

St Stephen's Uniting Church in the city

In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity



Winter 2019

VISION



Narromine visit to St Stephen's

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I have been asked to write the Editorial for this edition of *Vision*, and I am pleased to do so, because I am very proud of our church's quarterly publication. It is something I've been very happy to pass on, on many occasions to friends and to those who come by our church.

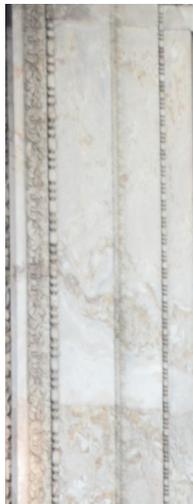
This year, our Editor, Janice Dawson (whose most recent overseas adventure has precluded her editorial pen composing this particular piece) has wisely chosen, rather than to allow the theme of each edition to be dictated by the liturgical calendar, to designate a theme of wider application. The theme for this edition is *Sacred Places*, and you will find, as always, a variety of thoughtful contributions reflecting on this concept from a diversity of viewpoints. I hope you are enriched by what you read, and motivated to think further about the nature of a "sacred place", and what places might be, or have been, sacred to you.

Also in this edition, we celebrate the visit to St Stephen's in June by six of our dear friends from Narromine Uniting Church. This is the fourth year of our "twinning" arrangement, and while St Stephen's people have visited Narromine twice, this was the second occasion when the reciprocal visit has occurred. The weather smiled on our time together, allowing a very pleasant visit to Parramatta via the Rivercat to tour Old Government House, after which a simple meal evoked the fellowship of the table. Sunday's service had been carefully crafted by Ken to acknowledge our rural visitors and the harsh drought conditions which they are currently facing, and included both our annual Harvest Festival and Holy Communion. We gathered around the table of the Lord for this most sacred of Sacraments, then afterwards gathered around another, very well furnished table for a luncheon. A big thank you, both to the six visitors from Narromine who gave the weekend to come to Sydney to visit us, and to all the St Stephen's people who warmly participated in so many ways – volunteering accommodation for our visitors, coming on our excursion to Parramatta, or attending (and catering for!) the superb lunch we shared together on Sunday. Our congregation will no doubt visit Narromine in 2020. Why not plan on joining us, especially if you've not been to that lovely town before? The hospitality of our rural friends is always overwhelming.

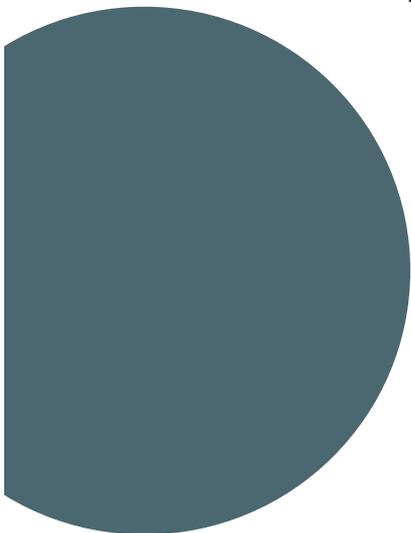
As one who is usually just a reader of *Vision*, I'd like also to take this opportunity to commend the team who so faithfully puts our magazine together four times each year – our Editor, Janice, and my wife, Lauris, whose desktop publishing skills, meticulous eye to detail, and countless hours spent getting it "just right", ensure that the excellent material elicited by Janice is presented in a format that simply invites it to be read.

We can be very proud of our church at St Stephen's, so ably led by Rev Ken Day. New faces keep appearing on Sundays, while our Tuesday congregation also continues to grow. Our monthly *Behind the Green Door* gatherings have attracted a whole range of new people into our community. None of this is about us. It is all about the One whom we serve, the Lord, the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ. The Spirit is working at St Stephen's. Let us give thanks; and let us share our *Vision* with all and sundry, that they may know where light is shining, and come to it to share in its warmth.

Alan Harper OAM



EDITORIAL



From the Minister

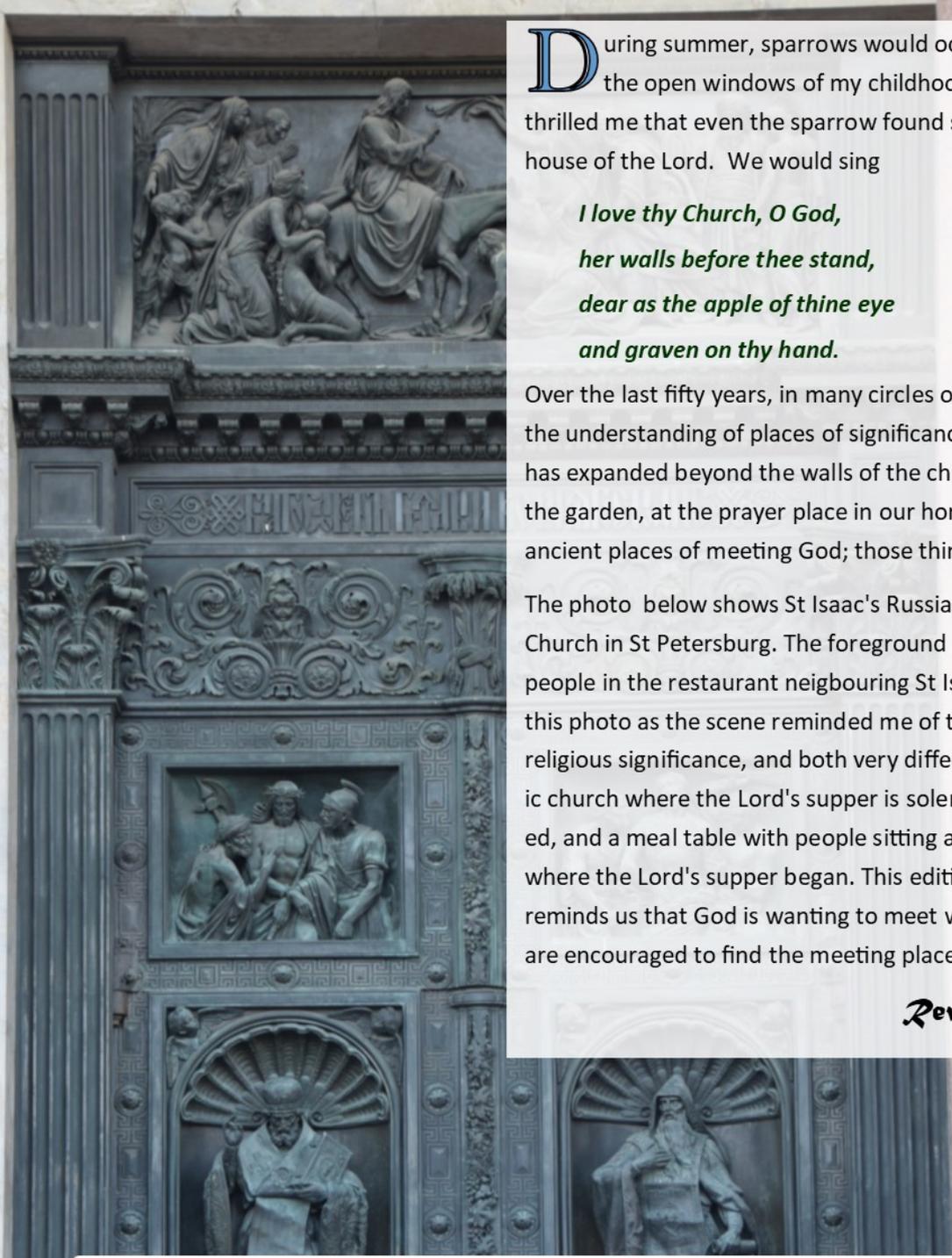
During summer, sparrows would occasionally fly in the open windows of my childhood church. It thrilled me that even the sparrow found shelter in the house of the Lord. We would sing

*I love thy Church, O God,
her walls before thee stand,
dear as the apple of thine eye
and graven on thy hand.*

Over the last fifty years, in many circles of the church, the understanding of places of significance in our faith has expanded beyond the walls of the church building. In the garden, at the prayer place in our home, or the ancient places of meeting God; those thin places.

