
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 37, Advent 2021

Advent Approaches - Greetings from Fiona

This letter is being written as the season of Advent approaches.

Advent is the time each year we prepare for the coming, and for the coming again, of Christ into our lives and hearts, into our world, into our awareness.

The four weeks` preparation for Christmas is a time to reflect and wonder:

what do I need to do,

to be able to welcome Jesus into my life with peace and hope and joy and love?

Not easy in an increasingly complex and tumultuous world.

These past twelve-to-eighteen months have been, without doubt, a time of enormous challenge for the whole world.

And for us, as a community of faith, the pandemic has required much of us too.

We have had to become adaptable and flexible - to be open in new ways: to try new things, to think differently about our life together, to develop new skills and engage with new technologies...

We have learned how to gather on Zoom, hold meetings, and pray on Zoom. We have learned how to care for each other – even when we couldn` t meet one another.

We have been challenged to re-think and re-orientate ourselves in terms of what it means to be a congregation - a people who congregate for worship - and what it means to be open to welcoming the stranger in that context.

And we have had to navigate emerging from prolonged lockdown...

All things considered, we have been blessed.

I am so grateful for the attitude, responsiveness and diligence of Church Council who have made my role so much easier.

When decisions have had to be made, there has been a welcome unity of purpose, a clear sense of direction, and a genuine thoughtfulness in weighing up the issues – which have been many, various and multifaceted.

Throughout it all, no matter what has come up, Council has been able to engage

Greetings from Fiona (cont)

in honest conversation, listening respectfully, thoughtfully, prayerfully -
not easy in a time when even Christians have fallen prey to vicious and pernicious polarity.

The grace of the Gospel, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
is truly a wondrous thing to experience.

I am most grateful – to Council, and to all of you, as faithful members of the Body of Christ:
for your continued commitment, presence and support.

If Advent encourages us to look back and reflect, it also encourages us
to look forward and wonder.

What are the next steps for us, as a Christian community, looking to live out God's mission
and vision in our particular location and context?

We can only wonder – and I mean that: *we can only wonder...*

So, we end this year grateful for all that has happened, is happening
and we are hopeful for all that is yet to be...

In all that's uncertain, may the sure hope of the coming Christ Child
fill you with peace and joy - this Advent season and beyond...

'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in His word I put my hope.'
Ps. 130: 5

Grace and peace. Fiona

From the Editors

Recent months have continued to throw challenges our way, including a need to suspend in person services yet again and revert to "Zoom". But now we're back to services in the Church, and we're looking forward to an uplifting season of Advent. Details of our services are set out on page 8.

And here we are with the Advent 2021 issue of *The Mustard Seed*. We hope you find it interesting.

In particular, we draw your attention to the vacancies listed on page 8. We'd love to hear from you if you can contribute to our life in either of the ways listed.

– Bill and Graeme

Contents

Greetings from Fiona	1
Editorial	2
Making my Oblation	3
Lethargy in the Time of Virus	5
Pat Tolsen	5
Bright Star	6
Acknowledgement of Country	6
Breakfasts	6
Around Armadale	7
Vacancies	8
Advent/Christmas services	8
Let's put Herod back into Christmas	9
Memories of the Darling Road	
Uniting Church	11
A Little History	12



Making my Oblation at the first Zoom International Oblate Retreat

April recently made her oblation to become a Benedictine Oblate of the World Community for Christian Meditation. An Oblate is a lay person who commits to following a monastic path and makes formal vows that express the ethos of that path. In short, oblates promise to try and live their life in accordance with these vows with God's help. They are then living in a 'monastery without walls' whilst also being connected to a physical monastery.

The World Community for Christian Meditation describes itself as "a global spiritual community united in the practice of meditation in the Christian tradition". Although influenced by Benedictine traditions, it shares the fruits of this practice widely and inclusively, seeking to serve the unity of all and build understanding between faiths and cultures. The international centre is Bonnevaux – an ancient monastic site now dedicated to global peace and dialogue around the daily practice of meditation – near Poitiers in France.

Oblation is the formal commitment during a ceremony to living one's life as described above. Before this takes place, a person must go through a period of Postulancy before then going into a period of being a Novice. This is a period of discernment during which one undertakes reading prescribed texts. As the order April committed to follow is a Benedictine order she studied 'The Rule of Benedict' and many other books and had a Mentor assigned throughout the whole process.

