



St Andrews

Building St Andrews aged care and retirement living: a whole of life ministry



Lutheran
Services

There for you



LUTHERAN
CHURCH
OF AUSTRALIA
QUEENSLAND DISTRICT

**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

St Andrews Origin Story owes its existence to the generous support and contributions from members of the Gold Coast 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 St Andrews Origin Story. See the full version and other Origin Stories [here](#).





A bold vision

In the late 1980s, elders from St John’s Lutheran Church in Miami and St Mark’s Lutheran Church in Currumbin noticed significant population growth in the southern Gold Coast region.

Inspired by the success of Trinity Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran College in Ashmore, they saw an opportunity to better serve their parish by uniting their congregations to establish a new Lutheran church and school in the region. Pastor Colin Helbig shared their dream, and with the founding members, the vision for an interconnected community of education and faith took on a remarkable shape: a place where school, church, and aged care would come together as one community.

Land was found for the church and school, which included 30 acres of bushland off Tallebudgera Creek Road. A special parish meeting was held on 15 September 1991 at St John’s Lutheran Church in Miami, where it was decided to pursue the site, and name the services St Andrews; honouring the Andrews family, who were long-time owners of much of the region’s land and founders of Tallebudgera’s first Presbyterian church. But more importantly, the name stems from the disciple Andrew, who invited others to “come and see Jesus” (John 1:46) – a Gospel invitation the parish hoped to extend near and far.

A contract was signed for the property in October 1991. An additional two acres of land were later sourced from local resident Eric Stevens to create space for the aged care service. Eric, a former Uniting Church minister, was married to Beatrice Andrews, whose family had owned the original land . Eric remained connected to his land by becoming one of the first residents in the St Andrews independent living units , living there until his passing in 2000. The Coolibah space at St Andrews today is named after Eric’s property.



Coolibah under construction.

A bridge to the community

Synod was asked to support the development of an aged care hostel and school. The cost of the hostel would be partly offset by a government grant. Future plans included a worship centre, high school, and childcare centre.

Without the support of Pastor Rob Erickson at Synod, the project would likely not have happened. Challenged on how they would fund the development, Pastor Erickson said "If God wants this, money won't be a problem." Many came to believe St Andrews must have been part of God's plan, as the project was approved.

A whole of life ministry

Steep terrain, lack of money and utilities, and local opposition to the build all presented significant challenges.

Despite the hurdles, the vision and commitment of the founding members of St Andrews never waned. In 1993, the Currumbin chapel was moved to the new site and rededicated as St Andrews chapel at Tallebudgera. Rumour has it that the church fell off the transport truck at least once!

Also in 1993, St Andrews Lutheran College was opened. The aged care service then welcomed its first residents in November the following year. The new St Andrews worship centre opened in 1997.

Once the site was up and running, the leadership group fondly known as the "six pack" was formed. Made up of the heads and chairs of the three sites, they met regularly to coordinate and strengthen connections between the church, aged care, and college. This model fostered a spirit of unity and shared purpose that carried the community forward.





Work starts on the Tallebudgera site.



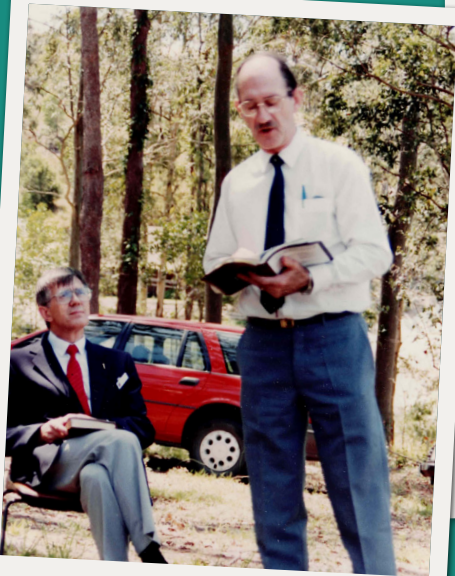
St Andrews Aged Care takes shape.



Construction continues.



The independent living units are constructed.



Pastor Colin Helbig and Pastor Glen Schultz at the groundbreaking ceremony, October 3, 1993.



Original staff members.



Ground breaking, 1993.



The aged care building was designed to let light in via high ceilings.

Standing the test of time

The founding members of St Andrews Lutheran Church dared to imagine a place where people could be known and supported through every season of life. And with faith and persistence, they helped bring it into being. Today, St Andrews Aged Care is home to generations of residents, families, and staff. It's a place of welcome, laughter, comfort, and prayer.

