THE UNITING CHURCH in Australia

ORMOND

God's creation takes many forms
as does the expression of our faith

THE PATHFINDER

OCTOBER 2026

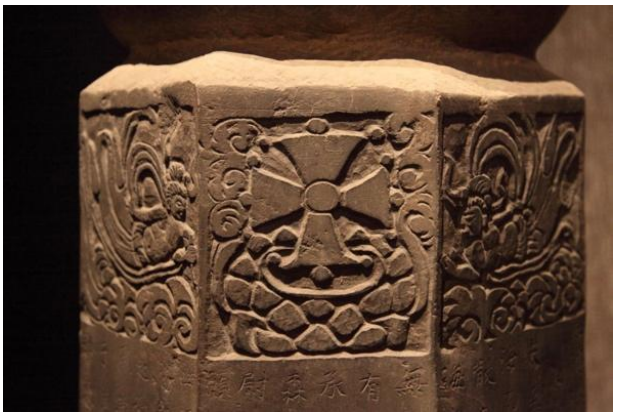
MINISTER'S LETTER

This week I finished reading a precious book. Back in May I paid U$200 and got it delivered to me at Yale, one day before my returning home from the US. The book in entitled *Defining Christ: the Church of the East and Nascent Islam*. It traces the 500-year debate about the nature and works of Christ, his humanity and divinity, and God's incarnation and salvation in and through Christ.

Unlike the Protestant Churches derived from the Greek-Latin speaking tradition in the Roman Empire, the Church of the East was the Syriac speaking tradition in the Persian Empire. During the Arab Conquest (622-642), the Church survived in the extremely difficult circumstances. It lost ancient cities, like Nineveh that I preached about two weeks ago in the story of Prophet Jonah. Christians were either heavy taxed or converted to Islam. The Church was internally divided and manipulated by external powers. But the various Synods made three key decisions that changed the history: a) returning to the spiritual roots during their decline, b) calling for Christian unity in the hostile world, c) starting the mission to the East.

These lessons from my research still speak to us today.

This week, Ormond Uniting Church will engage in a Discernment Day. It is to rediscover our purpose, reclaim our values, and revision our future.



Being faithful to God is at the heart of Christian faith, particularly in the declining environment. The Uniting Church's call for unity is still our directive for building a multicultural identity. The decision to mission is counter intuitive when human and financial resources are decreasing, but it will reshape a future by the positives, and hope.

1. **The Journey to the East**

Christianity was first introduced to China in the year 635 in the middle of Arab Conquest (622-642). It is historical knowledge that the Jesuits of the Catholic Church first arrived in China in the 16th century, followed by the Protestant denominations in the late 18th century.

Continued on page 3

POSTPONEMENT OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Please note that a decision has been made to postpone this meeting that was to be held on 18th October 2026.

This has become necessary so that Church Council can have time to update the Church Membership Roll before the Congregational Meeting is held.

The Congregation will be informed of the new date which is likely to be early December.

Please note that all nominations for Church Council received so far will still apply.

Brenda Grootendorst
Congregational Secretary

MEETING

POSTPONED

TRIVIA NIGHT – Yes, it's just a week away!

Saturday 10th October, 6.30 for 7.00 p.m. start

Have you booked your seat yet? Put on your thinking cap?

This is guaranteed to be a fun evening for trivia "nerds" and "novices". But you need to book now. Invite friends/family and make up a table of 8 or come along a join a table. As well as trivia questions there'll be games, a raffle, lots of prizes and surprises.

This is an important fundraiser for our church's community wide services so please support it as you are able.

Admission: $25 Concession: $20

BYO Nibbles and cold drinks (supper and tea/coffee provided)

Bookings Essential: Contact Cate (office) 0411 958 127
by 12 noon Tuesday 6th October or speak with Lisa or Maria on Sunday 4th.

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The story that I am going to tell is that the Church of the East took the Gospel to China 900 years earlier than the Jesuits and 1100 years earlier than the Protestants.