Here is April's account of her oblation (originally written for Via Vitae, the newsletter of the Benedictine Oblate Community of the World Community).

I was quite sure that I wanted to make my oblation with my oblate friends around me and so, with Gloria's listening ear and suggestions (Australian Oblate Coordinator), planned many possible ways that this could be achieved. Yet, somehow, I couldn't get the energy or the will to follow up on any of these possibilities. Of course, Covid 19 didn't help!

The two doves on a chalice is the WCCM's symbol (at the top of the page). It is a universal expression of the union of contemplation and action. A very ancient text describes them as 'two sweet friends' and the same idea is found in the story of Martha and Mary in the Gospel. (from the WCCM website).

When I came home from hospital following treatment for pneumonia over Christmas, I was surprised to sense a surge of energy towards really wanting to make my Oblation as soon as possible. I felt ready, so, when the Oblate Retreat on Zoom was advertised, I decided to request that I be able to make my oblation in July 2021.

All the doors that had seemed closed before that were flung open and I felt empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue my oblate journey. It felt right; like the culmination of many pointers along the way that I had been unaware of at the time,

stretching back over thirty to forty years.

It was certainly an amazing and somewhat surreal experience to make my Oblation on Zoom! It seemed like an incredible technological feat to attempt to bring together oblates from so many countries to our beautiful home at Bonnevaux in France for this first Zoom Oblate Retreat! I felt a wonderful connection with those attending. It was moving to feel that we were invited into the meditation room at Bonnevaux. There was a space left in the centre front (as in the icon of the Trinity) for us to join in the circle.

The 24-hour Meditation on the Thursday preceding the Retreat was a privilege to take part in. I was blown away when I heard that there had been nearly 3000 people meditating from 37 countries!

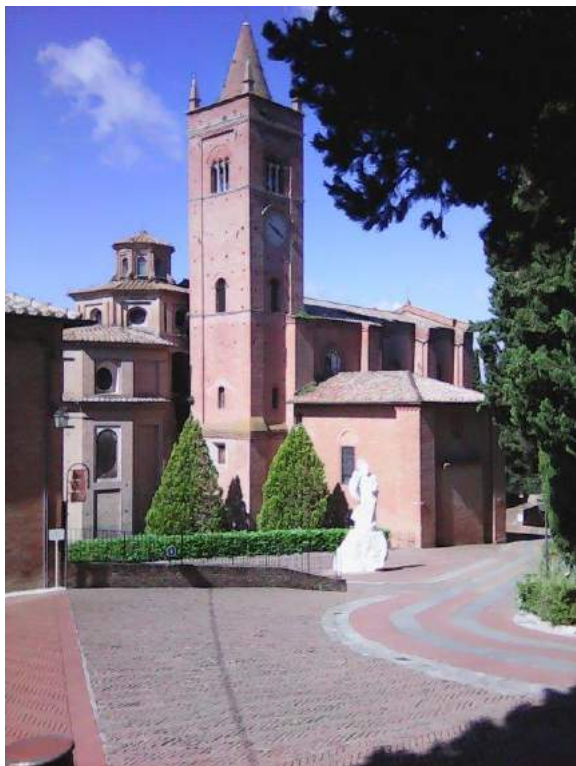
The talks by Father Laurence were inspiring, and the sense of support from the committee was very much appreciated. Somehow, despite having to deal with any face to face and virtual human situations they also took all the technological side of things in their stride.

It was wonderful to be able to speak with Father Laurence before making my oblation and despite a couple of technical wobbles we were able to have a meaningful conversation.

I was pleased that I was awake at 2 am in Melbourne, Australia to make my Oblation along with 11 others around the world. We all read out our vows one by one from our parchment charts. The following verse from Psalm 119: 116 was repeated three times by heart by each of us. "Sustain me O Lord, as you have promised, that I may live; and disappoint me not in my hope". Then we signed our names and put on our Benedictine crosses that had also been faithfully sent to us by our National Coordinators. I was pleased that I could write "On this eleventh day of July "at the top of my chart, the Feast Day of St Benedict.

I am thankful that we twelve will be put in touch with each other so that the bond we have will be strengthened.

In conclusion, I feel 'chuffed' to be the first Benedictine Oblate of the WCCM in Australia to make my oblation at the first International Zoom Oblate Retreat and offer my thanks to all involved in the organisation of the Retreat.



