

Vision Message 2017 Script

Discussion: What are your predictions for what will happen in the world and in this church in the next 7 years?

Some people I know seem to live in the future

- They're not fazed by things going wrong in the present because they see it all working towards something better in the future
 - Others I know find it really hard to imagine a future that's any different to the present

While we're not all visionaries...

- ... I would argue that all Christians need to be people of vision
 - Because we all need to seek God about our future
- If we never do that, then we can find that life and it's busyness drive us
 - And we can find we're no longer any different to people who aren't Christians

But if the word 'vision' is hard for you to identify with...

... notice this interesting thing in Scripture

Here is the most commonly quoted bible verse about vision - Prov 29:18

Proverbs 29:18 King James Version

18 Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

That's the old King James version

- Notice how different these other translations are:

New International Version

18 Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint;
but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction.

New Revised Standard Version

18 Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint,
but happy are those who keep the law.

New Living Translation

18 When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild.
But whoever obeys the law is joyful.

Revelation, prophecy and divine guidance...

... all substitute here for the word 'Vision'

And if you think of it in those ways...

... Vision is everywhere in the Bible

- With Nehemiah it started when he 'sat down and wept' (Neh 1:4)
- With Samuel it was a voice in the night (1 Sam 3)
- With Paul it was a dream of a begging man (Acts 16:9)

Neh 1:4

4 When I heard this, I sat down and wept.

1 Samuel 3:1

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.

Acts 16:9

9 That night Paul had a vision:

But what do you do...

... if you need God's guidance for yourself or your 9-5

- And God doesn't give you one of these dreams?
 - Or some tearful conviction?
 - And you don't hear his voice in the night?

Because life is just normal and everyday...

... and you're not a character from the Bible

... and the dreams you have are just weird!

A hugely helpful thing I learnt on the Caleb Leadership Course...

- Was to write a 7 year letter to yourself
- Ask God to inspire your imagination
 - Think of yourself or your 9-5, seven years in the future
 - And start writing down what it's like

Today, Vision Sunday, I want to start in the year 2024

... and once we've done that we'll come back to the question of next year

- I asked each of our elders to write a letter from 2024
- In case you're unsure, our elders are...



Lucy Sullivan is our unofficial elder

- She comes to our Elders' meetings for her own experience
... and to give us input from a young person's perspective
- To start let's invite Lucy and hear her letter from 2024

Letters from 2024: Lucy

Dear Mt Albert Baptist Church,

How are you all? I hope you are well! I have recently been invited to present a seminar at Easter Camp 2024 and they've asked me to speak about what it means to be a young leader and after catching up with Jess on our spontaneous trip to New York together, it caused me to think back to my two years at Mt Albert where my leadership skills grew and developed so much – can you believe that was 7 years ago now! I was still only a kid! But I thought I would write to you just to say thank you for that time that you invested in me!

I always loved how developing leaders was always a priority of Mt Albert Baptist. It was such a blessing to be respected as a young leader and to be given opportunities to lead in different ways at your church, it certainly helped me to gain confidence and get a little bit more used to being up the front! You even went as far as fully trusting me with your intermediates! It was such a joy to catch up with Jess and hear about how Jakob, Anna, Daniel and Hannah are all now leaders at Gravity and James, Alice and Grace are leading at Traction. They were just so young when I left them, don't they grow up so fast?

One of the other things that I clearly remember from my days at MABC was how well integrated the youth were with the wider church. It was always such a pleasure to come to church and see so many young people worshipping as a part of the wider congregation and some even up the front leading the worship! Jess told me about how their involvement has grown and now many of the teens are connected with an adult in the church who acts as a mentor for them which is awesome! And I love the way that you have created life groups which involve all ages and stages of life – what an awesome embodiment of the Kingdom of God!

My last weeks at Mt Albert were just before you embarked on your big building project, some may say that I got out at just the right time! But when I visited a year or so back, it was so wonderful to be served in your new café area by some of the community kids who had joined the youth group. I always admired the way you reached out to the community so well and it was so encouraging to see that continued in new ways. What a great opportunity for those young people to be trained in a trade in such a warm, loving Christian environment – it is things like that which will make such a great impact on your suburb and the wider city.

