



MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

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News from Manna Gum

It is with some sadness and much pride that we recently said goodbye to Deb Storie, who finished up on the Manna Gum Advisory Council to take up significant responsibilities in international development work. Deb has been a founding member of the Advisory Council and a much valued part of the 'team behind the scene' of Manna Gum's ministry. She is both an accomplished Biblical scholar and passionate international development worker, continually applying the insights of both of these worlds to the other. We will be praying for Deb in what will be important and difficult work. Please contact us if you would like to find out how you can support her.

In May, Manna Gum was involved with the *Future Dreaming* conference profiling the work of AHED (Arnhem Human Enterprise Development) in supporting indigenous economic

enterprise. The day was a great success. If you missed it, the conference audio is now all up on the web - you can find it all at www.mannagum.org.au/economics-us/indigenous-communities. AHED is currently advertising for a new volunteer position (see back page).

A new and exciting development this year has been Jonathan joining with Mark Brett of Whitley Theological College to co-teach a subject in 'Economics, Justice and Theology'. This has been a wonderfully stimulating opportunity and fantastic grist to the Manna Gum mill.

A brief note on finances: while the contributions of regular supporters has remained strong, this year we have experienced a significant drop in once-off donations. If you see some value in Manna Gum's ministry, please consider making a financial contribution.



LIVING IN BABYLON

Part 2: The task before us

by Jonathan Cornford

In the previous *Manna Matters* (May 2014), I explored the meaning of the city as it is revealed to us in the Biblical narrative. In the primeval history of Genesis especially, the city is revealed to be the outworking of all our attempts to live independently from God and nature, and to fashion life in this world according to our own purposes. The city is the heartland of humanity's rebellion. And yet, astoundingly, in the strongest of language, God declares that he will come into the city, that he will join his work to humanity's work and make it complete – he will make it holy. The ultimate Biblical vision for the city is for its redemption from a place of dislocation and destruction to a place of shalom, a place in right relationship with God, with all people and with creation.

That is the vision that we are called to give our lives to, but that is not where we are now. Those who seek to follow God find that the city is a place which is so often working against them. More than that, we must face up to the reality that the city lies at the heart of economic injustice and ecological despoliation in the world, and yet most of us are bound to the city in one way or another. In Biblical language, we are exiles in Babylon, the enemy of God. How do we live in such a place? 'By the rivers of Babylon we wept when we remembered Zion ... How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'

The idea of exile sets the background to the whole New Testament proclamation of good news, and the challenge of living in the midst of Babylon is one of the foundational tasks that it sets out to answer. Though the subject matter is both deep and wide, we can perhaps sum up the Biblical ethos through two commands, given through two separate and quite different letters written to exiles in Babylon:

1. 'Do not take part in her sins' (Revelation 18:4);
2. 'Seek the *shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile' (Jeremiah 29:7).

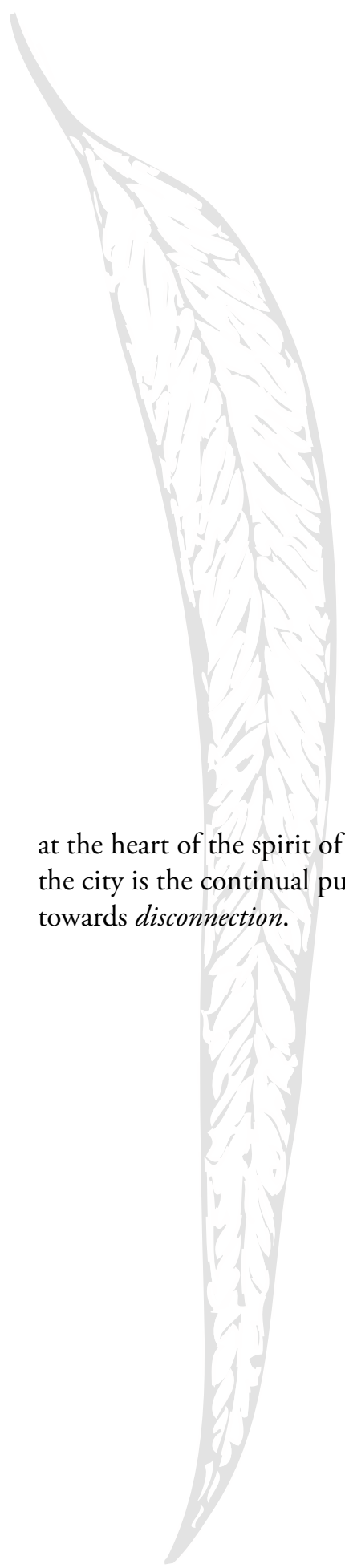
Put simply, we are enjoined by the Biblical witness to stop being a part of the problem and to start being a part of the solution. And that requires living differently from the norm.

