

St Stephen's Uniting Church in the city

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

VISION



Summer Edition 2017

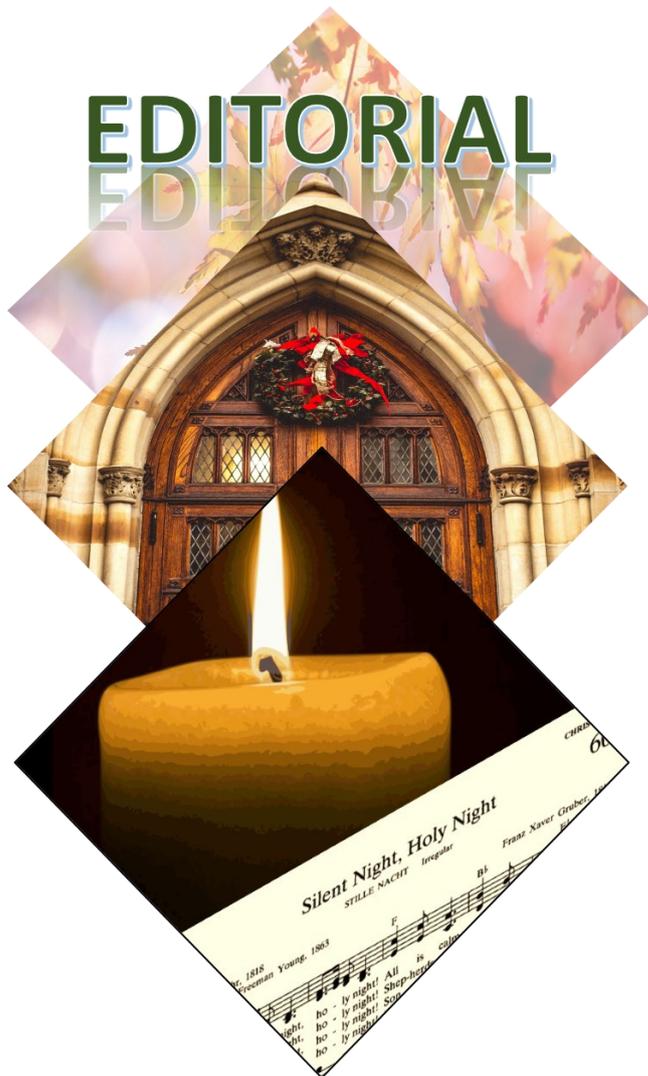


Virgin and Child (1530-1535) - Lucas Cranach der Aeltere (photo by L. Harper)

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It seems that every year, the shopping malls begin to display Christmas trees, lights, garlands and tinsel even earlier than they did the previous year. Christmas cards are put out for sale as early as late October, as are the special foods which are typical of the Festive Season. It seems regrettable, however, that there are few representations of the nativity scene to be found outside the churches. It is difficult to reflect on the true meaning and significance of Christmas, when there are so few reminders of the amazing coming of the Christ child into our world.

In this issue, we have invited members to offer their reflections on Christmas, to give perhaps a different perspective on this important time of the year or to describe an unusual or memorable experience of Christmas which they have had in the past. We are sure that readers will find much to interest them in what various members of our congregation have written on this theme.

Our Director of Music, Mark Quarmby, offers us some interesting insights into the difficulties experienced by organists and church musicians in general at Christmas time, depending on weather conditions. On a more serious note, Mark reminds us of the history of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, as well as the origins of the Christmas carol. As we go to press, Mark, Huw and the choir are busy preparing for the services to be held

on the 17th December, on Christmas Eve and also on Christmas Day – and we look forward to enjoying the beautiful music which we know in advance will uplift us and enhance each service.

In this issue, we are pleased to have our Mission Worker, Kathryn Lynch, write two very interesting articles for us. One is an account of two series of Bible studies held at St Stephen's in July and October of this year; this article should inspire members of our church to seek to attend at least one series of Bible studies which we hope will be offered in 2018. In her second article, Kathryn provides some interesting insights into her work at the Conservatorium of Music as a Uniting Church Mission Worker.

The two profiles we offer in this Christmas issue are of Alan Harper and Lauris Harper. This dynamic husband and wife "team" carry out a significant number of roles within the life of our church, including lay preacher and Chair of the Congregation in Alan's case, and Chair of the Property Group and Co-editor of *Vision* as far as Lauris is concerned.

It is with regret that we remember two members of our congregation who have passed away in recent months – Cliff Huckel and William Boddy. In this issue, we pay a tribute to each of them, and offer our condolences to their families and friends.

As we prepare to publish this current issue of *Vision*, we still feel uplifted by the wonderful "Greening of the Church" service which was held on Sunday the 3rd December. We also look forward to the other special Christmas services, and feel sure that they will be memorable because of the organisational skills and creative preaching style of the Rev Ken Day, as well as the beautiful music we know we will hear from our organist and the choir. Finally, we wish all members and friends of St Stephen's a truly blessed Christmas, and joy and peace in the New Year.

This is the second year we have “greened the church” with pine garlands, wreaths and a Christmas tree in the worship centre. The tree is re-establishing a St Stephen’s Christmas practice that some of you will remember. Each week, as we proceed through Advent, another candle is lit and the manger is introduced. The contribution of the organ, brass instruments and the choir to the December 17 Carols and Lessons, and the glorious music-filled, candle-lit Christmas Eve 11pm service - followed by the celebration on Christmas Day at 10am - all help us as we show our Christian priorities towards worship at this busy time. Will you be coming into the city over Christmas? Why not come to worship God with us? You will also get to see the pine-decorated church.

