



Spring 2015

Editorial

Editor's note: Its spring at last!

In fact, it's been spring for a few days, but our newsletter was delayed for a good reason. There was so much interest in Dr Robert Gribben's recent Conversation that we decided to publish it, and thank Robert for getting it to us so promptly.

There's a theory that the great Russian novels are so detailed and introspective because of the long cold winters that keep writers indoors, with plenty of time to think. Perhaps Melbourne's recent winter has had a similar effect on our writers as this newsletter offers plenty of food for thought in every article.

Both Craig and Tim (for the Church Council) have given us reflections rather than reports of their busy activities and am pleased we have examples of the three sections I'd like to see in each issue: A biography or interview with someone in the congregation. (Today its Wendy Langmore's story about Audrey Larsen).

Raising an issue or concern or experience that has touched the writer. (John Langmore writes about microfinance, Heather Mathew about a peace conference and Peter Blackwood intriguingly links the issue of climate change to Hildegard of Bingen!).

Providing a link to a story or article that would be of interest to our congregation, with a short comment about that choice. (Bill Mathew links to a speech by the Anglican Bishop George Browning).

Observant readers will note that we have a first in presenting articles by not just one, but two couples in the congregation; we can only think they must be two-computer households or very good at sharing! Our final piece of music has a family connection to the congregation, but Ill let you discover that for yourself.

Thanks to all who gave so much thought to their contributions and, as always, to Rod Mummery who gives the final version of the newsletter the look it deserves. I hope we get some sunny days to sit outside and read it!

Suzanne Yanko, Editor

Thoughts of love and church property

by Craig Thompson

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote that In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. You'll have to find a young man to check whether he was right or not. This spring *our* thoughts are going to be turned to matters of congregational property and resourcing. Doesn't have quite the same ring to it, does it?

The church council has now commenced a process of consultation with a project management consultancy, in association with the Presbytery and Synod, in order to determine the most effective way to utilise the very substantial (if a little flaky) capital resources at our disposal for responding to our vocation to worship, witness and serve as this particular Christian community.

More details about this process will be available to the congregation very soon. For the moment, the question of how we enter into it all is probably more important. There is nothing very sexy about thinking about church buildings; Tennyson's young man certainly has the better part. There's nothing very appealing about embarking on another round of consultations and analyses and reports and debates and decision-making.

At the same time, a question is posed by the shape of the resources we have, and it requires an answer. Thoughts about love require action if they are indeed concerned with *love*. But in all of this, the love-in-action which will carry us is not the love *we* can think but the Love which thinks of *us*. To return to Tennyson's springtime but now in terms of Solomon's spring rhapsody:

*Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Look, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.
My beloved speaks and says to me:
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the covert of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.
Catch us the foxes,
the little foxes,
that ruin the vineyards
for our vineyards are in blossom.*

Our Beloved thinks of us, and calls us away into resurrections spring. Winters of discontent are not fit frames of mind for the people of God. Ours is a time of singing, where the only real work to be done is to chase away whatever the little foxes might seek to ruin Gods vineyard. There will, doubtless, be a few of the little rascals.

Perhaps the trick in negotiating what is ahead of us will be this: to engage not in dreary property development or divestment but in a joyful work of love in Gods garden.

If this *is* the trick, then let us prove to be excellent magicians.

How to Stay Warm in the 'Ecumenical Winter': Some Suggested Locations from an Ecumenical Traveller

by Robert Gribben

I begin with the classical self-definition (and longest sentence) of the ecumenical movement:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptised into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people. (WCC 1961)

The Uniting Church is a child of the modern ecumenical movement, but we seem to have grown only to the level of bored adolescence, not quite sure of what we have yet to learn.

(See separate document for the full article)

Microfinance in Australia

by John Langmore

Microfinance is often thought to be a valuable initiative to help new, tiny businesses start in developing countries, but it is also an important form of financial support in Australia. Over three million adult Australians are excluded from banking services: the major banks will not lend to them or issue them with credit cards, for example, because their incomes are regarded as too low.

Some people are able to borrow from family or friends when they have urgent need of a lump sum to purchase a fridge or washing machine, have their car repaired or buy a computer. But that support is not available to many others, and hundreds of thousands go to pay day lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates for small and short term loans.