The ancient Syriac speaking Church is one of the oldest churches in the world, tracing their lineage to the mother of Jesus, Mary. After the fall of the east Roman Empire, the Church made a strategic decision to journey to the East. The missionaries came to China along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty (C6-C10). year 635, Bishop Abraham (*Alopen*) arrived in the Chinese capital, and he was warmly received by the Premier FANG Xuanling at the city's Western Gate.

Later the Emperor issued a decree to allow the Gospel to be taught in the Confucian society, alongside the state religions, Buddhism and Daoism. The decree said: "When the Dao and the Sage become one, civilisations will flourish under the Heavens". By the time when the famous monument was erected in 781, the inscription indicated: "Over one hundred churches had been established throughout ten provinces".

In 2017, when the Uniting Church delegation visited Xian, the Moderator Rev Wang invited our President Stuart McMillian to a dinner at the restaurant overlooking the Western Gate. He mentioned the Journey to the East by the Syriac monks over 1300 years ago. The Moderator added, although the Church in China had many disruptions in history, including the Cultural Revolution in his lived memory, Christ had never left the people. Next day, I was translating the President's sermon on "the Spirit of God". As I looked into the audience, they were numbered in thousands – overflowing from two church buildings into the street. This is a story about the rising of the fallen people, in the likeness of Christ's death and resurrection.

2. The Ancient Christmas Story

I have been studying this history since 2008. Last year I finished my work on the text *Listen to the Messiah* written in the 7th century. The text contains the first Christmas story in Chinese, prior to any Bible translations.

The story has a prologue; it introduces the origin of the Christmas story. The birth of Christ begins first within the life of the Trinity as the Father expressed the compassion to the world in suffering. Then the Christmas story has three parts.

The first part is about the Father sending the Spirit into the mission. The text says:

> *The Father of Heaven sends the Holy Spirit to the Virgin, named Mary. The Spirit enters into her womb, just as the Father has commanded. Immediately Mary is pregnant. … This mystery is also an invitation for all people to turn their heats to the purity of faith and return to God's mercy and kindness. When Mary gives birth to a boy, he is named Jesus.*

The second part is also about the Father sending the Spirit into the mission. The text continues:

> *The Father establishes the direction for the Spirit. ... Likewise, the Father in Heaven has issued the decree, encompassing the heavens and the earth; Jesus must be born [for the whole world].*

The third part again is about the Father sending the Spirit into the mission. But this section is written in an astronomical language.

> *The birthplace of the Messiah is evident for the whole world to witness; his rising Constellation has its correspondence in heaven as well as on earth… Succeeding the past and renewing the future, the Messiah [embodies God's salvation] and is born in the [earthly] Palace of Forestry. The Holy City of Jerusalem shall receive the newborn Messiah.*

3. The interpretation

When I first read the text, I was overwhelmed with joy. As a theologian I have never seen a Trinitarian explanation of the Christmas story. I was overwhelmed because it has explained a theological wisdom in such a concise and precise way.

The original text is likely written by a second-generation Syriac monk who lived in China. It contains many language mistakes, and it is rather difficult to translate. But the purpose is clear – to make the Gospel known to the Chinese people. The classic Chinese is written without tense, like poetry, so I have translated it into the present tense – because the story is eternal.

The main feature of this Christmas story is that the Holy Spirit has a clear agency. In fact, the birth narrative is the direct result of " divine dance" – moving out of the relationship between the Father and the Spirit – moving towards the Son. The purpose of this collaboration is for the salvation of the world.

Another feature is that "the Dao became flesh and appeared in human likeness". Like this ancient painting, *The Christ with four Crosses,* incarnation is about God taking on the fullness of human nature. When God has become a human person, so Christ's humanity becomes the pathway for our salvation.

For modern people, giving and receiving Christmas gifts are our ways to celebrate this Good News. For the ancient Christians, the true gift is about the inner life of the Three-in-One God who has personified on earth. This outward movement is the Economy of God, or the Providence of God.

The third feature of this story is about the cosmic celebration. The Spirit of God is lighting up the Creation, and the Good News is displayed in heaven as well as on earth. In faith, Christians begin to sense a deep connection across time and space. For us humans, the Christmas story and the Genesis story are two different events. But for God, the birth of Christ and the birth of the universe are two acts of the same God.

