

On Living Grace

Orientation Guide

Office Contact Details

07 4638 8555 | 0437 154 961 | living.grace.toowoomba@gmail.com

www.livinggracetoowoomba.org

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Welcome to Living Grace

Thank you for taking an interest in our congregation. Feel free to browse and glance at the different chapters of this booklet. May you gain a better understanding of who we are and where we are going.

God bless you richly

Pastor Edgar Mayer

On Who We Are

Living Grace had its beginning on Sunday 6 August 2000 when the first worship service was held in the Concordia College Chapel, Toowoomba. As people with a traditional Lutheran background, we were used to organ music and the liturgy but wanted to plant a church that was contemporary and less formal. God soon surprised us with the Holy Spirit which – in time – led to the following mission statement and values:

One citywide people of prayer
Operating in the power of the Word and the Spirit
To disciple nations
For the praise of His glory

- *Hunger for More*: God – by giving us a vision of Jesus – keeps transforming us from one degree of glory to another – through the Holy Spirit.
- *Worship*: God “inhabits” the praises of his people and intensifies his presence in worship.
- *Prayer*: God invites us to work with him through prayer.
- *The Word and the Spirit*: God has called us to minister in the power of the Word and the Spirit.
- *Signs, Wonders and Miracles*: God calls us to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified with demonstrations of the Spirit’s power – not with wise and persuasive words.
- *Healing*: God wants us to preach the kingdom of heaven and heal the sick.
- *Christian Unity*: God makes people one with the other Christians in their congregations and city.
- *Family*: God makes us members of a Christian household (the church) with spiritual fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters.
- *Culture of Honour*: God bestows honour on all members of the church family. He makes us cherish one another on account of our identity, gifting and calling.
- *Acceptance*: Everyone is welcome.
- *Accessibility*: God offends human pride but you do not have to be “weird” to be spiritual.
- *Freedom*: God invites us to be authentic before him, to give it a go and make mistakes and follow him wherever he leads.
- *Inheritance*: God grants us the joy of passing on spiritual breakthroughs as an inheritance to the next generation(s).

Since 2017, Living Grace is a self-governing church (in fellowship with other Christians and churches) and you find the story of our community and development in Pastor Mayer’s books “Surprised by the Holy Spirit” and “Surprised by Miracles” (available at reception).

Living Grace Church is a mainline Christian church and the following is what we uphold in our constitution:

- Living Grace Church confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments – the Bible – to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. As a whole and in all their parts, the Holy Scriptures are divinely inspired and the revealed Word of God.
- Living Grace Church upholds the three Ecumenical Creeds – the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.
- And we declare the following to be the first and chief article of our faith: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:24–25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works or merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23–25).



On Staffing & Ministry Shape

God bestows grace on all of his people and, according to his will, calls everyone into service and ministry. Therefore, it is our joy to see people released into their giftings and passions through the appointed leadership.

Ephesians 4:7-13: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it ... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all ... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The following are our staff:

Senior Pastor

Edgar Mayer

4635 5955 / 0405 397 920
mayeredgar@optusnet.com.au
Recreational Day – Friday



Associate Pastor

Eloum Tiya

0423 626 426
etholyspirit@hotmail.com



Associate Pastor

Herman Ruyters

0435 562 320
herman.ruyters@gmail.com



Community Manager

Vicki Meagher

0402 466 420
vic.don@bigpond.com



Administration

Sarah Jones

4638 8555 / 0437 154 961
living.grace.toowoomba@gmail.com
No regular office hours, please call, text or email



Administration

Anna Hayden

0413 181 106
annazena@gmail.com
Also Sunday Reception



Children's Ministry

Sarah Collins

0438 279 914
livingstones.lg@gmail.com
Mondays and Thursdays



On Functioning as a Congregation

At Living Grace, we operate on three levels of congregational involvement. There are the worship services with all of us being present. Then, there are home groups for mission, mutual encouragement, pastoral care, learning, prayer and support. Finally, we also encourage the one-on-one sharing of the faith and caring for one another.

In many respects, our Christian community functions like a family with spiritual “fathers” and “mothers” taking care of “children” and “babies” in the faith.

