



# Bathurst Uniting Church

Sharing God's love by connecting people to God;  
people to people; and people to community.

Newsletter

October, 2024

**Rev Keith Hamilton, AGM address**

**29 September 2024**

**Worship of God with the entirety of our life**

There are many activities and many opportunities to which we can give our life. We can even be connected to the church yet give our life to something other than God.

The Orthodox Church speak of the *Liturgy after the Liturgy*.<sup>1</sup> Meaning as the gathered people of God we worship God, and then as we are the dispersed people of God – blessed and sent out – we continue to worship the living God with the entirety of our lives. Another way to think about this is that we assemble – gathered by God - to bless God and then God blesses us to go – the dispersed people of God - to be a blessing to all of creation.

Daniel W. Hardy said,

worship is the most embracing act of life for Christians, and the primary means by which we locate ourselves in the fundamental activity of God toward humankind in the world. In blessing God, we are incorporated into his blessing toward humankind in the world – the blessing which is his own life.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible from start to finish is replete with encouragements as to who we worship, what is true and what is false worship of God, and the connection of worship with every aspect of life. Harold Henry Rowley concluded his survey of worship, stating,

For worship is more than ritual and liturgy; it is more than listening to Scripture and to exhortation. It consists in encounter with God and it has corollaries that touch every aspect of life.<sup>3</sup>

We could attend to any book of the Bible to review the place of worship and its coincident with life. I want to give attention to the last book of the Bible, to the book of Revelation. While it is often considered about the last things it is actually a book about worship.<sup>4</sup> The verb “to worship” comes from the Greek word *proskunein*, that is to prostrate oneself before God. The verb “to worship” occurs 15 times in the book of Revelation – a high incidence when compared to other New Testament writings.<sup>5</sup>

Revelation sets out three possibilities of whom we might worship. We might worship the beast,<sup>6</sup> or we might worship idolatry,<sup>7</sup> or we might worship the living God.<sup>8</sup> The “beast” in the Book of Revelations is probably a

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<sup>1</sup> Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996

<sup>2</sup> Daniel W. Hardy, “Worship as the orientation of Life to God,” *Ex Auditu*, Issue 8 Number 1, (1992), 55-71, 55

<sup>3</sup> Rowley, Harold Henry. *Worship in Ancient Israel Its forms and Meaning*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 271

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” *Ex Auditu*, Issue 8 Number 1, (1992), 45-54

<sup>5</sup> James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context*, (Urbana, Chicago & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 71

<sup>6</sup> James F. McGrath, *The Only True God*, 76

<sup>7</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” 47

<sup>8</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” 46

metaphor for the Roman Empire, but it could be a metaphor for other kinds of evil. Idolatry is miss-directed worship of that which is not God; putting our trust in anything other than God.

Michael L. Lindvall, suggests that we often talk about worship today in three ways.<sup>9</sup> Worship as entertainment, worship as therapy, and worship as education. As entertainment, worship aims to please the worshipper, “offering distraction from routine and demanding that the hour be engaging in the way that the flood of "entertainment" is.”<sup>10</sup> Worship as therapy evaluates experiences in terms of whether or not they promote psychological or spiritual healing.<sup>11</sup> Worship is judged by the extent to which it makes one "feel better" or brings "healing and wholeness" into a person's life.<sup>12</sup> Worship as education approaches worship as a school, “as an opportunity for the spiritual and intellectual improvement of Christians through instruction.”<sup>13</sup>

There is some element of each in worship, but the major problem with each, according to Lindvall, is that the orientation of worship is toward the worshipper: entertaining the worshipper, healing the worshipper, educating the worshipper, and not directed towards worship of the Triune God.<sup>14</sup> Graham Hughes made the comment that such worship runs the real risk of worshiping not God but our own image.<sup>15</sup>

The book of Revelation is arguing that we must worship God as God for God alone is worthy; we may not worship any other creature or thing.

