

Advent, 2010



Dear Friends

*Some people I call "Christmas Christians". The most important thing about their Christian faith is believing that the Baby Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Their favourite hymn is "Joy to the World."*  
*Others I'd label "Lenten Christians", whose faith revolves around sin, guilt and forgiveness. Their symbol is the cross.*

*Then there are "Pentecost Christians", on fire with the Spirit's energy and gifts.*

*I'm an "Advent Christian". I appreciate my brother and sister Christians, but I have a different way of seeing and experiencing the faith.*

*Advent Christians believe Christ came, but still we sing "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel." We believe that in Christ the kingdom of God has dawned, but still we eagerly pray "thy kingdom come" because we long for a world that is still to come. Exile, longing, watchfulness and waiting resonate with us.* Walter Klug, *Beliefnet*

Perhaps at different times we all see ourselves characterised as one sort of Christian or another according to the types Klug suggests in his article above. From time to time I see some of each of those types in my own faith journey. For the best part though, I think that I would also characterise myself as an *Advent Christian*, longing for a world that seems to lie just outside our grasp, a world that looks more like the place that God might want it to be and longing for a church that looks more like the church that God might want it to be.

As we rush towards Christmas it is important that we do not lose the sense of hoping and waiting and anticipation that is such an important element of Advent: that season of preparation, of expectantly watching. In a world that tells us over and over that we can have it all and that we can have it NOW, Advent gives us cause to stop and draw breath and wonder how we might participate in bringing to birth the kingdom for which we hope. We might even stop and wonder how our little corner of the church might be part of that kingdom.

Advent is also a good time to stop and wonder about how our lives reflect the faith we profess. At our AGM this year we adopted a Strategic Plan that expresses some of our hopes and plans for the coming three years. Many of these hopes and plans have at their heart a vision of the church and the world that looks a bit more like the kingdom Jesus proclaimed. Making them real will require much work, but if there is sufficient longing we may occasionally find the capacity to bring about real change.

There has already been significant change in the life of the Cathedral.

This year we launched an appeal to raise the funds needed to at last repair and renovate the Cathedral after thirty years of water damage to its interior. With significant support from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the NT Government we have so far raised just over \$500,000.00 and we are preparing to sign contracts for stage one of the works. Stage one will see the main window replaced and redesigned, flashings replaced, the remaining decromastic roof tiles replaced, an upgrade of the electrical system (including improved lighting, fans and a redesigned main switch-board) and the interior of the Cathedral made good with repairs to ceilings and a repaint. This work will begin towards the end of the wet season.

This important and long hoped-for work will be a sign to the whole of the Darwin community that we are committed to our vision of being a vital spiritual heart in the City of Darwin and remaining here while we make real the longings we have for the church in this place.

The life and ministry of the Cathedral continues to touch many, many people in addition to those who gather for worship each Sunday. The visitors' book is testament to the hundreds of people who visit the Cathedral as part of their visit to Darwin. These visitors use words like, "beautiful", "peaceful", "prayerful", "a place of tranquillity" over and over to describe their experience of visiting the Cathedral. They take photos, light a candle, stop and sit and even pray.

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Then there are those who come here for the pastoral services we offer: for weddings and funerals and baptisms. This year we have had more weddings at the Cathedral than we have had for many years and we work hard to ensure that people are welcomed on these occasions regardless of how often they have been here before. Over the course of the year well over two thousand people have come to the Cathedral to attend a funeral at one time or another, from the grand occasion of the military funeral for Pte Scott Palmer to more simple occasions for those less known. People come because they know they will be welcomed and treated with respect and care.

Many people also come through our doors during those two weeks in August when the Darwin Festival takes over the Civic Park and part of our back yard. This year we hosted, and assisted with, an exhibition of painted swags, created by artists who live in the 'long-grass' around Darwin. The exhibition was well received and will hopefully tour to other capital cities in the coming year. The cathedral was also a venue for a play reading and a quiet spot for those looking to escape from the noise of Civic Park.

Then there are those people who live in and around the Cathedral precinct, that transient group of people who bring challenge and distress and joy in equal measure. These people come because in this place they are treated as people and are offered hospitality: we learn their names, listen to their stories, get angry at them and with them, and take the risk that we might be "entertaining angels unawares".

So, people continue to come. And every time they do, for whatever reason, we have a chance to share with them something of our hope for the world as God might like it to be. We have a chance to share with them our longing for transformation, our hope that things can be better. With all those who come, we have a chance to share the gospel that lies at the heart of our faith, a faith that is written into the very stones of our Cathedral and is lived (as best we can) by those Advent Christians who long for a world that is still to come.

I wish you every blessing as we enter this time of waiting for the One who has been promised.

As Michael Leunig reminds us in a poem I share every year,

*Love is born  
With a dark and troubled face,  
When hope is dead  
And in the most unlikely place  
Love is born,  
Love is always born.*

Grace and peace,



The Very Revd Jeremy Greaves  
Dean of Darwin

Please find enclosed with this letter a calendar of events for the remainder of this year and for 2011, as well as a postcard with all our Christmas service times. These are for you to put on your fridge or give to a friend who might be interested in the life of the Cathedral.