
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Edition 24 – July 2017

From the editors...

On October 29, 1517, the monk Martin Luther nailed a copy of his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle church. From this day, the Reformation is generally considered to have begun. After this, the Western church would be split in two, the course of European history dramatically changed, and the word of God become available in common languages. The Uniting Church is one of several heirs to Luther's profound theological insights. During 2017 this momentous movement will be recalled with appreciation –and also with regret for the consequent division of Christendom in the West.

In this issue, Karel invites us to consider some of the issues raised by the Reformation. We also reflect on the 40th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia and Joan Wright has written about the issues in Niger. And we have a number of other items that we're sure will be of interest.

— Bill Rush and Graeme Harris

Fiona's reflection

Friends.

On the 22 June 2017, the Uniting Church in Australia celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Here at Armadale a small gathering met and remembered something of the disruptive and exciting times then and wondered a little about the as yet unknown times ahead...

We gave thanks for the Spirit led vision and determination of the instigators of the movement to create a new fresh, future looking iteration of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Australian context, and for the many faithful witnesses in the years between union and now, to the enduring and eternal truth of Christ.

1977 is a world away from our life today: note the photographs in *Crosslight* of those involved – almost exclusively men; the original language of the Basis of Union gender biased, non-inclusive, reading truthfully, if a little jarringly to today's sensibilities, of the era.

We live in a different world.

And yet we face similar issues, hopes, dreams and fears as those of the founding fathers - albeit in a very different world context. We continue to long and pray for peace, justice, hope; for forgiveness and a new start in our lives and relationships - locally, nationally, globally; for Christ's kingdom to come.

Each generation must confront its own challenges, trials and temptations. We cannot begin to imagine those faced by the visionaries who worked and prayed and brought into being the Uniting Church in Australia. Yet we follow in their footsteps and carry on the work they began. And we are grateful...

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May I commend to you again the inspired and inspiring book written by Rev. Dr. Geoff Thompson 'Disturbing Much Disturbing Many' in which Geoff holds up for consideration and discussion the pressing theological issues for the UCA today, provoked by the Basis of Union?

This is a timely and deeply encouraging work for Christians seeking to integrate contemporary pressures on the Church with biblical witness and Church history and does so thoughtfully and, for my part, convincingly, in humility but without embarrassment.

In an increasingly secular world, where truth claims are de-bunked and derided – save for the truth claim that there are no truth claims – where does the Uniting Church in Australia stand? Has sociology, political correctness and pop psychology replaced the witness of scripture and tradition? Will we declare unequivocally that Jesus is Lord? Do we believe, by his Spirit, that he is present with us now? We shall see...

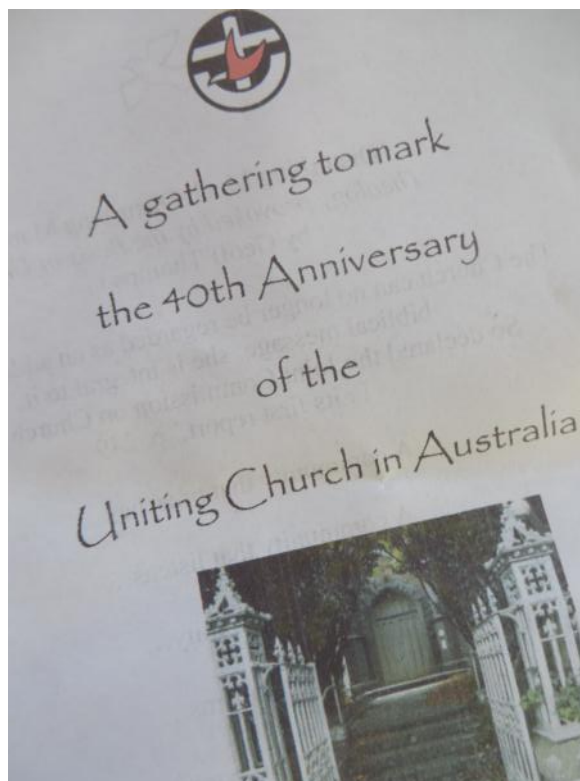
It matters how we respond to such questions... What we think and say about Jesus; what we say and think about the Church; what we say and think about now and all that is yet to be affects what we will do and what we will not do; how we live and how we will die.