In 1980 I had an experience in church with I have been pondering ever since. The church where I then lived had brought in a person to help the congregation attend to mission. On the Saturday a group of us were meeting, and one person who had been appointed leader of that discussion group began by talking about his work as the former Postmaster in Wauchope, with managing staff, about a recent holiday, and about his grandchildren. Then when we came to some of the questions for discussion, he said, “I am not very good with words.” Meaning, he could not speak about Jesus to other people. At the time I thought, how is it that you could speak freely about work, family and holidays, but not about Jesus Christ? I have been pondering that disconnection between being able to talk about anything and everything except to talk about the most important thing. I keep meeting with that conversation in Church as people can talk with ‘evangelist’ fever about a holiday, about work, even about grandchildren, but never about the most enduring and important thing in eternity.

If our faith is vibrant on the inside, vital and nourished by worship, by daily prayers and reading of Scripture, we will have something to say about Jesus. Indeed, we will be overflowing with desire to tell others about Jesus Christ. We will be the people who find someone spiritually thirsty, spiritually hungry, and we will have a cup of refreshment to offer. Our worship of God on Sunday spills over into worship of God Monday through Saturday; our worship of God spills over into witness and service to Christ.

It is for these reasons, when I met with the JNC and the congregation in 2021, I indicated that in the centrality of worship of God and growing in our holiness in Christ, it is important that we have the full diet of Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles and Gospels in our worship, and a creed or affirmation of faith that reminds us every Sunday of the Triune God, of the life, death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ as the basis of our faith and hope, of the Holy Spirit that motorises our Christian faith, and of the encouragement to follow the practice of daily prayers morning and night, and daily reading of the scriptures. In this way, we grow in our worship of God, deepen our relationship with God, and more.

All of these matters are becoming of increasing importance. Australia was never a Christian country. It is becoming an increasingly irreligious country. In the 2021 Australian Census the numbers of people who said they were non-religious, had no religion, exceeded even the largest Christian denomination in Australia. It

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<sup>9</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” *Interpretation*, Volume 53 Number 2, April 1999, 116-218, 174

<sup>10</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” 174

<sup>11</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” 174

<sup>12</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” 174

<sup>13</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” 174

<sup>14</sup> Michael L. Lindvall, “Revelation 4:1-11,” 175

<sup>15</sup> Graham Hughes, *Reformed Sacramentality*, Edited and introduced by Steffen Losel, forward by Gordon W. Lathrop, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), 20

found that 38.9% of people in Australia, 9,886,957 people, said they were of no religion. In round figures, 10 million people no religion. That is almost 9% higher than in 2016. To put that in the language of Revelations, 38.9% of Australians worship either the 'beast'<sup>16</sup> or idolatry. In Bathurst in 2021, 32% or 11,896 people said they are non-religious.

In a secular society, in which about 40% of Australians are non-religious, and additionally, many in the church live as if there is no God in respect of their daily decision-making, the shift to worship of the living God is a conversion - a metanoia - of the totality of people's lives. Not easy.

Augustine said, "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God." Meaning, while people are worshipping other things, there is a discontent. Mental illness is on the increase. Anxiety, a mental illness, is on the increase. The lack of common courtesies – rudeness, abuse, bullying - is on the increase. Concerningly, many in the church live with anxiety, and worry,<sup>17</sup> suggesting something is not right with their worship of God. Drug and alcohol addiction is on the increase. Family and domestic violence is on the increase. Loneliness is on the increase.

The greatest antidote to social isolation and loneliness is connection. That is why our BUSS programs are so important. They are an expression of our worship. The greatest antidote to anxiety is prayer and worship of the living God.<sup>18</sup>

Turning our worship into entertainment is not going lead to more people worshipping God. It might mean we are entertaining more people.

When a significant part of society has no interest in religious affairs, it will more likely be the quality of a life devoted to Christ that will influence.

