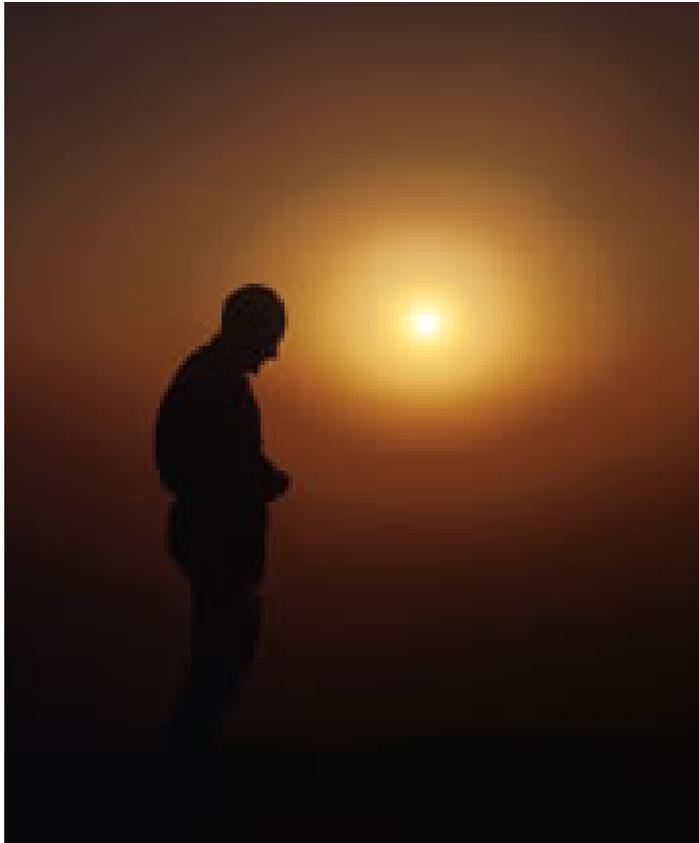


# *School of Discipleship*

## *Lent 2004*



South Yarra Community Baptist Church

### Contents

Chapter 1	<i>The School of Discipleship</i>	1
	Who is the <i>School of Discipleship</i> for?	2
	How the <i>School of Discipleship</i> unfolds	2
Chapter 2	Small Group Resources	7
Chapter 3	Daily Spiritual Exercises	20
Appendix	The South Yarra Covenant	41

## Chapter 1 – The School of Discipleship

**Lent** is a season of preparation and discipline that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes at sundown on Holy Saturday. During the forty weekdays and six Sundays in Lent, the church remembers the life and ministry of Jesus and renews its baptismal commitment to follow him in all the business of life. Lent is the traditional time to prepare for baptism, which would normally be performed at the Easter Vigil as the culmination of a process known as the ‘catechumenate’. In early centuries, the catechumenate was a lengthy *School of Discipleship* in



which enquirers and new converts learned how to both believe and practise the Christian faith. During Lent, those already baptised would join with these new converts by *returning to* the catechumenate, there to hear anew the call to follow Jesus. In this way even seasoned campaigners were given the opportunity to re-visit and deepen their baptismal vows so that their commitment to Christ would remain strong and whole through all the changes that life brings. The annual Lenten *School of Discipleship* we are offering at South Yarra is an explicit attempt to recover the riches of these traditions.

In this congregation we shall be entering into the Lenten season in a spirit of discernment. Most of us have been baptised. But each year it is our responsibility to work out the precise manner in which that

commitment and calling will become real in the ‘flesh’ of our daily living. During Lent the Church shall be actively calling its members and adherents to work, pray and worship in such a way as to hear and see what God has in store for us in the year to come—both as individuals and as a whole Church community.

### **Who is the *School of Discipleship* For?**

The South Yarra Church offers the resources of this *School of Discipleship* to anyone who is willing to engage it with a *genuine desire to hear God’s call and respond with a more resolute discipleship*. We expect that this will include:

- Those exploring the Christian faith and life by way of the 15 month Catechumenate which begins this year. The catechumenate begins with Lent in one year, and is completed at the end of Easter in the following year.
- Anyone who wishes to explore opportunities for a deeper engagement in the life, prayer and ministry of this congregation;
- All who wish to discover whether God is calling them to join the Covenanting Members of the church in committing themselves to live by the covenant disciplines;
- Everyone who intends to be a Covenanting Member for the coming year.

### **How the School of Discipleship Unfolds**

The whole process has a number of stages and progresses as follows:

1. Sometime in the weeks immediately before the commencement of Lent, the existing Covenanting Members meet together to decide whether, on the basis of their experience, there should be any substantial change to the content of the Covenant. Everyone who has attended worship in the

past six months also receives a letter inviting them to participate in the School of Discipleship.

