



THE ADVOCATE

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Diocese renews 'commitment to creation'

Representatives of every pastoral charge in the Diocese gathered at Bishop's Lodge on Saturday the 28th of October, for a service in honour of the Season of Creation. A beautiful sunny morning greeted visitors to Wangaratta, as they joined in spirited yet solemn worship, to pray for the preservation of the natural environment. The guest preacher at the service was the Rev. Dr. Rachel Mash, the Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, who challenged us with some hard facts about habitat degradation and public complacency when it comes to environmental protection. The care of creation remains not only among the Lambeth Calls, which the Diocese presently observes as part of its mission and action planning; but also a cornerstone of Anglican identity, inspired by the powerful statements of the Psalms. 'The earth is the Lord's and all that dwells therein', found in Psalm 24 challenges us to remember just whose environment we are called to protect. Dr. Mash also reminded us that we are people of Eden, whose duty it is to restore what was made for humans, and subsequently lost by them; though not without the hope of finding our way back to the garden. Bishop Clarence blessed 28 Seville orange trees, comprising our Diocesan 'communion forest', with each tree to find a home amongst each of the represented pastoral charges. The event was well attended, well catered, and featured the wonderful musical support of the Wodonga Brass ensemble. The day was truly a joyful Christian witness, reminding those in observance of the need to protect the earth in which we live, work, play and have our being.



Michelle B photos



Michelle B photos

Bishop Clarence writes...



Dear Clergy, People and Friends of the Diocese

Soon we will be commemorating and celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and the next few weeks will be filled with gatherings of people singing Advent and Christmas Carols while shops are decorated with Christmas trimmings depicting mostly the understanding of a secular society.

The presentation of Father Christmas, the reindeer, sleigh and presents with gatherings planned around the globe for people to connect and have special meals together is often a distortion of the reality of what Christmas is all about.

Of course it is a time of the year that is filled with much excitement and the opportunity for people to connect and for families and friends to be together. It is a time for many to have their annual break as they seek rest, refreshment and rejuvenation from a rather busy year. We know all too well that it is the story about the babe of Bethlehem, in swaddling clothes lying in a manger

adored by a tired mother and proud father. It is about those who came from near and far to behold God's gift of love to God's world as hope for the future. It is about the meek and the lowly, the outcast and the down-trodden and the ones who are willing to be transformed by the love of God offered in Jesus Christ,

I thank all our clergy, parishioners and friends of the Diocese of Wangaratta for their prayers, support and commitment to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This year we celebrated a beautiful connection through our Season of Creation Service and I ask that we get ready for continuing our WALK with Christ and with each other as we work towards reconciliation and make our primary task to be that of discipleship, evangelism and outreach to all within the communities that we serve. It is good to have a mission to all through outreach but we need to be aware that our base is the community of faith that we serve and it is from this foundation that we scatter ourselves to bring healing, wholeness and empowered service to all in the name of Jesus Christ.

A blessed and wonderful Christmas to you all as you behold the gift of God in Jesus Christ during this time and as you rest, reflect and rejuvenate so that we will be ready for the task at hand as we welcome a new year with endless possibilities.

+ Clarence

A Holy Valedictory Celebration

By Shae Doyle
Head of Anglican Identity
Cobram Anglican Grammar School

The prophet Jeremiah wrote, 'I know what plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope'. Cobram Anglican Grammar School has farewelled its class of 2023 with a valedictory chapel service and dinner. Students, families, staff, and distinguished guests, including Bishop Clarence Bester, Bishop, gathered

to commemorate the cohort, marking the culmination of their formal schooling. The event was a tapestry of reflections on academic achievements, personal growth, and the enduring bonds forged within the nurturing walls of the school. The valedictory service was a meaningful blend of gratitude and celebration, with prayers and songs, and a poignant reading of Jeremiah 29:11 – a verse that encapsulates the hope and promise that lies ahead for these young graduates. Bishop Clarence reminded the graduates that, as they step into the world, guided by faith and wisdom, the echoes of the valedictory celebration will linger, serving as a testament to the tight-knit community that has nurtured them along their educational journey.

The dinner that followed was a banquet of laughter, shared memories, and expressions of thankfulness. Teachers and staff recounted stories of scholarship, resilience, and the unique contributions each student brought to the school community. In bidding farewell to the class of 2023, the school community not only celebrated academic accomplishments but also the character, compassion, and resilience that will undoubtedly shape these graduates' futures. As they embark on the next chapter of their lives, the words of Jeremiah 29:11 serve as a beacon of hope, reminding them that their journey is guided by divine plans for a future filled with promise and purpose.

