

COLLINS STREET BAPTIST CHURCH
ANNUAL REPORT 2021

HOSPITALITY

JUSTICE

GROWTH



Photography by Geoff Maddock

INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGES CONTINUE

After publishing our 2020 Annual Report from lockdown last year, we would not have imagined doing the same in 2021. Yet that is exactly our challenge. Though we anticipated a very different church year, once again the doors of our sanctuary have been closed more frequently than they have been open.

While in February we met in-person again after 11 months of physical separation — and our gatherings picked up energy through those early months of 2021 — the end of May saw us back in lockdown. Since then we have only had five Sundays of reprieve. Altogether, that's 29 Sundays of livestream-only gatherings in the last 12 months. At the same time, this city and our state have lurched from lockdown to lockdown, experiencing challenges that have only deepened as time goes by.

As this document is collated, we are conscious that the uncertainty continues. Regardless, this report bears testimony to our persistence as a community of faith, our continuing dependence upon the grace of God, and our enduring commitment to the life and renewal of our city.



ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

Dr Robert Iles
Honourary Secretary

ADMINISTRATION

Due to the continuing difficulties of the COVID 19 pandemic, the past year has been very challenging for the maintenance of normal church life. We thank our Pastors, in particular, for the additional work that has fallen to them in order to maintain on-line Sunday worship services and pastoral care for our widely dispersed congregation. They have done a wonderful job in maintaining our interest and involvement.

We are grateful that **Laurie Buchanan** joined the diaconate during the year to undertake the role of Assistant Treasurer in support of the Treasurer. On-line services have also been facilitated by the work of **Nigel Smith** who not only procured the required technical equipment but operated it on many Sunday mornings. Thank you also to other members of the congregation who have assisted with the conduct of Sunday services including our organist, David Cundy. We are grateful to Katherine Jones who is currently leading the church in a process of re-establishing priorities.



DEACONS

During the year our deacons have continued to meet monthly, mostly via zoom, and have addressed a range of issues relevant to our church life including those due to the pandemic and the resultant difficulties of lockdowns. Their support for our Pastors is greatly appreciated. The work associated with the replacement of the emergency fire stairs is on-going but, understandably, has been greatly retarded due to lockdowns.

STAFF

Our church staff have continued their excellent work despite lockdowns. At the end of 2020 we farewelled **Anne Junor**, our office secretary, after twenty years of service and welcomed **Lyndelle Adams**. In her brief period with us, Lyndelle has significantly contributed to the smooth functioning of the church office. **Linda Cully**, our accountant, has very competently continued to maintain church accounts and **Setel Adem** and **Tekeste Andemeskel**, our cleaner and caretaker, have given invaluable support to maintain the church property during the pandemic. **Sherry Maddock** has worked creatively to continue the church's neighbourhood outreach program despite the impact of lockdowns on the local environment.

Between lockdowns work was done on up-grading the church office equipment and the security system. Our thanks are extended to **Peter Young** for the considerable amount of work he has contributed.

CSBC TRUST FUND

The Trust Fund has continued to be very capably led by its secretary, **Dr Peter Hearne**. During the year, the Fund undertook a major review of its investment policy and as a result changed advisors to Baharian Wealth Management. One significant benefit will be access to more comprehensive information enabling more timely reporting to Trust Fund members and to the Church.

The announcement by our Pastor for Worship and Teaching, **Rev. Carolyn Francis**, that she will be taking the position of Lecturer in Baptist Identity and History at Whitley College and thus completing her pastorate at the end of October is a sadness for us all. However, we rejoice that Carolyn's many talents and skills will be of service to the wider Baptist and Christian community in this new area of ministry. Her co-pastorate with **Rev Simon Carey Holt** has been quite outstanding and over the past decade their team ministry is an example to the whole Christian community. This ministry has been characterised by grace, humility, cooperation and a focus on service. A more detailed tribute to Carolyn's work is provided separately in this report.

Robert Iles

FAREWELL TO REV CAROLYN FRANCIS



A tribute to Rev. Carolyn Francis, Pastor for Teaching and Worship, on the occasion of her appointment as Lecturer in Baptist Identity and History at Whitley College.

