



17th PeaceWise Chair report for AGM 2024

Dear members of PeaceWise,

Good morning and welcome to the 17th AGM of PeaceWise.

A special welcome as well to our guests: Phoebe Van Bentum. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Torres-Russell, one of our Board Directors, is not present as she is on a 6-month sabbatical to recover from surgery.

I would also like to express my gratitude to those who will have taken the time and effort to read this report at a later time, when it is available on the PeaceWise website.

Before I share my report with you, allow me to pray.

Father in Heaven, we thank you that we can stand in your presence, because we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and made righteous through His sacrifice on the Cross. This report, like all the previous reports, is in honour of you and is an expression of our gratefulness for your faithfulness, provision and sustained grace and mercy. The fruits of the PeaceWise Ministry are a testimony of the faithful service and dedication of many to see an ever-increasing number of people becoming Peacemakers for life. We thank you that you have called us to promote peace and reconciliation in relationships through Your principles as written in your Word. This will continue to spur us on to fight the good fight for all people.

Amen.

I say it every year and I say it again: it is always an honour to present the Chair report at the PeaceWise AGM. This is my 11th Chair report and I am in my 12th year of being the Chair of PeaceWise. I am truly humbled by the trust the Board has put in me, for being the Chair and leading the Board and the governance of PeaceWise. Let me say immediately, that although I am the Chair with a particular role and responsibility, I am first an ordinary Board Director and team member.

When I was preparing for this report, I thought back to the days when I was asked to become the Chair. I took my time to pray and think about it. And one of the things that became clear in that period of discerning God's will and direction was that I sensed the Lord inspire me to develop and grow together as a Board. That is a Board

that would oversee and function not only for the organisational and ministry governance, but also would be aware that the Board carries a spiritual responsibility.

As a Board we are accountable to God.

This awareness makes everything we do an act of worship, of stewardship and of obedience, doing everything as unto the Lord. Everything we stand for and believe in, is expressed in our actions or doing, but this must come forth out of relationship and presence or being. Individual Board members are in a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Our Board is a spiritual community in relationship with God, our Father, and with each other. These relationships are an intrinsic part of our Board and form the basis, the DNA and the fabric of Board Culture. This asks for deep commitment to God and each other.

The culture of the PeaceWise Board is inspired and founded on God's word, on which our values, relational commitments and Philosophy of Ministry is based. The Board is intentionally relational above functional, living out and functioning in a Culture of Peace. The reality is that the unity and the healthy and joyful relating to each other in the Board facilitates and cultivates excellence in the functioning of the Board as it carries out its governance and oversight responsibilities.

A relational and healthy Board culture does not mean avoidance of disagreement, no space for expressing different opinions or views, or evading difficult and robust discussions. It is quite the opposite, because of our relational unity with each other and God, we do not allow "any difference of opinion" to become personal. We are willing and open to having robust discussions and to discern together what God's will and concern is, laying down personal agendas or ambitions.

The fundamental keys to all of this are humility, listening and loving well, and prayer, both personal and together. The Board is determined that Jesus is at the centre of the Board, the PeaceWise organisation and our organisational culture. We rely on the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for wisdom, guidance, and discernment of God's direction, especially for significant or strategic decisions.

Our spiritual responsibility as a Board and our dependence on God includes or rather compels us to care, to love and to look after those who tirelessly and unselfishly work in and for the ministry, both staff and volunteers. We also deeply value every supporter and client of the ministry. We aim to offer and deliver our services with excellence and love.

Have we arrived as a board? Are we perfect in all we do? That is certainly not the case. We continue to learn and grow as a Board and as individual Board members.

We have grown as a ministry.

I looked up several Chair reports from the first few years I was chairing the Board. Allow me to share a few observations.

In those days PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth were still a vision and PeaceWiseVoice an ambition at best. We primarily conducted National Training events in the major cities of Australia, a few Dedicated trainings, and several mediations and conflict coaching sessions. A culture of Peace was certainly on our radar, but we did not have the resources to support organisations. Nevertheless, we were grateful for what we could do with a handful of people and continued to pursue, in obedience to God's calling, the fulfilment of all PeaceWise's goals.

