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VISION



Christmas 2010 Edition
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FROM THE MINISTER'S DESK

Don't tell me -- show me!

A few years back, on December 25th, Australia was offered "The Nanny Christmas Special". Not to be missed, said the TV guide. The promo explained why. "Fran (the leading character) travels to the North Pole.

She flirts with Santa, sings with elves, battles an evil princess and" – wait for it – "teaches everyone the true meaning of Christmas".

Forgive me, Channel 10, but I gave it a miss. So that year I was left pondering the mystery of Christ's birth unenlightened by Fran's polar pilgrimage, her flirtations with Santa, her elfin singing and her brawl with an ethically challenged royal.

No wonder one of my friends says the Church's seasonal prayer should be "Forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmas against us".

Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with having fun. The problem for the Church is, all this tinsel trivality distorts beyond recognition what the celebration supposedly is all about. Grace gets swamped by schmaltz. Joy is reduced to partying. Christmas becomes a cliché.

Contrast the heart-stopping, history-bending claim of the Christian faith: that the impenetrable silence that surrounds us, the vast mystery that embraces us, is love beyond anything mortals could create or imagine, love we have glimpsed in the child of Bethlehem, love that goes to a cross and beyond for the likes of you and me.

If only we had the words to say it. So many Australians run for cover from religion and all its works. Yet they continue to yearn for light in the darkness, love in the loneliness, grace in the emptiness, meaning in the madness. Our churches, meanwhile, remain the improbable trustees of a treasure trove of faith and wisdom, of meaning and sanctity, of light and love.

But then, maybe it's not words that our compatriots need right now. "Don't tell me – show me!" warbled a song on the hit parades some years ago. Good advice for Christians. The Word, after all, became flesh, not words. Incarnation is the name of the game.

The true meaning of Christmas? It's unlikely to be found in your average TV special. But you may glimpse it as congregations like ours focus on the treasure, not the tinsel; the gift, not the wrapping paper.

May the angels sing this year – for you, for all of us, and for our waiting, yearning city.

David Gill



Please note that selected sermons can now be found at www.ssms.org.au

PRAYER POEM

Lord, we'd have done it differently,
Your coming to earth.
Press Releases.
Banner headlines.
Discussion on telly.
All the hype of the supermarket.
Wed really have sold it, Lord.
Your coming.

Yet you chose to come as a baby.
Helpless, dependent.
To a carpenter and his wife.
No better than she should be,
I expect they said.
Away from home,
On the road.
Not the sort of people we'd notice,
Except to joke about their accent.

And yet your arrival
Moved the world,
Shook it. Changed it.
Shone light in dark places.
Brought hope and love.
Especially love, Lord.
Not the pale reflection we show,
But love as a flame.
Burning into our lives,
Bright, clean, pure.
And burning itself out
On a cross.

And yet, in the burning out,
Lighting new flames.
Flames of faith and hope.
Spreading warmth across the world.
Love, rich in a poor stable.
Love, discounted on a cross.
Glorious in resurrection.
Tangible in human lives
Made beautiful, today.
Lord, help me reach out
To touch it.

**By Eddie Askew, From 'Many Voices One Voice'
Available at Leprosy Mission, Australia**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December

- 10th – Friday Music
Erika Simons (voice)
Alicia Crossley (recorder)
- 17th – Friday Music
Raisa Dobrinsky (piano)
Gregory Elmaloglou (cello)
- 19th – Fourth Sunday in Advent
10 am – Nine Lessons & Carols
- 24th – Christmas Eve
11pm – note the change in **time**
Lessons and Carols
- 25th – Christmas Day – 10am
- 26th – St Stephen's Day
Preacher: The Rev. Neil Ericsson

January

- 16th – Second Sunday after Epiphany
With the Combined Churches
"Messiah" Choir
- 26th – Australia Day Celebrations

EDITORIAL

The Christmas revelation at Bethlehem links Peace on Earth with Good Will to **all** people, and both are preceded by 'Glory to God'. Perhaps it has been fulfilled, however obscurely and superficially, in that Christmas is the only religious festival which unites people of all religious faiths. It is indeed interesting to see non-Christians sending each other cards and gifts! And why not? No religion objects to Joy, Peace, Goodwill or, most importantly, to Love.

