



**Immanuel**  
Lutheran Church

Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Within Immanuel College  
Forest Drive, via Wises Road,  
Buderim, 4556.  
PO Box 5729,  
Maroochydore BC, 4558  
07 5445 6894  
[www.ichurch.net.au](http://www.ichurch.net.au)  
[matt@ichurch.net.au](mailto:matt@ichurch.net.au)

**October 10<sup>th</sup> 2020**

**TO: IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**RE: EXTENDED SICK LEAVE**

Dear Beloved Church Family,

It is over 11 weeks since I found myself unable to cope and was forced to take sick leave. I found that my physical and mental capacity can break. Never in my life have I been so profoundly humbled.

For a couple weeks now I have been quietly circulating and returning a little to public life. Although still officially on sick leave, I have begun doing a bit of ministry around the parish under Pastor Mark's leadership. I'm hoping to gradually increase the amount I do each week.

On beginning to frequent Immanuel again I have heard some rumours about my condition and that people have been projecting strange things into this situation. I suppose that is quite normal.

Given *what I have heard about me*, I will attempt to outline my condition in brief form...

Over the last year I have been very run down, continually physically unwell, and gradually losing strength. Then in one month I experienced 7 painful disasters (some of which I haven't even described to our Church Council). The list included discovering two days in a row that my Dad had terminal cancer and that my brother a grave brain tumour. The final straw was a car accident - I was sitting at the Sunshine motorway exit and a young Holden Commodore driver came off the motorway, failed to stop, and hit my car in the rear. I am glad to say that his precious Australian Holden was repairable!!! The accident resulted in stress to my neck which already had a triple spinal fusion from a previous car accident. I ended up in constant searing pain and was unable to get a night's sleep for six weeks. I found myself struggling mentally and as soon as everyone was gone I would constantly break down and cry. The pain was both physical and emotional. Ministry is demanding even on good days, but I no longer had the physical or emotional ability to cope with it. My wife and doctor stepped in and ordered me to take time off.

During sick leave I have enjoyed a merry-go-round of doctors, medication that made me sleep for an entire month, sessions with a Christian psychologist, and almost too many friends wanting to offer support! I have also had some time with my dad and brother in wintry Adelaide. I am now coping better, my neck is improving, and my mental capacity is good enough for me to feel bored. I'm gradually learning to sleep again.

I genuinely love Immanuel - and by that I mean you people. This church is a community of beautiful souls in whom God has chosen to delight.

One rumour I recently heard *about me* is that I lost my faith. I lost much, but not faith in Jesus. Listen! The key to faith is not faith in yourself, not faith in your faith, faith is not about your resolve or commitment. Your faith must not be about you! It is simply recognising your need and helplessness and placing yourself in God's

hands. I never stopped that once. Even when I could hardly manage a conversation I found myself reading God's Word first thing each day. Often, I had trouble hearing God's voice at all, but in this time of pain I always haven't stopped knowing that God is love. I found myself reassuring those I love that even though I was failing, Jesus Christ was not failing. I have had to admit that I can't properly cope. But I never stopped believing that God can cope with anything. In the end God's love wins!

I want to thank Pastor Doug for his kindness. Doug more clearly saw me failing than I did myself. He has been very patient with me (and with you all too!). Doug is a gift of grace to this church.

I thank our chairperson Steve Mayer for sticking with me; talking and praying with me each week. I did not realise how strongly he worked to protect me. We all owe Steve our thanks for his leadership.

I thank Pastor Mark for stepping into the breach in this time. He's been touching base with me weekly, and early on, before I could attend church he bought me Holy Communion. Nothing could be better.

By the way if you have received anything good from me, apart from God, you should all thank my wife Karryn! In my first month of leave I received many cards of support. Karryn kept them and stored them up for later as a surprise! I want to thank you all for your support and prayers.

Until our Church Council say otherwise, Pastor Mark is our 'acting lead pastor'. So for now, anything I do in our ministry is run by him. I'm finding my way back, but the program for my return is not yet approved.

As I miss my first Immanuel AGM in twelve years I want to thank those that are there. Well done team!

Finally I leave you with something from God's Word...

*Five times I received the thirty nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from nations, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from traitors; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches....*

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness...*

*God said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

*2 Corinthians 11:24-28,30 & 2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

I'll see you soon!



Matthew Thiele