How do we live well in cities? I shan't pretend that I can answer this enormous and endlessly complex question. Our life circumstances are all so different and context is so important. Nevertheless, I would like to modestly suggest four areas of our lives in cities which at least deserve serious consideration, whatever we might feel our scope for action is in those areas.

1. Recognising the city as a spiritual force

I was recently talking to a young man from Melbourne who now lives in Bendigo. He was saying that although he was a part of groups and communities that talked a lot about the pressures of consumerism, it was not until he had spent some time living outside of Melbourne and then returned to it that he became fully aware of just how monumental is the onslaught of advertising and social pressure to participate in consumer hedonism. (These things are all present in Bendigo too, just not on the same scale.)

There is a huge literature that describes sociologically and psychologically the various effects that cities have on us individually and as a society. But the Biblical perspective takes us one step further, for it recognises the city



at the heart of the spirit of the city is the continual push towards *disconnection*.



is a *spiritual* force. And at the heart of the spirit of the city is the continual push towards *disconnection*. The primary manifestation of this disconnection, but perhaps the least noticed, is the way that the city provides the illusion of living independently from God. When continually surrounded by such an intense, complete and (seemingly) well-functioning human system, God becomes increasingly obscure, abstract, and for many, irrelevant. Whatever our religious confession, the city encourages us into practical atheism.

Disconnection from God leads inevitably to disconnection from one's neighbours, and this is an effect of the city that most people are aware of at some level. The more humans you crowd into a small space, the less available they become to each other as human beings – think of a packed peak-hour commuter train, where thousands of people are crammed into a highly intimate proximity, all the while studiously ignoring each other's existence. This is an understandable psychological defence mechanism, however the habit of ignoring the realities of other people is bad for our souls and bad for our societies.

Of course, by definition, the city is also a place of disconnection from creation. The implications of this are far greater than being distant from quiet places in nature where we can indulge in reflective sighs. The true cost of this disconnection is that we just cannot see one of the foundational truths about ourselves, which is that we are still entirely dependent upon the bounty and beneficence of the natural economy, and our inability to see this truth is killing us and the planet.

Although these disconnections are profound, we are either not conscious of them or apathetic about them, because the other genius of the city is its ability to seduce, divert and distract. Movement, lights, energy, grandeur, scale, food, culture, sub-culture, shops, opportunity, freedom, choice, anonymity, power, money, success – taken together all of these things amount to a very deep temptation to become complicit in the disconnections at the heart of the city.

If these things are true about the spirit of the city, then the Christian vocation in the midst of the city should be clear: it is re-connection. As with all false spirits, the spirit of the city must be resisted, which requires a reconfiguring of our mental world, and daily practical acts of defiance and resistance. We must find the ways to re-connect with God, with each other, and with the land, and we must find ways of resisting the seductions and distractions of the city.

2. Re-connection with people and place

One of the major forces for disconnection in the modern city is simply the way in which the geography of our lives is divided up over large, hard-to-travel, spaces. Home, work, friends, school, church, and shopping tend to be geographically isolated from one another and we effectively become placeless people. This has effects upon our stress levels, upon the planet, and severely limits what sorts of things are possible between people.

Therefore one very practical measure to counteract the disconnections of the city is to try, as much as possible, to limit

the geographic scope of our lives and live as much as we can within our localities. I hasten to add that this is not something that is easily achieved, however we have no hope of improving the situation if we do not at least become more seriously conscious of the cost of spreading our lives across the city, and when we get the chance, starting to make alternative choices.