To assist in avoiding this exploitation, about 30 years ago the Good Shepherd Sisters started lending small amounts, for which borrowers were not charged any interest. This no interest loans scheme (NILS) grew slowly until about 12 years ago when the National Australia Bank (NAB) began providing the capital for the loans. Also CentreLink agreed to cooperate, by deducting the fortnightly repayments from Commonwealth pensions. Then in 2009 the Rudd Government agreed to grant a subsidy of \$15m for three years to Good Shepherd Microfinance (GSM) which by then had been set up as a company.

Now GSM is issuing about 25,000 no interest loans each year of between \$800 and \$1200 each. The write-off rate is only just around five per cent. Women are the primary borrowers (68 per cent) with the typical age being 35-44 years, many heading single parent families.

The number of services has also grown, and includes StepUP Loans of up to \$3000 for three years at an interest rate of 6 per cent, mostly for vehicle-related expenses, and AddsUP, an incentive saving scheme.

The loans are issued by 260 community providers (including UnitingCare) through 630 outlets around Australia. The financial records of these outlets are maintained by NAB, which has now

contributed about \$25 million to the revolving funds. The Abbott Government announced in the May budget continuing support of about \$5.5m a year for each of the next five years; and the Andrews Government announced \$7.2m for the next four years, the highest of any state so far.

GSM is led by a Board chaired by the dedicated, delightful and highly efficient Christine Nixon, the former head of Victorian police, and I am deputy chair. There are a staff of about 55, including those in the Good Money outlets, which are shop-front lending agencies run directly by GSM.

The central goal of GSM is To enable economic wellbeing and resilience for people on low incomes, especially women and girls. The stated values of the agency are Human dignity, respect, social justice, audacity, compassion and reconciliation. There is still huge amount of unmet need, and we are exploring additional ways of attempting to effectively enable much more extensive means of addressing the support which is required.

About Audrey Larsen

by Wendy Langmore



One of Audrey's Philosophy lecturers said to his students some years ago: Whilst you are alive, you've got to live. And Audrey lives up to this expectation!

At ninety three Audrey is a free spirit, living and caring for herself in the apartment in Curzon St. she bought in 1962, still driving her car, studying The Life of Saint Paul at Wesley College three hours a week, practicing her piano and playing sometimes for the patrons in the Pub next door, reading, enjoying films, visiting friends and relations, as well as attending services at Mark the Evangelist (for over fifty years). What an inspiration!

Audrey was born in Bundaberg, Queensland, the middle child of three. In 1922, her father was a builder and contractor and his family had come from Denmark. Her mother, a nurse before marriage, expected their home to run like an efficient hospital ward. Audrey went to school in Bundaberg, and left when she was fifteen to train in shorthand and typing and then earn her living. She was taught the piano from a young age, playing the pedal organ in Sunday School for the singing and at school recitals. She continued studying piano and reached A Mus A level, and had played all her life, often with a Conservatorium teacher. At present she is working on a Mozart Sonata and a Chopin Waltz. She loves attending the MSO Saturday Afternoon Series of concerts.

Audrey entered the workforce as a stenographer, first in Bundaberg, then in Brisbane and Rockhampton.

She remembers taking dictation from an American Colonel after the war, and also learning Morse Code. When working at Burns Philp she was offered a job in Papua New Guinea, but her parents objected to her going there. So she decided to come to Melbourne instead and has made her home here ever since. After a year or two of nursing and living in at Royal Melbourne Hospital, Audrey decided to apply for Court Reporting using her very efficient shorthand. She started in 1952 and continued in this field of work both in Victorian District and City courts then in Federal courts until her retirement in 1980. Court reporting involved a lot of travel, so she visited many parts of Australia. She also enjoyed some overseas travel, going by boat twice to Ceylon and back and visiting friends there. In 1960 Audrey travelled to Canada and worked for six months in Kamloops in the Rockies, before moving on to Israel and East Berlin. On retirement she had other overseas trips, especially enjoying Turkey, Norway and Lapland and Denmark, where she could explore her Larsen ancestral region.

Whilst working as a court reporter, Audrey completed her Matriculation, and after retirement enrolled at Deakin University to study Arts. Her majors were in Philosophy and Religious Studies, and she so enjoyed the research and did so well in assignments, that she continued on to do a Master's Degree in International Relations. She usually studied off-campus and took her time, but graduated in 2011 with a BA and MA from Deakin.

At times, Audrey reflects on why her life has taken the path it has when there were other possibilities. She had opportunities to marry but didn't; she could have died from melanoma but someone saw the black mole on her arm and it was removed quickly and never recurred; she has enjoyed excellent health. A fortune teller in Ceylon once told her she would live a very long and healthy life and would be famous one day. She is still waiting for the latter!

