

INTERACT

Quarterly

Summer 2018/19 Vol. 20:No 4



Endeavour Hills Uniting Church Mission Statement

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church...

a worshipping, nurturing, learning community...

an open door, reaching out to show Christ's face to all.

'Together We Grow.'



ENDEAVOUR HILLS UNITING CHURCH

Cnr. Hellyer Way & Raymond McMahon Boulevard,
Endeavour Hills, 3802

Minister: Rev. Robin Yang
Email: minister@ehuc.org.au
Church Office: Telephone: 9700 2125
Web Address: www.ehuc.org.au

Church Council

Minister

Rev. Robin Yang 0416 190 723

Chairperson

Pam Cowley 0429 932 111

Vice Chairperson

Diane Hall 9700 5104

Treasurer

Catherine Gonsalves 9796 9852

Church Council Secretary

Judy Hopkins 9700 7551

Council Members

Gavin Bartholomeusz 9700 5015

David Garnepudi 0452 551 077

Brian Hall 9700 5104

Jean Lacey 9700 7246

Wes Porch 9706 1995

Colin Wilhelms 0434 498 900

Elders

Pam Cowley 0429 932 111

Cheryl Doddrell 9700 1674

Diane Hall 9700 5104

Judy Hopkins 9700 7551

Colin Wilhelms 9794 7175

Our Website

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church web site maintenance is overseen by Church Council. Please send all correspondence etc. to the Secretary, Judy Hopkins.

Staff/Office Bearers

Congregation Chairperson

Brian Hall

Congregation Secretary

Anne Williams

Presbytery Representative

Gavin Bartholomeusz

Editors:

Tidings (Monthly Newsletter)

Sue & Stan Ashley

Interact (Quarterly Magazine)

Ursula Ebert

Sunday Notice Sheet (Weekly)

Gavin Bartholomeusz

Finance & Property Committee

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Prayer Chain

Mary Mehl

Safe Church Contact

Diane Hall

Young People

David Garnepudi

Please note:

The views in the articles included in this publication are not necessarily those held by the Endeavour Hills Uniting Church.

WORD FROM THE MINISTER

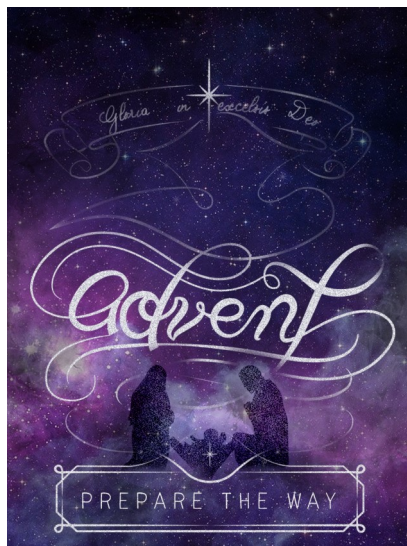


We are all travellers on a journey in our lives. A journey comes in many shapes and sizes. A walk around a park, a drive to the local supermarket, a hike up a mountain, a flight to visit family or a cruise to an exotic location are all examples of the types of journey we are on. Wong Fu Productions, a digital production company, created a short film pondering the idea that life is a journey through time. We move from yesterday to today, today to tomorrow. Living literally is a journey.

This Advent season, our church is looking at the theme of “Journey to Christmas”. We are reminded that our God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ journeyed from heaven to earth (John 1). We recall the angel’s journey to speak with Mary (Luke 1:26-38), Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7), the shepherd journey to see the baby (Luke 2:8-20) and the wise men’s journey from the far east following the star to visit the new born King (Matthew 2). We recall Joseph and Mary’s journey as refugees fleeing Herod and their return to settle into Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23). The whole Christmas story is about journeying. Indeed Christ came into the world so you and I would be able to journey with God both here on earth and for all eternity. May this be the good news for us Christmas season. God Bless!

Robin Yang.

IS JESUS COMING?



Several years ago, on the island of Maui, a church by the name of **Jesus Coming Soon** celebrated its 50th anniversary.

While congratulations are always in order for a church celebrating an anniversary, there did seem something a little incongruous about the whole thing. Someone asked the question, "if Jesus was coming soon 50 years ago when the church began, why has it taken him so long?"

One of the emphases of **Advent** is to look to the return of Jesus Christ to

earth. This is seen as one of the things about which the prophet Malachi spoke. Yet most scholars will readily note that it is pretty doubtful that Malachi was in fact speaking about Jesus.

For some, the return of Jesus seems imminent and for others it is further down the road. Still, for others, the matter is secondary to being present in this world.

