



Generations Ministry Update July 2024

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As I'm sure many of you know, these ministries are supported, upheld and championed by incredibly faithful teams of volunteers and it's my delight and privilege to serve them. I hope this report gives you all a sense of just how encouraging all these ministries are and how God is growing our young people and their families through them. This remains to be in many ways my 'dream job' and I'm deeply thankful for the ongoing support, love and fellowship Jason and I receive from St John's. There's a lot of different areas to include in this report so I've included a table of contents for your convenience.

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St John's Kids (Sunday programs and other events)

Sunday Programs

The main theme across these Sunday programs is the introduction as of 2024 of St John's specific curricula or teaching resources. Late 2023 I established a working group to consider how we can make St John's Kids teaching in each age group more appropriate to their ages and empower the families in them to disciple their children at home. We started with our youngest.

Another goal was to develop or provide resources for families to do discipleship in their own homes. Though it didn't receive a huge amount of traction, there were some household resources developed for the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving Sunday to invite our young people into the process of giving thanks. It's my intention to continue to consider types of resources that will benefit families during the week in future.

Toddler Time (Creche): Sunday 10am service

For the past year, the Toddler Time space has been facilitated primarily by Robyn Gorfine and some assistants. Robyn and I met late 2023 to discuss developing a recurring curriculum for the Toddler Time room that would be available for families to use on weeks it was facilitated by our leaders, but also accessible for parents to use in their own discipleship even on weeks our volunteers were unavailable.

We have since come up with a 2 year rotation that each term has a single theme that is looked at from multiple angles in the most straightforward, age appropriate ways.

E.g.

Term 1 – God Made the World

Term 2 – God Made Me

Term 3 – God Loves Me

If you're keen to check out these resources, you can find the current term resources on our website. <https://stjohnsdc.org.au/parents-blog/st-johns-creche-discipleship-resources/>

Toddler Time needs more volunteers and supporters and it will be a primary focus of mine for the coming term to recruit helpers into this space. We are aiming to recruit so that parents can (who wish to) on predetermined Sunday's leave their children in our team's care. At this stage, we don't have the leaders to facilitate this. We want young parents to be encouraged and fed in services during a particularly challenging season of life, when they need space to do this for themselves.

St John's Kids: Sunday 10am Service

Our Kids

We have regular attending numbers of around 45-50 children across just our PreSchool and Primary School rooms each Sunday. About 5-7 of those will only attend twice a term, and rarely do we see all attending the same week so each week it's more like 27-35 children.

We've seen a few new families join our church that have increased this number, and will always have visitors that come in and out of program each term that add to these figures.

Volunteers

We just have an absolutely AMAZING team of volunteers across the board. It would be remiss of me not to say that a lot of the behind the scenes is heavily supported by Tania Grinton. Tania faithfully leads with putting together rosters each term, serving more weeks than anyone else, organising our craft during the week when appropriate, and assisting me with general check-ins and chats about direction and every week running. I'm incredibly thankful to her for her partnership in this ministry. There are another 20+ leaders who serve anywhere between twice a term to every fortnight or most weeks! In that number are included 4 junior leaders (youth) who actively leading discussions, prayers, and craft activities.

We have been encouraged by seeing a few new additions to our team, but are still working hard to recruit more teachers and assistants in each area to respond to growth.

Teaching/Curriculum

For the past year we have been graciously provided with curriculum from New Peninsula Baptist that has enabled me to spend term time preparing St John's own content. Terms 3 and 4 we used their Exodus and James content, along with some Old Testament book studies in Term 1 2024. Joss has been incredibly generous with her curriculum and I'm thankful for her partnership and indebted to her immensely. We continue to have the Kids Wise curriculum as an option for us to consider any term where I don't have capacity to write the content.

As of Term 2 this year, the St John's Kids program was developed to come alongside the preaching program for the whole church, which saw us working through the Apostles' Creed alongside you all! It was an amazing opportunity to develop some curriculum that we can reuse in the future for our older grades to transition them from primary school to youth programs. We had amazing feedback about how this enabled rich conversation

around household tables and in family cars, and it was encouraging to see how our young people responded to the statements of belief. Many of these weeks I know had fruitful and engaging discussions about who our great God is and what He has done.

