



**Autumn 2016**

*Welcome to this thought-provoking issue of our newsletter, with a rather different structure than usual.*

*It centres on a report about Our Mark the Evangelist Futures Project (MTEFP), which is reaching a pivotal stage. At a Congregational meeting on 20 March, we will receive for the first time a narrowed down list of three options for our consideration. This report, prepared by Alan Wilkinson on behalf of the working group, suggests a framework for thinking about the relevant issues and choosing the best option.*

*Craig's letter guides our reading of this major document, and together these items form the core of the newsletter. There are two others: they appear unrelated to each other, and to the "business" of the newsletter and yet, a theme has emerged. In describing our 2016 liturgical candle, Mary Sutherland tells of a beautiful locked church in a tiny hamlet in Umbria and the structurally and culturally important crypt belonging to the Commune (which refuses to repair it).*

*Finally, we cross the world and come closer to home and our time, to Treasure Island, a Fijian-owned and run resort. Even before the hurricane it had a pressing need which we at Mark the Evangelist could easily meet. It isn't about frescoes or buildings just books. Please read the newsletter right through to the end so I can tell you the story.*

*I expect by now you've guessed our theme for Autumn!  
Enjoy this season of "mists and mellow fruitfulness".  
Suzanne Yanko,  
Editor*

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## **Our 2016 liturgical candle**

by Mary Sutherland



This year the cross on our liturgical candle comes from part of a crumbling former Benedictine Monastery we saw in Bardi Petoia in Umbria, on the way to Montone. Our friend Lucia came across this remnant church and its Romanesque carvings when she was cycling round Umbria in central Italy. The cloisters are ruined and full of weeds. The beautiful locked church in this tiny hamlet belongs to the Diocese but the structurally and culturally important crypt on which it rests belongs to the Commune which refuses to repair it.

In the church are some very early Romanesque carvings including mermen holding fish and this lovely little Byzantine cross. You can see the building is very high so flowers for a wedding were marvellous balls of white hydrangeas on the steep steps to the sanctuary.



Dom Vito the priest had been there 45 years and only warmed to visitors when he could see "they love my church." He is greatly burdened by the crumbling crypt which is sealed, damp and unsafe but full of Romanesque treasures. This local impasse between church and state in the Upper Tiber Valley is deeply rooted in the history of Italy and seems nearly insoluble. It makes our problems at Mark the Evangelist seem minor!



When our candle is finished we plan to email a picture of it to Lucia in Italy to give to Dom Vito. We want him to know that even in Australia we remember the beauty of his church and we are celebrating it with this candle.

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### One thing needful

by Craig Thompson

We have a big year ahead of us at Mark the Evangelist. In some senses, the church ought always to be having "big years", even if some in fact end up being more mundane than others! The particular thing which will wax large to make this year bigger than or at least very different from others is the approaching congregational conversation and decision-making about the future shape of our shared life as the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist.

This is, in some respects, a property-related discussion but it is also very much a mission-related discussion which touches on every aspect of the life and sense of identity of the congregation. The process we are employing to make this decision is very well described in Alan's piece in this edition of MtW. What follows here from me is something of a "thinking out loud" about the *kind* of decision we are going to have to make.

Our study is enquiring into two basic options for the congregation, assuming that a third option doing nothing about the condition of Union Memorial Church (UMC) is irresponsible. These two options are basically:

1. Stay and develop our site in some way, repairing UMC and setting up a church plant for the next couple of generations. This "Stay" option would involve developing and/or selling parts of the property, renovating UMC and linking it to the hall, or building other congregational and UnitingCare Hotham Mission accommodation onsite, all in a number of possible variations. Or
2. sell the site and find alternative accommodation for the congregation and Hotham Mission. This "Go" option might mean finding alternative accommodation by purchasing another site (possibly a space suitable for conversion for our needs, possibly a "clean" site on which we build); or becoming tenants on a suitable site; or combining with another congregation (UCA or ecumenically).

The ongoing property options study we have commissioned is focussed principally on the onsite options. It will specify in some detail just what could be financially viable onsite, and what kinds of risks would be in place for any viable options. In relation to the offsite options, our present study

can really only advise on what we might yield in a full site sale, and something of the likely costs were we to attempt to purchase or rent at another location.