So, finally, thank you Mt Albert for those two years that you trained me so faithfully. It is incredible to hear about and see the continued growth within your church and your wider community and I am so honoured to have been a part of that, even if it was for such a short while. Even now, 7 years on, in my role as the youth pastor of a rural church, I can see how my time with you shaped me in more ways than you can imagine and for that I am so truly grateful.

Lots of love, Lucy

Qns:

This letter makes a fantastic point, that leadership training now is a crucial investment for the future. And if we want to see another generation of youth at mabc we've got to train this lot up as leaders to guide them.

And I love how - for the sake of possibilities - you even named people: Jakob, Anna, Daniel and Hannah in the future, all leading at Gravity and James, Alice and Grace leading at Traction. Because people used to share a lot of prophetic words for each other in church: 'I think God's going to use you to...'. I don't know if we do that so much any more. There's real power in that as we all discern God's will together.

And in 2024 your letter says you're going to be a youth pastor in a rural church. Is that your dream?

Letters from 2024: Janferie

I'm staring up at the Rockies mountain range. I'm astounded by the sheer scale of it! It takes my breath away and reminds me again after all these years that nothing compares with God's creative handiwork.

It's May 2024 and my sister Jackie and I are away on one of our fantastic holidays! But something else also took my breath away recently. As I was packing for this holiday I found a really old copy of Pulse. It was from Term 4, 2017 - can you believe it! 2017! It got me thinking about how much had changed in the seven years since then!

I remember how in 2017 we were so cramped with our building project. What a difference there is now with MABC's new lounge and cafe! It's always buzzing with chatter. It has a great outlook over Rocket Park. We connect so much better with local community people after ESOL and Mainly Music, because now we've got a place to get to know them! There are so many community people in our cafe, and so many opportunities to relate and share. It really is becoming a Godspace. As we have our 60 Plus morning teas in there, we often think back with real thankfulness for God's provision.

I noticed on that old copy of Pulse how there used to be just two kinds of services - Contemporary and Classic - and how now in 2024 we have four different kinds! Just like people enjoyed the option of a quieter more reflective service back then, now there are four different worship environments to choose from. And with that variety we've managed to retain that all important value of unity.

And who would've thought, way back in 2017, that our Quiet Mornings would gain so much more interest. We had 25 people at our last one! Maybe it was because of that series we had last year on what it really means to be still and know God. Or maybe it's because in these seven years life just kept getting busier, and so many people inside and outside of the church reached breaking point.

One thing that hasn't changed since 2017 is that the Grey Warblers are still doing enthusiastic outreach in retirement homes. We were at Eden Village a while back. God seems so close to us when we're there. It's almost as if you can see God's love reaching out and touching the people we sing to. It's great to have all the younger singers that have joined us also!

Unfortunately our trip to the Rockies means I'll miss the next church prayer meeting. Our Prayer Meetings have become such a power house since 2017, and I guess they are the reason we are seeing new people coming into church fellowship every week.

I feel a little like the Apostle Paul as I finish this letter. I pray for you always. Mt Albert Baptist Church and all of you who are a part of it, really matter to God. The journey you have together, and all the things you do together, are important. It strikes me so much as I look back, that the future is what we, and God, make it.

May God help you live abundant and joyful lives, free from the kind of emotional baggage from the past that can hold you back. And may you carry the fragrance of Jesus wherever you go.

Your friend Janferie

Qns:

I love how your letter has 4 different kinds of services in the future!

Contemporary & Classic - I was trying to think what the other two might be? Any ideas?

Maybe a jazz music service?

And a no music service?

I guess it makes us think, as things get ever more diverse in the future, how will we go about keeping unity?

That's often not thought about when churches or organisations envision the future.

I also notice you mention prayer a few times in this letter: 'I pray for you always'... Would say prayer is the most important theme in your letter?

Letters from 2024: Carl

Just look out at that Mt Albert Baptist carpark full of self-driving electric vehicles silently charging on a bright Sunday morning from our wireless charging pad. Steve certainly had a vision of the future back in 2017 when parked his early plug-in electric car next to my thirsty V8. Thank goodness we installed enough solar panels on our building to be completely self-sufficient. Imagine having to actually pay for electricity like we used to !