May you, our readers and all your non-Christian family, friends and acquaintances be blessed by **The Gift** of Christmas.



VIEW FROM THE ORGAN BENCH – MARK QUARMBY (DIRECTOR OF MUSIC)

This is now the busiest time of the year for the St Stephen's Choir and we are so appreciative of our new choristers who have joined us over the past few weeks, meaning that we can attempt greater music - music which should be sung every Sunday at a church with a Macquarie St address... We are still happy to welcome new singers, particularly men and altos.

With Christmas fast approaching, the choir is about to learn several new carols, several of these having been performed at King's College in their famous televised carol services. We will be welcoming back the brass quintet that has made such a difference to our previous Christmas and Easter services plus the unforgettable Hymn Fest this year. We will also be welcoming back the young harpist, Jo Bae, who played for us last Christmas.

The services will be a little different this year. Our main "Nine Lessons and Carols" will be held on Sunday morning 19th December at 10am. A shortened version of this will be held at 11pm on Christmas Eve (note the earlier starting time than in previous years). This means we should be finished shortly after midnight so we can all return for 10am on Christmas Day.

Make sure you invite all your friends so that we can fill St Stephen's for all our Christmas services and more importantly, remember to come to our Christmas services yourself! It is no fun putting in so many hours of work if the congregation stays at home! Sometimes our choir is a third of the congregation and more people attend the Friday Music recitals than church on Sunday mornings!

Speaking of Friday Music, this will go into recess on Dec 17th and resume at the beginning of February. 2011 has already been entirely booked up and I have a small waiting list of performers ready to play, should someone drop out. On Australia Day we will have 6 recitals throughout the day so do come along and support our fine young musicians. All the details, including all the Sunday service music, can be found on the church's web site, which I am sure you would all know and consult regularly.

The choir will go into recess after the Christmas service and return on Sunday 23rd January.

'PRACTICE BEING CHRIST-LIKE RATHER THAN BEING CHRISTIAN'.

– Wayne Dyer - Submitted by Eve Wurth

MULTIFAITH REFLECTIONS ON THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

Hinduism - 'Take refuge in Him with all thy heart; through His grace thou shall attain supreme peace and eternal life.' - Bhagavad Gita
Submitted by Mataji

Judaism - The blessing of Aaron, the High Priest, and brother of our teacher Moses, which originates in about 1,400BCE: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His face upon you and give you SHALOM – Peace" (Numbers 6:24-26)
Submitted by Josie Lacey

Buddhism – "If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows one as one's shadow that does not leave one." - Lord Buddha

Islam - The Prophet said: "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself."
- Sahih Al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith No 13
Submitted by Jamila Hussein

Bahai - Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness.
- Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, Baha'I Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, p. 93
Submitted by Natalie Mobini-Kesheh

"Love is above religions: the nation of love has a different religion; they worship God directly without confusion."
- From Rumi. the Sufi poet

INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES IN CALIFORNIA

California is one of the most multicultural States in the USA. People have come from many countries as well as other American States so that there is a plethora of ethnic restaurants, festivals, TV programmes etc. in and around Los Angeles. In Pomona/Claremont, however, where I live in a Retirement Community, the differences are more economic and religious.

There are numerous Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches, one Jewish Temple and one Mosque. So, it was an interesting event when it was Temple Beth Israel who first presented the idea of an Interfaith Walk for peace and understanding between the three religions in our area.



My next door neighbour is younger than I am but we both were not really able to walk the distance that had been proposed. The walk started at Temple Beth Israel where a talk would be given concerning the Jewish faith, next to the Lutheran Church, chosen as but one of the many Christian denominations who had volunteered their premises to present their beliefs. Walking many blocks to the Muslim School of Education was proposed for the third presentation. Finally, walking four more blocks to the Islamic Mosque, would finalise the event with a Middle Eastern meal.