It is with great pleasure we congratulate Carolyn on her forthcoming move to Whitley College. Although, we are disappointed to be losing our Pastor of Worship and Teaching, we are delighted for the new career move and amazing career opportunity which we are presumptuous enough to detect the hand of God.

The following is the tribute made to Carolyn in a recent meeting of our deacons.

Carolyn, we take this opportunity to share some thoughts with you on this significant occasion.

Since you joined us as a pastor a decade ago, we have been richly blessed by your ministry. The leaders of the church have been truly blessed by your leadership and commented warmly. You have led us in your own right and share equally in a thoughtful, complimentary and successful co-pastorate with Simon. Through your ministry, the Collins St church has been greatly enriched.

In particular, the deacons testify to your outstanding preaching of the Gospel. They comment on your unflinching honesty, your thoughtful preparation, your love of literature, the inclusive, relevant and contemporary nature of your preaching, your willingness to speak passionately, publicly and indeed, prophetically on behalf of the LGBTIQ community from within the Christian Community, and your willingness to bear the significant personal cost of that discipleship.

More widely, your pastoral care of so many has enriched both our individual and congregational faith by walking with us through difficult times both personally and communally. In these last few years, your willingness to master new skills for which, as you have said, you were not trained, has been a lesson in ministry adaptation. Your quiet and considered contributions to the administration of the church, both as a Pastor and as a collegial member of the diaconate, have also been deeply appreciated.

Below are some of the comments from the Deacons:

“Carolyn is an exceptionally talented preacher and I have so appreciated the food for thought in her well-constructed sermons – often such an interesting and challenging angle on things that kept me reflecting throughout the week. Her love of literature shines through and we have all benefited from that. Her advocacy work for the LGBTIQ community has also been important, prophetic and at a high personal cost.”

“Carolyn is a distinguished preacher bringing reflections on the scriptures that always related to our existence here and now. In this she made my faith richer, truer and more active. It has enabled me to really see God working in my life and those of my CSBC friends. Truly remarkable has been her courage to speak passionately and publicly for the LGBTIQ community. A wonderful person”.

“Carolyn’s leadership on marriage equality, and commitment to her God in the face of personal challenges, is testament to an extraordinary faith. We may not understand the personal cost of her leadership at CSBC, but we can understand the legacy she leaves in a strong and faith-filled community”.

“I have really appreciated her unflinching honesty and her willingness to engage with difficult questions, conversations and situations.”

“Anyone who can bring tears to my eyes while preaching on the first 17 verses of Matthew chapter 1 is an absolute genius. Carolyn has been given a wonderful gift of preaching, teaching and communication. Carolyn, you have been an absolute blessing to us – preaching the word of God which is inclusive, relevant, contemporary and without euphemism. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me to navigate my journey over this past decade as I come to terms with significant changes in my life. Your support has been invaluable”.

Carolyn, as you complete your ministry at CSBC, know that you go forward with the very strongest endorsement and commendation from this church. We believe that you have now been called by God to share the Gospel with Whitley College, with the Baptist community and indeed, with our wider society. Know that you will leave with our support, our prayers and our confidence that God will indeed use you in the years to come to continue to proclaim, in ever wider circles, the breadth and richness of His love for the world and all its people.

Robert Iles, on behalf of the deacons and members of Collins Street

TEACHING AND WORSHIP

Carolyn Francis

Pastor for Teaching and Worship



This has been a profoundly challenging season in the life of the church and the wider community. Faced with ongoing lockdowns and the other restrictions and limitations brought about by a global pandemic, we have had to keep the church's doors closed more often than they have been open. For a church with a proud and long history of gathering together to worship, to pray, to share communion, to read scripture and to hear messages of hope, wisdom and challenge, this challenge is especially deeply felt.

In late 2020, we anticipated that, even as Melbourne exited its lockdowns, there would be many who were unable to join us "in person" on Sundays due to geographical location, illness or other vulnerabilities. We were mindful that during our period of online worship we had connected with people from beyond Melbourne who found

the worship and teaching at CSBC nourishing and relevant. Consequently, we began plans to fit the sanctuary with the appropriate equipment for livestreaming our services. Led by **Nigel Smith**, and with assistance from **Stefanie Peace**, this project was designed to allow our regular gatherings to be viewed by anyone unable to attend.