Between 2016 and 2021 the number of people in Bathurst who called themselves Uniting Church declined by 246 persons. Clearly not all those people were attending Bathurst UC. Some were, some died, some moved away, some dropped out, some became house bound, and others in the community stopped calling themselves Uniting Church. Does that mean we are a dying church? Declining numbers does not necessarily mean dying. One of the temptations when a church has declining numbers is to switch its approach to worship to entertainment, or therapy, or education, and turn from worshipping the living God to worship of idols. We must resist that temptation.

Drawing upon our Wesleyan heritage, it is the small groups in which people come to faith, and grow in their faith, in which people are taught about worship of God. The Faith and Worship Team this year initiated Lenten studies which were prepared by members of our 9:30 and 5 pm congregation. The preparation was a faith growing experience. The BUSS model of engaging with people at their point of need, exhibiting Christian hospitality, has inspired some people to attend the Tuesday Bible Study group, and some have come into the worshipping life of the church.

Our work in KUCA is over a long period of time. It is basically sowing seeds. Some of that seed might be on rocky ground, particularly if parents send their kids in the same way parents send kids to any other entertaining activity. Some of that seed will take root. KUCA and SRE sows seeds. We do that here.

The Mission and Strategy Team organised a wonderful congregation retreat in February this year. A lot of people attended. The Faith and Worship Team organised the Lenten Bible studies this year prepared by members of the church, and with multiple groups, including popup groups. The Organ 150<sup>th</sup> celebration team organised the anniversary celebration, masterclass and organ concert here in March. Over 350 attended the

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting the increasing numbers of people engaged in witchcraft, even here in Bathurst.

<sup>17</sup> The English word "worry" comes from strangling, or squeezing, or constricting. 'A dog worrying a sheep by biting it.' In English worrying is the closing off of possibilities, the damaging constriction of a life.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, Translated by Denis D. Martin and Michael J. Miller, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000). Anxiety is one of the authorities, power, and dominions over which the Lord Triumphed on the Cross and which he carried off captive in chains, to make use of as he wills." 81

concert. We had exposure of Facebook, ABC radio national, ABC local, 2BS, 2MCE community radio, articles in the Western Advocate, in other rural magazines, and Insights. The Organ Celebration Team have organised organ recitals across the year, and most have been attended by up to 60 people. Our Green Team have been engaging in the beautification of our property, working with BUSS to create a community garden, and led a service the other week. The Church Council has on alternate months to regular meetings held leadership development sessions. Our Pastoral Partners have provided outstanding support and pastoral care for people connected with our church. Our youth Group has gone through a reorganisation this year, and sent two members off on a Synod church camp. We have had a range of people both lead and preach at our morning service, and our evening service has several people lead the services and is now experimenting with a monthly meal as part of our communion service. There are several people who go from here to lead worship and preach at other towns and villages, as well as nursing homes and retirement villages. This year our BUSS has experienced increased demands and increased volunteers, and increased revenue and expanded the range of programs. We have a part-time paid worker. None of these things sound like a dying church to me, more like vibrant church.

When we worship ourselves, God is very small, even if our ego is very big. But when we worship the one true and living God, the one who raised Christ from the dead, we are worshipping a very big God.

We will receive the budget today (Sunday 29 September 2024) and it will show a deficit. That does not mean we are a dying church. Firstly, we have enough cash reserves along with our expected offering and revenue from the use of our properties to meet the budget for the next several years. Most importantly, we continue to be God's people.

So let us get our language correct. There may be numerical decline, but that does not equal dying. We believe in the God of abundance, not scarcity. If we believe God raised Jesus from the dead, surely God can also raise us from whatever deaths we may experience, into life. The worship of our lives can be on evil, on idolatry, or on the living God. We make that choice every day. A focus on scarcity is the worship of idols. In a world of scarcity, we focus our attention on the abundance in God.

Every week from our 9:30 and 5 pm services the living God sends 40-60 people from here in God's mission to gather all of Creation into God. We are sent to witness to and serve the living Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we worship.

The writer to the Ephesians speaks of God blessing us, and of our blessing God.

#### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the cosmos that we might be holy and blameless before him in love; . . . . For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, from whom every family in the heavens and on the earth is named, I pray that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to become strong in your inner being through the power of his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to the One who by the power operating within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all that we ask or we think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, to the age of ages. Amen. (Eph 1:3-4, 3:14-21  
Translation by Keith Hamilton)

Keith Hamilton  
29 September 2024

## BUSS News

Great news... Daybreak Rotary have announced that BUSS will receive a grant of \$15000 to support existing programs and to start new ones. Thank you Daybreak Rotary!

October is Gamble Awareness month and BUSS is joining with Lifeline for various activities.

A new Arts and Crafts group is beginning on Friday 18 October at 1.30pm and will be held each Friday. If you have a skill which you would be happy to share or help with please come along or contact one of the BUSS team.

## BUSS Coming Activities

Open Mic night on Thursday this week (10<sup>th</sup> October) from 6.30pm to 9pm in the 1837 hall. This is a chance for all musicians and singers to perform in a safe alcohol free environment. Anyone is welcome to join in even if you come as part of the audience ... all performers need an audience and all support would be wonderful !



On Saturday, 2 November 2.30 -4pm there will be a Thank You Afternoon Tea for volunteers, helpers and supporters of BUSS. If you help with meals, volunteer at the café, donate items or funds or just generally support BUSS in any way do come along so we can say thank you!

### Worship Services

**9.30am in the church.**

You can join worship on Zoom by going to <http://www.bathurstunitingchurch.com.au/> and pressing the purple button.

6 October Rev Keith Hamilton Holy Communion

13 October Brian Mowbray

20 October Rev Keith Hamilton

27 October Rev Keith Hamilton

3 November Rev Keith Hamilton Holy Communion

10 November David McLeod

### 'Sunday @ 5'

At 5pm – contemporary, informal, all ages worship in the Activities Hall.

On the first Sunday of each month there will be Holy Communion and a shared meal.

### PLEASE NOTE

The November Newsletter will be a week later than usual as I will be away for a few weeks. It will be sent out and available at the church on 10 November.

If you have items to include please have them to me by 6 November.

Thanks, Ruth

### PLEASE NOTE

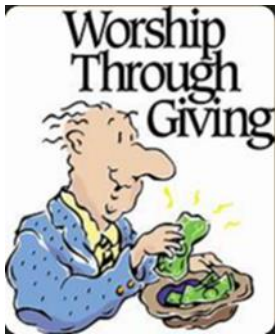
The newsletter email address is [bathurstucanews@gmail.com](mailto:bathurstucanews@gmail.com). Please send items by 9pm on the last Wednesday of the month

Please send news or information for the website to [allanwray@hotmail.com](mailto:allanwray@hotmail.com)

### Mowing Roster

19 October Ian and Allan

2 November Aisea



## Many Ways to Give:

**There is now a Tap and Go facility in the church foyer where you can give to various options with your card.**

**To pay invoices issued, to donate to the work of the Church, donations to the Organ Fund, etc:**

**For electronic remittances only @ UFS:**

**BSB: 634634                      Account No: 100019125**

**Account Name:** Bathurst City - Working Account

**Narration:** Please indicate why the funds are for.

**For cash or cheque deposits @ Reliance Bank**

**BSB: 882000                      Account No: 300003447**

**Account Name:** Bathurst Uniting Church

**Narration:** Please indicate what the funds are for by asking the teller to enter it into the Bank system.

**For Giving Direct and Offertories:**

**Please see Deb if you wish to set up a regular Direct Debit or Periodical Payment.**

**BSB: 634634                      Account No: 100027964**

**Account Name:** Bathurst City - Giving Direct

**Narration:** None is required as these deposits are completely anonymous

**Bathurst Uniting Support Services (BUSS)**

**For the work of BUSS as a General Donation or for a Specific Program being run by BUSS**

**BSB: 634634                      Account No: 100049962**

**Account Name:** Bathurst City – BUSS

**Narration:** Please indicate what the funds are for, or if you wish to make an anonymous donation a narration is not required.