From a Christian perspective, this probably means that we need to make efforts to re-localise the church. The trend towards larger churches has tended to abstract the experience of Christian community from the experience of place – that is, from the experience of day-to-day life. It also means a church tends to be disconnected from the life and concerns of the immediate local area, and especially the concerns of the marginal and hurting. Re-localising church could mean a re-invigoration of smaller local churches, or it could mean larger churches putting much more energy into establishing localised cells and groups. When Christian groups begin to share something more substantive than just a statement of belief – schools, parks, shops, good works etc. – then it is much more possible for them to begin to apply their faith to these contexts.

3. Re-connection with the country

Which brings me to another critical re-connection. One of the most socially and ecologically damaging effects of urbanisation has been the way it has increasingly driven a wedge between the interests of the country and the interests of the city. City

people tend to become dismissive and contemptuous of the country, and country people learn to be suspicious and hostile to the city.

One of the most practical and urgent things for city dwellers to begin reconnecting with, is food and the way we eat. As the article by Kim in this edition demonstrates ('Urban Food Possibilities', p.8), beginning to explore this area opens up how we connect with our neighbourhoods, with the people in them, but also with the country, with food producers, and with the earth itself. At a fundamental level, the city must become more aware of its dependence on the country, more grateful for what it produces, and more responsible for ensuring that the prices we pay, and the ways we get food, enable people, animals and the land to be treated with reverence and respect.

4. The challenge of housing

Perhaps the biggest and hardest challenge to living well in contemporary cities is the challenge of housing. One of the great travesties of our wealth-driven market economy is that the perceived interests of so many have been staked to driving up real estate prices, making the fundamental human need for housing one of the biggest arenas for profit-taking. The price of housing, whether ownership or renting, is an underlying structural determinant of what other life choices become possible for us in location, work, community etc. It determines the incomes we need to somehow raise and how much time we have available for other things; it affects our ability to locate ourselves more closely to friends and/or family; it limits how much money we can spend on making our homes more sustainable and efficient; it affects the nature and possibilities for church communities.

The Christian vocation in the midst of the city should be clear: it is re-connection.



If we are to find ways of living well in cities – with deeper and fuller connections – then we need to find creative ways of making housing more affordable. Churches should actually be excellent places for undertaking such thinking – they are often multi-generational communities that include those with substantial capital, and those with very little. If only there were some more creative and Kingdom-minded accountants in our midst! But the challenge is there to start thinking creatively and looking for examples of others who have already done so. In the next edition of *Manna Matters* we will focus on this issue.

In conclusion, I hope it is obvious, but it is worth stressing, that rejecting the *spirit* of the city does not mean rejecting the city itself or the genuinely good things that the city may offer. However it does require exercising a far more active, critical and rigorous discernment of the human-constructed environment that surrounds us, and it requires daily acts of resistance to those forces which dis-connect us from God, from each other and from the earth. It is central to the vocation of Christian communities to *be people who live well in the midst of bad living* – to be people who in the myriad of their daily activities choose for shalom, even in the heart of Babylon .