The transition to Lutheran Community Care

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

Having worked so hard and with such devotion to build the St Andrews Aged Care village, 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 was St Andrews' vision and commitment.



Early works on site.



Independent living units were finalised in 1995.

St Andrews today – part of the Lutheran Services family

Lutheran Community Care was renamed Lutheran Services in 2017. As the operator of St Andrews Aged Care 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 St Andrews' many residents, clients, and staff today.

Lutheran Services was established to ensure the ministry of care envisaged and established 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 St Andrews Aged Care and continues to make it such a special place.

By its 30th anniversary in 2024, St Andrews had grown into a thriving service, with 72 residential aged care beds and a community of retirement living residents in 24 independent living units. It's also a great place to work and a respected and valued employer of 78 qualified staff. Dedicated volunteers also contribute to the love and care at St Andrews.

There for you

As managers of St Andrews Aged Care and many other aged and community services, 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, with some being 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.



Moving in day.



A beautiful new space to create life enriching memories.



St Andrews has always boasted a great community.



Site dedication ceremony.

Timeline

Late 1980s-90s

- The vision for the school was born and search for land began.
- The vision was expanded to include an aged care service.
- “Six pack” leadership committee established.

1991

- 5 September – Special parish meeting held where motions were carried supporting the land purchase, range of services, financing support, and name for the project.
- 3 October – Contract signed for land on Tallebudgera Creek Road.

1999

Lutheran Community Care established.

1998

14 November – Dedication and opening of Coolibah.

1997

St Andrews worship centre opened.

2013

- Refurbishments undertaken including the gym.
- Library expanded.

2017

- Home care/support services commenced.
- Lutheran Community Care rebranded Lutheran Services.

2022

Camellia refurbished.



1992

- Land contract settled.
- May – Concept presented to Synod.

1993

- St Andrews Lutheran College opened.
- The Currumbin chapel was moved to the St Andrews site.
- 3 October – Aged care site dedication and groundbreaking ceremony.

1994

- 17 July – Dedication of the first 10 independent living units.
- 19 November – Aged care and retirement living dedication and opening.

1996

Swimming pool installed.

1995

14 May – Dedication of independent living units 11-24.

2023

- Kitchenettes in Gumnut and Rainbow refurbished.
- Renovations at Gumnut completed.

2024

- Students from St Andrews College help paint murals at Camellia.
- 30-year anniversary celebrated
 - 72-bed residential aged care home
 - 24 independent living units
 - 78 qualified staff.

Reflections

Colin Helbig

*Pastor, St John's Miami and St Mark's Currumbin, then St Andrews Tallebudgera
(December 1987 – January 1995)*

Many years ago, as a young pastor, I knew that one day I would be involved in planning a new school somewhere.

By the time I was called to the Gold Coast in 1987, my dream had broadened. With others in the parish, we were exploring how to become more effective as a church, and how to expand the Kingdom of God to bring people to Christ.

Meanwhile the dream was maturing and expanding for St Andrews. The concept became that a church should be for all ages, and so it ought to cater not just to the preschool and the school-age families, but also to the people in between and in their senior years. By doing it together on one campus, we would demonstrate that the church is there, serving the community, and carrying out a whole-of-life ministry.

The biggest challenges were knowing how to fund such a big dream and then finding real estate where we could develop it.

We hunted all over the southern Gold Coast for a suitable property. It had to be somewhere that would allow us to merge the two small congregations we had at Currumbin and Miami. When we eventually found the Tallebudgera land, we could see that with God's help and blessing, it could become an exciting Christian centre, a place where a church could be at the centre, and childcare, school, and aged care could all happen.

Finally, D-Day arrived, Sunday 15 September 1991. That was the day 35 members and friends of the then Gold Coast South Lutheran parish (St John's Miami and St Mark's Currumbin congregations) met to consider recommendations from their parish council regarding their future.

Just five items were on the agenda, and many approvals happened in that meeting. The group approved the purchase of land at Tallebudgera Creek Road, the master plan for diverse services, fundraising initiatives including the Lutheran Laypeople's League (LLL) matching deposits, and the project name "St Andrews", in honour of disciple Andrew who invited his brother Simon Peter and others to meet Jesus (John 1:40-42).



From some of the many people
who helped shape St Andrews
– then and now

EXPLORE OUR ORIGINS

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WOW! What an exciting decision. What an awesome God. First, he gave the dream. Then he expanded the dream. Now we'd agreed to embrace the dream.

