



Autumn 2023

Welcome to our Autumn 2023 edition of Mark the Word which encompasses the seasons of Lent and Easter. Not surprisingly, the two themes that have emerged are Easter and the future of MtE.

Peter Blackwood's fascinating description (and video) of his creation of the 2023 Paschal Candle is a must-read and viewing. As Peter has commented, the Paschal Candle is "the highlight of our sacred furniture".

Craig's "From the Minister" reminds us of the eight years of prayerful discernment and practical deliberations into what MtE's future would be and, now that we have very nearly come to the end, encouraging us to keep our trust in our "Easter God". David Radcliffe's contribution is about a Church in the mid-west of the USA, who are also struggling with what their future will be and how they chose a children's poem to help guide them along their way.

And, of course, Tim O'Connor very aptly keeps us up-to-date with the news from Church Council.

The editorial team also wish to remember Suzanne Yanko on the one-year anniversary of her death. Suzanne was a very talented and futuristic editor of Mark the Word for around 10 years and left a wonderful legacy to future editors. Her major contribution was to digitise Mark the Word so that it could be more easily accessed, and which has made it possible to add photographs and music to complete each edition. Suzanne also designed the creative banner for the digital edition.

May Easter bring you joy as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord.

From the Editorial team: Rod Mummery, producer; Vicki Radcliffe and Rosemary Wearing, joint editors.

Many thanks to all our contributors for this issue. We also thank Rod for his patience and advice and Donald Nicolson for his excellent selection of music.

From the Minister

by Craig Thompson

In thinking about what I might write for this issue of MtW, I looked back over previous things I've written for the autumn issues. What caught my mind was the first line of my 2015 contribution. "We have a big year ahead of us at Mark the Evangelist". That 'bigness' had to do with approaching decisions about our future.

Now, eight years later(!), it is possible that we are finally coming to the end of such 'big' decision-making. Conversations for the future accommodation of at least the congregation are going well, although there is still plenty of detail to settle. Once these things are addressed, we'll then have to take a step back and ensure ourselves, 'We can do this'.

Whatever we decide, the need for such a decision makes 2023 a 'big year' at MtE! It will be big, so far as it gives shape to our future, and in terms of the effort which will be required to move from Curzon Street after such a long time there.

But, lived properly, any year in the life of a congregation is 'big'. We mark certain times of the year as special, with festivals and remembrances, and occasionally have to shift homes. Yet the 'bigness' of the life of faith is not in periodic highs or in the unusual things which arise in any life, but the call of God day-in, day-out, come what may. Even Easter is a worthwhile remembrance only that if what we remember is the other 364 days of the year which Easter illuminates: the Easter God is there too, with the potential to make the ordinary extraordinary.

One way or another we at MtE have a new future in front of us, with its newness being first in the renewal which a life-from-death God can bring to us wherever we are, second, in our new digs. Let's live, love and pray towards all that!

News from Church Council

By Tim O'Connor, Secretary of Church Council

Peter Blackwood was elected a Church Councillor at the congregational meeting on 5 March, and two days later the Church Council elected him as its Chair, a role that Rod had filled as Deputy for a year. We are particularly pleased that Peter has accepted the position, as he also convenes the Working Group of our Mark the Evangelist Futures Project.

Bev Wendelken was farewelled by the Congregation at the service and morning tea held on 19 March. She had moved in February to be closer to her family.

A productive meeting of the MTEFP Working Group was held on 14 March with representatives of Pilgrim Theological College, equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM) and the Presbytery to discuss the proposed tenancy of Mark the Evangelist at the Centre for Theology and Ministry (CTM) in Parkville. The notes of the meeting reflect considerable thought and planning towards a move to the CTM, which also suggests significant opportunities for cooperation. A Memorandum of Understanding between the parties will now be drafted.

Comments, queries and suggestions are welcomed by the Church Councillors:

Peter Blackwood (Church Councillor and Chairperson), Gaye Champion (Elder), Mark Duckworth (Chairperson of Hotham Mission Board), John Langmore (Elder), Rod Mummery (*Elder, Treasurer and Deputy Chair*), *Tim O'Connor (Elder and Secretary)*, *David Radcliffe (Elder)*, Craig Thompson (Minister), Rosemary Wearing (Elder) and Alan Wilkinson (Mark the Evangelist Futures Project Coordinator)

Decorating the 2023 Paschal Candle

by Peter Blackwood

The Tradition

The Paschal or Easter Candle at the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist is a highlight of our sacred furniture. A feature of the Paschal Candle is its decorations – traditionally displaying a cross and the Greek letters Alpha and Omega and the year in which Easter is celebrated when the candle is first lit.