MESSAGE FROM OUR MINISTER



The Shepherd’s Field—photo by Ken Day

When I was in Palestine a few years ago with other ministers from the Uniting Church, I did see Aleppo pines around the Shepherd’s Field just out of Bethlehem, all with cones, in my mind waiting to be sprayed with Santa Snow and have holly attached. Casting my imagination back 2000 years as I walked down the track to look over where “shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night” witnessed the appearance of the angels, perhaps you, like me, would recall from Luke’s gospel, “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.’” In their expectation of seeing the Messiah, the shepherds said “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” The angels knew these young outsiders would be afraid. Fear of the sight of heavenly messengers, a multitude of them, in fact. Fear resulting from such an expressive revelation about a religious, political and humanitarian act of God. Fear that will immediately arise as to whether to leave the sheep and run to Bethlehem or stay at their post. Or the fear of doing nothing, and imprisoning within their soul what turns out to be news that

amazes all to whom the shepherds speak, including Mary and Joseph.

The Shepherd's Field in Bethlehem today longs for this announcement. "Do not be afraid; I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." Since I visited there (see my photo of the Shepherd's Field) it is reported a new Israeli highway has been built. Even though it runs through Palestinian territory, Palestinians cannot use it without a permit. On top of this, Israel has constructed settlements all round the school in what looks like an attempt to isolate the school from the local village. The only way to the school was via a drain tunnel and through the jeers of settlers. Like the shepherds, anxiety was overpowering the children who feared going to school. A bus has been arranged to take the children but as the bus is forbidden to travel on the highway, it has to take a 20 minute route along backroads to get to the school.



Location of the new Israeli highway—photo by Ken Day

The message of "Do not be afraid" is coming to the people of the Gaza strip. The congregation at St Stephen's Uniting, working with the National Council of Churches in Australia, is contributing to the Christmas Bowl (Act for Peace), supporting, via local churches in Gaza, three primary health care clinics. These healthcare clinics provide vital services to vulnerable and economically disadvantaged people, mothers and babies, including nutritional support and the provision of free prescribed medicine and dental care. Also the Christmas Bowl provides psycho-social support for new mothers and people who have suffered trauma. This help prevents serious mental health problems from developing in the future.

Thank you for using your Christmas Bowl envelope. Place it in the offering over the December/New Year period, or google "Act for Peace Christmas Bowl" and go to the "Give now" link. When you help, vocational training courses for youth including metal work, carpentry, secretarial and English language studies, and dressmaking are providing young people in Gaza with the practical skills and experience to gain employment and support themselves and their families. The words "Do not be afraid" move from the Bible page and lyrics of a carol into the life of a human being.

Bible Studies at St Stephen's

Christianity was never meant to be a spectator sport.

Belonging to a Bible study group is a vital part of a life of faith.

In the second half of this year, St Stephen's was the meeting place for two Bible Study series. The first was in July, when a small group of intrepid Bible-fans braved the cold of winter to meet over hot soup and warm bread to discuss life, faith and the Gospel of John.

Then, in October, on Tuesday nights another small group met to read and discuss contemporary writings on the meaning of the Reformation for Christians living five hundred years later. On Wednesday mornings, more people met and shared coffee and reflected on the Reformation.

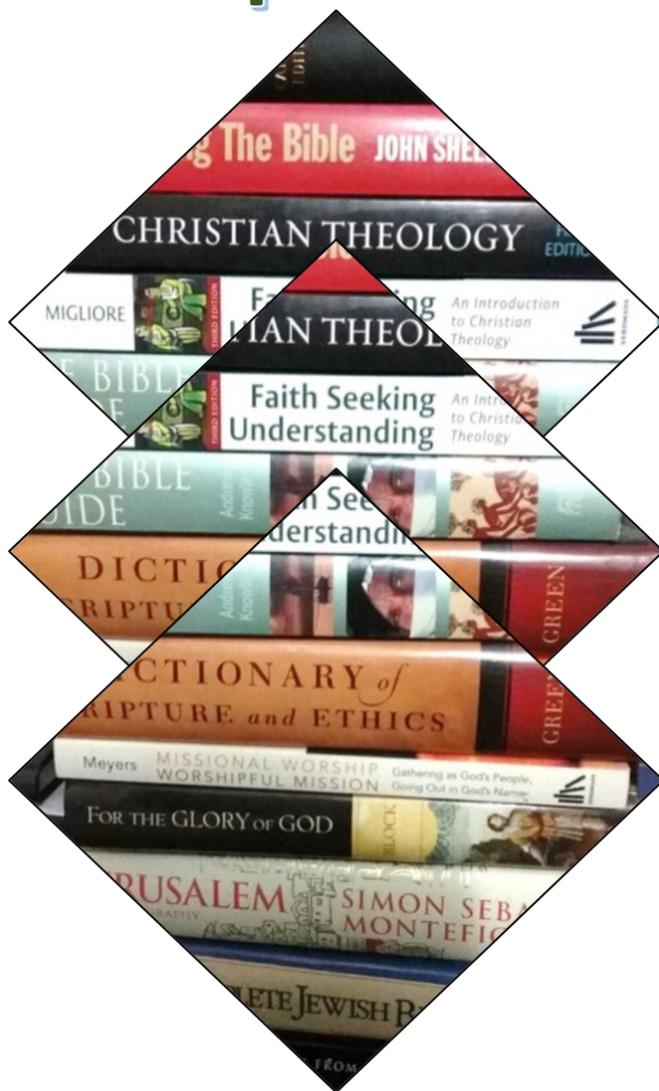
Christianity was always meant to be relational. Firstly, a relationship between ourselves and God; and secondly, between ourselves and those around us. As people of faith, we need a like-minded community around us, to help us learn and grow; to help us weather the storms of life; and to share the joys and wonder of life. Small groups, like Bible Studies, are a place where all of this happens.