No one can possibly know when or how the return of Christ might take place. While there may be signs as described in the Bible (such as wars and natural disasters) that could suggest he is coming to earth soon, these things have been going on for centuries.

Many recognize that the real point to our celebration is to concentrate on the presence of Christ in our world today and how we can help to embody that.

BIRDS SET FREE

A.J. Gordon was the great Baptist pastor of the Clarendon Church in Boston, Massachusetts. One day he met a young boy in front of the sanctuary carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. Gordon inquired, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy



replied, "I trapped them out in the field." "What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home." When Gordon offered to buy them, the lad exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well." Gordon replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage and the birds." "Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain." The exchange was made and the boy went away whistling, happy with his shiny coins. Gordon walked around to the back of the church property, opened the door of the small wire coop, and let the struggling creatures soar into the blue. The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon about Christ's coming to seek and to save the lost—paying for them with His own precious blood. "That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said Gordon, "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

This is Advent, and the message of these times is the song of those wild birds.

It's the song sung in every carol this season: Redeemed!

It's the meaning behind every gift given under the tree: Redeemed!

It's the Word the shepherds heard: Redeemed!

It's the assurance Mary received: Redeemed!

It's the star the Wisemen followed: Redeemed!

You and I have been trapped by sin, but Christ has purchased our pardon.

We have been redeemed!

Christmas Services 2018



Christmas Carol Service

Sunday December 16th

7.30 pm

(Please bring a plate to share for supper after the service if you can.)

Christmas Day Service

Tuesday December 25th

9 am

CHRISTMAS PLANNING

It goes on all the year. The stores stock up with the latest gifts for kids. The bigger the better. The Myer windows have been planned long ago and gradually set up in secret. Stores offer payment schemes, and even interest put off till later. Better to buy now, pay later is the psychology the unsuspecting fall for, whether it could be afforded or not. “After all, it is Christmas” is the excuse.



Children write out a wish list, post letters to Santa at the North Pole. Mothers and others think about Christmas dinner. Sometimes we are pulled into family strife. Will we invite so and so? Who will we upset, if so and so are invited? And of course, parties and Christmas break-ups are planned.

Also, Churches are busy in the planning stages—Children’s Services, special rehearsals for choirs and carol singers, who often do the rounds of aged care facilities and hospitals. Wow, what a kerfuffle! Is Christmas really worth it? I think we all need to take a step back and remind ourselves of the old saying, THE REASON FOR THE SEASON.

God had been planning for Christmas, the real Christmas, for a long time. The birth of a little child in a manger in Bethlehem, His only son, the saviour of a sinful world, born in the fullness of time, when all was ready to be fulfilled, according to the scriptures. How to begin to put Christmas plans into perspective?

Reflection: Let us all take a deep breath and go back to God’s plans. A good suggestion would be to start at the readings for Advent, making a special time in all your busyness and go on a biblical journey with prophets and gospel witnesses, and put the real story into central place. You will find helpful lectionary readings on the Uniting Church calendar for 2018.

Bill Pugh

A CHRISTMAS PROBLEM



Once upon a Christmas Eve, a man sat in reflective silence before the fireplace,

pondering the meaning of Christmas. “There is no point to a God who becomes man,” he mused. “Why would an all powerful God want to share even one of His precious moments with the likes of man? And even if He did, why would He choose to be born in an animal stall? No way! The whole thing is absurd! I’m sure that if God really wanted to come down to earth, He would have chosen some other way.”

Suddenly, the man was roused from his reverie by a strange sound outside. He went to the window and saw a small gaggle of blue geese frantically honking and aimlessly flopping about in the snow. They seemed dazed and confused. Apparently they had dropped out in exhaustion from the flight formations of a larger flock on its way from the Arctic Islands to the warmer climes of the Gulf of Mexico. Moved to compassion, the man tried to “shoo” the poor geese into his warm garage, but the more he “shooed” the more they panicked. “If they only realized I’m only trying to do what’s best for them,” he thought to himself. “How can I make them understand my concern for their well-being?” Then, this thought came to him: “If for just a minute, I could become one of them, an ordinary goose, and communicate with them in their own language, they would know what I am trying to do.” And suddenly ... suddenly, he remembered Christmas and a smile came over his face. Suddenly, the Christmas story no longer seemed absurd. Suddenly, he pictured that ordinary-looking infant, lying in the manger, in that stable in Bethlehem, and he knew the answer to his Christmas problem: God had become one of us to tell us that He loves us.

ADVENT: PUTTING THE WAITING BACK INTO WANTING

Do you feel at all stressed by the coming of Christmas? Are you troubled about all the money



you still spend on presents and food, decorations and travel? If we let it, the financial crisis will just add to this anxiety, making us more worried about all the money we are spending. That's if we let it. How about if we don't? How about if we credit crunch to make us reign-in our spending, to turn our focus away from buying stuff and reclaim the true spirit of Advent!

