



Winter 2019

From the Editor

Let's face it, winter has a bad press! Especially in the Southern Hemisphere, with no Christmas to celebrate no dashing through the snow with hopes of seeing Santa Claus for us! The best-known winter classical piece is from The Four Seasons by Vivaldi, and all three movements have a slightly jagged edge sometimes threatening discord. And there are Shakespeare's famous words: "Now is the winter of our discontent ...".

So perhaps it's not surprising that winter brings on sombre thoughts. Our minister, Craig, writes in this newsletter about the ghastly event in the local area. However, he suggests a way through thinking about this and even suggests a rather unexpected guide.

It would be fair to say that this is a busy time for the church. A positive initiative is found in Ann's account of Safe Church reinforced by Mary's beautiful photos of our children throughout this newsletter.

Tim writes about the Church Council which, as usual, has much to think about, including the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project. Alan keeps us up to date with his latest report.

Aside from work, we all enjoy a good read on a winter's night, so David Sutherland's book review is timely. We welcome more reviews for future newsletters!

With such a lot to reflect on close to home, we decided to make the focus of this winter newsletter the church we belong to – Mark the Evangelist. This meant holding over a few pieces for our spring newsletter, which will look beyond our sometimes-narrow concerns. Rod moves from producing the newsletter to writing for it, with some impressions of Papua New Guinea; Ann learns about Indigenous culture through a language program; and David Radcliffe ventures further from home, to Glasgow.

As we have three months before our spring newsletter, we invite you to join these writers with stories of travels or experiences that enhanced your appreciation or understanding of the world.

It now only remains for me to thank all contributors, and especially producer Rod Mummery for getting us all over the finish line, and to invite you to settle in with this good read, the first of many this winter.

Suzanne Yanko, Editor

From the Minister

by Craig Thompson

The violent death of yet another young woman in Melbourne this week, this time only a few hundred metres from where some of us live, opens up for us once more the fractures crazing our community and wider society. This particular fracture a young person on the fringe of the community, apparently attacked by another fringe-dweller fuels fear and anger and frustration in almost everyone who hears of it. 'How?' and 'Why?' and 'How long?' fill our thoughts, once the initial shock is passed. Theories abound. Perhaps we know what needs to be done but lack the courage to do it or just as likely the will to pay what it would cost, at all sorts of levels.

Whatever the 'Why', the harsh reality which is life for many people or the end of a life seems a long way from the lives we are promised in glitzy advertising or whirlwind political campaigns.

I reflect in this way while preparing for a series after Trinity Sunday on the prophet Hosea. Why another series? Because I'm beginning to think that it's one of the best ways to get deep into Scripture, holding us to read things we might otherwise skip over as too hard or too alien, encouraging us to sit with an 'angle' on God and the world long enough that our own angles might be adjusted. Why Hosea? Partly because I had a book on his ministry sitting on my shelf which had long been begging to be read. Partly because, caricatures and a few popular verses aside, the prophets are not well understood at least by me! Partly because the Old Testament is increasingly pressing itself on me as having an unavoidable and indispensable 'earthiness' about it which might make better sense of the fractured world than the New Testament can when isolated from the experiences and words of its forerunners. We saw something of this in the hard realism of Ecclesiastes and how it could inform our reading of the Gospel, and we can expect there's more to be seen in Hosea.

The prophets speak of God's rage, and pain, and longing, and will to consummate all things in love. Our world teaches us rage and pain and longing. We look to God for the consummation, and how to live in the meantime.

Our new Easter Candle

by Mary Sutherland



This year's Paschal candle follows the theme of the parish Lenten Study "The Spirit in the Desert." Our brightly coloured Australian desert sand has green shoots of new growth after rain.



This is the 11th candle the children at Mark the Evangelist have painted. With this time span the earlier children are now young adults! This project requires great concentration and dexterity at the extremes of what the children can manage. You can see from the pictures the care, concentration and effort they have brought to the task to produce a candle to enhance our worship.



Keeping Children Safe

by Ann Wilkinson

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By now you will all have heard of the policy entitled Keeping Children Safe. It is a policy of our Synod which requires all Uniting Church entities to provide a just and safe culture and environment for children.