Relationships don't just happen; they require an investment of time, and a level of vulnerability and trust. Meeting each week with the same group of people in a safe and warm place, over coffee or a meal, is the perfect setting for supportive friendships to grow. A group Bible Study can be a place to celebrate life's victories, get prayer support, be encouraged in tough times, and keep ourselves accountable in personal growth. Group Bible Studies offer us a structured time to focus on topics that address our needs or interest. They offer a lively place to help us live as Christians from Sunday to Sunday and a safe place to work out the challenges we face in our daily lives.

Bible studies move us from being spectators in a weekly church service to active participants in the spiritual community. As we encounter God's word together, and we share our different perspectives and insights, the Bible becomes more meaningful. The challenges of a life of faith become more possible. Discovering how to understand the Bible stories and being accountable to each other moves God's word from the intellect to the heart. Transformation happens and our lives are changed. And when our lives are changed, the lives of those around us are changed as well.

Do you want to be part of a life-changing Bible Study in 2018? Do you want to experience the meaningful relationships that come from being part of a small group? Ask Rev. Ken when the next Bible Study series will be starting. Or ask our Mission Worker, Kathryn how to start one. It's not as difficult as it sounds.

Will you be part of a Bible Study in 2018? It might just change your life.



Kathryn Lynch

(Mission Worker at St Stephen's Uniting Church)

A HERODIAN CHRISTMAS



In his 2015 biography of Herod the Great, Adam Kolman Marshak recognises this often-demonised king for the complex but highly successful Hellenistic monarch he was. It was Herod who brought Judaea “to its greatest economic and political prosperity”¹. His success – as a usurper to the throne, and as an Idumean, regarded by Jewish purists as a mere “half-Jew” – was due to his political acumen and ruthlessness. The Emperor Augustus, upon hearing of Herod’s execution of one of his own sons, is said to have remarked that it would be better to be Herod’s pig than his son!²

Herod was a political realist. He knew when he faced a threat. He knew what to do about it. And he pulled no punches, even – or especially – where family was concerned.

So the story in Matthew’s gospel (2:3-8, 16-18), known as the “murder of the innocents”, hardly lacks credibility. Hearing from the visiting Magi that a new “king of the Jews” had been born in Bethlehem, Herod gave orders that all boys in the vicinity of that town, who were two years old or under, be murdered.

Herod knew a threat when he saw it! While almost

certainly what Herod feared in the birth of this new king was a political challenge to his authority, he had it right in realising that the birth of Jesus Christ posed a threat to the existing order of things – to those in power, to the wealthy and privileged, to the élites and oligarchies. Even if Herod did misconceive the nature of the challenge, his instincts were right. He and those like him had much to fear.

Each year, I wonder what has happened that, far from apprehension at the coming of Christmas, our own potentates and élites greet the season with enthusiasm. Investors speak of the “Santa Claus rally” which often benefits the stock market; retailers depend on Christmas sales to fatten their annual profits; the hospitality industry awaits the tourist trade generated by the holidays that surround Christmas; and the temples to consumption do a roaring trade before and after Christmas as the mayhem of January sales descends. The rich get richer. Even some of the world’s vilest politicians put on a happy face and start talking about the “true spirit of Christmas”. Not even a whiff of danger here for the modern-day successors of Herod and his cronies.

Why? Because Christmas has been tamed, robbed of its power. Popular television shows are all too quick to tell us in schmalzy terms what the “real meaning of Christmas” is – and it’s always about being nice, being generous and being peaceful. It’s about family, children and Santa Claus. It’s about lots to eat and often a little too much to drink. It’s about time off and time away. It almost *never* has anything to do with the extraordinary person after whom the festival is named. Indeed we are following rather too closely the lead of the United States where even the word “Christmas” is avoided for fear of inciting religious angst: try buying a Christian-themed Christmas card anywhere but at your church. “Happy holiday!” or “Season’s Greetings” is so much safer. Who is offended by Santa and his reindeer?

But if the powerful, the wealthy and the élites love Christmas, it represents a challenge for those who

were closest to Jesus’ heart. Poor parents despair as they watch the retail extravaganza around them and struggle to give their children even a taste of the Christmas enjoyed by the well-off. The joy of the season for many homeless people is the meal provided by those outstanding charities such as Newtown Mission, the Exodus Foundation and Wayside Chapel – truly a wonderful witness, but at the same time a reminder of the disparities which beset our society. And the homeless still remain homeless. Even those with reasonable means can spend a good many months paying off the credit card bills left from the seasonal indulgence of trying to buy the happy time portrayed in all the advertisements.

Isn’t it supposed be the disadvantaged, the poor and the disenfranchised for whom Christmas is good news? Why are those closest to Jesus’ heart the very ones for whom Christmas is not good news?

Aren’t the wealthy and the powerful the ones to whom Christmas is supposed to pose an existential threat? Herod certainly thought so. Back when Christmas was about Christ.

