



Autumn 2014

Editorial

For this autumn issue of Mark the Word, we invited reflections on loss, grief and renewal – and can only thank God for the generous response. Generous because, even while recounting painful stories, our writers also kept the idea of hope and renewal in mind and shared that too.

The responses did not stop at our congregation and our concerns, but looked to wider issues – with such depth of analysis that I am holding some pieces over for our winter newsletter and an extension of our theme.

But first, Craig both puts Lent into context and suggests ways we might approach it that lift our minds above our chocolate ration. Church Council includes news of the stellar Heather Mathew’s resignation as its Secretary and welcomes her successor, with Council’s packed contribution this season worthy of being a newsletter in itself!

Two of our number write with feeling about a death in the family and, importantly, how this experience, common to us all, might be approached. We are particularly grateful for these contributions.

We keep Akbar in our thoughts, as well as the needs of asylum seekers as Rosalie Hudson explains how our gifts can be the gifts that keep on growing.

Mary Sutherland explains what the exhibition *Melbourne Now!* could teach us about engaging a young audience, while Mary Duckworth tells of the “Messy Church” concept and its wide appeal to all ages.

Writing from her messy study, the idea certainly has an attraction for your editor. With all contributions delivered online, the place still looks as if a whirlwind went through. Whatever happened to the “paperless office” we were promised?

And I haven’t finished yet! Please allow a little time at the end of this long newsletter to find out more about our next thought-provoking Mark the Word. In the meantime, enjoy this issue, which we feel privileged to present to you.

Suzanne

The Discipline of Lent

Lent has traditionally been a period for final preparation of people for entry in Christian life through baptism. More generally, it is also a time for all believers to follow Christ on his path to the cross in preparation for the re-affirmation of their own baptismal vows at Easter.

The focus on the way to the cross gives the Lenten liturgy a more subdued feel than in the post-Christmas and Easter seasons, and Lent has long been a time of focussing on particular spiritual practices, including disciplines of prayer, fasting, study or service. The discipline of Lent can be a matter of giving something up, or taking on something special.

The shape of a personal discipline for Lent can vary greatly; the following are some possibilities.

Reflective and Personal Disciplines

Resolve to spend some time in solitude each day for prayer or study, if this is not already part of your routine.

Commit to reading a book on a theme of faith during Lent. Some suggestions, among many other possibilities are:

Some older books

- *The practice of the presence of God* (Brother Lawrence – quite short)
- *The imitation of Christ* (Thomas a Kempis)
- *Celebration of Discipline* (Richard Foster)

Some more recent books

- *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles our Judgement* (Rowan Williams)
- *Our Sound is Our Wound: Contemplative Listening to a Noisy World* (Lucy Winkett)

Keep a journal of prayers, or of reflections on your reading.

Consider whether there is a need for reconciliation in some of your relationships, and seek guidance through prayer around these matters.

Read right through the gospel for this year's lectionary (Matthew) – 4 or 5 chapters per week.

Plan to attend a seminar or course during Lent that will stretch your faith and understanding.

Take control of your life by:

- taking some time each week, a “Sabbath”, to do something you never get around to;
- dealing with something which has been on your mind, and simply needs to be attended to
- taking an hour to inventory your priorities and plan how to re-order them
- giving up a grudge

Outward and Social Disciplines

Plan a weekly visit to a neighbour or church member who can't get out themselves.

Commit to being in Sunday worship each week during Lent (if you're not already in weekly attendance!).

Write a letter per week to a person of influence on matters of social justice.

Seek Christ's particular call to you in a ministry of service.

Drop something from your life that is a waste of time and money.

Learn something about a distant community in need, and how you might act to help meet that need.

Swear off gossip for the 40 days of Lent (...seriously).

Making a Lenten Commitment

It will help in your decisions about a Lenten discipline if you are quite specific about what you'd like to achieve in the 40 days of Lent. Being specific will help you to be clear about exactly what you will do, and will also free you from the sense that you could also be doing a whole lot of other things. Better one or two things clearly stated and done well than a great many poorly attended to.

However you choose to spend it, may this Lent be for you a time of growing stronger in the love of God and of those around you.

