



Spring 2021

“How long, oh Lord, how long?” Craig’s call brings with it hope and trust that perhaps the end is in sight. It is my hope that your contributions to this Newsletter can reflect this.

Producing the Newsletter is always a team effort but these months of lockdowns with their hardship and distress, (local and global), have brought into sharp relief how imperative is our sharing and collaborating as a members of our Congregation, more so than in past Newsletters. We are blessed with the quality and number of responses to our call for “postcards” which sought reflections on not only what we have missed or learnt about ourselves during the lockdowns but also what we hope or long for when the restrictions lift. Robert Gribben’s article “Mining Mount Athos” offers a sustaining recollection of how precious and amazing travelling overseas was and can be!

Under the past difficult and relentless times, I am especially grateful for Rod’s calm, skilful and insightful gifts as our Producer and I thank Rosemary for her willingness to learn the ropes!

**Suzanne Yanko, Editor**

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### **From the Minister**

by Craig Thompson

‘How long, O Lord?’ the psalmist wondered. We have begun to wonder that ourselves, although the ‘O Lord’ doesn’t feature as prominently today.

The deprivation we have experienced over the last 18 or so months has been significant for many, less so for some, but certainly universal in our community. With respect to the virus, we are reasonably sure that ‘one day’ things will settle, and those of us with sufficient resources to see it through comfortably have coped reasonably well. We may not have seen our children or parents or friends as often as we would have liked, but we understand why and can bear it in the expectation that things will get better. Perhaps the exception here is those who’ve had to watch from a distance people they love die, accompanied perhaps only by professional staff in a hospital and those, of course, who have died under those circumstances. We won’t forget all this, although those who come after us will. Many had not heard of the Spanish flu epidemic until last year.

Yet, for all the difficulty of what we have experienced, it has been for most of us just a small taste of what many millions around the world – and within our own ‘sovereign borders’ – experienced long before COVID-19 and will continue to experience once the threat which has confined us has waned. For my part, as one rather privileged in a privileged society, I wonder whether the epidemic has given me some small experience of what it is to feel unsafe in public places, not to be free to move beyond set boundaries, not to know what will happen next and so not to be able to plan.

It’s almost laughable to draw a comparison between what refugees and other socially dislocated people experience and my experiences within the safety net of a secure job and the privileges I enjoy as comfortably middle-class in a comfortably middle-class society. Yet I hope that, once this all settles and perhaps begins to feel ‘normal’ again, the sense that our temporary abnormal is the enduring normal of so many people will not fade. The ‘how long?’ of many of us already knows its answer: ‘just a bit longer’. Spring is in the air. For others, the question is more poignant. It desires but cannot yet see the time when dislocation and isolation will have passed, and freedom to live and love will have come.

As we pray for ourselves, coming out of winter into spring, let us not forget to pray also for those whose winter has yet much longer to run.

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## **News from Church Council**

By Tim O’Connor, Chair of Church Council

Church Council brings you an assortment of news that doesn’t fit neatly under headings but sits randomly beside dot points! Most news will be familiar and will remind you of church life from April to early October.

- There have been 14 Sunday services held in the church and 14 online since April so far. Linking many services were Craig’s illuminating sermons on Ephesians.
- We have certainly become used to online worship again following three further Covid lockdowns. Craig, Rod, Peter and Donald have enhanced their reputation as a smooth ‘production team’!
- Coffee and tea after worship in the church made a welcome return for a time, while ‘online morning tea’ following remote services has been important for sharing news.
- We fondly remember Mary Duckworth who died on 15 July. Members of the congregation took part remotely in her funeral service on 26 August.
- Dinners for Eight were held in the homes of the Sutherlands and Wilkinsons, but the others scheduled had to be postponed – to next winter!
- Gaye retired as Chairperson of Hotham Mission Board after ten years of dedicated service. Mark was elected Board Chairperson and has been co-opted to Church Council in that role. Previously at the AGM in March, Gaye and David (in a further term) had been elected elders.
- We welcomed the placement of Donald’s Rodgers digital organ in the church, which complements MtE’s fine Smenge chamber organ. It provides a great variety of registrations and tone colours for playing hymns, preludes and postludes.
- The Mark the Evangelist Scenarios Workshop – planned for members to imagine possible future locations for the congregation – is scheduled for Sunday afternoon, 14 November.