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DETAILS

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'Hearing the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor'

By Helen Malcolm

This was the title of The Rev. Canon Doctor Rachel Mash's presentation at a clergy gathering in Wangaratta the day before the Season of Creation open air service at Bishop's Lodge in October. Rachel is Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and secretary to the Anglican Communion Environmental Network. Rachel spoke of the challenges to clean, healthy land, water and air that our planet faces, reporting, for example, that more people die from air pollution than malaria and HIV/AIDS combined. She described the repercussions of the catastrophic East Africa drought, of which I saw evidence on a trip to Tanzania earlier this year. For the people of East Africa their cows are their currency – used for food, for selling to buy other necessities, for exchange during the marriage contract. Without water the people have no cows, no money. Another telling slide showed how the 'lungs of the planet', the Amazon rain forest, is suffering wildfires, depleting the amount of oxygen released back into the atmosphere and increasing carbon emissions. By the year 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea. These and other stark figures and our own experience at home with fires and floods, emphasise that we must do everything possible to turn this around. Rachel emphasised that there can be hope and showed us some examples – but it must be now, it must be co-operative, and it must be ongoing. We need awareness and action – the church of Southern Africa endorses regular reports on the environmental matters at Parish Council meetings. Some of the simple things we can do are to give seedlings at baptisms, confirmation, weddings, or planting trees in memory of someone; have services outside, go on pilgrimages in nature. Above all Rachel reminded us of the two 'books of God' - the book of nature and the written book of God and of God's very first commandment in Genesis 2:15: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.' Variations in different translations have 'to dress it and to keep it', 'to work the ground and keep it in order', 'to work it and take care of it'. As Anglicans we ascribe to the Five Marks of Mission – the fifth one being to 'strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth.' In discussion groups we were then challenged to plan what we, as individuals, parishes and the Diocese, will do to reduce our footprint.



Whorouly stands the test of time

Contributed

Not many churches these days can boast 150 years of consistent life. Such was Bishop Clarence's declaration on the night of November 17th, at a service celebrating the 150th anniversary of St John's Whorouly. It is a church that has seen eleven bishops of Wangaratta, and even bishops of the Melbourne Diocese when the parish switched between the two. Many other churches of its calibre and degree have closed as the years have drawn on. Though St John's is the definition of the adage, 'small but mighty'. The church was full to the brim with those who have shared in its life, from all age groups and walks of life. The atmosphere, though warm with the first vestiges of summer, was one of vigour, energy and colour. This writer, having served in Alpine Parish and thus St John's, was astounded by such deliberate and hearty

witness and fellowship, and remains proud to have served the church for all-too-brief a time. The Diocese sports a number of smaller congregations in quieter, more remote communities, though Whorouly in the dedication to ministry of its people is a standard to which many of these smaller, quieter churches can aspire. Congregations of this nature do not decline, they merely change; but discipleship and love of the Lord remains constant. The service was followed by the planting and blessing of two new trees in the church's memorial garden, and then by an equally joyous and hospitable dinner at local venue, Remel 185. It is a credit to the community of Whorouly and Alpine Parish, providing an atmosphere where parishioners not only dined with the Bishop, but also danced the night away with him. The parish is in the capable and hardworking hands of the Rev. Moira Evers, who has really brought a breath of fresh air after the stifling conditions of the Covid pandemic.

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St. Luke's Anglican Church Dookie 31.7.1903 - 1.10.2023

By Di Feldtmann

On 1 October 2023 St. Luke's Anglican Church Dookie was deconsecrated by The Rt. Rev. Clarence Bester, Bishop of Wangaratta, before a congregation of seventy, including past parishioners, people who had been baptised, confirmed or had their children baptised in the church, members of St Andrew's Uniting Church and St Mary's Roman Catholic Church and people from the Dookie community.

The dedication and opening service of St. Luke's was held on 31st July 1903 with The Right Rev. Thomas Henry Armstrong, the first Bishop of Wangaratta, officiating. The Parish Hall was built in 1928 and was officially opened on 23rd November that year.