The photo below shows St Isaac's Russian Orthodox Church in St Petersburg. The foreground is silhouettes of people in the restaurant neighbouring St Isaac's. I took this photo as the scene reminded me of two places of religious significance, and both very different. The historic church where the Lord's supper is solemnly celebrated, and a meal table with people sitting around, like where the Lord's supper began. This edition of Vision reminds us that God is wanting to meet with us, and we are encouraged to find the meeting place.

Rev Ken Day



St Isaac's Russian Orthodox Church doors—L. Harper

St Isaac's Russian Orthodox Church—K. Day

SACRED PLACES

Sometime in the 6th century BC, in the ancient city of Babylon, a Jewish psalmist sang the sad lament which we know as Psalm 137. Exiled to this foreign land along with many other of his or her compatriots, the author could not conceive that Israel's God could possibly be nearby.

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.....
How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?*

At the beginning of the 6th century, the great Temple of Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians, as the leaders of the nation and many others were carried off to captivity in Babylon itself. It had been a devastating blow. The Old Testament book of *Lamentation*, a collection of poems bemoaning the catastrophe, the suffering and the bewilderment of the people of Judah and Jerusalem, tells the story. How could God allow this to happen to his people? Why had God deserted them? And where could God be found, now that his Temple, his dwelling place, had been destroyed, and its treasures carried off to be placed in a pagan temple in a pagan nation?

The sacred place – the *most* sacred place – had been destroyed. God had been rendered homeless. God had left his people. God had disappeared. Without this most sacred of places, the Jews despaired that God could never be found again.

As the captives were to discover, of course God had never deserted them. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the later chapters of Isaiah, all reassured them that, not only was God still with his people, but that they would eventually return to their land, as indeed, they did in 539BC after several generations of exile.

Sadly for the Jewish people, history was to repeat itself in AD 70, but in an even more cataclysmic manner. In that year, the second Jewish Temple, built following the return from captivity, but expanded and beautified by Herod the Great in the 1st century BC, was destroyed. In the last days of the Jewish revolt (AD 68-70), Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, eventually defeated, and its walls and its Temple completely destroyed. The Temple has never been rebuilt, and its site is now occupied by the Moslem Dome of the Rock. All that remains of the second Temple is the "Wailing Wall", a part of the earthworks undertaken by Herod to expand the Temple platform, a remnant which remains even today as a most sacred place for traditional Jews.

So once again, in AD 70, it appeared that God had deserted his people;

yet once again, the Jews, and the Judaic faith, survived. Surprisingly for Christians, that survival was largely the work of the Pharisees, who receive such a bad press in the gospels. Because of their transformative work, today, Jewish people throughout the world worship God in synagogues and other settings, and a Temple no longer has a place in their worship or ritual.

These two tragic accounts from the history of Judah make an important point about sacred places. It is we who invest particular places with a sense of the sacred, it is not God. God does not need special sites, or fine buildings, or ornate decorations, to be



present. God is always with his people.

So what do we mean by a "sacred place"?

I remember a conversation I had many years ago with someone caught up in the amalgamation of two neighbouring Uniting Churches. Although rationally the proposal made eminent sense, there was a deep sense of unease among those whose building was to be sold off. When I made the remark that our faith was not about buildings, my interlocutor wisely replied, "But that building is where they found God, and they're frightened that they may not find him anywhere else."

It was surely much the same fear that drove the Jews on both occasions when the Temple was destroyed. The fact is that many of us require the security of a special place to be able to encounter God.

The Bible is full of people's encounters with God.

Some of these do indeed take place in sacred places: for example, God appeared to Isaiah in the Temple of Solomon (Is 6:1-3). However God appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb (Ex 3:1). “Take off your sandals, for the place you are standing is holy ground,” God instructed Moses. The place where this occurred cannot now be identified, and even at the time it was not obvious to Moses that it was a sacred place.

There was no special building, no ornate decoration, indeed nothing at all that marked it out as holy. The site was sacred because it was there that God chose to appear to Moses. It was not about the place, but about God’s presence there.



When Saul (the later Paul) encountered Jesus (Acts 9), it was out on the road leading from Jerusalem to Damascus, where Paul intended to persecute the Christians. Ironically he was an official of a sacred place (the second Temple – Acts 9:1-2) at the time, but his encounter with the risen Lord took place, not there, but on a road, quite possibly built or at least paved by the Roman occupying power. Nothing in the surrounds marked this place out as sacred; it was the presence of Christ that made it so. No archaeologist could ever identify the precise site because of the remains of anything that might suggest sacredness.

For the truth is that any place can be a sacred place; and the pervasiveness of the Holy Spirit, granted after the ascension of Jesus, and through the Spirit, the ubiquity of God, mean that every place is a sacred place. Surely no place is “more sacred” than another.

Yet most of us do have places that we regard as special, or sacred. The Paris crowds which turned out

when Notre Dame burnt bespoke the high regard in which that beautiful cathedral is held, even by those who are not overtly religious. The possibility of its destruction struck chords far deeper than just those associated with just any beautiful historic building. This place was *sacred*. Around the world, various shrines and other “holy” places are held by particular people to be sacred. Indeed, there would be more than a few people who would regard our own St Stephen’s as a sacred place; just as countless Christians around the world have come to regard their place of worship as, in some special way, sacred. At St Stephen’s, it is surely the effect of the magnificent timberwork glowing in the daylight filtered through the great stained glass of the Armstrong window, or at night, reflecting the warmth of the incandescent lights that are restrained enough to preserve the mystique of darkness and shadow.

There is surely no harm in our predilection for regarding some places as sacred, providing we recognise that our doing so is about our own needs and our own limitations. If a special place allows us more easily to let go of the worldly baggage we carry around with us, and to focus on feeling the presence of God, then it does indeed deserve the label of “sacred”. Danger lies ahead, however, when we cease to recognise that the special place is only special because it helps *us* in this way; when we invest the place itself with some magical spiritual quality, as if such qualities cannot be found elsewhere; and – most dangerously of all – when we find ourselves thinking that the presence of God is limited to those places which we have deemed to be “sacred”. For the cosmos is God’s creation, his presence is

everywhere, and the living God will not be confined to places, sacred or otherwise, of our choosing.

The author of Psalm 139 articulated this long ago:

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you. (Ps 13)*

My very own thin place

or pilgrimage, places where the tramping of faithful feet have worn down the gap between the mundane and the divine.

I have been blessed in my (relatively) short lifetime to have travelled internationally a few times, and to have visited some incredibly beautiful and holy places. And I have experienced God in many of them; in abandoned ruins, in vast isolated landscapes, in busy cities and in fellow travellers.

But there is a mountain in North-East Victoria, Mount Pilot, which has always been, for me, the clearest example of a thin place.

