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# The Mustard Seed

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Armadale Uniting Church

*Edition 27– August 2018*

## Greetings from Fiona

Greetings.

It was a shock to receive word that I have worked in the Uniting Church in Australia for over ten years! With this news came the possibility of Long Service Leave which coincided with the announcement that, in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of *L'Arche*\* in Australia, a pilgrimage was planned to the heart of Australia – to Yulara (close to Uluru) and Alice Springs. Nineteen years in Australia - I had never been.

And so late in May and for the first two weeks of June, I travelled with ten others from *L'Arche* Melbourne to the Red Centre. We drove thousands of kilometres (only one kangaroo incident) to arrive with sixty or so others from all the other *L'Arche* communities in Australia – and some from New Zealand, France and America too. It was quite a gathering! Old friends met. And new friendships began.

This was a journey into the very heart of Australia, a prayerful pilgrimage of the heart to the heart of this great country. After years of travelling and sharing life together, each of us with our disabilities and abilities, we gathered at Campfire in the Heart\*\* to remember and honour the journey thus far and to look forward to all that is yet to be.

At times it was gruelling and exhausting. Nowhere to hide...We got to know each other – and ourselves – a whole lot better. And it was exhilarating and inspiring as we discovered depths to this country – and each other – we had never known before.

The land. The plains. The escarpments. The colours. The rocks. The Rock.

The gorges. The ranges. Sunrise and sunset. Cool mornings and evenings. Hot, dry days...

So searingly beautiful...And in this wondrous ancient landscape, the searing beauty of each other in our giftedness and need...

Some of the things we discovered together along the way...

Tiredness. Grumpiness. Limitations. Resilience. Determination. Guts.

Impatience. Discomfort. Frustration. Kindness. Gentleness. Appreciation.

Grief. Honesty. Truth. Laughter. Acceptance. Good humour.

Dancing. Music. Joy. Food. Fun. Celebration.

Prayer. Silence. Gesture.

Stars. Fire. Tears. Smiles. Darkness. Light.

True beauty and transforming grace.

## From the editors...

This is our “mid-year” issue, that is between Lent and Advent. It’s the season of Pentecost, which lasts until the start of Advent.

Our lead article is by Fiona, and she describes her moving journey with L’Arche to Central Australia.

We’ve got a wide range of other items, including David’s article about three different churches he visited while in the UK, April’s very personal insight into prayer, Margaret’s update about the Bible Study Group, Bill’s visit to Sark plus contributions from Pat Tolsen, Karel and Bill and other items as well.

— Bill Rush and Graeme Harris

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Each of these words is a moment of reflection as I remember and give thanks for this wonderful experience.

More than once we sang this song by John Coleman\*\*\*

*‘Broken, all of us broken, all of us loved, all of us loved.*

*Broken all of us broken, invited to life, invited to life. `*

I invite you too to remember and reflect on the richness of your own life and experience created, known and loved so completely by God Creator, Friend and Companion.

Peace and joy, courage and hope to you and yours.

Fiona



\*L’Arche is an international community of communities for people with and without intellectual disabilities. [larche.org.au/larche-communities/melbourne/](http://larche.org.au/larche-communities/melbourne/)

\*\*Campfire in the Heart – find out more about this intentional Christian community in Alice Springs at [campfireintheheart.com.au/](http://campfireintheheart.com.au/)

\*\*\*John Coleman is a former Community Leader of L’Arche Hobart. An acclaimed singer/songwriter you can find out more about his work at <https://johncoleman.bandcamp.com/album/pilgrims-together>

One of the marvellous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn’t as individuals

Jean Vanier

*(Jean Vanier was founder of the L’Arche community)*

# A Tale of Three Churches (in the UK)

David Fallick



During our recent three weeks in the UK on a family holiday, I had the opportunity to experience three very different church services.

Two days after our arrival in London and having recovered, almost, from a serious case of jet lag, my elder daughter SJ and I walked the short distance from our airbnb in Kensington to the nearest church, a Church of England. The leafy residential backstreets were all but deserted and, as we approached the entrance, I feared we had made a mistake with the time.

