



# ANNUAL REPORT

2025-  
2026

*An Agency of the Anglican Diocese of  
Canberra & Goulburn.*

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2025-26 has been seminal year in the life of Embracing Ministries. The new Ordinance approved by Bishop in Council established Embracing Ministries as an agency of the Diocese. The new Ordinance makes clear the missional focus of Embracing Ministries: walking alongside young people with disability, their families, and carers and to present the gospel and encourage their full participation in the life of the church. It also made clear Embracing Ministries' role in educating, training and equipping parishes and educational institutions about people with disability to enable them to be participate in the life of the church and the wider community.

Although still providing wellbeing support and benevolent relief the principal focus of Embracing Ministries is to provide opportunities for young people with disability, their families, and carers to hear the Christian story and participate in the life of the church. Its focus is systemic appreciating that disability impacts the whole family. Our motivation is to show the love of Christ in all we do by building welcoming places for young people to flourish in the communities we build.

For much of the calendar year in 2025 I was the Interim Director of Embracing Ministries. This gave the opportunity to restructure the way Embracing Ministries operates. Team leaders were appointed to take responsibility for different activities and programs, pastoral care, and administration. This model enhances the sustainability of Embracing Ministries.

In mid-2025 I moved with The Board's agreement Kelly Wood from the role of Programs Coordinator to Assistant Director. In October 2025, the Board enthusiastically agreed to the appointment of Kelly to the position

of Director. Since then, Kelly and I have worked collegially given the many issues that need to be addressed.

I am most grateful for Kelly's wonderful gifts of leadership, for Lyndal Rogers (replaced by Dominica Lorimer) for pastoral care, Hannah Newcombe for her our youth coordination, for Briana Hays Evans our administrator and communications officer, the Pastor Brent Smith who looks after Checkpoint and Andy Gordon and Corine Richardson for organising our family gatherings. On behalf of the Board a huge thank you for all involved.

The Board has worked hard over the last 12 months. We welcomed Rev Dr Bili Malek as Deputy Chair and Rev Dr Wayne Brighton. Dalang Dkhar rejoined the Board after completing her PhD on the role of carers. I wish to give thanks to God for the support and wisdom of the Board.

In December 2025 Embracing Ministries moved into its new home at St Marks National Theological Centre in Barton. It previously had been itinerant. Having a home has been great for team building. The location at St Marks has provided opportunities for engagement with students about disability and an incredibly supportive community in which to operate

Embracing Ministries is funded primarily by the Stening Trust. We are most grateful to Deb Horscroft a trustee for her support. Other sources of funding come from the Chinese Christian Church of Canberra and from the Pelican Foundation to support our siblings' programs. We are most grateful to the Diocese for providing administrative and accounting support.

The Taskforce on Disability authorised by the 2024 Synod and established by the Board of Embracing Ministries has worked assiduously. I am most grateful to Roger Beale AO has chaired the Taskforce and to each member who has served. The Taskforce recognises that Disability is not a marginal issue. It is more than a pastoral issue. It goes to the heart and identity of the church. This is why it has developed a Theology of Disability and Diocesan Statement on

Disability and will recommend to the 2026 Synod the establishment of a Diocesan Disability Committee and a Diocesan Disability Adviser

Embracing Ministries wants to work alongside churches and Diocesan agencies to facilitate congregational conversations about disability to assist in making them places of belonging for people with disability, their families, and carers. We are developing Memorandum of Understanding to work with parishes on this vital but often difficult journey

Praise be to God for the Embracing Ministries community and for its vital role in providing opportunities for young people with disability to flourish and their families and carers

**Clive Rodger**

*Executive Board Chair*

*Embracing Ministries*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR



As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the many ways God has continued to work through Embracing Ministries. This year has been one of growth, new opportunities, deepening relationships and, most importantly, countless moments where individuals and families living with disability have experienced genuine belonging, support, and hope

At the heart of everything we do is the belief that every person is created in the image of God, deeply loved and worthy of full participation in community life. Throughout the year, we have seen this vision come alive across all our programs. Whether through a child attending Little Treasures for the first time, a parent finding encouragement at Soul Sisters, a sibling making a new friend, or a family receiving support during a crisis, we have witnessed the transformational power of connection and community.

Little Treasures remains a cornerstone of our ministry. Through both our Easter and Spring programs, children and young people with disability were given opportunities to learn, play, explore their faith and build friendships alongside an incredible team of young mentors and volunteers. Seeing mentors and participants form meaningful relationships, watching children grow in confidence, and hearing families share how much these programs mean to them continue to be one of the greatest privileges of this work.

Our support programs for carers and families have also continued to flourish. Checkpoint, Soul Sisters, Oasis, Walk and Talk, Retreats and Family Gatherings have provided safe spaces where people can find understanding, encouragement, and friendship. Increasing participation and growing waiting lists remind us of the ongoing need for these opportunities and the importance of ensuring carers feel seen, supported, and valued.

This year we have continued to invest in creating more inclusive communities through Disability Awareness Training. We have strengthened existing school partnerships, developed relationships with new schools and churches, and equipped young people and adults with practical tools to welcome and include people with disability. Every conversation, presentation and training session brings us one step closer to communities where everyone truly belongs.