World Week for Peace in Palestine/ Israel September 20- 26

by Heather Mathew

This week is designated by the World Council of Churches and the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network (PIEN) to promote a focus on prayer and peaceful action in support of a solution to this tragic and seemingly intractable situation in the Holy Land.

Other world hot spots are there, it is true, that command our concern and compassion; nevertheless we as Christians surely have a special call on this issue.

Act for Peace highlights the devastation of Gaza and the ongoing blockade (sea, air, land) that affects almost all aspects of life for Palestinians trapped in this tiny space. A few facts* that define life there:

- Food 72% of households are vulnerable to food insecurity
- Fishing access to the sea is so curtailed by Israel that the main catch is reduced by 90%
- Water & Sanitation 90-95% of water is unfit for drinking; for many, running water is available for 6-8 hours every 4 days
- Disability over 11,000 people were injured during the Israeli invasion in 2014, around one-third of the injured were children
- Medical services 75 hospitals & clinics were damaged in the bombing by Israel, 202 out of 480 essential drugs were out of stock according to recent reports
- Unemployment 70% of youth are unemployed

International aid is not the answer: political aid has to be the solution. Placatory murmurings about peace negotiations are farcical as long as an occupying power (Israel) continues to build settlements in the lands it continues to occupy in blatant defiance of numerous UN resolutions. While in good faith we continue to offer humanitarian aid (at present, 80% of Gazan residents are dependent on aid), there are practical steps that we can take as well.

In the week that focuses on peace for Israel and Palestine, as individuals we might resolve as well not to buy products from the occupied territories (Ahava products, Naot footwear, are examples of these). We might also resolve not to buy products from companies or brands that profit from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands (these include Motorola, Westfield, Max Brenner Chocolates). Another option is simply not to buy products from Israel (if the barcode begins with 729, the item is made in Israel).

While the activity takes more time, we might also resolve to write to or contact our Federal members of Parliament, PM, Foreign Minister, and urge them to adopt an even-handed approach to the Israelis and the Palestinians. The ongoing refusal by successive Australian governments to criticise Israel for its breaches of UN rulings and its continual abuse of Geneva conventions is morally indefensible and does nothing to solve the situation.

Another option is to join *Act for Peace's* call to Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to publicly call for Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza. This would immediately ease life inside the world's largest prison. I urge you to add your voice to the call at: www.actforpeace.org.au/blockade.

Peace/ Salaam/ Shalom

* source: The Link (*Act for Peace*) Winter 2015, pp. 10-11.

A Word for the Climate Change Debate from the Twelfth Century

by Peter Blackwood



Hildegard of Bingen Icon written by Peter Blackwood modelled on a black and white etching

A film clip of Barack Obama has recently been doing the rounds on TV where, quoting from The Governor in the documentary series *Years of Living Dangerously*, he says, We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it. (1)

A web page of quotations of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) indicates that the problem of despoiling the earth is not new.

Hildegard had opinions about the environment. She wrote,

“Now in the people that were meant to be green there is no more life of any kind. There is only shrivelled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples. The earth should not be injured! The earth must not be destroyed!”

“God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else.”

This is my favourite climate change one-liner: Hildegard said,

“All of creation God gives to humankind to use. If this privilege is misused, God’s justice permits creation to punish humanity.” (2)

The Uniting Church remembers Hildegard in its Calendar of Other Commemorations. In a rather secluded document on the Assembly web site Carolyn Craig-Emilsen wrote,

Hildegard of Bingen, renowned for her spirituality in her day, was a German Benedictine abbess of the twelfth century. She was a poet, theologian, composer, artist, playwright, healer, visionary and advisor to eminent church authorities. Hildegard was the tenth child of a noble family who, at age eight, went to live with the reclusive Jutta von Spanheim, at the monastery of Saint Disibod in Disibodenberg. She took her vows at 15 and on Jutta’s death in 1136 became leader of the convent.

Hildegard achieved fame when her remarkable work, *Scivias*, a record of her visions, was approved by Pope Eugenius who publicised it widely. Between 1147 and 1150, over the objections of the officials at Disibodenberg, Hildegard moved her community to Ruperstberg, near Bingen on the Rhine. In 1165, she founded a second convent at Eibingen.

Hildegard, despite frequent attacks of ill health, possessed extraordinary energy. During her long life she produced three books of visionary theology, several collections of writings on natural history and medicine, 77 songs and *Ordo Vitutum* the earliest surviving liturgical morality play. Hildegard is of contemporary interest with her appreciation of the feminine, her emphasis on the relationship between soul, mind and body. Her inspirational music has been widely recorded especially by the group *Sequentia*.

