

we sit beneath a temple high, a turquoise-vaulted dome - the sky, that spans the world with majesty
Omar Khayyam (paraphrase)

“A walk in the park”



Adelaide's ecofaith worship community



2005-2007



<http://ecofaith.org>

In November 2005 the ducks in the Botanic Gardens in Adelaide watched bemusedly as a circle of about thirty humans gathered to worship,

“the ancient God of this evolving life. Personal but not human, as much female as male. A God who is beyond us, became one with us, and remains within and amongst us.”

Or at least that’s what the poster said.



The Advertiser article before our first meeting

All humans look alike to a duck, but if they looked really closely they would have noticed the surprising diversity in age and occupation. Only God knew that there were Christians (some church going, but most very ex-church), a pagan or two, and some agnostics. Some were there because of the poster, some because of the Advertiser article, some because their partner brought them, and some wanted to see what it was that the minister, who happened to be their son/brother, did with his time.

All of them were part of an experiment, which I promoted and organised as the new ecofaith minister at Scots Church Adelaide. It was an invitation to explore, in worship rather than in seminars, what the creation stories coming from the sciences, especially evolution and ecology, had to say to and about Christian theology and the story of Jesus.



The ecofaith ministry concludes on Dec 31st, 2007, and although it was much broader than the worshipping community, it is likely that the community will be one of the longest living legacies of that ministry.



This booklet aims to capture some of the story of that community from the first six week experiment to the present,

Whilst I will be writing most of it, since I have the time, you will hear the voices of some of the more regular participants, and, I hope, get a pretty good sense of us.

If it leads you to come and visit, or have a go at starting a faith community of your own, that would be fantastic! Still, many more people are *not* mentioned than actually get mentioned. The few specific contributions which are mentioned are vastly outweighed by the many which have not made it in here. Partly that's because I don't keep a diary, despite frequent new years resolutions otherwise, and partly because the two hundred page book which would result is hard to justify, tree wise.

I would like to thank the members and ministers of Scots Church, through whose ecofaith ministry this community began. Particularly Milton Spurling (now deceased) and Rev. Judith A. Gilliland were instrumental in introducing the idea of the ministry to the rest of the congregation, whose support was continued to the present time. Judith Haines also deserves a specific mention, as the one who persuaded me to start the experiment at the start of my ministry in 2005, rather than waiting a few years as I had intended, and by which time it would all have been too late.

Rev. Dr Jason John

2005: the six week experiment



Can a PhD on the implications of evolution and ecology for Christianity, form the foundation for worship which is good news and life giving to the

one of the early gatherings in Botanic Gardens

participants, and which is at least consistent with what we are learning about how our planet was really created?

Put another way: If I was going to start my own church, what would I want it to be like, and would anyone else want to come?

And if so, what kind of environment and rituals would best facilitate people's engagement with God in this context, and have some integrity with what I was trying to achieve?

So I settled on the Royal Adelaide Botanic Gardens. Not exactly the scrub, but central enough that people could get their on public transport, and close enough to Scots Church to allow members of the existing congregation to visit.



A crocodile sculpture by Isaac



dog by Isobel

The format was identical each week, so that people could get used to it and enter into the rituals rather than stumble their way through them, with five minutes of input emerging out of parts of my thesis.



face by Billie

The next two pages outline the worship format used, with a bit of a commentary down the right as to why each element was there.

Ritual	Comment
<p>Call to worship</p> <p>The Aboriginal nations lived here with the Creator for tens of thousands of years before Abraham was even born. God was here long before even them; within and amongst the creatures of Australia.</p> <p>So come you creatures of Australia! Open your ears, eyes, noses, tongues and touch to the God of life- around, amongst and within you.</p>	<p>All Australian Christianity must deal with the existence of humans whose religion predates Jesus' birth by tens of thousands of years. Evolution further shrinks the Christian story (and human story) into a tiny part of the story of God and life.</p>
<p>Opening prayer</p> <p>God of 70,000, million million million stars and countless planets. We give thanks for your interest in ours. God of all the millions of species here around us, We give thanks for your interest in ours.</p> <p>You are welcome here. We pray for a sense of your presence here amongst us, and an openness to what you have to say to us this morning.</p>	<p>We are a small story of life on our planet, and our planet is a small part of the story of God and the universe. God is way out there beyond us and our control or comprehension, <i>and also</i> right here with us. Cosmology humbles us, our experience reassures us.</p>
<p>Meditation</p> <p>“God is love, (hands at sternum, reach up, around, down and back in a heart shape) the world is loved, (hands out and around in a horizontal circle, back to heart) I am loved, (hands stay on heart) help me love (hands from heart, outwards, fingers spread)</p> <p>Welcome to the group</p>	<p>The meditation late became: “God is beyond us, God is one with us (or became one of us), God is within us, God is amongst us.”</p> <p>This conveys the central claims of the trinity in more accurate language.</p>