Although a sad occasion in the life of the Church, it was a wonderful celebration of Anglicanism and community in Dookie. As with many churches, the closure resulted from dwindling active numbers, which do not allow for its viability. Fortunately, as is already in place, Anglican services and fellowship will continue to be held on the second Sunday of each month in



The Bishop of Wangaratta, the Rt Revd. Clarence Bester lead the service along with clergy from the Diocese of Wangaratta (Kilmore, Benalla, Wangaratta West)

St Andrew's Uniting Church. This has included five baptisms at our Anglican services in the last month! This completes a circle from when the first Anglican service was held at Cashel in the Cashel Union (now Uniting) Church in 1882.

There are important memorials in the church commemorating significant people who have been part of the congregation, including those who died in wars. The brass cross was donated by the Stevens family in honour of their son Private Keith in WW1 and the missal stand by the Allen family in honour of their son William. The

font was dedicated in 1919, presented by Mr and Mrs E Tacey in memory of their daughter.

The afternoon concluded with refreshments, fellowship and sharing of memories in St Andrew's UC hall.

Whatever the future for the 'little church on the corner', it has given the community of Dookie many memories, much fellowship and 130 years of Anglican community life.

Mothers' Union lone members gather together in Benalla

By Diane Grant

The Diocese of Wangaratta has quite a few Lone Members of MU and each year some of them gather together to enjoy a social time, lunch and fellowship.

MU Lone Member Coordinator Robyn Aulmann from Rutherglen organised a lunch for some of the members to meet on Thursday, 26 of October at "The Northo" North Eastern hotel in Benalla. Lone members came from Alexandra,

Yarrowonga, Yackandandah, Benalla, Rutherglen, Wangaratta and three guests - 2 from Nagambie and 1 from Albury.

Special guest was Diocese of Wangaratta MU President Jan Craig who made the special 3 hour trip from Corryong to meet the Lone members for the first time.

Jan welcomed everyone to the get-together and opened the time with the MU prayer. Jan spoke about how the MU may encourage new folk to join the ranks of this worldwide organisation and thanked the members for their loyalty and commitment to MU.

Each MU Lone member and guest spoke briefly about their connection with MU, some having a history of many decades as members.

Chitchat and laughter abounded over lunch and each person enjoyed socialising with their fellow MU members.

They were invited to attend the DOW MU Annual meeting on 20 November at Wangaratta.

It is hoped that the group of Lone members, and fellow MU members who want to join them, might enjoy a boat cruise on Lake Mulwala in autumn next year. Details will be available from Robyn Aulmann in 2024.

The afternoon closed with prayer and best wishes for the Christmas season for all MU Lone members and their families.

Harrietville Walk of Witness

By Canon Moira Evers

On Saturday the 18th of November, eighteen people and one chocolate Labrador gathered at St Etheldreda's in Harrietville for Bishop Clarence's Walk of Witness. Most of those who attended met at the Bakery and walked the short distance to the church to be met by long standing parishioners Joan and Doug Humphries who welcomed us into the charming little wooden building. Before praying we were given an interesting overview of the history of "St Eth's" which began life as a Methodist Chapel before being purchased by the Anglican Church thanks to the generous donation of Lilian Staff who also ensured that the church was furnished in true Anglican style with a beautiful wooden rood, altar, and statue of St Etheldreda. The namesake of this church would have to be one of the more unusual patron saints of a parish. Etheldreda born in 690, was the Queen of Northumbria, given in marriage, but with a strong desire to commit herself



to the religious life, eventually founding a monastery on her ancestral lands in Ely, East Anglia, England. Rev'd Victor Adams led us in a service of prayer and readings with Bishop Clarence delivering a fine homily around mission and evangelism before we set off to the local pub for refreshments.

Bishop Clarence, in his crimson cassock prompted a spirited discussion with some visitors who were curious about who we were and what we doing? Spontaneous interactions such as this are wonderful for the opportunities they can provide to give others a "reason for the hope" that they see in us.



Michelle B photos

Area Deans Licenced

By The Venerable Neil Hicks

As clergy and lay Synod Reps gathered in their Deaneries on 16 September to

continue discussion on the Lambeth Calls following Synod, Bishop Clarence made use of the gathered opportunities to license and commission The Rev'd Jerome Francis and The Rev'd Maryann Leonard as the respective Area Dean's of the North West and North East Deanery at St Margaret's Cobram and St John's Wodonga on the same day. This meant an early start for the

Bishop to ensure that both Area Dean's would have the support the Clergy as well as Lay members part of the proceedings. The Area Dean's have a particular ministry to the clergy of the Deanery and to foster fellowship and friendship amongst the Clergy by periodically bringing them together for sharing, prayer and reflection.