The wisdom of this undertaking was only fully apparent as further lockdowns saw the cancellation of all public gatherings across Melbourne for much of 2021. In recent months, government regulations have allowed for a team of 5 people to be present on Sundays to broadcast a service. We have done so with cheerfulness and gratitude. **Nigel Smith** has led this technical effort with commitment and enthusiasm. David Cundy has continued to provide music on the organ and piano each week, adding to our sense of the beauty and significance of each online service. **Simon Holt** and **Sherry Maddock** have also been part of our regular team, providing sermons, prayers, neighbourhood updates, community news, and leading communion. Over the weeks, we have also been privileged to hear from **Sean Winter**, **Frank Rees**, **Marita Munro**, **David Morgan**, **Penny Mulvey**, **Judy Morgan** and others. Our deacons and members have regularly provided prayers and readings via video and audio recordings.

While we have adapted to this challenging situation with grace, it would be remiss to fail to acknowledge the grief and disappointment that



has accompanied this season in the church's life. We deeply miss the experience of communal worship. The warmth of a greeting, the kindness of a caring look, the nod of recognition, the shaking of hands while sharing the peace – these simple parts of being together have been missed more than I could have anticipated. The ministry of preaching, which has been so central to the life of CSBC throughout its history, continues via broadcast, but lacks some of the liveliness and the experience of interaction which previously filled it with meaning. Perhaps most of all, we have missed singing and praying together. The vibrant sound of the sanctuary organ accompanying voices raised in songs of praise has been a key element of the worship life of the church across time. More than ever, I am aware that this embodied experience of worship and communal life is crucial to our faith, our spirituality, our life, our church.

It is wonderful to anticipate that soon, enabled by the extraordinary development and provision of vaccines, we will again join together and sing: *Let the Amen, sound from his people again, Gladly we praise and adore Him.*

It is with both gratitude and sadness that I complete this, my final report as a Pastor at CSBC. After nearly 11 years, my time in the church will soon conclude as I take up the position of Lecturer in Baptist Identity and History at Whitley College. It has been an immense honour and privilege to serve this beautiful, kind and faithful church community. I am especially grateful to have done so alongside my friend and colleague Simon Holt, who has taught me a great deal about faith, life and wisdom. To all who have shared parts of this journey with me: thank you. May you know God's grace and guidance, God's peace and hope as you continue in faith together.

Carolyn Francis



CARE AND COMMUNITY

Simon Carey Holt
Pastor for Care and Community



While the challenges of being a community of growth and support were significant in 2020, those challenges have only deepened through 2021. To be honest, the initial adrenalin that inspired our life together in the early months of the pandemic has met the deepening realities of weariness and the challenges that have come with that.

Regardless, I have been routinely inspired by the continuing strength of relationships that has sustained our community through the year. Through it all, we have remained a coherent and committed body determined to be the people of God, gathered or scattered, to the best of our ability. The energy with which we've engaged in our most recent process of church-wide discernment is an encouraging illustration of this.

While much of our caring ministry has been restrained by restrictions, we have continued to maintain pastoral contact with more than 150 people. I am so grateful to those who have been faithful and quiet providers of this support. What's more, our regular emails to the church community go out to more than 200 recipients.

Despite restrictions, our community has continued to mark significant moments and occasions. In late November we hosted a wedding service for Rae Farnsworth and Charles Leong. In February we gathered a small group of supporters to honour the memory of **Farid Zaeimfar's** father Ali who passed away in Iran. In May we honoured the life and ministry of our Life Deacon **Ian Pawsey** after his death in 2020. And in June we shared and celebrated **Radha Agrawal's** confession of faith and baptism. Along the way, many of our online Connect Groups have continued meeting through the year with occasional in-person catch ups in times of lockdown reprieve.