<p>Aboriginal Calendar</p> <p>we are between Wullutti and Woltatti- a time when animals are breeding, grass trees flowering, The Southeaster winds and sea breezes beginning to give way to the Northerlies, and there is plenty of fish and meat.</p>	<p>Why do we cling to a four season calendar in Australia? We experimented with a Kurna calendar, though we probably need a hybrid, given the number of non-indigenous plants and animals now in Australia and the Park. Aboriginal calendars start when the season starts, not a specified day, so we also had to be in tune with the park to notice when Woltatti started for example.</p>
<p>“Intercession”</p> <p>God hear our prayers, and speak to us of the North (arms at 45o, facing North) then do West, South, East Hold hands as a group- prayers for the group (60s) Hold own heart, prayers for self (60s)</p>	<p>More prayer which uses and engages us with the environment in which we worship. We went on to use the “four directions” in all kinds of ways. See later in the book</p>
<p>A reading of some kind</p>	<p>Often a children’s book, to include them and to help adults engage at a different, usually more emotional, level.</p>
<p>Five-ish minute “input”</p> <p>see the next section</p>	<p>Input was kept to 5 mins so that even non-evolutionists could engage in the rest of the worship without being too overwhelmed, and to maximise the time for discussion.</p>
<p>A moment of silence pondering or listening to the sounds around us</p>	

<p>Meditation 2</p> <p>Wander off around garden for ten minutes, collect one collectible (leaf, fallen flower, stick, rock) which strikes your eye to bring back to the group. Go around circle</p> <p>Put object in centre. Say your name and either: what brings you to the city regularly, what brought you here, what does the object mean/why did you pick that object? Where did you hear about us?</p>	<p>The meditative wander, and the use of objects, created some non-rational stimulation, and was a very rich source of reflection.</p> <p>If people didn't want to share deeply, they had the option of just saying their name and something easy. Deep sharing is an invitation not an embarrassing requirement. We found, though, that there was <i>a lot</i> of it, which was great.</p>
<p>More prayer</p> <p>Another minute of silent prayer for the group, now we know a tiny bit more about each other.</p>	<p>The above walking prayer, and this silent prayer, give space for people to relate to God and Jesus as <i>they</i> know them.</p>
<p>Sending out</p> <p>A God who is unseen, unheard, untouched, unsmelt and untasted is no God to us. So this week let us have ears to hear, eyes to see, and let us taste and see that God is good.</p> <p>Go in peace as part of life, into the loving presence of the God of life- beyond us, one with us, amongst and within us.</p>	<p>God is certainly not just in a building, not even just in worship out in a park. If God is in all and through all, if life is the image of God (see below), then we should be able to experience God everywhere.</p> <p>“one with us” includes but doesn't require Trinitarian faith. Using “who became one of us” implies it, though it doesn't say God became one of us only once.</p>

Most of the seventy or so people who came during the six weeks found the experience enriching and often challenging, and well worth having put on even just for the six weeks. Here's what they said...

It came to me at 3am one morning... It was one of those 'God is right here' moments – probably the closest I have felt to God for some time.

All we can do is open our hearts to the rest of creation and be prepared to receive all it gives us and learn all it is prepared to teach us.

I have felt very happy to talk to my family and friends about the eco group whereas I felt my previous association with the church was too far apart from real life to easily talk about.

eco worship is real and worthwhile.

The best Kris Kringle ever – just a great idea thank you.

The N S E W intercessory prayer or Bev's version are so worth doing every time we meet.

Liberating theology is important to me. I would like to belong to a faith community rather than a congregation.

The landscape is the text that I read, (or should I say the landscape is the text that reads me?).

It is my connection to the landscape – to all that is living, the seasons, natural phenomena, - earth, sea, sky – that nourishes my soul and speaks to me in ways that help me to make sense and meaning in my life.

In 'natural' surrounds is where I most experience a sense of the presence of God.

I love questions and abhor certainty, dogmatism, superficiality, artificiality and clichéd images.

Regular Sunday gatherings must continue

One month in the year [Season of Creation] is not sufficient

This could also encourage many who have left the church to consider returning part of the mission might eventually be to develop eco-leadership training for

other congregations, and even other churches.

The review of Scripture interpretation... seemed to revitalise the Bible as a living text rather than ossified in relevance to historical times.

I greatly enjoyed the inclusion of some gentle Yoga movements and meditative walks within the service.

This ecoworship program has given me optimism for wider appreciation of this living planet as sacred.

Using the four direction for prayer was exciting. I used this in our local congregation and the response was fantastic. People could really focus on people or situations.

As I wandered and pondered I was challenged by how can we (people) live in harmony with the world and each other.