Craig

Church Council Update – February 2014

Since our last report to the congregation, there have been two Church Council meetings, in December and February. Our summary report follows.

Membership

Church Council meetings continue to be very well attended. After 13 years, Heather Mathew has decided to step down as Secretary. She has been a marvellous secretary and we are very fortunate that she is staying on the Council as an Elder. Belinda Hopper has been appointed as the new Secretary and Rod Mummery as Deputy Chair.

An election was held at the Congregational meeting on 2 February resulting in a number of reappointments – Wendy Langmore as an Elder for a further 2 years, Gus Macaulay as an Elder for a further 5 years, and David Sutherland as a Church Councillor for a further year.

Arrangements for congregational meetings

The Church Council has suggested that for future congregational meetings seating should be arranged in a circle to enable easy discussion. It has also been suggested that when possible a projector be used to present information clearly, and that all making comments should use a microphone.

Uniting our Future

Both December and February meetings spent considerable time on this subject. A draft letter to the General Secretary from the Church Council was available for discussion at a congregational meeting on 24 November. As well, two small discussion groups on this topic were held in the week following, each attended by 9 people. As a result of these opportunities for discussion it was decided to express the letter to the General Secretary more strongly. The letter was sent soon after the December Church Council meeting and the final was shared by email to members of the congregation.

Replies were received from the Acting General Secretary and the Chairperson of the UOF Project Control Group. Neither addressed the key issues we had raised to our satisfaction and Church Council decided to write a further letter. The draft was discussed and approved by Church Council at its February meeting, and forwarded to the General Secretary. This will also be emailed to members of the congregation to keep everyone informed of the action being taken.

As a result of Uniting our Future, there has been no progress on our own Restoration and Renewal project. It is hoped that we will soon be able to develop a proposal for an alternative way to finance the work needed on our site.

Naming of Hotham Parish

A paper on this issue was finalised by Church Council and the following recommendation was brought to the 2 February Congregational meeting.

The Congregation of
Mark the Evangelist
Incorporating
UnitingCare Hotham Mission

The naming convention was immediately and unanimously accepted by the congregation. Changes will follow including an updated notice board, a new letterhead for official correspondence, and new internet addresses.

Finance & Property

Peter Rayner has resigned from this Committee and at its January meeting Rod Mummery was appointed the new chair.

As part of the 2014 Budget approved in December, the committee had recommended that the target for the congregation's Mission and Service payment be reduced from the \$40,000, which we have given for several years, to \$20,000. This decision was made because of the urgent need to reduce the deficit budgeting that had been a feature of our operations for some years. Presbytery has been informed. This matter will of course be constantly under review.

Mission and Ministry 2014

The paper, 'Mission and Ministry in 2014', previously called 'Vision, Mission and Goals' is now being used by Church Council as a focus for our planning, having been approved by the congregation in late 2013.

UnitingCare Hotham Mission (UCHM)

UnitingCare Hotham Mission's *Strategic Plan 2013-2015* has been approved by Church Council. Church Council commends this as a constructive and forward-looking strategy framed in the context of financial stringencies. Progress on the UCHM Constitution is well advanced. A model constitution for parish missions was recently approved by Synod, and Hotham Mission Council under the leadership of Gaye Champion is at present producing a Hotham Mission version based on this model.

Future Events for you to note in your diaries

- A Congregational picnic is planned for Sunday 2 March. This will be held at the Australian Native Garden at Royal Park in Parkville after the service. Norma and Rob Gallacher are coordinating. Please let them know if you can come.
- A series of 4 Lenten studies will begin on Wednesday 12 March.
- A workshop is planned for Sunday 30 March after morning worship for an hour and a half on the topic 'Preparing Intercessory Prayers'. The workshop is for Church Council members and others who may be interested.
- Mark the Evangelist Day will be on 27 April. Church Council has decided to invite members of Rochester congregation to visit our congregation for this celebration.
- The 2014 AGM is proposed for Sunday 25 May.

Next Church Council Meeting – Thursday 6 March

Feedback and queries from members of the Congregation will always be welcomed by members of your Church Council: Gaye Champion, Belinda Hopper, Wendy Langmore, Gus Macaulay, Heather Mathew, Rod Mummery, Tim O'Connor, David Sutherland, Craig Thompson, Alan Wilkinson, and Ann Wilkinson.

