

---

# The Mustard Seed

---



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 45, July 2024

## GOING TO CHURCH

Have you ever been asked why do you go to church?

I was once, and I'm afraid that my reply was stumbling to say the least. Is it really, as it may appear to many, a waste of a good Sunday morning - when we could perhaps sleep in, mow the lawn, wash the car, read the paper? Why spend an hour doing and saying much the same things, week after week, month after month, year after year? Even the sermons get their inspiration from the same triennial rota of the Word. The words and responses of Holy Communion are the same as when I was a teenager. Aren't there more interesting pursuits?

I hope I could give a better and more considered answer now.

We worship, as the theologian John Webster has written 'because of the supreme fact that God's works and ways include this astonishing fact: that he is our God, and we are his people'. Each life is a gift from God who is to be praised and thanked. Scripture also insists that we are called to worship him not only as individuals but by assembling in a community, even in a small one, like Armadale Uniting 3143.

Well, it's true that together we worship God more or less in the same way every week. Each Sunday, we praise and glorify God, we thank him for all he has given and gives us; we confess where we have fallen short; we receive unconditional forgiveness; we pray for the church and the world, for others, and for ourselves. From the outside it may seem like monotony.

But in worship we ask God to 're clothe us in our rightful minds' as the old hymn has it. We draw back from the lures of the world to the proper worship of our loving creator.

From the Christian viewpoint, this is a divine calling, a holy rhythm, intended for our good.

WR

### Contents

Church Going	1
Editorial	2
Coming to Faith through Richard Dawkins	2
A Chat with Barbara	3
News from Down South	5
You Tube country	6
Around Armadale	7
Who was Philip in the Bible	8
The Holy Family in Egypt	9
Alexei Navalny	10
History of Armadale Uniting Church	11

## From the Editors

For the last seven years Fiona has provided us with thoughts for page 1 of *The Mustard Seed*, but in recent issues others have provided us with their reflections. This month Bill has provided us with a reflection on Church Going. We've also had a chat with Barbara and we hear from Karel and Margaret about life down their way. And of course there is more.

– Bill and Graeme

## BOOK REVIEW

### Coming to faith through Richard Dawkins

Kregel Publications 2023

The editors Denis Alexander and Alister McGrath have gathered other intelligent minds from around the world to share their startling commonality: Richard Dawkins and his fellow New Atheists were *instrumental* in their conversions to Christianity.

Despite a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, all are united in the fact that they were first enthusiasts for the claims and writings of the New Atheists. But each became disillusioned by the arguments and conclusions of Dawkins, causing them to look deeper and with more objectivity at religious faith. The fallacies of Christianity that Dawkins warns of simply don't exist.

Spending time in this fascinating and powerful book is like being invited to the most interesting dinner party you've ever attended. Listen as twelve men and women from five different countries across a variety of professions – philosophers, artists, historians, engineers, scientists, and more – explain their journeys from atheism to faith. In the end, you may come away having reached the same conclusion: authentic Christian faith is in fact more intellectually convincing and rational than New Atheism.

(from the back cover)

*“This is a novel book: real life stories of people who have actually come to faith not in spite of, but through Richard Dawkins. It must be his own worst nightmare”.*

William Lane Craig



Ann and Rob recently visited Yvonne at Castlemaine

# A Chat with Barbara

Rev Barbara Allen has led us in worship a number of times recently, so we took the opportunity to learn a little more about her.

## **Where were you born? Any brothers or sisters? Other family?**

Ballarat. One brother, one sister. I have one son. My husband died last year. I have an elderly blind dog (Harry), an elderly cat (Leaf), three white doves and one goldfish.

## **Did you have a favourite subject at school?**

English.

## **What sort of books do you like to read?**

Ones with happy endings! I read a lot of non-fiction, about animals. I like myths and legends. Growing up, my favourite books (apart from the Bible) were *Charlotte's Web*, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Books that I read change through the years, from the Brontes, Russian literature (especially Tolstoy), to Mitch Albom, Kate DiCamillo and Ruth Hogan. I find moods/emotions often dictate what I read.

## **Have you always been a Christian? What do you think about Jesus?**

I think I have always been a Christian, but I pulled away during my teenage years. Jesus asks the hard questions, expects the best from us, but loves us anyway. Jesus is love.

## **Do you find personal prayer easy or difficult? Any other thoughts about it?**

At times I find it hard. I often pray when I am out walking, or doing something, which helps centre me and stops my mind from wandering. I tend to pray 'arrow prayers' when out and about-short prayers. I tend to chat a lot to God (poor God!)