The Spirit within us is the same Spirit in the environment/ecology

The question of where Jesus fits into all of what we have talked about has raised a few issues for me. I still see him as the son of God... he is a terrific role model in justice for all and taking responsibility for all creation.

I felt really excited about honouring the earth in a group of like-minded, loving individuals. My lack of attendance towards the end was due to other commitments (-out of the habit of regular Sunday worship also!)

I am one that respects my Christian heritage and my family's beliefs however have been somewhat 'put-off' and disillusioned. I feel I identify well in the 'eco-faith' community.

Some felt strongly that in this temporary community they had found their worship home. So about fifteen of us decided that, with the blessing of Scots to continue to trial it as part of the ecofaith ministry, worship would continue in 2006. But we wouldn't be meeting in the Botanic Gardens. Indeed, we were kicked out well before 2006...

Expelled from the Garden: literally

The Advertiser article shown on page 2 didn't just attract the attention of potential visitors to the group, but also the attention of the staff of the Botanic Gardens. The phone call informing me that it was not acceptable for organised groups to use the Gardens was quick in coming. It was a very polite phone call, but nonetheless firm.

Even though we were no bigger (and less noisy) than any of the other groups of picnickers around the gardens, we were an organisation, and we were advertising ourselves.

So it was, that on the week in which the input invited people to revisit the story of the "Fall" and expulsion for the Garden of Eden, that we found ourselves out in Botanic Park, near Speaker's Corner. If you have not heard of Speaker's Corner you are not alone. Apparently it's where unionists and other troublemakers used to brave the hecklers back in the 50s, but you won't find a single sign to it in the park anywhere!



Two majestic fig trees in our new location



The Christmas altar, 2005

At first I was royally miffed, but the rest of the group thought the new spot had a lot of potential, and so it is that we still meet there. The area does lend a certain intimacy and freedom, but also makes us significantly harder to find. It also makes the toilet dash considerably longer, promoting greater bodily awareness!

2006

So in the baking heat of February we regathered to ask, "why are we here?" What is the purpose of life? What is *our* role as a species within the vast family of life, and what was it that God needed to do to us, or get through to us in the event of Jesus of Nazareth?

We explored these issues in the midst of the frenetic activity of Adelaide in February: the time of festivals, of finding things, including God, in unexpected, even scary places.

With Easter upon us, we took a hard look at our Jewish/Christian traditions about the meaning and purpose of Easter, with God's love for all life and animals in mind. We ended up producing a leaflet to distribute around the place, with a series of poems or prayers from the other animals, critiquing the very idea that God would need their butchery in order to forgive humans. One was this one, by Andrew...

Themes for 2006, from

<http://ecofaith.org/ecofaithcommunity/index20052006.html>

Feb06- why are we here?

Feb 5th- Why is life here?

Feb 12th Why are humans here?

Feb 19th Why was/is Jesus here?

Feb 26th What does everyone else reckon?

March- April (eco-Easter)

What kind of salvation is being offered? To whom? Who misses out? What kind of God is being depicted? Does it make any sense to talk of Jesus as a "perfect sacrifice?" What do we need to do to be forgiven? Did God ever want other animals to be butchered? The unbiblical origins of Christianity.

May (Sex/relationships/kids)

Having talked a lot about death over Easter and Lent, we look at the next part in the cycle of life- sex and all that stuff. The plan is to look at the evolutionary story of sex, then sex and relationships, then sex and parenting, then have a group discussion in the last week of May.

The input will be based on a presentation I did at the [Christianity after Darwin](#) conference.

June

in June we started by celebrating World Environment Day. On the 11th one of our members led the input. On the 18th we had a combined service with the Scots 10:30 service ([sermon](#)), and on the 25th we reflected on the meaning of baptism, having just baptised two visitors during the week ([just what does baptism mean for 'green' 'progressive' Christians?](#)).

When I was born
in a splash of bag and fluid onto the
dry earth
My first sight was of my warm liquid
home being sucked into the soil, and
legs and grass and ants
My first breath was a cry.

Moments later I turned skyward and
began
to search for milk
as if desperate to replace what had
been lost.

Later I would wake to cool mornings
and dew covered fields
drawing moisture from the night that
had settled on the leaves and offered
up my sweat to a hungry sun.

Later still, by chance, I bore milk for
other's children on two legs and
watched them grow strong on my
moisture.

They were so very happy for me.
Just now a cool blade runs across my
neck
and once again I lie on the dry earth
and watch my liquid home pump and
soak
into the soil, into a bowl, and into the
fire

My last breath would be a cry
but that has been cut from me
by those thirsty children
for the thirsty earth and the thirsty fire
I don't understand why I feel so cool
And why those other children are so happy for me.

July 2006

During July we have Rev Samson Devasagayam and Rev Gethzi Chella Kamala sharing their insights on ecotheology and human justice in the Indian context.

August

A mixed bag led by various members of the community.