To some extent, our choice to stay or go will be directed by the finances and risks involved: some options will simply be too expensive or risky. Yet finances will not determine for us what to choose. For any onsite options which do look viable, we will still have to weigh up factors like the ongoing significance of the Curzon Street site for the congregation and its mission, in terms of location, church heritage, visibility and accessibility, and these factors over against considerations related to the money invested in such buildings as these and future flexibility on the site. Even if we could afford to stay onsite, we remain free to consider it better to leave.

It is also important to recognise that while we may be faced with a choice between an onsite and an offsite option, these are choices for quite different kinds of things. A decision for an onsite future will be quite specific about the future shape of Mark the Evangelist in terms of property and identity. In particular, we will know from the moment of that choice that we will *remain* "Mark the Evangelist", in our "own" space, whatever specific shape that space will be. More particularly, we will remain free to do our "own" thing liturgically, theologically, communally and in relation to Hotham Mission, among other things. It might be a long ride, but the destination would be clear.

By contrast, this is not guaranteed in the offsite option. Re-accommodation will require a suitable site to be found. One particular offsite UCA location for our accommodation has been mentioned in our congregational discussions already, which I'll not name specifically here as that location has not yet been consulted, and we do best to not to commit the proposal to print before the location is consulted! This mysterious allusion aside, it would be an "easy" and straightforward option if we could swing it, and one we could take up almost immediately.

If, however, it could not be realised, we would then have a long process of working through other site options or congregational amalgamations. Among these other options would be some which provided us with our "own" space, while others would involve negotiating with other church communities. But we need to keep in mind that what we might *not* be able to do is say, "We will move offsite *if* we can move to [wherever], but otherwise we'll go with an onsite options". This is because "wherever" might not actually be available. The offsite choice may be committing ourselves to a journey of discovery of a new home.

In this journey there are two principal possible ends. We can seek to accommodate ourselves, which then raises questions about how we decide what is a good location, or whether we actually want a permanent location and would be willing to be a little less secure because of other freedoms this would entail. For example, renting a suitable worship space in a commercial building might be cheaper than building and maintaining our own property, releasing money for other ministries and freeing us to upsize or downsize our space as required. Alternatively, we might seek to amalgamate with another congregation (UCA or ecumenical), which could risk losing something of what is valued at MtE if it involves a (re)negotiation between ourselves and another of church cultures. This doesn't have to be bad, but we should be aware that it might be part of the deal.

The point of all this is not to prejudice our thinking in one direction or another, but to state clearly at least some aspects of what we are deciding for, when it comes to decision. Deciding to stay onsite includes deciding for ongoing and relatively unchallenged identity, with commitments to the ongoing maintenance of these buildings and the limitations they might impose. Going offsite could liberate us at some levels, and could be very challenging and demanding at others.

The important thing is, however, that neither the present property options study nor the wider implications of one choice or the other can make our decision for us. *What matters* in making our decision is not merely the money or the location or the identity but precisely the question, "What matters?" And so, as we move into this discussion now with fuller intent, we need first as individuals to have a clear sense of what matters to us: what it is which most needs to be preserved and what it is which most needs to be enabled by the decision we make. This will necessarily be a "first as individuals" determination, although it will then need to be negotiated within the wider community of the congregation, employing such a peaceable wisdom as I've spoken about before.

This won't be easy. It is not easy to identify what is central and indispensable to a culture or a relationship when we are already in it and there are many quite dispensable but nevertheless worthwhile things going on. What matters? What must be preserved, or enabled? As we work together on the task now at hand balancing budgets and travel times and aesthetics and energy levels and the sheerly idiosyncratic we need to be working towards saying what the "one thing needful" (Luke 10.42) is which is being honoured in our decision. Then we will be free to decide.