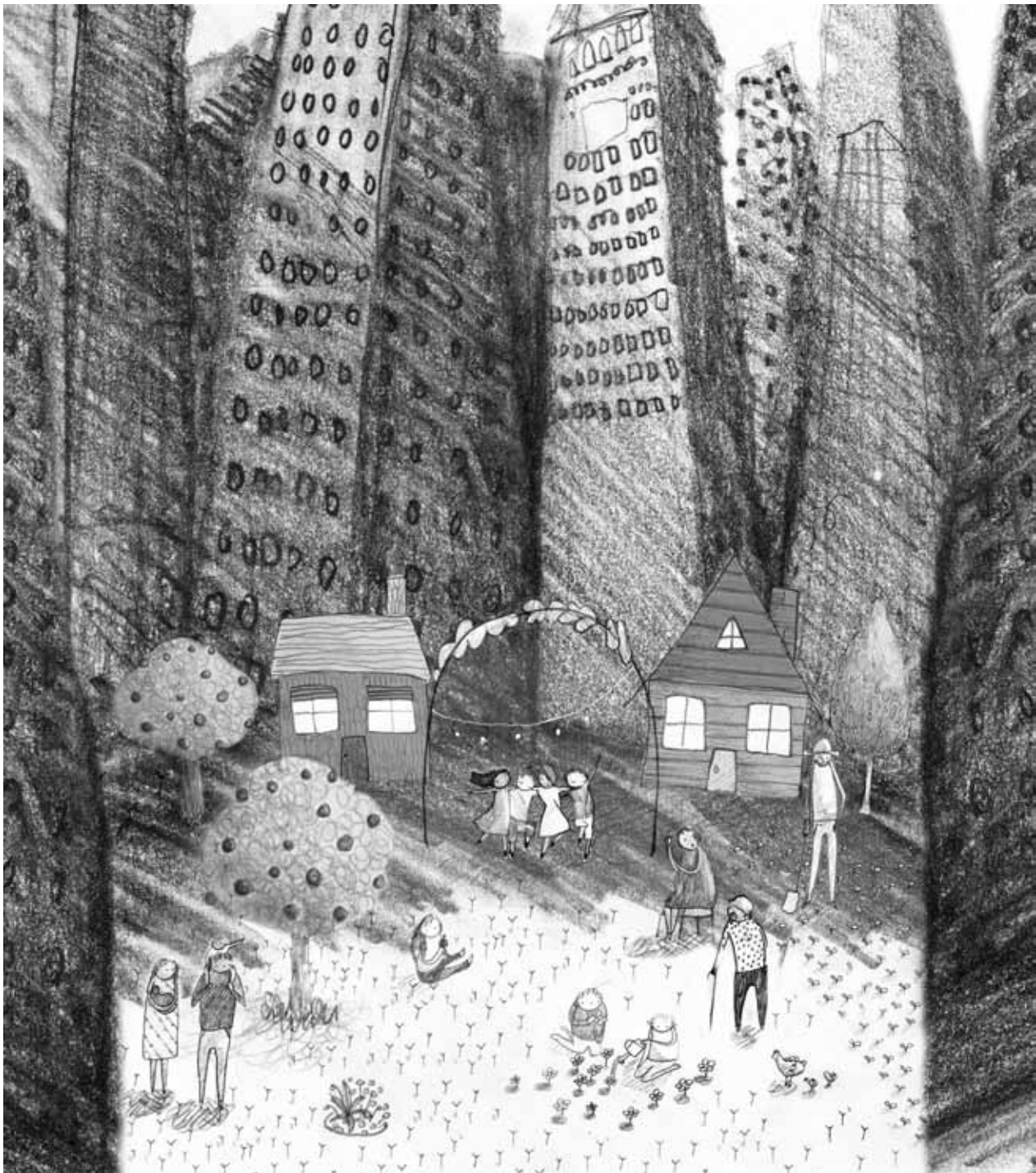


Illustration by Liz Taylor.

Having a go at rural living

by Elvira Hewson

I am already noticing that I am anticipating the change in the winds that comes sometime around the end of October. These winds bring the 'Bonney Upwelling' to the coastline surrounding south west Victoria in Spring; nutrient-rich water that starts a feeding frenzy right up the food chain to the Blue Whale. Right now, my son is climbing in the native trees planted around the border of our property. I am watching the birds come to drink in the bird bath outside our dining room window and I'm starting to think of all the work that needs doing in the vegetable garden. The patterns of seasonal work have started to feel like a comfort – looking forward to different tasks and growing a little more skilled each year in being able to carry them out.

These are fragments of my week, slowly building a story of our family here in our home in the country. But will we ever feel at home in a place so different from our upbringing in the city?

Greg and I moved to the country in 2006 with our first child, Patrick, then two years old. We had been renting a house in Footscray, Melbourne, for several years, and living there as an expression of our discipleship. We had developed practises of living that involved sharing our lives with other like-minded Christians, having time for people on the margins, and growing food in our backyard, which grounded us in our place.