Some things do not change: God's love for all creation; the supremacy and lordship of Christ; the ongoing work, encouragement and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What a joy and privilege to walk together as a 'pilgrim people' led and inspired by faithful men and women. We thank God for the Uniting Church in Australia and pray to be found faithful, for Jesus' sake and for the sake of all creation.

Grace and peace.

Fiona

'Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds'. Matthew 11:19



Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times .

Martin Luther

The Reformation: A View from the Pew

Karel Reus



Commemorative doors at All Saints' Church, Wittenberg, installed on Luther's 375th birthday in 1858.

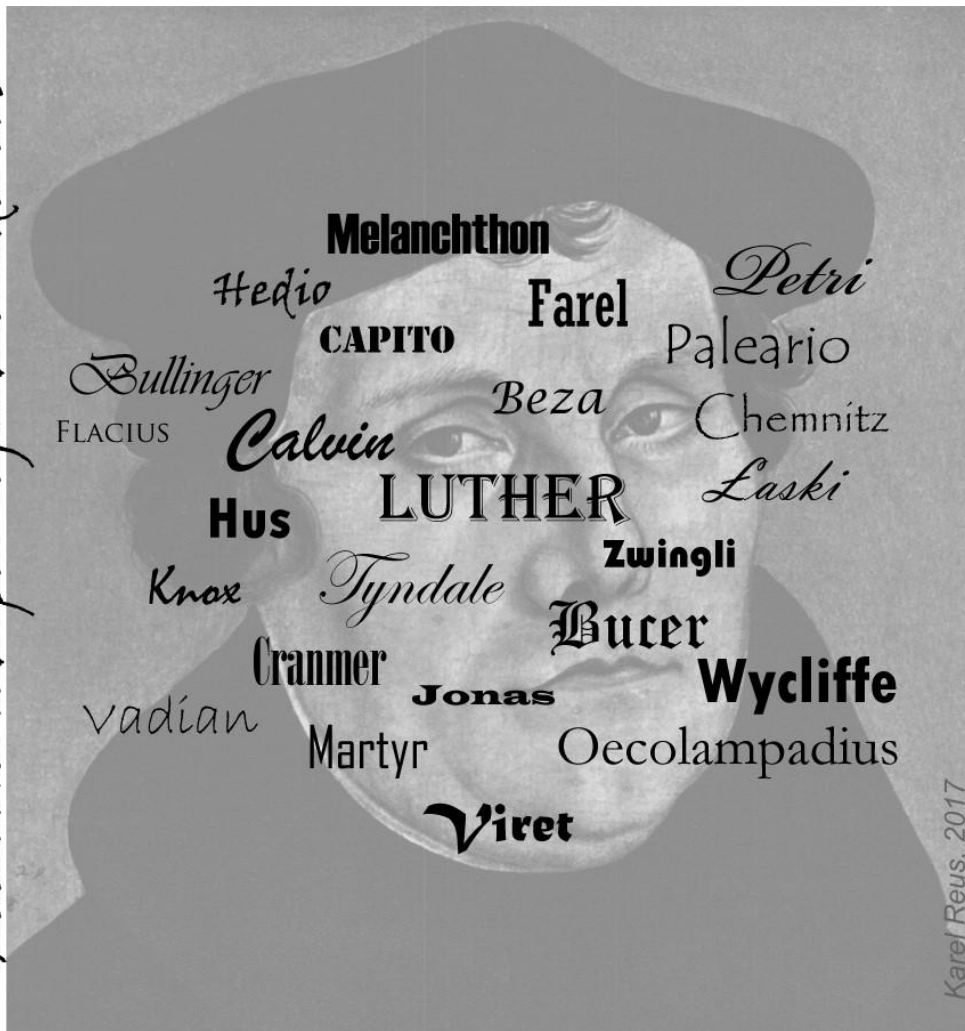
Next October 500 years will have passed since Martin Luther triggered the Reformation by nailing to the cathedral door in Wittenberg a list of ninety-five "theses" or discussion points. What we remember most about these points is that they contained a complaint about the selling of indulgences. This practice was a sort of mediaeval scam, whereby the payment of money could get you, or any nominated person, time off from Purgatory. Purgatory, of course, was itself pure fantasy; an invention from around the eleventh century with no basis in scripture, to show that good people don't need to go to hell, but could make amends for their relatively minor sins for a while and then go on to Heaven. Luther actually did not object to Purgatory too much, but he did object to the idea that you could buy God's forgiveness, or Grace.