4. Our story in this Story

How does this ancient story speak to us today? I believe there are three lessons.

1) We participate in God's mission.

The birth of Christ is God's gift to us. The gift derives from God's mercy, and the gift arrives in a form of mission by the Spirit. Each year when we listen anew to the story; in faith, we are invited to enter into this story once more – being transformed from a listener to a believer.

Our mission is not to save the world. God does that. But we are called to participate in God's mission. It is in the sending of the Spirit into the world that we are gathered into the life of God. This is the paradox of Christian mission, like the Magi from the East, it was on their journey going out to find the new born

Christ, they found themselves in Christ. And we too can discover our purpose as we participate in the outward movement of the Spirit.

2) The Three-in-One is a relational God.

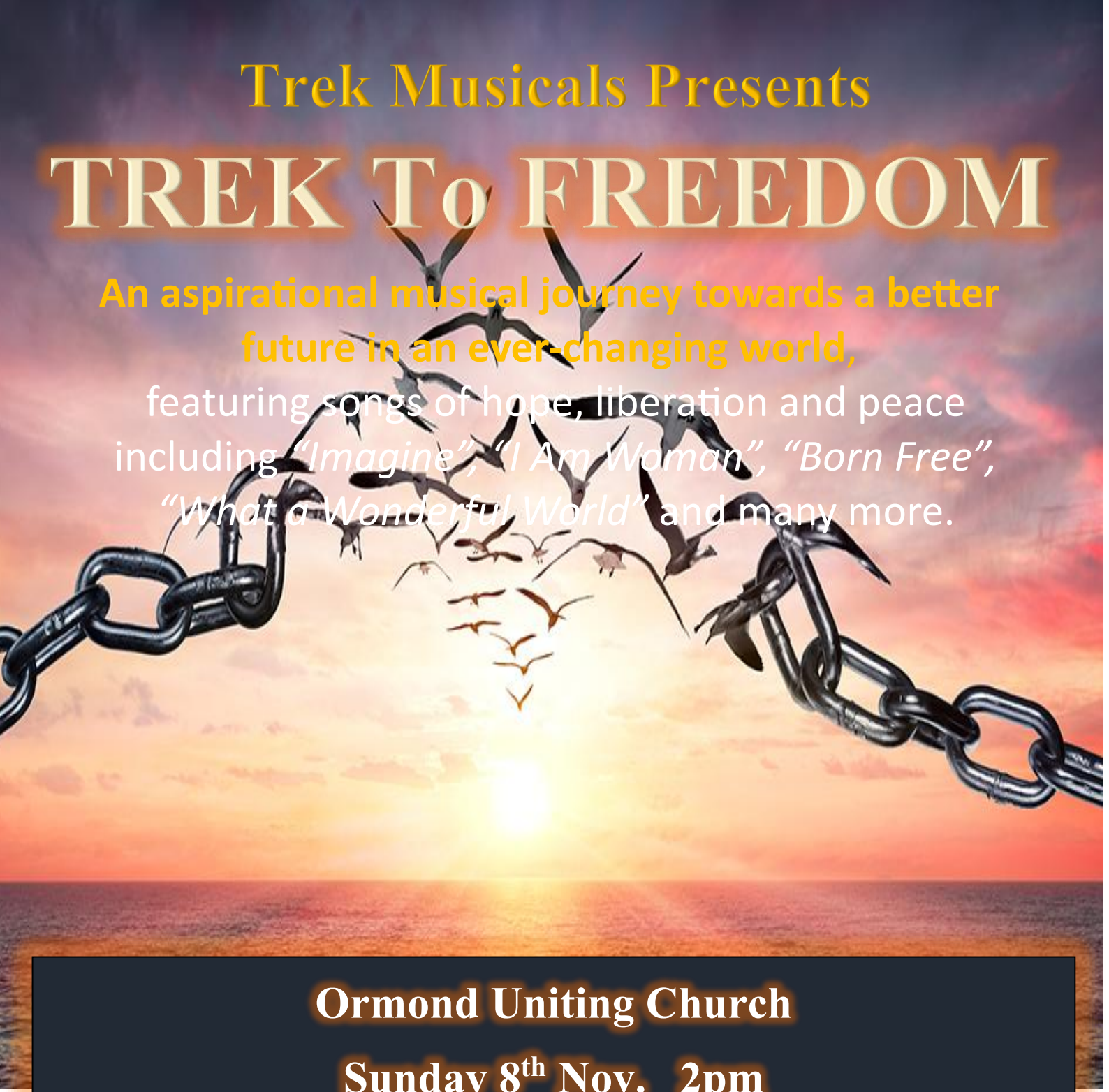
God is a divine community. God's mission emerges out of the divine collaboration – the Father sends the Spirit into Mary, the Spirit bears the witness to the Father in heaven, the Son personifies God's salvation on earth. Each Person of the Trinity is not independent but relational. Each is open to the Other in the life giving and receiving relationships.

