

Thanksgiving prayer – 20th Anniversary, 27th October 2002

Lord we thankyou for this day that celebrates 20 years of our life together as Westgate Baptist Community. Thankyou for all the stories, old friends and memories we bring to these occasions and for everyone who is here today to share them with us.

As we reflect over these years we sees years full of blessing, challenges, excitement, but also pain, loss and struggle. Thankyou that you have been ever present with us through these times.

For those early years when we were all full of energy and bright ideas that seemed to work first time every time. For all those small beginnings, dreams and visions that lead to the creation of strong independent community services like South Kingsville Health Services Cooperative, Lanigiro Housing, Westgate Community Initiatives Group and SKCC. And the less obvious acts of sharing and giving like the FRIENDS Group, Learning for Life, the Casserole Bank, the material aid supply, economic sharing, the pastoral worker for the clinic.

At those times, we sometimes complained that we were all too busy with social activism to stop and hear your still small voice. But we felt your leading and your presence in strong and positive ways as each step forward felt embraced by and steeped in a clear sense of your love and direction.

As time passed and for some of us, our energies became more directed by our families and working lives, thankyou for being there with us and blessing us with a strong sense of community, friendship and support for each other. As we were able to buy homes near each other, share tools, paint each others houses – join in working bees at the church and for other friends in the local area, these simple acts of working together and giving to each other provided us with a practical way to express your love and care.

We thankyou too Lord for the challenges and times of growth that you set before us. We remember the losses, the many good friends who have died over the last 20 years. Each person teaching us a little more about the continuum of life, leaving a sense of loss but also helping us to recognise and value the importance of the relationships that surround us. Reminding us again of how much we see of you in the gift of friendship and companionship.

We have faced other challenges too Lord, members who have decided to leave Westgate, often because of changing circumstances, but sometimes because of broken relationships, disappointments or simply because Church is just too hard to fit into our busy schedules. Lord, we have made mistakes over the years, conversations that were not immersed in your wisdom and love; things that were not said at times when there was so much that needed to be said. We recognise that we have not always been as loving as we could be and sometimes we have just not understood and made wrong choices. But we thank you Lord that you are there with us regardless. Sharing in our failures as well as our successes, showing a way of forgiveness and grace. There is much that we have all learnt from these times and we thank you that yours is the path of love, healing and forgiveness where bitterness and hard heartedness cannot sit long in your presence. Thankyou that so many of our 'ex Westgaters' are still our friends and companions in the wider community of our lives.

Lord, we thankyou for these last few years, even as we have spent time struggling to find a new direction, a new way of being church in this changing world. Sometimes, in berating ourselves, we have lost sight of the rich blessings that have continued to surround us. For all our wonderful children, the many new members who have joined us, especially our Karen friends, all who have brought friendship added energy and who have reminded us that our church and community life is something special and worthy of celebration. For the friendship, sense of community, simple acts of caring for neighbours and for each other, church camps, celebrations, poignant Sunday services, kids activities, bike rides, picnics, meals together, good and solid and thought provoking conversation and especially the significance of our small groups. Helping hands, being there, acts of kindness that are hidden but much appreciated. We sometimes need reminding to recognise how much of your love and presence we still do experience through these small but significant acts of community.

Thankyou too, that you do not allow us to get lost in our own small worlds, thankyou for always prompting us to look outward, to be part of a local, wider and even world community. Help us to know how best to move into the future, give us the courage to try new things, to let go of the old worn out ways of doing things, to find new ways of being church in this vibrant local community where we live.

Meredith Budge

As we look now into the future, help us to temper everything with your love, may we build on the lessons of the past and draw on your wisdom as we move forward. But help us too to give space for the visionary and energetic amongst us – to support each other as we come to grips with the changes that we need to make to be church in the 21 century.

Lord, we thankyou again for the many blessings that you have surrounded us with – help us to keep you central to our lives and show us how to be Westgate Baptist Community over the next 20 years.

Amen