
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 39, July 2022

Greetings from Fiona

Greetings.

Like writing a sermon, sitting down to write for Mustard Seed can be daunting!

What to write about?

There is no shortage of material as I take a look around but this time

I want to write about the work of Church Council.

Council's responsibilities are varied and extensive,
ensuring that - among other things:

- services of public worship are provided each week,
 - the sacraments are observed correctly;
 - members - and non-members – are cared for;
- the building and property are properly maintained;
- we consider the needs of society and the world
and how to help, to the best of our ability;
- there is order and accountability in legal and financial matters;
- there is ethical coherence in how we conduct ourselves
as a congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Without a properly functioning Church Council, the doors wouldn't be open,
the heaters wouldn't be on, the rosters wouldn't be filled, the job wouldn't get done.

So what is the `job` of a Christian congregation in Armadale?

(I wonder how you might answer that?)

As your minister, I want to say that it is to be a place of welcome and challenge:

to make Christ known in all we think, say and do;
to help us all to live Christianly in an age of turmoil.

We may not stand at street corners to preach.

We may not knock on doors and try to engage people on their doorstep.

But we turn up, week after week, month after month, year after faithful year,
to be formed, re-formed, transformed – to go and live out our faith the best we can.
It is not for us to know the effect we have on the community and people around us.

It is for us simply to keep on - learning, growing and living faithfully,
as followers of Jesus Christ in twenty first century Australia.

Greetings from Fiona (cont)

Part of the work of Church Council is to discuss and discern
how we are going to continue to do that in these most challenging of times.
One area we are going to explore this year is the garden...more to follow on that...

In the meantime, I write with thanks for all who are currently serving on Council -
for Janet as Chair, Chris as Treasurer, Ian as Secretary, for Karen, Cheryl, and Bill;
for those who have served over many years on Council –
and for all who continue to serve in so many different ways in the congregation.
It is a joy to work with you and serve as your minister.

You also are like living stones, and God is using you to build a spiritual house...

1 Peter 2: 5

Continued blessings.

Fiona

April Blackwell leads a Christian Meditation group at the church on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm.

Sessions usually conclude about 9 p.m. For further information contact April @ 0419 807 892

From the Editors

When we sit down to assemble each issue of *The Mustard Seed*, we're never certain what material might arrive. This issue has been no exception, but we're glad that the role of the Church Council has again come to the fore. As Fiona states, the Church Council has an important role in discerning how we can respond to the challenges that face us in our community. These issues were addressed by the Church Council at its recent retreat, as noted on page 4.

This issue contains a range of other pieces which hopefully will be of interest. We're always grateful to receive material, too, so give some thought to what you may be able to contribute to a future issue.

So much of 2022 has already passed and world is facing significant challenges but, with God's help, the Church and society generally will be able to address these and move forward.

– Bill and Graeme

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TANGLING WITH TANKAS

KAREL REUS

My browsing of late through the treasury of *Kindle* has unearthed for me the magic of those Japanese short-form poems known to westerners as *Haiku* and *Tanka*.

Historically the *Tanka* came first, with what we now call *Haiku* originally taking shape as the first three lines of the *Tanka's* seven. In English language terms the *Haiku* portion took shape as five, then seven, then five syllables. The remaining two lines of the *Tanka* were seven syllables each.

These syllabic “rules” are however to be approached with care, since Japanese does not have syllables in the way English speakers understand them. *Tanka* poets in English tend to honour the “rules” more in the breach than the observance.

I tend to be most comfortable composing *Tanka* as short-long-short-long- long lines. I don't seek formal purity – just a form that helps me to say what I want to say. Maybe it would be best to see the *Tanka* below as being, in the manner of *Tanka*, and leave it at that.

sermon
crafted to the nth degree
fine-tuned—
come Sunday it will emulate
a lead balloon

I am a life coach
he said by way of introduction
what are you
I am a soul coach said I
with few customers

my mum
bend with the bamboo
she said
observe the passing parade
and hold your tongue

is it better
to go or to come back
or are
all journeys much the same
and all destinations a disappointment

newspaper
on the lawn
a magpie
teases and pecks
at today's disappointments

I miss
the sparrows
though—
I did not see them
when they were here

children
of war begotten
not stirred—
our lot licensed to kill
on the 7:00pm news

NCLS survey and Church Council retreat

We heard on 10 July from *Ian* regarding the results from the **National Church Life Survey** and from *Janet* regarding the recent **Church Council** retreat day.