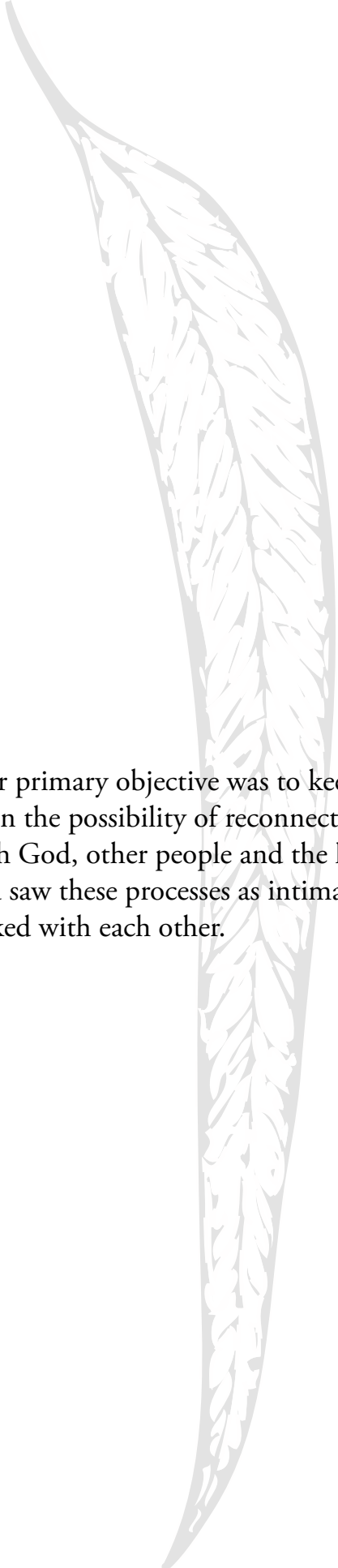
When Patrick was born, we had an increased sense of wanting to make a more permanent home. We had thought about buying in Footscray, but the rising cost of housing was prohibitive. We began a process of discerning whether it would be possible to have a go living outside of Melbourne.

The problem was, we had no family ties outside of metropolitan Melbourne, not many practical skills for living on a larger piece of land, and were really somewhat unnerved by the deep darkness of night without streetlights. How would we choose where to go?

However, we slowly pieced together what we thought we might need for it to possibly work. Our basic criteria were affordability, proximity to someone we knew, employment possibilities, close to a regional centre, and the ability to own at least one acre of land. Our primary objective was to keep open the possibility of reconnecting with God, other people and the land, and saw these processes as intimately linked with each other.

We chose Cudjee, twenty kilometres west of Warrnambool, as it fitted all of these criteria. Friends that we had met through the Common Rule were living on 14 acres on the edge of the township and were really keen to have a go at living intentionally with others. So keen, that they had begun a process of subdividing off four one-acre blocks for others to come and buy.

We moved into their shearer's quarters with our two year old son at the start of 2006, and started the process of building a home. However, after delays of various kinds, it was not until St Patricks Day in 2008 that we finally moved into our house with our son, and three month old baby daughter, Mairead. In between, we had spent a bit over two years getting to know our plot, laying down essential infrastructure, shaping a garden



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along permaculture principles, making mudbricks and then finally starting on our house.

Our aim was to build a passive solar house within a mortgage that would enable us to have space to continue to develop our values, time to get involved in the broader community, time for hospitality, time for our children, time to tend our garden and time for us both to engage in some part-time work. We have basically achieved this aim, but what is really important to note is the economy of sharing that made this possible: family and friends giving time, skills, resources and childcare to our project that actually helped keep costs within budget. For example in the weeks leading up to and following Mairead's birth, our mothers alternated in being present with us, camping in a tent, painting, cleaning up on site, mowing, and helping with site management! We moved into a mostly-finished passive solar house, with solar hot water, and thermal mass provided by a concrete slab and mudbrick wall as well as double-glazed windows. As time has gone on, we have used savings to pay for a grid connected solar system, verandah's and a north-facing

However, our decision to live rurally has also brought some hard limitations ...

pergola to increase the energy efficiency of our home.

We have enjoyed taking an active part in the life of the Cudjee community: helping to run a playgroup, taking on parent roles within the school community, trialling an art group, joining the CFA, participating in community tree plantings, sharing meals, supporting the social life of our children and being able to offer some hospitality and rest for friends and peers living in the city.