New priests set for fruitfulness in ministry

By Rev. Canon Scott Jessup

The Rev'd Canon Scott Jessup, Bishop's Chaplain and Priest-in-Charge of the Parish of Rutherglen & Chiltern, preached the sermon at the Ordination in which he used the image of River Red Gums on the banks of the Murray River to encourage Cathy and Lesley to prioritise prayer and contemplation. When you look at the River Red Gums on the bank of the Murray River, the undermining of the riverbank by water reveals some of the hidden root system. Canon Scott encouraged us to let the roots of our hidden and inner prayer life and contemplation of God grow and deepen so as to provide us, like a River Red Gum, with stability, nutrients, water and all that is necessary for joyfulness and fruitfulness in life and ministry.

'Come and See' – remain with God, abide – so that we may not just 'get by' in our life and ministry – but flourish and



be a blessing to those whom we serve. In the words of that great Anglican retreat director, teacher and mystic - Evelyn Underhill: 'The work of the parish priest, for God and for souls, depends for its

worth, and depends wholly, on a priest's own life of prayer.'

Safer Church Made Easy

By Ven. Neil Hicks

This was the topic for a gathering of clergy and safe church officers from the parishes of the Diocese on November 14th in Trinity house. Katrina Thomas and Marcella Meagher from Kooyoora were with us to refresh our understanding of why we do the work of Safe Church compliance and introduce us to OSCA (Online Safe Church Accreditation) – the new system for obtaining clearances which will be introduced next February in most Anglican Dioceses in Victoria. We were also shown a video produced by General Synod which discussed issues around the matter of 'persons of concern'. Just after lunch, which was provided by Michelle Bester and the Bishop and which due to rain saw us eating in Trinity House instead of in the gardens of Bishop's Lodge, Diocesan Safe Church Coordinator Neil Hicks spoke about Safe Church training and the issues some people have encountered as they did this online. Some ideas were given by various people as to how group training

can be done using the online units.

Almost all parishes were represented at this gathering. For anyone wanting more information about dealing with

Persons of Concern in a parish context, a video is available here: <https://vimeo.com/524013007> (password ACA-PoC-Final).



St. John's Thurgoona Mission District.

By Glenda Mitchell

At 11am on a beautiful Sunday morning the Bishop reopened St John's Thurgoona as a mission district. This special day was the first Sunday in Advent, the 3rd of December 2023. Together with the Bishop there were three priests in the sanctuary,

the Rev'd Emily Payne, vicar of the Parish of Northern Albury, Canon Alan Kelb, who will look after the services until a priest has been appointed, and the Rev'd Catherine Dawson, who is the hospital chaplain and also lives in Thurgoona. Forty-three adults and two children were there to worship and hear a rousing sermon from the Bishop. There were friends from St Mark's, St Paul's, Trinity Anglican College, parishioners of St John's before Covid days, and other friends and visitors. At the end of the service an orange tree was blessed and planted near the church. After the service we enjoyed each other's

company over a BBQ lunch with punch and sparkling wine followed by dessert. We sat under the shady trees and enjoyed the lovely surrounds. A lot of hard work was done before the service to make the grounds and church ready for this day. A big thank to you all who helped but especially to Joan and Bruce James. Thank you to the Diocesan staff who organised the service leaflet. We were encouraged that the next Sunday at 9am we were able to welcome eighteen adults to our service.



Blessings this Christmas from the Registry Staff

The registry staff came together over breakfast for their final get together before closing for the Christmas period.

The registry will close at noon on Friday the 22nd December and will reopen at 9am on Tuesday the 2nd January 2024.

The registry staff would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Christmas and safe and prosperous New Year.