The NCLS provided some interesting (although perhaps not all together unexpected) insights into our demographics and attitudes.

The successful Church Council retreat on 18 June decided on some priority issues to address in the next year, being

- spiritual growth (input will be requested from the Congregation as to how best to proceed with this);
- more focussed support for worthy causes; and
- more attention to be given to the garden.

* * * * *

The Purposes of Cold Weather

To observe the blanching of skin,
the blueness of veins.

To watch umbrellas sprout wings,
to welcome flame.

To pass lawns that sleep
under skeletons of trees.

To note the conjunction of clouds,
the declension of ants.

To give thanks for apple pie.

To write poems.

To consider our mortality.

Bill R

Around Armadale



(above) We made a presentation to Bill R on Pentecost to mark his many years of service on the Church Council, including a long time as Chair



We've been having Men's Breakfasts each month (at left)

Ian Thomas led us in Worship on 19 June, "Fear not - for I am with you" (at right)



THE ART OF TRANSLATION

J.B.Phillips

There seem to be three necessary tests which any work of translation must pass before it can be classed as a good translation. The first is simply that it must not sound like a translation at all. If it is skilfully done, and we are not previously informed, we should be quite unaware that it *is* a translation, even though the work we are reading is far distant from us in time and place. That is a first and indeed fundamental test but is not by itself sufficient. Though the translator may be a skilful writer and have conveyed the essential meaning of the original author, he may have so strong a style of his own that he completely changes that of the original author. I therefore make this second test: that the translator does his work with the least possible intrusion of his own personality. The third and final test is that of being able to produce in the hearts and minds of his readers, an effect equivalent to that produced by the author upon his original readers.

From the Preface to *The New Testament in Modern English*

* * * * *

POST-ELECTION DAY

You creator God
who has ordered us
in families and communities
in clans and tribes
in states and nations.

You creator God
who enacts your governance
in ways overt and
in ways hidden.
You exercise your will for
peace and for justice and for freedom.

We give thanks for the peaceable order of
our nation and for the chance of choosing -
all the manipulative money notwithstanding.

We pray now for new governance
that your will and purpose may prevail,
that our leaders may have a sense
of justice and goodness,
that we as citizens may care about the
public face of your purpose.

We pray in the name of Jesus who was executed
by the authorities.

Monasteries in the Sky



Rosanou

The monasteries at Meteora (in Greece) are famous for their location: perched on top of a series of high rocky outcrops that arise from the northwestern edge of the Thessalian plain..

This is one of the largest complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries and certainly the most precipitously built. They're second in importance only to the monasteries at Mount Athos. The six (of an original twenty-four) monasteries are built on immense natural pillars and hills-like rounded boulders that dominate the local area. An exception is The Virgin Ypapanti, which is built in a cave, and so appears to be built into the side of a pillar (as in fact it is).

The records suggest that the hermit Barnabas was the first ascetic in the area, and he was followed by a number of others during the eleventh century. The earliest hermits lived in caves and crevices in the rocks and supposedly devoted themselves to prayer and the study of religious texts. However, their religious duties required them to attend the Liturgy and receive the sacraments, so they were still required to attend services. This led to monasteries and communal living developing in the 14th century, and in total 24 monasteries were established high up on these pillars. Unfortunately, apart from the six that remain, many of the others are now in ruins.

Just why as many 24 monasteries were established doesn't seem to be clear! Seemingly monks preferred to start a new monastery rather than join an existing one

Perhaps the reason is partly due to the fact that, in the Eastern tradition, there are monasteries with communal living (the Coenobitici), although there's also the Idiorhythmic or individual tradition,



In the past, access to some of the monasteries was only by being hauled

where the monks live and eat apart and only meet each other in church. Philosophically the latter consisted of a hermit's total withdrawal from society, usually in the desert, and the constant practice of mental prayer. Apparently it was practised at Mount Athos (Greece) until 1992, but it's difficult to find any reports that it still occurs. A number of caves are visible at Meteora which were formerly occupied by hermit monks.