The belief that God forgives was not new; it was standard in the mediaeval church. Saint Augustine had talked a lot about it over a thousand years before. No doubt about it, God was a forgiving sort of guy. What was contentious was that Luther (and others before long) asserted that you cannot deserve forgiveness by doing good works and thinking good thoughts. God, argued Luther, initiated forgiveness himself, and made that clear in the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. That discovery made a huge difference to Luther, and to countless "reformed" Christians after him.

The theological principle came to be known as *sola gratia*. We are "saved" by grace alone, and not by the things we do. If that is the case we might well reason that we can stop doing good things. If we can't earn grace, and if God is so helpful, why not just leave everything to God, and abdicate responsibility ourselves. Luther argued that this would be a mistake. The reality is that the real consequence of being forgiven, of receiving bounteous and non-deserved grace from God, is that we will want to do good things. Our good works are a sign that we have received grace, rather than being the cause of that grace. The Catholic Church that (in fairness) sharpened its act after the Reformation, still holds fast to a doctrine that says we need both grace and works to earn God's favour. The Reformed doctrine of *sola gratia* seems similar, but is actually radically different.

The radical shift in ideas did not end there. The reformers also asked where authority lies in the Christian faith. The Catholic Church of that time (and the same church today), claimed that authority came from scripture, but that it came also from tradition and from the authority vested in the church hierarchy of bishops, priests and the like. The reformers understood the importance of tradition. Luther was inspired by Augustine, and read church history. Nevertheless, Luther argued that there is only one supreme authority, and that is scripture, and

Ecclesia semper reformanda est



Karel Reus, 2017

that scripture is a sure and reliable guide in all matters. This view came to be known as the principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone).

In a similar manner the Catholic Church insisted, as it does today, that there are seven sacraments, each of which is a "means of grace". This means that taking part in a sacrament is enough to ensure the transfer of some of God's grace. No way, argued the reformers, there are not only fewer sacraments (Luther argued for two, some others three or four), but participation in a sacrament is a sign that you have received grace, not a way of getting grace. Again, the differences may seem trivial to us today, but on closer examination the two positions on authority and sacraments are radically apart.

There is not space enough here to explain the other radical changes brought about by the Reformation. Even on the basis of these few paragraphs it should become clear that the differences of the time were significant, and that those differences remain. We live nowadays in a generously ecumenical world. We embrace, both literally and figuratively, members of other Christian churches and denominations. We enthusiastically declare that differences are not really important; that tolerance and fellowship outweigh our differences. That is all good, and it beats persecuting and killing each other hands down. But the differences are nevertheless there, and they are profound. Ideas are important. History is important. Our understanding of God, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and the nature and purpose of the Church is important. So, let's not dismiss the Reformation as something from the distant past that does not affect us now. Let's face up again and again to the challenges the reformers faced, and refresh and renew ourselves. There is an old church motto, *semper reformanda* (always reforming). That seems like a good way to go ahead.

In the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold or silver.

Martin Luther

Art at Armadale

Compiled by Bill Rush



Armadale Uniting Church is fortunate to have many of its spaces graced by the creative works of some of its members.

Lyn Ferguson has generously provided us with a number of her paintings works over the years. As well as being an accomplished painter herself, Lyn taught art to students at University High School.

In the worship area, Lyn's painting of the head of Christ on the Cross rests behind the pulpit. It is a theological complement to gold cross of the Resurrection on the centre drape. A red painting with symbols of the Sacrament of Holy Communion hangs by the organ console and three beautiful banners can be seen in the north transept. All these contribute meaningfully to our Sunday weekly worship.

In the main lobby is a semi-abstract painting of Lyn's, showing Christ and the disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. The sea looks somewhat turbulent so it can be read as Christ stilling the waves. It resonates with the sermon the Rev. Robin Yang gave at Fiona's induction service. (*Mustard Seed 21/ August 2016*). Other paintings of Lyn's are in the Reta Berry Room (a watercolour seascape), a cheerful summer landscape in the small meeting room, and a painting of a ship which is in the minister's office.



All these works show a great variety of style, medium and subject matter that speak of Lyn's artistic talent. We are very grateful for all she has contributed to the beauty of our surroundings, and the spiritual life of the congregation.