Ministry at the time of death – a personal account

by Barbara Gayler



My father died at Ipswich Hospice on Saturday 30 November after a long and full life. Although he had been admitted to the small local hospice only ten days earlier, for most of the latter part of the year my sister and brother and I had been taking turns to fly home to Queensland to spend time with him and to support our mother. It was my privilege to be there when he died.

From my experience in hospital and aged care chaplaincy, I knew what a

blessing it can be to conduct a short service at the bedside (usually with family members gathered around) to commend the dying person to God's care. To be prepared for just such an eventuality I always carried with me the small but excellent book of pastoral services produced by the Presbyterian Church of USA (PCUSA).

But it can be a bit tricky to know the right time to offer what can be a seriously confronting service. We knew Dad had been on borrowed time for months, but the hospice staff did not think his death was imminent. His GP, however, had been visiting daily, and when Mum had a routine appointment with him on the Friday morning, he told her bluntly, "I didn't like the look of Bill yesterday. I think it's only a matter of days. I'd be surprised if he lasts till Monday."

Mum was shocked by this assessment, but at least it galvanized us to spend as much time as possible sitting with Dad (not so easy when Mum is almost 93). From then on we were focussed on preparing for Dad's death to the exclusion of other concerns.

I talked with Mum about the service, "Prayer at the Time of Death" and she wanted to go ahead with it. We decided to wait till the early evening – usually a quiet and peaceful time at the hospice after the activity of the day was over. Dad had his eyes closed most of the time now and talking was an effort for him, but when it was getting dark I had a chance to speak with him alone.

At one level he knew that his body was giving out, but at another level he was still fighting the inevitable. "I don't know how I'm going to get out of this place" he had told me a few days earlier.

I informed my father that his doctor was of the opinion that he wouldn't be with us much longer. I also told him about the service of readings and prayers Mum and I would like to offer for him at this time. I was not sure how Dad would respond to this. Although a church member, Dad would not be described as a deeply spiritual or religious person. However he readily agreed for us to proceed with the bedside service.

The service was not long, but it was a very special time for us, especially the solemn prayers of commendation. Dad's eyes were closed most of the time and I wasn't sure how aware he was of his surroundings. Actually he was concentrating intently, and when it came to the Lord's Prayer he struggled valiantly to join in with a weak voice. This was a huge comfort to my mother when Dad was gone.

After the little Friday night service, Dad seemed a lot more peaceful. He seemed to accept that he was dying and that he didn't need to keep fighting. Mum and I spent Saturday sitting quietly at his bedside. We had planned to stay at the hospice till dinnertime before going home for the night, but by mid-afternoon I could see that Mum was tiring. I suggested instead that we go home for a rest and then come back after an early dinner. We remembered what a beautiful time of day this had been the night before.

As we left, Dad made an effort to say something about happy memories of times past and waved us goodbye. When we returned a few hours later he was quite unsettled and calling for assistance. Mum and I sponged his face with a damp cloth and after Dad was settled, we resumed our position at the bedside. Mum had the Bible her own mother had given her 70 years previously, but when I noticed that she was simply staring at an open page, I offered to take the Bible and read from it aloud.

I was reading the passage from Isaiah 25 ("The Lord will swallow up death forever") when the nurse sitting by the bedside reminded me that my brother in Melbourne had phoned earlier for an update on Dad's condition. I stepped outside the room and spoke to my brother for a few minutes when the nurse came running out to tell me to come quickly. Dad's breathing had changed and she didn't need to tell me that Dad's death was imminent.

I told Dad that my brother loved him and that we all loved him as I took the trusty PCUSA book of daily prayer from my handbag and quickly flipped to the office for the close of the day. I just had time to say the Nunc Dimittis (the short canticle of Simeon from Luke 2: "Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace") and pronounce the blessing while marking Dad's forehead with the sign of the cross. My hand was still on his head when he stopped breathing and the nurse said softly, "He's gone".

I am aware of the pain of sudden death, where there is no warning, no time to say goodbye or make any preparations at all. However, I feel immensely privileged that I was able to be with my father when he died and especially that I was able to offer spiritual sustenance from the rich resources of the Christian tradition at such an important time.