We often hear the admonition to “put the *Christ* back in Christmas.” As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, that has to be a call to arms for us. But we had better be ready for what it means. A Christ-centred Christmas would be a Christmas of power and danger. It would be a Christmas that turned the world on its head. It would be a Christmas that remade our society. It would be a Christmas in which many of the first would be last and many of the last would be first.

It would be the kind of Christmas that Herod feared and tried to prevent.

It would be a Christmas not welcomed by many of the “haves” in our own society.

Are we ready to put the Christ back in Christmas?

Alan Harper OAM

1. Adam Kolman Marshak, *The Many Faces of Herod the Great* (Cambridge, 2015), p. xxiii.

2. Macrobius *Saturnalia* ii.4.11.

A Provençal Crèche

During a holiday I spent in France over the Christmas/New Year period some twenty-one years ago, I was fortunate enough to be taken by French friends to view a Provençal *crèche*, quite a large and famous one, in a local church. It was a meaningful experience and one which I have never forgotten. I have consequently done a little bit of research recently into these *crèches* which are especially typical of Provence, and would like to share the following information with you.

A Provençal *crèche* is a depiction of the nativity scene, using clay figurines and set in a 19th century village in Provence. It is similar to other *crèches* which may be found in homes across France, except it goes much farther by encompassing an entire village scene. Often people begin collecting the miniature *santons* (meaning “little saints”) soon after they marry and move into their first home. The *crèche* then grows over the years, often including quite a large collection of *santons*, with new pieces being added every once in a while. A *crèche* is never meant to be completed, but to grow and evolve with the passing of the generations.

The *santons* were first created in Marseilles at the time of the French Revolution when the aggressive atheism of those days closed the churches and with them their traditional nativity scenes. Instead, individuals used these little figurines to create a Christmas *crèche* in the home, and this practice has continued since that era. However,



Provençal nativity scenes became very popular in particular in the early 19th century, and were inspired by the local community.

Santons represent not only the traditional characters of Joseph, Mary, the baby Jesus, the shepherds and the Magi – but also characters who depict the various trades of the era, such as the miller, the washerwoman and the scissors grinder. Figurines representing different animals are used to complete the nativity scene, which becomes symbolic of a village in rural Provence. Finally, the *crèche* is decorated with moss, straw, tiny logs and pine cones – sometimes even with lavender.

Occasionally in the largest *crèches*, the actual stable is tucked away in a corner, where it is apparently overlooked by the inhabitants of the village. They are entirely preoccupied with the many tasks and general business of rural life, and seem unaware of the amazing event taking place in their midst: the birth of the Christ child. It is tempting to compare this with the Christmas of our era, where social events, present buying and the preparation of special meals similarly appear to mask what the season is all about.

Janice Dawson

Observing Christmas and Epiphany

In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens told of a time when the celebration of Christmas did not begin until Christmas Eve. But even in my childhood in the 40s, Sunday School Christmas services, Lodge parties, and Carol Services were held in the weeks before Christmas Day, and we all know how commercial activities now begin long before that.

I keep as clear of those as possible and try to keep Advent as well as I can, but I think it is good if one can encourage displays of the Crib and the telling of the two Christmas stories – though many might well move from a child's understanding of the latter to that of an adult. Some shops no longer even put up decorations (though benefitting from the Christmas trade) and I cross them off my list! If this is because of reluctance to offend non-Christians, it is unnecessary.



The Jewish scholar, Geza Vermes, in one of his many books about Jesus wrote that “the magnetic appeal of the teaching and example of Jesus holds out hope and guidance to those outside the fold of organized religion, the stray sheep of mankind, who yearn for a world of mercy, justice and peace lived in as children of God”.

To Muslims, Jesus according to the Qu’ran, born of Mary, is a

Prophet, “the Word of God” and Messiah. Some moderate Muslim scholars, where it is safe to express their views, have long held him in high regard. Mustafa Akyol tells of these in his book “The Islamic Jesus” and in writing of Jesus, he concludes that “given our grim malaise and his shining wisdom, we need to follow him”. That to me is what Christmas is all about.

Finally, for many, Christmas is forgotten on December 26th but I find there can be great blessings in keeping the Twelve Days of Christmas, including our own patronal St Stephen’s Day, concluding with the lovely festival of the Epiphany, older than Christmas. Some churches have Epiphany carols, and social gatherings *during January* are very welcome by those, not travelling and not with family, for whom that month is the loneliest of the year.

Rev John Bunyan

A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS

Towards the end of 1978, a consortium in Canada bought from Qantas Boeing 707 aircraft with a view to starting up a new airline in Canada. My husband Ross, a Qantas Engineer, was charged with delivering that aircraft, with a Canadian crew, to the new owners in Toronto, Canada; Ross was to set up their maintenance system.

Actually, it was quite a funny situation because we were the only passengers in this huge aircraft. We had a Canadian crew of three (Pilot, Co-Pilot and Flight Engineer) but there was no Hostess. It is no doubt possible for you to guess what happened next – Mrs Warden became the “Hostie”!

Having hit the Canadian mainland, we spent two days in Vancouver as the aircraft required maintenance. Returning to the ‘plane one day, Ross enquired of a Canadian hostess who had materialized whether she had seen his “golliwog” (black curly hair for me in those days!), at which point the Canadian hostess looked absolutely aghast and tried to gently inform Ross that he should not use such language, as it was definitely no longer acceptable.