On Belonging to Living Grace

God designed us to be in community and attached many promises to congregational life. For instance, we read in the Bible:

Ephesians 4:4-16: ... the body of Christ may be built up until we all ... become mature ... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Romans 12:5: ... in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We are committed to the value of honouring one another because any other behaviour quenches the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Philippians 4:2: “Here is what I’m asking Euodia and Syntyche to do. I want them to agree with each other because they belong to the Lord.”

Mark 6:4-6: “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not honoured in his hometown. He doesn’t receive any honour among his relatives. And he doesn’t receive any in his own home.’ Jesus laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. But he could not do any other miracles there. He was amazed because they had no faith.”

Matthew 6:14-15: “Forgive people when they sin against you. If you do, your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Living Grace Church is registered with the government as a religious charity and new people can become formal members by supporting our constitution.

If you are reading this Orientation Guide and want to pursue membership at Living Grace, please contact us: living.grace.toowoomba@gmail.com; (07) 4638 8555, 0437 154 961. You are welcome.

On Holy Spirit Foolishness

God frequently offends us on purpose. For instance, people were continually offended at Jesus. They questioned where he came from: *"Nazareth? Can anything good come from there"* (John 1:46). They attacked how he shared meals with people: *"...Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'"* (Luke 7:34). They objected to his healings and driving out demons: *"It is only by ... the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons"* (Matthew 12:24). They objected to his teaching. Even the disciples struggled: *"Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?'..."* (John 6:61).

Jesus offended because: *"...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ... we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block [for some] and foolishness [to others] ..."* (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Then God continues to offend by using the "wrong" kind of people for ministry. The apostle Paul made reference to this and also spelled out the deeper principle of God's strategy in offending people: *"...Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The Holy Spirit is another great source of offense even among churches. Not only does he move in unlikely people, he also – frequently – comes causing strange manifestations. Even when the Holy Spirit came with power on the disciples for the very first time, the outcome was offensive. Some mistook the influence of the Holy Spirit for alcohol saying: *"They have had too much wine"* (Acts 2:13). The Bible reports in other places that the apostles Peter and Paul both fell into trances (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12-13). Then the Bible knows of people falling in the presence of God (Daniel 8:17; 10:7-10,15-19; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Revelations 1:17), faces shining supernaturally (Exodus 34:30; Acts 6:15), temporary blindness (Acts 9:4) or numbness (Luke 1:22), etc.

At Living Grace we want to recognize God's strategy of offending us and our pride. We want to humble ourselves and embrace *"foolishness"* because he *"nullifies the things that are, so that no one may boast before him"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).



On Worship Banners

Worship banners are not magic wands and they are not holy in themselves. They are simply tools to express the prayers of our hearts. For instance, when we pray for someone's healing we may act out the words of the prayer by waving the banner of healing over the person. Likewise, when we praise God we may act out the words by waving a banner toward God with joy. There are banners representing the Holy Spirit, joy, the breath of God...

Another purpose of the banners is to declare our faith. We do not simply state our faith with words but also declare the truth of God by waving an appropriate banner. For instance, we believe that according to the Bible Jesus is the "lion of Judah" and thus we declare that truth by waving the banner which depicts the "lion of Judah". Likewise, we declare our faith in the power and joy of God by waving the banners which take up those themes.

Even if one particular banner does not have any specific meaning or we may not know the symbolism of the banner, we can worship by waving them, thus combining our words with actions which express our innermost thoughts and feelings. God loves worship which involves everything we have: mind, body, emotions and will. Mark 12:30: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Traditional churches know banners in the form of altar vestments, stoles, gowns, wall banners, liturgical colours, etc. And in the Bible, God encourages us to lift and raise banners in warfare and praise: "Lift a banner in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations for battle against her" (Jer. 51:27). / "We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God" (Psalm 20:5). / "...Raise a banner for the nations" (Isaiah 62:10).



On Prophetic Actions

The prophet Ezekiel cut his hair, burned and scattered it according to God's instructions:

"...[Ezekiel,] take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind..." (Ezekiel 5:1-4).

Then, with his hair burnt and scattered, Ezekiel prophesied:

"...this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ...I myself am against you, Jerusalem... A third of you will die of the plague or perish by famine inside; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword" (Ezekiel 5:8-12).

What Ezekiel did to his hair was to illustrate and enforce his prophetic message: A third of the people will die inside the city, a third outside the city, and a third will be scattered.