I am only sorry that the availability of such resources is not more widely known, as in my experience, few non-Catholics think to call for their minister when a loved one is dying. To me this is very sad and says to me that church members assume that the church has nothing to offer, at least not until after the death has occurred and a funeral is needed.

I don't know what happens in the United States, but the instructions accompanying the PCUSA service are clear: *'When death is near, the pastor and other officers of the church should be notified so that the ministry of the church may be offered to the dying person and the family'*. Would that more church members would act on this excellent advice!

My Brother John: The Ghost Child

by Cynthia L Schultz

No, I am not referring to the John who became like a brother to many of us as our pastor at Mark the Evangelist congregation over a period of years.

Rather, I refer to my brother, John Louis Weiss, born in 1925. As with us all, my formative experiences influenced my pathways through life. Perhaps one of the most significant influences for me was the death of John, my elder brother, at the age of 10 years and 8 months, when I was just turning 2 years, my other “big” brother Noel aged 7 years, and my baby sister Yvonne 8 months.

I am keenly aware that I by no means have a prior claim on how loss and grief influence a person’s life. Encounters with loss and trauma are common to us all, and grief is a universal response to loss. However, I hope that in sharing some of my personal experiences I may bring some degree of comfort and solace into other lives.

We three remaining children grew up in a home permeated with John’s presence, not only with stories and photos but also with weekly visits to the cemetery after church on Sundays to attend John’s grave. I loved the stories of how John delighted in his baby sisters and the photo of Cynthia on his knee on the backyard swing. Another frequent story told was how my Father had dreamt of having John join him eventually in his structural engineering business and of his second son entering the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

At least the latter part of that dream was realised, with my brother Noel ultimately becoming a lecturer in systematic theology, and later, vice-principal at Luther Seminary, Adelaide, until his retirement from full-time ministry.

The practice of visits to John’s grave continued until we moved to another suburb in Adelaide, when I was about 10 years of age, when distance rendered such frequency unfeasible. I well remember, and have often read with wonder, the words chosen for John’s grave stone from Job 1:21: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”.

In writing that verse, I am reminded of the text chosen by my Mother from Philippians 4:4 for her own funeral notice: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” What a faith! What a wonderful spirit! She wore a locket around her neck which held a photo of John inside, a piece of jewellery eventually fondly kept in my sister’s home until it was stolen during a break-in and theft, a loss keenly felt for obvious sentimental reasons.

All in all, the brother whom I barely knew has been a presence all my life. I have often found myself thinking about how life would have been for our whole family if John had lived on, and I am sure my parents and siblings thought along the same lines. And so, the proverb from Greenland that “If you hush up a ghost, it grows bigger” did not prove correct in my case. If anything, the acknowledged hovering served to increase my brother’s presence considerably.

Hence, the term “ghost child” was chosen for this piece, a term that I encountered as I delved into the literature many years later. It captures the sense of haunting that I have known for as long as I can remember.



John with his baby sister Cynthia on the occasion of her baptism

Given that there was yet another tragedy concerning close family members with which I grew up, it does not surprise me that loss, grief, and caring relationships became one area of particular focus in my practice as a psychologist. Indeed, that became the title of the elective subject that I was encouraged to offer to health science and medical students during my years as an academic.

The other tragedy to which I refer concerned my Father's five maiden cousins, all long deceased, with whom my parents were always in close touch. Three of these women remained single almost certainly because of their being confined to wheel-chairs due to congenital disability and therefore being dependent throughout their lives on the loving care of their two sisters, for whom marriage under the circumstances was simply beyond consideration.

Closely observing these courageous women— these “aunties” to us children— had a profound impact on me. The two sisters, who became the sole carers once their parents had died, had clearly defined their separate roles: Viola was the bread-winner and car-driver (of a car especially fitted out to cater for the transport of the five of them and the three wheel-chairs (imagine the lifting!); Sylvia was, in today's parlance, the “stay-at-home-Mum”.