We have particularly relished our connection with the earth, enjoying being able to grow some of our own food, and primarily being more aware of creation than we were in the city, and feeling that, despite our clumsy efforts, this process is tapping into something of who we were made to be.

We long to keep drawing closer to God and with the commitment and support of our neighbours, have been able to establish some rhythms of prayer, bible study and worship, during the incredibly busy time of life with pre-school age children. Part of the lesson has been realising that communities





grow only as we are able to give of ourselves to each other, while also realising how many barriers there are within us to doing this. Life looks a little different to what we had expected, part of holding things lightly and trying to think creatively about how to remain open to practises with young children.

However, our decision to live rurally has also brought some hard limitations: not being able to drop in and share Sunday lunch with family; not being able to easily visit sick or ageing relatives; childcare options being restricted to occasional visits. Questions loom about how to navigate the high school years in a rural area. Is rural living an option for young families worth pursuing? I don't really have any clear answers. Probably the questions and wonderings that I have now are quite different from when we first arrived.

Our commitment to living in a way that honours God is a strong part of what anchors us here. The need for a different way of living in the way we care for each other and creation seems to be growing in urgency for me, with the consequences of our consumer-based connection to the land weighing heavily on our minds. Dorothy Day, from the Catholic Worker

movement, writes that love is the measure. I find comfort in the thought that Christ had nowhere to lay his head and that we are somehow called into a discipleship of dislocation.

Perhaps the measure of how we have gone is whether we have grown in love, been able to love our children, and opened up possibilities for re-imagining what it might be to live well in our uncertain world.

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Urban Food Possibilities

by Kim Cornford

When I was 25, Jonathan and I moved from North Queensland to the centre of Melbourne. We joined a mission community living at the back of the Baptist church on Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD. We lived there for three years, surrounded by the concrete jungle. In that time I started growing tomatoes in polystyrene boxes, a chilli tree, and various herbs in assorted pots. On the wooden fire escape at our backdoor, enough sunshine reached through the surrounding heights of glass and concrete to help them grow. It was good. And, for me, it was the beginning of a new connection to the earth.

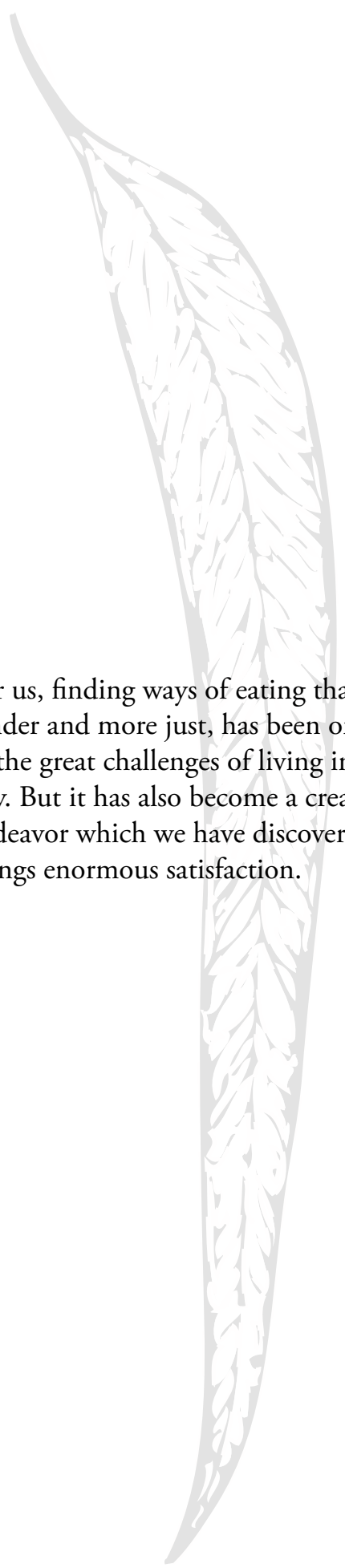
The food we choose to eat, and the way we eat it, reflect our faith. As Wendell Berry writes: "To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation... when we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament." Our creation story tells us that we were formed out of the soil and given the vocation of caring for the earth (Genesis 2:7,15). But cities, by their nature, disconnect us from food and from the soil from which it comes, and force us into dependence on food systems which do harm to the land, the animals and the humans involved with them. For us, finding ways of eating that are kinder and more just, has been one of the great challenges of living in the city. But it has also become a creative endeavor which we have discovered brings enormous satisfaction.

