God.
- Through David He expressed the strategic leadership and courage of God
- Through Solomon, a man who studied plant life, had his own zoo, wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs, designed amazing architecture, was incredibly wealthy and was considered one of the wisest men on earth. He expressed to the world the manifold amazingness of God.

Then we have Jesus, referred to in Luke 11:31 as "one greater than Solomon" who with the pure download of God manifested God's character, power and love to the world that did not know Him.

Jesus, speaking of His church said that we would do greater things and in Ephesians 3:10 Paul says: *"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,"*

The church is called to make manifest the manifold wisdom of God. We are called to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the hope of glory. We are called to demonstrate pure religion. If we attend to the things of God our passion for the church will build.

A firm but fair statement

Let me comment about these people that are pulling away from the local church and starting home groups or deciding not to attend any church.

These people have been hurt and will not forgive, or they are lazy when it comes to service or stingy when it comes to giving. They are independent with regard to leadership and generally come to nothing when it comes to results.

God loves His church and is committed to it. As much as it is imperfect and needing change the church is still God's plan. There are a few restless people within the church that are genuinely frustrated and desire more of what God has called the church to be, but those with a right spirit stick with the church and become part of the solution and not part of the problem.

When I align myself with my local church I

1. **I align myself with something that adds eternal value to my life.**

Serving God in a local church gives me the chance to affect people's lives for eternity.

I carry a great sense of encouragement and joy in my life, knowing that hundreds or possibly thousands are in or on their way to heaven. Why? Because I have been a part of a local church that has vision and direction.

2. **I put myself in a place where I will receive spiritual input.**

Most people that are involved in a local church grow in God and are spiritually alive and effective, especially those that are part of a small discipleship group and are active in some form of ministry.

3. **I put myself in a place where I will have spiritual outlet.**

Spirituality without an outlet causes us to be unbalanced. A good church will have many opportunities for outlet. This is so important to your growth. The Dead Sea is dead because fresh water flows in, but nothing flows out.

We have a number of people coming from other churches to find their outlet in our church because of the many opportunities we have created.

So don't be an island or part of some little dysfunctional group. Get with the strength and connect with the local church. Start growing, get involved and add eternal value to your life.

I love the church!

Kevin
97% muscle
3% fat
(when this photo was taken)





GlobeReach

On a Mission with God... Michael McGarrity

In my teens and early twenties I had been a self-obsessed, drug and alcohol-fueled troublemaker. I had no direction and no sense of purpose. At the age of 26 God intervened; I had a revelation of the truth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for me and a sense of a great calling and purpose in life—to join God on His mission to seek and save the lost, as He had sought out and saved me. God didn't promise me I'd be famous or rich, but He promises that if we stay close to Him we will have fruitful lives (John 15). There will be times of pruning, as He refines us, but a life lived serving Jesus will, in season, produce fruit that remains, as we remain faithful. Almost 20 years down the track I know that this is the truth.

In 2000 my wife and I with a few others pioneered the community church in Engadine, in Sydney's southern suburbs. There have been tough times these last nine years, but there have also been times of great joy. The church has grown slowly and steadily both in numbers and in maturity. Many have come into relationship with Christ, numbers have been baptised, babies have been dedicated and our community has been served and influenced. We're just a bunch of ordinary people, trying to take the teachings of the Word of God seriously and live up to them as best we can, day by day. One of the recent highlights was a life-changing short term mission. A team of twelve people—more than half of the team have come to faith and been

baptised in the community church—left on 1st January to travel to Uganda where we built a home and a classroom for kids who have been orphaned by AID'S and Civil War. It is a real privilege to see God fulfilling His promises. To see things that I had once never even dared to dream unfold before my eyes was incredible. I even had the opportunity of baptizing two of the girls on the team in the River Nile, while our faith-filled friends prayed and our faithful God kept the crocs away!

All of the challenging times we've gone through paled into insignificance, every disappointment was worth enduring, as I journeyed with a team of people who are committed to Christ, and shared in the impact they had on the lives of countless young Africans who now have a hope. The qualifications for serving God are not primarily great charisma, brilliant preaching, or inspirational leadership but things like authentic relationship with God, faithfulness to Him, and loving kindness towards others. These attributes are not easy, but in Christ they are possible for all of us.

So often we look to the great "superstars" of the church world—the conference headliners, the TV preachers—and think we could never do that. I'm convinced that God is more interested in hearts that are committed to Him. In God's economy, they are the superstars.—a bunch of ordinary people who connect with Christ and make a commitment to make a difference in the world, in whatever ways they can large and small. I wonder how

much of a greater difference we could make, if we stopped comparing ourselves to others and just did what we are able to do for Him.

God loves everyone, including you. He began our journey with a 26-year-old drug-affected dropkick, a loser in the eyes of our society... but that's who God chose. Jesus hung out with prostitutes, publicans and tax collectors and God uses people like that, people the world sees little value in, to build His Kingdom. Whatever your reason for doubting yourself it is not big enough to stop God from using you... if you'll take the chance. There is more to life than the cheap imitation that the world throws at us. True life has purpose, true life has meaning. I encourage you to join with God in His mission. It is the most exciting adventure this side of eternity. You'll find purpose and meaning and you'll ultimately find yourself—the real you that God created you to be...