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## Mark the Evangelist Futures Project

by Alan Wilkinson

### Frequently Asked Questions



Our Mark the Evangelist Futures Project (MTEFP) is reaching a pivotal stage. At a Congregational meeting on 20 March, we will receive for the first time a narrowed down list of three options for our consideration. This article provides a re-cap' of what the project is all about, the key steps which are being followed, and how it is likely to unfold into the future. It is presented like a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), much of which you may have seen on the MtE website last year. Skim through the headings and find the question that is most relevant for you.

#### What is the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project (MTEFP)?

The MTEFP is the work we are doing as a congregation to discover the most effective way to utilise the capital resources we have, both property and cash reserves. Part of this work is aimed at discovering the best thing we can do about the condition of our church building, although the church building is not the only property "issue" we face. Many of the buildings on the Curzon Street site are in need of considerable overhaul. In addition, the isolation of the church from the hall and the office space also greatly affects the usefulness of the buildings for many activities.

#### Is the MTEFP simply a property question?

The MTEFP is not simply a property question. An important part of the process so far has been clarifying via our "MtE Mission Futures" document who we are as a congregation and what ministries we expect to be exercising over the next generation. Identifying the likely resources we will have to support our congregation in mission is the basic purpose of the MTEFP.

#### What is the expected outcome of the MTEFP?

Quite simply, without knowing precisely what shape the recommendations will take, at the end of the whole process we will have a secure position from which to continue in mission for the next generation.

#### Why are we doing this feasibility study?

The congregation has in its care a large suite of buildings: a prominent church which is currently unusable, and many other buildings which are in reasonable condition and are fully used but which will continue to be costly to renovate and maintain. Good stewardship and the possibility of realising more resources for mission including ministry, demands that we tend to the question of our buildings and finances now.



### **Why have we engaged external consultants?**

The configuration of the resources we currently have and the challenges the future is likely to present to the congregation are quite complex. We have engaged competent consultants in order to:

- provide the congregation and Presbytery with an informed understanding of the widest possible range of property options which could enhance mission including ministry;
- inform us of the financial potential of the options so that we can be confident that resources are allocated to achieve the best outcome in relation to our ministry plans and a financially responsible future, taking into consideration such things as maintenance and insurance, future cash flow needs, and the risks involved in particular options;
- establish a clear and defined implementation plan, with support from UCA Property Services to minimise the workload for the congregation; and
- enable us to maintain and expand our mission priorities with property issues having been resolved.

### **Who is doing the work this study requires?**

The scope of the work which needs to be undertaken is beyond the competence of the congregation itself. Accordingly the first stage of the project is being undertaken as a partnership between the congregation (represented by Church Council), Synod Property Services, and a property advisory consultancy firm (SEMZ) to do the site assessment and identify the most appropriate way forward. The project is being overseen by a project control group (PCG) which includes Church Council members, Synod and Presbytery representatives, and the property advisory consultancy, SEMZ. The Church Council representatives are Alan Wilkinson (Councillor, Project Coordinator, and Chair of the PCG), Maureen Postma (Councillor), Rod Mummery (Elder and Congregation Chair) and Greg Hill (MtE Administrator). Work done by Church Council and the congregation on our Mission Futures is being included in the analysis, as is other material prepared in connection with our earlier Church renovation plans. There have been and will be further occasions on which the congregation will be asked to receive progress reports and be consulted on next steps.

### **Who makes the final decision?**

Church Council is committed to the outcome of this project being one which reflects the needs and desires of Mark the Evangelist. The formal approval of each stage of the process is being done by Church Council after consultation with the congregation. Members will be asked to consider and approve the preferred way forward on the basis of recommendations and next steps.



### **How are we going to go about determining the preferred option?**

The process is one of constant consultation between the congregation, the Presbytery, the Synod and the project consultant. The PCG advises Church Council on recommendations developed with the project consultant. Church Council is the formal decision-making body at the critical stages, but will only act in response to congregation input at these points.

The project can be considered in two stages the first stage is a study of various property options, ranging from development of the Curzon Street site to sale and relocation. These will include such scenarios as developing current buildings or available land into more productive sources of income

from residential or commercial facilities. The options of a partial or complete sale of the property will be included in the analysis.

The second stage follows the necessary Synod approvals and involves the implementation of the preferred option for our future way forward.

