



Winter 2018

Editorial



*The Mark the Evangelist Futures Project:
What dreams may come? (Shakespeare)*

As we settle into winter the newsletter finds us close to home, seemingly without major challenges (although Alan may disagree!). All the contributions have a direct relevance to our own church, and where some might disagree with the greater Uniting Church – from the way we work with children to how we treat refugees – there are lessons for us to learn. Craig explains the importance of love as underpinning all that we do, including the everyday, such as Tim reports on for Church Council.

Even when consider issues such refugees, we see that although the Church does take a position which we support, we have had our own way of caring compassionately for one who has

been in our thoughts for many years. This seems an appropriate place to thank Rosalie Hudson for keeping the plight of Akbar in our thoughts and for her role in making sure he is had a home and comfort in difficult circumstances for a very long time.

Speaking of love, Ann's report on Keeping Children Safe is a must-read for understanding how we can respond to our Church's concerns about this vexed question, while Alan reports on progress for our own great project. We haven't dealt with the issue for quite a while so I urge you read the document carefully. As for the church we have now, we read two perspectives on icons from Peter and Rob respectively. I wonder if they will find a place in the new structure, whatever it maybe. (The icons, I mean, not our two friends!)

Artistic contributions begin at home as we note from Marys beautiful pictures throughout this newsletter of our children and their candles.

Once again Rod and I believe that we have an issue worthy of your attention thanks to all our contributors. We invite you to read it from cover to cover (to use an old-fashioned print term). And please remember: spring will be here before we know it so start thinking about your possible contributions right now.

Until then, all the very best, be well and keep warm!

Suzanne Yanko, editor,
Rod Mummery, producer.

From the Minister

by Craig Thompson

Over the last couple of months we've been slowly making our way through the First Letter of John. It is, with all of Scripture, a text from a long way away in terms of time and space, and yet also one close enough to continue to speak to us today. The point of digging deeply into 1 John in this way rather than skipping quickly through the text after the manner of the lectionary is to discover what else John has to say beyond, or to inform, his best-known declaration: 'God is love'.

Central to this 'what else' is the imperative that we love each other: an inability to live in love for each other is a denial of the affirmation that God loves us. Life together in love is the only coherent theological and ethical option.

This is not straightforward at any level of human community. The 'business' of being church beyond gathering for worship and other more obviously churchly activities is all about life together: negotiating property questions with the central office, accountability to higher authorities on local personal safety issues, refining Mission policy to set out appropriate expectations and rules of engagement, gathering at regional and national levels to debate doctrine and ethics, fostering understanding across ecumenical divides. These things don't always look much like opportunities to love! Yet, this business is as much a part of our calling to be church as Sunday mornings, as onerous and exhausting and seemingly distracting as it sometimes seems.

To put it differently, these things are also works of love; if they are not, we ought to drop them or we re-configure them so that they come be so. In this way we become what God has made us, children of love, in love. Let us, then, continue to live for, in, as love.

News from Church Council

by Tim O'Connor, Chair of Church Council

Since Alan has written in this edition about progress on the Congregations property plans and Ann on Safe Church news, there is less for me to write arising from Church Council business. Here is other noteworthy news:

Illuminating Faith

Many of you will have heard of the Congregations initiative in faith education, Illuminating Faith, which has published this year Bruce Barbers study *The Lord's Prayer* and Craig Thompsons *Reading the Creed Backwards*. At the June meeting Craig presented a three-year plan for publishing and publicising a series of publications which was endorsed. Funds are now needed to make the growth of the program possible. Contributions from members of the Congregation will be invited in the second part of 2018, and an application for funds will be made to the Synod for the years 2019-2021. Illuminating Faith represents a major outcome of the Congregations Focuses for Mission and Ministry. For an outline of Illuminating Faith see the link on the homepage of our Mark the Evangelist website.

Audibility during worship

At the May meeting of Church Council we discussed the problem of audibility in the Elm Street Church during worship services: we identified issues of amplification of sound and reverberation, and made a list of possible remedies. We will now obtain recommendations and quotations from acoustic consultants, particularly on sound-absorbing materials in order to reduce excessive reverberation. In the meantime, a simple reminder for any of us who use the sound system: come close to the microphone and speak into it!

Comments, queries and suggestions are invited by the Church Council: Gaye Champion (Chair, Hotham Mission), Michael Champion (Elder), Belinda Hopper (Elder and Secretary), Gus MacAulay (Elder), Rod Mummery (Elder and Treasurer), Tim O'Connor (Elder and Chair), Maureen Postma (Elder), Craig Thompson (Minister) and Alan Wilkinson (MTEFP Coordinator).