Karel Reus Two of Karel's prizewinning photos are on display: one a portrait (in the small meeting room), the other, a composite study (just outside the door in the passage). Karel writes of his photographic life in these

Christ and the Disciples (above) and banner (left), both by Lyn.

words:

'When I retired almost ten years ago at the age of sixty-nine, I asked myself as many do, how will I fill in this life-space once filled in by work. Now was the time to unleash the artist in me, but what sort of medium to use? Watercolour? Oils? Sculpture? Sketching? I decided finally on photography, bought myself a half-decent camera, bought some books (as I do), and joined a club. I soon discovered that the club was a great environment for improving technique – and I did improve a lot. However, I leaned towards the practice of photography-as-art, and that was almost frowned upon. I was regarded as being a little too highbrow for comfort. I lasted in the club environment for about seven years, but then lapsed into taking photographs mostly for my own pleasure.

I enjoy the shape of things; the geometry of the world, the capacity of the photograph to reveal what is often overlooked. I approach photography as a form of Zen meditation, concentrating on the small things, the essence of things; what some would refer to as the mind of God revealed in creation. I love the way that the practice of photography has made me see the world in a new way, framed if you like by the quest for beauty and meaning.

In recent years I have also discovered with the help of new friends the imagery of words in literature, but mostly in poetic expression. I have found that there can be a cross-over between images-in-words, and images-in-pictures. The mental exercise involved in placing and framing both sorts of image are rather similar and I am enjoying "the art" of finding and expressing images in both ways. I also enjoy the craft of it all; the placement of elements, the highlighting and suppression, the framing and adjusting. I nearly always do my own printing, and delight in seeing the final image emerge from the printer as a once-only unique expression of soul.

(More of Karel's beautiful images can be discovered at www.kreusroads.com - Eds).

Pat Tolson

One of Pat's many paintings overlooks the space where we have morning tea. It is a romantic landscape entitled *Evensong* portraying a church, village green, and figures. Pat writes,

When I was a child, a painting of mine was exhibited in the Prahran Town Hall. Starting to paint in earnest in the early 1970's - and after gaining much knowledge from books in the Prahran Library - I began lessons from the Malvern and Brighton Art Societies before joining The Australian Guild of Realist Artists. The main themes of my work are children at play, landscapes and seascapes.



I have participated in a number of art shows - one of which was in the foyer of the Malvern Town Hall and opened by the Mayor. In 1974 one painting received a first at the Royal Melbourne Show and another came second at the Armadale Salvation Army. Other awards have followed.

Some 22 years ago I was asked to act as a volunteer

(Left) *Evensong* (Pat Tolson)

instructor for a painting group at the Malvern Artists Society which is still going. I also tutor a watercolour group for residents at MECWA, which I find most rewarding. This is not as easy as painting with oils, because watercolours are quite difficult to control.

Other items of Interest.

The Light of the World.

A coloured lithograph of this famous 19th century painting by Holman Hunt, can be seen on the brick wall opposite the kitchen door. The original hangs in the side chapel of Keble College Oxford, where Kylie Crabbe, who ministered at Armadale UC until 2012, lived while undertaking her doctoral studies.

The artist began this picture when he was a little over 21 years old, but he did not complete it until he was 29. The reason was that he wanted to perfect the sky. He did not succeed in doing this until he took the picture with him to the Middle East and found the perfect dawn he was looking for near Bethlehem. When he was nearly 70 he painted a replica which hangs in St Paul's Cathedral, London. This replica is very much larger than the original, but the colouring and details are not so perfect.

Two lights are shown. The lantern is the light of conscience and the light around the head is the light of salvation. The door represents the human soul which cannot be opened from the outside. There is no handle on the door, and the rusty nails and hinges, overgrown with ivy, denote that the door has never been opened. The figure of Christ waits to be invited in.

Under the picture, but not visible here, are words from Revelation 3:20 'Behold I stand at the door and knock'. A parable in paint.

The Mosaic

On the same wall is beautiful mosaic (at right) with the inscription 'In thankful remembrance of Leila Ida Lloyd, 2nd of January 1955. With Christ'. The subject matter is of the resurrection story, with the two wondering Marys peering into an empty tomb (Matt 28:1). It is a very well-crafted work but unfortunately the name of the artist is not known. The internet mentions a Leila Ida Lloyd (nee Brown) who was born in Maryborough in 1868. If, this were the same person, she would have been 87 when she died. This is an unusual name but whether it is the same person who was a member of the then Armadale Methodist Church is a matter for conjecture. Has anyone in the congregation more information?



The Abstract

This colourful and untitled abstract hangs on the south wall in the Reta Berry Room. It is signed *Irene 2013* - a participant of The Stables, an art therapy group attached to the Prahran Mission at that time. It is good to have this visual link with the Mission.

