



# OUR WAY OF LIFE



**‘People living in the wholeness and fullness of life as God intended it to be.’**



## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is written in order to share with you the heart and soul of our church. Nowra Church of Christ is an incredible community of people; people full of faith in the promises of God and the reality of His kingdom. For many people life is pretty messy and living as a community of faith is messy or as one of our people once said, "Life is pretty ordinary". And yet, in the midst of the ordinary is the reality of Gods kingdom. Can you imagine a community people who are dedicated to seeing one another live in the wholeness and fullness of life as God intended it to be? That statement in many ways captures the vision of our church and shapes our values and priorities.

As you read through this booklet you will not find a creed or a statement of belief. We are not interested in theological rhetoric that shapes belief but does not build faith or provide freedom. We are dedicated to people being restored, to be free to walk in the fullness of life that is on offer to us through work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is an experiential life forged in faith upon the promises and word of God and lived out of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This is life in the kingdom! As Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you," Or as some versions say – "among you" or "in your midst." What ever the case the kingdom of God is the living reality of Gods tangible reign on earth within and amongst his people!

May you be blessed and encouraged as you read on and may you gain a greater picture of what that means for us as a church and how it plays out in our way of life in community, ministry and mission.

In the cause of the Kingdom,

Wayne Jeffery



## THE KINGDOM OF GOD: **THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS**

What motivates our passion for ministry and mission at Nowra Church of Christ is the kingdom of God! The kingdom of God, (also called “the kingdom of heaven,” “the kingdom of Christ,” “the kingdom of the Lord,” “the kingdom,”) essentially is Gods dynamic and tangible and eternal reign – on earth. This is what Jesus was calling out for when he prayed, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” The biblical concept of the kingdom of God is the unfolding story of restoring earth to the way God always intended it to be, an earthly expression of a heaven reality. However, humanity pretty much refuses to orient their lives around Gods way of doing things choosing to be left to their devices preferring to be autonomous from the creator and making their own decisions which, in the most part, are not a reflection of Gods intention for them. The hope that Scripture presents from cover to cover is that this disparity between the heavenly realm and earth will be eliminated one day and the wholeness that God always intend will be restored.

This wholeness or restoration or ‘Shalom’ as the Hebrews called it is magnificently imaged for us in the Scripture. At the beginning of our story recorded in Genesis we see a picture of a creation in its perfection: a garden, two trees, creatures of all kinds and humanity – image bearers of the creator all communing in oneness.

‘Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ...’ Gen 2:8-9.

As the story of our beginning unfolds through Genesis 3:1-13 we see the complete deterioration of a perfect creation due to the choices made by humanity to become autonomous from its creator; to be God without God. ‘... LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” Gen 3:8-13

“What is this you have done?” is an incredible question. Essentially what man had done was destroy the perfection of creation. The loss of this perfection or rather ‘wholeness’ of things as they were intended to be is what we now live with. And it is the restoration of the loss of wholeness that the rest of Scripture is all about. This is what Salvation in its fullest sense means. The whole journey from Genesis to Revelation is Gods passionate pursuit to restore his creation to the way it was always intended to be, as the Apostle Peter wrote, ‘But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.’ 2 Peter 3:13

Isaiah also wrote about restoring creation to the way God intended it to be when he says, "I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create..." Isaiah 65:17-18 (66:22). This is why, as the Apostle Paul wrote, 'The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time...'

The destination of our eternal inheritance is an eternity in a restored creation. This is the kind of imagery that Jesus was giving when he said, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This is echoed by the Apostle Peter when he declared, 'He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.' Acts 3:21

Perhaps the greatest imagery of a physical but spiritually restored creation is captured in the response Jesus gave to the criminal next to him on the cross; "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:42-43. The word 'paradise' in the in Greek is Paradeisos (Para de a sos) which means a wooded park or Garden. This is picked up again in the revelation given to the Apostle John; "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Rev 2:7.

The fullness of the imagery of paradise is captured in Revelation 21:1-4 and Rev 22:1-4; "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:1-4

The Biblical story is a story about restoration, a restoration of creation to the way God always intended it to be. It's a story between the trees. In Genesis 2 we see a garden with the two trees; the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Then in Revelation 22:1-4 we see the tree of life once again, right in the middle of everything but instead of garden with two people there is a city with people from every tribe, tongue and nation; 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the

city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations...'