On 24th November, with our arrival in Toronto imminent, I glanced out my window on a well-lit, completely white scene, flat as far as the eye could see. We were obviously over the airport at Toronto and thought the white scene augured well for a White Christmas in another month. We soon landed, disembarked and were transferred to the hotel

directly opposite the airport where we were to stay for the best part of three months. At that time I was pregnant and not feeling great, so spent much of my time in our room as the few footpaths which existed around the hotel were so covered in snow that they seemed to be non-existent. As a consequence of spending so much time in our room I met all the staff as they came to attend to our room and was immediately “a hit” because they were all from the West Indies where cricket was a very popular sport, and they knew that Australia also was consumed with cricket and played against the West Indies from time to time. Anyhow we became firm friends.

From our bedroom window we had a full view of planes being de-iced each day and again we seemed assured of a White Christmas. However, our Christmas was not intended to be in Ontario, Canada, but in Waterford, Connecticut on the east coast of the United States, my brother John, a Presbyterian Minister, living there with his family and our planning on spending Christmas with them, making our way by means of the car which we had hired.

The trip occupied the whole of one day, that day being Christmas Eve, 24th December, 1978. The maximum speed allowed on the highways was 60mph and we were amazed at the restraint of the drivers, not one of whom ever attempted to overtake the car in front. Darkness fell and the traffic seemed to have thinned somewhat so that there were very few cars on the highway. At one stage after darkness had fall-

en, we were moving along merrily with not another vehicle in view when suddenly there appeared before us in large coloured letters seemingly up in the sky but really on a turnpike (as we were subsequently informed) - **"YOU ARE SPEEDING"** – not good for the nerves to say the least. In any event we arrived safely without being arrested. Much to our disappointment, we had seen no snow since leaving Toronto.

Needless to say we arrived safely at my brother's home. After a quick snack we left for the Midnight Service which John was to take, he having moved into the area only the week before. On arriving at the Church there was obviously no snow in sight and we became resigned to the fact that we would not have a White Christmas. Anyhow that did not matter as we were there to celebrate the birth of our Lord. There was a good congregation and the Service ran smoothly. Imagine our surprise when an hour later on leaving the church, it was obvious that snow had fallen and the snow ploughs had been busy whilst we were inside and the roads had been more or less cleared, enabling us to proceed home. We came to the conclusion that our Lord must have been looking after us all the time for which we were most grateful.

The next day the snow was still on the ground – a safe trip and a White Christmas with family. We could not have hoped for more.

Margaret Warden

REFLECTIONS INSPIRED BY A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Somewhat intrigued by the title and interested in another retelling of the time-honoured classic *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, I was motivated to see the recent movie *The Man who invented Christmas*. Was Christmas an invention of the Dickensian era and what is its message in a modern world?

Surprisingly, there was much to relate to personally in the movie. Like Dickens, I was locked in a writer's block at the daunting thought of another year of writing numerous Christmas messages and cards and like Scrooge, I had been subject to "Bah Humbug!" moments, encountering the commercial Retail Juggernaut that Christmas had now become in the 21st century. It was hard to reconcile the lowly birth of the Christ Child with what was on display in all the shop windows and malls.

However, by the end of the movie - motivated by the visit of the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future and by Scrooge's capacity to change, as reflected in his offer of goodwill to his neighbours and thus addressing some of the social injustices of his time - I had discovered a message of hope and inspiration, even for our modern times. Perhaps, in small ways, among the rituals of Christmas, we too can reflect and extend the hand of friendship and goodwill to our neighbours, whoever they may be, thereby keeping the true spirit of the Christmas message alive to re-echo the much loved words of Tiny Tim, "God Bless Us Everyone!"

Romany White



GREENING THE CHURCH





**FELLOWSHIP
LUNCHEON**
old friends and new



Faith, Justice and Community

Keeping faith, doing justice and building community. That is the motto of Christian Students Uniting: the Uniting Church on university campuses across Sydney.

Every week during semester at the University of Sydney, UTS, the University of NSW and Macquarie University – and now the Sydney Conservatorium of Music – students meet to read the Bible, pray together, eat together, laugh and have fun. And all under the banner of the Uniting Church.

Uniting Church Chaplains and Mission Workers like Rev Ken Day and Kathryn Lynch from St Stephen's host weekly Bible studies and discussion groups, and spend many hours talking to students about living a life of faith. We organise guest speakers and special events, and plan social gatherings.

Tertiary ministry is a vital ministry of the church. At the age of around 18, as young people leave secondary school and leave home, they start to interact with the world in a different way. They start making important life choices – finding a vocation, commencing a career, new relationships, meeting their life-partner. They are having to manage the everyday challenges of life: moving out of home, being part of a new household; managing time and money; dealing with stress and anxiety about the future. And they are also making decisions about their faith: Do I believe in God? Will I go to church? How will I live out what I believe?

As part of Tertiary Ministry, we talk a lot about God. We talk about how to keep faith, do justice and build community.

We encourage all our students in their personal faith, and encourage them to be disciples of Jesus. This means having a relationship with God that grows through private prayer, personal Bible reading and study, and making life-decisions that are consistent with God's will for their lives. It means getting involved in social justice. It means being connected to a faith community, through regularly attending church on Sundays, and belonging to a weekly Bible Study group.

