

# Seeking a healthy church

Rector's Report, 2026 Annual General Meeting

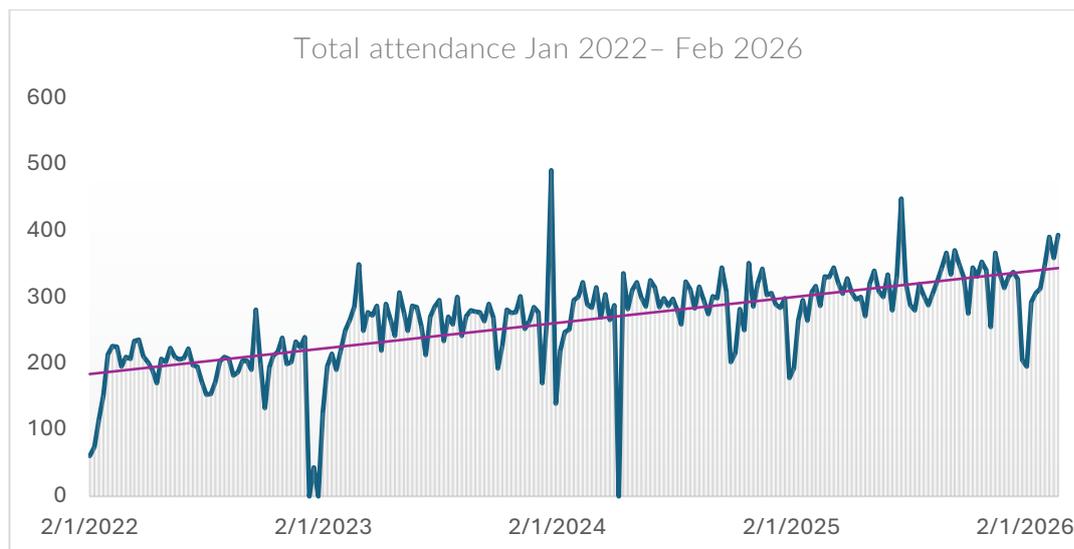
At the beginning of the book of Revelation we read letters from Jesus to the angels who represent seven churches. They are reports on their spiritual health, with commendations and criticisms. They make for challenging and instructive reading, as we discover what Jesus cares about and calls attention to. Churches are commended for their perseverance, their faithfulness and refusal of false teaching, and their progress in faith and love. They are criticised for their spiritual lethargy, their toleration of false teaching, and their self-deception.

What would the letter to the angel of the church of Newtown and Erskineville say?<sup>1</sup> I do not know, and I do not want to pretend to know. That judgment belongs to the Lord. It suffices to know that our Lord *could* write such a letter, and that he does care, right now, about how we are going. He expects things of us as a church. There is a shape into which we ought to be growing. 'I know your deeds,' he commends the church in Thyatira, 'your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first' (Rev. 2.19).

An AGM is an opportunity to pause and consider how we are going, and where we ought to be challenged. We should not confuse our conclusions about these things with the Lord's; it is his to judge in the end. Yet the prospect of that judgment ought to add seriousness to this effort. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, ascended as judge of all the earth, cares about this church and its health. So, although I believe we have much reason for thankfulness and encouragement, I do not want us to rest on that or become complacent. Let us continue to ask in earnest, what does the Lord Jesus want for this church.

## Health and growth

As we reflect on the last year, we have much to be thankful for and encouraged by. Our church has continued to grow steadily if not dramatically.



<sup>1</sup> I am not sure what level of ecclesiastical body gets to have an angel; perhaps it only applies at a diocesan or regional level, but we will ask the question anyway.

This growth has come through small overall growth at our 10am and CiG services, and more significant growth at Erskineville, which now has an average of more like 35 adults. This is very pleasing to see, as the first year of this congregation was bumpy. It is exciting and encouraging to see this congregation full of life and thinking about the challenges of growth. What must always be borne in mind, too, is that we remain a church with a fairly high degree of turnover. Even to continue at roughly the same numbers means regularly adding new people.