September

We followed the themes of the [Season of Creation](#), which is gaining worldwide momentum, but using our own style and theology.

October

We've been exploring our faith and spirituality using water metaphors: streams of living water; deer/kangaroos panting for water; deep calling to deep; foot washing (see left) and so on.

November

We have been exploring ethics: how what we believe might shape how we live, using the "global footprint" metaphor to guide us.

December

Not surprisingly, we will be exploring gifts and giving, of life and the planet being a gift *to God: Joy to the Lord, the World has Come!* Our last weekly worship is Christmas Eve, we will not meet in the park on New Year's Eve or January. If you can't join us, you might like to look at some [Christmas resources](#).

This was our first attempt at making some of the fruits of our worship and thinking available to the wider public, apart from the web site.

The fruits of a worshipping community shouldn't just be felt by those willing and able to come along, but should be available to others, especially those who never go anywhere. The next attempt would wait until Christmas...

In the meantime we were back in the paper this time, as a group rather than a rather wistful looking minister staring into the trees. It was this article that gave the title to this book, and one which I certainly didn't choose!



After all the talk about death and new life during Easter, it seemed a good time to talk about biological life and where it comes from. We delved into sex and relationships for a month, looking at sex and gender and relationships as they evolved both in the Scriptures, and in the evolution of life.

The light-hearted spirit of the group is reflected in a poem, which formed the basis for much of the input, and begins...

*Sex is fun, but that's not why we do it,
It's only fairly recently that evolution grew it!
Still, I hope we'd all agree, when all is said and done,
that we like sex- sex is fun.*

And, after many verses exploring the evolution of sex and gender, ends:

*Sex is spiritual, mystical, emotional, relational
Luminous, numinous, even educational*

*If you're having sex I hope you're having fun
Even if it started to avoid those pathojuns!*

The poem (full version at ecofaith.org) was first used at a talk I gave at University, and went through many rewrites before hitting the group. Sometimes the direction was reversed, with ideas I used in public first being trialled with the ecofaith community, because I knew I would find an open, and also constructively critical audience.

May also signalled our first worship in the rain! A few paltry spots, really, but enough to get the umbrellas out for a moment. The question we are asked about ecofaith more than any other is, "what do you do when it rains?" But since we've had two years of near drought in Adelaide, this photo represents only of one of two occasions in our entire existence when we have had to worry about it. The second was in 2007 during the Season of Creation's Storm Sunday theme, which couldn't have been better planned if we'd tried.



The water theme continued with our first baptism request, from Lisa, whose child was to be baptised in a very traditional Anglican church, complete with a very traditional service. She wanted to be baptised too,

but in a way that better reflected her faith. So with help of Susan Wickham, a colleague at Scots, Lisa and her friend Melanie were baptised down by the ecofaith creek. It would have been nice to do it *in* the creek, or at least using the creek water, but there's something weird about a creek in the city that flows even in Summer!

But what *is* baptism in the context of an eco aware faith? Or of a fairly "progressive" Christian faith? We continued to explore that as a community the week after the baptism. Much remains to be teased out, but you can find my thoughts so far on the web.



By now the community was really taking shape and consolidating. From a pool of about twenty or so we had twelve or so attend each week, plus visitors from far and wide. Some were regulars at other churches coming down out of curiosity, or to take our ideas back to their communities. Many were visitors, from interstate or overseas, who had seen the sign

up at Scots and wandered down. We even have one "regular" who is regular only in the sense that each Christmas she comes down and visits us whilst on holidays from Wales.

The community was also forming a clear, unwritten, way of being. Most of us had left the church years ago, before coming to ecofaith. Often this was because we had been unable to fit into the kind of faith that our respective congregations thought all Christians should. There was, then a deep commitment to let others see things their way, and to have questions without needing to answer them immediately.





We were reflecting the Uniting Church's metaphor of the church as a pilgrim people on the way. We didn't expect anyone else, or even ourselves, to be "there yet." Input continued to be brief, and the communal sharing of wisdom, humour, and emotions continued to be a mainstay of each week.

And of course the rest of life continued to add to our worship life. Were the ducks and magpies worshipping with us? Perhaps, if the psalms can be believed - and why not?

We began to tune into the seasons: the arrival of the baby ducks (and their gradual disappearance through predation), the autumnal seasons of the many non indigenous plants around us, the appearance of the bindies which made barefoot wandering contemplation that much more perilous!

The contemplating wander remained most weeks, so that people had the space to pursue their own prayer life and faith understanding, and to share their reflections with others. Some walked a different path each week, some went to the same spot and watched it change over the year. Sometimes the wandering sparked deeply moving reflections which were shared with the group afterwards, and equally often a bit of a sight gag.

Food! Always food and drinks. Sometimes a tiny nibble, sometimes a feast, but always enough without the need to revert to rosters.