As chaplains and mission workers, we talk it and we walk it; we are here to model the Christian life, with all its challenges. You can ask us anytime about the ways we ensure we are growing in our faith, worshipping God, being part of community, and making life-choices. We are always happy to talk about this, and we encourage students to find the words to describe their faith to others.

Tertiary Student Ministry relies on your generosity to employ Mission Workers and be a vital presence on campus. Will you support Tertiary Student Ministry in 2018? You can change the future of the church.

Kathryn Lynch

*(Mission Worker at St Stephen's
Uniting Church)*



From the Organ Bench

This issue of *Vision* is about Christmas and people's Christmas experiences. As an organist, it is a very busy time of the year with a number of carol services being held (many at schools well before Advent has even started to fit in with the Australian academic year!). Schools of all denominations have celebrated Christmas by putting on a "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols". The service was first begun in 1880 and designed by Archbishop Benson for Truro Cathedral. The service was revised by the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, the Very Reverend Milner-White for use in the chapel and this form is what has been used around the world ever since. It was first used in 1918, for the first Christmas after the end of World War 1 and will have been celebrated for 100 years next year. Originating in the Anglican Church, it is probably the only "Protestant" service which is regularly held in Roman Catholic churches and schools. It has become very popular in all denominations and crosses all denominational barriers as the story of what is common to all Christian faiths is revealed through nine Bible readings and carols.

We usually associate "carols" with Christmas but this was not always so. The word "carol" comes from the French "*carole*" which was a circle dance accompanied by singers. From these beginnings, "carols" became known in the 12th century as festive songs in a dance style and were not necessarily religious. Later on they became associated with festivals in the church and so carols were written for Easter, Advent and Christmas. Others were written to be sung during religious "Mystery Plays" in the 16th

century. Originally they were written in Latin but from the time of the Reformation, composers were encouraged to write carols in the local vernacular so that congregations could join in singing them. Many of the tunes were folk-like (as were the original Lutheran Chorales) and were harmonised by great composers to form the well known Christmas carols we sing today. While many of our traditional Christmas carols may have lost their dance-like character, there are many carols which we sing today which are still dance-like. A couple of examples from this year's carol repertoire, which were rewritten for choir and organ by established composers, are "The Holly and the Ivy" and "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day".

Dealing with the weather is also a large concern for church musicians. Here, in Australia, we need to ask if we need to take along an extra fan or two (or hope for an air-conditioned chapel!) while in Europe, it is a matter of filling up lots of hot water bottles to thaw one's fingers out between carols. My Christmas playing has ranged from -28°C in an Austrian Alps village church to well over 40°C in Sydney.

St Stephen's will have four Christmas services this year with Christmas Eve falling on a Sunday. Our "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" with choir, brass, harp and organ will be held on the 17th of December at 10am. Sunday morning the 24th December will be like a normal Sunday, but then we will all return for our "Lessons and Carols" (a shortened service based on the "Nine Lessons and Carols") with choir, brass, harp and organ at 11pm. Christmas Day will feature the choir and organ at 10am.

After all the Christmas services are over, the choir takes its well-earned annual break and will return for the first Sunday in February.

Mark Quarmby (Director of Music)



PROFILES

Alan Harper was born in Melbourne, but his family relocated to Sydney when he was about 3 years old because his father, Frank, had taken a position at the new Naval Experimental Laboratories at Rushcutters Bay. He grew up in Guildford and attended primary school in that area, then Granville Boys' High School. Alan regards his childhood and adolescence as pretty ordinary, though living right near the railway line at Guildford gave him his abiding interest in railways. His family attended the Guildford McCreadie Memorial Presbyterian Church, and Alan attended Sunday School and Fellowship there. Like many teens, he eventually fell away from the Church, and spent about twelve years with no church affiliation. It was Lauris' desire that their first child, David, be baptised that led Alan eventually to Lakeside Road Uniting Church in Eastwood, where he and Lauris spent some thirty years before moving to St Stephen's about four years ago.

At Lakeside Road (and subsequently Eastwood Uniting Church when two congregations amalgamated), Alan served for some time as an Elder, and was for many years Chair of the Church Council. Encouraged by one of the ministers, Alan commenced lay preaching, and for some years he assisted when ministers were away both at Eastwood and at one or two neighbouring congregations. In retirement he eventually found the time to undertake formal training for lay preaching and achieved accreditation. Since Easter 2015, he has led St Stephen's Tuesday service; he is devoted to this service, and to the people who attend. Alan was elected Chair of the Congregation in 2015, has been one of St Stephen's representatives on Sydney Presbytery for four years and represents the NSW/ACT Synod on the NSW Ecumenical Council.

Alan Harper:

Lay Preacher, Chair of the Congregation and Elder

Lauris Harper:

Chair of the Property Group, Member of Church Council and Co-Editor of *Vision*

A teacher by profession, Alan contributed significantly to the Australian College of Educators and the Teachers' Guild of New South Wales. He was also involved for many years with the Uniting Church's committee liaising with the Uniting Church schools in NSW, while he has served on the board of governance of an Anglican school for seventeen years. His contribution to education in these and various other capacities led to his award of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2013.

Alan loves being at St Stephen's, where he has made many new friends; he also believes that he has learned much from Ockert Meyer, David Gill and now Ken Day. He has really appreciated the new direction our Church is taking under Ken's leadership, and is excited about the possibilities. Alan also cautions that the Kingdom of God ought not to be measured by statistics: a full church is not necessarily a sign of success, nor an empty one a sign of failure. If just one person is brought to know Jesus as saviour, Alan believes that this is a huge gift. And he has no doubt that this happens very regularly at St Stephen's.