Late last year Church Council arranged a training course for those members of the congregation who hold Working with Children Checks, and other interested members. 21 members of our congregation attended a 2-hour session after morning worship. It was an opportunity to spend time thinking together about key tenets of the policy.

Questions discussed included:

- How do we go about promoting a culture of safety?
- The importance of insisting on access, equity and diversity in our dealings with each other.
- The recruitment, training and supervision of those who work and volunteer in our congregation.
- Promoting safety and encouraging appropriate behaviour.
- Encouraging child, family and community participation.

Training will be an ongoing activity as new people become leaders or join the congregation. The next training within our congregation will be conducted by Hotham Mission for its workers and volunteers. There is no doubt that the presence of an increasingly large group of trained people will assist the congregation to become more sensitive to the issues of Safe Church.

Church Council has talked at depth and over several meetings about a Statement of Commitment and a Code of Conduct to support this important program. The most current version of these documents will be considered for signature at the next meeting of Council.

Remember that Church Council members are very interested to hear your views about ways in which we can implement this policy so that our children are always safe. Talk to Church Council members including those elected at our last congregational meeting, or raise your questions with Ann Wilkinson, our Safe Church Contact Person. There is plenty of room for new initiatives. These are early days, and we all need to be involved in influencing our evolving approach to Keeping Children Safe.

News from Church Council

by Tim O'Connor, Chair of Church Council

Annual General Meeting

At the AGM of the Congregation on 12 May four elders were elected to the Church Council: David Radcliffe for a term of two years, Benita Champion and Andrew Gador-Whyte for one year, and Gus MacAulay re-elected for one year. We warmly thank retiring elders Belinda Hopper, whom we also thank for her service as Secretary in the past four years, Maureen Postma and Michael Champion. Peter Blackwood was elected Chairperson of the Congregation and Rod Mummery Secretary of the Congregation and Presbytery Representative.

Several reports were received by the Congregation. Tim spoke on behalf of Church Council's annual report; Craig for Hotham Mission's annual report; as Treasurer Rod recommended the reception of the Auditor's report for the year ended 31 December 2018; and Alan gave an update on the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project as MTEFP Coordinator. As there were no questions or adverse comments on the reports, we will take that as signs of approbation!

Lenten Studies

Held again with St Mary's Anglican Church in North Melbourne, Lenten Studies were on the theme of 'The Spirit in the Desert', the title of a series of talks by Rowan Williams on the faith of the desert monks of the fourth century. The talks were heard by audio through YouTube, while some participants also read Williams' book from the lectures published as 'Silence and Honey Cakes'.



Whether you have taken part in Mark the Evangelist studies lately or not, you are encouraged to join next month's study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'Life Together', a short reflection on the character of Christian community. Our MtE website has details.

Mark the Evangelist Day Lunch

The Congregation's annual Mark the Evangelist Day Lunch was held after worship on 28 April. Drinks were followed by a buffet lunch of dishes provided by members and enjoyed at with seats set in the round at tables. Numbers attending were fewer than last year, as was also the case at the AGM.

Generally speaking, do you think that more reminders and longer notice in advance of events in our calendar are needed? What might otherwise encourage greater participation in important occasions in our congregational life?

Comments, queries and suggestions are invited by the Church Council: Gaye Champion (Chair, Hotham Mission), Benita Champion (Elder), Andrew Gador-Whyte (Elder), Gus MacAulay (Elder), Rod Mummery (Elder and Treasurer), Tim O'Connor (Elder and Chair), David Radcliffe (Elder), Craig Thompson (Minister) and Alan Wilkinson (MTEFP Coordinator).

Mark the Evangelist Futures Project

by Alan Wilkinson, MTEFP Coordinator



Since our report to the Congregation at the Annual General Meeting, some progress has been made towards resolving the heritage issues we are facing, principally in relation to the key 'heritage package' of buildings Union Memorial Church, the Manse and the Elm Street Cottage.

What condition are our heritage buildings in?

Between 2007 and the start of the current stage of our Project, Mark the Evangelist has spent \$600,000 maintaining Union Memorial Church and the Hall. The assessment of the heritage restoration work currently required for the 'heritage package' of buildings has been completed

and costed. The total cost of all renovation works which should be undertaken is around \$2 million, two-thirds of which needs to be spent on 'essential' works to render these three key heritage buildings safe and weatherproof.