## **We know you are a writer. Can you tell us some more?**

I always wanted to be a writer, but I didn't think it would ever happen. I write non-fiction books about animals, but I have also written a picture book about Jesus and a dog. My published books are *I Was There*, *Pigeon*, *Animals in Religion*, and *Pelican*. My book about pet loss is coming out this year, as well as one about extinction. At present, I am writing *Goose* (these animal ones look at a particular animal in culture/religion/art etc as well as its biology). I always thought I would write fiction!

## **Where did you train for the ministry? What was the most/least enjoyable part of being a parish minister?**

I was a nurse, and then a teacher, before I trained to be a minister. I trained in a roundabout way. We were living in Canberra, so I did my degree externally, then we came down to Melbourne for a year so I could complete my training at the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville. I love pastoral care. It is such a privilege to be part of people's lives, getting to know them, and walking beside them, supporting them during tough times such as illness and death. I have been blessed many times during ministry. I have met many earth-bound angels!

**Least favourite part?** Meetings.

**When you were at the Lort Smith Animal Hospital, how did you interact with grieving pet owners?**

By being with them. I would always phone them the next day, and I would send out cards to about a third of them. I held two memorial services a year as well. Grief is grief, whether the deceased had two legs or four, it is about the bond. As chaplain, I supported them. I was often asked the tough questions, such as “Will my dog go to heaven?” -which is really a question about the existence of a loving God. I believe they do. I believe that all that God creates returns to the Creator.

**Which theologian(s) have influenced you the most?**

Ken Gire, Edward Hays.

**What sort of music/composer is your favourite? Do you play an instrument?**

1970s rock (my teenage years). Love Joe Cocker and Leon Russell. Enjoy Van Morrison. Love the blues. Hymns. Folk. Quite a range.  
I play the piano, but not very well.

**Can you describe your favourite meal?**

I am vegan, so my choices reflect that. Probably a good laksa, or a cauliflower and tofu curry, followed by a scoop of vegan Ben & Jerry’s ice-cream, and an endless mug of Earl Grey tea (I drink a lot of tea!)

**Have you travelled overseas? Is there a country you have not been to that you would like to visit?**

Yes. I actually met my late husband in a youth hostel in Bangor, Wales. He was from Sydney. We lived in Canada for two years. I would like to visit Iceland.

**We are a declining, ageing congregation. Any comments/suggestions? It’s OK to be brutal!**

You are lovely! Being small in number does not mean you are less worthy than other congregations. You are loved and precious to God. Being small, means you probably know each other quite well, like a family. Age might mean not having energy to do certain things, but it doesn’t mean you are obsolete, irrelevant, invisible, or past your use-by date! Think of some of our Bible family members, such as Abraham and Sarah.



# News from Down South

## From Karel and Margaret

For the past twelve or so years Margaret has lived in a North Caulfield house set aside for the use of retired Uniting Church ministers. I joined her about seven years ago and in 2018 we were married. Just before our marriage we received a visit from members of the Synod's Pastoral Care Committee, letting us know that the Synod would sell the house, but that we would be provided with alternative accommodation. Six years passed until late last year when we were invited to inspect a unit in Parkdale. If we thought the unit suitable, the Synod would make a bid for it. We were delighted with the unit which had recently been renovated. The Synod's bid was successful, and we moved in on January 13 of this year.

It had been a long wait, and we had pretty much given up hope that anything would happen at all. Of course there was a lot of downsizing to be done -- four hard rubbish days. Margaret's children (well, most of them) threw their weight behind the move. As always, the stress of the move was felt, and me having a heart attack a month or so before the move did not help but we got through relatively unscathed. The Synod was a great help. Another unexpected problem was our car's giving up the ghost, meaning that the move, and subsequent life in Parkdale has had to be car-free. We are managing though, with taxis and the occasional loan of a car.

We have connected with the Beaumaris Uniting Church. We already knew them and they welcomed us with open arms. They have even set up a roster to drive us to church and home again. There is a men's group that meets weekly in homes. Services are conducted by a supply minister, and I have offered to fill in any gaps. So far that has only happened once I think my preaching days may be on the wane. I'm not too worried about that.

We are enjoying a quiet Darby and Joan existence. Lots of reading. Lots of music. Lots of writing (though there should be more of that). More visits to doctors and specialists though. Fortunately we get our groceries delivered, and the chemist does likewise. The Kingston City Council provides services that include cleaning. Margaret is increasingly aware of her age. Me too!

We are very happy in Parkdale, but happy memories also accompany us daily. Of course we have lots of Armadale memories and if Armadale folk want to help keep those memories alive with a visit or a phone call, you would be most welcome.