Although there is much conjecture about the detail of what 'heaven' or our eternal destiny means in a physical sense the biblical imagery is one of a world that is not much different than the one we are in other than it is no longer subject to the brokenness, havoc, dysfunction, chaos and limitations that it currently endures as a result of sin. It seems to be that there is both continuity and discontinuity; the universe will be renewed, but this transformation will be so complete as to introduce a radically new order of existence. When our Father in heaven created this world it was good, it was perfect and the whole biblical journey is to restore his creation back to the way that it was always intended to be. To that end we pray with Jesus, "Our Father who dwells in heaven, how holy is your name. May your kingdom come may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

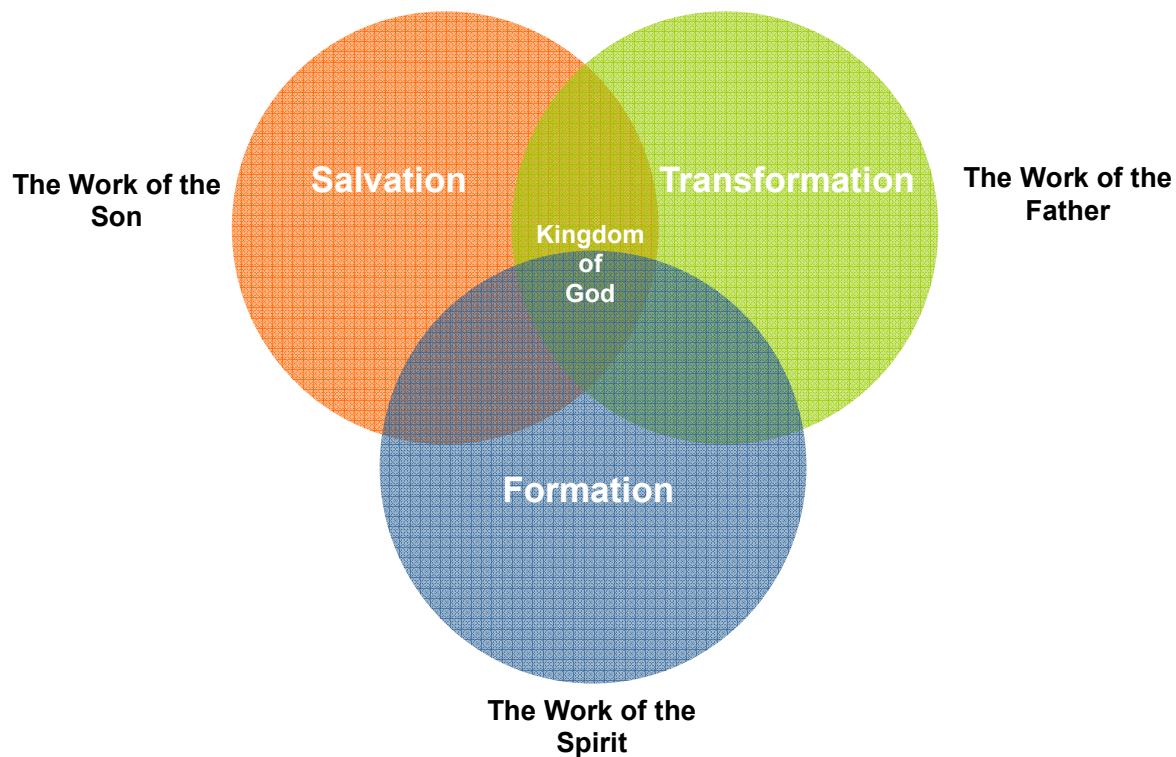
What follows is how our understanding of the kingdom plays out within the context of the life, ministry and mission of our church.

## THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM

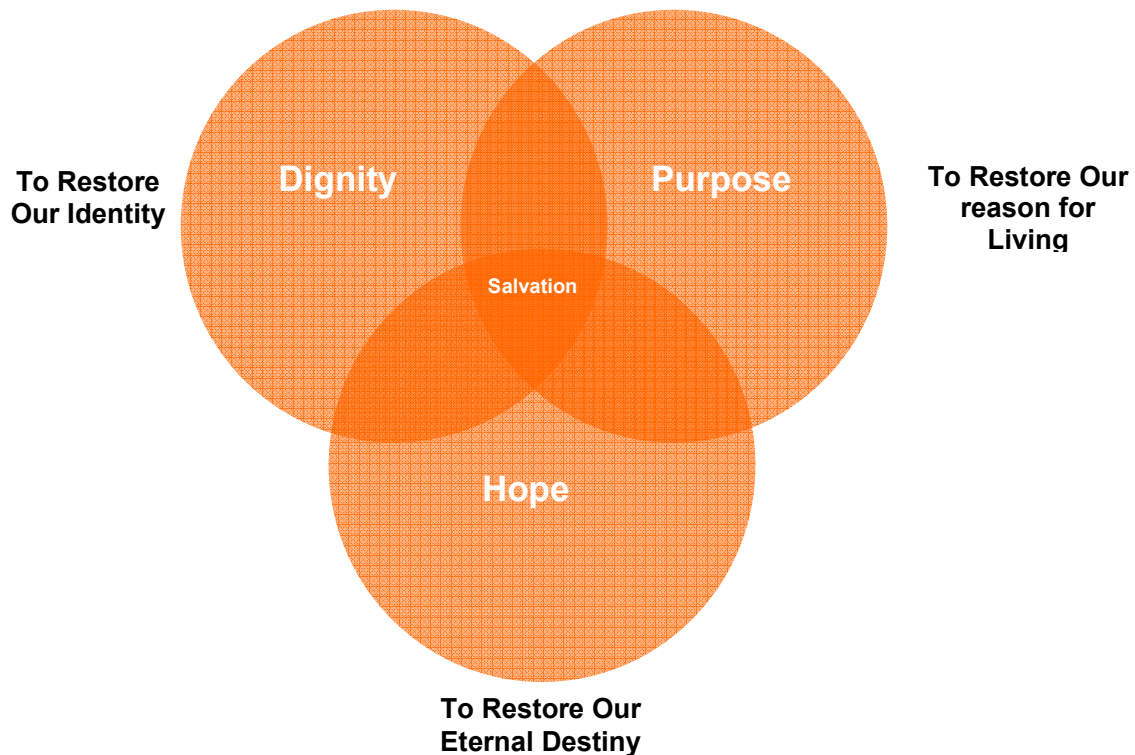
Jesus was once asked when the kingdom of God would come. He responded by saying, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” Essentially Jesus was saying that the tangible reign of God on earth is dynamic and cannot be contained by any one person or in any period of time or event. It is the unfolding of Gods will on earth working in, through and amongst people. “The kingdom of God being in your midst” has become an integral part of what it means for us to be the church.

One of the most powerful understandings we hold to as followers of Jesus is that God is 1 in 3 persons: Father – Son – Holy Spirit. Paul captures this in a magnificent way when he wrote, ‘There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.’ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. In Ephesians Paul also wrote, “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Eph 4:6.

So there is no better way of understanding the work of the kingdom than looking at the function of the ‘oneness’ of God within the context of the unique and dynamic relationship that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The diagram below is a way we have found helpful in capturing this dynamic and how it relates to our way of life as a church.



## THE WORK OF JESUS



At the centre of Gods passionate pursuit of restoring humanity and creation is the incarnation; the manifestation of and embodiment of the divine in flesh. “The Word (Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14 and “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” 1 John 1:1-2. Perhaps there is no better verse that captures it better than the most famous of all, “God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17.

Jesus came to save! Everything he did was to bring about salvation. This is the gospel! This is the good news of Gods kingdom! For many people though the gospel as it relates to salvation and Jesus solely focuses on the cross and has come to mean, or has been restricted to mean, the eternal destiny of the human soul. It has aimed to answer the question, “Where will I go when I die?” or as many people have been asked, “If you were to die today where would you go?” But the implications of