In his book *Roumeli* Patrick Leigh Fermor describes his visit to a number of Meteora monasteries, including St Barlaam, Transfiguration, the convent of St Barbara (or Roussanou)(where there were just two nuns at the time of his visit), St Stephen and Holy

Trinity. At the time he wrote (late 1950's, early 1960's), he estimated that there were only about a dozen monks left in all the Meteora monasteries, and Holy Trinity was uninhabited (although that appears to have been re-occupied in the intervening years). At that time, the occupants of St Barlaam were only the Abbott and a deacon. The hospitality was simple and was offered to both PLF and his wife Joan

However, I read that on Wikipedia that today there are approximately 50 nuns and 17 monks now living in the six active monasteries of Meteora. Perhaps the advent of tourism has somewhat revived these institutions from the low point witnessed by PLF. Rosusanou and St Stephen are convents. St Stephen was almost deserted by 1960 (after having had 31 monks in 1880), so became a convent in the following year. It is now said to be "flourishing".

continued on next page

(at right) Meteora – not a great photo, from a 2000 pre-digital image. Google tells me that my photo is the Monastery of the Holy Trinity (Aghia Triada), but i remain uncertain. It might be Barlaam.



Who was Patrick Leigh Fermor?

Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915 -2011) had an “interesting” upbringing, being described in one of his school reports as “.. a dangerous mixture of sophistication and recklessness”.

He’s been described as was one of the most charismatic and adventurous personalities of the 20th century.

After studying for entrance to the Army and then trying his hand at writing, he set off in 1933 at age 18 on his famous walk from Holland to Constantinople (described in *A Time of Gifts*, *Between the Woods and the Water* and *The Broken Road*). During World War 2 he served behind the lines in Crete with the Creten resistance, as featured in the movie *Ill Met by Moonlight*. During this time he lived for over two years in the mountains.

He had a great mastery of languages, especially Greek, and was a great admirer and lover of Greece. In the 1960s PLF and his wife Joan chose to spend the rest of their lives in Greece and to build their home, lavishing much love and attention on it, in the idyllic coastal town of Kardamyl . This is now accessible to the public.

Amongst his books are *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese* (1958) and *Roumeli – Travels in Northern Greece*. *Roumeli* was written mainly in the late 1950s and early 1960s (although published in 1966), In researching these books, PLF was just able to see enough of some of the old traditions to be able to write about them before they got overtaken by the 20th century.

Meteora (cont)

PLF quotes the Abbott of St Barlaam saying, the feeling in the monasteries is as if one is up in the sky, and “one feels nearly in Paradise”.

We did a tour of Meteora in 2000. At the time of our visit, all six active monasteries were open to visitors. To my surprise, although the monasteries we visited (just a couple, certainly not all six) looked almost inaccessible, in fact there was a road to a bus park not far from an entrance to the ones we visited!

But when PLF visited, he accompanied the Abbott of the St Barlaam monastery up from the nearby town of Kalambaka carrying supplies to the monastery riding on his mare. The path led through a gorge and along a chasm between the peaks, before turning into “a narrow flagged ascent between overpowering volumes of rock, winding among boulders and twisted plane trees”. Even this was an improvement on the situation before 1932, when there were no steps for the final ascent and everything, people and supplies, had to be hauled up in a rope net for the last stage.

It seems that the intervening years have resulted in changes occurring!

Many of the monasteries have rich spiritual and artistic treasures. These obviously include iconostases, but also frescoes and paintings, manuscripts, icons and embroideries as well as many religious objects such as crosses, chalices and other vessels. Somr were destroyed or damaged during the German occupation in World War 2 but fortunately many are still intact.

GH



St Stephen (left) and another view of Rosanou (right)

Christians, for instance, are not properly speaking believers in religion; rather they believe that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified under Pontius Pilate, rose from the dead, and is now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, present to his church as its Lord.

David Bentley Hart

FILM REVIEW

OF GODS AND MEN

In an Algerian mountain village in the mid-1990's, a humble community of eight French Christian monks makes honey and provides medical treatment for its poor Muslim neighbours. The brothers seem to age from 40-something to 80-something. They may have taken a vow of chastity but they radiate manly conviction. Every move they make – or decline to make – is an honest reflection of their faith. They're motivated by love of God and a sense of mission. They may be a bit stubborn in certain situations but they're thoughtful and admirable.