Thanks to the special car facilities, it was possible for all five women to take outings at the weekends, which often included visits to our family home. Our home and garden were also the venue for post-funeral gatherings, as one by one, the three cared-for persons died as they reached middle age. As a little girl, I remember the hushed tones and weeping of adults at those gatherings. Illustrative of the close family ties is the fact that Viola was my godmother. Apart from the lessons learnt in loss, grief, and caring, as a teenager I became terrified of becoming an “old-maid”!

In conclusion, for those readers who are still with me, I share a few thoughts gleaned over the years in relation to loss, grief, and caring relationships and written about extensively in numerous publications. *

Although grief is the universal response to loss, the particular response remains unique to each individual, being dependent on many concurrent and antecedent factors, such as personality, personal and family history, available support systems and so on. No two people will respond in quite the same way and there is no one “right way”. For instance, I was told that when John died my Mother was unable to shed tears; a response noted and frowned upon by others who expected loud demonstrations of grief.

Another telling example is that related to whether or not to take up the option of viewing the body of the deceased loved one. There are those inclined, albeit well-meaning, to put pressure on another to choose what they themselves found useful, disregarding or unaware of the individual nature of the situation. However, what we do have in common is that the experience of major loss, whether it is through death or any other of the numerous ways in which loss and trauma occur, has an impact on the whole person.

Living with loss affects us across all the interacting dimensions of our being: the physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual. But life goes on despite what has happened. In certain respects, living with loss forces adaptation. Working towards the best possible outcome is incredibly hard work.

Referred to in the literature as “grief work”, it involves overcoming fears and dreads and asserting control in the face of extreme difficulties. It means redefining or modifying hopes and dreams, a personal experience for me recently when my brother Noel died before I was able to realise my plan to spend time with him in Adelaide. Some years ago, my much-younger-than-me close colleague and co-author, Elizabeth Bruce, wept bitterly as she lay dying, having so much wanted to continue our collaboration. I share her sorrow to this day. Writing about these

personal experiences reminds me of how important it is to respect the place that grief will always have in a person's life.

The process of adapting means attempting to bridge gaps or fill voids at several levels: between the old and the new self; between generations, family members, and friends, who may not be familiar with the words to use or the approach to take in offering support; between self and others who are in similar situations; between self and professionals who are there to offer support.

As well as crossing bridges, it also means building shelters. These shelters are not always immediately apparent or available or within control. They may include finding adequate support, giving oneself permission to grieve and to express that grief, recognising the quietness and solitude that may be required by the loss, centring on the moment that now is rather than dwelling on lost opportunities, and finding purpose and meaning in life. For many of us, the greatest of shelters continues to be "the everlasting arms".

*By way of example:

-Bruce, E.J., & Schultz, C.L. (2001). *Nonfinite loss and grief: A psycho-educational approach*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Co-publishers: Sydney, Australia. MacLennan & Petty; London, UK, Jessica Kingsley.

-Bruce, E.J., & Schultz, C.L. (2004). *Through loss*. Melbourne, Victoria: ACER Press.

-Schultz, C.L., & Schultz, N.C. (1998). *The care giving years*. Melbourne: ACER Press.

Akbar: our neighbour in need

Members of the congregation are now well acquainted with the story of at least one asylum seeker 'on our doorstep'. Akbar, a young Iranian man, fled persecution in 2009. As a stateless Faili Kurd, he has no identification and received no formal education. After nearly four years in detention (Christmas Island, Maribyrnong and Broadmeadows) he was released on a bridging visa on the eve of the September 2013 elections. His release came in response to repeated appeals and a comprehensive submission to the (then) Minister for Immigration.

Although he is now "free" from detention (albeit with no hope of a permanent visa) his future remains uncertain as he struggles to find his way in a strange land, with no regular income or permanent accommodation. Under the present government's harsh rules he will never be permitted to see his family in Iran (even if he could afford the fare!); he remains in danger of persecution (or execution) if he returns voluntarily.

In spite of the serious physical and psychological damage as a direct result of four years' incarceration in Australia, Akbar is proving very resilient and highly motivated to learn English and make a contribution through regular employment and paying tax. In an effort to improve his health he has ceased all his "detention drugs" (quite high doses of antidepressants and psychotropic drugs commonly given to asylum seekers) and he has had no episodes of self-harm since his release.