Undeterred, we entered the brightly lit interior to join the other two worshippers. The youngish Anglo-Saxon Londoner conducting the brief, 40-minute service delivered a warm and enthusiastic address, there were no hymns or music but readings, prayers and a collection. As we left, he was particularly interested to learn that we were Australians and explained that the main service was later in the morning. Strolling back to join the rest of the family for breakfast at a local café, we hoped that the minister would have a somewhat larger congregation at the 10 am service.

Fast forward a week and we're in Edinburgh where Kaye and I are at the 11 am service at St Andrew's and St George's West Church in the New Town. We've joined the 70-80 other worshippers plus a choir of 8-9. We're seated in a deceptively plain round nave, with a high, but unadorned, ceiling and none of the 'features' one would expect in a substantial building of this period (e.g. the large leadlight windows are only clear glass).

There's a four page order of service plus another four pages of notices and it soon becomes apparent that we have *two* ministers, both the regular vicar and a visitor from Wider Horizons, a church group whose role it appears is to spread the word on the need to respect and safeguard the environment – God's creation. Apart from this interlude illustrated with a power point, the rest of the service was very familiar. With the help of the choir and an organ, both on a balcony behind the congregation and above the entry, there was some inspiring music, four hymns, a short sermon, the peace and an Old Testament and New Testament reading by members of the congregation and, of course, the offering. The musical highlight was the rousing anthem, 'All people that on earth do dwell'.

At the end of the service, which had lasted about 70 minutes, both ministers were in the porch

encouraging everybody to descend to the 'basement' for refreshments. We had to decline because our daughters were expecting us at the Writer's House in the Old Town – a fair hike! However, uplifted by the warmth of the service and, perhaps because of the theme of creation and the environment, and the peeling of the church bells, in the bright but weak Edinburgh sunlight in George St, I found myself involuntarily singing the anthem.

Another week, another town, this time Woodstock, northwest from Oxford and on the edge of the Cotswolds. Our daughters having fled to Madrid for a few days, it's just Kaye and myself staying at "The Feathers". Woodstock is a quintessential, postcard English small town-large village; an appendage to the much more famous Blenheim Palace, beneath the walls of which it nestles. Driving into town and in our subsequent rambles, we'd noted several very modest chapels squeezed between the houses and shop fronts in the main streets.

Sitting at the window at breakfast the next morning, Sunday, I noticed, diagonally opposite, a steady stream of people heading into the Woodstock Methodist Church. So, apologising to Kaye for my hasty exit, I crossed the street for the 10.30 service. As I glanced at the double-sided A4 piece of paper I'd been handed at the door, I read with interest that today's service was entitled 'Local Arrangement', with the following Sunday a Harvest Festival to be conducted by Rev Dr Martin Wellings.

Some 50-60 worshippers were crowded into the small simple nave and, as a late arrival, I was close to the entry where to my left on a slightly raised platform, the male organist was working hard and, on several occasions, abandoned his console to rush down the aisle to perform some other duty at the front of the church.

The middle-aged woman leading the service, with a great deal of support from other 'elders', did an admirable job. The hour-long service was, although less formal, similar to AUC: warm, friendly, engaging but respectful. Our leader explained that the female student minister, who had led the congregation for the previous year, had felt compelled to resign. We all prayed for her and I for the sincere and good flock at Woodstock Methodist Church.

Three consecutive Sundays at three very different churches and services, but all united by the common thread of the faithful, worshipping God.



Woodstock Methodist Church (left)

# What Prayer has meant to me during my life

April Blackwell



I have been asked to write something about the effect of prayer on my life and have been putting off doing so for at least a month because it seems to be a very daunting undertaking.

I think that the best I can do is to talk about my personal experience of prayer hoping that it may resonate with others at Armadale and perhaps give an insight that is helpful into another Christian's conversation with God.

My first experience of prayer was with my mother who taught me simple prayers which were said every night at bed time. Later, I decided to pray on my knees which seemed somehow more purposeful (needless to say, that has gone by the wayside).

Then there were Sunday school prayers and church prayers as a child growing up that I don't recall impressing me too much.

When I was about fourteen, I went to an Inter-School Christian Fellowship (ISCF) camp with school friends. Whilst there, I had a transformative experience of the presence of God and forthwith dedicated my life to God. In one day, I gave away all my precious collections (which were quite superior to most as I was becoming a wheeler and dealer already).

My mother was afraid that I would become a nun! My father talked to me about things being more shades of grey than black and white!