As Fr Christopher Jamison (BBC "Monastery") writes in his forthcoming book:

"Advent is the traditional month of preparation before Christmas, a time of fasting and intense prayer, a time of eager expectation. It is above all a time to celebrate waiting as a normal part of human experience, when the Christian tradition invites us to wait for the birth of a child. In Advent we rejoice that we are waiting, that there is still time to prepare a way for the Lord and we celebrate the virtue of patience. By contrast, the consumer world tells us not to wait but to 'buy now'. Greed cannot wait, so to learn to wait is a simple antidote to greed."

So this Advent, why not pray now and buy later? And while you are praying, make some of these great alternative presents from the Canadian web site.buynothingchristmas.org:

- knit a stocking, hat, socks, etc.
- bake some treats and pack in a recycled container
- frame a piece of your artwork
- give away a valued possession
- make a puppet from a sock
- make a calendar with pictures of family members and/or scenery
- make a soothing, herb pillow filled with lavender, rose, etc.

From Operation Noah's 'Reclaim Christmas' campaign.

A RICH (POOR) CHRISTMAS

Often people cry out “Christmas has become too commercial” but then they continue spending as in the past. It’s an understandable problem because there are so many temptations out there.

However, this year for many the tight economy may have major implications for holiday celebrations. Those who have lost jobs or had their work and/or pay reduced may well be feeling a pinch and not able to spend as they have in the past. Perhaps this is a gift.

The creative opportunity to explore alternative ways to celebrate the holiday can be a wondrous time of discovery. It can also present an opportunity for friends and neighbours to connect in new ways as less time may be spent buying and wrapping gifts and preparing for guests.

Try such things as homemade or recycled gifts, attending free seasonal events, walking around to enjoy Christmas decorations, gathering with friends and family for light refreshments and carolling, and spending time focusing on the beauty and transformative power of this holy season. The lists are truly endless, and the results can provide wonderful memories.

The prophet Micah pointed out that Bethlehem was one of the poorest and smallest places around, and yet it would be the birthplace of the Saviour. May our simple and poor hearts be places for Christ to be born anew.

CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTION

To your enemy, forgiveness.

To an opponent, tolerance.

To a friend, your heart.

To a customer, service.

To all, charity.

To every child, a good example.

To yourself, respect.

THE MAGI



You've probably seen them on Christmas cards, in nativity scenes, and Christmas pageants. You can read about them in Matthew 2. Who are they? That's a little tougher to answer.

The Greek New Testament refers to them as magi, from which we get the word "magic." This same

Greek word has been used for sorcerer or diviner, and seems to speak of those who read the signs of the times in stars and the natural world. Some call them "wise men" and still others call them kings.

How many were there? We don't know. They brought three gifts, but there could have been more magi. Where did they come from? We don't know that either, other than that they came from "the East" according to Matthew; most scholars think Persia.

Lots of legends have arisen around them. They have received names, although they differ – Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar in English; Hor, Karusdan, and Baranater in Ethiopian; and Larvandad, Gushmaph, and Hormisdas in Syrian.

They brought symbolic gifts: gold, symbolizing royalty; frankincense, symbolizing priesthood; and myrrh, an embalming fluid, indicating that Jesus would die to show God's love. They were mistakenly named kings because they brought rather wealthy gifts, although it is quite doubtful that they were royalty. Some even question the factuality of the entire story.

What we do know, however, is that for Matthew this was a very important story. It was his way of telling us that even foreigners – strangers from far away – recognized the presence of the divine in the newborn Christ child and came to worship him. Beyond that, they went home "by a different road." How can any of us encounter the newborn Christ and not be called to change our direction, too?

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTMAS



The following item appeared in a church newsletter and contains some good advice that will help us keep selfishness in check this Christmas:

1. Thou shalt not leave “Christ” out of Christmas, making it “Xmas.” To some, “X” is unknown.
2. Thou shalt prepare thy soul for Christmas. Spend not so much on gifts that thy soul is forgotten.
3. Thou shalt not let Santa Claus replace Christ, thus robbing the day of its spiritual reality.
4. Thou shalt not burden the shop girl, the mailman, and the merchant with complaints and demands.
5. Thou shalt give thyself with thy gift. This will increase its value a hundred fold, and he who receiveth it shall treasure it forever.
6. Thou shalt not value gifts received by their cost. Even the least expensive may signify love, and that is more priceless than silver and gold.
7. Thou shalt not neglect the needy. Share thy blessings with many who will go hungry and cold unless thou art generous.
8. Thou shalt not neglect thy church. Its services highlight the true meaning of the season.
9. Thou shalt be as a little child. Not until thou has become in spirit as a little one art thou ready to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.
10. Thou shalt give thy heart to Christ. Let Him be at the top of thy Christmas list.

