
The Mustard Seed



Edition 4: July 2010

Armadale Uniting Church

From the editors...

In this edition of *The Mustard Seed* we focus particularly on Prayer. In the pages that follow you'll find reflections on prayer from a couple of members of the congregation, as well as enjoying our regular feature of interviews (this time with Brooke Hutchins and Ann Lovell). A trip to Africa, the intricate design on a porcelain plate, reflections on the life of Jesus and how to raise money for the church with old stamps all also feature!

We hope that you enjoy the mix of offerings in this mid-Winter edition, and warm wishes to you all.

Regards, Kylie Crabbe, Bill Rush and Graeme Harris.

Practising prayerfulness

Kylie Crabbe

Sometimes we might be tempted to think that everyone else is better at praying than us – as though others have just been born with an insight into how to go about it which we have somehow missed out on. But it's hard to know why we would expect ourselves to just be good at this! Are there other parts of our life in which we expect ourselves to be expert without practise or teaching? This is not to say that Christian prayer involves following a formula – everyone will have their own sense of prayer – but insights from the tradition may give us confidence, depth and variety as our prayer life changes throughout our lives.

Recently the Synod's Spiritual Formation Advisor produced a kit entitled *Uphold One Another in Prayer*. The title draws on the promise the congregation makes during services of

baptism in the Uniting Church: 'With God's help, we will live out our baptism as a loving community in Christ: nurturing one another in faith, upholding one another in prayer, and encouraging one another in service.'

But what does this mean? How do we uphold one another in prayer, and how do we learn to pray?

Over winter, in 'ordinary time', as part of our worship once a month we will explore a different, simple type of prayer. This is designed as a non-threatening and practical introduction to some traditional prayers. And hopefully it will be gentle and enjoyable too!

If contemplating prayer sounds challenging, then perhaps at this point it is worth remembering that prayer starts always in grace. Having a practice of prayer will involve discipline as well, of course, but it is grace which makes prayer possible and calls us back into prayer.

It makes me think of the kind of contact we have with friends after they have stayed for a week or more and been part of our lives. You know when someone leaves after a longer visit and you find yourself filling them in on your daily life with a much greater level of detail – 'by the way I did find that product in the shop,' 'I fixed the guttering,' 'I eventually got onto that other friend who had to cancel our coffee the other day.' It is something to do with the friend knowing more about the minute details of our lives, so we keep them up-to-date. As we keep God in our conversation and our attention, we will find this in itself somehow keeps us coming back into the conversation too. And, of course, God is never very far from the conversation with us anyway.

As we begin to explore traditional prayers, here are some practical ideas taken from the *Uphold One Another in Prayer* kit. They combine some

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insights from Christian tradition which may help to lead us into prayer. You're invited to read through and make use of these ideas as you find them helpful.

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Preparing to pray:

There are some basic aspects to consider as you prepare to pray. These include making a regular time to pray, choosing a suitable place, taking time to prepare the body and mind, adopting a good posture and attention to breathing. Posture, breath, the sacred focus and blessing are all important components of prayer. Some will be more important than others as you practice different styles of prayer.

1. Posture

Be still and know that I am God (Ps 46:10).

Posture is an important aspect of prayer. If your body is still and relaxed, it is more likely you will be receptive to the way of deeper prayer and stillness. Gesture and movements can become acts of prayer.

If you seek to sit in stillness, you could follow these suggestions:

You may sit on the floor or on a chair with your hands resting comfortably on your knees or lap. Consciously let go of the stress and tension from your body. Close your eyes gently. If you are sitting in a chair, keep your feet firmly on the floor. Relax your shoulders...arms...neck...face. Keep your spine straight and your head level. Relax your legs and feel the stillness in your body. Be aware of any sounds in the far distance, then be aware of your heart beating. Be aware of the silence in the room.

You can also pray as you move. The rhythm of walking can aid your prayer. Finding gestures which reflect your feelings can form prayer. Dance can be prayer. Become aware of your body as you pray. Observe gesture and movement and let these inform your conversation with God.

2. Breath

The Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach*, the same word for 'breath'. St Paul links the Holy Spirit with breathing (sighing) when he writes:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit... (Rom 8:26-27).

