



*We reach up to God, reach in to  
one another and reach out to the  
community*

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## CHURCH COUNCIL

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## PASTORAL CARE NEEDS

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**W**ell here we are in the season of Lent. It began on Ash Wednesday, Wednesday 17 February. And nominally Lent runs for “forty days”, though in fact it’s more like six weeks, because in those “forty days” the Sundays aren’t counted! Lent will end on Good Friday. I don’t know about you, but Lent was not part of my youthful church experience in the Presbyterian tradition. I know others who grew up in the Methodist tradition, and they too had no experience of Lent. I was rather surprised, then, to read the following in the Wikipedia article on Lent:

This season is observed in the Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Moravian, Oriental Orthodox, Reformed (including Presbyterian and Congregationalist), United Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. (1)

Whatever the case might be in the worldwide Anglican Communion, here in Evangelical Sydney Diocese, the marking of Lent is also broadly unknown. In fact I rather enjoy teasing my Anglican minister friends by pointing out the occurrence of Ash Wednesday, or refer-

ring to Lenten practices such as fasting. Their puzzlement – sometimes their disdain – is often quite obvious.

It was upon coming to the Uniting Church that I first encountered Lent. I always assumed that the Uniting Church’s observance of Lent was part of a larger re-embrace of traditional liturgical and ecclesiastical practices (many of which had been preserved in Catholicism), but perhaps it did come to us from one or more of our prior traditions, Methodism, Presbyterianism or Congregationalism. I’d be interested to know that. When Lauris and I worshiped at our local suburban Uniting Church, we joined a Lenten Bible study group, which was organized jointly between the local Catholic Church and our Uniting Church. That was a richly rewarding experience, and a couple of the people we met there over thirty years ago remain friends. Whatever else I gained from that Lenten study, I did come to understand the value of Lent as a time of reflection, repentance and preparation for Easter. The lengthy observance of Lent magnified manifold the significance of the Good Friday with which it concluded, and that understanding has remained with me ever since.

So what is special about Lent? For some, a form of fasting or other self-denial is important. The founders of Lent Event were certainly able to build a great program of outreach upon that tradition of sacrifice. I’ve tried fasting – in fact, one year I undertook to eat nothing at all one day of every week during Lent, and I fulfilled my undertaking. Nevertheless, while I was pleased that I had found the self-discipline to do so, I couldn’t really say that the experience had deepened my faith or sharpened my spirituality. It had simply been a discipline, a matter of ticking the weekly box and heaving a sigh of relief when Lent came to an end. Of course, many people do find fasting helpful, and I fully respect that. The important thing is that it be a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

In more recent years, I’ve reflected on Lent as I’ve prepared sermons throughout the season over a number of years. I’ve found it helpful to remember that the choice of forty days (notwithstanding the non-inclusion of Sundays) is based on the gospel accounts of Jesus’ period of temptation in the wilderness. These are found in Mark (1:12-13 – the oldest account we have), Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-12). Now it’s true that, in Matthew’s and Luke’s telling, Jesus does fast, and one of the temptations he resists is food. However there is no such statement in Mark’s very brief account; on the contrary, Mark has angels waiting on Jesus. What the three do have in common, and what is fleshed out by the remainder of Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts, is that Jesus faced up to the real temptations of this world – the temptations of power and wealth; the temptation to try to make ourselves equal with God.

There is nothing sinful about nourishing our bodies with the food we need. Even if we have undertaken to fast during Lent, breaking that fast may reveal a lack of self-discipline, but it is not *sinful*. But devoting our lives to – in fact worshiping – wealth and power (or possessions or success or security or even our career or hobby or sport; or sex and



other bodily indulgences or luxury) is indeed sinful. None of these things, of course, is in and of itself wrong or sinful, but when it takes the place of God as our god, then it most certainly is.

These are the gods of this world that so many of us worship. Perhaps your god is not on the list, but I'm sure you can see what I mean, and can identify what it is in your life that takes your devotion away from God. All these gods are alluring, and they can be subtle. We can be gradually drawn in by them; we can regard them as benign, even good things; until we wake up one day to the realization that they have become our gods, and our life is spent in their worship. That we have jettisoned or shunted aside the one true God, and replaced him with a shiny idol that, while it may enthrall us, will ultimately let us down and prove to be of ephemeral and illusory value.

These are the temptations, the gods, with which Jesus went into the wilderness to do battle. He emerged victorious, and his ministry could begin. We do well to model our own Lenten journey on that epic battle of Jesus. While we cannot hope to defeat the gods of this world on our own strength, Lent provides us with an annual time of reflection and self-examination when we can be honest with ourselves, when we can identify what or whom we truly worship, and when we can seek to get our lives back on track.

And when we realise that, despite our best efforts, and irrespective of what incremental progress we may feel we have made, we are simply incapable of freeing ourselves from the thrall of these enticing but dangerous gods, we are ready to understand the eternal significance of Good Friday, and of Easter Sunday. Our celebration of Easter will be heartfelt and joyous.

May your Lenten journey be one of honesty, repentance, prayer and preparation, for over the horizon lie the tragedy of the cross, and the triumph of the empty grave.