Like Ezekiel, other prophets also acted out their prophecies in "strange" ways. To illustrate a point, Isaiah went naked for three years (Isaiah 20), Jeremiah carried a wooden yoke on his neck (Jeremiah 27:1-28:17), he tied a stone to a scroll of prophetic words and threw it into the Euphrates river (Jeremiah 51:62-64), Hosea married a prostitute (Hosea 1:1-11), and Ahijah tore the king's new garment into twelve pieces (1 Kings 11:30-40).

These "strange" acts caught people's attention and fired up their imagination. They came with emotional impact, played on people's minds and stretched their "frame of reference". When the prophets acted out something "wild" in accordance with their prophecies, they themselves exercised faith and also inspired faith in others.

These prophetic acts and "wild" behaviour also released power. In 2 Kings 5, the prophet Elisha told Naaman, the commander of king Aram's army, to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to be cleansed of his leprosy. Only when Naaman consented to act out this "weird" instruction – dip himself in the Jordan seven times – was he healed (2 Kings 5). Moses had to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide the water for the deliverance of his people (Exodus 14:16).

And when the king of Israel failed to engage and strike the ground often enough in a "strange" prophetic action (2 Kings 13:14-19), he forfeited decisive victory over his enemies. Thus, at times, God requires obedience and wants a practical action to be a demonstration of faith and release the power necessary for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

At Living Grace, we want to be open to prophetic actions when God leads us in this direction. And, in a sense, we are already practicing them when we immerse ourselves in water for Baptism, eat bread and wine at Holy Communion, and anoint people with oil for healing (see James 5:14).

On Glory Gold & Other Miracles

Since the last Sunday of 2009, our church has been experiencing the miracle of gold glitter manifesting on the skin of our members and visitors. It looks like body glitter and is purely a gift of grace. We know that Christians do not need sparkling skin for salvation. Jesus Christ loves all of us, but whenever the gold glitter appears on whomsoever, we all rejoice.

The Bible makes much of the purpose and power of miracles in the preaching of Jesus Christ:

John 10:38: ...even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.

John 14:11-12: Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Acts 2:22: ...listen to this: Jesus...was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

1 Corinthians 2:4: My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

Romans 15:18-19: I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So...I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

At first, the miracle of gold glitter or glory sparkles was confusing because we neither prayed for this miracle nor expected this gift. But we are grateful to God for his grace.

In our understanding, God can do anything, even surprise us with something new.

Isaiah 43:19: See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? See also Psalms 40:3.

Jesus seems to have done so many miracles that it was impossible to record them all.

John 20:30-31: Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

At Living Grace, we are excited about all of God's miracles, and know about their role in ministry and mission. They bring joy to us and glory to God.

On Prophecy

We love prophetic ministry at Living Grace but we also know that prophecy is not always an exact science. Prophecies need to be carefully weighed by others. The Bible says: *“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said”* (1 Corinthians 14:29). The apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians saying: *“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt”* (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20), but he also added: *“Test everything...”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). There is a weighing and testing of prophetic words that is needed because people with prophetic gifting do not always get the prophetic message right. On account of sin, human vessels may not always discern correctly the pure signal of God’s prophetic word.



On the Offering

(From a message by Pastor Rick Warren)

1. GIVING MAKES ME MORE LIKE GOD: God is a giver. Everything we have is a gift from God. The Bible says: *"God so loved the world that He gave..."* (John 3:16) You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. It makes you more like God.

2. GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD: The Bible says: *"Where your treasure is, there your heart is also."* (Matthew 6:21) Wherever I put my money, that is where my heart is. If you put your money with the Lord, it always draws you closer to God.

3. GIVING IS THE ANTIDOTE TO MATERIALISM: 1 Timothy 6:17-18: *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to be generous and willing to share. In this way they may take hold of the life that is truly Life!"*

4. GIVING STRENGTHENS MY FAITH: God uses finances to test your faith. God is saying: "Do you really believe that I can take care of your bills? Or do you think you have to take care of them on your own?" He is saying: *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, test me in this, says the Lord. See if I won't throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing you won't have room enough for it"* (Malachi 3:10). There are more promises in the Bible regarding giving than any other thing. Giving gives God the chance to do a miracle.