When we moved from the CBD and first started renting in Footscray, an inner-city suburb of Melbourne, one of the first things we did was to dig up the grass and make some veggie patches. Eating produce grown with the care of our own hands was very satisfying. It required diligence, observation, care, and the attention of our minds. In growing veggies in the backyard we found a place for us to restore some of the connections between ourselves, God, and the earth.

In Summer, we grew roma tomatoes in three beds of approximately 2 ¼ m², and yielded 20-30kg of tomatoes. Every March we bottled from this harvest which provided us with 6-8 months supply of tomatoes for cooking, instead of buying tinned tomatoes. In a bed of similar size, we grew another of our household's staples: garlic. The large majority of garlic in Australia is imported from China and the USA. To allow for the long storage periods required in this process, garlic is usually sprayed with sprout inhibitors before harvest, or irradiated after harvest. They are often bleached with chlorine to whiten the skin. Entering Australia, the bulbs are then fumigated with Methyl bromide. If we needed any inspiration to grow our own organic garlic, this was it! And, we have found it to be fantastically simple and inexpensive to grow.

Deciding what to grow in the limited space which we had in this backyard was guided by the types of food we enjoyed, food which we knew we could grow, and often, just wanting to learn how something grew. Other folk in our neighbourhood have always been a great source of knowledge on growing food locally. For a number of years we irregularly attended our local 'Harvest Swap Meet'. This is a monthly gathering where people bring along any excess from their garden and swap it with others' excess from their garden. There were always loads of herbs and greens and I ate many things for the first time through the harvest swap.

During the 11 years we lived in Footscray, an essential part of our



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household's weekly food supply was our membership with a local organic fruit & veggie collective called the WOC (Western Organic Collective). Buying organic fruit and veggies was made affordable for us through this method of community bulk buying. We got a box of mostly seasonal organic fruit & veggies every week for \$20 which largely supplied our needs for the week. In return, members of the WOC join in the work of sorting and delivering boxes once a month. (see www.organicfoodcoop.org.au). Through the WOC we also bought bulk 'dry' goods such as flour, sugar, rice, oats, lentils, dried fruit & nuts, and so on. This drastically reduced the use of plastic and other packaging in our household, and made organic food accessible to us at a price we could afford. The bulk purchase of some of these 'dry' goods also fine-tuned our use of them. For example, we learnt to use the flour to make our own bread and pasta, further reducing our plastic packaging consumption.

Another great source of local food for us over the years has been 'urban gleaning' (see Leviticus 23) from the multitude of fruit trees in people's yards. Not only is this a surprisingly abundant source of chemical-free food, but offering to pick from, and share the produce of over-burdened and un-picked fruit trees is a great way of meeting people in your neighbourhood. In Footscray, we managed to source apricots, peaches, apples, figs, cherries, kumquats, lemons, oranges, nashis, quinces, pears, and plums. We bottled and dried (using a food dehydrator) large amounts of this and enjoyed eating it all year through. Sharing some of this produce in the form of jams and cordials with the houses the fruit came from, adds another bond to neighborhood relationships.

Connecting locally, but with a wider reach, farmers markets

have developed strength and breadth. They provide a great opportunity to connect with local growers who can tell you exactly how their food is grown. As with growing your own food, farmers' markets show what is in season and what the land around the local region is actually capable of growing. Despite what our supermarkets provide, many fruit and vegetables are not locally available all year round. It's challenging explaining to my children why we are not buying the gorgeous deep red USA cherries from the supermarket - in June!

Over the years living in the city we intentionally sought out ways of making urban/rural connections around food. It became important to us to not only know where and how our food is grown, but to grow a deeper understanding of what is involved both for farmers, for animals and for the land. A key focus for us in this endeavour has been sourcing sustainable meat which prioritises the welfare of the animal in both life and death. With an ear out for someone who knows someone, we have been able to source beef, lamb, and pork from small-scale producers around Victoria. Going to visit most of the farms and properties where this was raised, and even meeting the animals destined for the table, adds a new dimension to a sense of connection, responsibility and reverence with regard to our food.