In Sydney I have enjoyed many such meals but to the people of these two towns this was to be a complete new experience.

Being that my neighbour and I were not able to walk the distance that had been proposed, I suggested that we drive to the Islamic School and then walk the 4 blocks to the Mosque. All well and good, but following the directions of the map and driving to the address given for the School we found ourselves actually at the Mosque where great preparations were going on to welcome the walkers. We were the first to arrive!

Five women immediately took us in their arms and insisted we sit and eat the food their husbands had prepared! I felt rather overwhelmed as I knew we were too early and we had not done our duty by walking - even the 4 blocks! The women could not care less. They plied us with food and asked us so many questions about ourselves that it was hard to find out about them!



The women were from Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and France. All dressed in such beautifully embroidered Middle Eastern clothes. They were so proud to show us their babies and little children - also in bright new and embroidered outfits. Over their jeans, the young teens wore the fluffy short skirts so popular at present. All were immigrants like I was and we talked for over one hour and a half about our experiences coming to a new country, and for them, the discrimination that they had experienced. Apparently, that was why they had built the Islamic School. They said that they wanted to send their children to the public schools but were afraid for their safety.

At eight o'clock I said that we had to leave as the walkers were just beginning to straggle in, looking very exhausted. After all, most Californians are not used to walking such a distance!

One of the women gave us her telephone number and I invited them back to have lunch with us at the "Gardens" one day. However, the number was not correct and I did not have a reply from my written invitation. I felt saddened by their response but realized that they were new immigrants and their circumstances may not be accepting for them to visit outside their geographical and religious area. That was also what we were told by the administrators of the Mosque when we enquired. Maybe next year we will meet up again and be able to see each other and become friends.

ANOTHER EVENT THAT THE INTERFAITH COUNCIL HOLDS EACH YEAR. .

Thanksgiving is a particular American celebration for it brings the sobering memory of the earliest settlers. In the 17th century, Pilgrims who had left Britain and who were living on the east coast were starving as they faced their first harsh American winter. The Indian Tribes living in that area took pity on them and together they shared their sweet potatoes, berries, yams, and wild turkeys - now so much a part of the contemporary Thanksgiving meal. Declared by an Act of Congress the celebration of commemoration is always held on the fourth Thursday of November. It is a time when people get together to share their food with family and friends. Unfortunately, it has also become an orgy of eating and shopping!



However, the Interfaith Council, again proposed by Temple Beth Israel, planned that the religious communities worship together either on Thursday morning of Thanksgiving Day or the previous Wednesday evening. Last year, the service was held at Temple Beth Israel. This year we walked to Our Lady of Assumption, the nearest Roman Catholic church to where I lived! Here we held a service with all of the many Christians denominations and the three Abrahamic religions taking part. Psalms were sung and Scriptures read. The Hebrew and Islamic texts were read in Hebrew and Arabic by young teenagers while others translated for the congregation. Prayers were offered by different ministers and the sermon or teaching was given by a teacher from the Islamic School who was not an Imam. We sang joyfully to the one God of our three faiths and hugged each other at the 'passing of the peace' for that is what we all do when we greet each other in our individual places of worship!



Faith Jones

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO YOU?

Responses from a few members:

Margaret Ayling

Carols. We grew up with always singing carols with the family as we went caroling. This means that the strength of family gatherings are at the heart of Christmas for me.

Ritchie Blunt

December 25th is my grandmother's birthday. Time to tend her grave at Rookwood. She, the greatest grandma, was the great encourager – she urged one of her daughters to become one of Australia's first female editors and one of her sons-in-law in parliament for Medical Benefits to be introduced. She would have encouraged one of her grandsons to press on with his proposal to seek for St Stephen's, a new minister sympathetic to the AA, as a means to increasing outreach, and numbers in the church on Sundays. Bless Christmas and bless her memory.

