



Spring 2014

Editorial

Vivaldi's concerto [Spring](#) from his *Four Seasons* is perhaps the best way possible to introduce the season. A favourite performance is by Red Priest (inspired by Vivaldi's nickname), a youthful group re-inventing this well-loved music. In this way it perhaps has a connection to Craig's discoveries in Sydney.

Craig may have been on a "spying mission" but, as in all the pieces in this issue, home was the starting point. This was an unexpected focus, but gave us a wide range of reading, from personal to social to political concerns.

My small contribution to the discussion is to quote my beloved late father, who jumped ship in Sydney in the 30s, was allowed to stay and became one of Melbourne's first restaurateurs as well as a passionate supporter of his adopted country. He said more than once: "Never take your bed for granted". It's a thought that applies equally to luxuriating in one's bed after a long flight – to consideration of those who have no hopes of such a bed.

Thanks to our contributors and to Rod, for his transformative production skills. I trust that this newsletter carries you into spring with faith, hope and charity – and some enjoyable reads!

Suzanne Yanko, Editor

Transform: a new ministry among young adults

by Craig Thompson

In July I went to Sydney to attend the "School of Discipleship", a ministry to young adults now in its 11th year.

This was a spying mission. In a conversation earlier this year between the ministers of the four congregations historically linked in support of the UCA chaplain at the University of Melbourne, we had been asking how better to support that chaplaincy. One suggestion was developing a School of Discipleship model for Melbourne (the VicTas Synod), along the lines of what has been happening in Sydney. After some quick concept development and a brief advertising blitz four young adults and three not-so-young ones went north to see how the Sydney School worked.

It is an impressive operation, with perhaps 100 genuinely young people and 20 or so young-at-hearts gathering for three big days of learning, fellowship, worship and not a little fun. We had conversations with the key leaders about the history of the ministry and its wider support structure. Teaching was provided by Dr Ben Myers from the UCA's NSW theological college, on the theme "the image of God". It was great to see such rich material being made

available outside of a formal theology class setting. Small groups were organised for more personal conversation, and a number of electives on various themes were offered.

Having operated for 11 years now, the ministry has developed its own strong culture and leadership. More widely, the ministry is supported by the work of a couple of congregations and a number of UCA-based student groups in Sydney tertiary institutions. It is an impressive show. As some of you have heard me say already, it was perhaps the first time I felt “old” in the Uniting Church, having even till now generally been one of the few “young” ones in most congregations, meetings, classes and collegial gatherings most of my life. To be in the midst of so much well-guided energy and promise was heartening.

On returning to Melbourne our circle of spies met to consider whether such a thing is do-able in Melbourne, and have decided to give it a shot. After a very brief life as “Discipleship21C”, this ministry is now calling itself “Transform”, with a subtext of being transformed and transformative in the world. Monthly gatherings are planned from September, and Pallotti College in Millgrove has been booked for a first weekend conference in February 2015.

A new web site is being developed, linked to a social networking identity for keeping our group well connected. We are looking to complement what young adult ministry is taking place in the VicTas UCA (it is there!), and will be communicating directly with congregations and groups we think might be interested in this, whether for their own young people or in support of what could become an important ministry in developing future leadership in the church.

Having some unexpected “spare” money in relationship to support we at MtE thought we were required to continue in relation to the Melbourne University chaplaincy, the MtE Church Council agreed to provide \$5000 seed funding for this ministry. On top of this we have applied to BOMAR (the Synod’s ministry funding body) for 5 years diminishing funding to underwrite the ministry. At this stage we imagine that much of this funding will be used to subsidise attendance of young people to the major conferences. The theory is that, in a church with few congregations (our own included!) which are able to support young-adult ministries in their own place, money spent this way is very well spent if it creates peer networks and spaces within which young people can continue to be encouraged in their faith development. It was making some of the MtE \$5000 available to the Melbourne young people we took to Sydney which made it possible for them to go and experience the possibilities first hand: it helps to begin with “converts”!

While developing and supporting a ministry like this was not on the cards when we developed our Focuses for Mission and Ministry document last year, it is something which has taken wing quite quickly and fits well within the idea of “Serving the wider church” – the third section of our ministry work in that document. It might yield some fruit for our congregation, in that we might see some younger people enquiring about a congregation which supports a ministry like this, and it might not. Such support, however, falls within the scope of being a “parish mission” – a congregation with a ministry which is not only local and congregationally oriented but reaches more widely into the church and community.