Things don't always go the way you hope they will go. But we persevered and we have a lot to be thankful for. As Christians, it is important that churches are active in the community in ways that matter, doing things that the community cares about.

God gave the dream. Wisely, He didn't give us the whole dream up front, just piece by piece, from one way of serving to many ways of serving. The dedicated members of the southern Gold Coast parish were the people who grabbed hold of His dream and ran with it. The result is what you see at St Andrews today, beyond what we could have ever dreamed of — a thriving church, school, and aged care centre.

Ultimately Christian service and ministry is not our doing; it is God's doing through us. He relies on people like you and me and others to get His work done.





Signing documents approved at the LCAQD church council meeting.



The original land was dense with bush.

John Grosser

Planning committee (late 1980s – early 90s)

The vision of St Andrews was born from the Holy Spirit.

I was the Chairman of the Elders of Miami congregation and Chairman of the combined Miami/Currumbin parish elders. I was impressed by what was happening with the school and congregation at Ashmore.

I spoke to other elders who supported the idea. At that time, we needed to call a new pastor. Pastor Colin Helbig accepted our call and was in full support of our dream.

The original vision focused on creating a new church and school. When Pastor Helbig came on board that changed to include three services – church, school, and aged care – all co-located. It became known as supporting the community from “cradle to grave”.

The parish were enthusiastic about it. Claude Harm and I outlined our vision before Synod, but the Vice Chairman told us we were dreaming! He wanted to know how we would afford it, as we were struggling just to pay the pastor. I had to admit, we didn’t know that yet!

It was Pastor Rob Erickson who came to our defence. He said if God wants this, money won’t be a problem. If he had not said this, I don’t think Synod would have approved it, but miraculously they did.

True to Pastor Rob’s comments, someone came forward after Synod and offered to lend us \$600,000. We looked at a lot of land and when I first saw the Andrews site I thought: Gosh how are we going to build on this land? It’s so steep.

The project was four and a half years in the planning. There were many roadblocks along the way...there was even a local petition to stop the development! But we had the right people in the right place. I always believed it should happen but often wondered how we could overcome the many obstacles – but each time solutions were eventually found. God had his way.

One of the initial challenges was having enough land for the development of the aged care service so we needed to look for more land.



The independent living units were completed in 1995.



The home of Eric Stevens, which is now the approximate location of ILU 24.

I approached 80-year-old Eric Stevens who lived on the two-acre corner block next to the church and school, where the sign for the aged care service sits today. Eric's wife's family had owned the original land and homestead. A real estate agent had warned me that Eric would set his dogs on me if I were to approach him.

When I arrived, Eric was chopping wood with an axe and his barking dogs surrounded my car. "I'm not for sale," he said.

I told him we didn't want to buy his land – could he call his dogs off and we go inside for a cup of tea? He then put the axe down, but I wasn't getting out of the car until he tied up the dogs!

After discussions and considerations, Eric agreed to swap his land for an independent living unit. I'm sure God had a hand in that. Eric designed his own unit – number three – to his specifications, including a fuel stove (he didn't like electricity), water tank, two balconies, and workshop underneath.

Eric's original block of land was called Coolibah – which is the name of the multifunction space and chapel today.

There was a carpet snake that lived in the ceiling of the original homestead where we held many of the preliminary meetings, and it would come down in the most unusual times. I sat on him once – we both got a fright!

It often felt like we were the surfers on a wave and God was the wave. That's how St Andrews came into being and is now a wonderful success.

I'm part of a new congregation now, but I still care for this one. It's good to come back.



A view across the site.



Stained glass, completed by Garry Beattie and Vicki Harm.

John Hembrow

*Honouree consultant (from detailed planning of the aged care building until present)
St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera congregation*

I was the treasurer of the Gold Coast South Lutheran parish when the idea of combining both congregations was floated.

A committee was set up to secure a site, initially for a new school and central congregation, which included those from Miami and Currumbin. I was not involved in the land purchase. When I found out what we did buy, I was not impressed. I only saw problems!

Although we had good political support from local, state, and federal members, the rezoning had many obstacles.

An initial concept plan that was commissioned for the aged care service was not fit for purpose. It was redone to the current buildings – low and high- care hostel facilities and a number of independent living units.

Serious earthworks were carried out initially to allow for the construction of the aged care buildings.

The aged care service was funded federally, which helped finance a sewerage connection with capacity to support the entire future St Andrews site. This system greatly helped the school in the early stages as money was very short.

A variety of internal agreements and land transactions helped us to complete the site as seen today.