A fresh perspective for Avenel

By Rev. Richard Pennington

St Paul's Avenel, consecrated in 1914, is our smallest Church in the parochial district of Central Goulburn. Avenel is a town of just over 1000 people and is 19 kilometers from Seymour and 129 from Wangaratta. St Paul's Avenel is also a church which hasn't welcomed a bishop for many years. Consequently, a visit from Bishop Clarence was met with much excitement. Bp. Clarence's visit was set for the last Sunday in October, the 5th Sunday of the month, and the Sunday when the Parish traditionally meets as one in Avenel. Bp Clarence, Michelle, Rev. David Still and Rev. Dr. Rachel Mash the Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa attended. Bp. Clarence took the service and gave a thought-provoking sermon on the two great commandments as declared in Matthew's Gospel. The service was followed by a parishioner catered barbeque accompanied with a range of salads, cakes, and slices. For many of our parishioners, who aren't always in a position to travel to services in the Wangaratta Cathedral, the morning was an great opportunity not only to see their



Bishop in the formal attire of a Bishop, in the formal surrounds of the church, taking a service and sermonising on the Gospel, but also to be able to then talk to him in the informal surrounds of the Avenel Memorial Hall over a rissole and green pasta salad. This was invaluable in bringing the human face of the Bishop of Wangaratta. It was

a wonderful morning and we of the parish hope that Bp. Clarence, Michelle, Rev. David and Rev. Dr. Rachel enjoyed the experience as much as we did.

Celebrating the past and future of St. Margaret's

By Rev. Victor Adams

The parish of St Margaret's recently celebrated and commemorated its existence as a faith community. On Sunday 12 November we gathered with Bishop Clarence to give thanks and afterwards planted a tree, as part of our focus on the environment. We also witnessed the confirmation of Thomas Burns and Dominique Thompson. A wonderful bring and share lunch followed and we were entertained with some amazing pipe organ Scottish music.



Michelle B photos

Morning Melodies a jolly success in Seymour

By Diane Grant

The local Anglican parish of Central Goulburn Mother's Union (MU) hosted a successful Morning Melodies in the Christ Church hall in Seymour on Thursday, 14 September. The well-known entertainer Noel Pearson kept the audience on their toes with his popular evergreen songs and some novelty dances. The Seymour branch began in the late 1950's and members from the Avenel and Nagambie groups joined them in the early 2000's. For over 40 years the local MU have been hosting an annual fundraiser for a leper child and for MU chosen charities. This year it was to send funds off to the National MU for Gender Based Violence and domestic violence and climate change project. Over 70 guests came along and were able to forget the winter blue and joined folk who like to socialise and sing along with popular musical songs. The Central Goulburn MU branch's oldest member Muriel Andrea (97) was able to come along and it is acknowledged that Muriel is one of the foundation members of the branch in 1959. The delicious morning

tea and accompanying raffle were thanks to the MU members and helpers and were enjoyed by all. The MU would like to thank Noel Pearson, all their guests, all those who donated raffle prizes and church members who supported the morning with donations of lucky door prizes, money donations, trading table items and morning tea and those who set and cleared up for

the morning.

The annual fundraiser was a success thanks to the support of all concerned and the funds raised will go off to the MU national project.



Some of the Seymour Hospital group doing the Y.M.C.A song antics at the Parish of Central Goulburn Mothers' Union Morning Melodies

Horsing around for a good cause

By Caroline Burge

It is said that you don't need an excuse to throw a party, but the same goes for fundraising parish social events. We certainly need very little prompting as such in the Parish of Kilmore. With a public holiday in the southern end of the Diocese for Melbourne Cup Day, what better way to raise money for ABM in the form of a 'Chicken and Champagne' luncheon.

Monetary donations in aid of ABM were asked of those attending; plus a sweep stake on the Melbourne Cup race; and also the good old 'Anglican raffle, all going towards the worthy cause to help those affected by the Palestinian conflict.

A good number of parishioners supported the day, and 'fun with fellowship' was had for many hours. Parishioner Shirley Evans



Group photo Fr David Kerr and some of his parishioners attending the luncheon

won the "best dressed on the field", with a few other ladies donning their hats and finery. Next year, the gentlemen will be expected to dress up for the occasion.

With thanks to all who supported and attended, over \$300 was raised.

Thanksgiving service milestone for Yea

By Carol Hogg

On September 17th, St Luke's Yea held a service to celebrate the completed restoration of the historic church building. The restoration of this National Trust church building, built in 1868, has taken place over many years. With over 50 people in attendance, Bishop Clarence presided, accompanied by two of St. Luke's priests, Rev. Mario Hendricks and Rev. Wayne Ireland. The journey to this point has been a combination of enthusiastic fundraising, generous donations and the tireless effort of parishioners to ensure that the restoration was achieved. The guest organist was Rod Junor and guest cantor was Charlie Rattray, while the FourFathers sang "Search Me O God" and led the congregation in the hymn "How Great Thou Art". Representatives from the National Trust, local architect Ian Sichlau, who donated his expertise to the project



Michelle B photos

and the specialist heritage builder Abode Restoration director Thomas Carson, were also present. As the oldest continually used church structure in Yea, St Luke's has seen countless weddings, baptisms and funerals, has witnessed the ravages of two World Wars, as well as the Crimean

and Boer conflicts and has been a place of peace, prayer and beauty enjoyed by congregations, visitors and the wider community for countless generations and will now be preserved for another 150 years.