These episodes, including horrifying suicide attempts, demonstrate the desperation he (and many others) experience as a direct result of their desperation, loneliness, hopelessness and abandonment, arising from long-term incarceration and repeated rejection of visa applications. The research is clear: those who are involuntarily confined under these conditions inevitably

suffer irreparable damage. As Akbar says, “I did not pay \$6,000 to come to Australia to be imprisoned (for no crime) for four years.” He believes he now deserves a fair hearing for permanent protection.

Every other person who arrived by boat with him in 2009 has a permanent visa. Those working permanently with asylum seekers believe it is quite unrealistic (under the recent government changes) to offer any signs of hope that Akbar, and the thousands of others like him, will have their claims treated favourably.

Akbar’s current state of (comparative) good health is, I believe, a direct result of him feeling loved, supported, cared for and prayed for. Since coming to Australia he has had a regular turnover of case managers and now has none (due to funding restrictions); so he has lacked any continuity of care.

According to Pamela Curr, the campaign director for the ASRC (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre), those who know Akbar’s case intimately now declare it “a miracle” that he has survived thus far. ‘None of us thought he would make it on the “outside”’, she told me recently. One significant key to his survival is the regular cash he receives from the very generous donations of members at Mark the Evangelist. I have been advised this is a key factor to combat the common experience of abandonment, not to mention poverty: to receive as little as \$50 per week regularly and with no strings attached provides a significant sense of freedom and hope.

Donations from the congregation are deposited in an “Akbar” bank account (any income into his own account must be declared regularly to Immigration and would not be to his advantage), so your generosity guarantees him cash for the foreseeable future. Cash donations are also used to purchase Myki cards and mobile phone cards (two of the life lines for asylum seekers); and to purchase some Persian treats he could not otherwise afford.

For his part, Akbar sends money to his parents in Iran whenever he can. He is also burdened by the \$6,000 debt he owes for his “ticket” to Australia. In spite of these challenges, his thoughtful generosity extends to his Iranian friends who remain in detention. “I know about detention food”, he tells me, as he describes the food he cooks for them when he is able to visit.

Together with sincere gratitude for the cash and material aid, Akbar continues to express his thanks for the prayers of the congregation and for your interest in him. Akbar is also enjoying the benefits of John Hood’s friendship, with practical support in a variety of ways. While there are many thousands of asylum seekers who need our help, Akbar is the one we know. Perhaps he is ‘the one’ sent to us as our neighbour in need. Most of all, we continue to give thanks to God who, in Jesus Christ, is neighbour to us all.

Many thanks to members of the congregation who have continued to donate cash to the ASP (Asylum Seeker Project). This practical giving translates into food vouchers distributed at their discretion to asylum seekers in the community struggling on little or no income. The Uniting Church Share Appeal will double donations for food vouchers in excess of \$100, so it is now easier to collect cash rather than vouchers. Donations of any amount will be gratefully received on the first Sunday of each month.

Rosalie Hudson

What Melbourne Now can teach us



The lively and engaging program currently welcoming children to the National Gallery of Victoria seems to have a lot to tell us about how children can be included and engaged at church too.

The gallery has been rather a place for children to be dragged along and expected to be cooperative and quiet without really understanding why the attendants are glaring at them and why it is so interesting to their

grandparents. The parallels with church are obvious.

Melbourne Now turns that experience on its head! This is more about why we go to the gallery with chances for hands on participation. For instance everyone is encouraged to be inside the tepee as being there activates the harmonics of the structure. I saw a toddler clapping her hands in delight in front of the shining magenta and orange strips in the foyer at St Kilda Rd. These are authentic experiences of both engagement and looking and they are similar to the engagement we should be seeking for our children at church.

Being welcome is the first. Any child tires of being shushed and their parents don't enjoy it either. Helping them understand why we all come to church and how things are done is part of it. This is well covered by Craig's excellent short children's addresses. More than just the children are leaning forward attentively to hear what new thing he is telling us all. There is an opportunity when we are out in the cottage for 30 minutes or so to explore a story quite boisterously by building, acting, drawing and asking questions. This can be fun because the children can relax and let off steam. Because we have varying age groups from our usual pre-schoolers to prep and then occasional grades 5 & 6 and beyond, with parents too, we have to be prepared to morph into an all ages event at about 10 seconds notice!