Today, we are active in all our PeaceWise brands: PeaceWiseYou, PeaceWiseKids & PeaceWiseYouth, PeaceWiseUs, PeaceWiseHelp and PeaceWiseVoice. This is nothing short of a miracle as we are a not-for-profit organisation and reliant on the revenue stream of our services, generous donations and many people, who have given over and beyond in time and overtime, skills, expertise, prayer, advice and support. God has been so faithful in bringing us all the resources we needed. The bottom-line is that it is God and people, who have made this happen.

But I should really return to 2023 and share some reflections on last year. There is much to be thankful for.

We have seen a continuing growth in the uptake of PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth by many schools, some churches and homeschoolers. As a matter of fact, in terms of revenue stream it has bypassed our National and Dedicated training events. But more importantly, schools are so pleased with the PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth materials and see the positive impact this has on the school culture, students, teachers and parents, that they renew their licenses each year, or increase their number of licenses. We are so blessed and we rejoice in seeing a growing number of schools using PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth and continue to rejoice in the positive impact that our ministry has on communities and individuals.

Financially, we met our budget in 2023, which means we are in a healthy financial position. I don't say this flippantly, because every year we know that we are dependent on God to provide through people, who sign up for our services, who give and believe with us in our vision and ministry. You can [download the 2023 Directors and Finance and Audit report](#) from our website for more details. In the Directors report you can also read more about PeaceWise's ministry activities during 2023 and what we have achieved through God's grace.

However, I would like to mention one large internal project we completed, which is the **implementation of a CRM system**, a customer relationship management system. That sounds perhaps not too exciting to you, but let me assure you that this was a major project and an absolute necessity. It has proven to be a gamechanger in efficiency, administration, documentation, streamlining processes and much more.

Without this CRM system we would struggle to provide the delivery of our products, support, and service to our growing number of customers. Without mentioning names, I know that a few people have worked very hard and given over and beyond to make this happen. The Board is very grateful.

PeaceWise has also continued to help both individual people and organisations with internal conflict to seek forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and restoration.

This ministry is of course highly confidential, but I can assure you that there is much reason for praise and thankfulness.

Sadly, there is also a flipside as there are people in conflict who seek our help but do not proceed to a reconciliation process for a variety of reasons. It is particularly sad and reason for much fervent prayer that there is unresolved conflict in the Body of Christ at all levels, but there seems to be an unwillingness to reconcile. We can only commit this to God.

There is one other thing I must mention and which in my opinion is a major step in the development of PeaceWiseVoice. Before the referendum of “The Voice”, PeaceWise published an article on this topic - [“PeaceWise’s position on The Voice to Parliament”](#). This article reflected to some extent the different perspectives that existed in the Board. The article was neither a Yes or No defense. There was already plenty written in that vein from both Christian and non-Christian points of view. Rather, the PeaceWiseVoice article discussed what it meant to be a peacemaker in a highly polarising and politically charged discussion. I am very pleased to say that we received many positive reactions, including comments that this is the best article read on this topic. If you haven’t read it, I highly recommend you read it, because it is still relevant today.

I would like to come back to the topic of growth I mentioned in the beginning of this report.

We have been blessed by growth of the ministry.

When I say growth, we usually think of growing numbers, larger budget, more products or more people reached. And that is certainly one important aspect of a growing ministry. Another aspect is the growing complexity of our world and its impact on PeaceWise. For example, we have a growing number of policies. We are legally required to have particular policies in place to be compliant and to operate responsibly with all the people and organisations we interact with. The PeaceWise Board is ultimately responsible to ensure the right policies are in place, implemented and adhered to. There is also a growing need for cybersecurity to protect against the growing criminal business of scams, hacking and identity theft. Therefore, PeaceWise has strong cybersecurity measures in place, including professional cybersecurity support to safeguard our data, including personal information.