Pray, and let God worry. The fewer the words, the better the prayer
Martin Luther

What's been happening at Armadale?

Fiona led thoughtful worship services over the Easter period, the most significant time of our Christian year. We shared Maundy Thursday with the Armadale Baptists in the Washing of Feet liturgy. Other Sundays we recognised were Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity.

Before Easter, there was a series of Lent studies on Wednesdays, at both AUC at 10 am and Stonnington Community Church (Ewing) at 7 pm.

Ann & Robin assisted as waiters at the pre-Easter lunch for participants at the Prahran Mission.

We welcomed Heather Cameron as a member of AUC by transfer from St Andrews, and Karen Brown as an associate member.

A retiring offering for the Bible Society's 200th anniversary was collected on 26 March

On Thursday 23 March, Rev Ian Savage conducted his final faith group service, when he was released from his ministry as Chaplain at Prahran Mission. Ian has been appointed Area Dean of Dandenong in the Anglican Church.

On Friday 24 March, the ladies had lunch at 8 Days café while Dorothea Bogle was visiting. She also joined us for lunch after the service on 26 March.

On April 30, it was a pleasure to be joined by SCUC congregation from Burke Road. It was good to have the Rev Joan Wright with us again. After the service we hosted a lunch and discussion with members of the Stonnington UC Councils.



Ian and Krystyna at Pentecost.

Our minister Fiona was on study leave and part annual holiday in May. On Sunday 14 May, Margaret B and Karel R prepared Worship in the Round in which the congregation participated, and on the following Sunday, the service was led by Ian Thomas. Karel then took the service on the following Sunday. For a congregation of our size, we are blessed to have two members willing & qualified to act as worship leaders. Margaret Black's extensive past experience as a UC Deaconess is another valuable resource.

It's been a tradition each May to collect items for the Prahran Mission on Harvest Sunday. This year we were able to send over 100 items of food and toiletries for Emergency Relief, as well as other material suitable for sale in the Goodwill Shop.

On 7 May, Hugh Luxford entertained us at morning tea on his impressive new guitar. Thanks Hugh – we enjoyed it! He also accompanied us during the service on 4 June.

It's good that Mioko Wood is home again after a long stay in Caulfield Hospital Rehab.

We are a congregation of travellers. Ian and Krystyna have returned from India and the Condrons from a six week outback adventure. Heather Cameron has visited Denmark, the Baltic,

France and the U.K. while Cheryl and Stephen included Germany and Switzerland in their recent travels.

Several of us attended the launch of the Prahran Mission's Winter Breakfast Program on 16 May. There was a good turnout, notwithstanding the early morning start on a foggy day! The keynote speaker was Kevin Sheedy, who spoke of his early upbringing in the Prahran and Malvern areas, as well as reminding us that mental health issues affect footballers at times, and it's an issue that coaches (and others) need to be able to live and deal with. We also heard from Prahran Mission's patron, Neil Cole, Louisa Dent Peraac, a Mission participant, and the CEO of Uniting, Paul Linossier, as well as the CEO of Prahran Mission, Silvia Alberti, and the Mayor of Stonnington, Cr Jami Klisaris.

We had excellent services at Pentecost and on Trinity Sunday. On Trinity Sunday, April talked about one of her favourite icons.

We marked the 40th Anniversary of the Uniting Church in Thursday 22 June 2017. Fiona led us in a special gathering.

On 24 June we heard from Susie Condron about the work of Hagar Australia amongst women and children, especially in Cambodia (we also noted this in the Advent 2014 issue of *The Mustard Seed*). Hagar's philosophy is "doing what it takes, for as long as it takes, to restore a broken life). And Susie certainly made it clear that there is a real need for this work (see <http://hagar.org.au/about/>).

On Sunday 2 July, books were presented to Ian and Karel as tokens of appreciation for their leadership of worship.

We've been pleased to welcome Margo Anderson and Geoff Parnham to the congregation.



(Above, left) April showed us her icon of the Trinity (after the Andrei Rublev icon) on Trinity Sunday and spoke about its significance.

(Above) Rev Joan Wright led us in worship on 30 April.

(Left) Lenten setting.



(Left) Hugh demonstrated his new guitar at morning tea.
(Above) Rob and Ann volunteered at Prahran Mission for the pre-Easter lunch!

Can you help?