Akbar: our neighbour in need

by Rosalie Hudson

Members and friends of Mark the Evangelist have supported Akbar, our asylum seeker friend, and 'neighbour in need' since 2013. Many of you will know his story: coming to Australia from Iran by boat in 2012, enduring several years, behind barbed wire, in Maribyrnong and Broadmeadows detention centres before 'release' to the community. Baptcare hostel provides free accommodation for 40 single male asylum seekers, most of whom have no birth certificate, no work rights, no visa and no eligibility for government assistance of any kind. While Baptcare does not provide meals or any income support they provide a safe haven for the men who live there. Meanwhile the government maintains these asylum seekers from many different countries are in Australia 'illegally' and may therefore be deported at any time. They have been told by the relevant minister they will never be granted a visa.

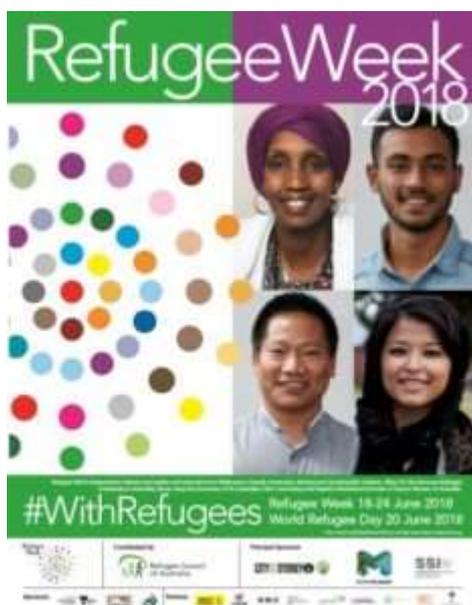
Due to the generosity of several members of our congregation, Akbar has enjoyed five years of regular cash donations, for which he never fails to express his gratitude. My fortnightly visits during this time have been a source of mutual satisfaction. His circumstances have now altered (albeit still without visa or government assistance), giving him a small degree of independence. A very proud man, he now wishes to exert that independence and be free from the congregation's financial support. Also, a very private man, Akbar has always politely rejected any of the many other offers of friendship and other material aid made by members of the congregation. He remains indebted to John Hood for male friendship; and I will remain in contact with him, although less frequently than previously.

I believe Mark the Evangelist members should not underestimate the impact of this material support for one asylum seeker over several years. While we may regard the 'problem' of thousands of unsupported asylum seekers too difficult to 'solve', we may be reassured that for this one person, whose name and details we know, the support has been life-sustaining. Nor should we underestimate the power of prayer; Akbar (who says he is 'Christian in my heart') is aware of our prayers and remains most grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous support of Hotham Mission, whose assistance has provided an extra 'boost' to the congregation's faithful commitment.

For those who have faithfully and generously supported Akbar over the last five years, please be assured of his appreciation. Please continue to pray for Akbar, together with the many others whose circumstances are similar but whose names are not known to us.

While, at Akbar's request, the regular weekly notice in the pew sheet has been ceased, he remains firmly on our prayer list; namely, on the first Sunday of each month.



Keeping children safe



Ann Wilkinson
Safe Church Contact Person

Following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which completed its work in 2017, our Synod has developed a policy entitled Keeping Children Safe.

This policy requires all Uniting Church entities to provide a just and safe culture and environment for children. This will be a continuous process and not something which is just done once. As a congregation we will be required in an ongoing fashion to:

- Promote a culture of child safety through our leadership and governance.
- Promote access, equity and diversity in all our dealings with each other.
- Encourage appropriate behaviour.
- Recruit, train and supervise our workers well.
- Manage risk, promote safety and respond to concerns.
- Facilitate child, family and community participation.

To support these various initiatives each congregation is to appoint a Safe Church Contact Person, and Church Council has appointed me to this role. Church Council has already adopted and signed a Statement of Commitment and a Code of Conduct.

In the next few months the congregation will be introduced to these Synod-wide initiatives.

- We will arrange a meeting of the congregation to share and publicise our commitment to Keeping Children Safe and outline the various responsibilities that we will share.
- This meeting will also be an opportunity to clarify my role as the Safe Church Contact Person.
- We will organise training for all leaders, employees and volunteers.

Please feel free to chat with me at any time about this new initiative. It is early days, and we all need to be involved in influencing our evolving approach to Keeping Children Safe.