Towards the end of the year we started to reflect on what all of the new ideas we had shared, and the old ideas we had reaffirmed, meant for our way of life.

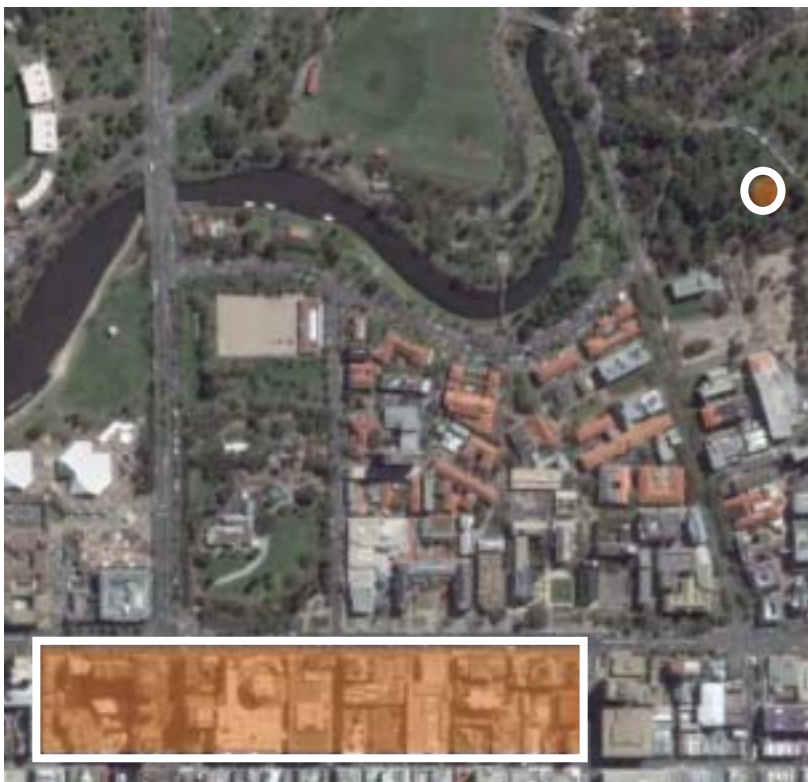
But just as the group was careful not to become theological dogmatic, we had made sure not to become dogmatic about



behaviour either. We didn't want anybody not to come because they ate meat, or didn't recycle. As individuals, all or most of us found that our year of worship and contemplation together challenged our own lifestyles and ways of relating to other creatures to greater or lesser extents, but we did not want to impose any specific decisions we as individuals had made on the rest of the group.

Our actual Sunday gatherings were a middle ground. Tea or coffee was, and still is, always Free Trade. Milk is soy or organic free range cow. Food was anything from organic home made sugar and gluten free treats, to tim tams. The guiding theme was to graciously accept whatever hospitality was offered to the group by whoever came to the group.

Nonetheless, we thought it worth talking about ethics and lifestyles, and used the idea of the global footprint to guide us, since some of the rest of my work was developing a tool for congregations to use to measure their own footprint on Sunday worship (see ecofaith.org/footprint).



The effective global footprints of ecofaith (small circle) and Scots Church (rectangle)

worshippers, our footprint was 1/10th of theirs, thanks to the lack of a building.

Working in our favour as a group was that we had no worship building. But on the other hand we had been relocated to an area more poorly served by public transport, which is poor anyway on Sundays in Adelaide. Added to that the distance many of us travelled to be together, and our footprint still ended up being 4,500 square meters of land to maintain our worship activities! By comparison, Scots Church needed 91,000, so we were still doing pretty well. When adjusted for the number of

Having looked at our consumption patterns in the light of our belief that God loved all of life, it was time to brace ourselves for Capitalistmas, or Christmas as it used to be known.



SOME GIFTS DON'T
HAVE TO COST
THE EARTH

A sense of humour, a poem or two and a bunch of rewritten carols served us well, and I turned them, along with some of Andrew's cartoons, into a "gift" to passers-by at Scots.

So we came to the end of the year, with a group fairly stable in numbers and growing in depth of relationships with each other, plus the steady stream of one off visitors who enriched our gatherings and whom, we trust, went away enriched themselves.



By now it was clear that this community was something worth continuing. On the one hand, it was now definitely the faith home for many of us, and nurtured our soul and spirit. On another, it was a resource to the wider church. Visitors went away with new ideas, the web resources were read all over the world, and my ideas were being shaped as I then went out to



GOD'S GIFT TO US

other churches and the wider community as part of the rest of my ministry.

To put it in Uniting Church language, the community had become part of the church's calling to bring about reconciliation and renewal for the whole creation (*Basis of Union*).



2007

Our attempts to be responsive to the seasons led to a January siesta from worship in the park, and instead we met together socially. I had hoped to use the break to lead worship more at Scots as well, to maintain links there, which I did once in the end.

