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Hughes News from Newcastle

Dear family and friends,

Thank you so much for your support over the last year - or two! December 2007 was our last proper newsletter, and we sincerely apologise for not honouring your prayerful support with good communication. We so appreciate your prayers, keeping in touch and the financial support that you provide.

This letter is to let you know some of what we've been up to, and what we're thinking for the future...

Looking back at 2009

Last year felt like we hit our stride - we felt more prepared for the unexpected and for the inconsistencies native to International Ministry in FOCUS (Fellowship of Overseas Christian University Students). We began the semester with two home-based dinner and bible study groups and ended with both groups bursting at the seams as 35+ students came each week for food, fellowship and bible study. Through the year we studied the book of Daniel, selections of Jesus' teaching from Luke, a series on Money, 1 Peter and some other one-off topics. We saw God answer our prayers for more not-yet-Christian students being regular attendees.

In second semester we experienced massive & sudden growth through two sources: First, an influx of



European students stemming from two keen German girls (Catharina and Steffi). The European students brought so much energy, great diversity and many challenging questions to us. Even the ride home was a gospel adventure, with a Swedish

You're Invited!!

We have so much more we could share and we'd like to say thanks for your support!

**If you're in SE Qld, we're having a Supporters Supper:
Thursday 11 February
7:00 - 9:30pm
Gateway Baptist Church
1052 Mt Gravatt-Capalaba Rd
Mackenzie**

Sample some of Dene's coffee, hear some stories of God's work in student's lives, watch some movies of FOCUS in action!

We'd love you to bring a friend who might consider being part of our support team.

On the home front



Elliott and Simeon are a constant source of love, joy and frustration! Last year Elliott learnt to ride his bike, which he loves to ride along the harbour while Rachel runs with Simeon in the pram. Simeon learnt to count so that he could play hide and seek and also loves to be a 'tansforma' which involves running around the house doing kung-fu type moves, making shooting noises and jumping on Elliott! They both enjoy books, playing with water (sprinklers are still allowed in Newcastle), trampoline wrestling, and watching Yo Gabba Gabba.

This year Elliott will start Kinder (first year of school) at Jesmond Public and Simeon will start his own preschool on Tuesdays at the uni while Rachel is teaching. It's the 3rd time Rachel has taught this subject, and so she's looking forward to tweaking and re-using material rather than complete re-invention.

girl asking "so is one supposed to search for a meaning in life, or should you wait for someone to tell you"? The second growth source was from our Aussie partners (NCS: Newcastle Christian Students) running a Discovering Jesus course which was attended mostly by internationals, and helped along by FOCUS. About 22 students from that course continued to meet until the end of semester.

It's been just fantastic to see German, Swedish, Malaysian, Chinese, American, Korean and Japanese students, around tables and lounge rooms earnestly asking questions about life's purpose, why Christians suffer, God's forgiveness and Jesus' sacrificial love.

Second semester's size was most evident in our big events. It was really exciting to see most of our students coming together for these four "FocalPoint" meetings. We saw 65 people at an evangelistic night and again at our end of year Christmas dinner. We also had some great camps, and a few students were able to come to the National Training Event with students from campuses all over Australia. We were sad to farewell 14 of our regular members who either graduated or are continuing their studies back in their home country.

Pray with us, that these graduates of FOCUS will continue growing as Christians, or continue seeking out Jesus just as they have begun in Australia. Pray that Jesus will seek them out. Pray that we, along with continuing FOCUS members, will support the graduates.

Looking ahead to 2010

As Dene struggles to find times and places for planning meetings, we're reminded once again that ministry with international students is volatile and unpredictable! Though we were hoping to have 3 home-based dinner and bible study groups, on the same night with 4 FocalPoints each semester, Dene's already had requests from key members for a study on a different night. Just when we thought we'd found the 'perfect program' it's a timely reminder that there is no such thing! But generally, the combination of home, dinner and Bible study seems to provide an environment that offers support and opportunity for Christian Students to



Happy boys at Christmas

FOCUS Snapshots



Students from Sweden, Australia, Germany and Malaysia share Christmas Dinner and gifts



Christmas Dinner and farewell



Thanksgiving lunch with Grads



grow in their maturity in Christ, as well as welcoming non-Christian students to investigate Jesus and see how a group of Christians live out his love.

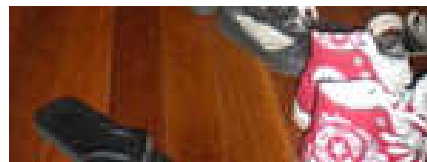
This year we'll also have the regular FOCUS camps, Dene will spend lots of time training Helpers, meeting to chat, pray and read the Bible with individuals, pastoring students in times of need, as well as one-off events like speaking at the Gloucester Baptist Church camp. Dene also has his first Ministry Trainee - Hugh Jonas, who will be working alongside him 3 days a week. What a blessing! One of Hugh's projects this year will be to train other Aussies to befriend internationals just like Hugh did with James Cho in 2007 - Hugh and James were the highlight of FOCUS for us back then!

Financial Position

In sorting through our support database, we're humbled by the funds that so many of you have continued to provide over this time, even through the GFC. We are thankful to God for you.

Our support level is at 88%.

Newcastle Area funds are making up our resulting \$7400 annual shortfall, but we would love to see this money go to putting on new staff and growing the ministry here. Consider this: FOCUS is in regular contact with around 1% of international students on campus, but our evangelistic attempts indicate that around 20% of international students may have an interest in learning about Jesus. There is so much work to be done! You can partner with us here.



Shoes at our door means Bible study is on!



Bible Study night at the girls ESL table



Singing by the campfire



Camp group photo



Hugh, Dene's new trainee

Looking to the future

At the start of 2009, some good friends from Bible College asked us to consider long term

ministry in Japan. It was fresh on our minds - we'd taken a FOCUS team to Japan just one month before. So we did consider it, on and off all year. We've thought about how we're quite happy in Australia and would like to be even closer to our families. We've thought about how much we like living in Newcastle, how we have a Church that is great for young families like us, good schools, a good job for Rachel, a healthy ministry, the boys have lots of friends, and Dene gets to make wonderful coffee for lots of people at least once a week...

But then we also noticed that there are lots of people we meet who would love to go into overseas mission but have things that prevent them – health, age, language, family, cultural and other difficulties. In comparison, we don't know what should prevent us. We have lived in Japan, our kids love Japanese food, enjoyed learning some language, and we have no health issues that would prevent us going that we know of.

Ministering to Japanese students here in Australia, we are acutely aware of the hardship faced by those who are new believers, going home to families, employers and friends that scorn such belief. We often think of our Japanese friends who have become Christians in Australia and the US, only to give up soon after returning to Japan. Dene sometimes sits in staff meeting with 20 others on the Church/Uni team and remembers another college friend, Maiko, who has 7 uni campuses that she alone looks after as staff-worker.

Finally, at the end of 2009, Dene led a workshop with Momoko - see right - who works in the KGK office (the Japanese equivalent of our head organisation - AFES) and she also encouraged Dene to consider working with Uni students in Japan.



The more seriously we consider Japan, the less adequate we feel. Yet we still feel drawn to serve there and very much challenged by the needs. So, we're still not sure...

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