I believe the future of Ormond Uniting Church is relational in nature, life-giving and life-receiving in the multicultural Australia. We are a community open to the wider Uniting Church, conducting mission in partnership with others. Each is called to meet this relational God who has taken on our human flesh and lived among us. And then we discover our mutual transformation.

3) There is a bigger story than the human story.

In this ancient story, God does not overwhelm us with power, but invites us to see the perpetual presentation of peace. In the Christ child, we too see our lives. Life at its infancy is pure and full of potency. Standing before the Christ Child, we too could move between our doubts about the virgin birth and our faith in God's limitless creativity. Like the Magi, we too could stop, stand still, and look into the impenetrable night sky, and then we follow the rising Constellation, and come to worship the Messiah and pay the holy family our homage.

The ancient text is about "The Dao Became Flesh, Appeared in Human Likeness". I believe, we are called to be "the Church Becomes Flesh, Appears in Human Likeness". Our mission is to be the Church, the Body of Christ, in and for the world.



Trek Musicals Presents

TREK To FREEDOM

An aspirational musical journey towards a better future in an ever-changing world,

featuring songs of hope, liberation and peace including *"Imagine"*, *"I Am Woman"*, *"Born Free"*, *"What a Wonderful World"* and many more.

Ormond Uniting Church

Sunday 8th Nov. 2pm

Tickets: Adults $25, Child/Con. $20 at the door

or

https://www.trybooking.com/DQGON

Fundraiser for

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

For more info or transport, speak with Dianne or Robyn who are organising

SEASON OF CREATION

As promised on last Sunday (27/9) I have shared below from the Season of Creation 2026 Theme and Symbol Presentation - section 7 “A Call to Action”

7. A CALL TO ACTION

“Our Father calls us to accept His love (1 John 4:19). Welcoming that love as daughters and sons, through a continual conversion of mind and heart, is our lifelong calling. If we choose to step into the true living water, we can contribute to a more just and life-giving world for the entire human family as well as for non-human creation.

Food security: Ezekiel’s prophecy speaks of trees that “bear fresh fruit every month” (Ezek 47:12). We are called to shape and influence our policies and practices so that all people have access to nourishing and safe food, so that the fruits of biodiversity are shared equitably. Churches can also promote greening projects which reflect Christian values on their own land, and/or equip their members with skills to grow some of their own food.

Water pollution: We are called both to refrain from and to denounce harmful pollution, while at the same time urging governments, local authorities, industry, and agriculture to act responsibly and protect water sources.

Water and sanitation: Many of our brothers and sisters still lack regular access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Therefore, we must act so that households, schools, healthcare facilities, and places of worship — including churches and parishes — have access to clean water and proper sanitation.

Environmental education: Parents, catechists, clergy, and faith communities are thus called to foster a holistic care for creation — human and non-human alike — drawing not only on technical knowledge, but also on relationships, ethics, and spiritual formation.

Drawing spiritual inspiration from Creation: Through contemplation of the natural world created by God (Job 7–12), we are invited to move from domination to humility, from exploitation to care, and from short-term profit to long-term

flourishing. This transformation is both spiritual and practical, requiring a rethinking of values, economic systems, and educational priorities.