I encourage you to encourage the Church Council in its support of this new ministry and invite you to “watch this space”, looking to see what God might do here!

News from the Church Council

by Tim O'Connor

Your Church Councillors are pleased to give you news of the Congregation and Church Council business.

Sunday services

The series of sermons by Craig on the Beatitudes (following the series on the Apostles' Creed) has been greatly appreciated by the Congregation. In a Festival of Psalms on 10 August cantors and musicians joined organist Donald in musical settings of psalms. Percussion instruments were introduced recently for the children to play sometimes during aptly chosen hymns; Craig has announced that the next goal is for the children to learn to play in time!

One-year-old Luke MacAulay was presented by his parents Gus and Jess for baptism on 20 July followed by an ample morning tea. After some months of participation in the Congregation, Kim Groot, Geraldine Rayner and Andrew Gador-Whyte were formally welcomed on 27 July as new members by transfer. At Sunday Conversations after worship in June and August we heard speakers Mohammed Isah, Manager of the Asylum Seeker Program of Lentara UnitingCare and Sunny Chen, Ecumenical Chaplain at the University of Melbourne. BYO lunches held on the first Sunday of the month in the Cottage have been happy gatherings and all are welcome.

The duties of Community Contact persons at Sunday services have been revised. Copies of these and other Sunday duties are available (Welcome and Offering, Elder, Scripture Reader, Morning Tea, Flowers and Sacristan).

Pastoral events and study

Four "Dinners for Eight" were held at the homes of members of the Congregation who offered their hospitality. The dinners proved thoroughly convivial occasions with delicious courses prepared by hosts and guests.

A book study led by Craig on *Theopolitical Imagination* by William Cavanaugh was offered over three sessions to an afternoon and an evening group. It produced lively, stimulating discussion and insights for our members and others attracted to the topic.

Membership and meetings of Church Council

After three years in the position, Ann Wilkinson resigned as Chair of Church Council at the Council's meeting in June. Church Councillors thank Ann warmly for her dedicated leadership expressed generously in many ways. At the same meeting David Sutherland resigned as Treasurer and Church Councillor due to ill health; we will miss David and his contribution. Tim O'Connor was elected Chair and Rod Mummery appointed Deputy Chair. Rod has been appointed Acting Treasurer until the position can be filled. Nominations are called for a Church Councillor to be elected at a meeting of the Congregation on Sunday 28 September; nominations close on 14 September.

Church Council has had lengthy agendas at recent meetings, covering arrangements for Sunday services, pastoral matters, Minister's reports and activities, finance and property, and planning for mission and property as a result of 'Uniting our Future'.

Uniting our Future and property matters

A significant meeting was held in July of representatives of Mark the Evangelist with Synod and Presbytery representatives to seek an explanation of the decision of the Uniting our Future program (the Synod's response to the 'Special Circumstances' declared by the UCA in Victoria and Tasmania) which divested the Congregation of two properties which would have funded essential property restoration and development. We did not receive details of why the

divestment was made or obtain greater income replacement, but our concerns were well heard and the meeting served to make clearer how we should plan for mission and property in consultation with Presbytery and Synod bodies.

As a result of the divestment, the Congregation has received income replacement, based on the Synod's estimate of rental income lost over a five-year period, provided as a single payment under Uniting our Future as "transition funding". It is not intended to compensate for the loss of 128 and 188 Gatehouse Street.

An application has been submitted to Property Services through Presbytery to obtain approval for a feasibility study of options for the use of the Congregation's properties and other assets. A more detailed report on these matters will be sent separately to members of the Congregation during August.

Feedback and queries from members of the Congregation are welcomed by members of your Church Council: Gaye Champion, Belinda Hopper (Secretary), Wendy Langmore, Gus MacAulay, Heather Mathew, Rod Mummery, Tim O'Connor (Chair), Craig Thompson (Minister), Alan Wilkinson and Ann Wilkinson.

Dinners 4 Eight

by Norma Gallacher

"Ah! It's warm in here," said our guests as they arrived for dinner one cold Saturday night in July. "So this is where you live." And we were pleased to show them around. It didn't take long! "Already we feel we know you better."



When the members of the congregation were

invited to register interest in the "Dinner 4 Eight" scheme the response was swift and keen. Delicious, interesting dishes arrived with the guests, and the conversation was varied, stimulating and personal – the right ingredients for a successful dinner party. And so it was also in the other three homes.