Is good to see the Joll and Penny avatars are online with us this morning. Chris's holographic avatar is going to give us his telepresence update this morning from Thailand.

3D printing, hyper-connectivity, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence, robotics, neural networks, deep analytics, autonomous vehicles, self-learning systems....We've embraced it all, but as I look back, on the amazing advancements in technology that have brought us to 2024 what has been our journey in this new excitingly-disruptive world?

As a bunch of failed and flawed believers journeying together to fulfill God's will I think we've done exceptionally well

over the last 7 years. Our congregation continues to grow exponentially in numbers and diversity. Our outreach ministries are flourishing and its all not by our own strength but by trusting and seeking heavenly wisdom and guidance. Not measuring ourselves by worldly standards but holding ourselves accountable to a higher standard in Jesus.

Our biggest physical achievement and a great celebration has been the exceptional reimagining of our buildings. We know that our church is not just a building, but the building is where the church meets, so is very important to the work of discipleship.

It's very apparent to us now that buildings are the most expensive part of discipleship! However many millions of dollars we've prayerfully and carefully invested over the last 7 years; it doesn't matter because we're finally done! I think back to the endless planning meetings I was involved in as an elder and the prayerful consideration we made for every detail and every dollar, it really was so worth it to God's glory! The seemingly insurmountable costs are long forgotten, we've even almost payed off the last of what we thought was a huge Mortgage! The quality of what has been reimagined here is a testament to those who had a vision for the future more than 15 years ago and we who had the courage to step forward in in faith to make it happen.

I love really love the food replicator technology we've installed in the MABC Café. Alpha and Traction dinners are so easy now, everyone can have whatever gourmet or fussy food they want (or need) all with a simple voice command. Although the coffee snobs among us do complain that the replicated blend available after the service is substandard, compared to the premium beans from the plantation we purchased in 2022 to help the changmai locals

Over the last 7 years I'm proud that we've re-established the Mt Albert family camp, as an annual event which continues to increase in numbers year on year. What a wonderful opportunity it has been for our diverse multicultural congregation to really connect as a community of believers at a deep and authentic level while having lots of fun together. It's been such a great opportunity to create lasting meaningful connections between generations in a weekend of fun, good food and togetherness. A weekend completely disconnected from devices and away from our "always on" connectedness, a weekend to honestly and openly connect with each other worship our God and Savior.

I'm so proud what we have achieved as a community of faith at Mt Albert and as the future leadership of this church passes to the new generation of leaders, the millennials, we know that our legacy of community, diversity, and faithful authenticity will continue to thrive and that our church will continue to be a haven of difference in our disrupted fragmented and unendingly fast paced world.

Qns:

I love the food replicator in the cafe!

And I was waiting for mention of the colony on Mars!

1. Your letter asks: What if tech & on the go connectivity were taken to its extreme? How would we make relationships important in that setting? You suggest an annual church camp where we agree to all completely unplug

- Do you reckon they could do that?
- How would we get them to agree to it?
 - - This letter really makes me think about how much technology stifles our relationships
 - - I think we're going to need an answer to this in the years to come

Congregation: What do you relate to in what you've heard so far? Who's got the future right out of these three?

Letters from 2024: Jean

It's the 7th of January 2024, and I AM STILL HERE AT MT ALBERT BAPTIST CHURCH!!!

Maybe it sounds comical starting my letter that way. But the truth is, I wanted to leave MABC 58 years ago! I'm not kidding. I was very unhappy in this church in 1966 and was hoping God would confirm it was okay to leave. Imagine my surprise then, when instead of releasing me, God showed me a picture of MABC rising up as a spirit- empowered army through Ezekiel 37! I was stunned!

I have held on tightly to that picture God showed me, all of these years.

Something important stirred in our church one Sunday in 2015, when Pastors Steve Worsley and Greg Liston challenged us be filled or refilled with the Holy Spirit. Almost the whole congregation in both morning services stood to their feet to do just that! Further teaching on emotional wholeness and a course led by Pastor Judy Ashman found many of us set free from long held issues.