In more recent years, we have become acquainted with the great urban food gathering tradition of dumpster diving. Originally, dumpster diving was done by folk out of economic necessity, but has now been taken on by those with a concern for unnecessary waste and the subsequent ecological impact. It is now thought that as much as one third of world food production goes to waste. Certainly the scale of unnecessary waste that comes from our supermarkets is something that has to be seen to be believed. Done

Offering to pick from, and share the produce of over-burdened and un-picked fruit trees is a great way of meeting people in your neighbourhood.



well (there are many things really best left in the dumpster!), dumpster diving can make a good contribution to the household food budget.

At the beginning of this year we moved to the regional city of Bendigo, central Victoria, and we find ourselves now having to figure out how to make the connections to food that we established over a decade in Footscray. In a regional city some things are easy, but others are harder. The things have come easy: a Sunday market with local farmers; new friends who have supplied us with lamb; continuing to bulk buy fair trade goods; dumpster diving. The hardest thing has been the loss of our organic food cooperative in Footscray, and we can only now afford to buy a little organic fruit and vegies. Along with a determined friend, we are working towards a small informal co-operative arrangement for purchasing dry goods in bulk. We look forward to discovering summer fruits in local backyards

around us, and now have space to grow our own fruit trees. Indeed growing more of our own food will be essential if we wish to continue to eat organic fruit and vegies.

The possibilities for re-shaping our understanding and practice of food in an urban environment are really hopeful. At no point have we radically overhauled how we eat. Rather, bit by bit, year by year, we have explored a new area, added a new skill, habituated a new practice, and found the ongoing creative challenge of doing so enormously rewarding and satisfying. What's more, we have discovered along the way that seeking alternative food options tends naturally to build relationships and community; other people become more than just optional relationships, they become *useful* and *necessary*. The challenge of food and eating is one that will be ongoing and never really 'solved' and that is as it should be. It only means the pleasure of food and eating will never be diminished.

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A DIFFERENT WAY

A week-long exploration of Christ's call to a new way of living

1-7 November 2014

Come and spend a week exploring Christian alternatives in areas of money, employment, consumption, sustainability, family, community, care for creation and serving the poor. The week will be split between time in regional Victoria and Inner City Melbourne, hanging out with a couple of Christian communities exploring a new way of living.



WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Study the Bible together
Reflection and discussion
Get your hands dirty
Meet interesting people
Cook and eat together
Sing & pray

THINGS YOU WILL DISCUSS

Vocation & employment
Family & parenting
Hospitality & the poor
Connection to creation
Community
Money & budgeting

THINGS YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT

Growing food and making compost
Ethical shopping
Stewarding energy and water
Waste
Land care and restoration
Global connections.

WHERE?

Cudgee (near Warrnambool) &
Footscray (Inner-west Melbourne)

COST

\$100 plus some money to contribute to transport costs (approx. \$20). Cost is negotiable if you can't afford this.

Registrations close on 17th October. Places are limited, so hurry.

Download registration forms from www.mannagum.org.au

For more information email jonathan@mannagum.org.au, or call Jonathan on (03) 5463 5223.





Can You Help?

We are currently looking for a volunteer to provide administrative support to AHED facilitators for a 3-4 week period (2 weeks absolute minimum) this October. The role would involve helping Yolngu entrepreneurs by :

- writing business plans
- setting up bank accounts
- writing land council lease applications
- carrying out research into new business structures
- other logistical tasks.

Contact : Jazlie@whywarriors.com.au

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Sign the pledge to act, learn, raise awareness and pray.

MANNA GUM seeks to live within the economy of God – frugally, ethically and through the generous sharing of abundance within the community of faith. If our work resonates with you, please consider becoming a financial supporter.

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* We can send you information on how to set up an EFT.

Support the work of MANNA GUM

About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and
2. Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

www.mannagum.org.au

Post to MANNA GUM, 25 Holmes Road, Long Gully VIC 3550
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