### **How long will it take?**

We have spent six months on the first stage of the project already and it will continue for another six months to August 2016. The congregation will have time in March and April to consider very carefully what is proposed. If the second stage is a develop-and-renovate option, it will take as long as design, permit approvals and actual construction require (several years). If the second stage is the property divestment and re-location option for the congregation, it may still take one or two years until we are resettled somewhere else.

### **What steps is the Options Study following?**

1. Establish our congregation's Mission Objectives and with the consultant establish what we want the study to achieve.
2. Identify preliminary property options.
3. Agree broad configurations of buildings for each of the property options.
4. The type, cost and return from each option to be detailed by the consultant who with further analysis is to produce a short list of options for the consideration of the congregation.
5. Final report prepared for Synod approval, and plan of action established.

### **When and what were the mission objectives we established?**

The congregation worked on developing its mission objectives between October 2014 and February 2015; they are summarised in the MtE Mission Futures document (February 2015) under the following headings:

- Being Served: Faithful Christian Worship
- Being Served: Diverse spiritual expressions
- Serving the Community Service
- Serving the Community Evangelism
- Serving the wider Church

### **What were the preliminary property options which were identified?**

On 22 November 2015 the congregation reviewed and commented on a status quo option and three other main property options to be explored:

Option 0: Status Quo – stay as we are at present;

Option 1: sell the whole site (and purchase, lease or amalgamate elsewhere);

Option 2: develop then sell the entire site (and purchase, lease or amalgamate elsewhere); and

Option 3: stay and sell (or develop and sell) two thirds of the site and renovate the Church.

### **What were the broad configurations of buildings for each property option?**

On the basis of advice from the heritage and town planning consultants, the highest value (maximum return for MtE) configurations took the form of residences up to a maximum height of four stories.

### **How did the consultant arrive at a short list of options for the consideration of the Congregation?**

The type, estimated cost and return to MtE from each option was detailed by SEMZ with the assistance of various specialist consultants. All options were analysed further to take into account market factors (development funding, saleability, etc.), risk analysis, and the financial impact of each on MtE's long-term budget situation. The status quo option (Option 0) established the congregation's starting financial position against which the relative benefits of each option was compared. On the basis of this analysis, the Project Control Group has presented to Church Council a Strategic Property Options Analysis report which identifies the base case (Option 0) and two other options as worthy of consideration.

### **When is the Congregation going to have the opportunity to consider this report?**

A Congregational meeting to receive the Options Analysis report is scheduled for Sunday 20 March 2016. A summary of the 2 cm thick report will be circulated to members of the congregation once it has been considered by Church Council on 3 March.

### **Will the 20 March Congregational meeting be required to decide its preferred option on that day?**

No. The purpose of this meeting is to present the Report and its conclusions and allow members to seek initial clarification. Members will already have the written summary (and the full report if requested). Following the presentation and discussion on 20 March, small group gatherings will be arranged for further discussion during April to provide the widest possible opportunity for congregational consideration of the Report and its implications for our life together in the future.

### **Who will decide on the preferred option?**

The preferred option must be decided by the congregation. This decision will shape our future. Our full participation in and ownership of that decision is critical. A further Congregational meeting is scheduled for Sunday 1 May at which the congregation's preferred property option will be determined. This indicative decision will be formally approved by Church Council at its meeting on 5 May 2016.

### **What is the final report for Synod and plan of action?**

This is the formal conclusion of the process and involves establishing a plan of action and presenting the Business Case for the preferred option to the various Synod authorities for approval.

### **Is MtE involved with the Business Case?**

Yes. The Business Case will be considered by Church Council on 7 July 2016 for recommendation to the congregation at a meeting scheduled for 31 July. After Church Council's formal approval of the congregation's decision, the document will be forwarded to the Synod authorities for approval.

### **What happens after Synod approval?**

Once approved by Synod authorities, what happens next in the second stage of the project will depend on what the congregation has decided about the future it wishes to follow. Its decision on 1 May will be critical.

### **How can I find out more?**

Talk to Alan, Maureen, Rod, Greg, Craig, or any of our church councillors.