It has also been exciting to see many new people join our evening service. Uni students and high schoolers are once again a major part of this congregation. My guess is that the average age of the evening service has dropped significantly in the past two years. This is a good thing for our church, as it means a more even spread of demographics and life-stages. I want to especially thank the CiG hospitality team, and those who organised the weekend away last year. These were major wins in the life of our church, I believe.

Our 10am service, though growing only slightly in overall numbers in the past year, has had a great year, and continues to regularly have over 200 people. This makes it a pretty big operation, and I want to especially thank the many people who make it possible. The tasks of making coffee and providing morning tea have become much bigger than they used to be!

Along with this growth in attendance has come growth in overall offertories. The wardens will report on this in more detail, but just consider two numbers: our actual offertory at the end of 2024 was \$656,861. Our actual offertory at the end of 2025 was \$758,005, an increase of over \$100,000. I am overwhelmed by this result, and very thankful for your generosity. It has enabled us to make the staffing steps we have made this year with confidence.

I am also encouraged that we have grown in our activity in a range of ways, and taken important new steps. Our youth ministry has begun the year with a new spring in its step. Our kids ministry has made things like pupil free day programs much more sustainable. We have made huge progress in caring for the site – I want to single out Jenna and Lucy Weston's efforts here, along with Hannah Ward. We have much greater clarity about our evangelism strategy and have developed a new course, Explore. People serve across a wide range of ministries and roles: Hospitality, welcoming, music, kids ministry (lil' church, lil'est church, pupil free days, junior jivers), youth ministry, connect groups, community garden, bike shed, cemetery care, We Belong, English conversation group, Sunday Service roles, men's and women's ministry teams, evangelism, global mission, maintenance team, SRE, parish administration, design and art, and Easter and Christmas events. Praise God! I am also pleased we have added a new mission partner in the past year – it is important that our mission support grow as the church does.

In the past two months our staff team has expanded as well, in a move we have been considering and feeling our way towards for some time. I am very pleased that James Marquet has joined the ministry team. Although the increase in capacity should not be exaggerated, it is significant, and I'm really pleased we have taken this step. Our admin staff has also changed shape, with Jenny Wallace stepping back to a two-day role focused on finances and safe ministry, and Emily Savige joining the team in a more on-site admin role. Emily has already added energy, ideas, and thoughtfulness. A key goal for me this year is for this new staff team to find its groove; I think we have started really well, and Megan, whose sense of this is often better than mine, agrees with me.

The truth of spiritual growth is, of course, not actually captured by these different indications, and is for God to judge. We must not cease praying that God will *give* the growth that truly matters by his Spirit. Yet we are not without signs that he has been doing so, and I praise God for them. And above all is the wonderful gift that in the past year, a number of people have made significant decisions to become or to recommit to Christian faith. Please join in praying that this continues.

## Areas to reflect upon

So, much to give thanks for and be encouraged about. What about areas to reflect on?

One thing that concerns me a little is the strain put on volunteers in certain areas. Although many people are serving across a wide range of areas, there are areas where our resources are thinner. It has been pleasing to see a couple of new volunteers for We Belong – that is a space where this has been an issue and I'm hopeful this will be less the case now, but it's worth keeping a watch on. Another area where our volunteers are thinner than I wish they were is with some of our community ministries: particularly bike shed, English conversation group, and cemetery care.

Crucially, this is also true in children's ministry. Megan does a wonderful job keeping a good team together, and making sure we are covered. But the truth is it would be great to expand our kids ministry team. The whole kids ministry is currently run by Megan and 5 other leaders, plus 6 junior leaders (teenagers learning the ropes). This is *just* enough, though one of the key leaders is pregnant. It would be wonderful if we had twice as many leaders in kids ministry. It is a wonderful, unique opportunity, and one of the most important areas for the long-term health of our church. Similar things could be said about youth ministry, though there is a little more capacity there at the moment, praise God.