In my childhood, my parents took me to Beechworth for many of our family holidays. We have ancestral links to the area and, so the story goes, the caravan park there had outstanding nappy-changing facilities.

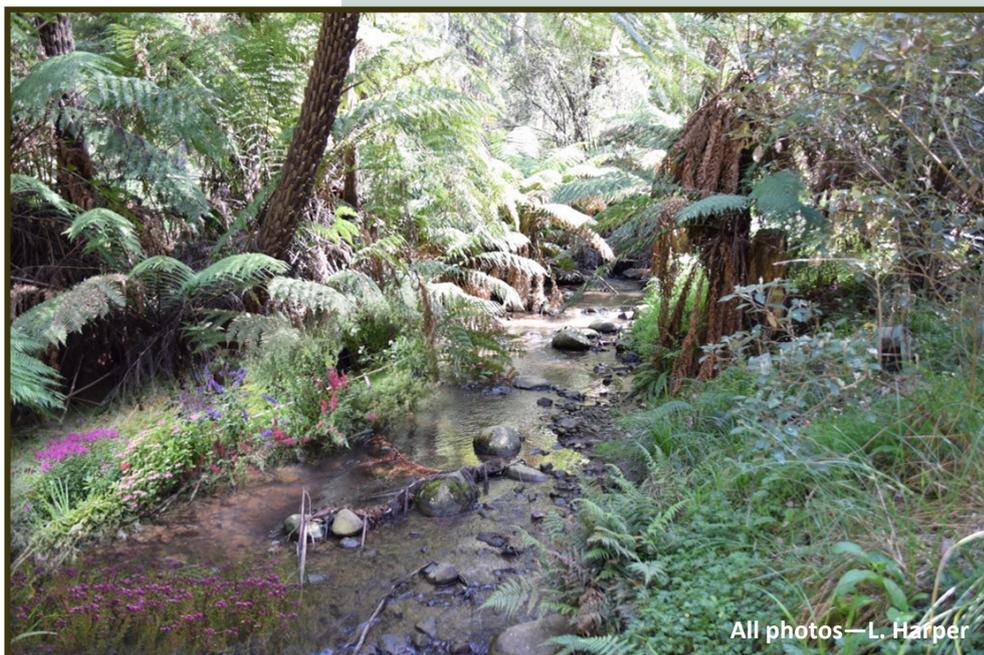
One of our special family traditions was to spend the final evening of our holiday climbing the peak of Mount Pilot. The afternoon would be spent in the



In the Celtic Christian tradition, there is a wonderfully resonant concept of the 'thin place' – a point of connection, home to a palpable sense that heaven and earth are not, here, that far apart. One writer describes these places as those "where the walls are weak", and another "where the door between the world and the next is cracked open for a moment and the light is not all on the other side."

A thin place is holy ground, where God is experienced in a different way, where Her whisper voice is heard: "I am with you. I love you. I have a plan for you."

Such places can be wild, rugged, rocky places, windswept and Yahweh-shaped. Or they might be places of near quiet, hidden river-valleys where delicate flowers spring irrepressibly from verdant hillsides. They can be places of worship



All photos—L. Harper

Beechworth Bakery picking out one sweet treat for each of us, then packing the picnic basket and making a thermos. Then we would drive to the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, timing it so that the sun was perhaps an hour from setting. We would climb the peak, not a long hike but a steep one, and celebrate the achievement with warm drinks and baked goods as the sun set.



But the final part of our tradition was for each of us (mum, dad and I) to find a quiet spot, and spend some time alone in prayer and reflection. Sometimes dad would spend the time less quietly, shouting out the words "God of Wonders" across the valleys, which echoed and reverberated like a cooee from the peaks surrounding. Even as a teenager, when I tended to get embarrassed by this fervour (although there was never anyone but the

three of us around), I knew it was because he too felt what I did – that God was near in this place.

After I finished university, and before beginning work, I spent a week driving from Sydney to Deniliquin, and then to Orange, to visit some friends. I made a detour to Beechworth and spent a few nights there. It was the first time I had been there without my family, but I knew, as the last evening of my stay approached, that I could not forgo the family tradition.

So I went to the bakery, packed the picnic basket, made up a thermos, drove to the mountain and climbed the peak. And, as was our custom, I spent the final half hour of daylight in prayer.

I sometimes find it hard to pray, but I have never found it so on Mount Pilot. I spoke to God that evening like I was chatting to my best friend, which in hindsight I was. I poured out my soul, spoke of my hopes and fears for the year ahead, wept, asked for guidance, gave thanks and praise for the blessings that have adorned my life so far and made promises for the walk ahead.

In the quiet, I again felt the presence of God. A presence of love and generosity, encircling my whole being with peace. The creator God reaching through the walls I myself had built up to embrace the created one, the loved one. God, not in the mighty wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small voice.

I have been around the church long enough to know that God is everywhere; that if I go up to the heavens, God is there – if I make my bed in the depths, God is there – if I rise on the wings of the dawn or settle on the far side of the sea, even there God's hand will guide me and God's right hand will hold me fast.

But I also know enough of humanity and of myself to know that sometimes it is hard to feel the presence of an invisible God and sometimes we need to be brought to a specific place, to a thin place, to experience the divine in a different way.

So I pray that you might find your Mount Pilot, your point of connection with God, and that you might bring from that place a blessing for the journey, a gift from the one who knit you together in your mother's womb.

Katherine Buchan

On the border



On our recent holiday in Georgia and Armenia Jack and I encountered many sacred places. It was difficult to select one as outstanding in either country where religion plays a huge part in the lives of the people. (Over 85% of people in both countries are Christian, although either Georgian Orthodox or Armenian Apostolic). Each church or monastery that we did visit, however, had a strong connection to the past and the stories which we heard there demonstrated how important those places had been at different

times from as far back as the first and second centuries in Roman times when pagan temples were in existence.

One monastery in particular, however, will be remembered for a number of reasons. It took several hours of driving on narrow roads to reach the David Goreja monastery complex in south east Georgia.

Ancient records show that it was established in the 6th Century in natural caves on the slopes of Mount Gareja by St David with a group of 13 Assyrian fathers. The monastery gradually attracted more followers and flourished under royal patronage in the 9th to 12th Centuries. It was abandoned after invasion by Mongol tribes in the 13th Century but by the late 17th Century was again inhabited and buildings were added. During the Soviet era (1921 – 1991) the site was used as an army base. Restoration began shortly after Georgia regained independence. Today it is once more a working monastery. While still a sacred place

for many pilgrims, it is also a tourist attraction because of its history and spectacular location. Its position on a very steep slope has offered safe refuge to the occupants who, initially lived and worshipped in caves in the rock. We marvelled at the devotion of the thousands of monks who had persevered in that location through the extremely harsh winters and hot dry summers. Presumably the current occupants (whom we did not see) have now a more comfortable life.

The monastery complex is situated at the current (unmarked) border of Georgia and Azerbaijan, its Muslim neighbour. (The “border” is a narrow path along the top of a ridge—photo 1). Photo 2 shows the monastery on the Georgian side. Some few hundred metres above these monastery buildings is a narrow ridge patrolled by two small groups of border guards. We met two helpful Georgian guards at the top as we puffed and struggled up the steep slope. On the *other* side of the ridge two differently uniformed guards greeted us with courteous nods as we admired the view into Azerbaijan. Fortunately, our tour guide was able to negotiate with them for us to have a 20-minute walk on the Azerbaijani side of the ridge to view some tiny chapels in several of the caves. Photo 3 shows one with 12th Century frescos above a rock-hewn altar. During the 10th to 13th Centuries the Goreji School of Fresco Painting flourished when the monastery complex was both an important educational institution as well as a religious community. It was sad to see this tiny sacred space so affected by vandalism and the elements and in need of restoration.