These are just a few of the necessary parts of a growing ministry and organisation, like PeaceWise. But if I think of Jesus and his ministry, I also see a growth in numbers and complexity. He started his mission alone, then he gathered 12 disciples around him and pretty soon he had a massive following. He had his logistical challenges, such as providing food for a crowd of over 5000 people, travelling up and down between Judea and Galilee, paying taxes and dealing with the hostility of the religious establishment. But Jesus never talked about numbers or growth as we tend to do in our reporting. He stayed focused on his mission and what he came to do. He did talk about growth, but rather in the context of His Kingdom, faith, love, hope, following Him, growing fruit and treasures in Heaven.

PeaceWise is legally required to report on some numbers, but we stay focused on our vision, purpose and mission activities, that were given to us by God.

We align all our missions, which are the activities of the five PeaceWise brands, with our vision *“To see vast numbers of people passionately living and sharing Jesus’ promise “blessed are the peacemakers”*. And each brand activity embodies our purpose of promoting peace and reconciliation in relationships through biblical principles and the power of Christ.

We are not intentionally seeking to increase revenue for the sake of revenue growth, or more training events and more training participants for the sake of yearly growing numbers of people reached. Or allow eroding of quality for the sake of quantity. Jesus said *“Hear, o PeaceWise, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other command greater than these”*. We, that is the people of PeaceWise, aim, strive, and seek together to love God with everything we have and consequently love each other, our supporters and our customers with everything we can offer through PeaceWise. The question is not *“Did we perform well”*, but *did we love well!!*

Now if we continue to look at the ministry of Jesus, then we see that after spectacular growth it all seemingly collapsed in a very short period of time with Jesus dying on the Cross. But praise God, He is risen and the Church of Christ was born and is still alive today. All to say that with any ministry that follows Jesus and is true to the Gospel, set-backs, disappointments, hostility and suffering will come. That is the way of Jesus and that is the way of Life and that is the way of eternal Kingdom success. This is quite different compared with the many ways without Christ.

As PeaceWise does grow and reaches more and more people, young and old with the Gospel of Peace, we should expect opposition, set-backs, difficulties and possibly even hostile opposition. We are so thankful that although we have had our challenges, issues and problems throughout the years, the Lord has so far shielded us from significant hostility or major setbacks. We rejoice in and are thankful for the favour we receive and experience in all our ministry and our relationships with customers and supporters.

If you allow me, **I would also like to briefly reflect on the growth of noise.** I don't mean sound, but I mean verbal noise, digital noise, political noise, the noise of fearmongering, social media noise, the noise of being busy, the noise of fear of missing out or I must have it, or the latest fashion, the noise of advertising, and so forth. All these noises shout over and overcrowd human suffering in wars, in environmental and natural disasters, in conflicts large and small, in the elderly, the poor, the disadvantaged, the lonely ones. The noise is deafening at an emotional and mental level, that can affect our mental and physical well-being. Perhaps, I show my age when I pose the question "How on earth can we find peace with ourselves, with each other, with God, with nature, with the future and with the past?"

PeaceWise, like any other organisation, exists and operates within this noise. We are not called to reduce or cancel that incessant noise, but there is the noise of conflict. What I mean is that conflict is often experienced or seen as a painful noise, that needs to be cancelled or replaced with another stronger noise. Conflict is an unwanted, maybe sometimes self-inflicted, noise, that adds to the noises of life. PeaceWise is called to help transform conflict noise into a harmonious melody, that will sing praises to God.

Do I think that PeaceWise will be called upon to meditate in the Israel-Palestinian war, the war in the Ukraine, between Houthi rebels and Western powers or Taiwan and China, or to conflict coach Extinction Rebels in light of their non-violent, disruptive civil disobedience actions? I doubt it.

But will a year 7 student, who is currently being taught and equipped in biblical peacemaking be called upon to mediate peace in a conflict of war in 20 or 30 years? That is possible.

Or in 30 years' time will a 40-year-old save his marriage because he remembers what he had been taught in years 5 and 6 today? That is absolutely possible.

Or will a year 9 girl, who today and over the coming years receives the PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth teaching, be able when she is at Uni to conflict coach her friend, who is in conflict with her parents? Yes, and Yes and Yes!

Or will a middle-aged lady, who has been taken along to a PeaceWise training, be able to forgive her father, who she hasn't seen in years? Absolutely!

