



# Salem & Northridge Salem

*Building the Lutheran  
Rest Home in Toowoomba*

**This story is dedicated  
to the many faithful men and  
women who came together to  
meet local needs and serve their  
region and community. The dreams  
and hard work of our founding  
congregations have made us  
who we are today.**

Lutheran Services draws on the fundamental Lutheran tradition of care for the individual, family and community. Together with the congregations that founded us, we have served the people and communities of Queensland since 1935. The diversity, vitality and significant contribution of Lutheran Services today is thanks to these origins and this foundation.

To celebrate and commemorate these beginnings, Lutheran Services is conducting an 'Origin Stories' project—to explore, document and share the proud histories and inspirational stories behind our many services and sites.

The project is a collaboration between staff from Lutheran Services and the Lutheran Church of Australia, Queensland District.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Salem & Northridge Salem Origin Story owes its existence to the generous support and contributions from members of the Toowoomba community.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who made this possible. Thank you for sharing your memories, stories, poems, pictures and prayers. This remarkable history and story has been written by you.

## **EXPLORE OUR ORIGINS**

This booklet is an abridged version of the Salem & Northridge Salem Origin Story. See the full version and other Origin Stories [here](#).



## Respite for Lutheran missionaries

The story of the 'Salem old folks' home' in Toowoomba officially begins in 1935. However, the history of the Salem name and the rest home on Hume Street stretches back to the early 1920s.

It was in 1921 that Pastor Ernst Victor Hermann Gutekunst of St Paul's Lutheran Church on Phillip Street proposed establishing a home to provide rest and respite for Lutheran missionaries on furlough from Papua New Guinea (PNG). A family home on the corner of Cranley and Hume Streets in Toowoomba was purchased for the purpose.

This initial Salem Lutheran Rest Home opened and received its first missionaries in March 1922. The initiative was driven by Pastor Gutekunst and generously supported by the Lutheran community.



Salem staff: Phyllis Mills, Sister Minnie Dorr and Merle Schelberg.



Salem's first matron, Mary Hanley (in black), with Ladies' Guild members.



Salem in the 1930s.

## *A rest home for local 'old folk'*

Salem would continue to provide rest and respite for missionaries on furlough from Papua New Guinea for more than 12 years.

As this demand decreased and the needs of the local community grew, Pastor Gutekunst proposed Salem be converted into a rest home for elderly members of the local community.

Salem welcomed its first four residents – or ‘inmates’ as they were curiously called at the time – in 1935.

The new Salem Lutheran Rest Home was officially opened on 1 December that year by the President of the then United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (UELCA) Rev AR Reuther, Queensland Premier William Forgan-Smith and Toowoomba Mayor JD Annand.

The home could accommodate up to 11 residents, a matron and a maid. The first matron was Mary Hanley.

## *Why this rest home was called 'Salem'*

Toowoomba-raised Dr Russell Brieze, Lutheran Services' Director of Chaplaincy and Ministry Development, explains that 'Salem' is short for 'Jeru-salem'.

'Salem' is a Hebrew word meaning peace. It is related to another word perhaps more familiar to us today – 'shalom'.







Salem's first Matron, Mary Hanley, with one of the first residents, Mr Henrickson, 1930s.



Salem in 1993.



Salem before renovations in early 2000s.



Commemorative plaque from EVH Gutekunst Memorial Nursing Home, opened in 1972.



Staff in 1990.



The old entrance before renovation.



Pastor Ernst Victor Hermann Gutekunst.

## *Built and supported by the Lutheran community*

In these early times, prior to government funding of aged care, Salem Lutheran Rest Home was built, operated and funded by the Queensland UELCA Synod and the local congregations and community – through times of economic hardship, drought and war.

For many years, it was the combined efforts and generous support of multiple Lutheran parishes – including Trinity Hume Street, St John's Wilsonton and St Paul's – and dedicated members of the local congregations and community that saw Salem continue to operate and grow.

Lutheran women's guilds throughout the Darling Downs raised funds and donated items. Above all, they provided friendship and entertainment – and baked thousands of biscuits.

## *Growing the Salem home, site and care*

Salem grew and evolved over the years, responding to the changing needs of residents and the local community. Extensions were built. Improvements were made. Adjacent properties were purchased.

In the early 1990s, opportunities were explored to further expand Salem to meet growing demand. A property was purchased in Holberton Street in Rockville, about 5 km from Salem. Northridge Salem Aged Care opened in 1996.





Salem in 2001.



The Salem Committee in 1994.

## *A key figure in the Lutheran Church in Toowoomba and Queensland*

Pastor EVH Gutekunst served the St Paul's Lutheran Church Toowoomba parish from 1912 to 1957. He was the driving force that established Salem, and remained an active committee member and friend of the home and community throughout his long life. He was a key figure in the development of the Lutheran Church in Queensland and the establishment of services provided to congregations and communities.

## *The transition to Lutheran Community Care*

In the late 1990s, increasingly complex funding and regulation requirements saw the Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District (LCAQD) establish an umbrella organisation – Lutheran Community Care – to manage the district’s community services and aged care operations, including Salem.

Having worked so hard and with such devotion to build Salem, many in the Management Committee, congregation, staff, volunteer and supporter network found this transition difficult. With the benefit of hindsight, we now see many aspects of this transition could have been better handled, resourced and supported.

What didn’t change, however, were the Salem name, welcome and spirit.

## *Part of the Lutheran Services family today*

Lutheran Community Care was renamed Lutheran Services in 2017. As the operator of Salem and Northridge Salem today, Lutheran Services recognises the considerable achievements and challenges of the past. We thank the many congregation and committee members, volunteers and supporters for their grace, devotion and hard work. Their efforts and endeavours continue to benefit the many residents, clients and staff of Salem today.

Lutheran Services was established to ensure the ministry of care envisaged and built by our founders would continue to thrive – so more people could experience Christ’s love through their services. We hope this Origin Story project will help to record, share and celebrate the incredible journey and spirit that built Salem and Northridge Salem, and continue to make them such special places.