It is thought that there are about 70 caves in the mountain, over 20 wells, numerous former storage areas for food and of course many graves. Formerly monks would have come and gone freely on both sides of the mountain. In the current century there have been many discussions between Georgia and Azerbaijan over border demarcation at the site. The two Presidents, however, evidently agreed to recognise the importance of preserving previous religious, cultural and economic bonds in February 2019. On the day that we visited, the importance of that whole mountain as a sacred place was maintained with quiet dignity at the “border”.

All photos—S. Wiard

Sheena Wiard

The Hagia Sophia

My much anticipated visit to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in Turkey could still not have fully prepared me for the sight that met my eyes on entering this unique edifice which has stood through history with deep religious significance in both the Christian and later the Islamic faith. There was a sense of awe at the structural architecture, together with an appreciation of the reverence, history and beauty of the internal space that was adorned with a blend of religious iconography, panels and mosaics all of which transcended time and culture.

When it was first constructed in the Sixth Century AD as a Christian Basilica, in the city of Constantinople, with a complex dome that was unparalleled in its time, Emperor Justinian is reported to have said'... *My Lord, thank you for giving me the chance to create such a worshipping place....*The Basilica served as a focal point of Byzantine culture and worship for nearly 900 years and the magnificent mosaics adorning the walls depicting biblical scenes and figures bear witness to that role today.



With the capture of Constantinople in the Ottoman conquest under Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 and the name of the city changing to Istanbul, the Hagia Sophia was changed in its function to a Mosque. Panels or medallions with Islamic calligraphy now hung on the naves, where bronze lamps were added and externally four minarets were added for religious significance and to fortify against earthquakes.

This historical structure continued to function in this role till 1935, nine years after the Republic of Turkey was established under Ataturk, when the religious significance and symbolic representations of both faiths were respected and preserved and the building was converted to a Museum, attracting three million tourists annually. Today the Hagia Sophia stands as a symbol of peace, harmony and tolerance, thereby perhaps fulfilling the meaning of its original name as 'Holy Wisdom'.

Romany White.

Fire at Notre Dame de Paris

On Tuesday morning the 16th April, I woke to the dreadful news that Notre Dame de Paris was burning. It seemed that little could be done to save this beautiful 850 year old Gothic masterpiece. I turned on the French news on SBS and the scene before my eyes was devastating. Fire was consuming the roof and the beautiful spire; before the eyes of shocked Parisians, and on television screens in France and around the world, the spire collapsed suddenly and dramatically. In the heart of Paris, hundreds of people were being kept well away from the Cathedral, where incredibly courageous firefighters were struggling to save not only the towers but the treasures kept within the cathedral as well.



Photographer: Guillaume Levrier

Parisians were openly weeping in the streets. Many were on their knees praying; tourists joined them as all hoped for a miracle. A large crowd of young people gathered around the Saint Michel fountain in the Latin Quarter and continued to sing hymns throughout the night as they watched their beloved Cathedral burn. They were joined there at midnight by the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Michel Aupetit. At last, in the early hours of the morning, not long before dawn, the word came through that much of the cathedral, though damaged, had been spared.

It seemed indeed a miracle to many, as they rejoiced that the Great Organ survived as well as the magnificent rose stained glass windows. Mark Quarmby and Nico Tjoelker have both played on this famous Great Organ; quite a number of members and friends of St Stephen's have seen those wondrous stained glass windows.

One of the first photos to come out of the interior of the Cathedral showed a dark, smoke filled scene with the burned wooden beams which had once supported the roof scattered in front of the high altar. But through the gloom the golden Cross above the High Altar stood out, a powerful symbol of hope – and two shafts of light broke through the darkness and rubble to highlight the Cross.

What an amazing symbol this was at Easter time. The Cross stood out above the ruins of the magnificent wooden beams, lost for

ever, which had fallen in front of the high altar. That Cross represented the hope of new beginnings, the promise that out of a great tragedy there would be a tomorrow when Notre Dame de Paris would be restored, its beauty and history once again a source of joy and wonder.

When commenting on the tragedy of the fire at Notre Dame, this is what the Archbishop of Paris had to say:

The fire in our mother church right at the beginning of Holy Week, when all Christians enter into a period of reflection on the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, brings us immense pain. What does the Lord wish to say to us through this experience of suffering?

Our hope is founded not on edifices of stone, which will always need to be renovated, but on the Resurrected One who lives for ever. We have lost the beauty of the setting, but we have not lost the jewel which it contained: Christ present through his words and in his body, given for us.

Finally, I would add that, when I lived near Paris, and during visits to *The City of Light* at different

times over the years, I have gone inside Notre Dame on a number of occasions, to marvel at the magnificent Gothic interior and the beautiful rose stained glass windows. I always felt a sense of inner calm and tranquility within its ancient stone walls. It is good to know that people from around the world, the wealthy as well as those of modest means, are going to contribute so that the Cathedral can be restored. As a great symbol of the sacred in our midst, the cathedral will rise again to be a beacon of light, inspiration and hope to the world.

Janice Dawson

OBERAMERGAU

In 1980, as part of a world tour with Rev Graham and Hazel Hardy taking in Israel, parts of St Paul's missionary journeys and Istanbul, I saw first-hand the world-renowned Oberammergau passion play, staged on the border of the Alps. What an enriching experience in bringing the Bible to life!

In the year 1633 when the black plague snatched away most of the inhabitants of the little mountain village the parish fathers, driven to desperation, took an oath that they would stage a performance of the passion of Christ every 10 years if the plague vanished. And the story goes that from this moment on the village was spared from the black death. In 1634 the inhabitants of Oberammergau fulfilled their oath. The play depicts the story of Christ's passion beginning with the entry into Jerusalem and ending with the resurrection and transfiguration.

This promise made hundreds of years ago – an exciting and fateful event, a vow based on great trust in God, a mystery of faith – continues to be fulfilled and has preserved its medieval origin. It has been carried on by people of Bavarian, Swabian and Tirolian descent due to their affinity to the soil and is constantly being revived in the art of wood-carving as well as the venerable passion itself. Through the ages, bearing witness to the heights and depths of mankind, stands the sign of the

cross: a warning and a hope for the future at the same time.

The text for the passion play was reformed between 1850 and 1860 by the parish priest Alois Isenberger from Oberammergau. The construction of the play with its living pictures from the old testament and the acted scenes from the new testament have been retained. The music for the passion play was written in 1815 by the Oberammergau school teacher Rochus Dedler. Employing a large choir and orchestra his compositions still encompass the entire play today.

