

WORD ON THE STREET



As we prepare this edition of 'Word on the Street', we take a moment to reflect on the past year and to appreciate the journey we've shared. Living in our bustling community, each day presents a new puzzle, a mystifying narrative that unfolds around us. In the thick of it all, it's often challenging to comprehend fully. Yet, in retrospect, we can trace the finger prints of God in our collective journey, subtle signs of God's work in the stories and lives in our neighbourhood.

This year, we have the pleasure of working with two remarkable families in Randwick Park. Steve and Faye Molen, who lead the local Salvation Army, joined us about 14 months ago. Their years of ministry experience bring a wealth of wisdom to our community.

Similarly, we were thrilled to welcome Michael and Rebecca Rhodes, along with their four children. Coming from Memphis, USA, they bring a decade of community development experience. Michael now serves as the Old Testament lecturer at Carey Baptist College.

Both families have wholeheartedly embraced the rhythm of our neighbourhood, building strong relationships and initiating positive projects. We are delighted to share this journey with them.

This year's newsletter embraces the theme of 'Mystery and Wonder', and we hope you enjoy the stories that embody this spirit. God bless. - Dave

The Castle on the Hill:

A journey of detached isolation to a life of unexpected mystery, wonder and joy.

Written by Steve Molen

Faye and I, both officers in the Salvation Army, were sent to South Auckland to help establish a new church plant in Manurewa. After four years we managed to plant a cool vibrant community-based church. However a deep inner sense of discontent began to gnaw at us, a feeling that something was not quite right.

We would spend our days working in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods of Manurewa, only to return each night to our luxurious dwelling, nestled high within an affluent part of the town. It felt as if we were living on a hilltop castle, disconnected from the realities of our day-to-day world.

This feeling was further exacerbated when Dave and Denise Tims suggested that we relocate to Randwick Park. Despite being geographically close, it was a world away in terms of demographics. Initially, we dismissed the idea as stupid. However, as time passed we were drawn more and more to the call to join the UNOH team in Randwick Park.

Since we moved into the neighbourhood it has been life changing as we have



discovered the wonder and mystery of neighbouring that can only be seen through lived experience. I think the biggest surprise for us was the sense of joy we have received from natural relationships.

Since moving into the neighbourhood children greet us in the streets, visit our home, help with gardening and car washing and then scam us for money or chocolates. These cool interactions allow for meaningful connections as we share stories and speak into each other's lives. Before the move, to socialize, we would have to leave our neighbourhood, and we barely knew our immediate neighbours. Now, our neighbours are our friends. We share meals, visit each other, and chat on the streets and driveways. Even though this seems like a small thing it's so exciting experiencing the joy of friendship.



Another enlightening aspect has been our involvement during times of domestic disturbances, altercations, robberies, or problems on the street. Instead of hiding in our homes in fear, condemnation and judgment, we find ourselves empathising with those involved, as a lot of the time we know them, have done life together, shared in each other's stories and that changes our perception of the different situations.

When I think about our neighbourhood I am reminded of the theme song from the Australian sitcom 'Neighbours'. "Everyone needs good neighbours... with a little understanding you can find the perfect blend. Neighbours should be there for one another, that's when good neighbours become good friends."

There is so much more in the neighbourhood that we are involved in such as, waiting on the move of the Spirit, prayer rhythms, food co-ops, discipleship groups, kids' clubs, street parties, life with the Tims and Rhodes (so awesome) and so much more. The unpredictability of life here, the never-knowing-what's-going-to-happen-next, adds to the wonder, mystery, and beauty of neighbouring. It's an action-packed adventure with Jesus at the centre and we love it.

Interrupted by Love:

The mystery of finding Connection in Unplanned Moments

Written by Dave Tims

Amid life's hustle and bustle, a neighbour's knock on the door can often come at the most inconvenient time. You're in the middle of something important, but they need your time. Do I consciously turn towards the other? I have a choice. They enter, sit down, and begin to share their worries over a hot cup of coffee. These moments serve as reminders of the delicate art of handling interruptions.

**Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours, no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's
compassion is to look out to the world;
yours are the feet with which he is to go about
doing good; yours are the hands with which God is
to bless people now.**

Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Spanish mystic

mother worried about her thieving son, an aunty concerned about disturbing images on her niece's social media, a nana whose landlord is selling her house, a single man whose dog has disappeared, or a student requesting a reference for a job. In these moments, you realise that the same "Source" and "Love" allows you to love yourself, others, and God concurrently.

These interruptions serve as profound reminders of the intricate web of love that binds us all. It is within these unexpected breaks in our daily routine that we encounter the beauty of love - a beauty that includes not only us but others and God. It is during these shared moments of vulnerability and connection, these brief pauses from our own self-centred stories and priorities, that we truly understand the broad mystery and wonder of love - love for ourselves, for others, and for God.

Mastering the art of being interrupted is challenging. It requires you to pause what you're doing, be present, and listen intently to the person before you. Your own needs and work demands have to be temporarily silenced. In the midst of this, a certain depth and mystery encompasses you.

Jesus once said, "Love your neighbours as you love yourself," linking the two great commandments of love: love of God and love of neighbour (Matthew 22:39). Richard Rohr suggests that this doesn't mean we should love our neighbour with the same intensity as we love ourselves, but rather that the same source of love enables us to love ourselves, others, and God simultaneously.

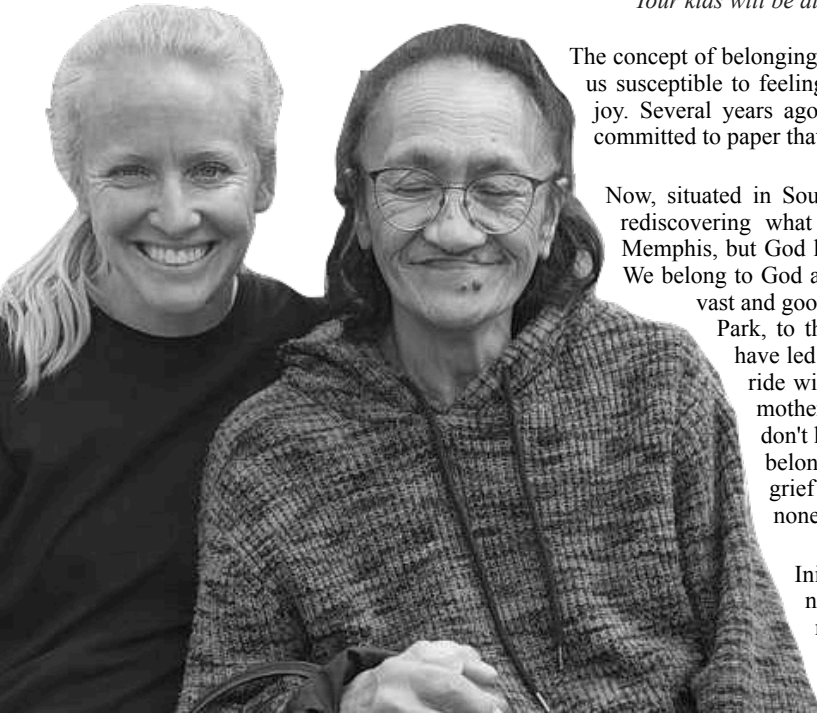
As I have allowed my life to be interrupted, and taken coffee breaks with a neighbour, I have been invited into a sacred space of story-telling; the concerns of a



Belonging to a New Home: The Soufpac Kids' Story

Written by Rebecca Rhodes

"Your kids will be alright at school. Soufpac kids watch out for each other."



The concept of belonging carries a profound mystery. It's a beautiful yet painful experience, making us susceptible to feelings of grief and longing, while simultaneously opening us up to hope and joy. Several years ago, our family, gathered around our kitchen table in South Memphis and committed to paper that one of our core values is 'belonging'.