In the mid 2020s, more than 90 years on, Salem is home to 87 residents. Northridge Salem, opened in 1996, is home to 42 residents. Salem Home Care provides in-home support services to more than 140 households throughout Toowoomba and surrounding regions.

These are also great places to work and important employers in the region. Salem employs more than 130 people, Northridge Salem more than 65, and Salem Home Care more than 35.







Salem's opening makes the newspaper.



Staff in the 1980s.



The first resident to reach 100 years old was Helen McGregor Moulder in the late 1970s.



Outdoor spaces in the 1960s.

# There for you

As managers of Salem/Northridge Salem and many other aged and community services today, Lutheran Services is one of Queensland's longest established and most diverse not-for-profit providers of human services. As part of the Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District, we draw from, express and add to the life and mission of the Church. We have grown out of the dreams and hard work of our founding Lutheran congregations. This Origin Story is another wonderful example.

Lutheran Services draws on the rich Lutheran tradition of care for the individual, family and community. We provide services, support and accommodation for older people, young people, families, people living with disability or mental health concerns, and people experiencing domestic and family violence. We serve metropolitan, regional and rural communities from more than 20 sites throughout Queensland – from Tallebudgera to Biloela.

While these sites and services are very different in where they are and what they do, they all have one thing in common: they began with a local congregation working together to meet a need and serve their region and community. These endeavours were often the first services of their kind in their region. Some were the first of their kind in Queensland. Today, they are integral and highly respected contributors to their communities and industries, providing vital care, support, employment and leadership.

## *The Salem Origin Story is also the Lutheran Services Origin Story*

Salem Aged Care in Toowoomba is the longest established of the many sites managed by the organisation we know today as Lutheran Services.

The origin of Salem Aged Care in Toowoomba therefore also represents the origin of Lutheran Services.

A meeting room at Lutheran Services in Milton is called the 'Hanley Room' in honour of Salem's first matron, Mary Hanley.



**Celebrating  
90 years**

**1935 – 2025**

A circular logo with a teal background. Inside the circle, the words 'ORIGIN STORIES' are written in a white, sans-serif font. The 'O' in 'ORIGIN' is replaced by a white cross symbol. The logo is surrounded by a series of concentric dotted circles in a light teal color.

ORIGIN  
STORIES





The courtyard's checkerboard attracted lots of players at one time.



Volunteers have been very generous over the years. Residents pictured in 2012 with some donated quilts.



Salem before renovations in early 2000s.



Newspaper records of Salem.

# Timeline

**1922**

Salem Lutheran Rest Home opened for Lutheran Missionaries on furlough from PNG

**1935**

Salem converted and reopened as a rest home for the local community

**1937**

Major extensions including two new wings added, funded largely by local Lutheran congregations

**1988**

Major upgrades, including therapy and activity spaces, hostel and nursing home room improvements, and accessibility enhancements, supported by a mix of community fundraising and government aged care grants