5. GIVING IS AN INVESTMENT FOR ETERNITY: You cannot take it with you but you can send it on ahead. Jesus said: *"Store up treasure in heaven"* (Matthew 6:20). 1 Timothy 6:18-19: *"Give happily to those in need and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasures for yourself in heaven. It is the only safe investment for eternity."*

6. GIVING BLESSES ME IN RETURN: Proverbs 11:25: *"A generous man will prosper but he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."* And 2 Corinthians 9:6: *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* (See also Galatians 6:7; Luke 6:38.)

Jesus also said: *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving"* (Acts 20:35). Have you ever heard anybody say: "You ought to give 'til it hurts!" No way! You ought to give until it feels good. Giving makes me happy.



On Baptism

To those that wanted to become Christians, the apostle Peter gave the following instruction in the Bible: “[1] *Repent and [2] be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. [3] And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call*” (Acts 2:38-39).

They were asked to (1) repent, (2) be baptized, and then they would (3) receive the Holy Spirit. In another Bible passage, Jesus said: “[1] *Whoever believes and [2] is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:16). Jesus declared that those that (1) believed and (2) were baptized would be saved.

In both Bible passages, baptism is a key component of becoming and being a Christian. Everyone needs baptism and – importantly – what happens in baptism, only God can do.

In baptism, God grants us the birth of a new self – a new person belonging to him – and this only God can accomplish because no person has ever birthed himself. According to the Bible, we are “*born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5).

Then the Bible says that “*we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*” (Romans 6:4). This means that in baptism we are incorporated into the saving work of Jesus Christ. As Jesus suffered and died to remove any claims for the punishment of our sins, so we die to sin at our baptism into the life of Jesus; and as Jesus then rose again from the dead after three days in the grave, so we rise again from the water of our baptism into the new life which we now have in Jesus. In this new life, we are free from sin, death and the devil. Once again, we cannot do this ourselves because only God can make anyone die and then rise again.

The Bible also says that “*you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ...*” (Galatians 3:26-27). This means that in baptism we become the children of God. In baptism, God adopts us as his children and no person has ever adopted himself. This is something that gets done to us – apart from our ingenuity and strength – which in turn – together with the previous images of “*being born anew*” and “*dying and rising in baptism*” – illustrates that our baptism does not depend on anything we do. God is the one that is active – birthing us, making us alive, adopting us. We can only receive the gift of baptism by faith.

Since God works his power in baptism, we trust him and submit to baptism without unnecessary delays. At Living Grace, we love to celebrate the goodness of God in baptisms.

The Small Catechism of Martin Luther sums up the teaching on baptism in this way:

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

Which is that word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

How can water do such great things?

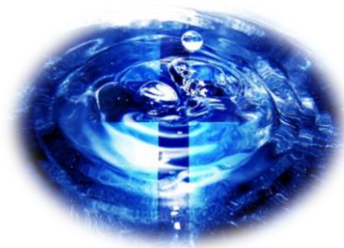
Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and not Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying" (Titus 3:5-8).

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father; we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).



On Holy Communion

The Small Catechism of Martin Luther sums up the teaching on Holy Communion in this way:

What is Holy Communion?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St Paul write: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: 'Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also, He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" [See Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.]

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?

These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "forgiveness of sins."

Who receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require hearts that truly believe.



When Jesus established the meal of Holy Communion, he made it clear that it was given to the whole community for joint celebrations – “Do this together in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). The disciples were to eat and drink together.

Then the Bible warns us about consuming the meal when there are divisions and disregard for one another in the community. The apostle Paul wrote to one church:

1 Corinthians 11:17-22: ... your meetings do more harm than good ... when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you ... it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk ... do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing ...

At Living Grace, we take this warning seriously. We do not want our meetings to “do more than good”. Jesus gave us his body and blood in the bread and wine to make us truly one, and we respond by recognizing and honouring our connection with one another.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17: ...And is not the bread [of Holy Communion] that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (See also 1 Corinthians 11:27-34.)

On Prayer Ministry

We encourage prayer for one another during the week and on Sunday. At the end of our worship services, all attenders can pray informally for one another and, in addition, we have a designated prayer ministry team which has received training and authorization by the church leadership. The prayer ministry team can be identified by their name tags.



Welcome again to Living Grace,

We hope that this Orientation Guide has helped you in understanding us better and draw you closer to our community.

God bless you richly

Pastor Edgar Mayer