Judith Barton

When I think about Christmas, I remember first of all the coming of Jesus at Bethlehem which brought such immense joy to the world. Christmas to me means LOVE in ACTION". When you love someone you want to give to that person, just as God wants to give to me. I am thankful for the gift of eternal life. I am truly thankful to the Giver of families and loved ones and offers us a new future and new hope. At Christmas I reflect on those who are homeless, disadvantaged and who are in despair. Finally, Christmas time reminds me that the God of Grace is there to care for us, and to reveal what His purpose was when He sent His son to us as a helpless infant.

Malcolm Catt

As a boy, I remember the anticipation of Christmas Eve and the excitement of Christmas Day amidst the carols sung about the baby Jesus. Over the years, sharing the Christmas table with strangers in our country and being a stranger sharing a family Christmas table in another country were memorable. Now the religious significance at special services has become greater. The excitement of Childhood is being re-lived through the grandchildren.

Janice Dawson

Christmas is a period when I focus on family and friends, and I am grateful for the joy they bring to my life. Christmas Day service is a significant moment to reflect again on the spiritual significance of this day before the arrival of my close family. Sometimes amidst the preparations and activities of the festive season, I do not always find the time to think of those in our midst without family and friends.

David Mutton

As most of us in Australia engage in an orgy of gift-giving over the Christmas Period, it makes me wonder what people really want. I believe that the true gifts of Christmas can be found in the enduring qualities of family and friends – not in the temporary surfeit-to-requirements bibs and bobs that find themselves on EBay in the New Year.

Helen Glixman

Christmas represents many things to me: the festive atmosphere, the special reunion with the family, the pleasure of sharing and giving, the spiritual joy ... as well as carols and plum pudding!

Anthony Pasquill

Hmmm... In England: maintaining my body temperature above 5 degrees! In Australia: avoiding the skin-burning sunshine at all costs! Christmas is also the time of year when my inbox becomes full of emails entitled "You've won our Christmas Giveaway!" Sadly, I never have!



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY AND 30TH BATTALION

On Sunday 14 November 2010 we celebrated Remembrance Day. The Congregation was very large.



Our choir was in excellent voice led by Anthony Pasquill, our Choirmaster. Mark Quarmby, our Director of Music and David Tagg, Organ Scholar, played the Organ magnificently. An inspiring sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr David Gill.

Some people (who are not Scots) say that the highland pipes do not play music, but “make a noise”. Well, on Sunday we “made a joyful noise unto the Lord” (see Psalm 66 verse 1).

We celebrated with the 2/30th Battalion AIF Association, the 30th Battalion (1939-45) AIF Association, 30th Infantry Battalion NSW Scottish Regiment (1948-60), A Company (Scottish) Royal NSW Regiment (1960 -).

This year’s Parade was the last for the NSW Scottish Regiment Pipes and Drums, and marked their continuous service to the Australian Army and community in general through 125 years.

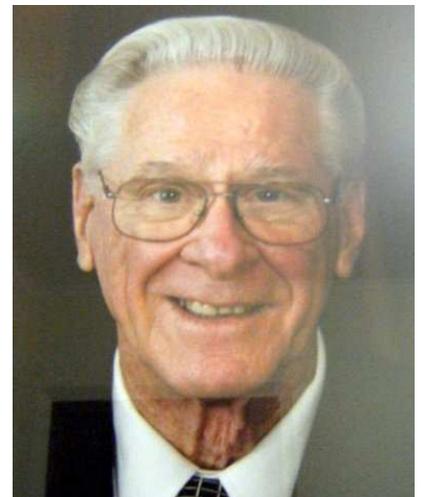
George Stewart

VALE SCOTT MCPHEAT

It is with regret that we heard of the death in Melbourne of the Rev. Dr Scott McPheat (81), highly regarded Minister of St Stephen’s from April 1988 to May 1999.