**1987**

In-home support services established

**1986**

Neighbouring houses in South Street purchased for future expansion

**1989**

Hostel: 69 beds (2 respite care); Nursing Home: 26 beds

**1991**

Daisy Court 12-bed hostel opened

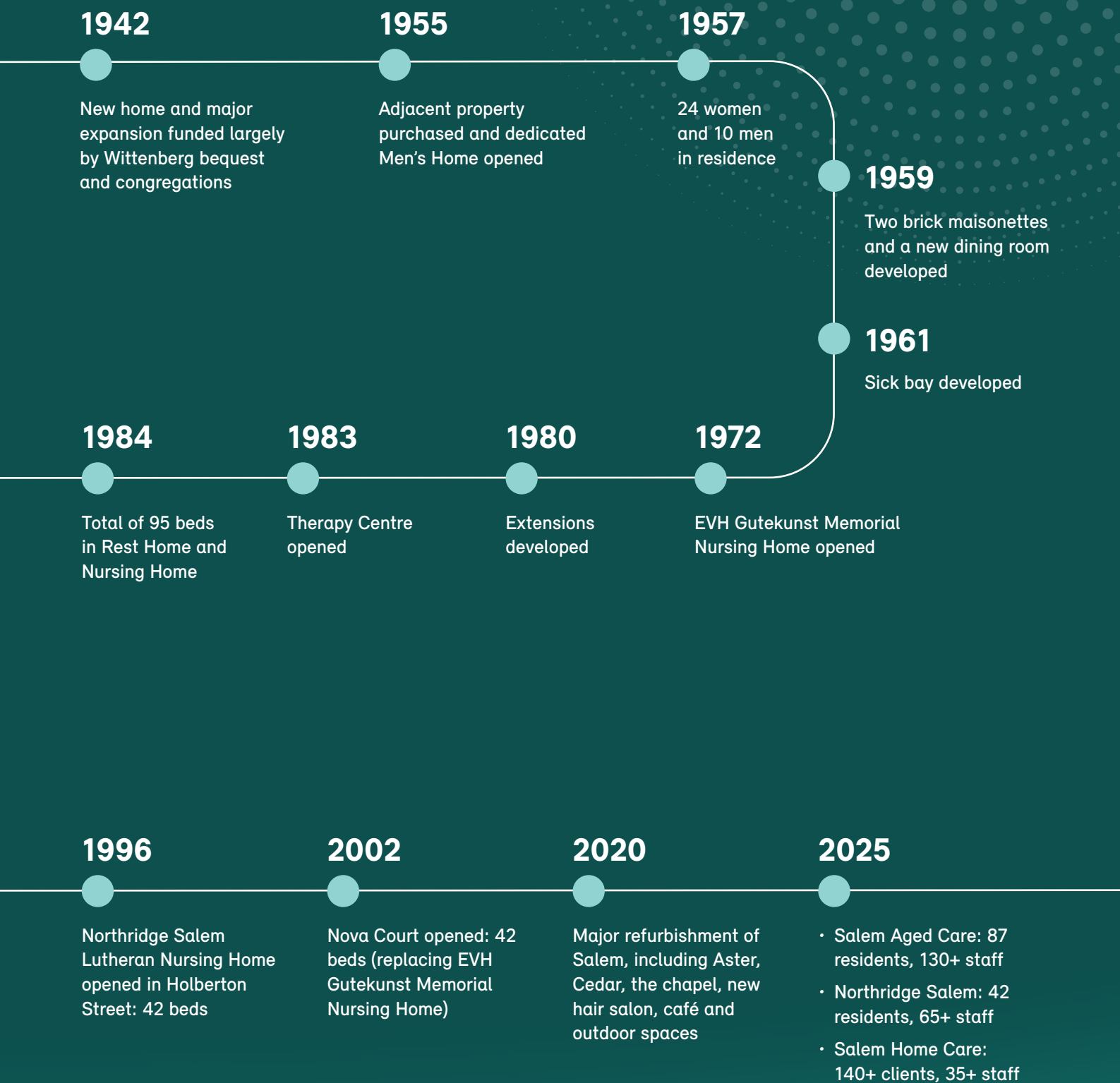
**1992**

Holberton Street property purchased

**1994**

Major extensions and improvements, including front entrance and lift for ambulance and wheelchair access





# Reflections

**Dr Mark Vainikka**

*Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District*

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I was a pastor in Toowoomba for 12 years – a little over half that time at St Paul's, and the remainder at Concordia. I have fond memories of visiting Salem and spending time with the residents. I have always felt a deep sense of care and belonging – with both the residents and the people who work here.

In 2025, we mark more than 100 years of ministry in this place since Salem began as a rest home for Lutheran missionaries, and 90 years since Salem began its mission in aged care. Serving others has always been at the heart of who we are as a church. From the earliest days, our congregations responded to the needs of their communities, establishing places such as Salem as expressions of Christ's love in action.

It was the vision of Pastor EVH Gutekunst that planted the seeds for Salem. His hard work over some 50 years as pastor at St Paul's saw Salem born and grow to where it is today. Through the dedication of Lutheran congregations and community members, funds were raised to establish a place of care and belonging. As community needs changed over the years, Salem's mission evolved – the entity, place and community responding to the needs of the people it serves.

I've always felt that Salem is a community shaped by the residents and families who found a home and sense of belonging here. It is also shaped by the carers and staff whose dedication reflects the love of Christ amongst us. And by the congregations and community members who have offered their time, energies and resources to make Salem what it is today.

This Origin Story is a wonderful way of honouring the past and inspiring the future – renewing our shared vision for Salem and strengthening the bonds that make this such a special place of love, care and belonging.

Through sharing and hearing these stories from residents, staff, Lutheran congregations and the many people with a deep connection to Salem, we give thanks for Salem as a place where care, compassion and community have been built over so many years.

We are remembering not only the history of Salem, but most importantly the people who have carried that history in their hearts and hands.



From some of the many people who helped shape Salem and Northridge Salem – then and now

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## Bill Cotter

*Former Salem Board Secretary, Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation*

I was Redeemer's representative on the Salem Board for over a decade from the early 1990s. I served as Secretary and the Board Member staff could refer financial matters to when the CEO was not available. I came from a banking background and worked in the bank where Salem had their account.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the Board. We discussed everything from the general operation to the stalls volunteers ran to raise funds. We even recorded the produce donated to the kitchen.

In the early 1990s, opportunities were explored to expand Salem. A property in Holberton Street was going to auction. The Church Office was consulted and agreed to our budgeted amount. They asked me to go to the auction. But, I had no experience with auctions. 'You'll be right' they assured me!

There were only two bidders – myself and the biggest accountant in Toowoomba at the time. He knew I was from the Lutheran Church and I knew he was from the Church of England.

The bidding got to my limit and he kept going. The gavel came down and he had seven days to come up with the funds. However, he hadn't consulted his church and they promptly said they weren't interested in his idea for the land!

So it was offered to me as the only other bidder. Was I still interested? I said 'Well, you know the last figure I proposed? Take \$10,000 off that!'

The money we saved helped offset the work we had to do to remove contaminated soil and asbestos from the former factory site. I was appointed to the founding committee overseeing construction. That's how Northridge Salem came to be.

I learnt a lot from my time at Salem.



Toowoomba Chronicle, 1980.



A new combustion stove – donated by the Lutheran Women's Association of the Darling Downs makes the newspaper.



School students have been regular visitors over the years. Here they are pictured with a donated quilt from a community group.

## Trevor Becker

*Elder and lay reader, St John's Lutheran Church Wilsonton congregation*

I have had many connections with Salem over the years. My mum Ailsa Lila Caroline, fondly known as Dolly, was a resident of Salem initially and later Northridge. The carers and nurses who became so close to mum expressed sincere sorrow at her passing. They are special people. I couldn't fault Salem and Northridge. Mum was cared for very well.

My cousin Merle Schelberg worked at Salem and was later a resident. Joyce Errington, a friend and member of St John's, was Director of Nursing. My aunt Millie Volker was also a resident, as was her daughter Dorothy much later, and my cousin Les Brown. My cousin Roy Becker, now 91, tells me his aunt, Mary Hanley (nee Lindeman), was the first matron at Salem.

**A meeting room at the Lutheran Services Support Centre in Milton is called the 'Hanley Room' in honour of Salem's first matron, Mary Hanley.**

My late friend Richard Waite wrote a history of St Paul's Lutheran Church Toowoomba – 'The Sword of the Spirit' – which included the development of Salem. I wrote a history of St John's for the 125-year anniversary. My father Reg Becker had written the 75th anniversary book. I've since compiled a 90-year anniversary of the St John's Women's Guild. These and other Lutheran congregations and women's guilds made an enormous contribution to Salem over the years.

We personally use Salem Home Care today for help with gardening and maintenance. We chose Salem from several providers. The service is excellent. We know more support is available should we need it.

Salem is unique. It was much needed by the community. It grew like topsy from a family house. There has been great support from the congregations for Salem over the years in building services for their community. Many of those supporters, like us, have turned to Salem for care and support as needs arose.





Edith Kowitz at St John's Lutheran Church Toowoomba around 2010.