If you'd like to get in touch with Karel and Margaret, just ask Bill or Graeme, who have their contact details.

### YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

**Women's Breakfast:** On the *2nd Friday* of the month. Contact Margo Anderson for details 0447 035 355

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

# YOU TUBE COUNTRY

Bill Rush

What would I do on a Sunday morning if there were no church to attend and no sermon to hear? Possibly turn on the TV and listen to one of the many and stimulating lectures or debates of John Lennox or Alister McGrath - which may be found on YouTube.

Both men have written copiously on the Christian faith and are international speakers, mainly in Europe and North America. Both have debated prominent atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Peter Singer.

John Lennox was Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University. He speaks four languages including Russian which he learnt while working in that country. Lennox reflects that “Either human intelligence owes its origin to mindless matter; or else there is a creator. It is strange that some people claim that it is their intelligence that leads them to prefer the first to the second”.

Alister McGrath was the Oxford Professor of Molecular Biology, at Oxford, with additional doctorates since in Arts and Theology. He is now an ordained Anglican priest. McGrath writes: “We live in a world of competing narratives. In the end we have to decide what is right. And having made that decision, we then need to inhabit the story we trust”. McGrath came to his Christian commitment after being a militant atheist and Marxist until he was forty.

## WEDNESDAY REFLECTION

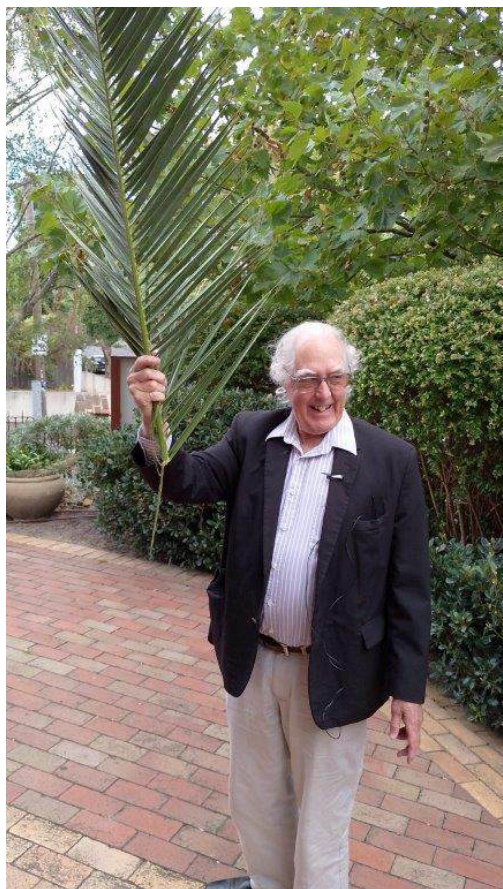
We meet together for Quiet Reflection each Wednesday morning at 10 am in the Church, and then have coffee at a local cafe. You'd be most welcome to join us.



Many of us light a candle at Wednesday reflection

As mysterious as it seems, our prayers have the power to live after us. Ken Gire.

# Around Armadale



(left) Ian Thomas led us on Palm Sunday and Rev Jay Robinson led us on Good Friday (below)



Replanting the lawn (left)

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

## Who was Philip in the Bible?

The New Testament mentions four different men named Philip. Two get cursory mentions as sons of Herod The Great (by different wives). The other two were both prominent in the Early Church: Philip the Apostle, and Philip the Evangelist, sometimes called the Deacon.

Philip the Apostle was one of the Twelve, and like Peter and Andrew, came from Bethsaida in Galilee. Jesus called Philip, who had been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:43), then Philip found Nathanael (aka Barthomolew) and introduced him to Jesus. John portrays him as a friendly agent, a go-between sort of person. Later, Philip was approached by some Greeks, also from Bethsaida, who wanted him to arrange a meeting with Jesus. As Philip is a Greek name one can speculate that he had a previous connection, perhaps through business, family or friendship, with members of the Greek diaspora there. Probably he spoke some Greek. He was the disciple who calculated how much money it would cost to feed the 5000: “*Six months wages would not buy enough for each of them to get a little!*”(John 6:7). He is only mentioned once in Acts as being present at Christ’s ascension.

. . . . .

Philip the Evangelist however was one of the deacons selected to help the poor members of the Jerusalem church. He left for Samaria after the “great persecution” (Acts 8:1) and took the good news of Jesus to the people there.