On the first week February we all met at Scots to be blessed in our endeavours in the park for the new year.

The next Sunday I hoped that most of the twelve or so regulars would come so that we could discuss possibilities for the year. I also secretly wondered whether people would use the break as an excuse to stop coming. Instead, we had eighteen people, with about six newcomers.



Human newcomers, that is. The magpies decided early in 2007 that, if we insisted on sharing their home every Sunday, we could jolly well share our food too. This seemed a more than reasonable exchange!

Themes during 2007

February

Feb 4 combined service at Scots, to bless and launch the ecofaith group. L Lee Levett-Olson

Feb 11 future possibilities for the ecofaith community

Feb 18 life as image of God, neighbour, "other", family.

Feb 25 replacing dominion *and* stewardship with....

March

Mar 4 rethinking the Fall *Clean Up Australia Day: bring creek cleaning gear if you feel like it, and can get into a creek safely!*

Mar 11 "original sin" same behaviours, better explanation.

(March 16-18 evolution, ecology, environment meets God, Spirit, Faith weekend at Scots)

Mar 18 Summary of Fri/Sat

Mar 25 Death and Resurrection.

April

April 1 Palm Sunday. April fools. Being a blessing.

April 5 (Thurs- commune together over dinner)

April 8 Easter

April 15 forgiveness

April 22 Can/Does Earth forgive us (Chris Carter)?

April 29 Yoga and Christianity (Beverley Carter)



It was also during February that the church council, much to my shock and dismay, accepted the recommendation of the executive to not extend the ecofaith placement past its two year term. Thus began a long and torturous process of seeking funding for ministry support for the community (and a job for myself) for the future.

With so many people having joined us who missed 2005, we revisited, but in much more depth, some of our opening themes, which also helped me lay the groundwork for an “Evolution, Environment Ecology meets God, Spirit Faith” weekend held at Scots.

Easter was then upon us, looking at forgiveness and the various biblical models for forgiveness apart from the “God killed Jesus to forgive us” model which is so common.

We were able to put forgiveness to the test almost immediately, when the magpies recycled some of the food they had been given, right on top of one of our member’s heads ;-). Then, as Toni explained to the poor unfortunate that, no, it wasn’t raining, she copped a dose too! The forgiveness was not towards the magpies for doing what comes naturally, but towards the rest of us (or was it just me) for doing what comes naturally: ie laughing!

My intention had always been to facilitate the community so that if nobody had the inclination or energy to lead worship (or do anything else) they wouldn’t feel obliged to, but anyone who wanted to contribute would be able to. The assumption was that people were already serving God in creation all week, and should be able to come and be

May 2006

Input and ritual by various women from ecofaith.

May 6th Jane

May 13th Mother’s Day (Jason)

May 20th Joy

May 27th Louise

June

June 3rd Terella- eco meets feminist

June 10th children: their contribution

June 17th Finn (age 5)

June 24th being a child of God

July

July 1st

July 8th Susan Wickham

July 15th Louise Johnson

July 22nd Waiting / hearing the Still, Small Voice.

July 29th Susan: contemplation at the Scots Sustainable Garden.

August

Aug 5th Communion. Worry/Possessions

Aug 12th [Paul Babie](#) (AU law lecturer, Ukrainian Catholic priest): property and environment.

Aug 19th suffering for joy

Aug 26th Elizabeth Young. Interfaith environmentalism or something like that!

encouraged and energised without having to feel further drained. Nonetheless, since the early days Beverley had led us in movements inspired by her yoga teaching to get us connected with our bodies at the start of worship, and whilst she was with us, Margaret led the four directions prayers most weeks.

After Easter the leadership by others cranked up a notch. Chris was the first to share some of his wisdom, continuing the theme of forgiveness.

Then we were blessed by having my many, and male, reflections, balanced by a series of rituals and inputs from the women. Beverley reflected on how her yoga practice and faith worked together (and the struggle to have her yoga accepted by some in the church). Jane brought her training in and passion for environmental studies to the group, Joy her many years of experience in parenting and partnering, and struggles in other churches, and Louise her vast reading and theological artistry. Finally, in June Terella reflected with us on her reactions to her studies of feminist theologians.

Behind the scenes, John encouraged me to get serious about collecting an offering: which I theoretically saw as a very valid thing, and in practice found highly embarrassing. More deeply, in a small group it is hard to collect an offering without making those who cannot contribute feel put upon, but we managed to find a way.

It was then time to reflect on the role of children in Jesus' life, and in our worship.

There is no formal "Children's time" at ecofaith. In 2006 there was usually a children's story, often from Louise's vast library, though this diminished in 2007, and should probably



Finn and Athea's broken glass sculpture(!)

be revived: as much for the adults as the kids! The children come and go from the circle as it pleases



Leila and the magpies enjoy a moment together

them. Leila usually stays with the adults and occasionally shares her considerable wisdom with us. Sometimes, though, she joins Finn, Athea, Isaac, and Maya in their direct engagement with life. This might involve sculpture and art from found objects, but more often involves running, rolling and occasionally splashing. Gabriel has moved from lying helpless on the rug, to climbing all over Toni and a few others, to starting to follow the bigger kids around.