Edith Kowitz at home at Salem in 2025.

## **Edith Kowitz** *Salem resident*

I was born at Oakey on 24 April 1935. Very close to the beginning of our Salem Lutheran home!

My uncle Alick Kliese was one of the early Salem committee members. He had two sons, Albert and Noel, and a daughter, Joan, who married Roy Kohler. They had been associated with the Trinity Lutheran Church in Hume Street.

I have been a farmer all my life until I became rather helpless about three or four years ago. Salem had to be our first choice as we are Lutheran. This is my home now. I am happy here. I'm proud to say I'm the same age as Salem!

The care here at Salem is wonderful. I have made good friendships – we all check in on each other. I had to go to hospital again recently and I couldn't wait to get back home to Salem!

## **Anna Althaus** *Salem resident, St Paul's Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation*

Like Salem, I was born in the 1930s – even a little before Salem!

My mother-in-law, Katrina, or Kit as she was known, was a Salem resident from the early 1980s until she passed away in 2000 a few weeks short of her 102nd birthday. There was a big celebration at Salem for her 100th birthday. Kit helped run the resident canteen. I would visit Kit at Salem. I never imagined I would live at Salem one day.

I'm a member of the St Paul's congregation, which has a long connection with Salem. Every year, friends and family would make a big Easter egg and bring it in on Easter Sunday.

I've been living at Salem for nearly three years now. I came here for respite care after a spell in hospital. I liked it so much, I stayed!

I never thought I would be in aged care. I never thought I would get to this age! But I'm happy to be living at Salem today.

## **Kylie DeFreece** *Salem Service Manager*

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I have worked in aged care for several years now. My perspective of the sector changed for the better when I came to Salem for an interview with Judy Bannerman for the Care Manager role in 2021. I was impressed that Judy had worked here for more than 20 years. That said a lot to me about Salem and Lutheran Services.

When I started, my immediate impression was of a place and an organisation that value their culture and live by their values. And they're values that I share.

I'm happy to recommend Salem to my own family, friends and colleagues. I have faith in the place and people. My nanna was a resident here a few years ago. Salem was the first and only choice for our family.

I have experienced some profound loss in my life. I chose to work in nursing and aged care. I was in law previously. I wanted to ensure that families receive appropriate care and bereavement support. I'm very proud of how everyone at Salem manages, not just the residents' care, but the families' as well.

There is great opportunity, career potential and job satisfaction in aged care. And it's wonderfully rewarding work.

I can't imagine working for another aged care provider now. I love my work since coming to work at Salem.

## **Pastor Mark Brinkmann** *Salem Chaplain*

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Chaplaincy is at the heart of Salem Aged Care – and all Lutheran Services aged care communities. This is what makes us unique. This is a fundamental part of the care and service we provide. It is grounded in our Lutheran identity and ethos.

As chaplains, we can spend time with people and get to know them. That's a real blessing and a credit to Lutheran Services' commitment to chaplaincy.

At the core of the chaplain's role is being there for people – to be the presence of God for people in their journey of life. Every person has their own story and journey. It is a privilege to be part of that journey – particularly in the twilight years. To be with people, spend time and bring the word of God is a real privilege.

Honouring the past is very important. I'm always fascinated by the history of the place and people. These stories are inspiring – the vision, faith and commitment of those before us.

It's a blessing to hear these stories of the past – and to think about our present and future.



## Betty Reid

### *Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation (previously Trinity)*

I was a member and treasurer of the Trinity Ladies' Guild for over 60 years – until we closed in 2018. We would visit Salem to spend time with the residents. We baked biscuits to take along. All the ladies' guilds were allocated a 'biscuit month' and a visit.

We also did catering to raise funds for the church and community. It was hard work and a lot of late nights, but we had a lot of fun and it was a good fundraiser. We held concerts at Trinity. We had a 'crazy café' where the meals were all back-to-front – you'd get your dessert first or you'd get a fork to eat your ice cream.

My mum, Wilhelmina Heuschele, was a resident at Salem in 1982–83. Minny, as she was fondly known, was only there for a few months, but she enjoyed Salem while she was there. It was good for her to be in a place and community where she already knew people.

In the early days, there was a cake shop down the Main Street of Toowoomba called 'Mum's Cake Shop'. Anything they had left over on a Saturday would

go to Salem Rest Home. My dad, Leslie Heuschele, would go down to Mum's Cake Shop, often with my daughters Marilyn and Lenore in tow, and they'd pick up the cakes and take them to Salem.

Salem began in the 1920s as a furlough home for Lutheran missionaries from New Guinea. I remember the original house on the corner of Hume Street and the sisters Mrs Vetka and Miss Probst.

I was born in 1927. I turn 98 in 2025. I live down the road from Salem today and catch the bus into town from the bus stop opposite Salem.

*Betty's granddaughter Gillian Reid became a chaplain at Salem in the early 2020s, and today is at Zion in Nundah. Gillian kindly recorded this reflection during one of her regular phone chats with Betty.*



The games area in the courtyard was a favourite location.



Former Bishop Lutheran Church of Australian Queensland District Paul Smith and Salem Chaplain Gillian Reid, early 2020s.



Emilie Briese in the veggie garden at Salem in the 1960s.

## Kevin Briese

*Salem volunteer/visitor/entertainer*

*Good Shepherd Lutheran Church*

*Toowoomba congregation (previously Trinity)*

My grandmother Emilie Briese was a resident at Salem in the 1960s. There's a photo of her tending the vegetable gardens at Salem.

My parents did volunteer work at Salem for many years. My father Albert was a carpenter and did quite a bit of work about the place. It was just one big timber house in the beginning. It's grown a lot over the years. My niece Sue worked at Salem for 20 years, from the time she was a teenager in the 1980s. She loved the residents.

I was a volunteer and visited Salem for quite a few years from the early 2000s. I was part of a group called the Harmonics. We would visit the residents with a choir and music program. Lots of singing and socialising. Everyone had a good time.

Salem is such an important place of service for the local community. And local Lutheran congregations have played an important part in building that.

