

News & Notes January 2024

No Church December 31st or January 21st & January Garden Services

At our last society meeting we decided to take a break from our regular services, and so we'll be closed on the 31st. We'll resume on the 7th of January and I expect that to be a Holy Supper service as it is our tradition to start the year with that. As in years past, my plan is for our services through the month of January to be outdoors in our garden, weather permitting of course.

We won't have church on the 21st either because we'll be joining in with our friends at Roseville. Speaking of which...

A January Weekend Retreat – January 20-21

As you likely know, the planned retreat was cancelled, but it has been resurrected in a smaller, shorter format. The original planned theme was "What's the Use!" and it remains a resonant theme, especially in an era where traditional expressions of faith seem to be waning in our rapidly changing culture. As our church communities experience these shifts, many of us might find ourselves grappling with the profound question, "What's the Use?"

Yet, this question, poignant as it may seem, isn't just limited to our collective faith journey. It's also deeply personal. Each one of us, at different moments in our lives, might question the purpose or significance of our thoughts, intentions, or actions. What value do they bring? What impact do they have? Frankly, some of us may even question our own use in this world.

It is for this reason that the Roseville New Church has decided to hold a 2-day retreat for those who want to engage with this subject. The rough plan is for a weekend gathering (20-21 January 2024) at the Roseville New Church. Formal presentations will be held Saturday and we will all meet for worship and a wrap-up discussion on Sunday.

In a world constantly evolving and redefining its values, how does an institution as venerable as the church retain its significance? How can it remain a beacon of hope, guidance, and solace in today's landscape? We'll embark on this journey of discovery, seeking answers and perhaps finding even more questions, as we explore the enduring relevance of the church in our contemporary world.

More information will be forthcoming in the January issue. For more information please contact **Rev. Howard Thompson** (revhathompson@gmail.com)

Spiritual Growth/Journey Program – Rise Above It! - Starting February 4, 2024

Rise Above It has been around for a long time, but it is a program that we've not run in Hurstville during my time here. I've spent some time this month reading through the book, and it really is quite good and still relevant today.

Here's the official description:

Rise Above It is a spiritual guidebook for daily living in the twenty-first century. This book is a result of fifteen years of experience leading spiritual growth courses on the Ten Commandments in a wide variety of settings. Filled with candid and inspiring journal entries from seminar participants in university settings, parent groups, churches, prisons, and remote African villages, this book invites you to enter a life of ever increasing love, wisdom and service.

Each chapter shows how one of the Ten Commandments occurs in each of the world's major religions, and how it can be applied to each of our lives. As one reads the book and applies the suggestions for spiritual development to one's life, it becomes increasingly clear that the Ten Commandments contain the essence of world spirituality, and that everyone who lives according to them is saved. As Helen Keller has said, "We are not born again suddenly, as some people seem to think. It is a change that comes over us as we hope and aspire and persevere in the way of the Divine Commandments." Jesus put it even more succinctly: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

Because of where Easter falls this year, we'll be condensing this program to 7 weeks. In an effort to make the most of our time, I intend to distribute reading materials for the first week at the end of January, so when we show up for our first group meeting on February 8th, 11am, we'll have more to talk about. That said, these books are hard to come by, I've only got 6 copies, plus my own. I can get some from the US, but that will take some time for them to arrive, so if you need a book, please let me know ASAP.

2023 – Year in Review

It's that time of year where we often take a look back at what's happened, and remind ourselves of the things that have come to our life that weren't there a year ago. There are a few changes that come to my mind for 2023...

Topping my list, there's little doubt that this year has been the year of the short video. In 2023 I created 96 short videos for the "Lord, I'm Trying" channel, which were a big part of the 105,000 views the channel got so far in 2023, up from 46,000 in 2022. Facebook shows our reach this year was 86,000 people (1,700 in 2022), plus 144,000 (Zero in 2022) from Instagram and 25,000 on Tiktok (Zero in 2022). There was some advertising done on Instagram that definitely helped with that number, but still, that's 360,000 views total, and massive increase over 2022.

Another change that happened this year was the ending of having children's talks at the beginning of our church services, and with it, a reduction in the number of hymns sung per service. I really don't mind singing less, but I do miss the children's talks, however that's mostly because I miss having little kids at church. I think we all do. Yet life marches on, and we have to help the people that God has put in our life, regardless of who He hasn't.

The reality is that God *has* sent people our way to help and connect with. We've had some new people joining us for church services: Bede, Sylvia, Tony and Ellen. It's been great to have some new energy around, and they seem to be enjoying themselves. Additionally, this year Baringa has hosted Ros Taylor, the Coates family, Bev Shepperd, Dan Heinrichs, the Meyers family, HyunJin & YoungHee, and Joel Brown. While you haven't interacted with all of these people as much as I have, I can assure you that they are all super grateful for their stay in Baringa, and that they have been blessed by the experience. We have helped all of them on their journey, and I think that's something to be proud of.

As we look to 2024 we really have to ask ourselves how we can continue to be a blessing to others. What tools, abilities and assets do we have that we can utilize to spread the teachings, and help people on their own journey? The Lord will send people to us, let's make sure that we're ready to do our job and play a part in somebody's Christmas miracle.