We've found that it is mostly possible to channel a desire to strip leaves and chase birds into a more appreciative way of relating to other creatures amongst the children. This was helped somewhat when the kids, despite several warnings to the contrary, kept getting too close to the baby ducks. Suffice to say a defensive mother duck in full attack mode makes quite an impression!

Although I've occasionally agonised over whether I am doing enough to organise "religious education" for the kids, the other parents are good at reassuring me that everything is on track, and it is often apparent that in their constant running around, and into, the group (occasionally treading on the food), that they are absorbing a remarkable amount of what we explore each week, and processing it in their own way.

Having talked about children and Jesus, it was hard to refuse Finn's request, though he was only five, to lead worship the next week! So with much trepidation I helped him, as non-directively as I could, plan a service. Next Sunday, with moral support from Jasmine and Amber, he

September 2006

: [Season of Creation](#)

Sep 2nd Ocean

Sep 9th Fauna

[Clive Pearson](#) (United Theological College, NSW) will visit ecofaith, then be up at [Scots](#) for a chat

about ecotheology at about 12:15

Sep 16th Storm (God beyond us)

Sep 23rd Social Justice Sunday (God with us (&them))

Sep 30th Blessing of Animals ("them" is also other animals)

October

Oct 7th: Cosmos (God within us)

Oct 14th God amongst us (communion)

Oct 21st Terella: grief.

Oct 28th Identity/Diversity

November

Nov 4th Joy/Louise with the Seymour College year 5s & their families.

Nov 11th ...

Nov 18th Jane: Love and fear

Nov 25th Louise

December

Dec 2nd communion

Dec 9th Stuff and the storyofstuff

Dec 16th gifts

Dec 23rd gifts (2), and joy

Dec 30th ...

led us in a wonderful time, starting with a stirring rendition of Advance Australia Fair, and featuring a dragon diorama!



Finn's dragon diorama

It turned out to be rather serendipitous that I was able to participate in, rather than lead, worship during this time. Ecofaith had only ever usually taken up about five or so hours a week, alongside other things I did, but now a lot of mental energy was going into securing funding for its future, and mine. This process involved writing a lengthy submission to Uniting Foundation, a major source of funding for new initiatives in the SA Synod of the Uniting Church. The submission was completely rejected, much

to my surprise. The disappointment and even anger at the decision expressed by many others in the wider UCA encouraged me to believe that eco-faith was not just something important to me, or to the community in the park, but to the church.

So another long process led to a semi-successful appeal: two years funding, half time, for ministry to the ecofaith community, but not for the other work I had been doing. Although only two years, this would mean considerably more time could be devoted to ministering with the group, though the inability to continue to resource the wider church and engage in the wider community was a blow.

Putting that to one side (and a very long side it was), June saw not only the first worship led by a child, but the first wedding of an ecofaith member, as Radek married his fiancé Bernice, and she came over from Canberra to live with him, and to worship with us from time to time.

In July Louise led us again, and Susan, a colleague from Scots came to share her alternative worship gifts with us twice. Her contributions were very well received, and I would have loved to be able to make more use of her time.



Susan's second session was actually held outside Scots. The native plant garden, which had been in process for an eternity, finally neared readiness, and so the ecofaith group worshipped in the garden outside Scots.

We then helped "plant" the sign which the Botanic Gardens provided for the garden. This

also allowed us to come in for part of the Scots worship, for a blessing of the seedlings, and to share morning tea afterwards.



Even though Scots and ecofaith would not be part of each others worlds past 2007, everyone was happy for the chance to maintain some connection until then. That Sunday also helped foster connections with Seymour College, since some of their students and teachers were at worship that morning, and we



have several conversations over the garden fence afterwards.

August marked our first liturgical communion. Of course, *every week* was communion: with each other, with the rest of life, with the God of all of us. But in August and roughly every month since, we have started to explore what the traditional Christian celebration of the eucharist (good gift) or communion (relationship) means in an eco-faith. We are far from nailing that one down, or at least I am. But then part of the point of the ritual is that it is non verbal, and therefore cannot be nailed down.

Slightly less common in church, some of our brave souls formed a human pyramid under the direction of Elizabeth, a trained performer who had come to share with us about her experiences in a global youth interfaith environment conference. Next year we might try to share communion whilst in a human pyramid!



In September we again joined churches around the world in celebration of the Season of Creation. Although we celebrated creation every week, we still followed the themes being engaged with in the wider church, as much to show our support of the idea as anything.