I'm interested in a wider conversation about how serving works at NEAC, and whether there is not always a good match between people's capacity and our ministries. Perhaps there are ways of reorganising things that would work better. But I also want to put these things before you as opportunities for wonderful, challenging but rewarding service. We need some people to give up more time on a Sunday, so they can serve our kids.

Another area of some stretch, I think, is in the staff team. At the end of the year the team, including me, felt more tired than I would like. I think these are probably partly predictable growing pains, and also the result of some unexpected and difficult challenges; but they do need an eye kept on them. I want to acknowledge the very hard work of Megan, Peter, Marcelle, and James McDonald, as well as Fergus. This is an extraordinarily competent, skilled team, and it's a privilege to lead it. I believe we have made the right step up in capacity this year to meet this challenge.

Another area to continue reflecting on is our supporting infrastructure. Although good steps forwards continue to be taken with our buildings, they remain a challenge. The possible future for Erskineville we were discussing a year ago came to nothing, unfortunately, again due to the complexities of development on the site. It's worth taking note of this as a key fact as we consider possibilities in the future: developers have repeatedly looked at the site and had trouble imagining how to make it work. (Though I stress, this is not my area of expertise and I have no intention of trying to make it so.) Happily, another possibility is emerging on the horizon, but it is early days. We continue to make slow and real progress on the Newtown site, though great challenges remain. In many ways the buildings are a success story of the past year, but they remain, I think, an area of risk for us, and we still lack a clear, overall strategy for our buildings.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our wardens, Paula Carleton, Ajay Philip, Matt Cox, and our parish council, Laura Yeates, Jenna Weston, Ryan Southwell, Bec Low, Celia Toose, Harry Williams, and Anastasya Liu. Without these parish leaders, things simply would not work.

Over the past two years Amanda Lefcovitch has significantly improved our financial oversight through her role as treasurer. Although there have not been any major problems, it has been great to have Amanda's laser focus on the detail and passion for cleaning up the books. Thank you Amanda!

## Looking ahead

What would it look like for us to have done well a year from now? Four things stand out to me.

First, as I already noted, the staff team needs to get settled, and start to realise the strengths of its particular combination. We've made a great start, but we haven't yet had the chance to see how we will change as a team – I am looking forward to this and would love to see what this looks like a year from now. I pray it's a blessing to you all.

Second, I would love to see us follow through with our plans about evangelism. Peter Rodgers is overseeing this area this year, and Nick Meuli is heavily involved. We've developed Discover, and are planning two Explore courses. A year from now, it would be great to think we had built on our growth and had a clearly established, well-functioning evangelism strategy.

Third, I would love to see us making steps this year to address the challenges identified above to do with serving and stretched areas. One strategy for this is the effort I signalled last year to meet with everyone individually. This will take time, but the survey we've developed for these meetings is already proving useful. A key part of it involves talking to people about serving. I would love it if this and other things helped people find their way to new avenues of service, and made some of our ministry areas more sustainable.

Finally, I would love to see continued progress on the buildings: to see the bathroom renovation completed, the spire works taking steps, and perhaps some new ideas for Erskineville. I commend these things to your prayers.

Two final comments, though. The first is that the most important things are not these, which have to do with organisation and strategy. The most important things for the health of our church are the continued, faithful hearing of the word of God, and the continued effort to love one another. Each of us makes a unique and critical contribution to both of these: in the way we pay attention to God's word, perhaps teach it to others, and make it the centre of our lives; and in the efforts we make to love one another generously. These things are what will make us a healthy church, and they are all of our job.

The second comment is to remember, as we must, that we do not know what will happen tomorrow, and that it is the Lord's to give and take away. We and our future are in his hands. And so we make these judgments with a light touch, trusting that our Father, who loves us, will do his good work in his good way and in his good time. To Him be all glory and praise through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Rev Dr Andrew Errington  
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8<sup>th</sup> March, 2026