What is special about the Mark the Evangelist candle is that it is decorated by members of the congregation. Over many years Mary Sutherland has upheld this tradition producing memorable Paschal Candles, many of which were created under her supervision by the children of the Sunday School.

Mary has retired from this task and this year the baton (or candle) was passed to me. The 2023 candle follows the general format established by Mary but it looks different because I am a different artist. My dominant art form is Byzantine iconography and my painting medium is egg tempera.

The Design



The dominant colours of the design are Ultramarine Blue for the broad band, Venetian Red for the lettering and gold for the narrow bands.

The central symbol is a Celtic Cross. This cross is distinguished by its circle. The Celtic circle predates Christianity in Ireland and Scotland and belonged to the ancient spirituality of that culture. My Church History Professor and one time member of the College Church Congregation, George Yule, would explain that this cross imitated the missionary style of the evangelising monks. They did not obliterate the old spiritual values but 'baptised' them with the gospel. Thus the cross lays atop the circle, baptising it with the cross of Christ. The cross is also decorated with Celtic knots.

Our 2023 candle is unusual. Not only does it have the customary symbols on the facing side but has an icon of the face of Christ on the back of the candle

directly opposite the cross on the broad blue band. The icon is called the Mandylion. It remembers a story in which King Abgar of Edessa sent an emissary to Jesus asking him to come to heal the king of an illness. Jesus was washing his face and gave the messenger the towel with which he had dried his face. Miraculously his face was imprinted on the towel and, miraculously, the towel healed the king. Many other miracles were attributed to the cloth with the image of Christ made without hands.



The Materials

We choose a bee's wax candle. Its appearance is warmer than a pure white one.

I am most familiar painting with egg tempera. This is a solution of equal parts of egg yolk and white wine (or water and vinegar, but I prefer wine) mixed with dry coloured pigment. Most paints do not stick well to wax. Egg tempera just pools and is uncontrollable. An undercoat of gesso solves this problem.

Gesso is also used in painting icons and is made from dried rabbit skin glue, one part to fifteen parts of water, soaked overnight, then heated to less than fifty degrees and 24 parts of chalk whiting added. I coloured this pure white mixture with Red Ochre pigment and painted it on the areas where paint and gold would decorate the candle.

The gold bands are 23 carat transfer gold. Two coats of a high gloss acrylic varnish were painted onto the gesso. When dry I breathed onto the glossy surface and pressed the gold in place.

A full visual account of decorating the candle can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/G7tg0SJ7Em8> The three hour task over three days has been reduced to ten minutes, so watching will not use up too much valuable time.

Decorating our candle has been a great privilege and I learned a lot as I experimented with icon painting methods for painting on wax and a curved surface.

Where the Sidewalk Ends

by David Radcliffe

For nine years, Vicki and I were members of the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in West Lafayette, Indiana. We made many friends in this welcoming community, an important part of our faith journey. We were enriched through exposure to new social, cultural, and church traditions. Vicki continues to meet online with Hands@Work, a group of ladies who started out knitting prayer shawls and we read the weekly FUMC bulletin to stay in touch with happenings.

Over recent years the FUMC community has had to work through several major challenges, in part linked to the growing schism in the United Methodist Church worldwide. As they were planning for Lent this year they began to reflect on a well-known American poem, Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein. They felt that they had come to a place where the sidewalk ends for them. This comfortable community had left familiar terrain and known pathways. They were forced to explore new ground that lacked a predetermined route.

The poem suggests we need to approach the unknown with trusting childlike innocence and a sense of joy, putting aside the baggage of world-weary adulthood. It is not so much about the place we go as the mindset with which we approach it.

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

*Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.*

While this poem may speak more directly to those who have a long familiarity with it, nevertheless I thought I would share it, from one church community to another.

Noticeboard

- Passion Sunday:** 2 April, 10am
- Maundy Thursday:** 6 April, A Tenebrae service, 7.30pm
- Good Friday:** 7 April, 10am
- Easter Vigil:** Saturday 8 April, 8pm
- Easter Day:** 9 April, 10am
- Sunday 16 April:** The service will be held at the Centre for Theology and Ministry, 29 College Cres, Parkville (no service at Elm St.)
- Sunday 23 April:** Mark the Evangelist Lunch following worship
- Congregational AGM:** 7 May, following worship.



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