Michael McGarrity

Michael is the Senior Minister of Engadine Community Church and also works part time at a local school. He is the father of two children and husband of one wife. Michael loves 'mambo' shirts and riding his Harley and sometimes does both of these things together. Michael is a friend of Ozreach.

24HR EXPRESS @ LIFE

24th to 25th April 2009 James Morrison will be playing at Soapbox. Martyn Webb's artwork will be displayed on the night.



My Story—Marion McNaughton

Last year my husband Joe and I were invited to two degustation dinners at Life Church and during the evening Nikki gave her testimony. She didn't hold back at all. In front of a room full of all kinds of people she told us about herself—her past, what she had done, how she had found Jesus and in turn had been saved. Then she told us about Soul Café and the work the church did there, about how she loved helping the clients and, above all, how Soul Café had helped her. On our way home that night I told Joe that I wanted to volunteer at the café—perhaps once a week. But it took me six months until I had the nerve to call in. Finally I went into the church and told Nikki that I wanted to help one day a week. I thought that perhaps I could help in the kitchen...even wash up, but no, Nikki had other ideas. She wanted me to talk with the clients,

which was so out of my comfort zone! When I came in the following Wednesday, my head was spinning as I met everyone in the café. What was I doing there! I felt totally lost and out of place. Joan took me under her wing and sat me with someone she knew would look after me. I have never been very brave and I felt so awkward being in a room full of strangers, but I went home feeling very elated because I had got through my first day. My "one day a week" turned into two, and then three. I still found it difficult to talk with total strangers. I still felt out of place. Then one day, I was asked to take the orders and hand out the meals, and hallelujah, I could do it. I had found my niche. What a pleasure it is to help in the café. Everyone I work with is so friendly. I come in four days a week now, and often initiate conversations with total

strangers. I have learned so much since I started working at Soul Café last year—a little about AA from Ted, compassion from our clients, friendship from my fellow workers, and most of all, I am learning about faith in Jesus. I'm always telling people about the wonderful work that Life Church does through the café. Some want to volunteer too. I hope that working at Soul Café will become an addiction for them, as it is for me—not an addiction like AA, of course, but an addiction to helping others. And I hope that they also will find faith in Jesus, as I have. Can you imagine? During the Christmas break I missed being in the café so much that I could hardly wait for it to reopen. It feels like home to me!



An Australian-based relationship of churches and ministries that work together in reaching our nation and beyond to plant, parent and partner with churches in order to see them impact their communities, providing relational and visionary oversight

CONNECTING IN 2009 Ministers & Leader's Gathering

MELBOURNE

Friday 20th to Saturday 21st March

Ozreach gathering at

Mantra on the Park Melbourne from

Lunch time Friday 12:00noon to

Lunch time Saturday 12:00 noon.

Bookings can be made on

Ph **03 9668 2500**.

If you have an entertainment gold card we have been quoted:

\$180.00 for a 1 bedroom apartment or **\$220.00** for a 2 bedroom apartment. If you **DON'T** have a gold card you can book your room through **Luke Thompson** on Ph **03 9668 2500** and let them know you are attending a conference and have been quoted **\$192.00** for a 1 bedroom apartment and **\$272.00** for a 2 bedroom apartment.

WEB address is:

www.mantracityhotels.com.au
See attached brochure for details

A number of the team will be sharing along with a few ministers from Melbourne, Plus, many enjoyable meals will be had together as we enjoy the restaurants of Melbourne.



Having Life outside of the Ministry

The Joy of Wine Making

Hi All,

One of the highlights for me in 2008 was making our very own wine—a cab sav—our first vintage!



The Hesselbergers stomping out the grapes

My family, with another young family from church, went out to Gundaroo (near Canberra) to fill our boss trailer with 200kg of grapes that we picked on Good Friday. After a picnic in the vines and equipped with instructions from the winemaker, we took the grapes home and foot-stamped them in the garage. The kids got in the barrels too and we stomped for a

couple of hours to some Italian music and lots of laughter! We kept some bunches so the church could have real cab sav juice for communion on that Easter Sunday!

The juice fermented over the next 2 weeks and we had to work it 5 to 6 times per day with our hands to get all of the colour and flavour out of the skins. When fermentation finished we pressed the wine off the skins by wringing it through muslin cloth. Up to this point, there was quite a bit of work involved, but it was all a labour of love—intoxicatingly enjoyable! The wine could then be stored through the winter in large 54 Litre glass demijohns to allow it to mature and stabilize. When spring came a local winery did some analysis on the wine for us and then we bottled it in December. We labeled the wine “Good Friday Picking”. It was fun to have our own wine for Christmas with family and friends.

Grape-picking season will be here

again in mid March and I'm really looking forward to it. We are doubling production by adding 200 kg of sangiovese—I'm really excited about that! We have started a new family tradition and it is just great. I have thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience!

Darren Hesselberger



Darren is the Senior Minister of Highlands Christian Church at Mittagong. He is also a coal miner, father of two, husband of Nicky and wine maker extraordinaire. Trust me I tasted the produce Darren and Nicky served in a number of our churches on the South Coast, and now they pastor their own. They are great friends and champions of the faith.

Kevin

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This team get together once a month for the purpose of prayer & fellowship.

All churches wanting to relate will need to make contact with this team.

Next meeting is 9th March in Sydney
And 20th March in Melbourne