We need a representative lay person from the congregation to accompany Fiona to Presbytery meetings.

These take place monthly at Noble Park. Any support (even from time to time) would be appreciated.

There is an opportunity for a lay person from our congregation to attend the Victorian UC Synod Meeting.

This year, Synod will be held at the Box Hill Town Hall from September 8-13. See Fiona if you would like to attend all or any days.

Sammy Stamp: We collect used stamps from which the UC receives valuable revenue. In the past, Betty Terrell made sure these made their way to the Synod Office. If someone from our membership could undertake to deliver these by hand or post to headquarters, perhaps a couple of times a year, it would be appreciated. Your own used stamps can be left in our office.

Directory/Next of kin/contact details

The Directory has been updated and was recently distributed. Please note that it may only be used for matters relating to the Church. If your details need to be changed, please let Fiona know. Also, please consider giving Fiona contact details of your next of kin/contact, so that they're available if a situation arises where contact needs to be made with someone on your behalf (this information is not included in the Directory).

Graeme and Bill are always pleased to receive contributions from all members of the congregation for *The Mustard Seed*. These might be relevant photos, letters to the editors on an aspect of Christian or church life, your favourite hymns, concerns, travels, reflections, memories, book and movie suggestions and reviews, your life story, etc. In short, whatever you think might be of interest to others in the congregation. We would welcome anything from 50 to 500 words.

Niger

Rev Joan Wright

Niger is in the news as I write. “France backs new anti-terror force... Paris considers the Sahel a breeding ground for militants and traffickers who pose a threat to Europe.” The Sahel is desert country in West and Northern Africa. Most of Niger is covered by the desert. It looked expansive, dry and dusty as we flew over from France last August to visit our daughter and her family living in Niger as missionaries with SIM. (Serving in Mission, previously Sudan Inland Mission).



Inside a village friend's hut

This landlocked country shares borders with Nigeria, Benin, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Libya and Algeria. We listen keenly when these names are in the news. Andrea (Andy) Brad and children Hunter and Belle are about to finish an eighteen month internship with SIM, living on the outskirts of the capital Niamey in the south. It is a relatively safe part of the country for Westerners. I did feel safe there. As a precaution, they do have a guard overnight in their yard. ‘Ross’ who has become one of their many Muslim friends, is glad of the employment too.

There is arable land in the south due to the Niger River flowing through and thus a concentration of population. Niamey has an airport and some Western style infrastructure. There is a huge power station for example, but it was damaged on starting up and has not worked since. There is a train line but no train service. There are lots of old cars, and many more motor bikes darting in and out of unpredictable traffic with no apparent road rules. Camels, donkeys, handcarts also vie for a place on the road!

Beyond the capital and a handful of cities, people live in tribal villages in hot, arid and impoverished land. Andy and Brad feel particularly drawn to the desert people and they have embarked on learning the Fulfulde language of the Fulani people. A New Testament translation in Fulfulde has recently been completed. Fulfulde speakers, amongst several ethnic groups move from the villages looking for work or hospital care, but with little chance of affording any. The Kirkwoods live near the hospital, the grounds where many desperate people wait, seeking help, which does not necessarily come.

Of the one hundred and eighty-eight countries on U.N. Human Development Index, (based on life expectancy, expected years of schooling, gross national income per capita,) Australia is second in the world. Niger is second last. Poor health and disease – poverty of opportunity, of resources, of education, of employment are very evident.

Martin, Andy's brother, visited last March from the UK. Like us he was deeply struck by the contrasts with our lives in the West.

The family's intentions for the interim time was to pray, to build relationships. Mostly they sought to simply and sensitively live out and share their Christian faith. We were moved by the quality of relationships they have made, the mutual respect, the ease of the kids in their friendships, and their alternating between speaking the local language, French, and then English at home. Learning, experiencing culture and contributing wherever God leads them has all been part of the discernment in clarifying a 'long term' call to be Christians, living, serving in this Muslim land.

(Right) Martin with 'Josh' and 'Mark' . Martin was ordained at Armadale in May 2010, and prior to that led us for a number of months in 2008.



Everyone who has done me some sort of injury or harm has not shed his humanity on that account or stopped being flesh and blood, a creature of God like me. In other words, he does not stop being my neighbour.

Martin Luther

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Regular service times (except January): 9.30 am each Sunday.

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

During January, and occasionally at other times, we hold combined services with the other Stonnington region Churches, instead of meeting at Armadale.