Behind every program lies an equally important ministry of family support. Throughout the year, our team has walked alongside families facing hospital admissions, educational challenges, advocacy needs, family crises, and complex life circumstances. It has been a privilege to stand with families during some of their hardest moments, offering practical support, pastoral care and the assurance that they do not walk alone.

None of this work would be possible without the incredible commitment of our volunteers, mentors, staff, Board members, church partners, donors, and supporters. You are the hands and feet of this ministry. Your generosity, compassion and willingness to serve have enabled us to reach more families, expand our programs, and deepen our impact across the community.

As we look to the future, we do so with excitement and expectation. New partnerships are emerging, awareness of our work continues to grow, and more families are finding their way to our community. While the need remains great, so too does the opportunity to continue building places where people of all abilities are welcomed, valued, and empowered to flourish.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

**Kelly Wood**

*Director*

*Embracing Ministries*

## ABOUT EMBRACING MINISTRIES

### VISION

Embracing Ministries vision is to see young people with disability and their families and carers flourish, grow in their spiritual journey, connect with others, and become part of Christian communities which are enriched by their presence.

### MISSION

Embracing Ministries provides supportive safe, and relevant programs and activities for young people with disability, their families including siblings.

Embracing Ministries also exists to empower, encourage and equip churches to be places of belonging, welcome, acceptance and spiritual nurturing for people with disability and their families.

### BASIS

Embracing Ministries exists for and welcomes all in our community irrespective of faith, religious affiliation, or financial capacity. It is part of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. It is open to all.

### FUNCTIONS AS SET OUT IN THE 2025 ORDINANCE

To minister and provide well-being services to young people with disability, their families and carers and educate, train, and equip parishes, church agencies, and educational institutions within the Diocese about people with disability, and enable people with disability to participate in the life of the church and the wider community.

The focus of the agency is to present the gospel to people with disability and their families and carers and encourage their participation in the life of the Church.

## OBJECTS AS SET OUT IN THE 2025 ORDINANCE

The Objects for which Embracing Ministries is established are to:

1. provide, in the name of the Diocese ministry to young people with disability through programs and activities such as:
  - Autumn and Spring holiday programs for young people with disability and their siblings.
  - Programs, activities, and camps for Siblings of young people with disability.
  - Easter and Christmas events for families of people with disability.
  - Respite, nourishment, care and refreshment for mothers, fathers, and carers caring for people with disability.
  - Building communities of support for families of young people with disability; and
  - Provide pastoral and practical support for families of people with disability.
2. To educate, equip, empower, and resource churches to be places of welcome, acceptance, engagement, and participation of young people with disability and their families and carers.
3. To educate young leaders in schools and educational institutions to be equipped to be appropriate partners with people with disability.
4. Undertake other activities consistent with the Objects.

The services provided by Embracing Ministries will be available to the public without regard to religious affiliation or financial capacity.

The services provided by Embracing Ministries are provided in ways which:

- Afford and protect human dignity.

- demonstrate care and respect; and
- Endeavor to reflect high standards of service delivery to people with a disability without discrimination and in ways which support inclusion and encourage their participation in the life of the church and wider community.

## EMBRACING MINISTRIES BOARD MEMBERS

### CHAIR: CLIVE RODGER



Clive Rodger has been Chair of the Board of Embracing Ministries for the last 5 years. Clive has a deep passion for the work of EM having lost a brother to mental health issues.

He is an economist by training heading a large Australia wide economic consultancy. He has held senior Board positions in both public and private companies as well as serving on many Boards of church organisations. He holds a BA (Honors) University of Sydney, BEc, BTh from St Marks, a ThM from Princeton, M Litt organisational health and conflict resolution. Clive undertook post graduate theological studies at Princeton in the mid-1990s with particular interest in the disadvantaged in society. He has lectured at St Mark's in leadership, management, and mission. Clive has been married to Lynlea for 55 years and has two and 2 adult sons and five grandchildren.

### DEPUTY CHAIR: REV DR BILI MALEK



Rev Dr Bili Malek is Assistant Priest at Holy Covenant and Visiting Medical Officer at Queanbeyan Hospital. Bili has extensive experience specializing in aged care and palliative medicine. She retains membership of the Royal College of Physicians and fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Bili holds an Honorary Senior Lecturer position at ANU Medical School within the Rural Clinical School. She holds an MA in Theology with Distinction from St Marks through CSU as well as an Associate Fellowship of Higher Education. Bili was ordained a priest in 2024 She and her husband have an adult daughter with disability.

## TREASURER: MR CHRISTOPHER WOOD



Christopher Wood is a double degree (accounting and law, UNE) CPA Accountant. Christopher has extensive experience in NFP and Charity management and governance. As the longest serving Director Christopher uses his finance gifting as the Embracing Ministries Treasurer and Compliance Officer. Christopher currently works in the APS, has been married for 25 years and has two neurodivergent children.

## PARISH REPRESENTATIVE: REV DR WAYNE BRIGHTON



Rev Dr Wayne Brighton has had a long experience with Embracing Ministries having been the Archdeacon overseeing its work when Andrea was Director. Wayne is Rector of Holy Covenant Jamison and from 2015 to 2021 was Archdeacon for Chaplaincy. He has led Basement Ministries, lectured at St Marks and been a member of General Synod Commission on Ministry and Mission. Wayne Chairs the Public Issues Commission of the Diocese and is currently a member of Bishop in Council. Wayne holds an BA Hons Masters in Theology from Regent College and a PhD from CSU. Wayne is strongly committed to the vision of Embracing Ministries.