*Editor's note: Thanks to Alan for putting together this comprehensive document (and in such a way that it needed virtually no editing!)*



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## **Treasure Island**

by Suzanne Yanko



Now to complete the picture ... a trip to an exotic island! Just recently, before Hurricane Winston hit, my daughter Jess, her boyfriend and three children (between them) had a low-key holiday at the magically named Treasure Island in Fiji. As

the emphasis was on local activities, they were all invited to attend the village church. The singing was rich in harmony, but the books being used (whether Bibles, prayer or hymn books) were in a dreadful state, missing covers and even pages, with many people sharing the few they had.

**Jess reported this, with the query: couldn't your church do something for them, mum?**

**Hold that thought.**

Late last month, Fiji suffered a disaster, as reported in The Guardian. "Cyclone Winston, the worst storm recorded in the southern hemisphere, left 42 people dead, according Fiji's National Disaster Management Office. The category-five storm also left many without water and it could be weeks before electricity is restored in some areas."

Treasure Island resort was badly hit, but the management of the resort has its eye across the needs of the people, as evident from this letter ...

"Sad news as we continue to update our list of damages to homes of Treasure and Bounty staff. So far we have received reports from 61 members of staff, with more than 50 reporting extensive damage to roofs. With the heavy rains we experienced alongside Tropical Cyclone Winston, loss of roofing means that for most of our staff, their personal belongings, electrical items, and furnishings are also damaged or destroyed. As kitchens in Fiji are often located outside the main house many staff have also lost their entire kitchen due to it being blown away!"

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*Treasure has a Staff Recovery Fund, and later in this newsletter there's information about the Uniting Church's Appeal. But I am still keen to pursue the question of books for the Church. I have made contact with a Church councillor to find out what they need, the cost etc. (It seems that it will be best to send money as the local language books will be sourced in Fiji).*

*Please think about helping me in this project. I'll use the pew sheets for updates on what we need to do. In the meantime, if you prefer to give through the Uniting Church, the details are at the end of this newsletter.*

*I'll sign off, with thanks to our contributors, and Rod for making a coherent whole of this newsletter. Oh, and our theme? What do we really need to worship in the way that we should?*

*I hope we find the answer!*

*Best wishes,*

*Suzanne*

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## **Share Appeal for Fiji**

From: **Angela Goodwin**

Angela.Goodwin@victas.uca.org.au

Date: 2016-02-25 9:06 GMT+11:00

Subject: Share Fiji Cyclone Appeal

Good morning,

In response to the recent cyclone in Fiji Share has launched an emergency appeal to support the people and communities affected. Please find attached a pastoral letter from the Moderator and appeal materials.





Donations will support UnitingWorld's partner, the Methodist Church in Fiji. The Methodist Church is the largest denomination in the country, covering an extensive network across 55 districts. Funds will be forwarded to UnitingWorld and used to support the Methodist Church's relief efforts, including re-establishing healthcare and schools, replanting crops and livelihoods and building back better' to safeguard communities against future cyclones.

If individuals wish to give a donation they can do so online by visiting [www.shareappeal.org.au](http://www.shareappeal.org.au). Please note that we are currently experiencing difficulties with the website and are working to have it resolved as soon as possible.

Donations can also be made by calling 1800 668 426. Cheques and money orders can be sent to Share, PO Box 24154, Melbourne, Vic, 3001.

Regards,

Angela Goodwin

Director

SHARE

130 Little Collins St Melbourne 3000

t (03) 9251 5248 | f (03) 9251 5491

[www.shareappeal.org.au](http://www.shareappeal.org.au)

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## Noticeboard

### Easter Services:

**Palm Sunday** 20 March 10AM

**Maundy Thursday** 24 March 7:30PM (including the Eucharist and the foot-washing ritual)

**Good Friday** 25 March 10AM

**Easter Vigil** 26 March from 8PM

**Easter Day** 27 March 10AM (including the Eucharist and a re-affirmation of baptism)

**20 March** MtE Futures Project Congregational Meeting

**10 April** MtE 2016 AGM

**17 April** Tour of Hotham Mission Program Sites

**24 April** MtE luncheon following worship

**1 May** MtE Futures Project Congregational Meeting



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