

Emmanuel Church Rector's Report 2024

I must be honest, I always struggle to put together the Rector's Report for our AVM. It's a hard thing to reflect on all that God has been doing among us over the past year. How do you capture and assess that accurately? There is so much that has happened and much of it is unseen.

But one thing is certainly clear: God has been teaching us to trust him. All of life is a school of faith. Everything we go through is meant to teach us what it means to trust God more and to trust him wholeheartedly. As I look back on 2023, it certainly seemed that we, as a church, were being put through that learning process in an intense way. There were wonderful highs, along with some sad lows. But at each step of the way, God was reminding us to trust him.

A year of goodbyes

One of the hard parts of last year, was all the goodbyes. We ended 2022 with four pastors, but by the middle of the year, we were down to just one – this one! Fortunately we still had a great staff team that remained behind (Toni, Michelle & Carrie), but the loss was significant. Bryn Philip moved to Christ Church Hermanus at the start of January, as expected, to take a position as Assistant Minister there. We were very sad to see him and Rina go, but also knew that this was a good next step for them.

Towards the middle of May, Luan Stoop was approached out of the blue by Fellowship Church in Dubai to ask if he would consider applying for the position of Children's Ministry Director at their church. When he'd first arrived at Emmanuel, Luan had done a year-long online coaching course in children's ministry with Sandy Galea (wife of head pastor at Fellowship Dubai, Ray Galea). In retrospect, that might have been an error in judgment on our part 😊. Sandy must have noticed the potential in Luan and felt like he might be a good candidate for this vacancy. We've always said that we need to hold onto our staff loosely. So, after visiting Dubai during his mid-year sabbatical, Luan and Joni made the decision to accept the call. Luan had only been with us for two and a half years, so it would have been wonderful if he was able to build on the good foundations laid. But we had to trust that God knew what he was doing.

When Louis Claassen came into my office just a few days after my first conversation with Luan, to say that he'd also been approached by a church (St. Stephens Church in Krugersdorp) to consider a pastoral call there, I really started to wonder what message God

was sending! Although, as a leadership, we recognised that the timing wasn't ideal, we also felt that this could potentially be a good fit for Louis. Over the weeks that followed, Louis had many conversations with the church that culminated in a visit with his family at the end of June. While losing Louis from Emmanuel was always going to be significant, it seemed clear to everyone that the Lord was calling him to take up this new role. Again, we had to trust the Lord.

At the end of March, we also had to say goodbye to Lynette Pereira, who had been on staff at Emmanuel for more than three decades. Through all the changes and developments over those years, Lynette had always been a constant stabilising force on the team. Her wisdom in financial and operational matters, together with her integrity and dependability, meant that she would leave a big hole in our staff team. We had to trust the Lord.

New faces on the team

The process of finding an Assistant Minister wasn't easy. We are a small denomination, which means that the pool of capable and available pastors is limited. There were many conversations with potential candidates that happened in the months after Luan and Louis left, but without any success. We were starting to think that we might run out of options. But the Lord knew what he was doing. In a casual conversation with one of our other ministers, Conrad Rheeder's name was mentioned. Conrad was serving his curacy at Christ Church Waterkloof. We got in touch, met up and immediately felt that this was the right man for the job. Conrad and Amy joined us in January and we couldn't have asked for a better fit.

We also welcomed Jemma Laue in January of this year as a part-time apprentice. Jemma is thinking about some form of full time ministry and agreed to join the team while she continues her theological studies through SATS. Jemma made a positive impact immediately and we are very grateful to God for her. The good news is that she has agreed to do a second year of apprenticeship in 2025.

All hands on deck

In many ways, the unsettling times last year paved the way for wonderful expressions of God's grace and provision. Even though we were severely understaffed, it was incredible to see people in the church step up and serve. It really was all hands on deck!

One of the biggest needs that arose, was the urgent need to find someone to lead our youth ministry. We knew that this was not a small task and that it required a person with particular gifts and abilities. God provided that person in Andrew Worrall, who agreed to

step into the youth leadership position in the third term. You need to know that Emmanuel Church has never had anyone who was not a member of staff in charge of running our youth ministry – such is the demand of this vital ministry. But Andrew willingly took on the responsibility and stuck with it, even in the face of tremendous pressures at home and at work. We are very grateful.

When I first approached Andrew, I asked if he would be willing to commit for six months. Almost a year later, we realise that it is unfair to expect him to carry on indefinitely. Andrew will step down at the end of this term. As an interim measure, we've asked Conrad to take on the youth leadership role from next term. Conrad has many years of youth ministry experience and will no doubt do a great job. But, we do need to find someone who can join our team, with a more long-term focus on youth ministry. Please pray with us that the Lord would provide the right person at the right time.