QUOTES & COMMENTS

Until one feels the spirit of Christmas, there is no Christmas. All else is outward display – so much tinsel and decoration. For it isn't the holly, it isn't the snow. It isn't the tree nor the firelight's glow. It's the warmth that comes to the heart.

There is nothing you can do that will make God love you less. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. God's love for you is infinite, perfect, and eternal.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Christmas comes every time we see God in other persons.

Ann Weems, "Christmas Comes"

The point is not to land at Christmas, but to arrive there ready to be changed. Like the shepherds, we go to the stable not quite knowing what to expect, but we go away transformed, ready to live new lives, having encountered the Christ in the baby in the manger.

Donald Schmidt, In the Beginning

I have always thought of Christmas as a good time; a kind, forgiving, generous, pleasant time; a time when men and women seem to open their hearts freely, and so I say, God bless Christmas!

Fred, in Charles Dickens,

It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air.

W.T. Ellis

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Kent Keith, Jesus Did It Anyway

RECOGNISING JESUS



One of my favourite Christmas stories is about the old shoemaker who dreamed one Christmas Eve that Jesus would come to visit him the next day. The dream was so real that he was convinced it would come true.

So, the next morning he got up and went out and cut green boughs and decorated his little shoemaker shop and got all ready for Jesus to come and visit. He was so sure that Jesus was going to come that he just sat down and waited for Him.

The hours passed, and Jesus didn't come. But an old man came. He came inside for a moment to get warm out of the winter cold. As the shoemaker talked with him, he noticed the holes in the old man's shoes, so he reached up on the shelf and got him a new pair of shoes. He made sure they fit and that his socks were dry and sent him on his way.

Still he waited. But Jesus didn't come. An old woman came. A woman who hadn't had a decent meal in two days. They sat and visited for a while, and then he prepared some food for her to eat. He gave her a nourishing meal and sent her on her way.

Then he sat down again to wait for Jesus. But Jesus still didn't come.

Then he heard a little boy crying out in front of his shop. He went out and talked with the boy, and discovered that the boy had been separated from his parents and didn't know how to get home. So he put on his coat, took the boy by the hand and led him home.

When he came back to his little shoe shop it was almost dark and the streets were emptied of people. And then in a moment of despair he lifted his voice to heaven and said, "Oh Lord Jesus, why didn't you come?"

And then in a moment of silence he seemed to hear a voice saying, "Oh shoemaker, lift up your heart. I kept my word. Three times I knocked at your friendly door. Three times my shadow fell across your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet. I was the woman you gave food to eat. I was the boy on the homeless street."

Jesus had come. The shoemaker just didn't realize it.

Melvin Newland

TOGETHERNESS

A New Year! Sometimes as individual friends of Jesus, and as churches, we feel a bit small. So many congregations struggling, not enough Ministers of the Word to go around.

A visit to the country changes that impression. Congregations are joining and sharing resources. Wonderful and inspiring worship leaders and lay preachers, a lectionary and biblical resources at hand, are caring, visiting and sharing the ministry of God's people.



As the People of God, together, in fellowship, the churches mission and outreach spreads, widens and grows. "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God!" We are spirit filled people. We are called to be a witnessing and sharing fellowship. TOGETHER , we are strong.

In 2019 let us celebrate our togetherness, praying, caring and worshipping, and keeping the doors of our churches wide open, welcoming and receiving, and moving out daily, witnessing, resourcing and building up His Kingdom, realising our TOGETHERNESS.

With many songs of praise and grateful hearts, in faith we accept the challenges of 2019!

A Happy New Year. A Blessed New Life!

Reflection: New Year's resolutions are made and broken. Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians made the best New Year's resolution of all: "but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind". (Philippians 3: 13–15)

Bill Pugh

Contributions to Interact

Any material you may have to be included in Interact may be sent in one of two ways:

- 1.e-mail (preferred method) to interact@ehuc.org.au putting “Interact” in the subject line
- 2.leave in the green Interact folder which is located on the stand to the right of the kitchen window.

Your contributions of up to **450 words** are very welcome, ***BUT please include your name, phone number &/or email address in case it is necessary to contact you.*** Material should be submitted by **12 noon** on the deadline date indicated below:

Issue	Deadline	Publication Date
Autumn	17th February 2019	3rd March 2019
Winter	19th May 2019	2nd June 2019
Spring	18th August 2019	1st September 2019
Summer	17th November 2019	1st December 2019