## PARISH REPRESENTATIVE: REV PHIL RADEMAKER



Phil is on the board as an ordinary member and joined late 2024. Phil has lifelong experience with disability and has an interest in seeing the church become a more inclusive place for people with disabilities. Phil wants to encourage the church to see people with disabilities not just as those who need care, but also as fellow ministers.

Phil loves how Embracing Ministries brings together various parts of the church and opens new conversations. Phil is the Rector of Christ Church Hawker. He is married to Laura, and they have three children. In his spare time, Phil likes to read Australian fiction and play Dad Rock in a band full of Dads.

## PARENT REPRESENTATIVE: DALANGLIN DKHAR



Dalang has been the parent representative on the board of Embracing Ministries since 2021. She is fully immersed in the disability community as a full-time carer and disability advocate for her son since 2012. She has just completed her PhD research on the lived experience of carers. Carer advocacy is something she is passionate about and speaks at academic and community events on

the topics. Prior to being her son's carer, Dalang was employed as Producer of Wesley Mission Television & Corporate Communications in Sydney.

Dalang is passionate about Embracing Ministries because it supports the community of families living with disabilities in a holistic way with programs and services for young people with disabilities, their siblings as well as their mum and dad. She is also a fervent believer that inclusion is not about bringing people with disabilities and their families to the table, but to build a new table together. Hailing from Northeast India, Dalang presently lives in Canberra with her son, her husband, Patrick, and Sheldon – the English Cocker Spaniel that rules the house.

## EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVE: MR ANDY GORDON



Andy Gordon is the Foundation Principal of Stromlo Forest Anglican College and an enthusiastic advocate for education as an apprenticeship for life. With extensive leadership experience in schools like Radford College and John Paul College, he is committed to creating inclusive opportunities for children and families from early learning through to post-school transitions.

A graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Andy serves on the boards of Embracing Ministries and Abilities Unlimited Australia, two not-for-profits dedicated to supporting young people and their families. His recent MBA further enhances his leadership and vision for fostering meaningful community connections.

With his passion for inclusion, fun, and faith, Andy is well-suited to lead Embracing Ministries' Family Gatherings. He is dedicated to creating welcoming spaces where families, especially those with children with disabilities can come together in a joyful, Messy Church-style environment filled with petting zoos, magicians, bubbles, and more. A devoted husband, father, Andy believes that the ultimate human experience and expression of Christian faith is striving to become as close as possible to love.

## EMBRACING MINISTRIES STAFF MEMBERS

### KELLY WOOD – DIRECTOR



Kelly has had extensive lived experience as well as many years of supporting families impacted by disability. Being a lifelong carer herself, she identifies with the families that we look after and has a real drive to make a difference.

Kelly has management experience from her time in Banking where she was the Assistant Branch Manager for a smaller building society, as well as supporting other business owners through her own company. She also supports other Mums who have complex needs families get things sorted out, so life is not so overwhelming. Kelly has taken on the role of Director from October 2025, after being the Programs Coordinator from January 2025 and then Assistant Director.

When Kelly is not hanging out with us at Embracing Ministries, she loves helping other businesses find their sweet spot, a good rerun of Grey's Anatomy or having tea with friends.

### BRIANNA HAYES EVANS – ADMINISTRATION



Brianna supports Embracing Ministries behind the scenes, bringing her skills and passion to all things administration and social media. She has been part of the ministry for two years, dedicating herself to fostering connection, inclusion, and support for families.

As a mother of three, including two children with additional needs, Brianna understands firsthand the importance of creating welcoming spaces. With a heart for the Embracing Ministries community and a keen eye for detail, she helps keep everything running smoothly, ensuring the ministry's message of love, and belonging reaches far and wide.

## DOMINICA LORIMER– PASTORAL CARER



Dominica has a background in early childhood education, home schooling, and more recently counselling and pastoral care. As a qualified counsellor with a special interest in individual, couple, and family therapy as well as holistic care, Dominica's goal is to provide support and genuine connection to families and carers.

Dominica (often known as Mimi) has been married for over 30 years, attends a community-based church, and enjoys organic gardening, permaculture, cooking, and op shopping. She also has a soft spot for reading, classical music, hygge-style hospitality, bushwalking, and spending quiet moments meditating by the ocean. Dominica joined our team in February 2025

## HANNAH NEWCOMBE – YOUTH COORDINATOR



Hannah is an Art Therapist by trade and a Youth Programs creator by passion. She is deeply passionate about mental health, ensuring kids have fun, and most of all, her faith in Jesus. Hannah feels blessed to be joining the Embracing Ministries team, where she can use both her skills and passions to support and bring fun to the community.

If Art Therapy or Youth Programs sound like something for you or your family, stay connected with Embracing Ministries, reach out, and look for Hannah at EM events and on EM socials to see what is happening and available to you and your family.

Hannah joined our team in January 2025 and is finishing with us at the end of June 2026. Jess Fields joins our team in July 2026.

## PASTOR BRENT SMITH – MEN’S PROGRAMS



Brent has been married for 20 years and has two wonderful daughters. He is a pastor who loves music, cooking, sports, and spending time with family and friends.