Fr. Laurence Freeman is the director and spiritual guide of the World Community for Christian Meditation. He is a monk of the Benedictine Congregation of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, a Benedictine monastery in Tuscany near the small village of Chiusure. The picture at left is the entrance to Abbazia di Monte Oliveto Maggiore.

Lethargy in the Time of Virus

It is afternoon and the doona
still lies on the floor
like an exhausted swimmer.

The extra blue blanket
added at midnight,
rumples in frozen waves of wool.

Below the head-board
hovering pillows cower like clouds
that have taken a beating.

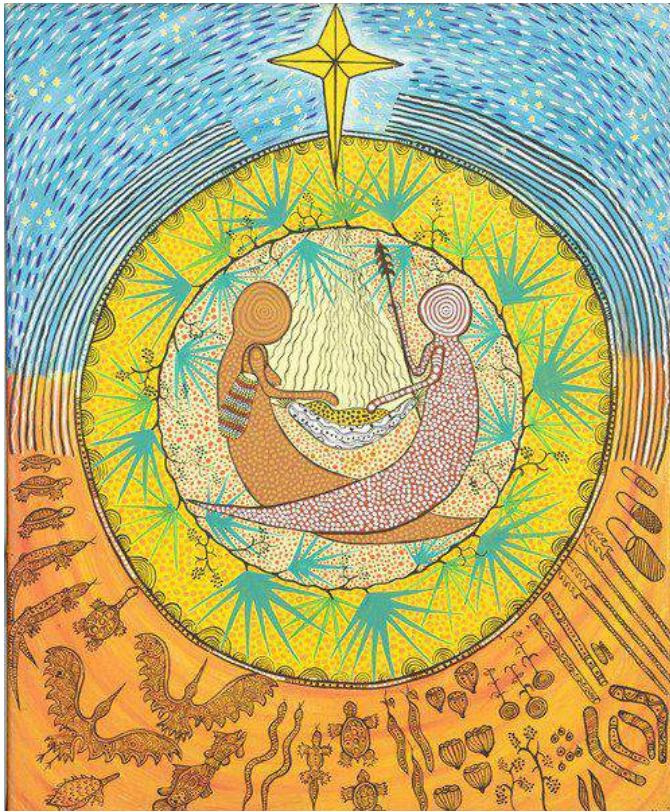
Tomorrow I will bring
purpose to this careless sea.
I may even change the sheets.

Bill Rush

Pat Tolson

Pat Tolson died on 20 October 2021, aged 88 years. She had not been in the best of health in recent years, but was always in good spirits. We particularly remember her for her paintings, some of which hang in the Church (we mentioned two of these, in our July 2017 and July 2020 issues). She had taken up painting in earnest in the 1970s, and had tutored at MECWA and the Malvern Artists Society.





Bright Star by Grace Kumbi

Grace comes from the Naulyu Nambiyu (Daly River) area of the Northern Territory. In her superbly designed image, Mary has a dilly bag and Joseph holds a spear. Grace depicts all creation looking towards the Holy Family with the plants and animals of her region.

The image is from 'Our Mob, God's Story': Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christianity', which features the work of 66 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian artists from communities, towns and cities across Australia (published by Bible Society of Australia). Image used by permission of artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In September 2021, the Church Council decided to make an Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of its meetings in recognition that it meets on the traditional lands of the First Peoples of Australia. It reads:

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri People, traditional custodians under God of the land where we meet. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and commit ourselves again to walking together with all First Nations in this land.

Janet Atkinson

YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

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

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

Around Armadale



As we do at each of our services, we lit a candle for those who were unable to be with us at our first service post-lockdown on 7 November 2021 (at left). On this occasion, those that we remembered included those who were participating via “zoom”.

The big silver birch tree in the Church garden blew down in the storm in October (at right).



Karel led us in worship on “Christ the King” Sunday (21 November) (at left)

VACANCIES

1. There is an opportunity for someone, as a lay representative, to accompany Fiona to the meetings of the Presbytery of Port Philip East.

This is an invitation to see and enter into something of the wider and inspiring work of the Church – and how it concerns us, as a local UCA congregation. Might you be being called to offer some of your time and talents here?