There is some finessing to do of the content for the future, but Term 3 is also ready to go with St John's own curriculum in the Psalms which Tim and I worked together in paralleling again based on the positive response above.

Preschool Room

This year as we have introduced the curriculum for the Primary School groups that has followed along with the sermon series, the preschool team have worked hard to use our existing resources to develop more age appropriate versions. Margaret, Tash and Belinda have been instrumental in sourcing content, craft and activities for these sessions and working with me on finding helpful resources for our Preschoolers.

My hope is that we will be able to have Preschool curriculum of our own added to what already exists with the support and expertise of many at St John's who will help bring that about with me.

Peak Experiences: Various events throughout the year

This term coming will see the return of our peak experiences for our Grade 3-4's and 5-6's. These events are designed to encourage these groups to continue building on the relationships they have established since the start of the year, but invite families to join and engage in discipleship with them. There are games, food, discussion and time to connect with one another.

Our Grade 3-4's will be meeting at St John's for a few hours to play games and connect with one another early term 3, and our Grade 5-6's will be returning to the McNichol property for a bonfire and dinner at the end of term.

Grades 6/7 Dinner

We also have the Grades 6/7 dinner that usually occurs early term 4 to invite our current Grade 6's to join our youth programs officially. We kick this off with a dinner just between the 6-7's and then the whole youth group joins after for games. Last year the Pilkington's hosted a backyard firepit and BBQ with wide games and it was a highlight event for many of our youth, not just our newbies!

St John's Youth (Sunday Life groups, external events)

Sunday Life Groups: from 345pm Sundays to 6pm service or dinner

Each Sunday our leaders meet from 315pm to brief and pray before our youth join from 345pm until either the service begins, our monthly dinners start, or youth band requires them elsewhere. It has made an enormous difference to our ability to be 'together' this term since the dinners were moved to monthly and has led to some incredibly fruitful discussions, studies, and opportunities for our youth to do Q&A and also tackle the Apostle's Creed. Both our junior and senior life groups have been making our way through the Apostle's Creed teaching and have found our slower pace really helpful for repeating themes or theologies that need a lot of time to digest. We're up to the Holy Spirit week this term 😊

There has been an incredible amount of growth in the faith and personal conviction of many of our young people in the past year. It is truly the most wonderful thing to see and in some way assist. Despite having major leader changes at the start of this year, our life groups feel like they have some wonderful rapport and depth of conversation and sharing. The introduction of sermon 'scavenger hunts' in term 4 2023 has also made a great impact in their engagement with talks and their learning and understanding of our teaching series. It's been more fruitful than expected in their own personal evangelism and faith.

Kylie, Mark and Jason work enormously hard to prepare content for our energetic and persistent juniors. This group is so big and enthusiastic that most weeks they split into two smaller groups which means two of them prepare a study every week in advance.

Our senior life group is smaller and has a very different 'vibe' to our juniors. Some of our seniors have transitioned out of the youth life group space this year but are still regularly connected with worship and serving at 6pm and some are in young adult life groups. I primarily lead with the support of Scott Pilkington. With all of our life group being wonderfully musical or tech savvy, each time youth band occurs, we have a brief check-in and then send them off to serve! Alison Knuckey does an amazing job of discipling this group of young people within the context of service and music ministry. Our senior life group also noticeably stepped up to lead on the Northern Churches Youth Camp in March, and all had really positive experiences at State Youth Games (SYG) this past term.

Almost all of our youth group was involved in serving as Junior Leaders at Going Bananas.

One of my key challenges in youth is recruiting leaders into this high-demand ministry in terms of frequency and preparation. At this stage, only two households support the leadership of this ministry, which I'm very conscious of in weeks when one household is

otherwise engaged. A key priority for the coming 6 months will be to recruit more life group leaders, and potentially a separate few extra volunteers who are happy to facilitate the external events alongside me to give our life group leaders some balance.