So, as you prepare to pray, pay attention to your breathing. Become aware of the present rate of your breathing, then gently move toward a deeper, slower and calmer rhythm. Consciousness of your breathing helps you to become more centred and still, more deeply aware of the Spirit within.

3. The sacred focus

In Christian prayer the reciting of a sacred word or phrase, reading of scripture or attentive listening to God revealed in Jesus Christ is an expression of love and faith in God's presence. It represents our intention to be attentive and receptive to God's presence and action within. It expresses our heart's desire for God. The sacred focus helps to centre the mind and heart enabling us to leave behind other thoughts and worries.

4. Blessing

Prayer is a gift, a grace. By grace, the person who prays becomes a blessing to others, as though they were a candle flame placed on the lamp stand and filling the room with light. Prayer is not a selfish and solitary act. It is of benefit to the whole world. Observe the blessings of your prayer as you journey through your day.

Prayer leads to action. The more we grow in a loving friendship with Christ the more we will be graced to be involved in his mission to the world. He asks us to be the 'salt' of the earth and the 'light' of the world – to love both God and others.

Taken from Joan Wright Howie and Anneke Oppewal-Korbjijn, *Uphold One Another in Prayer*; (Melbourne: Centre for Theology and Ministry, 2007).

The Ordination!!

**Here are some pictures from
Kylie's (and Martin's)
ordination on 30 May 2010**

(Thanks to Peter Fallon for many of these)



Rev Kylie Crabbe



David Fallick extends a welcome



Jenny Hayes (Chairperson, Presbytery of Port Phillip West) and Rev Dev Anandarajan (Deputy Chairperson, Presbytery of Port Phillip East) presiding



The Ordinands



Kylie and Jenny Hayes



Some of the congregation



Rev Alistair Macrae preaching

PRAYER

Peg Gray

Humans have always felt that there existed a mystical supreme power who controls the world – one deserving or sometimes demanding their praise. Their attempts to communicate with this power have been many and varied, often totally abhorrent to us, always involving a ritual ranging from sacrifice, both human and animal, to song and dance.

In our worship we have our own rituals as we seek to become closer to God. Hymns and prayers have an essential part, uniting us as a group with a common faith. They reinforce our own beliefs, express our hopes and uncertainties and strengthen each one of us, giving us the comfort and security that come from being included in



a wider group of shared belief.

While I join sincerely in the prayers offered during the service, my personal method of prayer is one of silent meditation. Thomas Aquinas thought that we should seek God within ourselves – the God within us. Surely a universal and infinite God must also exist within all beings.

I set aside a time each day when I try to clear my mind of conscious thought – of the cares and worries. Surely God within me knows all of these anyway. Success varies but there are times of total peace and serenity – but always these periods of silent concentration are times of renewal of faith.

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Some celebrations.....



Congratulations, Kylie!

In April Kylie graduated with her Master of Theology, with the thesis *Transforming Tables: Meals as Encounters with the Kingdom in Luke*

Congratulations, Jeanie and Jason

The congregation gives its best wishes and prayers for Jeanie Dougall and Jason Knott who were married at Armadale Uniting Church on Saturday 17 April. It was great to be part of the celebration, and to see Isabella and Alessandra excited for the occasion too!



WHY CHRISTIANS PRAY

Lyn Ferguson



‘The Lord’s prayer must have come from Jesus’ inner world, where he was truly himself, an insecure, loving man, prepared to take the risk of loving’, writes Neville Ward in his book, *The personal faith of Jesus as revealed in the Lord’s Prayer*. He goes on to suggest that these appear to be the thoughts about life he has spent much time thinking of, taking counsel from them, and surviving on them when there was nothing else.

When asked by his disciples, he taught them his own prayer, which steadied him and took him straight to the truth of every situation. Their request must have gladdened his heart. The new thing about this was the remarkable warmth and affection with which Jesus apparently said and used the word ‘Father’. The directness and brevity of the prayer he gave them was certainly unusual in its brevity and free from pious solemnity and verbal pretentiousness. It was the style of a man who never said more or less than he believed.

