



Pastor Matt Thiele and his wife Karryn have demanding callings and a busy family life.



PHOTOS: WARREN LYNAM

I support her life-goals and her calling.
Karryn: No I don't feel a lot of pressure. Once people get to know us they realise very quickly that we are a normal couple – we both have demanding callings and a busy family life. Like everyone we have good days and bad days. We have to keep working at our relationship and making sure that we put time into it.

How did you meet and how long have you been married?

We worked together as volunteers leading camps for teens for three years. While working closely together we became “almost friends” but we each found the other very annoying and were often in disagreement in team meetings. Then on Good Friday 1993, we attended an outdoors dawn service on a very chilly Adelaide morning. Necessity forced us to share a blanket for seating. That day it was like we each saw something new in the other – love followed. We have been married for 23 years and are still discovering new things in each other.

How did you come to be on our glorious Sunshine Coast?

Karryn is a Queensland. Matt is from down south. Queensland won hands down.

Karryn, as a teacher for children with learning difficulties, what motivates you to invest so much energy into leading and inspiring others?

I always loved teaching, but when our son was born with Down Syndrome I discovered a new world only a parent can understand. I wanted to help all children learn and become valued members of their community. I discovered a passion for including all children in schools, and a desire to help teachers work with (and love) children of

difference. I did seven more years of study to specialise in disability, learning support and autism.

You're often required to work together as a couple at church. What is the most difficult aspect of that?

Karryn: It can be hard to manage our time together as a family as Matt can be called upon at any time of day or night.

Matt: It's great to have Karryn with me in my public life. But for Karryn it can be challenging when my work intrudes on home. As far as working together goes, it's usually great fun, except for when we are choosing songs in the band.

You've quietly impacted so many lives in many ways the community will never know. Do you each have a highlight of your respective careers so far?

Matt: My highlights involve being in extreme situations with those who are hurting and vulnerable – and seeing that they were helped. I have also loved seeing young people and families flourish. It's really cool to see children you mentored two decades ago now changing the world.

Karryn: Seeing the smile on a child's face when they are fully engaged with learning and feel good about themselves, their learning and growth. That makes it all worthwhile.

We all have those days when we're not the best versions of ourselves. How do you overcome those substandard ones to fulfil your hectic roles?

Matt: On the bad days I practise honesty. When someone asks me how I am, I don't give them the longest version, but I admit my struggles openly. I hope this helps others do the same.

Karryn: I think you just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other and remembering that what you say and how you act can have a huge impact on those around you.

Matt, can you share any stand-out, behind-the-scenes humorous moments of your role as pastor?

Yesterday I was sitting with someone in hospital who is facing death. When I went to shake his hand at the end, I slipped and almost fell. Although he could hardly speak, his eyes filled with mirth and he laughed and laughed at me. We laughed together for a very long time! Sometimes your weaknesses (like clumsiness) can be useful.

What's the best advice you've ever received about relationships and who did it come from?

Before we were married we did a marriage course. In that course the facilitator said, “You two come first, keep your relationship strong and your children will be secure. Never let the children divide you or think that they come first – their security comes from knowing that you two are strong. When you get home, kiss each other first before giving the children attention!” It works for us.

As Influencers, who have been your mentors or people you admire?

Karryn: I have worked with some teachers who are total wizards and some principals who could turn a frog into an educational princess. Watching them find the best things in the heart of a child and encouraging that inspired me to do it too.

Matt: I have been befriended by a number of pastors (Eric Simpfendorfer, Mel Mueller, Rick Zweck) who never achieved great fame but quietly served their community, cared

and loved for their whole lives. I want to be like them.

Technology continues to entertain and challenge couples. Have you noticed any other testing trends as we surge on into 2018?

We both use social media less than ever before. We've both been heavy users and approached something like social-media addiction at some point. On the Sunshine Coast isolation and busyness continue to increase – people are online more and face-to-face less.

How do you unwind and separate work from your personal life?

We love talking and eating together and sometimes we do talk about work at home. We both help each other grow with a “daily debrief”. We unwind by walking on the beach and op-shopping together. We love to play games and it can get very competitive in our household.

Matt, what do you appreciate about Karryn the most?

I can't say one thing: Beautiful, intelligent, centred, wise, selfless, funny, and great to talk to.

Karryn, what do you appreciate about Matt the most?

The way that Matt always makes me laugh and the beautiful cards he writes.

Joanne is a neuro-psychotherapist and relationship specialist at The Confidante Counselling. Email jo@theconfidantecounselling.com or visit www.theconfidantecounselling.com



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