The standout “value add” for the school was the major earthworks deal. A small onsite mountain was blasted and ripped, and the high-value blue metal boulders were taken interstate to construct a sea wall. The school was blessed that this deal was put together with the help of Tom Regan, our civil engineer at the time. It worked well for both parties and delivered us a usable site and large oval. This work allowed the secondary school to be built at a relatively low cost.

The cooperation across the congregation, school, and aged care has been unique in my opinion.

Debbie Beattie

Church Council member

I was on the church council when they suggested that we take the two congregations – Miami and Currumbin – and merge them into one. The cradle to the grave idea was a great vision. We were excited by it.

We looked at a few blocks of land and found this one. I loved all the big trees. We sold both churches and our manse. We brought the little Currumbin Church with us; it's great to keep the connection to the old church.

We worshipped there and over at the school until the new worship centre was built. We still have services in the little church today!

We had working bees to get work done. My husband Garry and I helped install the concrete up to the school. I'm not sure it was legal... you're supposed to have it at a certain angle!

Garry worked at the school as a cleaner. He also got roped in to doing the leadlight doors at the aged care service. He and another congregation member, Vicki Harm, were doing a course – I was too, but I cut myself on the first day and didn't go back! My Mum volunteered Garry and Vicki to do the work – and it was immaculate!

My Mum, Freda, would do everybody in when she wanted us to do stuff. She was great like that. She nominated my sister to volunteer on reception, and she ended up getting a paid job!

Mum and Dad were always going to move to St Andrews. They both wanted to go into an independent living unit, but Dad passed away before it happened. Mum still moved in and stayed there until she moved into Acacia.

They both put a lot of work into it. Mum was always at the committees, or ironing – whatever she could do, she would be there doing it.

She helped with the shopping trolley, and she and Dad were always at the weekly card games between the congregation and residents. We still do that.

We had scrapbooking weekends and we did international dinners. We used the kitchen to make Thai food to raise some money. I've always found the aged care service to be very, very welcoming and supportive of the congregation.

Bruce Griffin

St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera congregation

My mother was one of the original residents at St Andrews Aged Care. My wife Angela and I remember we were still running around hanging shower curtains in all the rooms on the first day that residents started moving in! Many of our St Andrews congregation were helping with the setup of the aged care units.

We shall always be grateful for the wonderful care that my mother Jessie received at St Andrews, firstly in an independent living unit and then in higher care.

John Howard

Service Manager, St Andrews Aged Care (1994-2004) | Planning Committee Member

We were worshipping in Miami when we heard about the plans to develop a three-stage complex – college, aged care, and church. Milton Eckermann, who would become the founding Coordinator of Lutheran Community Care, approached me about joining the planning committee because I managed a nursing home and retirement living units in Bundaberg before we moved to the Gold Coast.

When the St Andrews Management Committee was asked by Synod how the building of the aged care hostel was being funded, they said “We haven’t done anything about that yet.” Thankfully we got a loan from the LLL to get going. For us, it was then a matter of getting on with the job of building.

We had approval for 72 aged care beds; the design was for a central facility with three houses at each end – all under the one roof. We didn’t want to name the houses after people, so we decided on two flowers (Camellia and Waratah), two trees (Gumnut and Acacia), and two Christian symbols (Rainbow and Dove).

I became the first Service Manager at St Andrews Aged Care – a role I held for 10 years.

The independent living units opened first. Eric Stevens owned number three. His land was used to extend the retirement village in exchange for a unit for himself; it was designed to his specifications and had a workshop underneath as well. Coolibah is named after Eric’s property and homestead. It still brings people together; it’s a gathering space for the community.

It took about a year to fill the entire aged care service. The Southport hostel had been sold to free up money for the build, so those residents were some of the first to move in. Molly Moore was one of the original residents and stayed with us for many, many years.

We worked together to get the church, school, and aged care services up and running. We started what we called the “six pack” – representatives from the congregation, the school, and the aged care service; LCAQD also had a representative on this committee.

We collaborated and always kept each other involved in decisions.

Aged care gave the college some land to build a full-sized oval in lieu of developing further independent living units in the future. The cooperation between the services was really good.

A lot has changed in aged care over the years. When we started, we didn’t even have night nurses. Staff would stay over and answer the call bell if needed. If they got up to respond to a bell, that would be one and a half hours of pay! Residents were much more self-sufficient – they would make their own beds and morning tea and still drive.

Before we had a lift, we used a stretch golf buggy called “The Beaver” to take people from the hostel to Coolibah. There was no other access – you had to go out the front door, down the hill, and then underneath it to get to Coolibah. The Beaver was designed by the husband of Pam Bridges – who was the Service Manager at Zion Nundah Aged Care.