## Gary Low

*Toowoomba local and cousin of Kevin Briese*

I've lived in Toowoomba all my life. I grew up in Rome Street. I was confirmed at St Paul's. I went to Sunday school at St John's.

My maternal grandmother Emilie Briese was a resident at Salem in the 1960s. Grandma had a strong German Lutheran background. I remember visiting her at Salem as a boy. She was happy there.

Salem was just a big old Queenslander in those days. There was a massive backyard and veggie garden. The house was at the front. I have a photo of Grandma in the veggie garden at Salem.

I remember Salem as a warm and welcoming place – like a big family home. I've seen the place grow over the years. Salem is at the heart of the Lutheran congregations in Toowoomba. It's an important part of the Toowoomba community and our history.



## Rev Dr Russell Brieese

### *Director of Chaplaincy and Ministry Development, Lutheran Services*

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I grew up in Toowoomba. I was baptised, confirmed and ordained just down the road from Salem at Trinity Lutheran Church. This congregation closed a few years ago, but looms large in Salem's history.

My great-grandmother Emilie Brieese was a resident at Salem in the mid 1960s. When I started work at Lutheran Services, someone sent me a photo of Emilie tending the vegetable gardens at Salem.

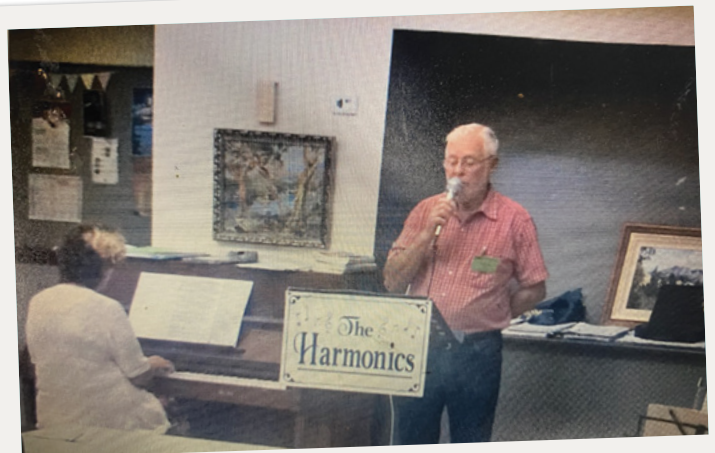
Salem – like most of our services – is a grassroots facility. It was the local people, congregations and communities who put their shoulder to the wheel and progressed it themselves. Salem was always cared for and revered by congregations in Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. Salem was the first of the LCAQD's aged care facilities, coming into being as a progression from a place for recuperation for missionaries working in Papua New Guinea.

Part of the DNA of aged care at Lutheran Services is the provision of paid chaplaincy services. Salem was the site which first transitioned to dedicated aged care chaplaincy. Pastor Marcus Schultz was the first pastor to be called to a specifically chaplaincy-based role. Marcus worked hard as a chaplain in conjunction with his pastoral duties at Trinity. From there a full-time role at Salem was established.

In 2025, Lutheran Services has 19 chaplains – ordained, lay, full-time and part-time – providing quality pastoral care to all residents while being a beacon of the Lutheran faith and ethos.

The name 'Salem' is short for 'Jeru-salem'. Salem is a Hebrew word meaning peace. It's related to the word 'shalom' – a greeting Jewish people have used for thousands of years that is familiar to us today. No doubt in naming this place 'Salem', the founders hoped that older people would find peace and tranquillity here.

While Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the real action of his life happened in Jeru-salem. That it was Jeru-salem where Jesus was crucified and rose again is the connection for this idea of peace. Our peace (our 'Salem') comes ultimately from the death and resurrection of Jesus in Jeru-salem – from the hope that Jesus brings for us all for eternal life with him. It is God's hope and desire for us all to live in peace, in Salem.



Kevin Brieese sings at Salem Aged Care.



Resident Barbara West has a room filled with her craft work.

### **Monika Schultz**

*Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation (previously Trinity)*

I was part of the visiting volunteer program helping the Salem lifestyle team for several years from the early 2000s.

I would visit weekly and spend time with several residents. We would talk, read, do activities and help with events.

I really enjoyed my time with the residents at Salem. I felt it was beneficial for them. We formed close bonds.

### **Ruth Genrich**

*Salem Personal Carer and 'Pastor's daughter', Northern Downs Lutheran Parish Crows Nest congregation*

I've been working at Salem since the mid 1990s. Salem was the first place I looked for work. I started straight away. You did a lot of learning on the job in those days.

I enjoy working as a personal carer and interacting with the residents. It's like a second family. When I started, it was a lot more formal. The registered nurses and director of nursing we called 'Sister'. Some of the residents we called 'Mr' or 'Mrs'.

My father, Pastor Marcus Schultz, was the first full-time chaplain at Salem and played an important role in establishing dedicated chaplaincy for Salem in the mid 1990s. When dad and I were both working at Salem, some of the residents I cared for called me 'Pastor's daughter'!

There are lots of staff who have been at Salem for a long time, in lots of different roles. I've cared for several residents who worked at Salem previously. Salem is an important part of the local community, for both residents and staff.

## **Pastor Marcus Schultz**

### ***Salem's first full-time Chaplain***

#### ***Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation (previously Trinity)***

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I started serving as a chaplain at Salem in 1996. Chaplaincy at Salem at the time was just a part-time arrangement. Prior to 1996, the local Lutheran pastors would take turns to hold Sunday evening services and conduct a Lutheran communion service midweek. Any congregation member visits would also occur at this time.

I thought it would be valuable for Salem to have a permanent chaplain. I saw the need for spiritual care for the residents – whether Lutheran or otherwise. Over the coming years, I worked to achieve that aim.

I would take three services at Salem on a Sunday and a Lutheran communion service midweek. My work as chaplain at Salem also involved the staff. The chaplain was an integral part of the Salem team. I held a weekly staff devotion.

I have long valued the role of chaplaincy and the service of chaplains.