Who will undertake the essential heritage works?

Our objective has always been to avoid the necessity for MtE to have to undertake these heritage works. Our Architect and Heritage Consultant, Lovell Chen, has now been advised by Heritage Victoria that these essential heritage works could be covered by a 'bond' which could be transferred to the purchaser of this group of heritage buildings.

What is our subdivision approach?

The Subdivision Plan has been simplified by dividing the Queensberry / Curzon / Elm Street block into four major lots. Lot 1 on the west side will include the Elm Street Church and the land to the north (the former Children's Centre) for the new two-story hall and office space. Lot 2 includes the Elm St Cottage, Union Memorial Church and the Manse (the 'heritage package') which needs to be the first to be sold. Lot 3 includes the five Queensberry St cottages, each with their own title. Lot 4 includes the two-story office block and three apartments on the Queensberry / Curzon corner. Lots 3 and 4 are only to be sold following the sale of the 'heritage package' of buildings (Lot 2).

Church Council on 6 June is likely to endorse this plan.

Is anyone interested to buy the heritage buildings?

Church Council was pleased to hear that the Bastow Institute next door has shown interest in the 'heritage package' (Lot 2). The Institute has a lengthy and involved budget approval process. There is a level of confidence that a suitable framework for negotiation could be established between Bastow and Mark the Evangelist over coming months.

What's the latest on the current work program?

Time to assess the condition of the three key heritage buildings had not been built into the 2018 Stage 3i Program. The latest update indicates that Stage 3i, including both the Subdivision Permit Application and the detailed Schematic Design process, will not be completed until April 2020.

Can we access any grants for our heritage buildings?

This year is the fourth that the State Government has funded a Living Heritage Grant Scheme. Without cost to Mark the Evangelist, Lovell Chen has prepared and applied on our behalf for up to \$200,000 for renovation of the Curzon Street Manse. There is no guarantee we will be successful – but nothing is lost by trying!

Is synod happy with our progress?

When in 2017 Synod Property & Operations Committee (P&OC, formerly the Property Board) approved the start of Stage 3i of our building project, Property Option 5a+ envisaged a one-level hall being constructed to the north of Elm Street Church with the Elm St Cottage being retained by Mark the Evangelist. During Stage 3i our thinking evolved, and we now plan to construct a two-level building and sell the Cottage to raise the extra funds needed. We are therefore preparing a progress report for the P&OC to gauge their comfort with the new direction of divestment and missional space design we are taking in Stage 3i of the MtE Futures Project.

Book Review: Word from Wormingford by Ronald Blythe

review by David Sutherland

This is an entirely enchanting book that I feel sure will appeal to many members of our congregation. Ronald Blythe is probably best known for his sociological studies "Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village", and "The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age". But he is also a reader and lay canon in the Church of England. This book began as a weekly column in the Church Times, where he reflected on his week, but now these have been collected into this charming book.

It is framed by the church year yet firmly grounded in village life and the East Anglian countryside. He mixes events in his very simple daily life with his extensive theological, literary and historical knowledge. We drift seamlessly, guided by the poet's eye, between centuries, places, people and ideas. We are gently amused, constantly informed and often tantalised with passing references to theological ideas or literary themes. It is almost a devotional book, but not in the usual form. Yet, it is perfect to have by your bed to dip into time and time again. I am drifting through it for the second time, while Mary is keenly waiting to start her third reading.

If you think I am exaggerating then please have a chat to Rosemary Wearing!

Noticeboard

June Study Groups

Our study groups will consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'Life Together', a short reflection on the character of Christian community, written when he led a group of pastors-in-training into a small break-away seminary at the beginnings of the Nazi era in Germany. It will serve as a good follow-on from the 'life together' thoughts of the desert monks we considered in the Lenten series.

There will be two study groups:

- North Melbourne: Tuesday evenings June 4 July 2, 7:45pm; location 2 Elm Street
- Hawthorn: Friday Mornings June 7 July 5, 10am at Habitat Augustine, 2 Minona Street, Hawthorn, in the 'sacred space' room.

Full details available on the website.



Uniting Church in Australia
The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist - North Melbourne