Now in 2024 I sit in our church cafe and my heart is filled with thanksgiving as I observe all that God is doing. People are sitting at tables talking and praying for one another. The Baptist reserve has gone, people are being healed physically and emotionally as they unburden themselves to one another, share the stresses of their work day lives, and go home refreshed in body and soul. Newcomers are seeing that church is not simply a place to hear a sermon but see the body of Christ in action through the caring conversations and genuine friendship among everyone.

Across from me some brochures at the Welcome Desk catch my eye. What a great idea it was including people's occupations in our MABC Directory! Now newcomers can easily connect and find meaningful support with people like them. A second brochure helps you discover your motivational gifts. It's so easy to find people for teams or new initiatives, with the enthusiasm people have to use their gifts. And there's another brochure Pastor Rob produced about how to understand and relate with the different cultures in the church. This has really helped bring down barriers. Now all our Life Groups are multicultural. But the brochure that really has a story behind it is the one titled, 'Christians Against Poverty'. What a world of difference it made when we started partnering with CAP! Now we actually have a way of helping people recover from addictions, get out of the cycle of debt, or get back on their feet after a crisis. And you should see the crossover with so many of these folk coming to Christ on our Alpha courses!

If you looked in on a church service in 2024 you may be surprised to find that the real growth area in these last seven years, has been children. Our Children's Pastor is doing such a good job that we regularly receive news of children giving their lives to Christ, and we hear from parents who are amazed at the changes in their children's behaviour! And don't let me forget something we've prayed for for ages: We are getting really good connection with Kids Forever, Mainly Music and the Toy Library, with many coming to faith and joining our church!

I'm so glad I didn't leave in 1966, and I'm so glad I hung on to that picture God showed me. The Lord always fulfils His word if we are willing to let Him do it in His way and His time.

Qns:

This feels like the prophetic letter! MABC as a spirit empowered army!

Do you feel like you're seeing that vision from 1966 come about in stages?

Is that picture mostly about the church being spiritually alive?

We're pretty happy you stayed at MABC!

And excited to see how God outworks Ezekiel 37 through us

Letters from 2024: Jeff

Dear friends

I am writing this letter on the 11th of November 2024, which happens to Armistice Day, which commemorates the peace accord reached at the end of World War 1. After last week's fantastic outreach and now reflecting on both the first and the second World Wars, I find myself thinking back to the first Parihaka Night we had at MABC in 2017. All we did that night was tell the Parihaka story. Yet the message of loving your enemies and building bridges across cultures has profoundly impacted not only our church, but our local community as well. I also realise that our Global Cafes, our multi-ethnic life groups and cultural seminars have been more than just events. By God's grace, we have been modelling the opposite of war.

I am currently away visiting some old Chinese market gardeners in Ohakune and as I meet these special folk in their homes, I am reminded of the many different wonderful cultures we have in our church. We have much to be thankful to God for in the rich cross-cultural congregation of over 30 ethnicities that now make up the MABC family, and in particular the wonderful integration that has progressed significantly over these past 7 years, helped greatly by the fact that we now have 28 Life Groups and every one of them has a blend of 3 or more cultures attending and contributing.

It was so inspiring last Sunday to witness the commissioning of Pastor Lushai Daji as a second Associate International Pastor working in Pastor Rob Lovatt's team, together with Pastor Joshua Wong. It was also wonderful to have Pastor Steve and Jo back on Sunday following their recent sabbatical trip to Asia where they were greatly blessed as they met with each of the 4 local pastors and their families who have been sponsored by MABC over the past 5 years. Our mission-focused heart as a church may have changed direction from sending missionaries out to other lands, but the mission flame is still burning brightly as we support the training of local pastors in their own culture and setting, and as we witness each of them bringing a plentiful harvest into God's Kingdom.

The arrival of our church bus last month is already having a noticeable effect amongst our Sunday morning children's work, with a connection to 23 new families whose children are now coming regularly each week. It's some 45 years since MABC last had a bus and apart from helping with picking up children each Sunday, this resource is going to be a

great asset for youth excursions and daytrips for our elderly. It will be available for hire to other organisations and groups to help with costs.