This intense stage continued until I was about nineteen and then I bailed out for about nine years during which I went overseas, married and had our first child. Timothy only lived for a month and then died of sudden infant death syndrome. My whole world was turned upside down and had to be somehow rebuilt.

It was my mother who turned me around one day when I was lamenting that I couldn't just turn to God when I was having a hard time. "Why ever not?" she replied. So, I tentatively started to attend church again and have continued to do so. However, my path has not run smoothly.

I have always been a seeker after truth: always seeking answers as to what we human beings are doing on planet earth. For many years I explored other spiritual paths and went to India three times. This was very helpful at the time and eventually, I reached a point where I realized that instead of searching "horizontally" along many different spiritual pathways, it would be better now to stay with the religion that was part of my own culture and in which I was raised. I decided to go vertically deeper into Christianity.

As I have continued my life as a Christian; prayer has become increasingly important to me and revealed itself to me in many different ways.

The Celtic concept of "Thin Places" can perhaps best express this. This is a wonderful way of helping us to see God more clearly and intensely through different mediums. So, a *thin place* is like a window onto the divine.

The most obvious example of this is the natural world. If you recall Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils", you will remember how, suddenly, the beauty of the sight of "a host of golden daffodils" transported him into a different way of seeing. He was left with a sense of wonder that could be recalled again and again. Another wonderful way of appreciating the underlying rhythms and patterns that are always present in the natural world but not easily seen with our busy lifestyles, is to just sit quietly in one place for a while. The wonder of creation and our place within that gradually comes into focus. Perhaps if you haven't tried this you might try it when you are on holiday which is when I find the time too!

Another "Thin" place is music which can transport us into another realm not so easily accessed via words.

Art is another window onto the divine. For example, an icon is a particular sort of painting or writing that depicts Christ or one of the saints. Sitting before an icon can be an aid to prayer. It can be wonderful to just sit before an icon and ask yourself "what do I see in this icon?" And, "What does the icon see in me? All forms of art can open us to different aspects of the world, others and ourselves and stretch our boundaries.

Praying the psalms is a moveable feast. I like to reflect on the fact that Jesus was saying the same psalms as us. They deal with the whole gamut of our emotions and have something to say about all our daily struggles, hopes and joys.

Then, there is Holy reading of the scriptures or "Lectio Divina". This also takes a little time, but I have found it richly rewarding. The first step is to just read a passage (which can be a short one) through slowly a few times until a sentence seems to speak to you more clearly than anything else. Sit with that sentence and repeat it over and over asking yourself then how it is touching your life.

Silence is very important for me and the quiet time that Fiona has introduced into the middle of the week at Armadale UCA is a precious time for those who attend.

Also, very important for me is the practice of Christian Meditation; a very simple and direct way of praying and enabling a growing awareness within of the presence of the Lord. The founder of the World Christian Meditation Movement, John Main says "All forms of prayer are complementary provided that we know them as they really are: as entrances into the eternal prayer of Jesus which is his loving return to the Father." (John Main, "The Gethsemane Talks" p 38)

I will be interested to hear whether some or all of these ways of praying have resonated with you. I also resonate with Paul's words in Romans 8:26: "For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

## *In Defence of the Church*

It's a puzzlement for sure  
that far and wide  
they congregate  
each Sabbath Day  
respecting ideas and beliefs  
that make no sense  
... at all.

They talk of faith, love,  
forgiveness and salvation  
and sacrifice of self  
for greater good.  
Where else can such ideas  
be heard  
... repeatedly?

They speak of peace  
despite the fact that peace  
is more a hope than  
a reality, and heaping hope  
on desperate hope they see  
the gracious Hand of God  
... everywhere.

They decry their dwindling  
numbers, but still they pray.  
They bemoan their lack of faith,  
but still they sing.  
Their actions belie their earnest  
words, but still they feel  
... redeemed.

Do not dismiss this weirdo  
crowd offhand. In them  
and all their foolishness  
... lies hope.

*Karel Reus*

# Bible Study Group 2018

Margaret Black



Early in the year Karel Reus and I thought it would be good to host a Bible Study group. We began by exploring how we might organize such a group. Then we needed to find others interested in joining. When we had a group of about six we asked permission of the Church Council. We had already indicated to Rev Fiona Winn, our minister, and the congregation, that it was a definite proposal.