Nagambie rose garden a fitting tribute to beloved Queen

A major thunderstorm, gale force winds, heavy rain and freezing temperatures did not deter a loyal band of Nagambie community folk from attending the dedication and blessing of the Queen Elizabeth II Memorial Rose Garden at Nagambie on the morning of 8th September. For three months a Memorial Rose Garden project has been planned, planted and now dedicated to our late Queen Elizabeth II. Sixteen donors, including the MU branch, donated standard roses for the project. The fickle weather on the day made the Dedication service move to the Mechanics' Hall not far from the garden. The space, decked with red, white and blue ribbons and a portrait of the Queen, the dedication service kicked off with a proud rendition of our national anthem, led by Russell Turner.

Rose Garden co-ordinator Diane Grant conducted the Welcome to the ceremony and Rev Richard Pennington, Anglican

priest of the Parish of Central Goulburn led the service in memory of Her Majesty, stating that this commemorative project garden was appropriate for a monarch who was devoted, respected, loved, admired and appreciated by so many people in our community, our nation and across the world and who loved gardens. In 1952 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth granted her royal Patronage to the Mothers' Union. Representing the Strathbogie Shire Council was Deputy Mayor, Cr Paul Murray, who had the honour of presenting

Certificates of Appreciation to most of the 16 donor groups or individuals and volunteers who supported the Project and made the garden possible over the past few months. 'Even though the Dedication did not take place close to the garden,' said coordinator Diane Grant, 'the sentiment and patriotism for the project and support for this community project was felt by all who came along to show their respect and honour for, and share fond memories of Her Majesty's long reign.'



Looking Down the Valley

By Rev'd Dr. Edwin Byford

Christmas can be an utterly frustrating time for those of us who want to proclaim that the centre of the celebration, even the reason for the celebration, is the birth of the Saviour of the world, our Lord, Jesus Christ. The greetings at this time of the year have been transformed from "Merry Christmas" to "Happy Holidays" and the commercial interests of retail stores and the sellers of food and beverages dominate the advertising and the news stories in the popular media. It can feel that they, whoever "they" are, have stolen our feast day. It is as if we are fighting a rear-guard action. We put up signs outside our churches saying something like "Christ is the reason for the season" and hope that they will have an impact and cut through the commercialism of the culture. It used to be that we saw a lot of people in church at Christmas (and Easter) who came and worshipped only a couple of times each year, but now our congregations at these times are those we see all year round.

But is all lost? The transformation of Christmas during the twentieth century has had to find a reason for all the commercial activity that has now become central. If we can put aside our dislike of the commercialism and look at what is emerging as the secular foundations for the eating and drinking and exchanging of presents we may be surprised. A quarter of a century ago it was said to me by a rather perceptive news commentator and broadcaster, Mike Hayes, that "they" had to get Christ out of Christmas to transform it into a commercial festival. What we now see that is that "they" have had to find a reason for the festival or the commercial activity collapses. It is very interesting to think about what it is that is said about why we do what we do at Christmas.

Why do we buy presents to exchange on Christmas Day? Why do we invest in rich and special food and drink at this time. We will even see dozens of suggestions about how to consume all the leftovers from Christmas Day. Why be excessive about almost everything that we do over the period from Christmas to New Year? In Australia this is almost doubly so. Christmas is in the Summer and is the traditional time for holidays. We go to the beach or the mountains and we gather together. It is an important time for family reunions. The theme of being a family and especially of being a family together is pervasive. Many retail outlets tell us that