Presbytery-in-Council meetings occur 4 times a year (2 on a Saturday morning and 2 on a Wednesday evening) either on Zoom or in person at 1 Allan Street, Noble Park. If you are curious or interested, please contact Fiona 0403 662 786.

* * * * *

2. With 2022 just around the corner, Church Council is looking ahead and wondering who might be discerning a call to serve the congregation on the Council.

Before February, do pray and consider if Council might be the right place for you to serve the Church and our congregation, as well as the wider community.

The Council concerns itself with the spiritual growth of the congregation, pastoral matters, and the proper use of our financial and other resources. This is important and necessary work that affects and helps us all.

If interested and you are wondering if it might be right for you, contact Bill on 0429 829 828.

Advent/Christmas services 2021

We can only wonder...

Advent Sunday, 28 November 2021 - *Believe.*

Advent 2, Sunday 5 December 2021, with Holy Communion - *Get ready!* (regular 1st Sunday in the month service).

Advent 3, Sunday 12 December 2021 - *Be thrilled!*

Advent 4, Sunday 19 December 2021 - *Say 'Yes'!*

Christmas Eve, Friday 24 December: 6.30 p.m. - *O Little Town of Bethlehem!*

Christmas Day, Saturday 25 December: 9.30 am, with Holy Communion. - *O Come Let Us Adore Him!*

Boxing Day, Sunday 26 December 2022: Boxing Day 9.30 am. - *Joy to the World!*

All services at 9.30 am except for Christmas Eve service (6.30 pm).

He became what we are so that we might become what he is.

Athanasius of Alexandria

LET'S PUT HEROD BACK INTO CHRISTMAS

by J. Richard Middleton

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. *Matthew 2:16*

As long as I can remember, I've heard Christians bemoaning the commercialisation of Christmas, the rush to buy gifts, the annual spending frenzy. 'Let's put Christ back into Christmas was their recurring refrain. Although I am sympathetic with the genuine concern here, I think it is misplaced.

The commercialisation of Christmas doesn't actually exclude Christ. He's there in the Manger scenes we know, even in department stores. The problem is not that the commercialisation of Christmas has displaced Christ. The problem is that this Christ doesn't match the biblical portrayal. According to Matthew, 'Jesus did not sleep in heavenly peace' On the contrary he slept – if at all – in the midst of great danger and death. It's difficult to sleep when you are a refugee, fleeing for your life. It's difficult to sleep when Herod is around.

Unfortunately, the Christ that many Christians want to put back into Christmas tends to be a sentimentalised figure, strangely removed from the world of Herod – the real world of pain and brokenness. And so this Christ is largely irrelevant, A baby sleeping in heavenly peace is largely irrelevant to anyone grieving the loss of a loved one, to anyone who has been sexually abused, to anyone living in a war zone. He's irrelevant to the unemployed and the underemployed, to those struggling with doubt and disappointment. He's certainly irrelevant to anyone sleeping in a doorway in winter. Tear-jerking manger scenes and soothing Christmas carols just don't cut it in a world that's full of the reality of Herod.

And who comes to worship the child? Not Herod, not any Jewish religious leaders, but pagan astrologers. This baby lying vulnerable in Bethlehem was perceived rightly by these 'wise' pagans to be the true king of the Jews, whose birth had such cosmic significance that there was a new star in the heavens. Herod himself rightly perceived this baby to be a threat to his pretensions of power. So threatening indeed to justify the frenzied slaughter of innocent babies.

This doesn't mean that we should never enjoy manger scenes or get teary-eyed when we sing carols or watch kids dressed up as participants in the Christmas story. But let's never forget why God showered his unfathomable love on us at Christmas two thousand years ago: because he cared so much for our wounds, for this suffering world that he personally entered the fray, this bloodbath we

The word Incarnation denotes the coming of God into our world in the person and life of Jesus, which happened for the first and only time 2000 years ago. Diarmud O'Marchu

call history, to redeem us – and history – from the bloodbath. So although I can appreciate the desire to ‘put Christ back into Christmas’ I want to suggest that we put *Herod* back into Christmas in order to counter the commercialisation of this sacred day.

The fact is, that Herod is integral to Christmas because Herod places the birth of Jesus squarely in history. At one level that’s literally true. We date Jesus’ birth between 6 and 4 B.C. because Herod died in 4 B.C. and he ordered the slaughter of children under two. Herod places Jesus chronologically in history. But Herod also places Jesus in the harsh reality of history. Jesus didn’t come into some mythical, storybook, never-never land. He came into the world of Herod. The world we know only too well.