The key is that the learning is not passive and we welcome surprising questions. If we can't answer them we have the most amazing resources in our congregation and many who would welcome a challenging question. It must be part of our program to lovingly engage in growing our children's understanding of our faith, which is so important to us all.

Mary Sutherland

When is Messy good? When it's Church!

As one of their websites tells us: Messy Church is a way of being church for families involving fun. Its values are about being Christ-centred, for all ages, based on creativity, hospitality and celebration. And it is found across the world.

In reality Messy Church is a vibrant happy gathering with meetings for non-churchgoers and churchgoers. Very different from Sunday School as the children from 0-12 have to be accompanied by a parent or carer.

My daughter runs one in London once a month. She relies on helpers who set it up in the crypt of the church with activities (often messy things not encouraged at home!) for different ages

groups. It starts at 3pm running for one and a half hours. Everyone wears a name tag and children and grown-ups gravitate to whatever interests them.

When it has been going for a while, tea, coffee, soft drinks cakes and biscuits (all nut-free) are available, with tables and chairs set up around the room. Parents tend to chat and the children play and eat.

Soon after 4pm, those who wish gather in a quiet room with cushion seating and have a very short Christian service, usually with Power Point pictures, and sing a couple of choruses to a guitar accompaniment. The Vicar blesses the gathering and everyone leaves usually smiling.



Messy Church in St. Paul's Cathedral London

On a Saturday the end of January the London Diocese invited 650 people from their Messy Churches to come and enjoy Messy Church under the Dome. (No glitter, paint, or glue!). Great success!

My daughter ran an area where children and grown-ups decorated footsteps leading to the painting *The Light of the World*. Ordinary tourists joined in and wanted to know more about it. I think the bishop took the short service, at the end.

It is not necessary to have children in the congregation to start a Messy Church, just advertise it locally because any one with children is welcome to come along. It does not have to be on a Sunday either.

Who pays for it? There is a box for a gold coin donation but the church picks up the cost.

What are the problems? At first getting enough volunteers, to help on Sunday afternoons. Those who do it enjoy it and become regulars. There is a fair amount of clearing up, fathers and partners tend to help shifting the chairs and tables. When I have been there I really feel we are a great big family.

It is worth a try. Start small; there is a need for it out there. Visit some of the Melbourne Messy Church afternoons and look on their websites for good ideas. Ask Lauren Mosso and Mark Duckworth who have seen them in action. I am sure we could do it.

Mary Duckworth

What's on

ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday 5 March 6.00 pm

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

Sunday 13 April 10.00 am

- Procession with Palms
Eucharist

TRIDUUM (The Three Days)

- **Maundy Thursday**
Thursday 17 April 7.30 pm
Eucharist, Foot Washing
- **Good Friday**
Friday 18 April 10.00 am
- **Easter Vigil**
Saturday 19 April
8.00 pm
The New Fire, Eucharist

EASTER DAY

Sunday 20 April 10.00 am

Eucharist

MARK THE EVANGELIST DAY

Sunday 27th April

Details to be advised

CONGREGATIONAL AGM

Sunday 25th May

Looking ahead...

As flagged in the editorial there are even more ideas to canvass, particularly on the concept of renewal. Some are controversial, as Alan Wilkinson found in an article by Callum Denness suggesting that “Paternalism never has, and never will work for Aboriginal people.”

The idea that governments must find ways to give back autonomy to Aboriginal communities and enable them to participate in and claim ownership of the solutions to the serious disadvantage they continue to face, is one to be seen in the annual “Closing the Gap” Report. It was responded to by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, on Thursday 13 February 2014, the anniversary of the 2008 National Apology delivered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

Alan presents this issue in the winter edition of Mark the Word.

Bill Mathew explains the concept of GNH, Gross National Happiness, and the country that champions it. And the world's greatest living Chinese composer, Maestro Tan Dun, tells me about the thinking behind his new *Resurrection Concerto*.

Another great issue coming up ... with your deadline just 10 weeks away! Please be kind to me and our excellent, long-suffering producer Rod Mummery (thanks again, Rod!), and get your contribution in on time.

All the best until then,

Suzanne Yanko



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