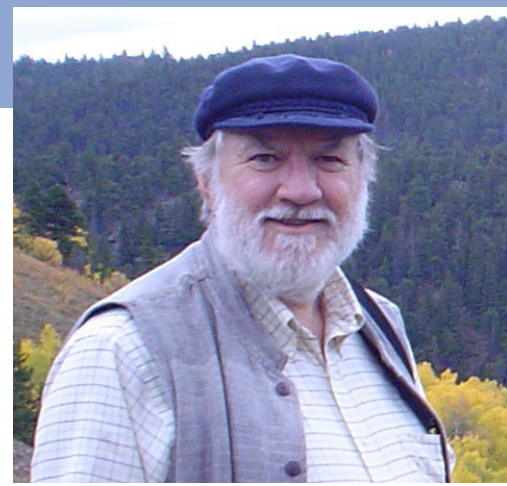
they have everything that you will need for buying presents from the newest of babies to the great-grandparents. In most communities there will be a community Christmas dinner for those who are alone and have no family with whom to gather. Christmas is a time for family and for connection. Often we will hear that the true meaning of Christmas is "Family".

The modern Christmas is a development of western (and mainly Protestant) Christian culture. It's story is fascinating, but not for the moment, as I want us to think about what is rather than how it came to be.

In our society the organisations with the greatest resources for finding out what people think, what they want and what they think that they need are the advertising agencies. Advertisements tell us a great deal about who we think that we are, what we fear, what we hope for and what we think is important. It may well be the case that the advertisements we find most irritating are those that reveal the most about us. Advertisements that purport to tell us "the real meaning of the season" are constructed to tap into what the research tells the agency about the fears, desires and hopes of the targeted audience. The product being advertised is presented as the solution that will overcome the fear or fulfil the hope or need that is perceived.

It seems to me that one of the main themes that the advertising reveals is the desire for connection and reconnection. The exchange of presents is presented as a mechanism for establishing, re-establishing or maintaining connection within families and with friends and colleagues. It is the exchange that is important. One demonstrates one's commitment to the connection by the quality of the goods or services exchanged. The connection and reconnection is established and maintained by these mechanisms of exchange and sharing. In the secular culture the exchange has become central.

Some years ago I told the story of how it came to be that we celebrate Christmas on 25th December. In the decade after the Council of Nicaea the Bishop of Rome chose this very important festival of pagan Rome and transformed it from a festival of the Winter solstice to the festival of the Incarnation of the Word of God. It was not to be a celebration of the rebirth of the sun but the celebration of the birth of the one who is responsible for the creation of



everything.

What happened in Rome seventeen centuries ago has a great lesson for us. A pagan festival was transformed and became supremely important as the Gospel spread into Northern Europe where the Winter solstice was much darker and bleaker. We have seen how modern secular society has converted the free gift of God as the centre of the celebration into a series of exchanges to establish or cement relationships. Exchange is a double-edged sword for it can destroy relationships as well as build them. At Christmas we proclaim the free gift of God in the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour. A gift is not an exchange. It is undeserved, unexpected and literally free, gratis and for nothing. It is the gift of God that connects and reconnects.

The advertising agencies have done us a great service. They have revealed a desperate need in our society for connection and reconnection. The ultimate connector is God. In the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem of Judea, God has revealed that we are all his children, brothers and sisters together, joint heirs of the Kingdom. Our connection is in Christ, as Saint Paul expressed it to the Galatians, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." We need no series of exchanges to establish or maintain connection. The connection is established by God. In Christ, the gift can be restored to its place as a free expression of love.

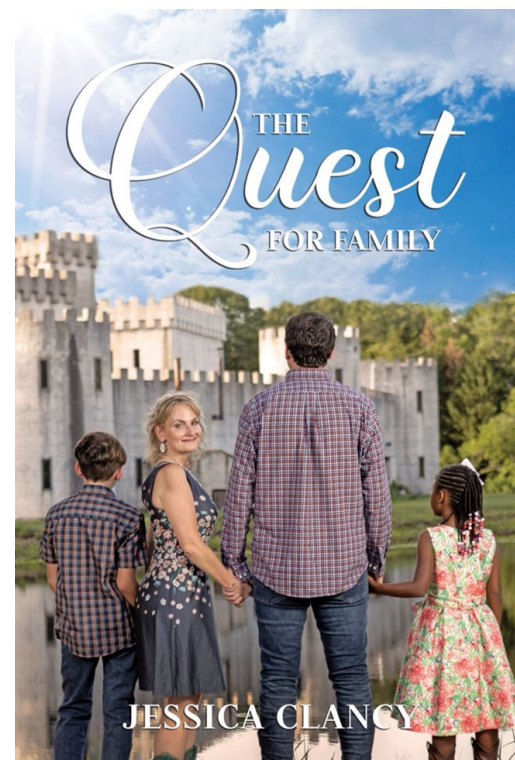
We have real good news to proclaim at Christmas. The deep needs for connection in our sort of society find their solution in the message of the free gift of God in Christ. It is our task, as Christians, to bring it to expression.