External Events: Various Friday nights during terms

As our Sunday program is heavily weighted towards discussing and bible study, we've been thankful for the NCYC churches group and the NEW Collective youth events to provide some balance and 'play' during our terms. The wide games at the 6/7 dinner, camp, NCYC worship nights and other events are always highlights for our youth.

This term we are going bowling with the NCYC crew and Jason and I are hosting a games and dinner night at our house later in the term. We are constantly processing ways to increase spaces of play and connection without adding heaps more to our calendars, both for our volunteers and our families. Added to this, we have seen a few youth families regularly involved with the TGIF space.

Mainly Music (Wednesday mornings 900-1130am)

This year has seen a lot of changes to Mainly Music. With an ever-increasing demand on our program from the community, we launched at the start of 2024 with two groups. These groups run parallel to one another with one group starting at 930am and the next at 10am. They move through free play, to music and dancing, a God spot, and finally morning tea and craft.

Our Mainly Music ministry continues to be an amazing regular local outreach to our community that sees significant numbers of non-church families engaging with St John's and God through the music time and volunteers. We currently have just under 50 children enrolled in our program with anywhere between 1-4 parents, grandparents or guardians coming along from each family. Most weeks we will have an average of 17-18 children in the first group and 10-11 in the second group.

The dedicated group of volunteers of about 15-17 who oversee this have worked tirelessly to enable this program but are each week feeling the strain. More volunteers, and in particular areas of service such as tech, up front leading, and general connecting with the other families, are needed. More committed 'every week' team members will lead to a more sustainable 2 groups and could lead to a 3rd group!

Last term we had our annual trip to Rare Bears Playcenter in Eltham and it was a highlight of the year so far for many of us. It enables both groups to connect with one another and

for more organic conversations to be sustained for longer periods of time. It's also just amazing seeing how much fun our little ones get to have.

We still have almost weekly inquiries for our program with other local programs struggling to see interest. As we are currently, we have no capacity to meet this demand but are seeing great growth with the cohort we have and continue to be encouraged by MM families engaging with other St John's ministries with their older children, like Going Bananas.

KidsHope (Diamond Creek P.S.): One Child. One Hour. Once a week.

Our now ten year relationship with KidsHope continues with smaller mentor numbers at present but a great enthusiasm from the Diamond Creek P.S. Wellbeing team and Principal. At present we have 3 mentors who go for one hour every week. There are 1-2 more people at St John's interested in becoming mentors so I will be training them this term or next to either enter by term 4 or the beginning of 2025.

At the end of this year, we will lose one of our mentors as they take a well-deserved break and their mentee graduates primary school. As many of you know, we have had some amazing good news stories from our ministry through KidsHope and I'm very committed to continuing this program as long as possible.

My goal is to see another few mentors engaged each year with longevity in mentoring and ideally some more male mentors who are in great demand at Diamond Creek P.S. On a personal note, I have thoroughly enjoyed the mentoring process of engaging with the school, having a warm and friendly mentee who's always excited to see me, getting to know the teachers and staff, and occasionally running into some St John's kids! I make a big difference in this one child's life and I'm greatly blessed by that every week. One hour once a week is all it takes to help make difference in a child's life, a family and a school community.

Thank God it's Friday (TGIF) (Twice a term Fridays 6-930pm)

This year we began a trial youth outreach in our local community that meets twice a term at the Diamond Creek Skate Park. The idea of the drop-in style program was to make a space for play, fun and create meaningful relationships with local non-church youth. Each event our team sets up lights, a marquee, picnic rugs, cushions, games, henna, and engages at the skate park. Every time is different in terms of who engages, how long they stay, and

what kinds of conversations we can have. It's been an encouraging start but has a long way to go in terms of building traction and a presence in our community.

I've had (and others on team have had) some great conversations with local teens about their lives and pressures as well as lots of being silly, enjoying the bikes and skateboards, feeding local teens seeing their joy at our generosity, and just being really encouraged by the commitment of the team who are pioneering in this with me. My particular thanks go to Chris and Belinda Grinton and Jason Bialecki for their consistent, engaging and welcoming attitudes with Lachie McInnes and Dave Tregale. And specifically, for Chris always coming on a 'flyer walk' with me to invite more people to the space and being willing to talk to strangers and police.