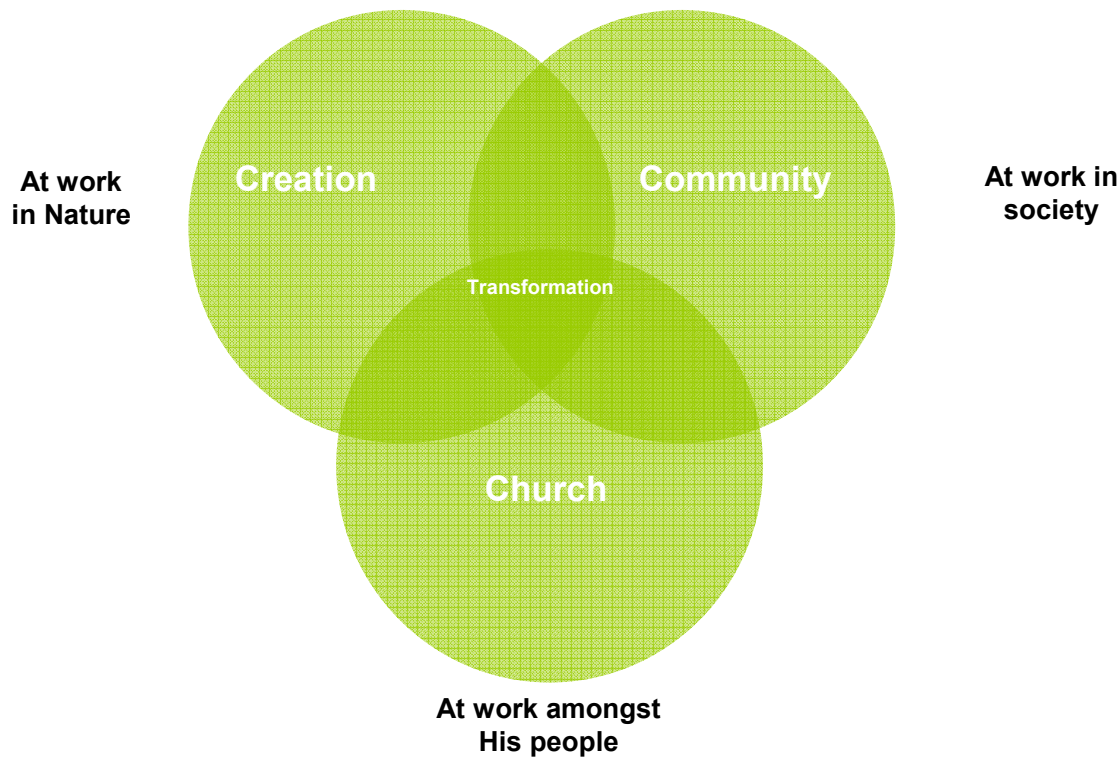


the gospel, the good news about God's kingdom, is much broader than the salvation of the soul. Certainly it does provide the answer and means of humanity's eternal destiny, but the good news about God's kingdom, as lived and proclaimed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, extends to all spheres of life, right here – right now. Jesus said, "I have come to give life, life to the full." This 'fullness' of life is about people being restored and being made whole so they can be who they were created to be and live the life they were created to live.

The diagram above shows how the restoration of Jesus relates to 3 areas of life; Our Dignity, our Purpose and, our Hope. The gospel is truly good news for it brings healing, restoration and wholeness to the core of who we are, why we are here and where we are going. It truly is good news!

As a church we are committed to declaring and demonstrating a gospel that transforms lives. We care about a person's dignity, their purpose in life and their eternal destiny and are convinced that these aspects of life can only be answered, addressed and fulfilled through Jesus. It is through him we are restored both to the Father and in ourselves. That is why he came, that is why he died and that is why he rose again and that is why we wait in expectation and anticipation for his return. That is why we are unapologetic about our allegiance to Him and the cause of His kingdom. And that is why the vision of our church is; to see people live in the wholeness and fullness of life as God intended it to be.