Tree growing: Many churches now link tree planting to key moments of faith such as baptism, confirmation, and funerals. Let tree growing become an integral part of our spiritual lives. Trees absorb carbon pollution, prevent erosion, reduce flooding, provide food and medicine, and cool urban environments—they truly bring healing to the nations.

Caring for our oceans — our "Blue Lung" — which face rising threats from waste discharge, overfishing, pollution, and deep-sea mining. Life and biodiversity beneath the waves must not be treated as out of sight and out of mind. May educators help our communities see and value these marine worlds. May government leaders act with courage to protect marine biomes and livelihoods. And may we choose guardianship that keeps the Blue Lung breathing for generations.

Ecosystem and biodiversity restoration and protection: We are called to restore land in our churches, homes, and communities. There are many initiatives which we can engage with : a Decade of Climate justice has been declared by both the World Council of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches; there are online platforms such as Laudato si' Action Platform, Anglican Communion Forest and national programmes such as Green Church / Eglise Verte or Eco Church - A Rocha International.

Let us overcome our fear and step into the water of God's love - to be part of the River of Transformation for the world, to see the literal healing and renewal of creation and the blessing of the Earth.

Ron

Source:https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qFbwpWB3wJx0A-gxPzjjI6BUEJ7Kzh3tasq_wmuKDX8/edit?tab=t.0Ron

OUTBACK BBQ – We raised $619.30 for Frontier Services!

Thoughts from Heather and Lorraine

What a joy that so many people (33) gathered to eat a sausage and salad together a couple of Saturdays ago. It was a wonderful time of fellowship in support of Uniting Church's Frontier Services which supports people living in remote parts of Australia.

Lots of delicious food, great company and enriching conversations. We were delighted that six of our Coffee Spot attendees joined in the frivolities. Thanks everyone for what you did to make this such a special day.

David B in a moment of wisdom and clarity reflected, "It's all changing. I don't think they realise it's happening ". What an interesting and thought-provoking comment:

- Who is "they"?
- Am I ready for the change that David sees?
- And what is that change anyway?

These are questions for us all.

News from Community Lunch…….

This week we welcomed 19 guests including a group from the Chatty Café that meets at Bentleigh Library. Thanks to all our volunteers who supported the lunch – Maria, Frank, Heather, Xixi, Rod, Gary and Dianne.

Our volunteer from Glen Eira CIS distributed information about the local **Urgent Care Clinics** which provide healthcare to people who **need urgent medical care but not an emergency response.** They provide treatment for infections, cuts, burns, fractures, sprains, etc. The service is free and you do not need a Medicare card, an appointment or a referral from your GP.

The Urgent Care Clinics closest to Ormond are:

- **Carnegie** Medicare Urgent Care clinic, 2 Koornang Road, Carnegie. Ph: 9069 7522 Open 7 days, 8.00 a.m. – 10.00 p.m.
- **Sandringham** Medicare Urgent Care Clinic, 193 Bluff Road, Sandringham Ph: 9119 1085 Open 7 days, 8.00 a.m. – 10.00 p.m
- **Monash Children's** Urgent Care Clinic, 246 Clayton Road, Clayton Ph: 0493 564 696 Open M – F: 6 am – 11 pm, Sat: 12.30 – 11 pm, Sun: 11 am – 11 pm

DID YOU KNOW THAT FRIDAY 16th OCTOBER IS WORLD FOOD DAY?

This year's theme focuses on making food and agriculture systems resilient against the modern challenges of today, from extreme weather conditions to global economic shock. Innovative and sustainable food production practices are at the heart of securing and improving supply chains, reducing food waste and improving our health.

Synod's Justice and International Mission Unit has prepared resources about World Food Day and some of the impacts of food and its production on the world's environment and our health. Curious to know more? Visit

https://justact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/7890-UCA-World-Food-Day-1.0.pdf

3 Minute Retreat – (Loyola Ministries) - Faith

Lead in: Take three deep slow breaths to still your mind and look at the picture, before reading.