Comments, queries and suggestions are invited by the Church Council:

Gaye Champion (Elder), Mark Duckworth (Chairperson of Hotham Mission Board), John Langmore (Elder), Rod Mummery (Elder and Treasurer), Tim O’Connor (Elder and Chairperson of Church Council), David Radcliffe (Elder), Craig Thompson (Minister), Rosemary Wearing (Elder) and Alan Wilkinson (Mark the Evangelist Futures Project Coordinator).

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## Mining Mount Athos

by Robert Gribben

For many years of my life, I have travelled the world on ecumenical business, either for the Victorian Council of Churches or the World Methodist Council, on which I represented the Uniting Church. It's fairly easy to get to know most Protestant and the Roman Churches, but the great challenge was to cross the barriers to get close to the Orthodox. They are at their most closed on the rugged peninsular off Greece called 'the Monastic State of the Holy Mountain', otherwise known as Mount Athos. I had to go! I managed it in 1991. Click [here](#) for a reflection and description of what I discovered.



*Entrance to the Monastery of Stavronikita, Athos*

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## Postcards from Lockdown

### Rob Gallacher

Most I missed being able to visit my wife, Norma, while she was in hospital and Rehab.

I look forward to being able to meet with people face to face, especially family in the country.

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### John Langmore

I have missed most the unrestricted opportunities to see, be with and enjoy conversations and shared activities with children, grandchildren and friends. This has been a profound loss. The partial relaxation so that we could meet outside was a major relief, but it still set artificial limits on active shared support and entertaining and being entertained. The aggregate impact on the whole community must have sometimes been seriously damaging to social vitality, to self-confidence and to the strengths of community life. Perhaps the consciousness of the impediments will have heightened motivation for seeking to restrengthen social bonds, but that will not fully compensate for the loss of shared time together. These comments do not mean that I think the lockdowns were a mistake. Far more of us are still alive than would have been without the restrictions. However, times together with family and friends are likely to be valued more highly because of the deprivations.

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### David Radcliffe Finding a New Voice

Over the past eighteen months, I have found my voice as a writer of local history. By drawing on a diverse range of historical resources, I have been able to tell the stories of women and men whose lives were largely forgotten. In addition to the book about our corner of Port Melbourne, I have published fifteen articles online and in history journals. This was only possible because, as the dictum goes, "every writer needs a good editor" and Vicki has been my supportive critic and methodical editor. Our daily discipline of write-read-critique-edit, and repeat, has afforded a much-needed distraction for us against the dispiriting impact of end-to-end lockdowns and pressers, a serendipitous space in which to create. My inner social geographer has been released after a fifty-year career in engineering!

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### Mary and David Sutherland Lockdown and after!

We have learned how much we love being sociable! Fortunately we can learn a few new tricks, Zooming and YouTube even for funerals, WhatsApp, FaceTime, phone calls and emails all over the world, online shopping, Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, and ingenious local explorations and picnics.

Nothing is quite like face-to-face encounters. We are looking forward to seeing family and friends in a more relaxed way, live church, live music and theatre and getting out and about. Aren't we lucky to have all this technology to keep us in touch from home despite COVID.

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### **Rosemary Wearing**

I have missed being able to fly interstate when medical emergencies inevitably and cruelly emerge amongst elderly sisters and brothers-in-law, or visit overseas daughter and granddaughters. I miss visiting my "village" neighbours, I miss feeling safe on public transport to allow me to see faraway friends and live musical performances. I miss walking into our church hall and being welcomed into (and enriched by) a sharing with others the service, the music and morning tea talking. I have learnt how technologically inept I am but I feel I have been blessed and I am thankful for precious time to read and listen to music and radio.