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Mark the Evangelist Futures Project

by Alan Wilkinson

MTEF Project Coordinator

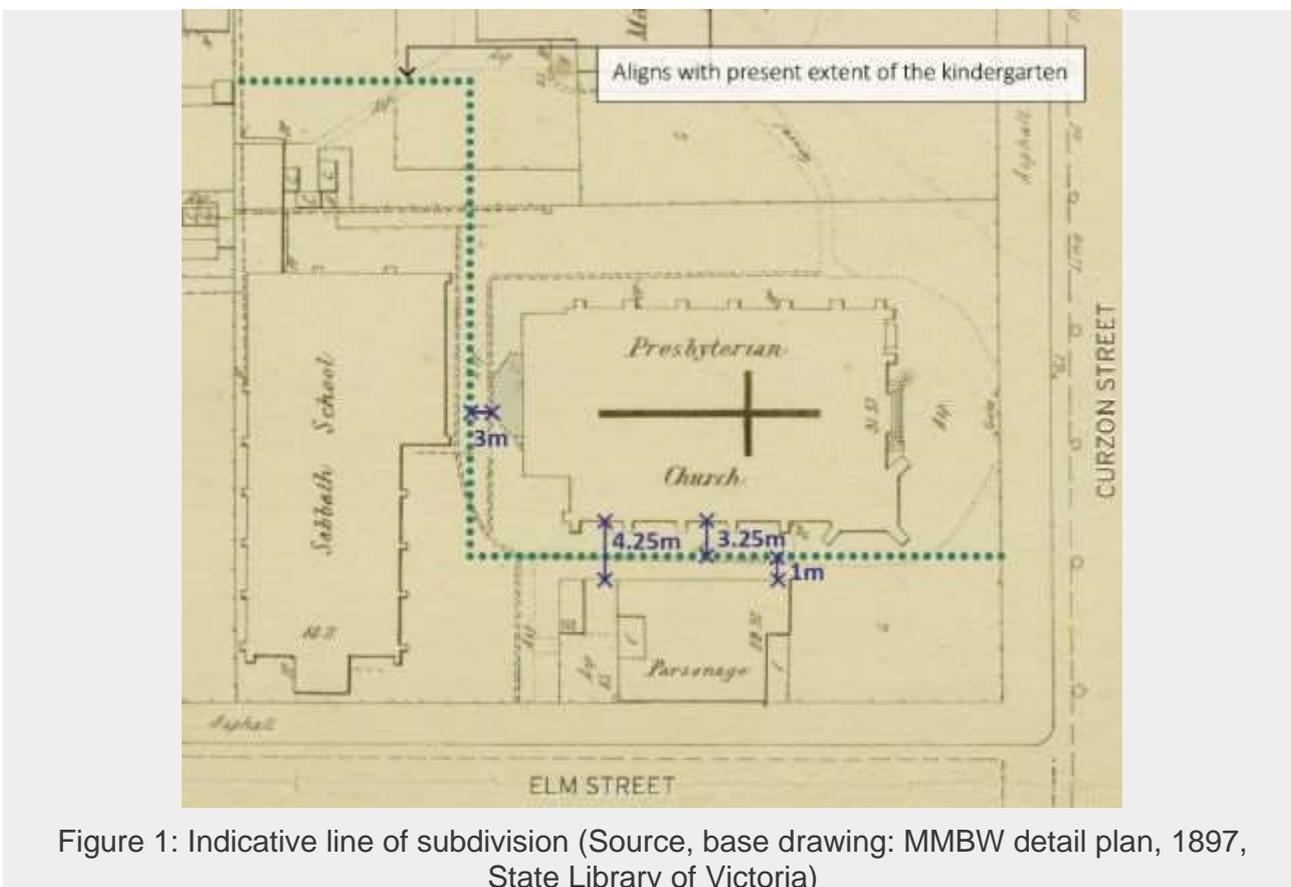
Background

Its now just over two months since we last reported to the Congregation on progress with the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project. In Church Councils Annual Report for 2017 we explained among other things that the ground lease proposal was no longer considered feasible, so we are now proceeding with the development of Property Option 5a+ concepts into detailed plans.

Subdivision of the site

In March 2018, the Project Control Group (Chaired by Dan Wootton, Yarra Yarra Presbytery Minister Administration and including four MtE representatives) set as its first task the verification of the subdivision envisaged under Option 5a+. Heritage consultants, Lovell Chen, were appointed to undertake this verification. They commented as follows:

“It is considered that subdivision of the Presbyterian Union Memorial Church Complex as per [Property Option 5a+] can reasonably be contemplated from a heritage perspective. It is an action that would not result in demolition of significant fabric or elements and would perpetuate the association between the subject site and active use by the Uniting Church”.