When Lutheran Community Care took over the management there was a feeling that the committees and congregation had lost control. They felt disempowered. I always looked to the Committee of Service for their advice – it was a consultative process. Above all I would focus on fulfilling the vision of the congregation of three services within one community.

One of the highlights of my time at St Andrews was working with people – particularly residents and prospective residents. Every day was pretty much a good day. I felt I was making a difference, knowing we could provide a level of care and concern for our residents while maintaining a homelike atmosphere. And we had good staff, because we chose them. It felt like a family.



Helen Howard

Planning Committee Member and wife of John Howard

When I first came to the St Andrews block of land I thought: "What are they going to do with this? It's billy goat country!" It's amazing to see how it has developed.

God gave us the right people to make St Andrews the special place that it is. Smaller congregations could not have brought the three elements together – they just would not have the people.

There are so many family connections at St Andrews. Freda Jeffer's daughter Debbie, her husband, and Vicki Harm made the stained glass in the doors at the entrance to the six houses. Freda was on the committee and is presently a resident in St Andrews. Vicki Harm was the wife of the foundation Chairman, Claude Harm, who was also a resident in St Andrews. Our son Grant built the kitchen, altar, and lectern at Coolibah. Being a tradie, he used to swear a bit – I think he'd forget that Pastor Ed Szabo was using the room next door as an office.

The resident wedding was a highlight. John and I connected with Elmore Klinge and his sister Rosa when we lived in Bundaberg. Elmore was a lost soul when his sister died and his family moved him to a nursing home on Mount Tamborine. We visited him regularly and when John was employed as the Manager of the St Andrews Nursing Home, we helped him make the move there.

At St Andrews, Elmore met Zena. Elmore was a bachelor and Zena a widow. They met in the dining room, formed a friendship, fell in love, and married here at St Andrews, both in their 80s. John organised for them to connect their units so they could live side by side in adjoining rooms with a connecting door. Their story made national news – a beautiful reminder of the care and joy here.

John and I still play cards with the residents on Fridays. I always notice how lovely the staff are. They make it a home and build a sense of family.

It means a lot to share the history of St Andrews Aged Care and give it meaning. There aren't many people still around who were part of the original committees, congregation or staff. Not many people know the story of how St Andrews came to be.



The Beaver buggy transports residents around the site.



Pastor Schirmer officiating church service held in the hostel.

Martin Schirmer

Pastor, St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera (1994 - 1998)

Chaplain, St Andrews Aged Care | Chaplain, St Andrews Lutheran College

I was the first to offer chaplaincy at St Andrews Aged Care starting in 1994. At the same time, I was the pastor of St Andrews congregation and chaplain at the college.

I was at St Andrews for four years and thoroughly enjoyed it. There was good rapport between the aged care service and the church – at that time, some residents were also part of the congregation. I have many fond memories of my time at St Andrews Aged Care. It was a magnificent setting, I loved the people, and there was a great team led by John Howard. The place was wholesome with a good spirit. Everyone worked well as a team.

While there I conducted the wedding of a beautiful couple, aged in their early 80s. The man, a bachelor, had been a resident of St Andrews for some time. The woman took up residency sometime later, after the death of her husband. She made friends with the man at mealtime, who helped her cope with her grief and get on with her living. Having fallen in love they decided to get married. She had a wonderful sense of humour. While they were engaged, she joked with her hairdresser that if she and her husband-to-be had children, they'd send them to St Andrews school!

I officiated at the wedding and the event became prime time watching on all three major TV channels at the time. The Service Manager, John Howard, arranged for her to have a unit alongside her new husband's, with a door inserted to join the two. They were very happy!

Because the congregation had no pastor's study, John arranged for me to use a unit in the complex. Two units away from mine was a unit occupied by a lovely resident who invited me, on a weekly basis (if possible), to their unit at about 5pm on a Friday, for a brandy. The resident was a bit of a character – a real gem, whose son and daughter are part of the congregation.

Naturally I took weekly church services, taking devotions in different areas, spending time visiting all the elderly, and officiating at some residents' funerals. I have fond memories of pastoring there.

Kathy Friebel

Chaplain, St Andrews Aged Care (2012 – present) | Teacher, St Andrews Lutheran College (1997 – 2001) | St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera congregation

I've been part of the St Andrews community for 28 years. I moved from Adelaide to teach at the college in 1997, at which time I also joined the congregation. I began working as the Aged Care Chaplain 13 years ago.