Or will 14-year-old Johnny show his parents, who have no church or Christian faith background, how to really say sorry, because the school has embraced biblical peacemaking through PeaceWise? Is it possible that strained or estranged or broken relationships between husbands and wives, daughters and in-laws, sons and parents, brothers and sisters, be transformed to renewed, growing and healthy relationships? Yes and yes, we witness that many times.

And through all this people meet Jesus and have an opportunity to get to know Him at a deeply personal level and to let Him remove destructive noises from their lives and receive a personal song, perhaps for the first time.

Will none other than children, youth and adults living in Australia be able to receive equipping in biblical peacemaking? That is a definite No, because the Gospel of Peace does not stop at country borders.

God willing and directing, PeaceWise will intentionally cross over into other countries as a next step towards fulfilling our vision.

There is another exciting development on the horizon with a potentially international impact. **PeaceWise will develop a fully interactive App**, that will support people and help them grow in their journey as peacemaker. No App like that exists! The Development of this app will enlarge the space, in which PeaceWise operates. It will encapsulate and express the DNA of biblical peacemaking and it will be like a journey planner that people can consult on their journey as peacemaker.

Although PeaceWise has a few overseas schools as customers and we are partnered to SIM, we have not yet entered the international space. However, we sense that God is preparing us to make the leap. The deployment of this app means anyone, anywhere in the world can access it. You will soon hear more from us with more details and how you can help us, because we cannot do this alone. It is not just the app development, it is the opening-up of new horizons far and wide across the world, where people live and who we want to offer the opportunity to learn biblical peacemaking and become peacemakers for life. Can you see that this works towards the fulfilling of our vision of vast numbers of people passionately living and sharing Jesus' promise: "Blessed are the peacemakers"? **Can you believe with us?**

A few years back I used a metaphor of horizons of ministry possibilities and developments, which we were walking and working towards. Some of those horizons we have reached, such as PeaceWiseKids and PeaceWiseYouth, or audience-specific peacemaking training, or a growing number of partnerships.

We do not stop as if we have arrived, but we walk forward in faith, trust and with much prayer. We follow the One ahead of us. He is beckoning us to keep going. We need to focus otherwise we lose sight of Him. We know that He is our Lord Jesus. The wind of the Holy Spirit is softly blowing through the trees, wherever our Lord Jesus is walking, and it gently pushes us forward. As we walk in the present, that connects the past to the future, the horizons change, but our Master stays the same, leading us forward.

The landscape around us has become more and more diverse and intense, changing fast. More signs appear, pointing towards all kinds of promising destinations. Broad and wide exit roads curve away to distant places of success and fulfilment. Voices are calling to stop, park, eat, drink and to be happy. But Jesus walks on and at times

He looks like a King, other times like a Shepherd and then like a Warrior. He points ahead to where noises of conflict, suffering, and loneliness come from. But we hear also sounds of wonder and joy, calls for help and cries of souls, hungry for peace. We know the path we follow is not the easy one, but we are compelled by love for Him and for the ones He brings on our path. Some of the horizons are in distant countries, while others are nearby but difficult to reach. We are not alone, a multitude of peacemakers of all ages have joined us.

Together, we rejoice in the journey, rejoice in following Jesus, the ultimate Peacemaker, rejoice in the challenging horizons ahead of us and rejoice in serving those who seek peace and reconciliation.

Heavenly Father, we humbly approach your divine presence, seeking your guidance, wisdom, and grace.

Lord, you are the future, and we place our hopes, dreams, and aspirations in your care.

Father, I ask that you to grant us clarity of mind and vision for the days and ways that lie ahead.

May your Holy Spirit fill us with wisdom, discernment and understanding, guiding us in every decision we make and every step we take. Help us to align our plans with your perfect will, surrendering our desires and ambitions to your greater purpose.

Heavenly Father, we trust in your unfailing love and faithfulness. Grant us the strength and perseverance to overcome challenges and obstacles that may arise, knowing that through you, all things are possible.

Shield us from the snares of the enemy and grant us your divine provision in every aspect of our ministry.

In all things, Lord, may your Name be glorified.

We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.