And he came to take Herod out. That’s what Christmas is all about: the decisive blow God dealt to evil, injustice and suffering at the cross. But it started in Bethlehem with a baby lying vulnerable in a manger, threatened by a tyrant. Can we like the wise men, discern the cosmic significance of this Christmas?

This article first appeared in *The Catalyst* (Nov-Dec 1993) and received an award for the best ‘Theological Reflection -Inspirational’ from the Canadian Church Press.

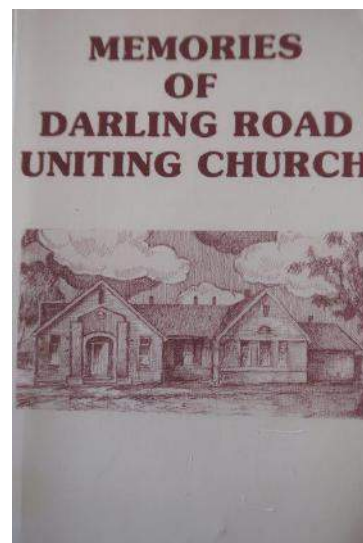


(left) The Magi, mosaic at Basilica S. Apollinaris Nuovo, Ravenna (6th century)

A sign outside a local book shop. Please Note: We’ve moved a few books around. Travel is in the Fantasy section. Sc-Fi is under Current Affairs and Epidemiology beside Self-Help.

Memories of the Darling Road Uniting Church

A history of the Darling Road Church is contained in “*Memories of Darling Road Uniting Church*” compiled by Mrs Dorothy Adams and former members of the Church, published in 1985. Ann Ahin came across a copy of this fascinating book, which she’s passing on to the Malvern History Centre.



Worship commenced at the newly-constructed Darling Road Methodist Church, on the corner of Olive Street, on 22 September 1919, and the final service there – then a Uniting Church – was on 29 December 1981.

The book draws on Rev C Irving Benson’s book, *A Century of Methodism*, mentioning that the Darling Road Church had a number of links with the Armadale Methodist (now Uniting) Church, as originally they were both included in the Malvern Circuit . This was until 1926, when a separate Malvern South circuit was established. In fact, the organist at Armadale, Stan Graham, recommended the purchase of an organ for the new church in 1919, at a cost of £20.

The history touches on the history of a number of the churches in the area, including AUC (all as recorded in Dr Joy Parnaby’s history, at <https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Parnaby-AUC-history.pdf>), which commenced services in 1881.

The history also mentions the closure of the small Grandview Grove church in 1971, as a result of financial issues. Following this, 11 flats were built on the site, which for a number of years were administered by the AUC . The church on this site had dated from 1885, when it was established by the Bible Christians (who came into the Methodist Union when it occurred in 1902).

The Darling Road church leased part of its property to the Currajong School from 1974 onwards and the school still occupies the site today.

More generally, the book sets out a detailed history of the Darling Road church. It reflects the passion and commitment of the people associated with the Church, from those who were involved in the establishment of the Church in 1919 through to those who participated in the last service.

The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby. Needing to be fed, changed and taught to talk like any other human child. The more you think about it the more staggering it gets. No thing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.

J..I.Packer

A LITTLE HISTORY

In the 16th and 17th centuries, large numbers of Huguenots (French Protestants) fled France to nearby countries to escape religious persecution and forced conversion.. Many settled in England around the Spitalfields area of London (near Wesley Chapel) where they worked mostly as silk weavers and silversmiths. The last of their London churches, now being renovated, is in Soho Square and services in French continues there today.

Though none of the first refugees came directly to Australia, some of their descendants did. Surnames recognisable today include La Trobe (state governor), Boyer (the Boyer lectures), Charles Chauvel (film producer), and Cazaly (footballer). There is a Huguenot Society of Australia with a branch in Victoria..



Burials of Huguenots were usually in Anglican churchyards thus they appear in parish registers, but some can be found in the early nonconformist cemetery at Bunhill Fields, just across the road from the Wesley Chapel

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.

Armadale Uniting Church

86A Kooyong Road
ARMADALE Vic 3143

Minister: Rev Fiona Winn
Organist: Rowan Kidd
ucarmadale@gmail.com

0403 662 786

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

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

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday.

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

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