

Advent Greetings from OZ

15 December 2011



“I ready myself for the birth of Christ by getting rid of the clutter in my heart. Advent is about making room in my life – my heart, mind, and spirit – for God’s blessing through Jesus’ birth.” – Beth Richardson

“Keep awake and wait. And wait. This is the discipline of Advent, and, in some ways in our modern culture of frenetic activity, it is more difficult even than the penitence and denial of Lent.” - David Henson

“My favourite comment on Luke 1 comes from Will Willimon. He tells the story of a college student talking to him about how the virgin birth was just too incredible to believe. Willimon responded, "You think that's incredible, come back next week. Then, we will tell you that 'God has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.' We'll talk about the hungry having enough to eat and the rich being sent away empty. The virgin birth? If you think you have trouble with the Christian faith now, just wait. The virgin birth is just a little miracle; the really incredible stuff is coming next week." - Mary Hinkle Shore

Do we believe God still acts?

One of the Advent readings this year is from Isaiah 64 - “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...” Do we believe God still does stuff like that? Enter this world and turn things upside-down? We’re waiting this Advent season for God to turn things around for our 1643 Community. Not “a little miracle” like the virgin birth but some of that “*incredible stuff*” Willimon hints at in the Jesus story.

Full House!?

We mentioned in our last *Greetings From OZ* that our 1643 Community was now full. We have nineteen people living in seven units at two properties here in the Northern Beaches area of Sydney. The last four to join us are Bible College students. We were rejoicing at the realisation of our dream of establishing a Christian community in this part of the city. But then it all came crashing down!

The owners of the two properties – and also key members of our community – received a letter from our local Council saying someone filed a complaint against us. Evidently we are in violation of some local building codes and someone – the complaint is anonymous – does not like that.

What this may mean is that three of the living units will need to be vacated and seven of our community members will have to move.

Those are the facts and figures but let us flesh out the tale with some personal stories.

Community Members

One of our community members is recovering from an abusive work place situation that left her shattered and put her into “a dark night of the soul” situation. She thought she lost her faith. Joining our community was a huge step for her on her road to recovery. She found a new home with us at 1643 – a safe place to be. And then the news that she might have to move put her right back on a downward trajectory and she felt things were spinning out of control again.

Another 1643 resident gave up on God after experiencing the horrors of World War 2 in Holland. She came to OZ in the ‘50’s and has purposely avoided the church. Moving in with us was a major step for her. Some in her family thought she was crazy. She has become part of



PLEASE PRAY!

1. Our old address sign
2. Jon Owen from the UNOH (Urban Neighbours of Hope) christian community in western Sydney speaking at our church on Dec 4
3. New mailboxes and address sign
4. View of new house from the street
5. Dance group of Young Aboriginals living near the UNOH community were also at church Dec 4. This young guy is acting as a goanna. The teacher of Aboriginal culture and dance is playing a didgeridoo in the background.

our 1643 family and is slowly moving toward a new faith in God. This situation has rocked her but after a community meeting where residents were able to voice their anger and fears and apologies were made and forgiveness granted, she is wondering if this faith thing is real. She said the other day, "Mark and Mary keep saying God can bring good out of all of this, maybe I should believe."

The other five affected are a family who moved here to be close to the hospital because their one daughter has a condition that makes proximity to medical care necessary. They wanted to try out this thing called "Christian community." If they have to move it will be away from this area because of the expense of local housing. It will mean a new job for the father, new schools for the kids, and a new church somewhere else for the family.

"WHY GOD?" STAGE

The first week or so after we heard about the complaint we were all stunned and stuck in the "Why God?" stage. But after speaking and praying together we have moved to the "What can we do?" and "What is God doing?" stage. There have been some good discussions among community members and with neighbours (who were "gutted" – devastated – when they heard the news).

Next week several of us are meeting with the local Mayor to share our community vision and to ask, "What can we do to keep the community together? Is there a way ahead?"

There is a new feeling of expectation among us. Maybe God can "*tear open the heavens and come down*" for us in this situation. We're learning something new about waiting during this Advent season. Will you join us in the waiting and praying?

We hope to be able to write about "*incredible stuff*" that God has done here at the 1643 Community in future Greetings. Stay tuned!

God's blessings to you as you wait during this time of Advent!

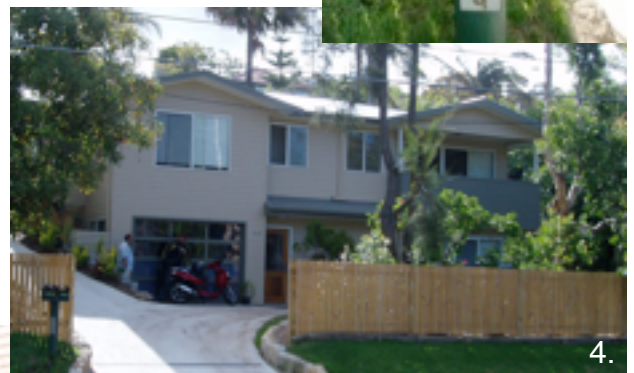
Shalom,

Mark and Mary

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Contributions may be sent to: Mennonite Mission Network, Box 370, Elkhart IN 46515-0370 and must be clearly marked as a designated contribution for the Mark and Mary Hurst MST



Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