Twelve years ago, Brent and his family experienced a major life shift when their youngest daughter was born with cerebral palsy. Navigating this journey brought many tough days and seasons, and while the adjustments were not easy, they have shaped his deep passion for supporting other fathers in similar situations.

For the past few years, Brent has been running CHECKPOINT with Embracing Ministries, creating a space for dads to connect, share, and walk the rugged and adventurous road of fatherhood with children who have additional needs. Through CHECKPOINT, he hopes to offer friendly support, encouragement, and a sense of brotherhood to other men on this journey.



## OUR PROGRAMS & SERVICES



## LITTLE TREASURES

Little Treasures is a Christian holiday program designed for school-aged children with disability and their siblings. Inspired by the love of Christ, this unique program creates a joyful, inclusive, and faith-filled environment where all children can grow in their faith, build friendships, and have fun.

### Embracing Ministries offer two special programs each year:

- Little Treasures Easter – A three-day program in the Autumn school holidays that takes children on a journey through the Easter story, sharing a different part each day through worship, storytelling, and hands-on activities.
- Little Treasures Spring – A three-day holiday program in the spring school holidays filled with Bible stories, prayer, music, creative workshops, and sensory-friendly activities.

### What to Expect at Little Treasures:

- Sensory-Friendly Group Time – Worship, prayer, engaging Bible stories, and interactive games.
- Small Group Activities – Tailored programs that meet each child's abilities, including sensory-friendly and hands-on learning experiences.
- Recreational Play – Fun, accessible games and creative activities that encourage inclusion and connection.
- Creative Activities – Crafts, singing, and dancing that encourage expression and joy.
- Special Workshops – Exciting sessions led by external providers, including:
  - 🎵 Dance and drumming workshops
  - 🌸 Flower arranging
  - 🎨 Creative crafts

Closing Group Time – A retelling of the day's Bible story in a fresh way, worship, a blessing, and a joyful send-off.

## **Encouraging Faith & Participation**

At Little Treasures, children are not just passive listeners, they are active participants in their faith journey. We encourage each child, whether they have a disability or not, to share their gifts, encourage others, and express their faith in ways that are meaningful to them.

## **A Place Where Every Child Belongs**

We believe that every child is a treasure in God's kingdom. Little Treasures is more than just a holiday program—it's a safe, secure & welcoming space where children feel valued, supported, and included no matter their abilities.

All program leaders and Mentors have completed Disability Awareness and Safe Ministries Training to ensure a supportive and secure environment, and each child is paired with their own mentor who is a student in Years 9-12. This Mentor provides guidance, encouragement, and companionship throughout the program.

## **Little Treasures Spring 2025 Program**

Our Spring Little Treasures program, held at Emmaus Christian School, was another wonderful success. Twenty children attended, supported by a similar number of mentors from schools across Canberra. The program demonstrated the power of inclusion, with young mentors and participants forming friendships that often extended beyond the week itself.

One of the most memorable highlights was a visit from the Canberra Reptile Zoo. Participants eagerly interacted with lizards, snakes and even crocodiles, creating moments of excitement and discovery. Alongside these hands-on experiences, children participated in crafts, games, sensory activities, group challenges and Bible-based learning designed to nurture both confidence and community.

The program also saw significant growth in our mentor base, with students from Emmaus and Merici joining long-standing mentor partnerships from Marist, Radford, and Canberra Girls Grammar. This growth reflects increasing awareness of our mission and strengthens our ability to support more families in future years.

Most importantly, Little Treasures continues to provide an environment where children are known, valued, and celebrated exactly as they are, while parents gain confidence knowing their children are participating in an inclusive and supportive community.

Thank you to The Emmaus School community, especially Melanie Spencer, Phil Newman, Sara O'Connell, Gayle Smith, and the wonderful year one and two teachers who allowed us to use their space.

Thank you to Deirdre Hermann, Samson Pond, Hannah Newcombe, Lyndal Rodgers, Bernadette Mannion, Will Pak Poy, Beth Cooney, and Amy Uebergang for their tireless leadership in this space.

### **Little Treasures Easter 2026 Program**

Little Treasures continues to be the cornerstone of Embracing Ministries, providing children and young people with disability an opportunity to experience friendship, acceptance, fun and the love of God in an environment designed specifically for their needs. Throughout the year, our dedicated volunteers, mentors and staff worked together to create memorable experiences that built confidence, fostered independence and encouraged meaningful relationships.

Our Easter Little Treasures program welcomed 21 participants, including 13 children with significant disability, supported by 24 mentors and a team of leaders and volunteers. Activities were carefully tailored to suit a wide range of abilities and interests, providing opportunities for every child to participate, explore and succeed. We were delighted to welcome new room leaders, mentors, and volunteers, helping strengthen the program and expand its impact.

Across the week, participants enjoyed creative activities, interactive Bible teaching, sensory experiences, games, friendship-building activities, and a much-loved treasure hunt. The program's Easter theme provided opportunities for children to engage with stories of hope, love and belonging in ways that were accessible and engaging. A highlight was seeing friendships develop not only between participants and mentors, but also among families who often experience isolation in their everyday lives.