## **THE WORK OF THE FATHER**



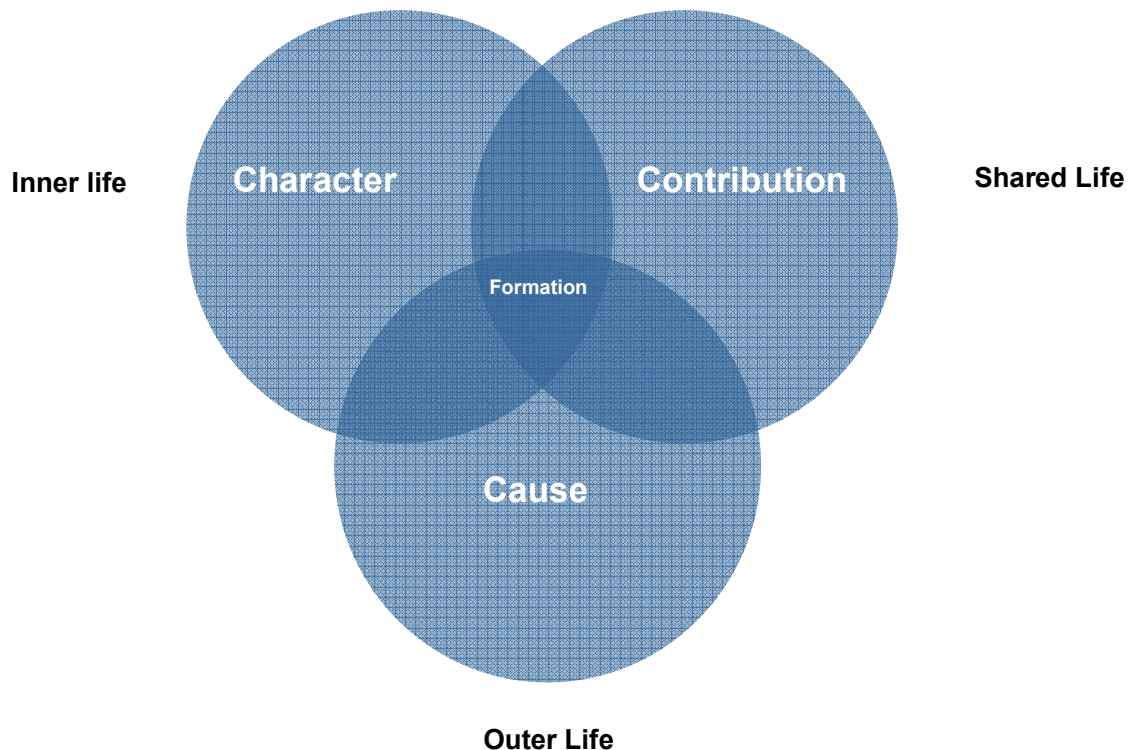
Our God is actively at work in bringing transformation to every sphere of life. He is a creator who renews, revives, restores and regenerates life in every dimension of he has made. Being aware of where the Father is at work is essential to a healthy and holistic spirituality. It is so easy to separate our world into that which is sacred and that which is secular. The result of such a dualistic worldview is a narrow expression and misguided understanding of what it means to be the church and what it means to worship God. Jesus' worldview was deeply connected to the interaction of the Father with his creation. "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." John 5:17. No matter where he was or what he was doing for Jesus it was all spiritual, it was all an expression of worship and at the heart of this was a profound awareness of and appreciation for the work of the Father, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." John 5:19-20.

Jesus unwavering commitment to align his life with that of the Father was the defining feature of his ministry. It was this working with and alongside the Father that governed His way of living, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." John 14:10.

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” John 4:34, As the diagram above shows we see the Father’s work taking place in three spheres of life; Creation – the natural world in which we live, Community – the society in which we live and the Church – the faith community of which we are a part. As a church we are committed to integrating a holistic understanding of the work of the Father understanding that a healthy and balanced spiritual life is one that actively participates with the work of the Father in all areas of our life.

As image bearers of the creator (Gen 1:26-27) we care about the world in which we live. Being an image bearer is not just about our capacity to relate to God but it is also about our capacity to care for all that he has made. We also care deeply for the community in which we live trusting that this is the coal face for the work of the Father. It is here we connect most with the words of Jesus, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” John 5:17. As the Apostle Paul wrote, ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.’ And we care deeply for his people, the Church, knowing with full confidence that the Father is actively at work in those who follow His Son, ‘it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.’ The Work of the Father in the Church is captured further in the next area; The Work of the Spirit.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



We realize that God is not just with us but is in us through His empowering and guiding presence, the Holy Spirit. This is not just a theological concept but a reality for anyone who is a follower of Jesus, 'Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?' 1 Cor 3:16 and, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?' 1 Cor 6:19. The incredible dynamic of the Holy Spirit is the defining feature of the Christian life. It is the presence of God's Spirit within us that shapes and empowers our life to live as God intended us to live. The Message version of Romans 8:5-11 captures this in a fantastic way, 'Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God...if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's!