With regard to the future development aspirations outlined within Property Option 5a+, Lovell Chen advised:

- “Demolition of the garage, the extension to the caretaker’s cottage and the kindergarten is supported.
- Significant alterations can be contemplated to the Supper Room, recognising the extent of change to the building over time. It is possible that Heritage Victoria will expect the retention of the original external fabric. Replacement of the Supper Room with a structure of comparable scale to the existing that provides a role similar to that originally provided by the Supper Room might also be achieved. Further research and physical analysis is recommended.

- Built form to the north of the Bluestone Chapel/Supper Room should generally be screened in views from the public realm by the Bluestone Chapel and the Manse.
- The introduction of built form of greater than one level on the site of the rear addition to the caretaker's cottage may be resisted by Heritage Victoria.
- It would be appropriate for the fence between the caretaker's cottage and the church to drop down in height to the east of the caretaker's cottage, where it is most exposed. The fence may typically be 1.8m high and drop down to 1.2m at the east".

Site survey

Having received this verification of the subdivision feasibility from a heritage point of view, the Project Control Group proceeded to appoint Reeds Consulting to survey the site, identify the utility services which will be affected, and prepare and submit a Subdivision Planning Permit Application to Melbourne City Council (and Heritage Victoria). This work is about half completed.

Development advisor appointment

While this preparation for the subdivision of the site was proceeding, Church Council issued invitations to three firms to submit proposals and quotations for the provision of the Development Advisor and Manager services for Stage 3i of the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project (MTEFP). Based on an assessment from Property Services, a recommendation from the Project Control Group, and further consultations with the preferred candidate, Church Council at its meeting in June appointed Gauge Property to undertake the Development Advisor services required. Gauge will begin work on the MTEF Project immediately and initial estimates are that Stage 3i will be completed by January 2019.

Clarification of our space needs

One of the first tasks to be undertaken by the Development Advisor working closely with Church Council is the preparation of a 'mission and spatial objectives' document based on Property Option 5a+. While MtE's 'mission objectives' are clearly spelt out in the Business Case, the 'spatial objectives' need to be more clearly stated. The open-ended Space Needs document developed with Randall Lindstrom and Jason Williams in 2013 was one of the base documents for the Stage 2B Business Case. Following the decision of the Congregation to proceed with Property Option 5a+, we now need to clarify how our space needs are being met by the building developments planned behind the Elm Street Church and behind the Cottage.

To speed up the process, Church Council has requested Finance and Property Committee to start the process of clarifying how the 2013 open-ended Space Needs document fits with the building developments planned within Property Option 5a+. This process will be continued in collaboration with the Development Advisor.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about the Project, don't hesitate to have a word with any of the Finance and Property Committee members Rod Mummery, Craig Thompson, David Radcliffe, Greg Hill or Alan Wilkinson.

Icons

The thin edge of the wedge in worship
by Peter Blackwood

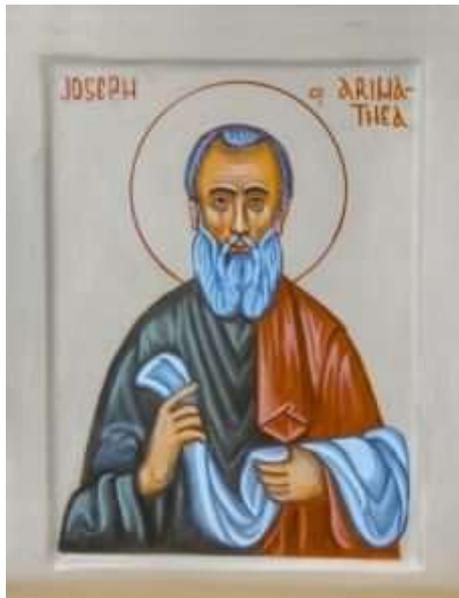
In the Scottish church of my great great grandparents there were no hymns or instruments or pictures. When two American Methodists, Ira Sankey and Dwight Moody conducted an evangelistic campaign in Edinburgh in the second part of the nineteenth century the psalm singing Scots loved it. They took to singing hymns and spiritual songs accompanied by musical instruments. How could they allow themselves to revel in such indulgence? Well, this sacrilege was not being committed in the kirk. It was out there in public halls so that made it all right.