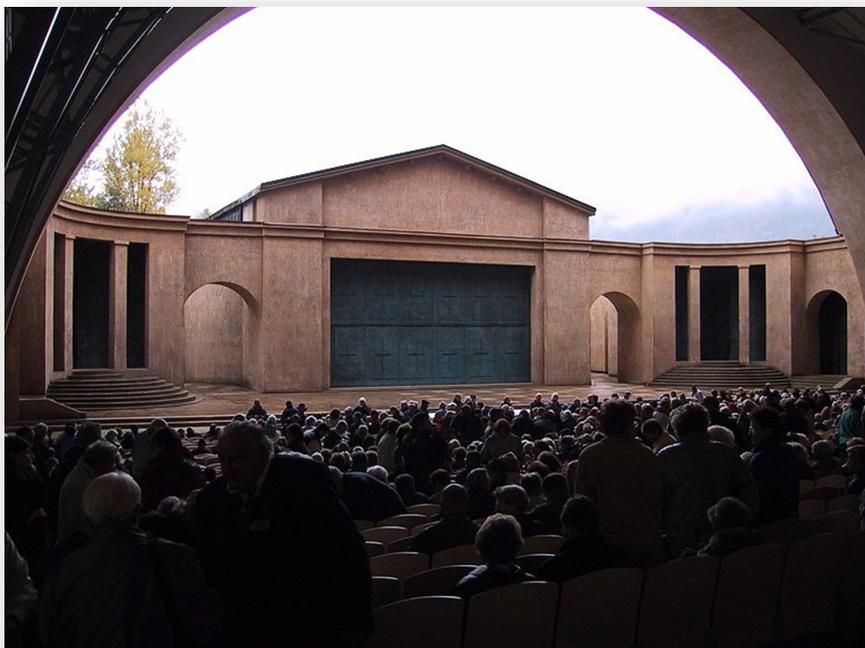
All the people taking part in the passion play or as it is known in German *passionsspiele* are ordinary people who carry on pursuing their normal everyday lives such as doctors, teachers, housewives. All the main speaking parts are filled by actors who were born in Oberammergau or lived there for at least 20 years. A performance lasts an entire day beginning at 9.00am and ending before 5.00pm. The midday-break lasts 3 hours. 100 plus performances of the play occur between May and October.

Accommodation arrangements included bed and two meals a day staying in the village people's homes. Exploring the town was a wonderful experience, marvelling at the beautiful frescoes on many of the houses, the baroque architecture and excellent wood-carvers' shops. A bit like fairyland really!

We nearly didn't make the play as we had left the tickets back at our billeted home, but mum ran there and back in record time and just got through the giant doors before they closed. A lived experience travelling with Rev Graham & Hazel Hardy, members of St Stephen's congregation, but most of all a wonderful and gracious lady, my mother, Mollie Barton.

Memories I'll never forget.

Judith Barton

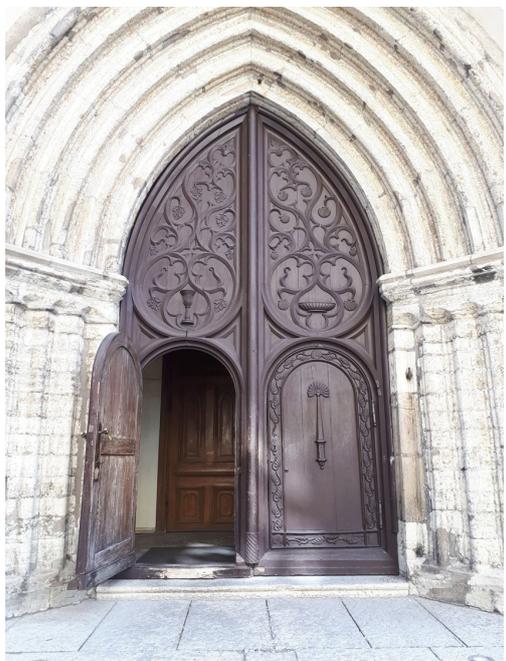


A Journey to the North Pole



Estonia is a picturesque nation located on the Eastern Coast of the Baltic Sea. I was fortunate to visit Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, during the course of my employment – which is currently as a contract Seamstress on cruise ships. So, from having never been out of Australia, to being flown around the world – the year 2019 has been one of many new horizons unfolding before me.

As a small child, I enjoyed a peaceful existence having moved from the hustle and bustle of Sydney to a rural outpost on the way to the Southern Highlands. Moving there was like moving into a fairytale: where cottages, flowers, trains, rivers, trees, horses, goats, chickens and pigs came to life as companions, replacing the people and bricks of Sydney. I could be Mowgli or Anne of Green Gables or David the Gnome or Heidi out here, running the rivers and the bush as fleet as a wallaby in the wilderness that was our home on the watershed of Sydney Catchment.



A school built in 1888 became mine too, and the children had long and beautiful names, also like in storybooks. “Call me Tati” was spoken in English, while the family spoke amongst themselves in low tones of another language. They looked like the sky – with snow white skin and pale blue eyes. I didn’t know much at the time but I knew I enjoyed the company of these people whose grandmothers would slump in chairs inside the house, wearing embroidered dresses like Mum’s dressing gown and with gaily painted flowers and embroidered motifs. Their Mums would make jams and cakes and paint flowers and make dresses – mine too when she had time off work. The men were mostly rural workers and heavily involved in fruit and poultry farming.

“We are Estonian” I gleaned and I knew that they “came here after the war”. I knew that my Pop had never been the same “after the war” and that whatever it was, “the war” was a pretty big thing.

CHRISTMAS is a pretty big thing in the life of a child. If there was one thing my town knew about, other than footy and chicken farming – it was Christmas. Books, stories, plays, decorations, dances, bush dances, barbecues, morning teas and Carols in every park in every village – in my mind, there was no Christmas like a Bush Christmas. In the city – Santa might come out into the big chair if you yelled loudly enough and BELIEVED. In the country – Santa rode on the back of a firetruck, and he would throw out lollies to all families good or bad – because even bad people knew that you had to give money to the Rural Fire Service, because they would help you when the bush fires came.

And why do we celebrate Christmas? was a trick question laid down by Mrs Griffiths, the scripture teacher. **PRESENTS!** was a standard answer but those in the know, knew that Mrs Griffiths would be VERY disappointed with the answer of PRESENTS!



We celebrate Christmas because of the “presence” of Baby Jesus.

Good one, Mrs Griffith!

Good one, Jesus!

Back then, summer was the time of Christmas carols, Christmas books, Christmas feasts, Christmas holidays - it's the time when all the adults went mad, dropping 'the rules' and everyone was happy and all the kids got to knock off school and roam around on foot and bicycle to inspect each other's Christmas trees – especially what might be under them with our names labelled..! But most importantly it was instilled that due to the birth – and thereby presence of Jesus – Christmas was a sacred time of peace, love, and goodwill to all men.

At 12 years old I was accomplished in the fields of playing chess, dressage, baritone horn, long distance running and singing in the choir. Our school had a Concert Band, and Choir programme, and I was a dedicated student. Our wonderful Choir director taught the art of dramatic expression, pleading to the sensibilities of rural Australians. As a choir, we were far too happy to sing on behalf of the orphaned Oliver Twist. We were to imagine living without our mothers while starving in London and THAT is the correct tone of the song. It was there I learnt that performing as a suitably mournful orphan in the choir, could bring visible peace to the conductor – from that example, whose untiring efforts rewarded us with some success including performing at the local high school, and at Sydney Opera House...!

I saw an inviting sign about the choir at St Stephens whilst walking from a job at the Sydney Opera house. I put some effort into finally escaping the weekend work that funded my efforts at obtaining a Bachelor of Arts. Could I still sing, twenty-five Christmases later?

On the 6th of January 2019 I got up early to catch the train to attend St Stephens where I was immediately made welcome by Janice and Judith. On the 8th of January 2019, I got put on a ship to Moreton Bay – and began this leg of my patchwork career – this time at least in the correct trade, as a costume sewer.