Over the centuries, the development of civilization has not created a stable structure of peace or equality – and it breaks my heart when our children turn away from belief in a loving God and Saviour. However other reports on human experience show that generally speaking, people who believe in God rarely find their belief in him shaken by suffering. Faith is a way of interpreting both the goodness and evil of life.

To say the Lord’s prayer mindfully is to deepen our faith, especially in a time of anxiety of suffering. People’s intolerance of suffering varies astonishingly. People who know or have known deep love are practically certain to say that whatever pain life has brought them, even the death of the beloved, has not been as powerful in meaning as that love. They would not trade that love for a life without pain. In one of Tennessee Williams’ plays, a character argues that the greatest of all differences in this world is not between rich and poor, or even good and evil, but between those who have loved and those who have only watched it in envy.

Jesus’ mind seems to have worked within the certainty that God’s power, his involvement in the life of the world, and his desire to help us find our way to him, are all unlimited, and that he is to be trusted in the worst and the best that we encounter. Naturally, then, he turned to him in prayer.

Living on the Christian assumption means accepting the tensions involved, between God’s love and the world’s evil, between our faith that God desires to help us and the limitations he has evidently set for that help. It will always be hard to fit together our prayers and God’s providence. God is the unity, the One, in whom, all opposites are reconciled, and, being reconciled, are themselves transformed into the unimaginable sustenance of the love that is His eternal kingdom.

COMBINED SERVICES AT GARDINER

We’ll be continuing to worship jointly with St Andrews on a regular basis for the rest of the year, and in particular we’ll worship at Gardiner on

8 August 2010 and 14 November 2010.

On these Sundays, there will be no service at Armadale (so place these dates in your diary now!). Plans are also being made for a Stonnington Combined Service on 28 November 2010, so if this proceeds, it is likely that there will be no service at Armadale on that day, too.

A conversation with Brooke



Kylie had a conversation with Brooke Hutchins.

Where were you born? Do you have brothers and sisters? What about pets?
In the city. I have one younger brother (Will) and a cat named Biscuit.

Do you remember the first time you came to Armadale Uniting Church?
No – I can't remember it.

Favourite football team?
Geelong.

What would be in your favourite meal?
Rissoles, icy poles and jelly.

What is your favourite thing about living in Armadale?
My friends, good school.

What is your favourite thing to do at school?
Art, choir and having auctions in class (a way of earning points during class).



Biscuit

What after school activities do you like?
Gymnastics.

What do you remember most about church?
Drawing, kids' club, making the art and craft city, singing – especially singing Christmas carols.

What else would you tell someone who was wanting to know something about you and what is important to you?

The most important thing to me is my family and friends, because they're so good to me.

Some thoughts from

Ann Lovell



1. Where were you born? Any brothers and sisters? Where did you come in the family? (eldest, middle, youngest?).

I was born in Melbourne, the eldest of 3 children with one sister & one brother (now deceased).

2. How long have you been attending Armadale Uniting Church? Why do you come?

Approximately 7-8 years. I attend church because I am a committed Christian and like to practise my faith.

3. Which football team do you favour most – and least?

(a) Collingwood (b) Carlton.

4. Describe your perfect meal.

Oysters; Ocean Trout; Sticky Date Pudding.

5. How would you describe your personal prayer life? (a) it's pretty regular (b) I try but it's not easy for me (c) it happens occasionally.

Pretty regular. I meditate when possible.

6. What sort of worship do you prefer ? (a) traditional (b) informal (c) other?

Traditional.

7. What has been your main area of work during your life? What else would you have liked to have done?

Accountant/Investment advisor. My preference was to be a Reporter/Journalist

for which I had the offer of a cadetship but my father chose otherwise. I have not regretted it as I have had a very interesting career.

8. What advice would you give a young person about to choose a career?

Think carefully, study hard, pursue your dream.

9. What's something you would like to learn?

Anthropology.

10. Do you have a favourite hymn or hymns? (up to 3).

Jesus loves me; Onward Christian Soldiers; Amazing Grace.

11. Your favourite piece of music or composer?

Moonlight Sonata (Beethoven).

12. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the Church in our society? Any comments?

I try to be optimistic but I think it will be a difficult journey.