We began in March, meeting on the second Wednesday between 5 and 7 pm here at 16 Pental Rd, North Caulfield, in the old Edwardian house I live in with Karel, thanks to the Uniting Church Synod. We meet around the table over nibbles and drinks, mostly water, and usually prepared by Karel.

Initially, we used passages from Bible study notes “With Love to the World” for the following Sunday. Our topics around Easter have been for

MARCH – Jesus’ death and preparation for death,

APRIL – His Resurrection and life after death,

MAY – Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit , and in

JUNE we took the book of Job - why the innocent suffer, why do the evil fare so well, and when bad things happen to good people, as our subject.

In all of our discussions we have used questions as a basis, drawing heavily on our own and others experiences of life and faith. We have had 2 groups of 8, and 2 groups of 5. Each time members have shared deeply personal experiences, which have both thrilled and amazed us both, so we give thanks to all those who have so willingly and generously taken part – it has been all of what I had hoped and more, but also a richly spiritual, enlightening and refreshing experience of faith sharing and socially getting to know and care about each other.

It convinces me that this is the way the Church should be going in future as numbers fall off – sitting around a table, sharing food with the Word of God on our lips and in our hearts and encouraging each other in our faith journey.

\* \* \* \* \*

The function of prayer is not to influence God but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.

Soren Kierkegaard

# A REMARKABLE CHRISTIAN

Ordained in 1926, Paul Schneider was pastor of a Lutheran church in Hochelheim, Germany. Like Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he was one of a minority of German church leaders and laypeople who confessed allegiance to Christ at any cost. For him, the greeting 'Heil Hitler' was a form of idolatry. Conflict with the Nazis eventually led to his interment in Buchenwald concentration camp. He was labelled as 'psychologically deviant'.

On the morning of Sunday, 28 August 1938, Paul, like his namesake in Acts, preached from the bars of his cell to men lined up for the 6.30 roll call. Survivors recorded what he said:

'Our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from our sins ... if we have faith in him we need not fear what man may do because we, through Christ, belong to God'.

He confided to a camp orderly 'there is no spot on me that has not been beaten black and blue'. They set dogs on him, beat him with bull whips, and eventually killed him with a huge dose of the cardiac depressant strophanthin. They gave his wife Margarete 24 hours to collect the body, nailing his coffin shut so she could not see what he had suffered.

In 1939 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in London when he heard of his death. He gathered his nieces and nephews to tell them:

'Children, you must never forget the name of Paul Schneider. He is our first martyr.'

\* \* \* \* \*

# THIS TREASURE HOUSE

A previous issue of *The Mustard Seed* included information about '**With Love to the World**', a magazine of the Uniting Church which helps readers prepare for Sunday worship by reading and reflecting on the weekly readings before we arrive at church. One of its aims is 'that we will not come to Sunday morning spiritually & mentally cold'.

The current issue (Pentecost, May to August 2018) is of special interest to Armadale as the cover is graced by one of Karel's excellent photographs - and the content inside, by one of his poems (on page 6). Though the Bible receives scant attention in our secular world, it is foundational to Western society and continues to influence and re-orientate individual lives. An earlier issue of the Mustard Seed recorded the actor David Suchet, known for his TV role as Agatha Christie's detective Hercule Poirot, returning to his boarding house after an evening theatre performance and finding a Bible. He read the Letter to the Romans and became a Christian after 40 years as an atheist.

Along with daily prayer, absorbing scripture is a real agent of spiritual growth. In the words of Queen Elizabeth the Second, 'To what greater inspiration and counsel can we turn than to the imperishable truth to be found in this treasure house, the Bible?'

One thing we might do is to try day by day to grasp something which is the hardest thing for any one of us to grasp: that the gospel is true; that growth in the Christian life is simply growth in seeing that the gospel is true; that Jesus Christ is the pre-eminent reality of all things.

John Webster



# Around Armadale

**Rev Deacon Steve Crump** - We were pleased to welcome Steve for four weeks during Fiona's absence on leave (below right).