**Alan Harper OAM**

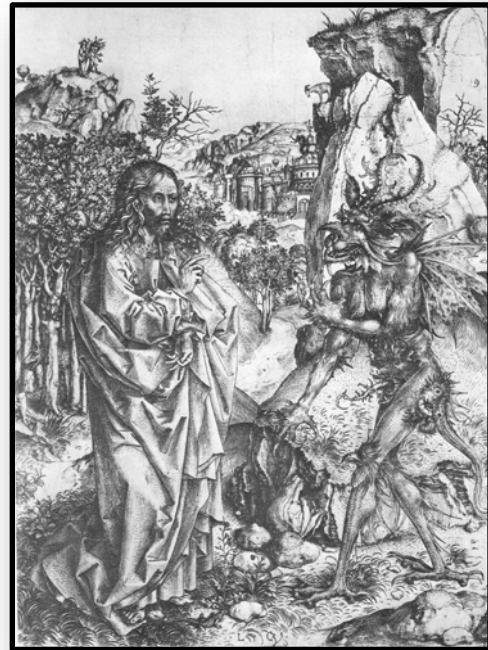
(1) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent>, accessed 23 February 2021.

Paintings from the top (all Wikimedia Commons):

*Temptation of Christ* (LCZ alternate)

*Tentaciones de Cristo*—Botticelli

*Temptation of Christ*—Pacher





# JOHN WESLEY

## and singing in church

Given that we have all been robbed of the joy of singing in church for much of the last year, it seemed worthwhile to examine what John Wesley had to say about singing in church. But it should also be kept in mind that most of his preaching was outdoors. The following has been adapted from <https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/local-church/wesley-s-directions-for-singing/>

**T**he opening pages of the American *United Methodist Hymnal* contain a preface that has bemused and bewildered distracted worshippers for ages. These seven rules, titled *Directions for Singing*, were first included in the 1761 publication *Select Hymns*, a hymnbook for early Methodists.

The hymns that we take for granted as “traditional worship” were almost all new in John Wesley’s day (brother Charles was, after all, writing them), and most of them would never be sung within church buildings during Wesley’s life.

Newton’s *Amazing Grace* had not yet been written. The Methodist movement was happening outside church walls, where there were no limits to what new music could be made. Usually, only the preacher had a copy of the book with all these cool new songs. They would sing one line out at a time and the gathered crowd would repeat what they heard. George Whitfield (Anglican minister and one of the founders of methodism), was said to be a master at this after he finished preaching. Wesley’s directions are rooted in his belief that worship is the work of all the people, meant to unite us as a priesthood of all believers in service to God.

As it was, the church had a tendency to elevate musicians and preachers as somehow separate from the crowd, who tended to become spectators instead of participants. Wesley’s directions for singing are meant to offer practical ways we worship together. Here they are:

*Directions for Singing. That this part of Divine Worship may be the more acceptable to God, as well as the more profitable to yourself and others, be careful to observe the following directions.*

- I. Learn these Tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please.
- II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all; and if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.
- III. Sing All. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up and you will find a blessing.
- IV. Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan.
- V. Sing modestly. Do not bawl, so as to be heard



above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.

VI. Sing in Time: whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend closely to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can. And take care you sing not too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.

VII. Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your Heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

When you look carefully at them, Directions I & II emphasize uniformity across the Methodist movement. Methodism began as a revival outside church walls. Wesley carefully chose certain hymns (many of them from his brother, Charles) to define the worship experience of the movement. It would be important for everyone across the movement to learn the same words and tunes so they could easily join in at any Methodist gathering (they weren't reading the music from a book or screen). In today's worship music, (especially the contemporary scene) we need to be careful about choosing songs that sound great on a recording but are impossible for a congregation to sing. Modern worship songs are often written for radio, and mimicking the instrumental solos in moderation may provide an appropriate or pause, in the song, but may, conversely, become distracting and the congregation becomes unsure of what they're supposed to be doing.

Direction III focuses on the importance of everyone's participation, even the ones who don't enjoy singing or have no musical ability. The point of all singing is that worship is the work of all of us together. Community is formed in the experience.

Directions IV, V, & VI offer practical directions for how to sing united in community. Be bold, but not so bold that you make it about you. Be modest, but not so modest that someone standing next to you can't hear you at all. Keep an upbeat pace to the music. Apparently, there were a lot of obnoxious people who thought singing as slowly as possible was more worshipful.

The final direction emphasises the purpose of having directions and music at all. It is all about glorifying God. It's not about impressing someone else with your awesome voice or personal worship experience. It's not about you being so impressed with the musicians or the choice of song. If you can't worship because the songs are too difficult for people to sing together, then it's time to question the music ministry of your church. But if you just "can't worship" because the music isn't your style or the songs aren't trendy or sophisticated enough for you, it's time to check your motives.

**Stephen Dain**





## Australia and New Zealand Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Distribution

**T**hrough an unprecedented year, Australians and New Zealanders came together to pack over 214,000 shoebox gifts! 2020 was challenging, with states in lockdown, churches unable to meet and business closed, however this did not stop individuals and churches from packing shoeboxes. We also saw thousands of volunteers give their time to serve the ministry - thank you to everyone who was involved!



# March Roster

Date	Colour	Preacher & Worship Leader	Musician	Bible Reader	Prayers of the People	Welcomers	Projector	Open close + Communion	Morning tea	God's Gang
07		Alan Harper	Alison & Arinona	Carolyn	n/a	Charles & Harry	Gordon	Dennis & Schofield family	Pam & Talafu	Shirley & helper
14		Rev Amos Deori / Ese Enari <b>STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY</b>	Alison & Komiti	Sydney	Sydney		Shirley		Alison & Stephen	Terangi & helper
21		Bruce Hanna	Alison & Marques	Pam	n/a		Komiti		Carolyn & Terangi	Shirley & helper
28		<b>PALM SUNDAY</b> Rev Dr Hawea Jackson Elders: Shirley & Siunipa	Alison & Arinona	Alison	n/a				Ese & Sara-Belle	Charles & Pam

Please arrange substitutes when you are not able to do your allocated time.

Communion Sundays—someone please bring bread