The Stevens family in particular has also supported this ministry with Paul providing lights and skateboards as well as the kids coming along to enjoy the space and hang out with us on a Friday night and it's been awesome to share this with them. Our hope is that more of our teens will be interested in inviting their friends to the space in the future.

I will need to do some thinking and planning about how to continue to spread awareness of the program for the future as we are in between digital ministers. Local high schools have also been contacted about the program with a hope to connecting with more locals.

More recently, I've met with the Youth Engagement Officer at Nillumbik who will oversee the new Youth Hub currently being renovated across from our site to discuss what partnership may look like. For now, it makes more sense to operate as we have been but it was a great first step in building relationship with them, and led to a separate meeting with Steve from Open House to discuss their interest in the Youth Hub and any other local Nillumbik programs and how we can support or partner with them.

The next stage of TGIF is to keep building, rocking up, making friends and making a difference however slow or small it may be.

Going Bananas (First week of Winter School Holidays)

It's been less than a month since this awesome ministry and all that has occurred in the lead up to it! This year we were once again booked out with 120 children from the north coming to share in Jungle Rumble!

Among our incredible team of over 60 volunteers we had 31 teens who not only went through the entire clearances process including some extra training on our whole team training day, but were essential to the smooth and joyful running of this year's program.

Our tech and media team was entirely run by teenagers (one turning 18 a day before program 😊) and our small groups, craft, science, and outdoor games all had junior leaders stepping up to lead and facilitate these spaces.

Our theme, Jungle Rumble, focused on the 'I am' statements Jesus makes in John's Gospel through skits, Tim's awesome teaching, and our discussion in small groups. We were so excited to see these young people learning more about Jesus and what his life and person means for them. You can see that reflected in our prayer wall so I recommend reading it before it goes! Our family fun night had a great recap of the teaching for the week, our awesome highlights video, some shenanigans from our skit team, and heaps of dancing and praising Jesus and lots of yummy food. There was a lot of really positive connecting between families and it was a great showcase of just how high quality and God-glorifying GB is.

BIG thank you to the core team, Sue Jetten, Kylie Pilkington, and Tania Grinton (which often includes their entire families) in how they dream, plan, and execute this fabulous event! There was a lot of joyful sharing, really encouraging connections made between leaders and participants, and lots of positive memories made amongst our team as we bumped out on Friday night.

Northern Churches Youth Camp/Events (Once a term event or annual camp)

This year we saw a bigger than ever group of young people descend on Upper Plenty Conference Centre and for the first time in our history became interdenominational with the Persian Resurrection Church sending 6 of their young people! I did a fair amount of work on adjusting our systems and screening processes to set our camp up for further growth in the future and have since had 3 new churches join our group that will hopefully join us in Upper Plenty next year!

This year our Core Team invited Stephen Tan from Regeneration Church Monash to be our key speaker across the weekend. His talks focused on the themes of Cradle, Cross, and Crown and were geared for the youth to practice evangelistic conversation in their own contexts, including an awesome workshop on the Saturday around faith and science. Our discussion groups went deeper on these topics and were a great space for youth from different churches to get to know one another and open up about their own faith journeys. Our own Abi Johnson shared her testimony on the weekend which was positively and thankfully received by many.

Our time of course includes the delicious food from Upper Plenty's staff, as well as awesome wide-games, activity rotations, free time play, quiet times, discussion groups, and worship including a reflective style 'service' on Sunday morning to process and respond to all that God had been saying to us over the weekend.

As always, the team was an incredibly example of partnership in the gospel and I'm deeply thankful for the partnership of St James Ivanhoe, Plentylife, and All Saints Greensborough for how our young people are known to one another, and our leaders continue growing in love and friendship for one another as we seek to disciple these young people.

St James Worship Night (Term 2 Event)

Following on from the success of our camp, St. James hosted a youth night including games, worship and supper. Our own Alex Ellul gave his testimony in an interview with me, and Kirk taught from the parable of the persistent widow on prayer. It was an incredibly encouraging night with youth from Banyule Parish and Redemption Church Craigieburn joining our group.