The continued support of Bethany Care enabled us to provide additional disability support where needed, ensuring children could participate fully and confidently throughout the program. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from families reinforced the importance of creating spaces where children with disability are welcomed, celebrated, and empowered to flourish.

A big thank you to Radford College for your support of this program. Thank you to Deirdre Hermann, Samson Pond, Hannah Newcombe, Sharon Hoffmann, Christina La, Fedwa Faried, Beth Cooney, Anna Paton, Stuart Manuel, and Amy Uebergang for their tireless leadership in this space.



## CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

### SIBLINGS

The Embracing Ministries Siblings Program is dedicated to children and teens who have a sibling with a disability or additional needs. We recognise that being a sibling in this unique role comes with both joys and challenges, and Embracing Ministries offers support, fun, and connection which focuses on the sibling. Embracing Ministries always recognises the systematic impact of disability on family units. Unlike NDIS, Embracing Ministries focus is on the whole family that is impacted by disability.

The Siblings Program exists to support children and young people who have a brother or sister with disability—a group whose experiences are often overlooked.

A highlight of the year was our Siblings Day Camps, where young people enjoyed tie-dye workshops, clay sculpting, face painting, beaded craft activities, reptile encounters, bonfire experiences, and marshmallow roasting. Participants also engaged in age-appropriate Bible teaching and discussion groups focused on identity, self-worth and belonging. Each child received a Bible to take home, encouraging ongoing faith development beyond the program.

Throughout the year, participants also enjoyed zoo visits, bowling outings, painting workshops, laser tag, visits to the Dinosaur Museum and creative sewing activities. These events create opportunities for children to form friendships with peers who understand their unique family experiences while having fun in a supportive and encouraging environment.

A big thank you to our awesome team of Siblings leaders –Zander Newcombe, Samson Pond, Stuart Manuel, Nat Martel-Karo, Peter McAlister, Michael McAlister, Ewan French, Larissa Schwenke, Daniel Morris, Caleb Jeffries, Annie Hodgson, Keira Warren and Brittany Everett.

Thank you to Rev Ben Paton and St Simon's Kaleen for their overwhelming support of our Siblings camp.



## WOMEN'S PROGRAMS

Our women's events exist to create spaces where mothers and female carers can step away from the demands of everyday life, find encouragement, build meaningful friendships, and invest in their own wellbeing. Through connection, reflection, creativity and shared experiences, these gatherings provide opportunities for women to be supported by others who understand the unique joys and challenges of caring for a family member with disability. Whether through Soul Sisters, Oasis, retreats or Walk and Talk, our goal is to ensure women feel seen, valued, refreshed, and strengthened for the journey ahead.

### SOUL SISTERS

Soul Sisters continued to grow into a deeply trusted and valued community for mothers and female carers of people with disability. Throughout the year, women gathered regularly for friendship, encouragement, and mutual support in an environment where they could be honest about both their joys and challenges.

Gatherings included devotional reflections, discussions around faith, personal storytelling, and opportunities for women to share their lived experiences with others who genuinely understand. Special presentations, including discussions about the role of music in sustaining faith through challenging times, provided meaningful opportunities for reflection and encouragement.

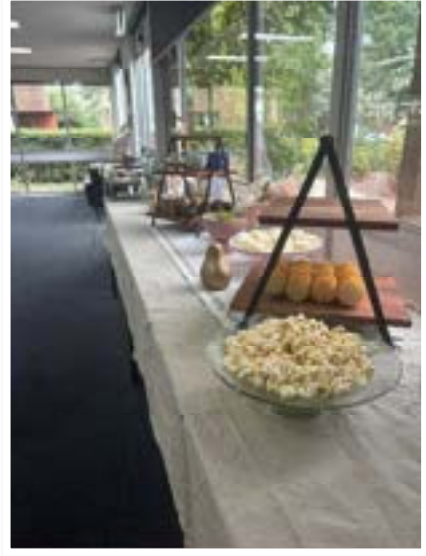
As attendance has increased throughout the year, so too has the depth of connection among participants. The development of this trusted network continues to combat isolation and provide carers with a place where they feel seen, valued, and supported.



## WOMEN'S OASIS

### What happens at Oasis?

- **Warm Welcome:** Start the day with a cozy cup of tea or coffee as you settle in.
- **Nourishing Meals:** Enjoy a light morning tea and a delicious lunch, all thoughtfully prepared to fuel your day.
- **Relaxation & Rejuvenation:** Unwind with a relaxing massage to soothe body and mind.
- **Creative Activities:** Engage in fun, hands-on activities like plate writing, sewing, cookie decorating, and more! Each session is designed to help you unwind, express yourself, and have a little fun.
- **Connection:** Share moments with others who understand, and build a community of support in a compassionate, welcoming environment.



Oasis events offer shorter opportunities throughout the year for women to invest in their wellbeing. Activities included journalling, creative arts, reflection exercises, massage therapy, light yoga, sewing projects, keyring making and opportunities for quiet conversation and support. These gatherings encouraged participants to slow down, reflect, and receive encouragement while building stronger community connections.

We particularly would like to thank Julie Woods for providing massages for our women and Lynlea Rodger for our yoga session.

## WOMEN'S RETREATS

The Women's Retreats provide an opportunity to Escape the everyday and to immerse yourself in a peaceful place. Four times a year, we take up to 5 women away to a beautiful home in **Long Beach, New South Wales**, offering a peaceful environment where you can truly rest and refresh.