The reports from the 34 people who took part were all very positive. Sharing food with the people with whom we share the faith enriches our fellowship, and affirms our commitment. At our event we learned more about people's interests, what they want to do and what they want to get out of. We heard stories of our friends' life journeys, and their views on sundry topics.

Our guests went home saying, "We have enjoyed a friendly and fruitful time together. We should do this again!" And why not?

I am the door

report from the Children's Group

In their short Sunday sessions the children have been doing a series about how they can know about Jesus. When we came to the shepherd stories I was reminded of the anecdote told by Geoffrey, the Chaplain at St Nicolas in Ankara. A few years ago when he was on his way back from taking the Gallipoli dawn Service he was showing friends the picturesque coast near Assos. Seeing a young Turkish shepherd in a field with the traditional doorless sheepfold he went and asked the boy how the sheep could be safe with no door. "That's easy" he replied in Turkish "I am the door!" This was a young Moslem boy knowing no Christian rhetoric.

Here is the sheepfold built by the children with the shepherd guarding the door.



The Beautiful Balkans

by Suzanne Yanko

Our organist, Donald Nicolson, is gathering something of a fan club at Mark the Evangelist, thanks to his appearances with various ensembles, not least of them Anja & Zlatna.

You may well have met Anja at church, and she is the focus of this piece. I reviewed a recent gig as part of a round-up of eastern European music for [my website](#)

"Rounding off the week was a Sunday afternoon concert, The Beautiful Balkans, at the Iwaki Auditorium as part of ABC Classic FM's Sunday Live series. The ensemble Anja & Zlatna comprises Anja Acker & Kirsty Morphett (vocals) percussion Matt Stonehouse, double bass Andrew Tanner, flute Michael O'Connor and harpsichord Donald Nicolson. This unusual combination worked to produce a vivid and melodic concert of music from the Balkans, Serbia, Macedonia and Russia (with an unexpected brief stop-off in South America!).

With harmony intrinsic to these songs, the match of voices was a delight, as was the versatility of the four instrumentalists. Nicolson is better known for his performances with the baroque ensemble Latitude 37, but made a convincing case for the harpsichord as a vibrant accompaniment to the songs.

Whether it was a plaintive lament or a folk dance-inspired celebration, the singers brought depth and warmth to the mostly Slavic sound, often heard to advantage when sung *a capella*. O'Connor's lively flute proved an ideal partner in "dialogue" while the rest achieved an exciting percussive sound. Russian music ended the concert, and ranged from a languorous tango to a song so infectious that the audience was easily persuaded to clap along.

The applause went on well after the music had ended!

Asylum seekers

by Rosalie Hudson

Members of the congregation are familiar with my regular updates on Akbar, who has received our regular, substantial support since his release from detention in July 2013. Advice from various migration agents and others who have wide experience in this area, suggests that one of the best ways we can support asylum seekers such as Akbar is to provide regular cash donations with ‘no strings attached’. Akbar continues to be profoundly grateful for these fortnightly cash donations from our members. He also appreciates the regular friendship and other material support from people he can trust.

While his long term future remains in limbo Akbar is able to enjoy buying some food of his own choice and a (very) small degree of financial independence. From his meagre ‘savings’ he regularly sends money home to his parents in Iran. Akbar is also very grateful for our continued prayers.

He is comforted by the fact that, while he feels totally abandoned by the Australian government, he is not abandoned by God, or by the faithful community at Mark the Evangelist. For those who wish to contribute further, cash donations (of any amount) may be given to me or to Rod Mummery in my absence, on any Sunday.

The broader issue of asylum seekers on Manus Island, Nauru and Christmas Island

- excerpt from letter in BASP (Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project) newsletter May 2014

“I am writing from Manus Island Detention Camp. We left our homes because of a variety of reasons. We found Australia thinking this would be a place of shelter. We had different reasons for stepping into this very dangerous and so suffering journey. But all of us have suffered from a common pain, which was lack of freedom. We didn’t come to Australia to take from you.

“Australia didn’t confirm us and banished us to a so far island in the middle of the ocean. After about 9 months travelling on land, by car, plane, boat, and ship we have been banished and faced being wildly attacked. This led to the killing of one man, Reza Barati, and the injuring of more than 150 others. Some of them even lost parts of their bodies.