Late in the year, with the prospect of our Advent and Christmas celebrations online, we determined to gather in-person as a community in Treasury Gardens in mid-December. We did so with our picnic baskets and rugs in beautiful December sunshine. And despite our inability to share morning teas in the narthex or our Green Room lunches through much of this year, we've had Sunday moments of sharing and hospitality. In March, as a part of Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's annual fundraiser, Feast, we raised \$1,700 as a congregation. Together we enjoyed a

Palestinian meal made by a professional chef, an asylum seeker herself, and continued in our commitment to help the most vulnerable population in Victoria. In May, our bookshop in the narthex raised money for Global Interaction during mission month. On one Sunday in particular, with a donated pumpkin, we served soup and collected donations totalling \$250. Over all, we managed to contribute almost \$900 from and talent table sales.

Though 2020 we distributed more than \$15,000 from our Communion Fund to those in particular need. Through the last year we have distributed a further \$9,000 assisting with such things as utility bills, medical and dental bills, rent assistance, tuition fees and 12 Coles gifts cards.

Simon Carey Holt



NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT

Sherry Maddock

Neighbourhood Engagement Coordinator



There are two unfortunate records set by the City of Melbourne during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- In terms of employment, residential and economic life, it is the hardest hit district/neighbourhood in all of Australia.
- Just this week surpassing Buenos Aires, Melbourne is now the city of the longest lockdown in the world.

The symptoms and side effects of a city hard-hit by this historic pandemic are evidenced everywhere: dormant cafes, empty restaurants, shuttered department stores and small boutiques, bankrupt business, ubiquitous for lease signs and deserted footpaths. The city has lost 90% of daily foot traffic and almost all international students. There are no tourists. Vibrancy and life are on hold. As of October 2021, Melbourne is a city in a coma.

During lockdown, Central House has hosted residential life only — a vertical neighbourhood of three diverse households (four neighbours of African descent, two Americans and one Aussie). Without in-person contact, support and communication have relied solely on social media apps, phone calls and gifts of food, flowers and supplies by the door. Of utmost significance is CSBC's ongoing ministry to people seeking asylum. Without secure residency visas or any government assistance, these neighbours under our roof rely entirely on the partnership of Baptcare and CSBC. The housing provided on level 9 is life-saving sanctuary. Because of the pandemic, people seeking asylum in Victoria are more vulnerable than ever.

Plants in CSBC's buildings outnumber everything else. There are now three well established gardens: on the Verandah, in the Green Room on level 1 of Central House and on the roof of Central House. Among these gardens, residents have shared seeds, cuttings, herbs and houseplants. From CSBC's gardens, plants were carted out and distributed by social workers throughout Melbourne, given as gifts to isolated,

vulnerable residents. Finally, plants have helped to establish neighbourhood relationships and cultivated shared interest among city residents. Through in-person gatherings and zoom meetings, Residents 3000 has offered a learning, social environment in the form of a garden club. Monthly, with a dozen city-dwellers, we learned about plant care and maintenance, talked about a mutual love of gardening and experienced much-needed social interaction and belonging.