The community of St Andrews was well established by the time I arrived. It was clear that many people had given their time and talents to see the vision of the shared campus come to life. Seeing the college principal mowing the lawn on the weekend was one example of the way people served outside of their paid work to create and maintain spaces where community could grow and flourish.

I remember when the Service Manager, John Howard, appointed Erika Rose as the first chaplain at St Andrews Aged Care. When it was announced at church I thought "wow, a female can do that!" I was so inspired! She laid great foundations and built strong relationships; I am proud to follow in her footsteps.

Erika was the first chaplain to have a role enmeshed in the facility, dedicated to just the aged care. Prior to her position, Pastor Martin Schirmer and then Pastor Ed Szabo visited the aged care as part of their role as the local St Andrews congregation minister. After Erika was appointed, and to this day, the local Lutheran Pastor continued to lead Tuesday worship every few weeks. Erika continued her service to the aged care through volunteering, as have many other members of the congregation over the years.

Children have always been a welcome and important part of life at St Andrews Aged Care. When I was teaching at the college I accompanied the choir on the piano. Once a year we had an eisteddfod for which we had a special rehearsal day. The best place to practise was the aged care where there was a piano and an audience!

Sunday school children from the church have made visits over the years, and now students of many ages also visit the aged care service to share time and stories. In the early days before the internet, visits included computer lessons, and more recently, painting murals on outside garden walls, playing bocce with residents, and sharing musical talent.

The ANZAC service at the aged care is led by student leaders, and this year also included a choir from the Junior School. Coolibah was full with half of our residents and about 40 students, which gave an extra special intergenerational feel to this shared remembrance occasion.

The Christmas season includes a combined worship service where congregation members visit the aged care for carols and readings. Every resident is visited by a congregation member with a greeting and a gift.

It is wonderful to have spaces where groups can visit. The design of the building lends itself to community engagement but also showcased its practical function during times of COVID restrictions. As our building has six houses of 12 rooms, residents were able to maintain connection with other residents in their immediate area while minimising risk of spreading infection. With easy access to garden areas, residents were still able to spend time in the great outdoors.

Connection to nature, other people and faith are important aspects of wellbeing for people of any age and remain a focus of our resident-centred holistic care. With St Andrews Aged Care having the support of people from the college and church, the St Andrews community continues to live out the vision of its foundational members.



St Andrews rock'n'roll themed 10th birthday.

Debra Pankhurst

St Andrews Aged Care employee (1998–2008): Quality Manager; Education; 2IC to the Director of Nursing; Director of Nursing

Garry Pankhurst

St Andrews Aged Care employee (1999–2009; 2018–2019): Bus driver/maintenance man; Service Manager

Debra: We both held a variety of roles at St Andrews. I started there in 1998 as a Registered Nurse – the only one on staff at the time – then became the Quality Manager, Education, 2IC to the Director of Nursing, and then Director of Nursing. I really enjoyed my ten years at St Andrews – in fact it was me who got Garry to join the team!

Garry: I was between jobs when Debbie suggested I volunteer to drive the bus at St Andrews in 1999. The usual bus driver/maintenance man was on holidays, and I held a heavy vehicle licence. After four weeks it turned out the maintenance man was not returning to the role. I was always handy, so I took on the position. The Service Manager at the time, John Howard, ended up giving me responsibility for all non-clinical departments.

I had worked for 20 years in business development and the hospitality industry, so had a lot of experience working with people and managing operations. In 2003, John moved to the Support Centre, and I took on the role of Service Manager.

I was the second Service Manager at St Andrews. I did that for six years before leaving and coming back almost 10 years later.

Aged care changed a lot in the time I was away. St Andrews used to be a low-care hostel; residents were generally younger, and more mobile. They'd be up and about making their own morning tea! So, I witnessed first-hand how staff had to adapt to providing a higher model of care. The nursing home originally planned for was never built, as the hostel morphed to meet those needs.

The team had been very autonomous before Lutheran Community Care took over the management of the service. There was lots of angst about loss of control, but I could see that as the service evolved it had to be run as a business – and that could be done more efficiently through a centralised team.

Tony Wilson

St Andrews Aged Care employee (1996–2024): Personal Carer; Lifestyle team member

I worked at St Andrews Aged Care for 28 years. I started in April 1996, doing work experience as a personal carer. I worked there on weekends and looked after my children during the week.

The first time I walked in, I thought, “Well, this looks like a resort!” It wasn’t quite what I expected. People think aged care will be full of doom and gloom.