The liturgies themselves, however, are rather too Lutheran, and too formal for us, and studiously steer away from mentioning anything about the evolution of or great age of our planet, which robs them of much potential in my humble opinion. It also makes them less controversial and easier to “sell” to the Christian mainstream, and taking whatever steps are necessary to at least introduce a season of creation is a great and wise project! The resources are also very focussed on Jesus’ atoning murder to win God’s forgiveness for our sins, which glosses over the question of whether a God of *all creation* ever desired a sacrificial system, rather than being able (as we are expected to do), to simply *forgive*.



Seymour College came back into our lives, with the year five students and their families coming down to join the group for worship in November. The students had just returned from

Kangaroo Island, and brought their passion for the environment and

considerable confidence to the group as they led much of the worship. I was away for the whole of November, so Joy, who went with me to visit the students back in October, facilitated the day beautifully.

Jane and Louise led the group through the rest of November, until Toni and I got back in the first week of December. It was wonderful to return to the group in December and share communion together, though Toni was away at yoga teacher training. The next week we reflected on all the great, free, stuff around us. We were challenged by the video at <http://www.storyofstuff.com>, ironically enough played to the group on my laptop. This was only the second time in two years that we had used anything electronic at all in worship!



Now we are in the midst of the celebration of all the gifts which have nothing to do with money, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ-mas: the one who brings freedom is with us!

So ends this little, vary partial reminiscence, which started out as a Christmas present to the rest of the ecofaith community, and ended up being written more to you, whoever you are!

The gaps in it are glaring!

So many names and stories are missing, especially of people who arrived in 2007, who will hopefully feature in the upcoming sequel “A walk in the Park: the ecofaith community’s first decade.”

I haven’t mentioned the deaths which occurred to friends and family of group members, and the support which the group, even though we were often so new to each other, gave to those people in those times.

At first the ecofaith community’s way of worship seemed strange and a bit weird (and I wrote it!). By the end of 2006, however, I found myself amazed by just how odd traditional church worship is, and how the use of resources which are usually either old, and from overseas, so often means that what the congregation says it believes *outside* worship, or even hears in sermons, is markedly different from what they pray and sing and say *during* worship.

Often it is hard to know *what* the individuals in the congregation believe, because there is no interaction during worship, and the chat over coffee is about work and shopping.

I now find it weird not to check the weather report a couple of times a week to see how I might need to shape the service, and despite the artistic brilliance of some humans, it takes an awful lot of effort (or wasteful technology) to make the inside of the church look like the outside, rather than just getting outside in the first place.

Ecofaith has a 360 degree (or is it 720?) panoramic real life animated projector system/floor to ceiling stained glass wall, with 27.1 surround sound and a trickling waterfall display, all for nix! Admittedly, the conveniences are a little inconvenient, but only because the old bush pee and pit loo is not yet acceptable in the park! Well, not to all of us anyway: every now and then someone looks more relieved after a quick stroll.

Loos aside, I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to have been given a chance to call this community into existence, and more-so for those who came and formed the community, transforming it from one person's idea into a vibrant, committed and caring place to be. Out amongst life with the God of life, playing our part to encourage each other in global reconciliation, or the renewal of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation.

If you would like to visit us in Adelaide, the following maps should help, and we would love to see you there at 10am ish, just not in January! (And if nobody is there, wait until 10:30 incase we have switched back to a later start, or check the web to make sure!)



It seems fitting to end this quickly written booklet with the text of an even more quickly filmed and edited movie about the group, made to show other attendees at the last SA Synod something about our community. It leaves out more than it says, of course, but at least it makes sure that there are many more voices than mine speaking to you. The video itself is on our web page (of course), along with a longer four minute version.

<http://ecofaith.org>



This is a place where it is easy to understand and comprehend

that God is in everything. In every single thing. In the wind, in the earth, in us.

Not just for us humans, but then you've got ducks. Thirteen little ducklings wandered past.



We've got a magpie, that will pinch a biscuit if you don't watch out. We've got a kookaburra that sometimes sings to us and sometimes just observes us.



I come from a traditional Christian worship background. I guess at this

stage I'm working through the issue of ecofaith worship to see what, in a sense, I will embrace in the long term.

I'm not quite sure why I come yet. I haven't been involved in a church for over 10 years and I don't even know if I'm a Christian



still. I felt like this would be an inclusive and open place where I could explore some of the ideas I have about life, and God, and everything.



Christ was a person of the outdoors and so it just makes the religion really come

real. I have belonged to churches before, and I especially value the freedom that there comes in this group and the respect for everyone in this group and their ideas.

When you think about it it's very Garden of Eden!... Christ being out



amongst people not so much in buildings.



I started coming because I wanted to have

a different kind of church experience. That's something that I like about ecofaith is that Jesus invited everybody to his table, and we invite everybody to our table, so in that sense we are continuing his mission.