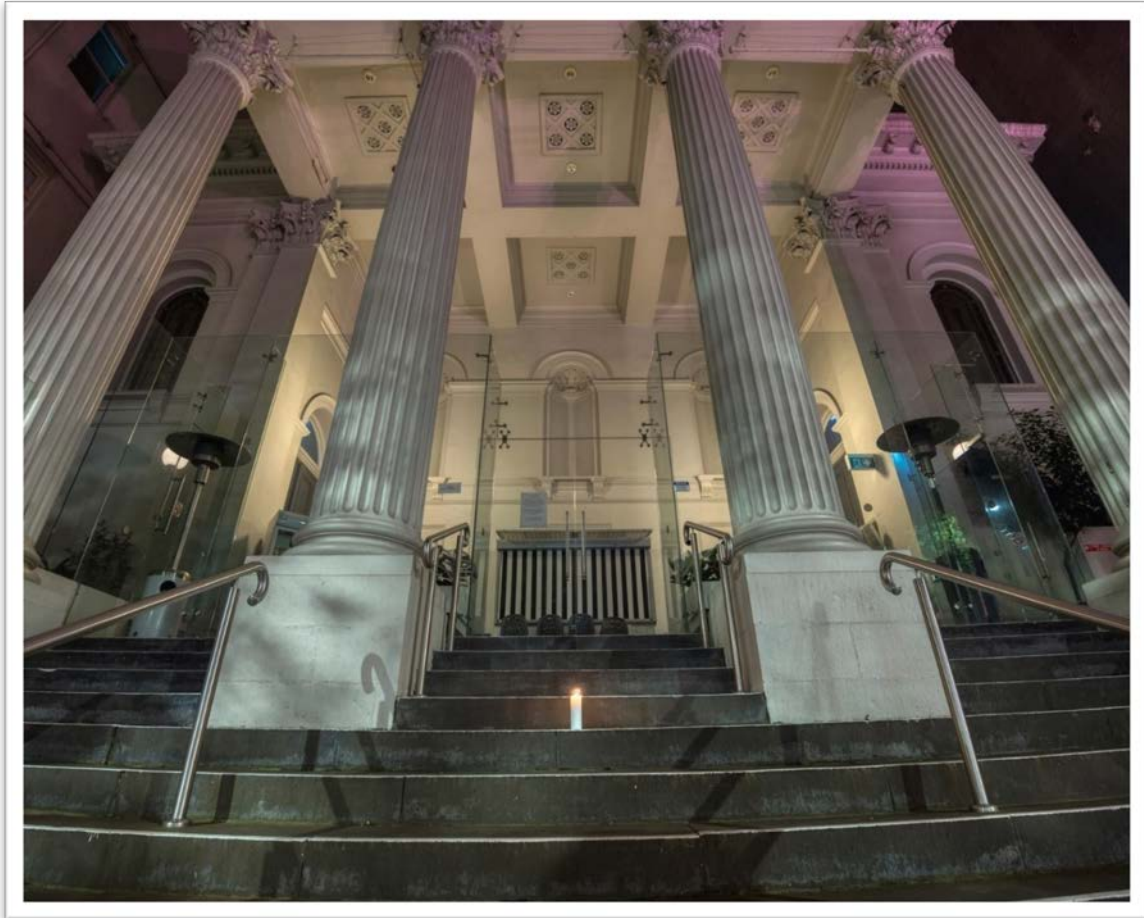
Although yet to be realised, there is a new vision for the Green Room. With a triangular vision of food, conversation and plants, this space will host CSBC community, offer space for learning with language and cooking, and continue to be a place for hospitality within a unique indoor garden

Sherry Maddock



THE VERANDAH CAFÉ

The café has remained closed for the past two years. How we miss the fellowship of this meeting place. This season has reminded us of just how central hospitality is to our sense of mission in the city.



GOSPEL HALL INC.

Stefanie Pearce
Secretary



The Gospel Hall Trust, a ministry of CSBC, is now in its 175th year of operation. The building at 116 Little Bourke Street, known as Lion Garden, and owned by the Gospel Hall Trust, continues to provide long-term accommodation for young people at extreme risk of homelessness. The ground floor is the operational centre for The Intersection: Urban Learning, which conducts city walks for high-school students to teach empathy, diversity and connection.

THE INTERSECTION: Covid restrictions have had a major impact on The Intersection with school groups cancelled for much of the year after an early promising start. Online alternatives have not proved as popular as hoped. Some staff have been stood down and the balance are working absolutely minimum hours pending the lifting of restrictions.

HOUSING: Melbourne City Mission and Housing Choices Australia jointly manage the residential accommodation. Despite the lockdowns this program continues relatively well, with most tenants engaged in education or employment and meeting subsidised rental commitments. Bunnings has offered a refit of the communal kitchen and donated a barbecue.

COMMITTEE: The Trust's committee of management must comprise 10 members, no more than five of whom may be Baptists. Committee members familiar to CSBC are **Monica Lusardo, Carol Geyer, Peter White** and **Stefanie Pearce**, as well as **Frank Rees** who retired from the committee in May. The committee is chaired by Noel Williams. The Trust was saddened to learn of the death of **Brian Bayston** earlier in the year. Brian was a committee member from 1983 to 2013, when he retired as honorary Life Member.

Stefanie Pearce