When I joined, the aged care service still wasn’t full. When we got full occupancy, all the staff got a fruit cake.

In those days we also used to clean the rooms, make the breakfast and do laundry, that sort of stuff. None of the staff ever left though, unless their family was moving or something like that. It had to do with the community feel. There were always good people around – staff, families, and residents.

I ended up doing my diversional therapy (DT) study and joined the St Andrews Lifestyle team, where I worked until I retired in 2024.

In Lifestyle, my job was to make people feel good, needed, and valued. The residents had their old memories, but I wanted to make new memories for them too.

We used to have the school kids come over to play bingo and bowls. When the kids visited, the energy levels went up – the residents would be laughing and smiling.

My children went to school there too when they were little and they’d walk over after school and chat with the residents until I finished work.

It was, to be honest, a fun place to be. You had little moments with people and built a rapport. I used to go in on Christmas Day even though I wasn’t working and go to op shops for zany costumes and decorations for our theme days.

We used the Coolibah room for our big theme days. We would have residents from the aged care service and the independent living units, and families...I think we had about 130 people down there one time. It was massive! We got used to arranging it so people using walkers, chairs, and wheelchairs could move around easily.

At one stage we had a rescue cat, Neil. He had his favourite people and used to stay with one lady all the time. When she passed away the funeral was downstairs in Coolibah. Neil came downstairs, walked up the centre aisle, walked around the coffin of this lady, sat there for a minute and walked out. It was just unbelievable! I never saw him in Coolibah before or since.

Later on, there were more high care people. We’d have concerts every Thursday and do the “YMCA”. We’d have staff, residents and families mimicking the YMCA signs; people from the kitchen and the carers and the office all up the front there doing this silly dance. The smile on the residents’ faces when you’re dancing with them was a big plus.

I think we always got on well with the families; it was a real community. They connected with us – we were their support. We were there for them too.



Irene Henseleit

Retirement Living resident (2009 – present) | Ladies Guild Member | Volunteer | St Andrews Lutheran Church Tallebudgera congregation

We were part of the Currumbin congregation when they decided to start on this project of the school, church, and aged care.

St Andrews became our local congregation. When I retired, I started volunteering in the aged care hostel, tidying the cupboards, ironing, and running the shopping trolleys. Erika Rose, the Chaplain there, talked me into it – she started the trolley. I liked doing it and just kept going. It was nice getting to know all the people there; I made a lot of friends.

My husband Noel and I moved into the unit at St Andrews in 2009. Noel gradually moved into the aged care dementia wing, and I'm still in my retirement living unit 15 years later.

I ran the shopping trolley for 20 years, along with some of the other retirement living residents. You've got to have two people doing the trolley. So, I asked my husband Noel if he would come and help me. And he did!

We sold cards and treats to the aged care residents; the trolley was managed by the Ladies' Guild and all the profits were donated back to St Andrews.

I'm still with the Ladies' Guild – I have been ever since I retired. I worked with the girls catering and doing trading tables, raising money, and cleaning the church.

I don't do the trolley anymore, but we play cards at least once a week in the Coolibah room and a few come down from the hostel and the units.

Claude Harm was instrumental in getting that entertainment room down underneath Coolibah which we now use for church movies, meetings, cards, all sorts. He was part of the congregation and on the committee and a good worker for the church.

Noel and I used to help a gentleman who had moved up from Adelaide. He didn't have any family up here. Noel drove him to doctor's appointments, and I always made him a date loaf.

Eventually he got into St Andrews too. He wanted to leave us money in his will, but we told him to give it to the church. His bequest was eventually used to build the manse.

It's good living here – I've met a lot of people and enjoyed volunteering after I retired.



Attendees at St Andrews dedication ceremony.

Rebecca Pay

Service Manager, St Andrews Aged Care (2012 – present)

I've been at St Andrews Aged Care for just over 13 years. I began in the kitchen while studying nursing, and over the years moved into different roles as my skills and circumstances changed. I was Support Service Coordinator for a time, and since 2022 I've been Service Manager. Having worked across the facility gives me insight into every role and how to best support our team.

Kitchens are said to be the heart of the home, and food is central to life at St Andrews. I stepped back into the kitchen during Cyclone Alfred, when many staff stayed onsite to ensure continued care.

Our core focus is serving residents in ways that suit their personality and needs. It's the little things, like knowing their favourite song or how they take their tea, that make the difference. Building relationships helps residents feel seen, valued, and loved, and I enjoy getting to know them and their families.

The people here make it what it is: safe, comfortable, compassionate, and full of small but meaningful moments. It feels like home, not just for residents, but for staff too.