Coming up this term we have a group bowling night in Greensborough open to any and all of these churches. I genuinely have concerns we may not fit in the alley based on our growth which is an incredibly fun problem to have!

Local Mission Events (Christmas Events, etc.)

This category is mostly to acknowledge the crossover between some regular local mission events like Town Fair and Carols with our younger brothers and sisters. The Christmas Eve family service is the main aspect of this collection. Without adding too much that would have been included in Joel's mission report, it is super encouraging to see how intergenerational both the carols service and town fair are as a great representation of what we as a church value and who we empower and give voice to!

Christmas Eve 5pm Service

This year a couple of changes to the 'attractions' of the family service were made to respond to the growing cost of the animal farm and to be able to provide some meaningful alternatives that were still high value. A few volunteers invited families to play lawn games out the front before the start of the service and after as well as purchasing and offering some high-quality ice cream for children and families after the service in the foyer.

The actual service itself is a testament to the highly competent young people we have in our church family with the youth band leading all our worship, our St John's Kids doing our Bible readings, the skits and prayers, stage direction, and our teens helping in other areas like games, ice-cream scooping and tech.

Rehearsals for our play started on the final Sunday of November and went through until the dress rehearsal just before. It was so encouraging to see how many young people wanted to be a part of the play but also wanted to serve in other ways like stage management. The families and young people who practiced and rehearsed for this event put in so many hours and did such a fantastic job!

Playgroup

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the suspension of our Playgroup program as of the end of 2023. This group began in Term 2 after a soft start event Term 1, and had a great interest from key families in our community both St John's and non-St John's. We saw some great relationships built during its time.

Unfortunately, due to it being both a St John's hosted program and not having enough of a leadership or core team to lead this out, we had to suspend the playgroup for the foreseeable future. At the end of the year, we invited all our families to consider Mainly Music as a slightly different alternative that still engaged with this age group and a few of our key families moved over to Mainly Music and continue to positively connect with us today.

Whilst I am deeply sad that Playgroup was unsustainable for this season, it is always a model and ministry we can return to in the future provided we consistently have a core team to lead it out.

Safe Ministry

A lot has been done in the past year to improve and continuing refining our Safe Ministry practices at St John's. Many volunteers have been taken through Clearance processes or been brought up to date, and there has been a lot to respond to in our current world concerning legislation and young people.

My main goal for this next term is to revitalise our Child Safety website page by changing it to 'Safe Ministry' and enabling the page to be more dynamic and relevant to the public and

not just the clearance for service requirements for volunteering with young people (as important as they are). One major finalisation for this will be uploading publicly our 'welcome packs' for families to give them resources to teach their children about safety at home and what we as St John's prioritise. As our church isn't just on about Child Safety but Safe Ministry, these website changes will seek to give voice and platform to all the ways we already do this and do this well!

One of the key foci in my portfolio has been to seek feedback from our families and young people at various points around their perceived safety. Last year I asked specific families to participate in a survey, this year I have sent the survey to all St John's Kids and Youth families encouraging them to complete it alongside their children to engage in Safe Ministry conversations and learning, as well as have a space to express any concerns. At this stage, only a few responses have been received, but I will continue to find avenues or vehicles for this that engage with families in accessible ways for them.

This year, any junior leaders serving on Going Bananas had to also complete a Clearance for Service in their age category requirements. My deep thanks go to Carolyn Burns for her tireless efforts in supporting me with the paperwork and steps of this process.

One of the side benefits of the clearances process for teens was test running the new ADOM (Diocese) teen helpers safe ministry training. This went a LONG way in fulfilling to best practice some of our child safe standards around empowering our young people with education around Safe Ministry and knowing how and when to speak up.

The final 'extra curricular' addition to our St John's Kids program was to include investing in some 'Calm Space' resources to enable safer ministry to a wider range of children. We saw some really positive responses to this and continue to offer it, but some finessing will need to be done for how we outwork this in the program and some policies for safer ministry in these areas.