Since the fifteenth century, when her name was incorporated into the Roman Martyrology, she has been remembered on 17 September. (3)

(1) The governor who said this first was Jay Inslee of Washington State.

(2) www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/features/view/20274/quotations-by-hildegard-of-bingen (11/8/15)

(3)

https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/Theology_Discipleship/pdf/Calendar%20of%20Commemorations%206%20-%2027%20February%202014.pdf A Calendar of Other Commemorations (11/8/15)

News from Church Council

by Tim O'Connor, Chair of Church Council

A dominant theme in the work of the Church Council in recent months has been communication and so it will be in this report too how we as the Congregation make our intentions, interests and plans known to each other, other parts of the Uniting Church and our community.

A good place to start is to comment on the great progress made by Craig as he continues to make the website of Mark the Evangelist more informative, useful and attractive for us as a congregation and for others who visit the site. The regular emails we now receive headed Mark the Evangelist News are remarkable, I think, in how effectively they convey news to us. After clicking here within the email text of the most recent news of 27 August, we see a news summary which strikes me as similar in function and presentation to the contents page of a nicely produced magazine. A click on any of the colourful banners on the right leads us to information about After Christendom (forthcoming reading groups), A Thoughtful Faith (theological conferences and gatherings), Transform Gatherings and a link to UnitingCare Hotham Mission.

At this point you may be wondering why I am describing what you have probably already seen for yourselves. You may also sense that I'm not only impressed but also slightly awed and you would be right! Such change in how we receive information is so recent (less than a decade old in widespread use) that it might be easy for us to take it for granted and to overlook how readily it has been taken up by a majority of people. I for one am rather shocked at the pace of change in communications, whereas others such as Craig or Rod (neither so-called digital natives!) as well as some of you reading this seem to take it in your stride. As for me I'm struggling to keep up with the innovations, so I was oddly reassured, as perhaps you were also, to learn that royal commissioner Dyson Heydon doesn't know how to read or send emails: reassured that the latest technology will never confer the kind of wisdom accumulated by a judge. I expect that many of us at Mark the Evangelist would have reservations about the benefits of being in the vanguard of taking up the latest communications technology. However what is certainly important for us as a Congregation is that current ways of communicating will enable us to be in the marketplace when it comes to communicating with people beyond the Congregation.

These observations on communication are relevant to plans by Church Council and the Congregation for outreach of different kinds. The Focuses for Mission and Ministry 2015-2016 document and the long-term Mission Futures document of Mark the Evangelist, both approved by the Congregation this year, refer to how the Congregation may serve the community and the wider Church in coming years and how we wish to reach families, young adults and others to invite them to join us in worship and activities which Mark the Evangelist will offer. And so through initiatives in communication that are also referred to in the documents, platforms are being laid (as telcos like to say, if you will permit me!) that will allow the Congregation to communicate more readily and widely with those whom we want to reach, witness to and serve.

Communication of a different kind has moved into a new phase with the convening recently of the first meeting of the Project Control Group of Mark the Evangelist Futures Project. The PCG will consider and make recommendations for the long-term resourcing of Mark the Evangelist on behalf of the Congregation and report directly to Church Council. (Our Congregational Meeting held on 2 August received a progress report on the Project which gives more details.) The PCG consists of four members of Mark the Evangelist Alan (appointed PCG Co-ordinator), Rod, Maureen and Greg Hill (as Administrator of MtE) two representatives of Yarra Yarra Presbytery and the Synods Manager of Development Projects. The Church Council understands how important it will be to inform and engage the Congregation in these matters of property and resourcing, and in fact the decision-making process led by the PCG requires such engagement. A progress report will be made to us all in September through an email of Mark the Evangelist News.

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

Links we like: *Bishop Browning on Palestine* by Bill Mathew (See separate document)

Noticeboard

Congregational Meeting – *This will be an introduction of the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project (MTEFP), which is the process we will be going through to make a decision regarding our utilisation of the various capital resources we have for mission (including questions of the renovation of Union Memorial Church) – 20 September*

Transform gatherings: Young Adults Conference – *Let's Talk about sex: the Bible, faith and relationship – 25-27 September (See website for details)*

After Christendom? – *Reading Groups on Stanley Hauerwas' book *After Christendom: How the church is to behave if freedom, justice and a Christian nation are bad ideas* – October-November (See website for details)*



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