“We have borne many kinds of disrespect. We are in a very bad mentally sick and physical health situation now. The fungus illness is epidemic here in camp. We are stuck in limbo here. This experience is unexplainable through words. We cannot go back and we cannot go on. Everything in us has become dull and everything is meaningless.

“Now we watch the broken pieces of our heart and souls on the ground. We don’t know if these broken pieces are all we will ever see. We don’t know whether these terrible days and nights will come to the end or not?”

Family members of people on Nauru report the following:

“There are no air conditioners. The tents have fans but they don’t always work. The heat is unbearable. It is too hot to leave the tents but almost too hot to stay in the tents. The meals are terrible. No food is allowed out of the dining tent. People are searched and patted down to ensure that they do not leave the dining tent with even a slice of bread ... If the children don’t eat at the right time the parents can’t get any food at another time. There are no activities for children. There is insufficient water – each person has only a few minutes to shower and no time to wash their hair.”

Other reports state that infants cannot develop normally, as the ground is unsuitable for babies learning to crawl, and maternal/child health care is unavailable.

The good news is that agencies such as BASP (Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project) are bringing these dark situations into the light, so we can raise awareness of the plight of these asylum seekers.

You can receive further information by subscribing to BASP newsletter at bssc@cyberspace.net.au

Closer to home is action by our former Minister

Wes Campbell, as reported in August's *Crosslight*

Which way?

Retired Uniting Church minister Rev Dr Wes Campbell has drafted a letter calling on members of the church to actively resist the government's asylum seeker policies.

"The Minister for Immigration Scott Morrison, and the Prime Minister, declare they are Christian," Dr Campbell writes. "They make this claim while acting in increasingly brutal ways toward people seeking asylum.

"Is it thinkable that churches in Australia might be led to declare that in these policies a line has been crossed? That those who participate in such brutality have removed themselves from the Christian faith?"

The open letter cites Christianity's long-standing tradition of opposing tyranny, from the Swiss reformer John Calvin, to the resistance of leaders such as Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany and the civil rights movement in the United States led by Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Dr Campbell acknowledges the direct action taken by some in the church who have participated in the 'Love Makes a Way' protests. Throughout Australia, members of the Uniting Church have joined with those from other denominations and faiths to stage a series of sit-ins in the electoral offices of prominent politicians. In some cases, the protests against Australia's treatment of asylum seekers have led to church leaders being removed from the premises by police.

The Palestinians – a People Abandoned?

by Bill Mathew

"Am I my brother's keeper?"(Genesis 4:9). This is a question that troubles most Christians, especially in times of conflict and killing.

On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped and killed near a Jewish settlement that had been established at gunpoint on illegally occupied Palestinian land in the West Bank. Israel has blamed Hamas Islamists for the killing, although no evidence has been given to support this. Some international observers have claimed that the killing of the Jewish youths has been carried out by street thugs in the West Bank. It should be noted that the West Bank has no effective police force to enforce law and order as a deliberate result of Israel's ongoing aim to destroy the Palestinian civil society.

The Age (3/7/2014) reported that a Palestinian teenage boy was burned alive in revenge by the Israelis. This followed the Israeli army's arbitrary arrest of hundreds of Palestinians in both West Bank and Gaza and commencement of the bombing of Gaza. Gazans in retaliation fired hundreds of ineffective rockets to Israel. By late August, some 2,000 Gazans have been killed, including 400 children, and more than 10,000 injured by Israel's indiscriminate bombings and shellings. The four English-speaking Christian nations – America, Britain, Australia and Canada – have effectively supported Israel's action, instead of the outright condemnation these atrocities merit, being in flagrant breach of international conventions in inflicting collective punishment on civilians.

It is important to remember at this stage that Israel's occupation and inhuman treatment of Palestinians, and the West's support for this, has been a major trigger for Muslim militancy, the 9/11 attacks, the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the destabilisation of Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. More than a million Iraqis have been killed so far, and millions have been made refugees. And still there is no peace in sight. Peace can come only when Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian lands comes to an end and restitution and reconciliation achieved.