Two other big gaps that were left behind by Luan's departure were the need for someone to oversee our Children's Ministry and someone to lead Young Adults. As always, God was one step ahead of us. Carrie Steyn joined our staff team in January last year in a part-time Children's Worker capacity. With Luan's departure, Carrie was the obvious choice to step into that role. It has been wonderful to see her rise to the challenge and take our children's ministry forward. The Young Adults ministry was fortunate to have Ross and Nicole van Heerden to provide continuity and leadership until Conrad joined them this year.

The Care Ministry at Emmanuel was another area of concern. Without Louis' capable and passionate leadership here, the fear was that we would see the quality of care within the church family suffer. But, again, God ensured that there were many who took a greater role in caring for those in need. Toni Groom took responsibility for the administration of the Care Ministry. Roy and Susan continued their valuable ministry to our Seniors and, along with many others, visited people in hospital and those who were no longer able get to church. Our meals team got even more involved in providing meals where needed. Our Care Fund team dealt with applications with great wisdom as they deliberated on how best to care for those in financial need. Monique Blair-Brown provided counselling support as needed and many others were cared for simply by being part of a loving Growth Group. Isn't God amazing?!

There are so many other stories of people getting involved in the life of the church. What last year showed us is that the ministry is not just the job of the paid staff. Ministry is the responsibility of all church members. God calls every one of us to be involved in works of loving service within the church family. When you see it happening, it's a beautiful thing.

A growing church

Another key reminder from 2023 was that God is the one who grows his church. He does not depend on human giftedness or a full staff compliment to do this. At a time when we were most stretched, we saw many new individuals and families join Emmanuel. Over the course of the year, I sent more than fifty welcome emails to families or individuals who completed the yellow info card. There seemed to be a real hunger among many for clear biblical teaching and a yearning for genuine Christian community. There were many new faces at our DNA evenings and, earlier this year, we had nearly forty people join us for our Discovering Jesus course. We also welcomed 32 new members to the Emmanuel family.

Look back on the teaching programme from last year, we covered a range of books and topics. We kick-started the year by looking at a biblical view of The Church. This gave a helpful overview for the many new Emmanuelites as to what we believe about church. Over Easter, we looked at three big theological ideas that relate to the cross – Redemption, Propitiation and Victory. Over the next three terms, we looked at Galatians, Matthew and The Sermon on the Mount. We were also privileged to have a number of guest preachers and speakers. Author Tim Chester was with us in February. And during the course of the year, we hosted Johan Dreyer, Mark Parris, Quintin van Rooyen, Gareth Heuer, Vuyani Sindo, Pete Smuts and Grant Stein. What a privilege!

A tough decision

One of the biggest changes to our Sunday routine came midway through the year when, after many months of prayerful deliberations, the decision was made to close our evening service. There were a number of factors that ultimately led to this decision. One them was simply the opportunity cost involved in putting on an evening service. Each Sunday evening service requires a preacher (who has to put anything from 12-18 hours of preparation into his sermon), a band, service participants (prayers, readers etc.), support teams and many others. Given the fact that the vast majority of the 40-50 people had already been to a morning service, this meant that all of this additional effort was primarily for the benefit of 5-8 individuals.

We also realised that we were not adequately giving attention to the growth we were seeing in our morning congregations. People needed to be followed up and integrated into the church family. New leaders needed to be trained. We needed to find space for membership classes and evangelistic courses, not to mention the many other discipleship needs of the congregation. The closing of the evening service freed up capacity to give more attention to some of these needs. And, although we could not have known it when the decision was

made, the imminent loss of pastoral staff meant that the timing could not have been better.

Work to be done

With a growing church, comes a growing need for raising up new ministry leaders. The Leaders in Training (LIT) course is designed to equip future leaders with a broad foundation in theology, ministry and bible handling. It was wonderful to see 17 people graduate from this 18-month course at the end of the year. What's even more encouraging is to see many of them serving in ministry.

But we still need to raise up more people who are equipped in handling the bible and passionate about seeing God's word faithfully taught. Particularly, as new people join Emmanuel, we need more Growth Groups to start up and more leaders trained to lead them. Please pray for this. I hope to start the next round of LIT in the new term.

We've also got to up our mission heat at Emmanuel. By that, I don't just mean cross-cultural mission. It's been so good to see a growing awareness of and involvement with God's mission to the world. But we need to be more intentional about the mission on our doorstep. It is a dangerous thing to have a church that is full. Jesus said, "The fields are ripe for harvest." We just need eyes to see it. The problem is never with the harvest, but with the shortage of workers. That's us! We need to make sure that our vision is set by the fields, not the barn. This often starts with simply finding ways to connect with our community. One example of this was the Light Party we put on in October. What a great joy to see so many of our neighbourhood pop in to enjoy the fun. Similarly, the carol service is always a great connection point with the community. We need to use all our creativity to do more of this.

I've gone on too long. I am so grateful to be part of what God is doing at Emmanuel. I feel privileged to be partners with such a great leadership and staff team, and such a supportive and gospel-minded church. As always, none of it would be possible without the backing of my wonderful family. In particular, Chantelle's encouragement, companionship and partnership helps to spur me on in the job I've been given.