Scott McPheat was a man of immense capacity and highly organized self-management who made a powerful impression on all who worshipped here.

Prior to his appointment to St Stephen’s, Scott had a distinguished record as an AIM Patrol Padre, a Parish Minister and Conference Leader in both Australia and New Zealand. He also taught religious education in schools and taught at Bible College.



Among his scholarly sermons was one entitled “Eight words can change your life”, drawing on a text from St Paul, but echoing the words of Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius: “Our life is what our thoughts make it.” Shaped by our Bible and by prayer, our stream of consciousness, perceptions and attitudes determine our actions and the kind of person coping with life’s challenges, and encountered by others. He had an array of publications on a variety of subjects many of which are still valued by their owners.

November was ‘Tribute to McPheat’ month, ending on Tuesday, 30th, with a 5pm drink-and-biscuit celebration of his life in the vestibule of the church.

Alex Norquay



2010 Donation to the Conservation Appeal?
Cartoon by Marion Welch

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Christmas time is here, by golly,
Disapproval would be folly;
Deck the halls with hunks of holly,
Fill the cup and don't say 'when'.

Kill the turkeys, ducks and chickens,
Mix the punch, drag out the Dickens;
Even though the prospect sickens,
Brother, here we go again!

On Christmas day you can't get sore;
Your fellow-men you must adore;
There's time to rob him all the more
The other three hundred and sixty
four!

Relations, sparing no expense'll
Send some useless old utensil
Or a matching pen and pencil –
(‘Just the thing I need – how nice!’)

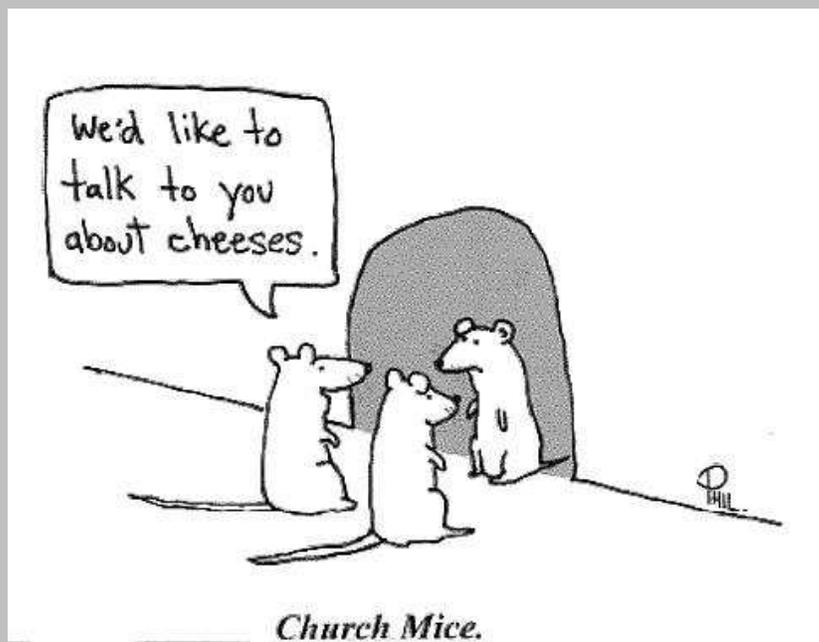
It doesn't matter how sincere it's
Nor how heart-felt is the spirit,
Sentiment will not endear it;
What's important is the price!

Heart, the 'Herald', 'Tribune' sings
Advertising wondrous things.

God rest ye merry merchants
May you make the Yuletide pay.

'Angels' we have heard on high,
Tell us to go out and buy.

From Tom Lehrer's album



Submitted by Florence Bell

UPDATE ON NATIONAL TRUST APPEAL FOR ST STEPHEN'S

The Conservation Appeal is moving ahead slowly but positively. Every week there are donations arriving at the Church and this will mount up in time. Some of these have been for \$1,000 or more.