This retreat is an opportunity to unwind, recharge, and enjoy some well-deserved time for participants. With delicious meals provided, no cooking required, and the luxury of **private rooms**, retreaters experience true relaxation and comfort.

Leave behind the pressures of daily life and take time to reconnect with yourself in a calm, supportive environment. Whether you are looking for solitude, rest, or a peaceful getaway to restore your energy, this retreat is a space to find renewal. The retreat is an opportunity to share experiences with others and make connections.

We are most grateful to Shirley for generously sharing her magnificent house for our men's and women's retreats.



## MEN'S PROGRAMS

### CHECKPOINT

CHECKPOINT is a supportive community designed for men who play a vital role in the lives of children with disabilities. Whether you are a father, brother, uncle, grandfather, or guardian, CHECKPOINT provides a space where you can connect with others who truly understand the unique challenges and joys of caregiving.

Checkpoint continues to provide a dedicated space for fathers and male carers to connect with others who understand the realities of caring for a loved one with disability.

Throughout the year, men gathered for breakfasts, informal conversations, sporting events, and social activities. Highlights included attendance at Canberra Raiders games and regular opportunities for friendship and mutual encouragement. While still a developing program, Checkpoint is steadily building a community where men can share experiences and support one another in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

### MEN'S RETREAT

#### **Recharge & Refresh: Men's Retreat at Long Beach, NSW**

Twice a year, we take up to 5 men away to a comfortable home in Long Beach, New South Wales, offering a peaceful setting where you can unwind and find true refreshment, rest and recharge.

This retreat is all about relaxation and renewal – enjoy delicious meals without the hassle of cooking, and the comfort of private rooms for ultimate rest. Unwind by the pool, take in the fresh air with easy access to the beach, or catch your favourite sports on the big TVs available throughout the home.



Leave behind the demands of daily life and reconnect with yourself in a tranquil, no-pressure environment. Whether you are looking for solitude, some quiet reflection, or just the opportunity to rest and reset, this retreat offers everything needed to recharge.

We thank Bishop George (RT Rev Dr George Browning) for taking the April Men's retreat. Thank you, Brent, for running CHECKPOINT so effectively.

## FAMILY EVENTS

### FAMILY GATHERINGS

Family Gatherings continued to provide much-needed opportunities for families to connect, relax and build supportive relationships with others who understand the unique challenges and joys of life with disability. These events are intentionally designed to create welcoming, inclusive spaces where every family member can participate, have fun and feel a sense of belonging.

Our annual **Christmas Family Gathering and Volunteer Appreciation Event** continued to be a much-loved celebration. Held at Malkara School, the event featured accessible activities for children, craft stations, bubbles, face painting, music, Santa photos, and a dedicated Christmas play space. Families enjoyed gathering together to celebrate the end of the year, while volunteers and mentors were recognised for their invaluable contribution to the ministry. The event also highlighted the strength of our partnerships, with community organisations contributing food, activities and photography to create a memorable experience for all involved.



A highlight of the year was our **Easter Family Gathering**, held at Stromlo Forest School. The event attracted 66 registered attendees, with families coming together to enjoy an afternoon of friendship, recreation and community. Embrace Disability Group once again partnered with us, providing their popular woodfired pizzas, which were enjoyed by participants throughout the afternoon. The gathering also provided an opportunity for new families to connect with existing families and begin developing valuable support networks.



Throughout the year, planning and development of our family events focused on creating traditional community-style gatherings that remain accessible and inclusive for children and young people with disability.

This vision was reflected in the planning of our **Family Picnic**, held in October within the grounds of Black Mountain School, which brought families together in a relaxed outdoor setting, encouraging connection and relationship-building between parents, carers, and children. Partnerships with organisations including Canberra Chinese Christian

Church helped make these events possible and strengthened our community connections.

More than simply social events, Family Gatherings play a vital role in reducing the isolation that many disability families experience. They create opportunities for friendships to form, support networks to grow and families to discover that they are not alone in their journey. Time and again, parents tell us that one of the greatest gifts these gatherings provide is the chance to meet others who truly understand their experiences. Through these events, we continue to build a community where families are welcomed, valued, and supported.

## PASTORAL CARE

### WALK AND TALK

Walk and Talk provides a simple but meaningful opportunity for connection through shared exercise and conversation. Meeting primarily at the National Arboretum, participants gather to enjoy gentle walks, conversation, and coffee in a relaxed environment.



While attendance has been modest, participants consistently report valuing the opportunity to step away from daily caring responsibilities and connect with others. Even when Canberra's weather has disrupted plans, the program has remained a place for friendship and support over warm drinks and meaningful conversation.

## GROW CONFERENCE

GROW Conference is a half-day conference for 120 children's and youth workers from Canberra and the region. Canberra Christian Conventions ran it on 2 August. Kelly and Hannah helped Lyndal present an elective called "Heart Tune-Up: How Inclusive of Disability Is Your Program?" and Embracing Ministries also ran an advertising stall.

This year Kelly is presenting an elective on "Caring for the Carer." GROW will be held on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> August.



## DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

Disability Awareness Training continued to expand its reach during the year, helping schools, churches and community members better understand disability and inclusion. Through partnerships with Marist College, Emmaus Christian School and other emerging school relationships, dozens of students were equipped with practical tools to become more inclusive leaders in their communities.