Now, situated in South Auckland, in a small neighbourhood named Randwick Park, we are rediscovering what belonging means. We mourn the sense of belonging left behind in Memphis, but God keeps gently and kindly unveils the grandeur and simplicity of belonging. We belong to God as His children, loved by Jesus and called to extend this love to others—a vast and good concept. Yet, we also belong to this tiny corner of Aotearoa, to Randwick Park, to this specific place and its people. We've experienced small moments that have led us towards trust and friendship, creating a new fabric of belonging: a train ride with a grandmother who taught me how public transportation works here, a mother with four kids (like me) assuring me that she will be my tribe since I don't have one here. These and many more instances are weaving a new sense of belonging. We step back to admire the emerging beauty—a beauty mixed with grief and pain, a hope that's robust yet not fully realised, but a beauty nonetheless.

Initially, I harboured some fear about our children's sense of belonging in our new home in Aotearoa—at school, on the playground, on the street, in our new neighbourhood. I needn't have worried. God is good. He gave us Soufpac. Soufpac children, grandmothers, mothers, and fathers watch out for each other. We belong to one another. We belong.

Ordinary Bricks & Extraordinary Cathedrals

written by Denise Tims

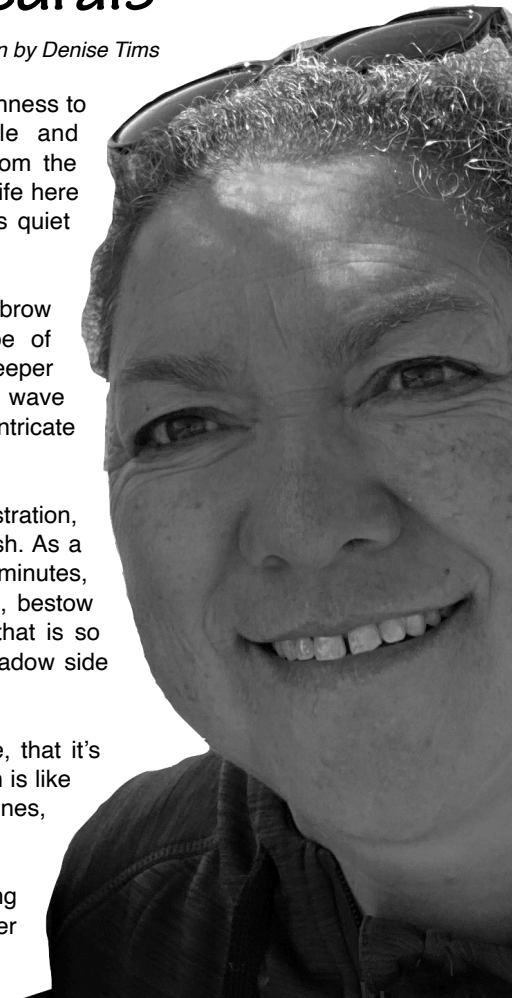
I walk our dog Toffee every morning, just as the sun lifts its head in the sky, bringing a new freshness to the neighbourhood as the streets become alive. These unpretentious streets, humble and unremarkable, carry an aura of familiarity about them, significant in an understated way. From the grass-laden park, with flax flowers budding attracting birds to drink upon their nectar, everyday life here holds a peculiar kind of mystery, one neither earth-shattering nor ostentatious but potent in its quiet constancy.

Like clockwork, I chat with my neighbours, sharing fleeting moments punctuated by the kiwi eyebrow or a quick hello. As often as these exchanges transpire, I am met with a kaleidoscope of personalities, richly variegated with the Master's touch. Mostly these conversations are no deeper than acknowledging each other's existence, a friendly nod, a shared smile, a recognisable wave across the street, but on some rare occasions, they become narrative threads embellishing an intricate tapestry of life.

At times, my days, feel mundane and rather uneventful, steeped in leadership roles and administration, yet essential for a passion I have to see those on the margins and those who are Māori flourish. As a bulwark for my community, work threads through the realm of chairing meetings, immersing in minutes, untangling knots in budgets, and making decisions. These responsibilities, though undramatic, bestow upon me the ability to sow seeds of empowerment and do the grassroots community work that is so desperately needed today. It is with this importance that I sometimes need to speak to my shadow side that seeks to rear its ugly head, comparing and challenging self-worth.