One standout memory was a fashion parade about seven years ago. Residents helped plan the event choosing menus, music, and outfits. We had finger food, champagne, and live entertainment. A local boutique supplied clothing, and hair and makeup artists volunteered. Families joined in as models, and everyone worked together to help residents prepare. Seeing residents, some with wheelie walkers arm in arm with staff, confidently strutting down the runway, was pure joy.

Many residents leave a lasting mark on me. Molly Moore, our first resident, was unforgettable. She had presence, grace, and a deep appreciation for small joys, especially fresh flowers. If you walked past without commenting on them, she'd prompt you: "Aren't they beautiful? Don't they smell lovely?" She wore hats adorned with flowers, and her delight in them reminded us all to slow down and appreciate life's beauty. Ensuring she always had flowers became a small act of love that influenced how we chose to focus our attention.

Over the years, I've worn many hats and each role has deepened my respect for this season of life. Spending time with residents is a privilege. They remind me of what matters most, and I'm honoured to be part of their stories.



Children sing to the residents.

Pastor Andrew Koehler

Pastor, St Andrews Lutheran Church (2019 – present)

I have been Pastor at St Andrews for the past six years, and was pastor at Trinity Lutheran College, Ashmore from 1998 to 2001, during which time I was a member of St Andrews College Council. I was privileged to see St Andrews near its very beginning, to now come back and see what it is today.

I believe that St Andrews is the success it is because of prayer and people. God wanted the “cradle to grave” idea to work here, and it did. Many other communities would have been overstretched to try and build all three components of St Andrews, but the right people were here to bring the church, school and aged care service together – people with passion, vision, and expertise. There are so many people who gave so much for so long.

The congregation was a combination of the Currumbin and Miami churches. It was very unusual for two churches to amalgamate. It was a big deal for them to look ahead and think, together, we’re going to do better at what we’re called to do. If they had stayed separate, we wouldn’t have the aged care. We wouldn’t have the school. For a congregation to start a school, college, and aged care – that’s huge. And it speaks to the people who were there.

St Andrews Aged Care connects generations together. Some of the independent living units look down on the school oval. Residents love having their grandkids come along at lunchtime and to have a chat, and they love sitting out and watching sports days.

I’ve been a pastor for just over 30 years. I’ve always had school involvement, and for over half of that 30 years, I’ve been full-time in schools. Though over all my years, I’ve never been in a context before where there’s been both aged care and school together. We have good links, and I think that’s because we’ve got the people here who are involved in both. I knew a resident who moved into the aged care service, became a member of our church, and then her grandchildren started coming to the school. There is so much strength in having the three together.



Children are a joy to have at St Andrews.



Resident at St Andrews rock'n'roll themed 10th birthday.

Deborah Batchelor

Creative Programs and Volunteer Coordinator, St Andrews Aged Care (2024 – present)

I've been the Creative Programs and Volunteer Coordinator at St Andrews for over a year now.

When my daughter was in year nine St Andrews Lutheran College, she loved coming across to the aged care and having conversations with the residents. She told me they just sat and had conversations, and it was really sweet the way you'd listen to a story then two minutes later, the resident would tell you the same story again.

We have some year nines coming to visit again. Within our lifestyle activity program, we really have a lot of intergenerational contact. It's a benefit of having the different services on one site.

The grade twos play bocce with the residents each week, and the early learning centre students join activities like the bean bag throw, bowling pins, and drawing. It is lovely and there's lots of energy. We also take residents in our minibus around and sit in on their activities. The interaction and the joy that the residents get from the children is amazing.

We celebrated Mother's Day with the college. Some family members joined too – it's nice for them to be able to come out somewhere with their loved one. The year eleven hospitality students put on a very fancy morning tea.

The highlight for the residents was chatting to the students about what they are studying and their future. They had big smiles and were asking when we could do it again before we'd even left!

All those interactions with early learners right through to the senior students are amazing.

I'm so lucky with my role – I really enjoy it. We have concerts and morning teas. There was even a Shetland pony here the other day!

One of our residents, Ray, used to play dominoes and card games with a couple of residents. When they passed away, he was a bit lost. So, I started chatting to him and he taught me how to play Canasta. He's good friends with John and Helen Howard, who were foundation members of this whole place, so every second Friday I block out an hour and a half and I get to play Canasta with the three of them. It's a lovely connection.

Can you add to the St Andrews Origin Story?

We'd love to hear from you!

contact@lutheranservices.org.au



EXPLORE OUR ORIGINS

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



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