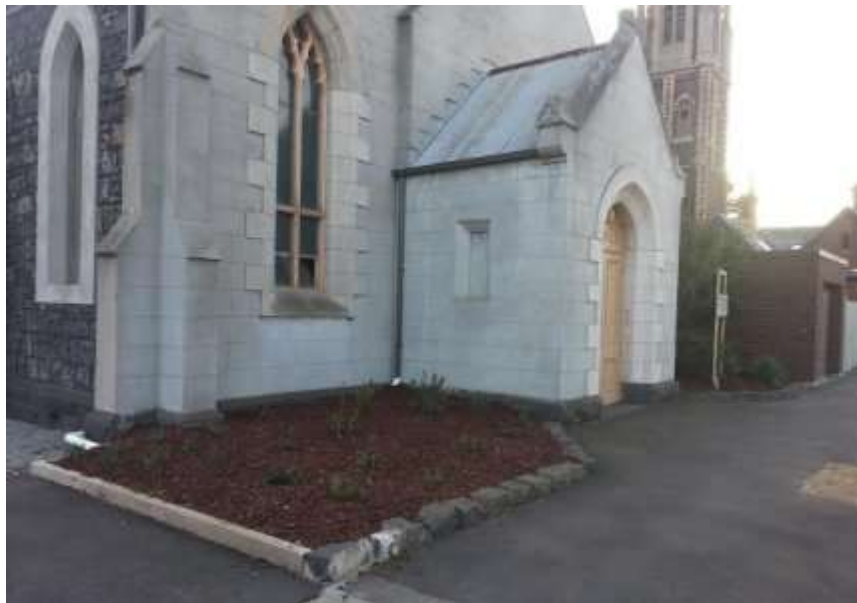
Professor Juan Cole, Michigan University, writes in Informed Comment (1/7/2014): "Likud (Party in power in Israel) has a policy of keeping the Palestinians stateless. Stateless people lack the right to have rights, in the phrase of Hannah Arendt and the US Chief Justice Warren Burger. They have no state to back their rights, therefore they have no real title to their property, no rights over their land, water or air, nor really even control of their own bodies. In some ways their situation is analogous to that of slaves. Since the stateless lack a state, they also lack law and order. What most struck me from my last visit to a Palestinian refugee camp was how much of a frontier situation it was. There are no police. Everyone has to fend for themselves. And it is easy for predatory gangs to form."

In my knowledge, the Presbyterian Church of the US and the US Methodist Church are the only organised Christian groups actively engaged in opposing Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza through actively promoting BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanction). It is time Christians elsewhere join these US churches and enforce BDS to bring justice and peace to the Holy Land. We have a duty of care for our brothers.

Finally, a ray of hope from our keen gardeners, rejoicing in finding worms!

The North Melbourne Gardening Group Report

We (Mary, Tertia, Ann, Alan, Maggie, Brenda, Craig and Annette) have met together on three or four occasions and had great fun and fellowship gardening together. While we have only invested a little time we believe that already the gardens around the church are beginning to look more loved and there is some evidence (we have recently found worms in soil



that initially was very poor) that we have even had some impact on the soil quality. To date we have:

- cleaned up the garden beds near the entrance to the church hall
- planted Australian natives in the garden bed near the entrance to the church hall (see the picture above)
- cleaned up the garden beds around the cottage
- planted some strong hardy old fashioned hedging roses called mutabalis roses (which are supposed to flower for ten months of the year) in the garden beds around the cottage

Our next project will be to clean up front yard of the old manse, we will be planting mainly fruit trees in the garden beds that a join the front fence of the manse. We have already scheduled our gardening dates for the rest of the year and they are as follows:

- Saturday September 6, 2:00-4:00pm,
- Saturday October 11, 2:00-4:00pm,
- Saturday November 8, 2:00-4:00pm,
- Saturday December 6, 2:00-4:00pm.

All are welcome to join us on any or all of these occasions. Should there be anyone who wishes to support us without getting their hands in the mud we like to have a coffee and cake break during each of our gardening sessions!

Thanks to all those who have helped and encouraged it has been fun scheming and gardening with you,

Yours in Christ, Annette L. Graham

Noticeboard

Election of Church Councillor: *Following Sunday worship September 28*

A fresh look at Elders/Leaders in the Uniting Church: *Discussion of Assembly paper following Sunday worship October 12*

Congregational Spring Picnic: *Following Sunday worship October 5*

Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire: *November reading and discussion groups*

All Saints Day Lunch: *Following Sunday worship November 2*

Christ the King: *Readings, hymns and anthems – Sunday worship November 23*

The Song of Songs: Longing, Beauty, Desire, Possession: *Advent sermons, December*

Our December newsletter looks at journeys



Uniting Church in Australia

The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist - North Melbourne