As the diagram above shows we see the work of the Holy Spirit taking place in three areas; The Spirit working within us in the formation of our character, among us in the formation of our life as a community of faith and in the formation of our life in contributing to the cause of His kingdom. One of the greatest challenges of growing and maturing as a follower of Jesus is to learn to live in the Spirit. It is vitally important that followers of Jesus shift their understanding of the Holy Spirit from being a theological idea/concept to an integral reality of the way of life in Christ. We need to learn more and more to not so much ask for the Holy Spirit to come but release the Holy Spirit within.

### ***God in us***

"If anyone loves me, [they] will obey my teaching. My Father will love [them], and we will come to [them] and make our home with [them]." John 14:23

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." Romans 8:11

'So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.' Gal 5:16, 22-26.

'these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 1 Cor 2:10-12

### ***God among us***

'Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.' Ephesians 2:19-22

'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one

Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.’ 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

### ***God through us***

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” John 7:38-39

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

### **In Conclusion**

There is much shared in this booklet about our way of life as a church. There is much more that could be shared but what we hope is that as you have read through this booklet you will have captured our heart as a church to live a holistic, vibrant and full spiritual life that is integrated into every sphere of our life and to be oriented around the things that God is involved in and cares about. We are not interested in just going to church. Our desire is to be the church and for that to become a reality we understand that we need to live a more balanced and integrated life.

If you would like to know more about what has been shared here there is a preaching series available that looks at each area talked about in this booklet.

Preaching series:

Our Ethos: The Work of the Kingdom

First Things First: Exploring Our Priorities

## OUR PRIORITIES



At Nowra Church of Christ our priorities flow from a desire to create a culture of 'care' that permeates the life of our church and impacts the life of our city. We define 'care' as;

*Our unrelenting commitment to seeing people live in the wholeness and fullness of life as God intended it to be.*

### **Spiritual Health**

Christian spirituality is not just about believing in a creed or a statement of faith but living a life intrinsically connected to the Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For us this is a whole of life experience; a life dedicated to growing in relationship to our creator and Saviour, a life directed by His Spirit, a life dedicated to His word and a life lived within the context of a spiritual community. We long to see people become followers of Jesus and thrive in their spiritual journey becoming vigorous and passionate about their pursuit of faith and growing to maturity in what it means to live life in Him.

### **Relational Health**

Being a follower of Jesus is synonymous with being in community. Faith was never meant to be a journey taken on in isolation. But its also not just about attending services or programs. For us its about being in community; a community where being real and authentic is normal, a community where we are accepted and where we belong, a community of deep spirited friends. To this end we endeavour to shape a culture that provides people with the best possible means of establishing deep abiding friendships that provide spiritual support, emotional sustenance and social connections.

### **Personal Health**

Being concerned about and caring for people struggling with physical, emotional or mental well-being reflects the heart of God. We were not meant to cope or endure on our own, especially when dealing with circumstances outside our ability to care for ourselves. Looking after the 'sick' within our midst needs to be met with every resource we can adequately provide. With this in mind we are intentional about shaping a culture that is responsive to the needs of others through an effective, efficient and excellent prayer network, personal response, and practical needs support system.

## **Functional Health**

Living life well or to the 'full' encompasses more than just doing well with God it also involves doing well in life. Some of our greatest struggles in faith are not associated with 'spiritual' battles but rather with functional battles such as financial management, nutrition, boundary setting, addictions, attitudes, relationships etc. A vibrant and healthy faith encompasses all of life. It is as much 'physical' as it is 'spiritual' or to put it a better way 'seen' as 'unseen'.

## **Missional Health**

Seeing our community and our world transformed by and for the kingdom of God is at the core of why our church exists. Being the church is all about actively participating with God in seeing his values and will unfolded in people lives. At the heart of this is helping people become followers of Jesus; understanding who he is, why he came, what he did and, teaching and showing them how to orientate their life around his way of doing things. As a church we are passionate about declaring and demonstrating the good news of God's kingdom in ways that connects with peoples felt and faith needs. This means we are actively involved in various ways within our own community and in partnerships throughout the world that brings transformation, empowerment, advocacy and relief to people and their community. We have a deep conviction that the gospel is truly good news!