

LSF Valedictory Speech

delivered at the LSF Valedictory Service
St John's Southgate
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by Esther Cramer

Hi everyone, and welcome to Sunday Night at St John's. Welcome especially to any visitors with us this evening, it's great to have you with us, we hope you'll join us afterwards for supper in the hall. Thanks to everyone who helped out with tonight's service—can we thank the band please? So, announcements for tonight...!

Does this sound familiar to any of you? That's because this was my mantra. Almost every Sunday night for more than three years. Announcements Chick, and proud of it.

I've been at LSF for a while now. It started off at Sunday Night at St John's, on an evening quite like this. I'd moved out of home in Ballarat and into the Davies Street LSF House just a week before. My two loveable LSF housemates, Paije and Jo, brought me along, and this has been my church home, and this LSF community my community, ever since.

So there's a lot I could say now, giving a speech about it all. After all, I've been through a lot here...

There was that time when someone sent out the monthly LSF email on April 1st, with the top story being that Judy Bowman was resigning as LSF chaplain to enroll in the ALC in anticipation of women's ordination. And even Judy believed it! What a great April Fool's Day joke that was. Classic.

There was that surprise goodbye party we held for Mog, our favourite Benbow, when he left for Halls Gap. (Just joking Steve. Renata's our favourite.)

There was that amazingly huge turnout back in December 2006, our LSF Christmas service and also Pastor Andrew Brook's farewell, which in my memory is only matched by the numbers we had at Pastor Nathan Hedt's welcome and installation service this time last year.

There was that Commencement Day where we featured the dancing sign language alphabet. Watching a row of people doing random dance moves to no music was hilarious.

There was that magical LSF National Conference in South Australia which led to four couples getting together, who would all later go on to get engaged and married.

There have been heartaches and break-ups, engagements and marriages. There have been happy LSF share houses and not so happy ones. There have been LSF Balls you thought would never actually happen, but they all came together in the end. Worship groups, prayer groups, Bible study groups, focus groups. Hilarious LSF Christmas plays courtesy of Miriam Zanker. I even survived the LSF pastoral vacancy... maybe we should start making T-shirts that say that!

And now, here I am, finishing a five year degree with no idea what to do next. And I suppose soon enough I'll be finishing up at LSF as well, moving on to the 11am service, seeing how I'm newly married and three months pregnant... No, not really. But even now, at the end of it all, LSF has been such a myriad of experiences, with such a crazy and ever-changing mix of people, that it makes it almost impossible to describe—at least without copying and pasting from the website.

But eventually, I've been able to identify two things about this stage of my life and how LSF has featured in that.

The first is this: over these last years, LSF has given me some of the best times of my life, as well as some of the most fun, hilarious, enriching, challenging, enlightening, and rewarding experiences of my life – more than I could have imagined or hoped for.

The second is this: when I think over it all, and what I am taking with me as my life moves forward, I find myself dwelling on what I call the things that matter.

For example, those CTM goal-setting meetings I was part of, where we would debate the question, “Why do we want to draw people to LSF anyway?” And we concluded: because we care about people in this stage of life having a community to rely on, to connect with; a community that cares for them and grows them. That’s what’s at the heart of all our LSF scheming: something that matters. That’s why we have prayer meetings, student meals, and mission trip plans.

I’ve seen deeply into the wounds of friends, and felt sadness when those wounds wouldn’t seem to heal.

I’ve been under relentless spiritual attack. Again and again and again, hitting harder and deeper in a way that would make me stop and think, “Is this really worth fighting for? This struggle to follow Christ?”

And in the last twelve months or more, I’ve heard the gospel. Really heard it. When it mattered. And experienced its power. Saving. Redeeming. Life giving.

It’s for this kind of stuff that we have a community, that we are the Church, the body of Christ, the people of God. To care for each other, and in that caring to bring the power of the gospel. This is what matters.

But it’s more than that. It’s more than community.

We could see it when Glenice Hartwich, from the LCA Board of Mission, inspired Ariel to lead a small team of LSFers to the isolated jungles of Sabah in Malaysia.

We could see it on Dion’s face when he came back from doing mission at Theo’s coffee shop; when he spoke about encountering an angel—God coming through for them at a crucial time.

We could see it in Emma when she told us about helping people in tough situations through St Vinnie’s.

I think it’s what we would see on the faces of the apostles as they were killed for proclaiming Jesus—if we had been there—that this is what matters.

So I take with me, from my social work degree and from my time here at LSF, not only some amazing memories, but also a strong sense of what matters. And I feel like, if we can get beneath all the trappings and we can get to know the one True God, and understand what it means to be in community, that’s what matters.

And I hope and pray that LSF can continue to grow as a place where the gospel is received and given, as it has been for me.

So in conclusion, I have very few conclusions, only thanks for a wild ride that no one person can take credit for. And as I’m not really pregnant, and not planning to start going to morning church any time soon, I hope this wild ride of LSF will have a few more twists and turns for me yet.

Congratulations to all the graduating students, and my condolences to everyone who is still studying.