## **Barbara West**

### ***Salem resident***

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My husband Brian's grandparents were among the early German settlers who started farming at Middle Ridge. Brian's parents also settled in Middle Ridge. So Brian was very familiar with the area, riding past Salem daily on his way to school.

After we married of course we were regular visitors to his parents. I remember when the eucalyptus trees were planted on Hume Street, which would be about 70 years ago. I would visit Salem residents with my church congregation.

In 2022, Ann Hopper from Lutheran Services came to the retirement village where we lived to tell us about their wonderful services. Little did we know we would need them so soon.

In 2023, I became very ill and was hospitalised. Brian was initially taken into respite care at Salem and ultimately became a resident. He was very well cared for at Salem until his passing.

When I was released from hospital, I too became a Salem resident with a not very promising prognosis. However, with the excellent nursing care that I received, I recovered.

I have now been a very happy and contented resident of Salem for over two years, and have always been treated with great dignity and respect.

## **Val Zell**

### ***Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation***

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Salem and I were born in the same year. We both celebrate our 90th birthdays in 2025!

I visited Salem for many years with the Redeemer Lutheran Women's Guild. We had a music and social program. We would take afternoon tea and have a nice singalong.

There were six different women's guilds with different parishes in Toowoomba – they took turns visiting Salem – Redeemer, St Paul's, Trinity, Good Shepherd, St John's and Our Saviour's.

These days, I live in Barbara West's beautiful villa at Glenfield Grange Retirement Village. I'm very happy here. Barbara is now happily living at Salem. When I need permanent care, I'll be going to Salem. It's a wonderful place.

I discovered recently that Salem is the end part of 'Jerusalem'. The Lutheran church and services and God's word have always been the most important things in my life. So may God continue to bless and keep this place.



Salem's Sound of Music production.



Sue Dougall 2025.

## Gloria Chambers

### *Salem resident*

I've been living at Salem for two years. I enjoy living here. I have company when I need it. I have privacy when I need it. We're encouraged to do what we're able to do and enjoy doing. Without exception, the staff are pleasant and efficient. I feel I'm in better health today than when I came to Salem – physically and mentally.

In a way, I've come home. My mother was born in Pittsworth. I had a grandaunt there who lived to be over 100. I am descendant of German immigrants who settled in the area in the mid 1800s. The surnames Hess, Balzer, Reibelt and Roehser led the way. They came here for a better life and to escape religious persecution.

I've moved home many times throughout my life. I'm just so pleased I'll never have to move again.

## Sue Dougall

### *Salem resident*

I've been living at Salem for about five years. We've got a house just a stone's throw from here. My husband John still lives there and I see him every week. My son Tom comes and picks me up every Sunday and we go home for a meal and family time. My daughter-in-law Kate cooks for us and ensures that I am happy and safe. Everyone at Salem is very caring. Our family are made to feel welcome.

I became very good friends here with a lovely lady named Judy. Sadly, she's passed now. Jude was here first. We shared a table in the dining room and quickly became friends. I'd see Jude three or four times a day. When I'd get up of a morning, I'd walk around to see her. I'd give her a kiss goodnight each night. It's amazing the friendship you build.

Everyone knew Jude. She made lots of good friends here. She met the Elvis performer. He came and sang in her room. Jude thought that was wonderful. Everyone loved her and enjoyed her company.

I have a big photo of Jude. I wear a necklace she gave me. It has a message that says: *One day, God sent an Angel to be my friend. And that Angel is you.*

I miss her so much. I value the time we spent together.





Salem's Sound of Music production.



Keith Lawrence and Chris Gauld in Salem's Sound of Music.

## Keith Lawrence

*Salem volunteer/visitor/entertainer, Toowoomba Community Baptist Church congregation*

Kevin Brieese and I were volunteer visitors at Salem providing entertainment for the residents. The daughter of one of the residents played piano and accompanied us. We did that every fortnight for almost 10 years from 2010. The residents enjoyed it. Music has a way of connecting.

One time I suggested putting on a show for the residents. Our coordinator at Salem, Chris Gauld, thought The Sound of Music would be ideal. I thought this was crazy, but Chris was confident and offered to play Maria if I could play Captain Von Trapp. We rehearsed for a couple of weeks and pulled the show together. It was quite a production. The Von Trapp children were played by staff – some of them in their 60s. It was pretty funny seeing them in pigtails and children's clothing. I also played the delivery boy. The change room was a toilet. It was hilarious.

Blow me down, about 100 people came to see us – residents, family and friends. We sang all the songs. The only thing missing was the hills – but the place was certainly alive with the sound of music. It was epic.

Despite the aged performers and ludicrous casting, it was a big success. We sang our hearts out. Everyone loved it. They clapped and clapped.

We always had a great team at Salem. The personal carers were the real stars of every show. They helped get everyone along and make things happen. They really loved the residents. It's a credit to them and Salem.



Salem Manager Terry Arthur and Mark Demmer cooking a barbecue in 2013.



Salem Origin Story-telling gathering, March 2025.



Salem is officially opened by Queensland Premier Mr W Forgan Smith, 1935.

## Amy Cuckson *Redeemer Lutheran Church Toowoomba congregation*

My mother Janet Mirtschin worked at Salem as a registered nurse in the late 1980s – early 1990s. She enjoyed returning to nursing work after raising a family, even on the 'graveyard shift'.

In the 1980s, my grandfather Pastor Len Mirtschin and his great friend Pastor Arthur Koehler were chaplains at Salem in their retirement. Grandpa would conduct chapel services and my grandma Alma Mirtschin would play the organ. I often attended too when I was staying over at their house.

In my youth, I would visit Salem with other congregational members to sing Christmas carols for the residents. They always enjoyed our visits – and so did I.

My father Lawrence Mirtschin was a resident at Salem briefly in 2022. He was not mobile anymore and the staff took good care of him. He even had a cake on his birthday!

## Carol Manteit *Former Salem Personal Carer*

I worked at Salem as a personal carer for 20 years. The staff were wonderful and welcomed me aboard. Four members of my family have come to live at Salem. They've been very well cared for.