13. What is your favourite TV show?

Talking Heads (ABC)

14. Given our small numbers and limited resources, is there anything you think we could do better at Armadale Uniting Church ?

I think everyone at Armadale works hard and with Kylie leading us we will succeed.

The Ahin African Safari

Ann Ahin

Robin and I travelled in March & April 2010 to Africa. We became 'overlanders' travelling on a safari truck with a group of mainly young British travellers and most nights we camped in two-man tents & helping to prepare meals. We rapidly became firm friends with all.

Our itinerary took us from the feared city of Nairobberry (oops Nairobi) in Kenya to Johannesburg (or living hell according to those from Cape Town) via many wondrous sights in between. In the first couple of days we saw the 'Big 5' animals (lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos, and buffalos) in the Masai Mara. A couple of days later in the Serengeti and Ngorogoro crater we saw thousands upon thousands of wildebeest, buffalo, giraffes, zebras, elephants and antelope of many varieties. Many of these had their babies of a few months old which were extremely cute!!

Apart from the abundance of wildlife we also visited the island of Zanzibar with its faded Stone Town, one of many ports exporting slaves in darker years. Now it is better known as a spice growing island with many beautiful safe swimming beaches.

We also enjoyed the beaches along the freshwater Lake Malawi (or Lake Nyaza), the third largest lake in Africa of some 30,000 square kilometres. This had all the appearances of an inland sea with sand and waves but no tides or salt. The air here was so clear that the stars at night were brilliant, and lightening could be seen from



so far away that we could not hear the thunder.

Our next highlight was Victoria Falls which was nothing like we had ever seen before in our dry continent. It is the largest waterfall in the world spanning 1.7 kilometres and with a drop of 108 metres. It is also known as 'the smoke that thunders' with spray that rises ~ 400 metres and can be seen up to 50km away. In the same area we took a safari elephant ride, and walked with and patted an 18 month old lioness.



From there we travelled to the unique Okavango Delta where the Okavango River ends in a delta or inland sea some 250km by 150km in size, in the Kalahari Desert. We travelled through the marshland by mokoro or native canoe being 'poled', in a similar style to Venice in Italy. The 'poler' for Robin and myself was a local tribal lady looking older than us and who wove delicate baskets and bracelets from fibres from palm leaves between other duties. Then we travelled via more safari parks into South Africa and Johannesburg. There we left the tour and met up with two sets of friends and

stayed with them. We visited the Maropeng Exhibition which exhibits 'hominid' or prehistoric man fossils



found in the area showing that humankind was born in Africa. It also showed that the earth has survived 5 major extinctions of life forms with the fittest life form flourishing after each. It suggests that humans may be causing the next! It gave me optimism for the long term future of the earth, but possibly not of the short term future of humankind!

On our holiday we were often challenged about our beliefs, from debating the doctrine of predestination, the concepts of wealthy tourists visiting obviously financially deprived locals and visiting Maropeng as guests of friends who believe strongly in Creation over Evolution.

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SAMMY STAMP

Betty Terrell



'Sammy Stamp' is the popular name of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship (UCAF) Stamp Fund. Every Thursday about 20 volunteers meet at the UCA offices in the city to trim, sort and sell used stamps, Australian and foreign.

Individuals, business firms and church groups send in their bags of stamps and envelopes with stamps attached. Metcards are also included.

Experienced sellers in the group deal with buyers who also come in on Thursday. Recent stamp issues are always in demand as are stamps of higher value, but *all*

stamps are welcome, even the common ones which are sold by weight.

Money raised in 2009 was \$27,635, bringing the total since the Stamp Fund commenced in 1977 to \$583,744. All proceeds are donated to worthy causes, mostly related to the Uniting Church, but which are not financed from the annual UCA budget. Requests for up to \$5000 to fund specific projects are considered and voted on by the group.

I joined "Sammy Stamp" about 2 years ago as one of the "trimming and sorting" majority. Please save all your used stamps and give them to me on Sunday!