**Yvonne Smith's 90th**—we were privileged to help Yvonne celebrate her 90th birthday at morning tea on 5 May (below)



We supported World Vision's appeal for the Rohingya refugees with a sausage sizzle on 11 May (right and below)



# The Winter Breakfast

Armadale UC was well represented at the Annual Winter Breakfast program launch of Uniting Prahran on 15 May.

prof Alan Fels and an interesting panel spoke of the gap between rich and poor in Australia and of possible ways of change.

Then on 29 May we had our annual collection for *Prahran Mission Emergency Relief*. This was very well supported and a big load of non-perishable food and toiletries was delivered to the Mission.

Here are some pictures from the breakfast.



I woke today but could not see  
another thing, but only me.

I felt unhappy, tight inside  
- just couldn't take things in my stride.

Wrapped up I was – and all alone,  
my whole world was in monotone.

Then I saw a man so pale and thin,  
with sightless eyes and wrinkled skin,

yet with a smile upon his face  
- which rightly put me in my place.

Pat Tolson

# A Day on Sark

Bill Rush

The small ferry boat that plies between the harbour of St Peter Port on the island of Guernsey to the island of Sark has to take account of the tides, some of the highest in the world. Twice a day, dinghies and yachts lie stranded and askew on the harbour seabed; twice a day the sea returns and the tilted craft resume a more dignified upright position.

In October last year, a small group of us landed on the island of Sark with the sun shining overhead. It is one of the smallest of the Channel Isles and has a unique history. Although closer to France, the islands became attached to England after the conquest of William the Conqueror. Elizabeth the First rented Sark, then uninhabited, on perpetual lease for the annual sum of two pounds - forgetting to allow for inflation. The present Seigneur, or Lord of the Manor, Christopher Beaumont, still hands this peppercorn amount to the Crown each year. Until very recently, he and his predecessors (his grandmother was the famous Dame of Sark) exercised feudal, if benevolent, control over the lives of the roughly 500 inhabitants. This changed when the EU Commission insisted on democratic elections leaving him with his title and diminished powers. Our small group was granted the privilege of a tour of the main house and an inspection of its rather musty treasures. More interesting were the nearby Seigneurie Gardens, flourishing in this mild climate and still beautiful in autumn glory.



To arrive on Sark is to be confronted by a couple of tractors which haul visitors in open carriages up to the village. One is designated for the fire brigade, the other is used as ambulance. Otherwise, no cars or buses are permitted which explains the prevalence of bicycles and horses and carts. Unsurfaced lanes wind past fields, stone cottages, dry stone fences, and a pretty church. There is a post office, a general store, a couple of shops selling postcards and of course a pub. Sark has one doctor for its residents. Also a constable to maintain law and order - not a difficult job I should think.

Bill and local transport on Sark (left)

God made and governs the world invisibly and has commanded us to love and worship Him as no other god.

Isaac Newton

The recent history of Sark has been bound up with the Barclays, twin brother billionaires, owners of the Daily Telegraph newspaper and the Ritz hotel in London. They have built a huge mock Tudor residence on a much smaller island nearby and then bought considerable property on Sark, no doubt attracted by the fact that the island has no income tax or capital gains tax. The islanders were understandably fearful of what might eventuate but whatever long term plans the Barclays had seem to have been thwarted by a ruling from the English High Court.

The French novelist Victor Hugo lived on Guernsey for 15 years in exile from the reign of Napoleon the Third. It is said that on a clear day, Sark is visible from his house. Whether the famous writer visited Sark himself is not known although it is more than likely. Hugo loved the Channel Islands and wrote Les Miserables and other novels while living there.

More so than Guernsey, perhaps Sark would make an even better retreat for a writer. The weather is mild, the noises of the modern world are largely absent, and an atmosphere of peace pervades the island.

I would liked to have stayed on Sark overnight. It's designated a Dark Sky Island because as there is no street lighting there is consequently little light pollution. So on a cloudless night the stars blaze overhead in all their glory. For poets, astronomers, or those wanting to get away from the rat-race, Sark could be the perfect place to live.



Sark flag

#### SMILE PLEASE ...

There was a grammarian who went about shooting owls because they said 'Too Who' instead of 'To Whom'.

Doctor, Doctor, people think I'm crazy!

... Why?

I like sausages.

... That's not crazy!

Oh good! You must come and see my collection.

As for the man who invented the knock, knock, joke... He was awarded the No Bell Prize.

**Thanks Hugh!**

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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.*