This Philip is particularly remembered for his meeting on the road with the Ethiopian eunuch, a member of the court of Candace the Ethiopian queen. He came across the official sitting in his chariot, puzzling over some words in the Book of Isaiah. The eunuch was no doubt reading from the Septuagint – a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The fact that he had a copy of this book of his own, could read, and that he had his own chariot, indicates that he was a man of considerable position, intellect and wealth. His interest in the God of Israel was sufficient for him to undertake the long journey to Jerusalem and back – although having reached the Temple, he would not have been allowed to approach further than the Court of the Gentiles.

Who is this person that the prophet is referring to? asked the eunuch:

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer ... For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people ... although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth ” (Isaiah 53)*

At his invitation, Philip sat beside him and explained that the words he was reading was in fact a prophecy about the future Messiah of Israel, now the crucified and recently risen Jesus. Having absorbed and understood the Scripture, the eunuch then asked Philip to baptize him in some nearby water before he proceeded on his journey home to his own people.

Today the Coptic Church in Ethiopia regards the eunuch as founder of their present day church.

*From Quora and the website of Mark the Evangelist Uniting Church, South Melbourne.*

Growth in the Christian life is simply growth in seeing that the gospel is true; that Jesus Christ is the preeminent reality of all things.

John Webster



# The Holy Family in Egypt



***Now when the magi had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.'***

Ann and Robin Ahin recently had the opportunity to visit Egypt and found that the supposed route of the Holy Family is well marked and venerated. Opinions vary on how long the family were in Egypt, from a few months to seven years. Also, there is a theory that they were accompanied by a relative.

A map of their travels seen by Ann and Rob suggests that the journey was 3½ years, travelling from Bethlehem towards Cairo (probably known at that time as Babylon), then north towards Alexandria (a popular haven for exiled Jews), west through the desert, returning to Cairo and the Nile. They then travelled south. The eastern side of the Nile is the favoured side as it is closer to the sunrise, while the west is less favoured being closer to sunset. Various monasteries commemorate where they stopped.

On hearing that Herod had died, they headed by boat upstream to Cairo then continued overland to Nazareth. Whilst the family was happy to return to Judea, it was considered that Nazareth would be safer than Bethlehem.

# ALEXEI NAVALNY - Strange?

Paul Caron

Before the world forgets the corpse of Alexei Navalny in the subzero environs of an Arctic penal colony, we ought to look at him – especially those of us who follow Jesus Christ – to see what moral courage actually is.

Navalny repeatedly referenced his profession of Christian faith:

“The fact is that I am a Christian which usually sets me up as an example for constant ridicule because mostly our people are atheists - and I was once quite a militant atheist myself ... but now I am a believer. ...”

Specifically Navalny said he was motivated by the words of Jesus “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be satisfied (Matt5-6) ... I’ve always thought this is more or less an instruction to activity, and so while not really enjoying the place where I am I have no regrets ...”

Navalny recognized that the allure of moral cowardice when standing in courage means standing alone. A conscience can always reassure itself that being quiet is the right thing. He recognized the terror in the thought of being left outside of a field of belonging – being branded a traitor by fellow countrymen and a heretic by fellow churchmen ... he recognized that one must embrace ‘strangerhood.’

This was the root, I believe of his moral courage, his willingness to stand alone, his willingness to die ... it’s the way he seemed to know Scripture ... he seemed to recognize not just the bare ‘instructions’ from Jesus about hungering and thirsting for righteous, about being blessed in persecution, but also the story behind and around them. He knew these words seem strange. He knew they sound crazy...

The very point of ‘hungering’ and ‘thirsting’ is that one is prompted to see that something’s missing – that the satisfactions on offer aren’t enough. The very appetite for such things is a sign that what one is hungering and thirsting for, is really out there.

A person can see that sometimes, even from a gulag. That’s strange. That’s crazy. But that’s what at least one Person I know would call “blessed”.

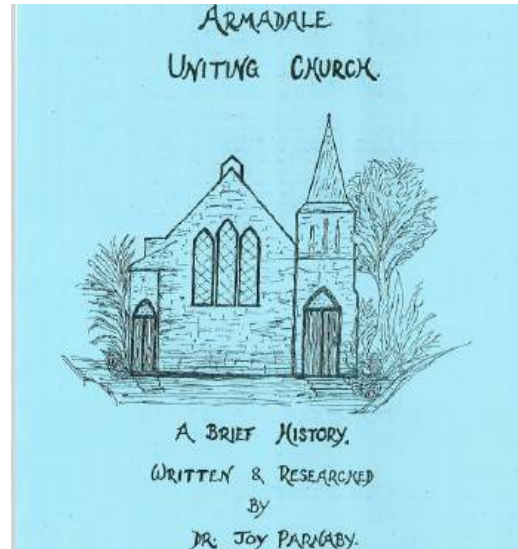
*Abridged from Christianity Today February 25,2024. ‘What a Murdered Russian Dissident Can Teach Us about Moral Courage’ by Paul Caron.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Offerings

We’re grateful for the level of support that we receive through weekly offerings, but have you thought about the amount you contribute? If it hasn’t increased for a while, perhaps you might like to consider whether a small increase might be in order. Some of us use envelopes or make direct credits. Envelopes are available on the table as you enter the Church, and you can speak to any member of Council about making direct credits.