Lauris Harper, née Seymour, had a fairly typically parochial childhood of the 1950s and 60s. Born at the San, Wahroonga, she grew up in Pennant Hills, attended the local primary and high schools, and then went to Macquarie University. Lauris' childhood and adolescence were therefore dominated by a ten mile, strongly Anglo radius. Her particular childhood memories include nursing a wallaby in the backyard of her family home and the orchid glasshouses which filled her parents' backyard. Adolescence is probably a period most people want to forget, but Lauris has fond memories of school musicals and bands, of Inter-School Christian Fellowship camps almost always in



the Blue Mountains, and of twice weekly classes at the Conservatorium. Lauris attended Beecroft Methodist church with her family and later St Luke's Church of England, (as it was then) Thornleigh for her mid and later teen years. In later married life she attended Lakeside Road Uniting Church, serving as an Elder for many years, and desktop publishing the church magazine, *Contact*. At St Stephen's Lauris is Chair of the Property Group, desktop publishes *Vision*, is on Church Council and is involved with other groups associated with the re-development of 60 Martin Place.

Lauris considers herself truly blessed with family, friends, church and the opportunities and challenges that God has placed before her in her life. One of those opportunities and challenges is St Stephen's itself, uniquely placed in the city to reach out to a wide range of people in the Macquarie Street precinct; the challenge is to find a way to achieve this. Lauris firmly believes that it is not for nought that we say "With God's help, we will."

A Shared History

It was at Macquarie University that Alan and Lauris met in their third year, marrying at the end of their fourth. Both studied History – Alan, Ancient and Lauris, Modern – with English, and a Diploma of Education. Alan completed an Honours year, and in later years both completed Masters Degrees. Both taught in the Government school system for almost ten years and then their teaching paths diverged. Alan moved to the Catholic system for six years

followed by independent schools, his final sixteen years being spent at Trinity Grammar School at Summer Hill. During the latter part of his teaching career, Alan was the Director of Studies; he really loved his work in that area, as well as teaching his first academic love, Ancient History.

Lauris' career followed a less predictable path. She and Alan had three children, and around the evolving commitments family entailed, she added new subjects to her teaching repertoire, and developed a deep interest, and skills, in pastoral care. She taught in a variety of settings, including the TAFE system, independent schools (three years in the stimulating environment of a performing arts school and five as Head of Middle School) and a national museum. Her final three years were as Education Manager for a specialist medical college, a role she thoroughly enjoyed until retirement in 2015.

Since retirement, Alan and Lauris have been able to devote more time to the Church, as well as enjoying their own pursuits and time together. The work they most enjoy is country ministry, relieving lay-led congregations and/or those where a Minister finds it very difficult ever to get away. This has led them to richly rewarding work in Crookwell, Narromine and Jindabyne. Both are also Logistics Officers for the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network. They enjoy overseas travel, theatre, museums and art galleries. Lauris takes ballet classes and loves anything to do with architecture, a career she wanted, but "girls don't do that sort of work!", while Alan has finally found time to resurrect his love of railways. And both have finally found time to indulge their very different tastes in reading!

W T E V A

William Boddy was born in Sydney on the 22nd of July 1964, the second youngest of four children, to proud parents, Valma and Thomas (Snr). As a child, he liked drawing boats and planes and putting models of them together, as well as playing with his Meccano set.

William commenced his career as a draftsman in the Ship Drawing Office at the Naval Dockyard on Garden Island in 1983 on a four-year apprenticeship. Whilst employed there, he enrolled part time in the Naval Architecture Certificate course at the Sydney Institute of Technology, and graduated in 1989. William then went on to do further studies, obtaining a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering from the University of Technology Sydney in 1994, and a Bachelor of Engineering in Naval Architecture from the University of New South Wales in 2000.

William's initial work in the Ship Drawing Office was on emergency refit packages for various naval vessels including the *Brisbane*, the *Adelaide*, and the *Sydney*, for future Gulf War deployments. In April 1995, he transferred to the Research Special Projects Group of the Australian Defence Industries Engineers. He continued to work on a variety of projects during his career at Garden Island, including the preparations of various technical specifications for both naval and commercial customers. Until his retirement in 2016, he occupied a number of positions of responsibility within the Departments of Navy and Defence. His last position was with the Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group, a challenging role which involved a variety of tasks, including undertaking complex procurement procedures for all naval ships based on the east coast.

William and his younger brother Thomas (who passed away on the 4th of June his year) were great friends, and in fact followed the same career paths. William was also christened and confirmed at St Stephen's, attended our Sunday School and Youth Fellowship group, and has had a close connection with our church throughout his life.

William was a loyal son, brother and friend, conscientious and reliable in all that he undertook. He was intelligent and capable, achieving a great deal in the course of his career which sadly was cut short at the age of 52 years. William passed away at the age of 53 on the 14th September this year, and his funeral service was held at St Stephen's. He will be sadly missed by all his good friends and former colleagues. His passing is in particular a great loss to his two sisters, Rosalie and Heather, and to his brother-in-law Robert Reid, and we extend our sincere condolences to them.