"But you remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it." 2 Timothy 3:14

There are many similarities between the times of Saint Paul and our own. Living a Christian life was a conscious choice, and was not supported by society. At large Christians were faced with many temptations to turn from their beliefs or to grow slack in the practice of their faith. Paul exhorts, Timothy (and us) to be faithful to what we have learned, and believed about Jesus. Our gathering, before communion, is a way we strengthen our faith as well as support one another for our common mission as disciples. Our individual faithfulness builds a stronger faith community.

Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful to his beliefs. How might I encourage someone today to be faithful?

Where do I find strength for living my Christian faith?

Prayer (or use one of your own)

Loving God, your gift of faith is precious to me. Grant me the grace to live my life in such a way that others may recognise Jesus in me.

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

We are a small group who meet monthly for a chat & afternoon tea.

YOU are welcome to join us.

WHEN? **Monday 19th October, 1.30 p.m.**

WHERE? At the church.

Take care

Jan Davenport (ph: 9578 1713)

Lectionary Readings

October 4	**Pentecost 19**	Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20, Psalm 19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46
October 11	**Pentecost 20**	Exodus 32:1-14, Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23, Philippians 4:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14
October 18	**Pentecost 21**	Exodus 33:12-23, Psalm 99, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22
October 25	**Pentecost 22**	Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Matthew 22:34-46
November 1	**All Saints**	Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 34:1-10, 22, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12
November 8	**Pentecost 24**	Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25, Psalm 78:1-7, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25:1-13

Some Bible verses to reflect on:

And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies, because of his spirit who lives in you. *Romans 8:11*

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. *Proverbs 4:23*

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in. You will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. *Philippians 1:6*

Whoever loves me will keep my word and my father will love them, and we will come to them and make our dwelling with them. John 14:23

Rosters

	Reading	Prayers	Communion	Welcoming	AV
Oct 4	Karen R	Dianne R	Marg D Warwick B	Nev P Lynne P	Graeme D
Oct 11	Heather B	David N		Frank O Hans T	Nev P
Oct 18	Lisa S	Warwick B		Jan D Graeme D	Gary R
Oct 25	Marg D	Heather B		Dianne R Brenda G	Robyn M
Nov 1	Dianne R	Marg D	Gary R Robyn M	Hans T Nev P	Lisa S

	Music	Tea & Coffee	Resource Delivery	Coffee Spot	Mowing
Oct 4	Peter H	Suzie F Lisa S	Brenda G	3rd Team 1	Gary R Dianne R
Oct 11	Karen R	Marg D Lynne P	Gary R	10th Team 2	
Oct 18	Peter H	Nev P Sue M	Hans T	17th Team 3	Kevin D Dennis T
Oct 25	Peter H	Nev P Lynne P	Frank O	25th Team 4	
Nov 1	Peter H	Jan D Claire H	Gary R	31/11 Spares	Frank O

Images: Cover – The Bungle Bungles from the air – Dianne R
Outback BBQ – Lorraine D
Communion image VesaL - Pixabay
others by church members or from the website associated with the article.

Diary Dates

Saturday 3rd October	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
	9.30 a.m.	Church Council/Formation Day
Sunday 4th October	10.00 a.m.	Worship - Revd Dr Ji Zhang
Thursday 8th October	7.30 p.m.	Church Council
Saturday 10th October	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
	6.30 p.m.	Trivia Night
Sunday 11th October	10.00 a.m.	Worship - Revd Dr Ji Zhang
Saturday17th October	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
Sunday 18th October	10.00 a.m.	Worship - Revd Dr Ji Zhang
Monday 19th October	1.30 p.m.	Friendship Circle
Saturday 24th October	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
Sunday 25th October	10.00 a.m.	Worship - Revd Dr Ji Zhang
Saturday 31st October	8.30 a.m.	Bob's Boys
	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
Sunday 1st November	10.00 a.m.	Worship - Revd Dr Ji Zhang
Saturday 7th November	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot
Sunday 8th November	10.00 a.m.	Worship – Revd Dr Ji Zhang
	2.00 p.m.	TREK Concert
Thursday 12th November	7.30 p.m.	Church Council
Saturday14th November	9.30 a.m.	Unity Tea and Coffee Spot