'Remember – you have already given your life to God', says the group's leader, Brother Christian. So, if violent Islamic radicals are terrorising the local population and unsubtly suggesting that the brothers clear out, the monks reason that the biggest risk is not to life and limb but to heart and soul. The members of the religious community examine their consciences with exemplary courage and act accordingly. (The final scene shows the ultimate cost of their decision to stay).

The Islamic radicals are so sure of their own righteous cause that they crash the monastery on Christmas. When Brother Christian calls their attention to how impolite their transgression would be at any time but how supremely rude it is under the circumstances, the marauders no-nonsense leader apologises.

Near-tireless physician Brother Luke is about the coolest monk who ever lived. When a young woman asks him if he has ever been in love, he replies that he certainly has, but all that was some 60 years ago before he committed to a higher love. Luke's sense of purpose and his numinous contentment are inspiring.

The director has found ways to convey the collective power of belief and the manifestation of an all-encompassing love. The movie convention of two lovers running toward each other in slow motion here takes the form of the monks drinking wine together, their faces radiant with joy and later, with sorrow, as – of all things – 'Swan Lake' plays in the background.

I wonder what the wording is for a blessing over a film? May I suggest:

Oh, Higher Power, who made possible persistence of vision and the wonderful entertainments that have flowed from the meeting of light and celluloid, electricity and pixel, bless this film and all those who sit through it. May this venture not be a waste of time. Imbue it with truth and beauty or, failing that, telling details that reward the viewer. Let those who come to commune in the dark leave the theatre with a feeling of kinship in their hearts, grateful for having chosen this film and not another from the bountiful choice in this, the entertainment firmament. Amen.

SBS Review (abridged)

The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.

G.K.Chesterton

The Earliest Church Hymn?

In the season of 1896/97, two young archeologists from Lincoln College Oxford, (where John Wesley lived and studied), found a huge ancient rubbish dump about 100 miles south-west of Cairo. Over the next 100 years it yielded the largest collection of ancient papyri ever found. The people who lived nearby threw away their useless records, bank statements, receipts, invoices, correspondences on matters military, religious, political and economic. The hot desert sands and climate preserved all these so we now know intimate details of their lives from the times of the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines. Most of the manuscripts/fragments date from c.100-450 AD. In addition to important fragments from most of the books in the Old Testament, we have fragments and passages from all the books in the New Testament.

One papyrus, discovered in 1918, has what is considered the oldest Christian hymn. Written in Greek, with words and musical notation, has been dated about 260 AD and so is an example of how Christians in the early church praised the Lord. The words (in translation) read:

*Let all be silent, Let the luminous stars not shine,
Let the winds and all the noisy rivers die down;
and as we hymn the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
let all the powers add "Amen, Amen",
Praise always, and glory to God,
the sole giver of good things, Amen, Amen."*

abridged from Early Church History (Arts).

(However: some scholars think that sections of the New Testament such as Colossians 1:5-20 and John 1:51-17, may well be parts and evidence of even earlier 1st century hymns).

I am not young enough to know everything.
Oscar Wilde

Website

Don't forget to keep an eye on our website. It's at

<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

We try and keep it up-to-date, but we always welcome any feedback (you can send this to Graeme). We would also welcome any items of interest that you think might be suitable to be posted.



April liked the Planet Earth installation at St Paul's Cathedral (left), called Gaia (see <https://cathedral.org.au/gaia/>).

Miracles are a re-telling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for us to see.

C S Lewis

YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

Women's Breakfast On the first *Thursday* of the month. Contact Margo Anderson for details 0447 035 355

Men's Breakfast On the first *Friday* of the month. Contact Graeme Harris for details 9504 8234

Armadale Uniting Church

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Minister: Rev Fiona Winn
Organist: Rowan Kidd
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<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday.

Children's program: 1st Sunday of the month, during term time.

Usually on the 5th Sunday (where a month has 5 Sundays) we hold a combined service with other Uniting Churches in Stonnington, which are not always at Armadale. If the service is not at Armadale, no service at Armadale on that day. During January, the format of our services may vary.