So to end up in Tallinn, Estonia, in their springtime of May 2019 was one of many pleasing moments of the year so far. To visit Europe, with its rich history and a beautiful church on every corner – could this be my life now?

It was Sunday when we arrived and I split away from my

touring group, whose primary occupation was taking selfies and visiting coffee shops. At this point I had visited several churches in Port towns of the Baltic Sea but NONE had been open and I was running short of time to belt out a Sanctus in Europe. Seeing the Spire of St Olav's, I headed that way and was pleased to find a service in process.

I was welcomed into a pew by local parishioners and proceeded to enjoy the service within an 800-year old, gothic style building. There were two services at 10am and 12pm, and all services at St Olav's were held in Estonian language.

The hymns appeared to be sung by a small team of singers. I could not see a choir but it is possible they were out of sight. The words to hymns were displayed on TV screens mounted on the walls and most of the congregation sung along. The church had hymnbooks with musical score, yet it seemed optional for people to use one. At the end of the service, a guitar and trumpet duo played upbeat music for a short time before unpacking to make room for the next service.

It was impossible to accurately capture the simple beauty of St Olav's due to its vast size, but I have taken some photos to document the experience. It remains a firm opinion that a drawing, or etching is the only way to accurately communicate the detail of any building in singularity, by isolating its detail from an irrelevant background. That task will have to be saved for another Spring Sunday in Estonia...!

It was obvious in Estonia that church attendance is very much a part of ordinary life. There were a large number of churches, and there were people gathered around each at varying times on the Sunday. It was apparent that church-going remains an activity that binds the Estonian community together and it was a delight to see many communities coming together within a township.

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.”

And after a homecoming of sorts in faraway Estonia – I anticipate the year ahead, between the ship voyages to all lands – to be one of making joyful noise unto the Lord, as often as possible, with the choir at St Stephens.

Recordings: <https://soundcloud.com/sputnicity/sets/organ-hymns-of-st-olavs-church-tallinn-estonia>

Emma Sputnik

Music Ministry @ SSMS



Photo—Live Photography

My mother, Jenny D, and I have been attending St Stephen's Uniting Church services together for nearly three years now. Mum started attending Tuesday lunchtime services as she worked very close by in Macquarie Street. I cannot recall why or when exactly we first attended a Sunday service together, but I remember feeling like I had found a place that welcomed us with open arms (and a box of chocolates!).

There is a word found in many Indigenous languages that I find very fitting to my sense of community at St Stephen's: Allawah. Allawah means: *Stay here. Rest. Sit down.* It is a word of peace, unity, and harmony. This is the sense of home, welcoming and comfort we have found at St Stephen's.

As a city church, we love that St Stephen's services the local community, being a diverse mix of people and back-

grounds. And we particularly love that the church provides support to local scholars from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music down the road in many ways including the Friday music series.

It was really the music ministry at St Stephen's that drew us to the church community. We are extremely lucky to have the expansive talented choir that we do, led by Huw Belling and Mark Quarmby. The choir of talented volunteers and scholars from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music bring our worship to a higher level through music.

At each Sunday service we feel blessed to have such a beautiful choir and organists to lead us in song and worship. It has become our draw card for family and friends to join us at a service and is always complimented.

When I was preparing for my wedding then, it was only

fitting for me to request to have some members of the choir and an organist to support the ceremony. I am so thankful that eight of our wonderful choir members, Huw and Mark all gave up a beautiful Saturday morning in March to support me on my wedding day and provide the same wonderful music ministry that we love at St Stephen's.

Having some of my most favourite hymns to sing with my closest family and friends on my wedding day was such a beautiful blessing and gave me that sense of unity and comfort. I feel particularly blessed to have had the spiritual guidance of Ken Day in parallel to the musical guidance and advice of Mark Quarmby in the lead up to my wedding day.

This photo is so fitting to my sense of community at St Stephen's: family and friends in worship together supported in song by the choir. I will always be thankful for the musical ministry at St Stephen's and the St Stephen's church choir will hold a special place in my heart, having had such a special role on my wedding day.

To the St Stephen's choir, Mark Quarmby, Huw Belling and Nico Tjoelker, from the bottom of my heart and on behalf of the St Stephen's congregation, thank you for the blessings you bring to the church community through music.

Elizabeth Gordon

If you would like to support the Music & Cultural Foundation, tax deductible donations (over \$2.00) can be made by Direct Deposit (BSB 032 024, Acc. 274133). Please email your details to the church so a receipt can be issued.

VALE: Dorothy Howard



Readers will be sorry to learn of the passing of Miss Dorothy Howard, a loyal member and supporter of our church since the 1940's.

Born in December 1927, Dorothy matriculated from St George High School in 1944, and began a varied career taking in CSR, the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps, BHP and a personnel role back in CSR again. During this time she acquired a number of qualifications ranging from Army Signals to Personnel Administration – this in an age when ladies tended not to move beyond basic skills.

She was very much a secret agent for Jesus Christ, being an active knitter of beanies and jumpers which were donated to Frontier Services, and a very generous donor to the Street Stalls and other Fellowship fundraising activities.

In retirement she supported cultural and artistic organisations and travelled extensively, while still participating in the life of her wider family.

We will remember her taking her regular seat in the southern aisle at worship services – and thank God for her involvement – one who was “rich towards God” (Luke 12).