Thank you for shining the love of Jesus just where God has placed you – keep up the good work!

JJT

Qns:

I like this idea of a church bus. Can we get one before 2024?

Maybe we better wait till after the building project?

I love the international flavour of this letter

We know that Auckland will only get more multicultural

So it's reasonable to think our goals of cultural integration will be really important

But why is it so important to you, as a European NZer?

And now finally, by video...

... because today happens to be his wedding anniversary

- Here, in 2024, is Blayne Herr

BLAYNE'S DVD

As you can see my elders are a very positive bunch

- They're seeing really positive things in the future
 - But it is worth entertaining the idea that maybe the future isn't entirely rosy

What if there was nuclear war, or a terrorist act in NZ?

- What if pornography became mainstream following its rise on the internet?
 - What if the plastic soup in our oceans meant we could no longer eat fish?
 - What if the volume of global refugees didn't ease, but skyrocketed?

Any of those things could happen, and some of them may

... and if they do, the work of the church becomes even more vital

- The darker things get, the brighter the light of truth shines
 - Imagine Global Cafes about cultural integration if a war was going on
 - Imagine Freedom in Christ courses if there was a porn epidemic
 - Imagine tech free church camps in an age of Smart Houses, Robots and AI

I think family life and marriages are going to be more under threat than ever...

... in the coming years

- So the things we followers of Jesus commit to will matter more than ever

I'd love to hear from more of you,

... about what you'd like to see in the next seven years...

- And I'm thinking early next year could be a good time to develop these ideas further
 - Right now though, let's focus specifically on next year

As staff and elders have thought it through together...

... we have come up with a theme for 2018:

“The Year of Jubilee”

Why?

1. We'll spend a good chunk of next year worshipping in Jubilee Hall
2. Almost to the day it's been 50 years since Jubilee Hall was built (1967) to our current renovations
3. The biblical 'Year of Jubilee' is all about freedom and closeness to God

Here's what we wrote:

2018 will be an unusual year. From March onwards, we will hold our church services in the Jubilee/Gymn hall areas and won't have use of our church building for anything during that time. Aside from some working bees, the vast majority of the actual building work will be done by contractors. We looked at what kind of goals might fit well with our temporary circumstance.

Tensions can be high through times of transition. Accordingly we felt that intentional work on our **withward arrow** would help us get through this time well, & would also build the foundation of who we are & what we can do together in the future.

In our Year of Jubilee we want to grow...

- Closer relationally
... withward arrow strategies
- Closer physically
... more intergenerational mixing as church meets in the youth space
- Closer to God
... like the Old Testament transition time through the wilderness years
- Closer to our local community
... LWYL projects, CAP

Now we've got all these ideas about withward arrow possibilities...

... and six goals for the year

- We'll go through those and get your thoughts on them at our 5 o'clock Vision meeting

For now let's just pick out some of them:

QUESTIONS..

- Would it be awesome to have a church camp next year?
- If you attended the Parihaka Night, would you love to see it develop in to:
 - A Stage Musical?
 - A 'Parihaka Peace Day' in Rocket Park?
 - Other?
- Is hospitality a strength at MABC and would it help to organise ourselves by creating a 'Hospitality Ministry'?

DISCUSSION?

To close...

At the Baptist Hui I went to last week...

... I spoke to a pastor who has done loads of building projects

- He said to me: 'You can expect to lose 10% of your people when you go through a building project'
 - I was really taken aback
 - Is that really true?
 - Can Christians be that superficial that they would leave at an average of 10% over the temporary awkwardness of a building project?
- Yet it is fair to say that there's disruption and possibilities for tension when you go through a year of building change

What if we could prove that theory wrong?

- I want to challenge us to be intentional about relationships
 - About our withward arrow, in 2018
 - So that whether it's numbers of people or quality of fellowship, we come through 2018 stronger than we are now

I believe God is calling us to come closer to each other

... and closer to him

... in 2018

... our Year of Jubilee

PRAYER