Training sessions included hearing directly from people with lived experience of disability, exploring common barriers to inclusion and developing practical skills for respectful communication and support. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how minor changes can create significant opportunities for belonging. Feedback consistently highlighted the value of hearing personal stories and gaining a deeper understanding of disability from those living it every day.

The training also serves as a pathway into mentoring, preparing young people to confidently participate in programs such as Little Treasures and increasing the capacity of schools and churches to welcome people of all abilities.



## CHRISTMAS APPEAL

The Christmas Appeal continues to be a practical expression of generosity, hope, and community partnership.

Last Christmas, nearly 50 families received personalised gifts and hampers. Rather than providing standard food parcels, hampers were intentionally designed to include items that reflected the preferences and needs of the

families receiving them. Volunteers spent countless hours collecting donations, wrapping gifts, preparing hampers, and coordinating deliveries to ensure families felt valued and supported during the festive season.



The Appeal continues to grow through strong partnerships with schools, churches, and community organisations. As planning begins earlier each year and processes improve, we are excited about the opportunity to support even more families and bring joy to more homes in the years ahead.

We particularly want to thank Canberra Grammar School, Bungendore Anglican Church, Canberra Chinese Christian Church, St Simon's Kaleen, Radford College, Christ Church Hawker, and Simon Leonard for driving our truck.

## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR DISABILITY IN CHURCHES

The Community of Practice is a group of people within all denominations of the church who are working in the space of Disability who would like to collaborate and share resources.

Virginia McDonald from Melbourne Anglican Diocese and Andrew Pfiefer PSM have taken over the front-line work of this to be able to establish this as an independent space with sponsorship from Embracing Ministries in the back end.

## MINISTRY TRAINING

## ST MARKS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Our colocation with St Marks Theological Centre has created a space to discuss the inclusion of disability into different courses and how we may better equip our upcoming ministry staff on how to best engage people with disability, as well as support them, their families, and carers.

We will be offering prizes for candidates that submit outstanding essays in Biblical Studies, Theology and Pastoral and Practical Theology.

St Marks Theological Centre are also at the very beginning steps of considering their space and how it can be adjusted to better support people with disability.

## CLERGY CONFERENCE

Kelly spoke at Clergy Conference in May. The topic of the conference was on Embracing Neurodivergence in our Ministry Contexts.

Kelly spoke on her lived experience as a parent of two teens with neurodiversity, as well as sharing about Embracing Ministries and what we do.

This was a terrific opportunity to meet several people and start relationships. Whilst the conference was a lot of information, the feedback has been that what was shared brought value. We have released some resources to go along with the Conference that are now available on the Embracing Ministries Website.



## GRANTS & FUNDING

We are so incredibly grateful for the funding received from the Stening Trust of \$250,000 this financial year. Without their support, we could not do what we are doing.

We acknowledge the donation from the Canberra Chinese Christian Church of \$15,000. Without this support we could not provide the wrap around supports for our carers and siblings.

Embracing Ministries also received \$15,000 from the Pelican Foundation to support our Youth Ministry and Siblings programs.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION IN CHURCHES

As mentioned in the Chair's Report Embracing Ministries has been working with parishes in the Diocese to support their awareness of disability and to work with them in helping make churches places of welcome and belonging for people with disability, their families and carers. Visits have been made to several parishes in the Diocese where a sermon on disability is preached and Kelly presents the congregation with the activities of Embracing Ministries. A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed to work with parishes

## TASKFORCE ON DISABILITY AND PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

In September 2024, the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn (the Diocese) agreed to establish a taskforce to undertake an assessment of how the Diocese can become an exemplar of welcoming and hospitable ministry for people with disability and to report back to Synod in 2025.

The Taskforce for Participation of People with Disability in the Life of the Church (the Taskforce) is now established and focussed on delivering Output 1 in its Terms of Reference:

1. Consult with Parishes, Ministry Units and Diocesan Agencies to provide an assessment of the current state of disability-inclusive practices, thereby identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and regarding increased accessibility and inclusion for people with disability and report back to Synod 2025. *(See below: Strengths Assessment for indicative areas of assessment.)*
2. Assess the use and uptake of *Everyone Welcome: accessible church for all* by Dr Louise Gosbell (hereafter, *Everyone Welcome*) and provide feedback for the augmentation of the Canberra and Goulburn version.
3. Collate and communicate best practice and associated resources for improvement of accessibility to the gospel and inclusion of people with disabilities in the worshipping community.
4. Include a report on the interim progress of inclusive ministry pilot projects being undertaken in parishes during the consultation period. A final report on the progress of the pilot parishes will be collated and provided at Synod in 2026.

There is a separate report for the Taskforce.

## TASKFORCE

Embracing Ministries wants to particularly note our gratitude for this team that has pursued this cause with such enthusiasm and passion. This team has worked through many issues and many different scenarios to present a well-rounded and considered report into this topic.

We pray that their continued passion in this area will bless many people and will help make our churches places of welcome and inclusion for everyone.

## ROGER BEALE AO



### Taskforce Chair

Roger has lived with paralysis of the legs since 1948 as a result of polio and has been an advocate for people with disabilities particularly those over 65 who are unable to access NDIS and don't get adequate support through Aged Care. He uses a wheelchair.