Alex Morquay

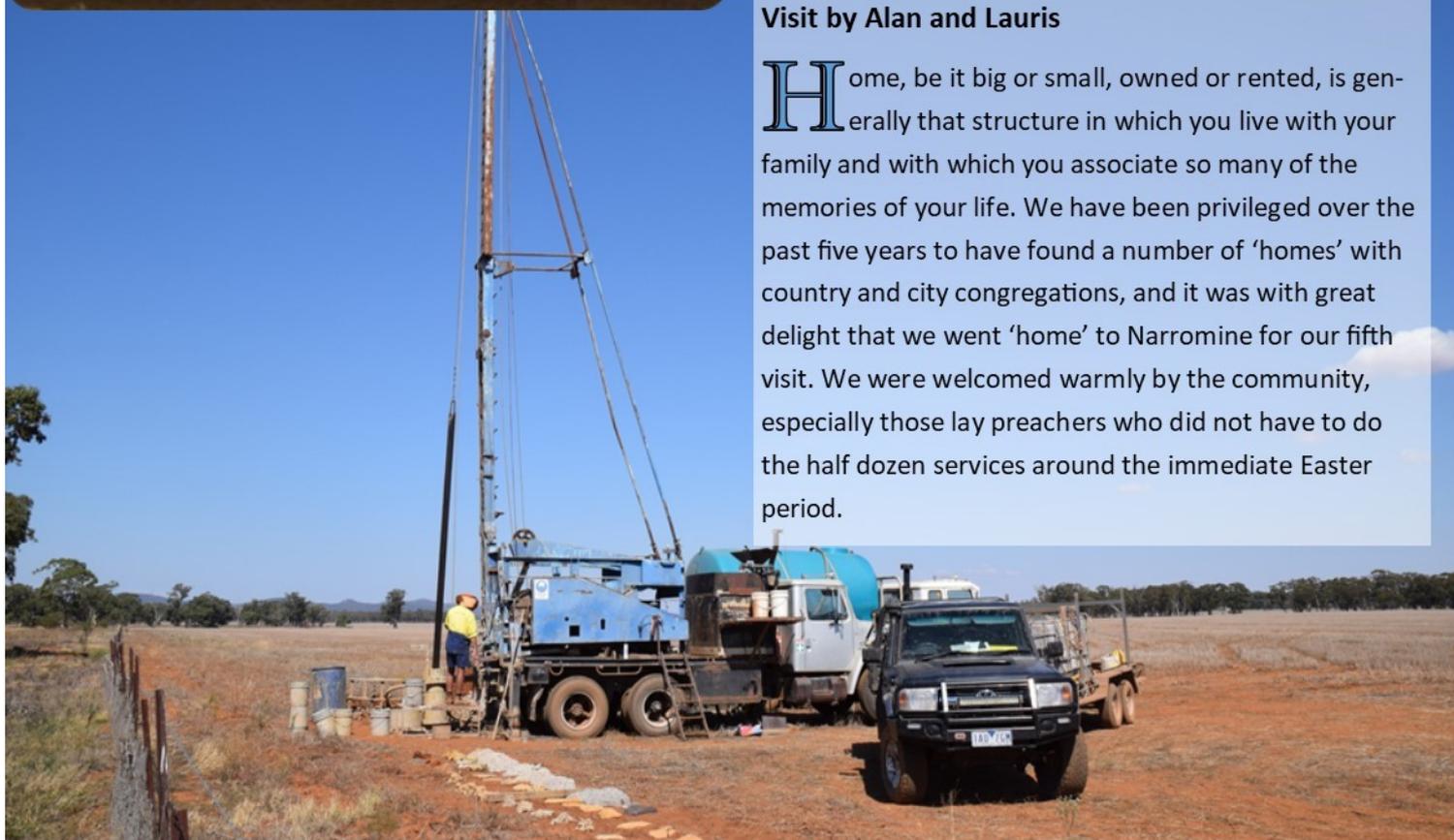


Narromine

2019

Visit by Alan and Lauris

Home, be it big or small, owned or rented, is generally that structure in which you live with your family and with which you associate so many of the memories of your life. We have been privileged over the past five years to have found a number of 'homes' with country and city congregations, and it was with great delight that we went 'home' to Narromine for our fifth visit. We were welcomed warmly by the community, especially those lay preachers who did not have to do the half dozen services around the immediate Easter period.



Easter with its focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, is always a time for deep reflection on just what has been given for us and the sacrifice that God made. But with the permission of the Church Council, Maundy Thursday this year focused on *Jesus Christ Superstar* which is, of course, more about Judas than Jesus. People were challenged by the content and there was a diversity of opinion about the production. No-one could say that the viewing hadn't been thought provoking.

Those from St Stephen's who were in Narromine last year will remember the trip to the Dandaloo church (who can forget Darby ending up in a VERY muddy field!), with its wonderful timber structure and vivid stained-glass windows. We were delighted to lead service there. Forty-two people attended, some from as far afield as Boggabri! It was magic to have the church full, with a number of children present, and the singing filling the countryside. As usual, we also did a number of services at Timbrebongie House, an aged care facility. Every Wednesday there is a service run by either the Anglicans, UC or one of the residents. The parish and former village of Timbrebongie was on the Macquarie River



just north of Narromine, and this how Timbreebongie House derives its name.

We care enormously for our Narromine congregation and always make pastoral visiting an absolute priority. In a lay led congregation, often those in the leadership positions are also working as is the case with two of the three leaders at Narromine. By being available to visit members we relieve them of that burden for some time, and it has the upside of letting us get to know people even more deeply. It is a privilege to be able to sit, listen to stories, talk and discuss issues that are pressing. Of course, this time the drought featured in a lot of conversations. One of our visits took us to the Salt Bush Farm on the Dandaloo Road. I wrote in the last issue of Vision about the use



of salt bush for fodder and being able to see it grown from small to large plants was extremely interesting.



The world grows ever smaller, and this was proved when I went to Nyngan for a day to help with the Small School's Summer Camp. This camp, held every second year at the Nyngan Show Grounds, hosted schools from Wanaaring, Louth (4 students), Enngonia, Burke/Walgett DE, Hermidale, Marra Creek, Carinda, Girilambone, Philliga, Gwabegar, and Quambone – I knew of three of these towns only!! The activities (gymnastics, music, art and craft, sport, science and technology) for the students were planned and supervised by teachers and students from PLC, Knox and Ravenswood. And my role was to help volunteers from Narromine and Broken Hill prepare morning and afternoon teas, and lunches for 240 people. No mean feat. The Flying Padre was also in

attendance. And the small world reference? – a friend of mine from Eastwood whom I have not seen for a few years was one of the teachers present.

The only Anzac Day service Alan and I have attended was in Canberra in 2015 for the centenary of Gallipoli. It was a moving experience with images of those who died projected on the War Memorial at dawn. One hundred and twenty thousand attended, but it was hardly personal. This year in Narromine we attended the Anzac Day service at 11.00am with hundreds of people. But this country experience was entirely different. It was a small community coming to honour its own – those who had grown up in the area, had served and died. Dozens of wreaths were laid at the Cenotaph from all manner of groups including Indigenous tribes. And the speaker was an army officer from Narromine. It was personal.

Our Narromine 'home' continues to amaze, encourage and support us, and we grateful for the community's love and look forward to our return journey in 2020.



Lauris Harper



Narromine visit Sydney



Over the last weekend of May 2019, six Narromine Uniting Church parishioners were guests of members of the St Stephens congregation in Sydney. This is an annual twinning arrangement that has been in action for a few years. 2019 was the turn for the bush bunnies to visit our city cousins.

We travelled by car and train to Sydney on the Friday and settled into our various hosted accommodation. The next morning, we

met with St Stephens people at Circular Quay to board a "Rivercat" or ferry to Rydalmere. Our destination was Parramatta but the wharf was under repair so a bus took us to Parramatta from Rydalmere. We had several stops to Rydalmere and from the water we saw the development along the shore line as we ventured up the Parramatta River. We noticed the abundance of multi-storied units/apartments all presented in dull/bland colours. It was a perfect morning for a ferry ride and our hosts assisted us with information about historical and prominent places along the way.

At Parramatta, we walked a short distance to Old Government House, the first official building of the new colony, fully preserved, some areas in original condition and furnished with items of the period though not original. We had a guide who knew his stuff and we were



taken back to how the people lived in those days nearly 230 years ago. The buildings were well restored and maintained ensuring our heritage is not lost.

We had a light lunch before going back to the Parramatta CBD where a lot of construction is underway. We were hoping on a wander through the Anglican Church but it was locked. We went our own way for the night. I joined other Narromine folk plus Sydney folk for a dinner with the Harpers, quite a fun night.



We all attended the Sunday service at St Stephens in Macquarie Street. A beautiful church, with amazing timber panelling, many stained glass windows, great acoustics, very high ceilings and a magnificent organ. We had a communion service that went for about 90 minutes. The organ and a male/female choir added to the service. Rev Ken Day conducted the service and Ken asked Narromine people to participate in the service and provide hymns. I did the gospel reading and nominated two hymns that were included in the service. A video of the service was made and copies will be sent to Narromine.

After the service we gathered in a hall under the church for fellowship and a magnificent lunch. The Sydney people were generous with their time and

friendship as we were made very welcome. No doubt several people went to a lot of trouble to ensure our visit was something to remember.

After the Sunday lunch we went our own way. Some visited the VIVID display, others rested after a busy, but exciting weekend.