# History of Armadale Uniting Church



Have you looked at the history of Armadale Uniting Church? It's readily available here: <https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Parnaby-AUC-history.pdf>

*Armadale Uniting Church – A Brief History* was written and researched by Dr Joy Parnaby in 1996. She sets out the histories of the two churches that came together at the time of church union in June 1977 to form what is now the Armadale Uniting Church. These were the Armadale Presbyterian Church, which was at Denbigh Road (the building has now been converted to a residential complex) and the Armadale Methodist Church in Kooyong Rd (cnr of Clarendon Street).

The first service at Armadale Presbyterian Church was held on 16 August 1891, but it traces its origins back to a Sunday School established in Orrong Rd in 1876 which was developed into a Mission in 1890.

The first service at Kooyong Road was held on 20 August 1881, in a former dance hall bought by the Mt Erica church, with the foundation stone of the present building being laid in May 1886.

However, at the time of Union there were also other churches in the area, including the Toorak Village Church (originally the Toorak Methodist Church), on the corner of Toorak and Williams Roads. At the time of Union, it had been under the care of Armadale Methodist, where it remained, instead of becoming part of the Toorak Uniting Church (formerly the Toorak Presbyterian Church). However, worship here ceased in early 1981, and the property (which needed a lot of work) was sold.

There was also the Malvern Road Congregational Church (also known as the Prahran Independent Church) in Malvern Rd, but in 1979 it was detached from the Armadale Parish and became part of the Prahran Parish. It was sold to the then Prahran City Council in 1980, and is now Chapel on Chapel.

Earlier, there had been other churches in the area, including the Mt Erica Methodist Church, which a Google search tells us celebrated its centenary in 1955 but which was sold in 1963 to become St Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church. There was also a property in Grandview Grove, East Prahran. Dr Parnaby's history notes that closure of the "Grandview Grove Chapel and Sunday School" occurred in 1971-72. In a newsheet in 2006 we recorded that when this closed, Mr Ralph David and Rev Robert Weatherlake (who was Minister at Armadale from 1970 to 1978) arranged for the independent living units that then (and now) occupy the Grandview Gr site to be constructed. They're known as "Cornwall". Management passed to Harrison Community Services (now absorbed into Uniting VicTas) in 2006. In Sally Wilde's *History of Prahran 1925-1990*, this is referred to as

having been a Methodist Church but there is little information on the internet about it.

The minister at Kooyong Road, at the time of Union, was (as mentioned above) Dr Robert Weatherlake. Rev Dick Collard was the minister at Denbigh Road. Rev Howard Abbey replaced Dr Weatherlake at the end of 1977 and Rev Collard moved at the end of 1979 but was not replaced. Subsequent ministers at Kooyong Rd were Rev Gerrit Peterschlingman (1983 to 1992), Rev Dr Max Champion (from 1992), then Rev Judith Watkins, Rev Kylie Crabbe and Rev Fiona Winn. At times, there have been supply ministers, including Rev Gillian Crozier, Rev Peter Beale (joint ministry for some months with Serrell Street, East Malvern) and Rev Martin Wright as well as others on a short-term basis.

The parsonage for Armadale Methodist Church was at 2 Erskine Street, Armadale, which was sold in 1980. It had damp and other issues so needed work to be done on it. The manse for the former Armadale Presbyterian Church was at 65 Denbigh Rd, just along from the Church. It was sold under the “Uniting our Futures” program in November 2013 for \$2.64 million.

## 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.

Western Christians have imagined that, at the end of the day, God is going to throw the present space-time universe into a trash can and we'll be sitting on clouds playing harps. The ultimate future that we're promised is much more interesting. It's new heavens and a new Earth and with new bodies to live in.

Tom Wright.

## Armadale Uniting Church

86A Kooyong Road  
ARMADALE Vic 3143

Minister: Vacant  
Organist: Rowan Kidd  
[ucarmadale@gmail.com](mailto:ucarmadale@gmail.com)

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

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

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday (except January).

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

Usually on the 5<sup>th</sup> 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.