As a young man and even more recently he has had bruising relationships with the Church over physical access, the linking of disability with sin and inappropriate offers of healing through faith – he never wants anyone else to go through that. For Roger Embracing Ministries is about ensuring that does not happen to the current generation of people with disability or their carers.

Roger had a lengthy career as a senior public servant, consultant, and company director. He is an artist and lives in a loving relationship with his wife of 55 years, Venetia. They have two boys in their forties who are married and live in Canberra, with two young grandchildren.

## CLIVE RODGER



### **Task Force Executive**

Clive Rodger has been Chair of the Board of Embracing Ministries for the last 5 years.

Clive has a deep passion for the work of EM. He is an economist by training heading a large Australia wide economic consultancy. He has held senior Board positions in both public and private companies as well as serving on many Boards of church organisations.

Clive undertook post graduate theological studies at Princeton in the mid-1990s with particular interest in the disadvantaged in society. He has lectured at St Mark's. Clive has been married to Lynlea for 55 years and has two sons and 5 grandchildren.

## REV PHIL RADEMAKER



### **Task Force Executive**

Phil is on the board as an ordinary member and joined late 2024.

Phil has lifelong experience with disability and has an interest in seeing the church become a more inclusive place for people with disabilities. In particular, Phil wants to encourage the church to see people with disabilities not just as those who need care, but also as fellow ministers.

Phil loves how Embracing Ministries brings together various parts of the church and opens up new conversations. Phil is the Rector of Christ Church Hawker. He is married to Laura, and they have three children. In his spare time, Phil likes to read Australian fiction and play Dad Rock in a band full of Dads.

## LINDA PASCAL



### Secretariat

I attend St Alban's Anglican church. I believe that all people are made in the image of God with the same responsibilities to praise God, care for each other and the planet. With Christ as our head, we meet together as the church to worship Him and serve and encourage each other through our various gifts. I am happy to support a taskforce whose aim is to assist churches to become inclusive and hospitable places of belonging and discipleship for people with disability.

My career has focussed on equality and social justice. Before joining the public service, I managed recreation and employment programs for young people with developmental disabilities and autism. In the public service I was mainly a director of social policy and research and worked in museum and heritage policy. In retirement I am a volunteer archivist and social historian, researching and writing about Australian women artists and women in church history.

## EMERITUS ARCHDEACON ANNE RANSE OAM



### Task Force

Archdeacon Anne Ranse OAM has dedicated her life to ministry and community service since her ordination in 1998 at St Saviour's Cathedral, Goulburn. Coming from a family with a long line of clergy, Anne has a particular passion for supporting the elderly and isolated. Early in her ministry, she became chaplain at Ginninderra Gardens Nursing Home, where she successfully advocated for the creation of an on-site chapel, the "Chapel of the Good Shepherd."

In 2001, Anne was appointed Archdeacon to the Diaconate, nurturing and encouraging the ministry of deacons across the diocese. She also contributed to the Episcopal Task Force for Older People, shaping church policy on elder care. At Holy Covenant, Jamison, she currently

leads holistic day-hospice programs for people with life-limiting illnesses and facilitates inclusive ministries such as Noah's Ark Pet Ministry and Colours of God. Anne continues to offer pastoral care and weekly reflections and was awarded an OAM for her outstanding service.

#### DALANGLIN DKHAR



##### **Parent Representative**

Dalang has been the parent representative on the board of Embracing Ministries since 2021. She is fully immersed in the disability community as a full-time carer and disability advocate for her son since 2012. She is currently completing her PhD research on the lived experience of carers. Carer advocacy is something she is passionate about and speaks at academic and community events on the topics. Prior to being her son's carer, Dalang was employed as Producer of Wesley Mission Television & Corporate Communications in Sydney.

Dalang is passionate about Embracing Ministries because it supports the community of families living with disabilities in a holistic way with programs and services for young people with disabilities, their siblings as well as their mum and dad. She is also a fervent believer that inclusion is not about bringing people with disabilities and their families to the table, but to build a new table together. Hailing from Northeast India, Dalang presently lives in Canberra with her son, her husband, Patrick, and Sheldon – the English Cocker Spaniel that rules the house.

#### DR WINIFRED LAMB



##### **Associate Member (as available)**

Winifred is an associate member of the Taskforce committee. She is married to John who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's nearly 3 years ago. Her own father was similarly diagnosed also later in his life. As John's carer, Winifred's experience of the condition has enabled her to identify closely with the purpose of the Taskforce, as well

as with the challenge of paradigmatic shifts necessary in the practice and mindset of the diocese in “engaging a world of difference with the love and truth of Jesus” Embracing Ministries represents for her the commitment to that paradigmatic shift for all persons with disability.

Where dementia is concerned, given our ‘hypercognitive’ view of the human capacity for learning, Winifred believes that we need to appreciate what spiritual sustenance and ‘discipleship’ could mean for those with the condition. This is especially the case, given its progressive and terminal nature.

Winifred is a retired teacher of Philosophy and English. She was born in Hong Kong and has taught in Hong Kong, the UK and Australia. She & John are members of St John the Baptist in Reid.

## WITH THANKS

The work of Embracing Ministries is made possible through partnership and community support, and we gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the following donors and partners.



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