We travelled home on the Monday.

I would recommend locals consider the trip to Sydney in 2021.

Next year, Sydney people will visit Narromine and we have some ideas to entertain them.

**Geoff Smith,
Congregational Chair,
Narromine**

The King's Speech bible study,



The Ladies Bible study group completed a study based on the movie *The King's Speech* and shared their enthusiasm for our study with the congregation one Sunday. You may remember that Albert (known as Bertie, and father of Queen Elizabeth II) came to the throne when his brother David abdicated because he was in love with an American divorcee. Bertie had never wanted to be king mostly because of his speech impediment – he stammered.

The study was called *Finding Your Voice*. These days many of us seem to have lost our voice! The voices raised against faith in God are loud and strong, confident and self-assured, and are generally dismissive!

Do you have faith in your voice? In your speech? In your ability to use your voice for a purpose? We were all quite challenged by this study to think about how and when we can find our voice to use as God would wish us to. This was the challenge for Bertie when he became King: Bertie was terrified of public speaking, of using his voice to express an opinion, indeed in any circumstance where he did not feel safe.

The King's Speech is a multi-layered film that delves into many questions and concerns, into the characters of Bertie, later King George VI, and Lionel Logue, Bertie's speech coach, into their relationship/friendship and into the King acquiring his 'voice'. It is about the power of encouragement and support; the power of perseverance, courage, love and friendship!

Narromine

SESSIONS 1 & 2

In sessions 1 and 2 of our study, we discussed how our fears can affect our ability to carry out the tasks set before us. We are reminded to fear not for we are God's own people; to proclaim the mighty acts of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His glorious light.

The movie gives the example of how the fears of Bertie, Duke of York, affect his ability to articulate the words he wants to say. Lionel Logue patiently waited until the Duke was able to face his own fears and the reasons behind them. Lionel kept the Duke's confidences and was a true friend and encourager. The author of the study Hilary Brand states *"In the Kings Speech it is only when Bertie, warmed by friendship, could acknowledge his own humanness, that he was then able to fulfil his calling as a king."*

We discussed how our own fears affect us; and that God chose many fearful people to act as His spokesmen saying to them FEAR NOT, for He (God Almighty) is with them and is able to help them overcome their fears and provide them with the support to carry out the tasks He requires of them. We discussed upholding one another with encouragement and friendship to build the faith of each one in Gods ability to help us in our individual and our community walk with Him.



SESSION 3

His speech tutor, Lionel Logue, knew that if Bertie really wanted to master his stammer, it would be a long haul and would involve intensive training. There were no short cuts. In the 3rd study we watched 2 clips from the film that showed us what the training sessions might have been like. There were some unusual teaching methods and some strange exercises, but most of all it seemed that Logue was trying to win Bertie's trust.

Anything worthwhile takes commitment and perseverance. If God has given us a task, then he has given it for us to work at. There are no short cuts. It takes commitment and perseverance. And with God's help, we will get there.

This lesson was a thought-provoking one for many of us ... we were asked to think of an image that might describe where we are at this moment in our lives – suggestions given were a long mountain climb, a gentle stroll, a ride of some sort, a jungle or a maze. Not one of us chose the "gentle stroll"! but for most of us the image we chose seemed to indicate feelings of busyness, frustration or anxiety.

This showed us that we might be trying to do things on our own, that we might not be talking to God about the things that concern us. God knows everything about us. He knows that we are striving to reach that goal to be his people, here in this place. There are no short cuts, but He longs for us to share our journey with him, to walk with us and to share the load.

SESSION 4

Study Four spoke about the power of Discouragement and Encouragement in our lives.

In the film Bertie's stammering was put down to his painful childhood because he had been put down by his family and his peers for his stammer. This led to him being discouraged with his life and all that was expected of him.

DISCOURAGEMENT – *is one of the strongest causes of sin as it provokes frustration, anger, confusion and pain that eventually erupts onto others.* (Hilary Brand). For example comments such as 'you're worthless'; "what an idiot thing to do".

It is said "one criticism outweighs ten compliments".

Every day we should be quicker to LISTEN and slower to SPEAK.

Therefore, it is much better to focus on ENCOURAGEMENT – as Lionel Logue did with Bertie helping him to get rid of his anger and frustration – letting it out – by swearing or singing what he wanted to say to catchy songs. He found he didn't stammer!!!

How can we ENCOURAGE OTHERS?

- ◆ be good listeners, give your whole attention, be slow to speak
- ◆ be empathetic, ask questions and pay attention to the answers, give a hug if needed.
- ◆ give sincere spontaneous compliments
- ◆ say thanks

People blossom when they are encouraged. But be aware sometimes people we wish to encourage are not in the place to receive it.

The old adage is a good standby "IF YOU CAN'T SAY SOMETHING NICE – DON'T SAY ANYTHING AT ALL"



SESSION 5 “I have a right to be heard ... I have a voice”

In this last session we watched the “Coronation” of King George VI and his “War Speech” – both were moments of triumph for him after his striving, facing his fears and his perseverance. We saw that Lionel Logue had a quite unique way of helping Bertie to cope with his speech difficulties. Playing on Bertie’s famous temper, we saw Bertie become clear and eloquent when goaded by Logue. He realises that he does have a voice and he has something to say! And, importantly, he had found a friend who was there with and for him during his long struggle. There is a lesson here for us to be an encourager and to acknowledge our own need for encouragement. And to trust in God to be with us in all circumstances.

Bertie’s first wartime speech to the nation has a double message – one for his people, but also one for (and about) himself. He says it is unthinkable not to meet the challenge that is being thrown at them by Hitler, and that the task ahead of the country will be a hard one. The people were fearful and confused and needed a reassuring voice to lead them on. They heard a man, who had risen to the challenge of becoming King, of speaking to his people despite his impediment. This gave them all hope. But the speech is also about Bertie – the challenges he faces and his perseverance to be able to do his best.

So how does this apply to us? The writer of this study thinks that Christians are losing their voice, are not prepared to stand up and be counted. Rather they want to continue with their comfortable, quiet lives. We need to speak the words of God to our generation. We can see that God called Bertie as he was, not as he wasn’t. It is the same for us. And there are so many things about which we need to speak. Our job is to rise to the challenge, do what we can and speak what we believe, authentically, with humanity.

Kay Anderson, Chris Samuels, Carol King, Pam Rendell, Lauris Harper

The back page

Sunday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Friday
10:00am Worship	1:00pm Reflection, prayer, scripture, music, communion 2nd Tuesday	2 nd Wednesday of the month 5:30 – 7:00pm Jazz, supper, soul 4 th Wednesday of the month 6:00pm – 7:00pm Worship, prayer (mission, healing, the city), music, communion	1:10pm – 1:50pm Friday Music

UPCOMING EVENTS

WHAT	Frontier Services Great Outback BBQ	Christmas in July Trivia Night with a professional trivia caller. Form a team or join one on the night	Luncheon
WHEN	Sunday 14 July 2019	Friday 26 July 2019	Wednesday 31 July 2019
WHERE	At the Church	At the Church	Double Bay Sailing Club
FOOD	BBQ	Nibbles, light supper provided. BYO drinks	Lunch at the Club
COST	Tickets \$5.00 Donation \$20.00 tax deductible	Workers—\$15 Concession—\$10	Your expense
CONTACT	(02) 9221 1688	Judith 0413 786	Judith 0413 786

Frontier Services
serving remote Australia