### **Tim O'Connor COVID Church**

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God: for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God. Ps 42:5 (NRSV)

This is a Safe Church  
Certified by the State of Victoria  
Work Permit MtENM3051  
Seating density 4m<sup>2</sup>  
Entry with QR code  
Masked singing suspended  
Lord's Table closed until further notice

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### **Wendy Langmore**

I have slowed down during this last lockdown and have enjoyed having more time to read the paper each morning, to read interesting books, and discussing them in book groups on Zoom, and to catch up with old friends interstate either by zoom or phone.

I am enjoying doing the garden both at home, and weeding my step daughters' gardens when they are working inside their homes. I've enjoyed getting to know our local community as I walk or shop (masked of course).

I've been more aware of the seasons and the weather, explored new parts of Royal Park, especially the wattle plantings. I've watched lectures from the Royal Botanic Gardens.

I've done several acrylic paintings and sent photos of them to my artistic son in the Blue Mountains, Andy, and to my Art teacher, Anne, and received crits and suggestions.

I've had time to share in John's enthusiasm about the Peace Initiative.

I look forward to the indoor pool being open at Ascot Vale, so exercise classes can begin again, and seeing friends in person, and to normal Church Services, when lockdown ends.

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### **Ann and Alan Wilkinson Experiences of lockdown, and hopes for the future**

Over the past 18 months, we have managed to keep pretty busy and that has definitely helped us pass the time in a relatively productive fashion. We know we are very fortunate as many have found the long period of lockdowns and restrictions terribly difficult. Additionally, we know that the road out of lockdown will be a very difficult one for many in our city. We suspect it won't be easy for anyone really as the road is full of unknowns.

There are definitely things we have missed badly. At the top of the list is people – friends and family. We have 2 primary school aged grandchildren here and have been lucky to spend some time supervising their home schooling. This has meant that we have been able to keep up with them and their parents. As well it has been a real privilege to be part of such an impressive home-schooling system. It is a long time since we worked along with learners, but we greatly enjoyed it and it has brought us much closer to the children.

Friends and far away family are another matter. It is a huge understatement to say that we have missed them greatly and their absence has made big holes in our lives. We have occasionally managed to have walks with one older grandchild or a couple of friends at a time, but having a chat behind a mask as you walk along is something we will be glad to leave behind. More than anything else, we long to invite friends in for dinner, or to meet them again at the local pub. These occasions cannot come soon enough together with some interstate visits to see friends and family face to face.

We have also greatly missed live performance – be it plays, operas, or concerts. They are so different from entertainment in the living room!! It has been very sad to cancel one performance after another, and to contemplate what this means for the performers. So a huge longing for the future is to get back to live performance. It will be wonderful.

Along with all of this there is no doubt that we have learned a lot. Most weeks we have registered for a Webinar on line and as a result have kept up with important issues around climate change, COVID-19 and its controversies, State and Federal politics, international issues. In the evenings we have watched more television than in all our lives, but thankfully it does not feel as if it's been a waste of time. We have watched our share of fun programs, but as well have loved all the really interesting programs which are available, especially on the ABC. We both belong to book groups and these have continued on Zoom, so we have had an incentive to keep up with our reading. That has been a wonderful pastime to have.

Finally, we feel very privileged to be part of a small number of communities which have come to mean more than ever before. Our Church community has remained very strong on-line. Worship, meetings, bible study, social exchange have all been highly anticipated on-line activities. We are very grateful to those who have enabled these things to happen. In our locality we know all of our neighbours and have kept in close touch. When we go out for our daily walk it takes a lot longer than planned as we often stop along the way for socially distanced chats. We also often sit and read on our front verandah which is about 10 feet from the street, and the many passers-by greet us whether they know us or not. All this has strengthened our relationships to those close by. It has also been good to keep in touch with our extended family and our friendship groups interstate and overseas – whether by email or phone. We know we are lucky to have all of these ways of communicating available to us and are very thankful.

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## Noticeboard

We are hoping that restrictions will be eased sufficiently for us to be back in the church in November. Accordingly, we have scheduled the following:

**Sunday 7 November:** Baptism of Mannat Pahwa

**Sunday 14 November:** Workshop to discuss the future location of the congregation (following worship and for a maximum of three hours including lunch – details to come).

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