It was wonderful working at Salem. The 20 years went by quickly! I felt a strong connection with the residents and loved spending time with them. It was a joy to come to work.

My time at Salem will always have a special warm place in my heart. I miss the place and people. I pop in sometimes to say hello. Salem is always in my thoughts.

ORIGIN  
STORIES

## **Jenny Stollznaw**

### ***Former Salem/Northridge Salem Cook/Chef Bethlehem Lutheran Church Glencoe congregation***

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I worked with Salem and Northridge Salem for 21 years until I retired. As a child, I would accompany my grandparents when they would visit friends there. As a Sunday school student and later teacher, we visited to sing and entertain the residents.

I began working as a 'domestic' in the kitchen at Salem. When Northridge opened in 1996, I was employed as one of two cooks there. I stayed at Northridge for 10 years. I went back to Salem as Assistant Cook.

I later became Assistant Chef. I was then given the opportunity to do my Chef's Apprenticeship at 55 years of age – thanks to Salem's very switched-on General Manager, Terry Arthur.

In the 21 years I spent at Salem and Northridge, I was given so many opportunities. That's just what Salem did – they gave us all amazing opportunities to improve our skills.

For many years, there was a Committee of Management made up of representatives from the Lutheran churches in Toowoomba. I am a former member of St Paul's in Phillip Street, which was closely involved with the running of Salem for many years.

The women's guilds of the Darling Downs would bake biscuits for the residents. They would also visit to entertain the residents and bring afternoon tea. I vividly remember the ice cream containers and cereal boxes full of the most amazing homemade biscuits!

Concerts were put on by the staff for the residents at Christmas time. The residents loved to see the staff having fun and being a bit silly. The staff loved making the residents smile.

Salem has always had a great name in the community. I was proud to work there and be part of the Salem family. There have been many changes over the years, but the signature Salem care and support for all involved remain the same. Salem was always first to try new and better ways of working.

I loved my time at Salem. Many friendships remain to this day. God blessed me by giving me this wonderful opportunity all those years ago.

## **Jo Rub**

### ***Salem Creative Programs and Volunteer Coordinator***

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I have had several family members come to Salem, including my mother, Fay Wessling. I know she was well cared for, treated with dignity, respected and loved. Mum always spoke highly of the staff.

Now my grandmother (by marriage) is a resident. I also have an uncle at Salem and an aunty at Northridge.

Some people think aged care is only about ageing and endings, but to me it's about connection, humanity and life at its most honest. I'm proud to be part of this industry, and even prouder to be part of the Salem team.

I never imagined how deeply I'd come to love working in aged care. What began as a job quickly turned into a calling. Now it's hard to imagine doing anything else.

Salem is part of the Toowoomba community. As staff and residents, we are part of the Salem family. It's a privilege to work in such a wonderful place with such wonderful people.

## Dawn

### *Salem resident*

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As a child I attended Toowoomba South Primary School. There were lots of Lutheran pupils and while most denominations, like the Church of Christ where I attended Sunday school, were combined in one room, the Lutheran pupils had their own religious instruction class.

Later when I joined the workforce, I became great friends with a Lutheran co-worker, Marie. Through this friendship, I met Pastor Gutekunst whose engaging perspectives and discussion of bible teachings helped consolidate my faith and emotional connection. I respected him sharing his knowledge and experiences, which helped reinforce my own beliefs.

Salem was always more to me than just a name. It was a familiar sight, a place woven into the fabric of my daily life, and I can still remember the original house on the corner. I passed by its doors countless times, watching it change and expand over the years.

My stepmother, Jan, was a resident at Salem and I visited her often. Partly due to this familiarity and partly because of my friendship with Marie, I could envisage that one day I might step inside, not as a visitor, but as a resident. Eventually in July 2024, I became a Salem resident too and I am content to call it my home now.

By happy coincidence, one of the staff here was a student of mine years ago when I was teaching art classes. I remembered her and she recognised me! That was a nice reconnection.

I value Salem's place in the community, the work being done here and the care provided.

## Thalia Manz

### *Salem Payroll and Rostering Officer*

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I started at Salem 28 years ago in hotel services and did that for 10 years or so. Then I was given the opportunity to work in admin at Northridge Salem where I spent the next 10 years. And then I was blessed to get the opportunity to work in payroll and rostering back at Salem.

I feel fortunate to have worked here for so long, to meet so many residents and staff, and see the places grow and change.

My maternal grandmother was a resident at Salem long before I started work here. She had a beautiful sunny room. Nanna loved it here. Several other family members have also been residents at Salem, so I felt like I knew the place before I started working here.

Noel Janetzki was the manager when I started. He later became a resident at Northridge Salem. In those days, you'd bring in your resume one day and start work the next. Things are a little more complicated now, but I'm pleased to say our staffing levels have improved considerably!

Salem is a lovely place to work. It's like a family. Many staff have been here for a long time. You build strong friendships. There's a strong connection. It's more than a job or a place of work. We're thankful to have such a good place to work. And Salem does good work for the local community.







Pastor Ernst Victor Hermann Gutekunst and Mrs Marie Gutekunst.



Cranley Street side of Salem Lutheran Rest Home in the time of Matron Hanley in the 1930s. She always had a vegetable and flower garden growing.

## Judy Bannerman

*Former Salem Service Manager  
Good Shepherd, Lutheran Church  
Toowoomba congregation*

I started at Salem in 2001 working in the kitchen. I worked in a variety of roles over the years and ended up as Service Manager. Apart from a few years at Tabeel in Laidley, I was here for 21 years when I retired in the early 2020s.

From the day I walked through the door at Salem, I felt welcome. It was a warm place. Wonderful people. Great teams. Beautiful residents.

I loved my time at Salem. And I know for a fact that it continues the way it always has been – wonderful people working together, for the glory of God, to make sure the elderly are well cared for.

People often comment when they first visit Salem what a warm and welcoming place it is. You feel the love of the community from the moment you arrive.

So my life has been truly blessed by coming to look for a job at Salem. I don't think I could have had a better place to work than with Salem and Lutheran Services.