The Porcelain Country

by Aileen Liang



Last year, I received a porcelain plate, from my late aunt, who lived in the city of Shanghai, in China. The plate is 18 centimetres in diameter. It has the following colours: red, yellow, blue, green and purple. It has a hand-drawn picture, which comprises of a dragon on the right, and a flying bird on the left. This represents the King and Queen. On the top and bottom, are the batmen with the olden Chinese currency. They represent power and long life.

On the back of the plate, we can find Chinese characters saying it was made during the reign of the **Emperor Qian Long at Qing Dynasty** in China (1736-1795).

According to Chinese ancient history, China was for a time ruled by the Mongols. We call this time the Yuan Dynasty, which lasted from 1279-1368 A.D. And the whole of China was for a second time ruled by foreigners from far north east Asia (*ed* - the Manchu), during what we call the **Qing Dynasty**. It lasted from 1644-1911 A.D. In 1912, the last Emperor abdicated, and China became a republic.

During the reign of the Emperor Qian Long, porcelain production continued to be important, and many innovations were made using new colours. Colours that were developed, comprised of shades of green, and compositions of black and yellow. Dark blue and bright red colours were also used. Painting was also important, and for the first time, European influences were seen.

I hope you enjoy this brief history of China. However everybody knows that China has two meanings. One meaning is Country and the other meaning is Porcelain.



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A PRAYER BY DESIDERIUS ERASMUS (1466-1536)

Lord Jesus Christ, the world's true sun, always rising, never setting, whose life-giving warmth engenders, preserves, nourishes and gladdens all things in heaven and on earth, shine into my soul I pray; scatter the night of sin and the clouds of error; blaze within me, so that I may go on my way without stumbling, taking no part in shameful deeds done in the dark, but ever walking as one born to the light. Amen.

What do we really know about Jesus?

Christine Oldham

John Bell, the Scottish minister and hymn-writer, asked this question in his seminar at the Centre for Theology and Ministry last year.

In the seminar John Bell explored aspects of the personal life, relationships and ministry of Jesus that are seldom mentioned in preaching or conversation. The gospels abound in references to Jesus working with people, with children, with congregations — settings that prompt questions about the personality of Jesus.

What sort of a fellow was Jesus?

Jesus is often portrayed in a passive role as: baby in a manger; saviour on the cross; and redeemer in Heaven. John Bell observed that many people have an understanding of Jesus that is traditional, limited, and unduly influenced by sentimental hymns and popular carols. He feels that more attention should be given to what happened between the cradle and the cross. We will understand Jesus better when we have some understanding of his life.

The gospels gather together sayings and events relating to Jesus written down before people forgot what this

extraordinary man was like. Jesus spoke ardently of a world where there will be justice and an end to violence and inequality. His words ring true today. They challenge current conventions of politics, economics, society and religion.

The stories of Jesus are important because they are about a man who crossed boundaries and broke down barriers to show how the world could be and how we, inspired by those stories, could play some part in realising this. Furthermore, Jesus had a dubious family background, spent a great deal of time with misfits and eccentrics, and sought out people from beyond the mainstream.

Jesus was given to engaging with women and elevating their status. Women regularly provided food and accommodation for Jesus.

Did Jesus have a sense of humour? We don't see or hear reports of Jesus laughing – rather that Jesus wept. But Jesus enjoyed laughing. John Bell urges us to recapture the humanity of Jesus.

If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

ORGAN CENTENARY

The organ at Armadale UC is 100 years old this year. We're going to celebrate its centenary at a special musical event at 2.30 pm on

Sunday 24 October

So, keep the date free! Susan Gin is leading the team organising this function, so if you have any queries, please speak to her, or email her on spslo@bigpond.net.au

Praying Psalms

The Psalms give us an insight into the prayers of others – and they remind us that there is a long history of being able to be intimate and honest with God, it's right there in Scripture!! Reading through a Psalm contemplatively can be like joining your prayers to the prayers of the psalmist, and to those of so many people who have prayed these psalms since.

Reflecting on the intimacy of God's care for each of us, you might like to prayerfully read Psalm 139.

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-15

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it....
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

All up, there are 150 Psalms in the biblical book of Psalms, and they cover a great range of emotions, from thanksgiving to lament and a whole lot in between. You may like to consider prayerfully reading some others, such as: Psalm 6, 22, 23, 27...

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