But it was the thin edge of the wedge. Hymn singing crept into the kirk and so did the kist o' whistles, the organ. Scots Church Melbourne had to get a harmonium to accompany this newfangled hymn singing a far cry from the huge four manual Rieger organ that challenges the sensibilities of my acapella psalm-singing ancestors. By the end of the century the Scots Presbyterians had published their hymn book. It was revised in 1927 which book Presbyterians were still using at the time of Church Union.

How could the heritage of the Reformers be so ignored by our church? I will spare us any theological or sociological analysis of this change and simply say that good theology clothed in good poetry accompanied by good music helps the church to pray to God.

In the past forty years a few more wedges have been slipping into place mainly visual aids to prayer. Liturgical colours, banners, candles are all part of our worship. I am sure the ashes of my grandparents quiver in their memorial wall over these changes. What they would think of Orthodox icons I shudder to think.

I will shudder too if the introduction of icons into the life of Protestant churches is no more than an indulgence in an ancient art form. There are wonderful icons in most leading art galleries throughout the world, but icons true home is in churches. In this context their work is to help the people of God to pray, to lift their hearts in praise for the gift of salvation in Christ and to bring to remembrance the cloud of witnesses that inspire faithful discipleship. Any church that contemplates the thin edge of this wedge will do well to reflect together on what will be needed to read the language of icons into its worship.



A growing appreciation of icons
by Rob Gallacher

“Methodism was born in song” or so I was taught from an early age. However it took quite some time for me to appreciate how hymns can contribute to a service of worship. Words and music can combine to lift me to heightened consciousness of life in Christ. Surrounded by the singing congregation I was ministered to. The priesthood of all believers was made real. I was “lost in wonder, love and praise”.

When I was first introduced to icons it took quite some time for me to appreciate how they contribute to worship. Icons seemed strange, badly drawn, foreign and out of date. Gradually I realised that this visual image could lift my spirit in the same way as a hymn. There were many steps along the way. For example, I remember going to the former Congregational Church in Surrey Hills shortly after it had been sold to the Orthodox. I had been there a couple of years previously, and thought it rather puritanical. It seemed undecorated, some would say simple and without distraction. I found it dull and uninspiring. But this time I arrived as the lights were turned on. The whole building pulsed with energy. The gospel story was set out in the icons of the Christian festivals. The Last Supper was above the altar. The whole company

of heaven was there, praising Christ, the ruler of all, and I was surrounded by the company of saints and martyrs through the ages. Wow! I was uplifted in spirit, in another world a heightened consciousness of life in Christ.

Another step was to learn of the personal devotion and particular significance of icons. I met a Russian who had fled persecution at the age of six, when his priest/father had been executed in front of him by Stalin's soldiers. His father had been given an icon at his ordination. It was buried in the garden before the rest of the family fled. When the wall came down in 1989 he returned and retrieved it.

Mercifully I have not been afflicted by such personal trauma, but, nevertheless, whether in a church or at home, I find that something significant to behold and contemplate moves me, as does word and song.

I was glad to learn about "receptive ecumenism". It is a new stage in the Ecumenical Movement, whereby churches are encouraged to receive from the treasures of other traditions. In the uniting Church, we are a young church, ecumenically oriented, and still developing a style that can be enriched from many sources. Icons can be one of these, a gift from the Orthodox. I live in hope that Orthodox Churches may one day include a Wesleyan hymn. Icons and hymns correspond at many levels. What Charles Wesley put into words, such as "He has burst the gates of hell, Hallelujah", is pictured in the resurrection icon, where Christ is seen trampling on the broken gates of hell.

And I am very pleased to learn that both John and Charles Wesley had significant relations with Orthodox priests. Indeed, at one stage, John seriously considered arranging for an Orthodox Bishop to ordain his preachers – just as the founders of our Uniting Church, at one stage, considered a Concordat with the Church of South India, so that our ordination could be seen to be within the historic episcopate.

Our new Paschal candle

by Mary Sutherland

As usual the children have worked on our new Easter Candle over 3 Sundays. This year it is decorated with St Cuthbert's cross from the treasury of Durham Cathedral but originally from the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne.



They have learned how the candle is a symbol of Christ as the light of the world and also the symbolism of the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, Christ the beginning and the end. But as well they have learned about the reconciling leadership of St Cuthbert in the pagan world of Celts and Anglo Saxons in the North of England before the overwhelming Viking raids.



They concentrated really hard on this very difficult task as you can see from the pictures.

This newsletter is neatly summed up in the sentiment of 1 Corinthians 13:13 (whichever version you prefer):

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.



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