Janice Dawson

Cliff Huckel was born on the 27th August 1928 at the Royal North Shore Hospital to Frederick and Catherine Huckel, and was the youngest of five children. At the time, the family was living at Lane Cove but shortly after Cliff's birth, they moved to Newtown to run a milkbar and confectionary shop there. Sadly in December of 1933, the year that Cliff started school, his father died of tuberculosis. The family remained strongly united and Cliff had wonderful memories of highlights of his childhood, including birthday celebrations, outings to the beach and Sunday School picnics. Cliff went to Newtown Technical School for two years, where he completed his Intermediate Certificate in 1943. Cliff's mother passed away two years later, and Cliff and his siblings went to live with their Aunt Edie and Uncle Les.

Cliff's first job was at Breville's Electrical Factory; however, Cliff left after a short time there to take up an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner. One year later, Cliff decided to transfer his apprenticeship in order to become a motor mechanic and he began work with Boyded's Car Dealers. He later worked for different companies, and his last job was working as a Dispatch Clerk for Lister Diesels. Cliff also proudly served in the Citizens Military Forces between 1949 and 1952.

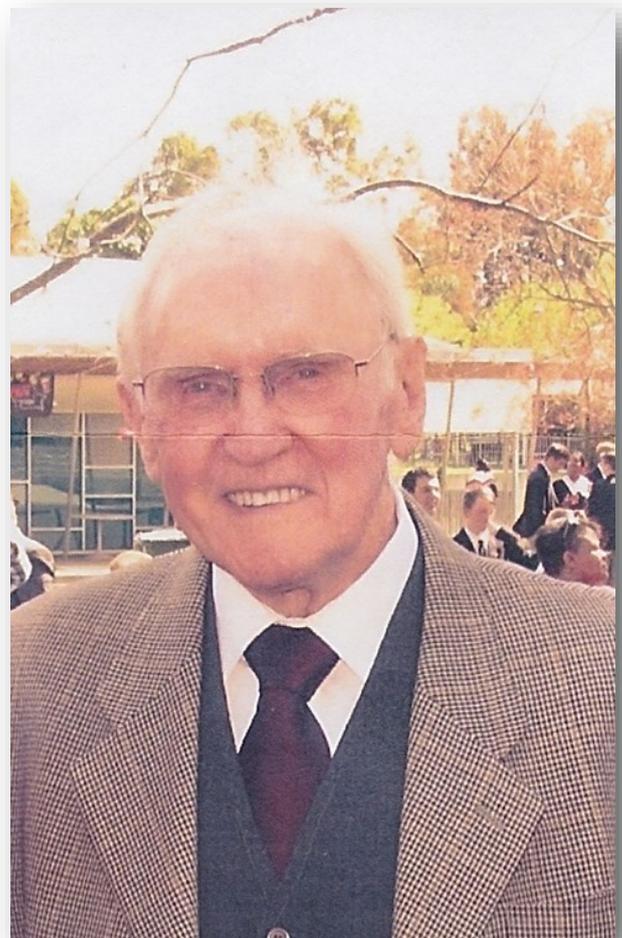
In 1951, Cliff met Pat, the girl who was destined to become his future wife, at the Hurlstone Baptist Church. They were married in 1954 and later bought a block of land on farmland in Panania, where they built their home. They lived there for 53 years and remained a devoted couple, as well as becoming proud parents and grandparents in the course of those years. Family life was very important to Cliff, and every week, he and Pat liked to meet up with their children and grandchildren to enjoy breakfast out at a local cafe. Cliff also liked very much to spend time with members of Pat's and his extended families. Cliff was especially fond of his sister Thelma, and every Friday he would have coffee with her husband and her at their home. Friends were also important in Cliff's life and twice a week, Cliff would enjoy a cup of tea with his great friend Col Pearce.

Cliff was a truly amazing handyman and he spent a considerable amount of time in his garage. Cliff's

garage was filled with a remarkable assortment of tool cupboards, benches for different tasks, grinders, wood, lengths of steel and a myriad of other items. Cliff was a skilled workman and could fix anything – but he was also a craftsman. His greatest feat was building a grandfather clock out of solid cedar timber planks, and that clock is still proudly displayed in their lounge room. For many years, Cliff was virtually the “resident handyman” at St Stephen's, and even in his latter years, Cliff would build different items and fix others throughout the church building. He really enjoyed carrying out these important tasks, and members of our church community were very appreciative of his skills and the time he was prepared to give to helping to maintain St Stephen's.

Cliff Huckel will be greatly missed by his wife Pat, his children and grandchildren and all the members of his extended family and circle of friends. He will be sadly missed by members of the St Stephen's congregation who have fond memories of Cliff's warmth and friendliness, and who remember as well his outstanding abilities as a craftsman and workman. We thank God for Cliff's long and fruitful life.

Janice Dawson



CALENDAR

Weekly Services

Friday Music — 1.00pm (NOT January)

Tuesday	1.00pm	Worship (Recommence 30 January)
Wednesday	8.00am	Communion (Recommence 31 January)
Sunday	10.00am	Worship Morning tea provided. Light lunch 1st & 3rd Sundays of the month (small donation) (NOT January)

JANUARY

Sunday 28	10.00am	Service and Messiah Choir
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FEBRUARY

Tuesday 6	10.30—12.30	Fellowship
Tuesday 20	10.30—12.30	Handcraft

MARCH

Tuesday 6	10.30—12.30	Fellowship
Tuesday 20	10.30—12.30	Handcraft

EASTER

Thursday 29/3	TBC	Tenebrae
Friday 30/3	10.00am	Good Friday
Sunday 1/4	10.00am 2.30pm	Easter Sunday Steiner's <i>Crucifixion</i>

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