So though this work might not seem all that fascinating on the surface and some may argue, that it's ordinary, which is true, I know it is also potent in its mundane rhythm. Life in this suburban patch is like a canvas with its hues spread meticulously, one stroke at a time – laden with ordinary routines, echoing the tangible reality of everyday life, yet brimming with the prospect of the extraordinary.

At its essence, it reminds me of an analogy of the stone layers of old. One stone layer was laying a stone, one after another, complaining of the monotony, the tediousness of it all. But then another



stone layer, working on the same site had eyes that were flickering with a sense of purpose, even joy, as he gently placed each stone, envisioning the majestic cathedral they would ultimately become.

They say perspective is everything, and I couldn't agree more. Is it stone-laying, or is it cathedral-building? Is it ordinary, or is it extraordinary? The dichotomy is less about what's done, and more about how it's seen. That's what my everyday life in leadership is like. It's about the attention to the mundane: the routine meetings, the editing of writing, the preparation of reports, and the relentless emails. However, woven into that monotony are the threads of something much greater. Despite its perceived simplicity, I know each day I am laying stones, brick by brick, towards building something extraordinary. This is where the mystery of the ordinary pierces its rays of sunlight.

It's easy to overlook the mystery shrouded in the ordinary. Much like my everyday walks apart from being routines, they transform into silent testaments of life's uncharted wonders. From seemingly peripheral interactions with my neighbours to taking on leadership roles, the ordinary in all its generality gives birth to the extraordinary, much like the cathedral emerging from a modest pile of stones.

So, as the gentle orange sunset blankets our street at the end of each day, I realise that my life is not merely comprised of ordinary actions or routines, but rather a series of tiny mysteries, meaningful insignificancies, paving the way for profound experiences. For, without the ordinary, the extraordinary wouldn't, couldn't happen. It's these seemingly inconsequential experiences that, stone by stone, brick by brick, build up to the most radiant cathedrals. And that, to me, is true mastery in the ordinary.

Toso Vata: Moving Together Towards Holistic Wellbeing...

Written by Eric Mailau

I had the privilege of participating in a community initiative called "Toso Vata," a phrase from the Fijian language that translates to 'moving together'. This was a month-long challenge designed to encourage Pasifika men to engage in physical activity, with the goal of improving their overall wellbeing.

Each day, different Pasifika men, many of whom were personal trainers, led sessions open to all men, regardless of age or fitness level. The workouts ranged from low impact exercises to CrossFit training, step classes, and even friendly games of ripper-tag. These men, from all walks of life, shared a common goal: to enhance their health for their own benefit and for their families.

Physical exertion, with its accompanying sweat and muscle aches, can be uncomfortable. Yet there's a profound beauty in the struggle, particularly when supported by others who encourage you with words like "keep going, brother," even as they too face their own challenges.

Exercise is known to contribute to good physical health, but its benefits extend far beyond the physical realm. It also promotes mental strength, social connection, and spiritual growth.

Physical exercise, with its tangible and measurable outcomes, can inspire hope. Seeing personal progress, whether it's completing more reps than before or simply feeling healthier, opens up a world of possibilities. At the same time, it grounds us in reality by reminding us of the cost—the immediate discomfort that comes with pushing our limits.

Furthermore, the shared experiences of exercising with others foster a sense of camaraderie and brotherhood. This encourages empathy and mutual support, enhancing our social wellbeing.

These experiences also nurture our spirit and soul. We begin to understand the interconnectedness of our physical activities, mental states, social interactions, and spiritual journeys, challenging the idea that these aspects of our being exist in isolation.

The psalmist's proclamation, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," might not only refer to the marvel of the human body, but also to the intricate interplay of body, mind, spirit, and their collective, mysterious connection to God and others.