New book explores faith response to childhood trauma

With an astounding 39.6% of Australians aged 16-65+ affected by domestic violence, 32% having experienced physical abuse, and 30.9% impacted by emotional abuse, it's no wonder there's been an explosion of mental health disorders across the country. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study revealed that child maltreatment resulted in significantly increased levels of major depressive disorder, generalised anxiety, alcohol use, and post-traumatic stress. In her recent book, 'The Quest for Family', Jessica Clancy outlines her life experiences, and how she has been able to move beyond the pain and suffering of childhood mistreatment to a fulfilled life of love and happiness and the creation of a new family unit.

The book explores her struggles from childhood to adulthood with her life severely

impacted by the actions of her negligent mother who remarried several times and moved her around the US where she was exposed to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. "Our lives can often feel like shattered glass," says Jessica, "and once it breaks, it is impossible to put back together on our own. We try to pick up the pieces, but just hurt ourselves more, often feeling hopeless and helpless. I believe our past does not define us. It is only part of the journey if we allow it to stretch and grow us. I am not defined by the things that happened to me. I am defined as a child of God." From her own life experience, Jessica wishes to encourage others that have been affected by childhood abuse to know that they can move beyond the trauma to live the life God intended for them. If you or someone you know has suffered from abuse, this book can help heal past hurts and help you recover and move on to live a healthier, happier life. And for those who work in ministry in any of these areas, this story will help you reach others in a more impactful way. 'The Quest For Family' is available from <https://www.jessicacancyperseveres.com/>



and retails for \$30 in paperback or \$13 on Kindle.

Climate action: What can we do?

By Anne Baumgarten

One of the joys throughout this series has been the opportunity to listen to people in our Diocese express their wide-ranging views on big picture issues such as climate change. Unsurprisingly, many in our Diocese do not feel energised or compelled to commit to climate action, while others have joined action groups or initiated constructive conversations. What a blessing that we have genuine love for each other that embraces us all, way beyond our politics and differing opinions!

Throughout the millennia, humans have been able to adapt to catastrophic events and it is true there are signs of hope with climate change. However, we cannot sugar coat the evidence, the hard truths about our impact on God's creation.

So how do we proceed while embracing the God given gifts of all in our diverse Christian community, even the adamant naysayers? This article provides a few ongoing suggestions to enable each of us, whatever our opinions, to unite and

respond usefully to climate change (and other divisive issues):

Prayer: Guard against the temptation to jump straight into action. Remember God's timing is always perfect. An open minded, open hearted, servant attitude is needed. Prayer and contemplation help us to build an approach where we can step back from all the noise, listen to the Spirit within and patiently wait for the 'Aha' moment.

Knowledge and understanding: Rather than believe everything in your favourite media outlet, discern between the real and false prophets. Real prophets are not always churchy or even Christian, but their truth will resonate with your prayerful heart and mind.

People: Involve everyone possible from the beginning; lovingly respect each person's gifts. Jesus demonstrated how to love inclusively and without hierarchy. He knew how to 'bring people with him'. Find genuine common ground and connections but take time to think through opposing comments. Truth can be found in surprising places.

Leave your ego at the door: The humblest person in attendance at your first meeting, may have the necessary nugget of truth. The benefits of each person

having a sense of contribution from the beginning is essential for the motivating power of shared ownership.

Dialogue: Respectful dialogue is key. It requires nonjudgmental, attentive listening. Discern the times to listen and the times to thoughtfully speak up. We've heard many times that Anglicans often find it safer to keep their opinions on certain matters to themselves. But all must feel safe to respectfully voice their perspectives in this kind of conversation. When discussing these big picture issues, we need to be 'hard on the issue, soft on the people' so we can be open to the Spirit.

Conflict: Strong groups and individuals are inevitably tested by conflict. The key to this is how the conflict is managed. Smart people deal with the conflict, not avoid, or squash it. They have the wisdom to use conflict to foster strength and collaboration. This is not the time for either silence or dominance.

Aha moment: At some stage in the dialogue, a crystallising moment happens when people know what must be done. From this unified position, they can now mobilise, plan together and be active. Have courage and faith; together we can do this.