Thank you to all who have donated to this appeal which will fund the work needed to restore the Church building to its former state.

The urgent goal is to raise \$75,000 before the end of December 2010. This would make us eligible to apply for a NSW Heritage Grant. If we are successful we can secure a dollar for dollar grant which would bring the total to \$150,000. This would enable us to complete the disability access from Phillip Street, and meet the requirements for fire egress and exit and provide a disabled toilet. We would then comply with health and safety regulations.

Stone restoration of the Macquarie Street façade and work to repair water penetration from the roof are not yet completed.

Further tax deductive donations to The National Trust of Australia (NSW) St Stephen's Uniting Church Macquarie Street Sydney Conservation Appeal will enable us to complete repairs to the stonework on the north and south facades and other necessary repairs and upgrading of the building.

Bernice Stewart

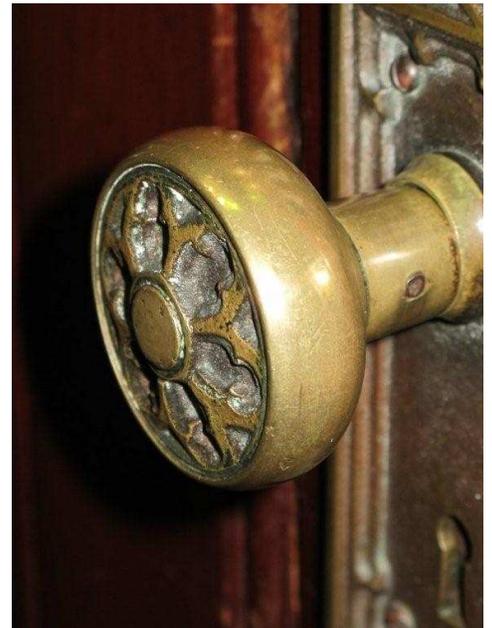
SOMETHING WE TAKE FOR GRANTED

In my work refurbishing the door handles in the Church, these handles have amazed me - their design and the fabrication of the components.

The handles themselves are actually two separate pieces pressed together (probably a custom design handle pressed onto a standard spigot) with the handles carrying the same design as the backing plate and, in turn, reflecting the design of the Church windows. One handle is pinned to a central square section shaft which passes through the door. The square shaft activates the door latch when the handle is turned. The other handle is attached to the shaft via a threaded section and fixed via two "grub" screws. If this all seems a bit complicated to comprehend, let me add that all these components have been hand made. Consequently I have been able to disassemble the components and replace the worn parts - again hand made, but this time by me, however these parts are now metric rather than the original imperial.

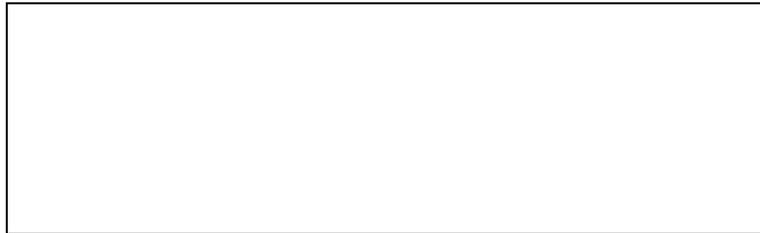
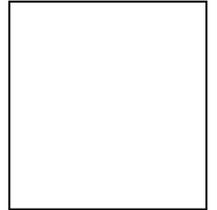
There are no spares, so if you see a door handle missing, you will know it is out for refurbishing. But, next time you open a door, take a moment to look at the door handle we take for granted - they are not only a piece of technology from the past, but, they are also beautiful and are an essential piece of the Church.

Geoff Allan





If not claimed please return to:
St Stephen's Uniting Church
197 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000



The response from members for Who's Who at St Stephen's has been disappointing, with less than half the membership replying.

Such a response cannot justify the publishing of a directory. This is your last chance to include your name and details as requested:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Mobile _____

Fax _____

Email _____