## Rhonda Levis

*Salem Creative Programs Facilitator*

I've worked at Salem for 23 years – more than 21 of those as a personal carer. I originally came to Salem because of its reputation as the best place to work in aged care in Toowoomba. When I first arrived, everyone made me feel welcome and part of the team.

It's a pleasure to have worked at Salem for so many years. To work closely with the residents and hear their amazing life stories is a real privilege.

**Jean Carmel Andrews**  
*Former Salem staff member (1950s–60s)*

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I started working in the kitchen at Salem in 1958. I worked there for three years.

I worked with Ida, Meryl and Shirley. These ladies worked in serving food, cleaning and even delivering medication at times. We worked hard and were good friends. We had a lot of fun. I'm still friends with some of them today. Marcia was the cook. Sheena worked in the laundry. We all wore a green straight through dress. The Matron, Phyllis, wore a white dress. Many of the staff lived onsite. Marcia was a resident a few years ago.

There were about 26 residents at the time. The ladies were in the main house – 10 on the Cranley Street side and 10 in the middle – and there were six men in a separate house on the corner. We called the residents Mr and Mrs.

I would bring the men over for tea. I remember one of the ladies most days after lunch would have her bag packed and try to take off up Cranley Street. I was the one chosen to go after her because I could get her to come back – though I did get hit with her walking stick one day!

There were white tablecloths in the dining room and we had to polish the silver. Fresh fruit and veggies were delivered every Saturday.

I loved working at Salem. It was a lovely place to work. I enjoyed my time there. I still smile when I think about the place.

**Kaylene Lotz**  
*Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Toowoomba congregation*

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My grandmother Edith was a Salem resident in the 1970s. I remember visiting grandma to introduce her to my fiancé, Ian – now my husband of 49 years. Ian's aunty Alice was in the same room.

Ian's father Arnold was a resident at Salem in the 1990s, and his mother Louisa in the 2010s. My mother Irene was a resident at Northridge Salem in the 2020s.

Both our mums enjoyed congregational and guild member visits to Salem. Louisa from Toowoomba Redeemer and my mum from Oakey Lutheran Church and Toowoomba Redeemer.

Our ancestors were loving, caring people. So we were very grateful for the care and support Salem and Northridge Salem provided. We all felt blessed to have the Salem and Northridge Salem staff.

Our extended family would visit regularly and sometimes also sing and entertain the residents. The staff were always so obliging in letting us use their facilities to celebrate special occasions there.

We are very grateful for our Lutheran rest homes in Toowoomba and the wonderful staff, Christian community and pastoral care that Salem and Northridge Salem provide.



## Valda Brunner

### *Salem Creative Programs Facilitator*

My mother-in-law, Valma, has been a Salem resident since 2024 when she was 96. Having her meals brought to her makes her feel like a queen! We are very grateful to the Salem staff for taking such good care of Valma.

I have been part of the Salem family for seven years as a member of the creative programs team. We create experiences that spark smiles, stir memories and encourage social connection. Our residents have rich life stories and unique talents. It's a privilege to get to know them.

The work environment at Salem is very collaborative and supportive. I feel very blessed to be part of Salem.

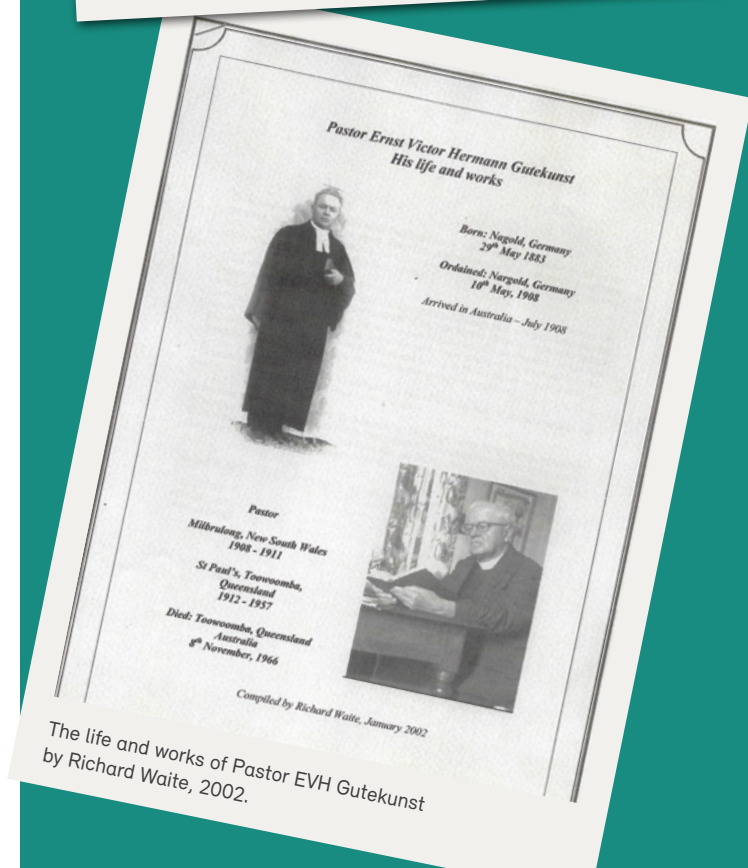
## Rev David Schmidt

### *Assistant Bishop for Mission, Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District*

It is a privilege to hear the reflections of those with connections to Salem, both historical and current. It is these connections, and the work of the congregations over generations, that have helped build Salem and Lutheran Services to what they are today.



Staff in 1957.



The life and works of Pastor EVH Gutekunst by Richard Waite, 2002.



Mrs Marie Gutekunst at the opening of the Pastor EVH Gutekunst Memorial Nursing Home in 1972.

## Can you add to the Salem & Northridge Salem Origin Story?

We'd love to hear from you!  
[hello@lutheranservices.org.au](mailto:hello@lutheranservices.org.au)



## EXPLORE OUR ORIGINS

This booklet is an abridged version of the Salem & Northridge Salem Origin Story. See the full version and other Origin Stories [here](#).



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