2. On **Transfiguration Sunday** a copy of this booklet, and the booklet called *Introducing South Yarra Baptist Church* is made available to everyone who has indicated their intention to participate in the *School of Discipleship*.
3. On the evening of **Ash Wednesday** all who have chosen to participate in the *School* will attend a service of worship in the church. The service will include a rite of penitence, a suitable beginning for all who would turn from the old way of life and embrace the new.
4. On the **First Sunday of Lent** we shall be enrolling everyone who has indicated their intention to participate in the 15 month Catechumenate.
5. Between **Ash Wednesday** and the **Third Sunday of Lent** all the participants in the *School of Discipleship* will have an individual meeting with one of the Pastors for encouragement, guidance, and counsel in their personal discernment. The Pastors will meet with a Visiting Pastoral Overseer for the same purpose.
6. During Lent the home groups use the materials provided in this booklet for a series of weekly bible studies on themes surrounding the meaning of baptismal life and ministry. Also provided are daily Spiritual Exercises for individual devotion.
7. On the **Fourth Sunday of Lent** a one day retreat will be held for all catechumens. Input will be provided to encourage, challenge and inspire us in our discernment. There will also be time for quiet prayer and reflection. At some time during the retreat day, everyone will have the opportunity to meet with one of our Visiting Pastoral Overseers for individual exploration and counsel.
8. Between the **Fourth Sunday of Lent** and **Passion Sunday** all the catechumens will provide their Pastor with a written summary (using a common outline) of commitments they feel called to make for the coming year, or else they will seek a further meeting with their Pastor to

discuss the progress of their personal discernment. On the basis of these written or verbal reports, the Pastors may initiate further meetings with anyone with whom they have concerns about either over-commitment or under-commitment.

9. During the **Easter Vigil** (or, in exceptional circumstances, one of the Sundays of the Easter Season), all church members shall have opportunity to 'confirm' or reaffirm their baptismal vows.
10. During the Easter Season, the opportunity will exist for anybody who needs it to seek further time or assistance in completing their discernment process.
11. During the Easter Season, if the Pastors identify any clear trends that would suggest that some aspect of the content of the Covenant should be reconsidered, they will call a meeting of the existing Covenanting Members to that purpose.
12. Towards the end of the Easter Season, a brief congregational meeting will be convened over dinner on a Sunday night to ratify the final content of the Covenant.
13. On the Sunday nearest the **Church Anniversary** (June 18), the Covenanting Liturgy will be performed during the evening Eucharist.

So there you have it! Now we can move on the specific resources we are providing to help the *School of Discipleship* happen.

Of course, in the end, whether the *School* does its job or not is ultimately up to you. There is a very real sense in which this booklet, and the other resources offered by the Church, will only be as useful as you allow them to be. In the end we are each responsible to God for our *own* discipleship. Our failures cannot be blamed on others. They are ours alone.

## Chapter 2 – Small Group Resources

### Week before Lent 1

During the *School* all participants will be part a small group which meets weekly to study the bible, to pray, and to share their Lenten learning with others. Those who already attend one of our regular small groups will continue to do so. Those who do not will be formed into a new small group for the season of Lent alone. Of course, the new group is quite at liberty to continue meeting beyond that time-frame!



The bible studies and spiritual exercises provided in this chapter are designed to assist each group to think and pray its way into the shape and challenge of baptismal faith. It is recommended that each group meeting take the following form:

7.30 pm	Gather and catch up
8.00 pm	Pray, using the form provided by the Church
8.10 pm	Read the Scriptures & reflect upon them using the exercises below
9.15 pm	Pray, completing the form provided for the day
9.30 pm	End

### **Prayer of the week**

Show me your ways, O Lord,  
teach me your paths;  
guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my saviour  
and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25. 4, 5

### **Reading:** 1 Peter 3. 18-22

*Background.* In the ancient Mediterranean world, people believed in a multi-storied universe. Above the sky, or perhaps on the highest and most inaccessible mountain, was where God or the gods lived. Human beings lived on the earth. And below the earth, in some kind of intangible shadow-land, was a region known as Hades. Greeks and Romans believed this was where the souls of the dead went to after they had died. For them it was a neutral place, filled with both good and bad spirits. But Christians and Jews imagined Hades differently. For them, it was a place of suffering and torment. It was the place where the unrighteous went to after they died. And while some Christians believed that the righteous also went to Hades for a time (in a kind of torment-free waiting-room) they expected that all the righteous would eventually be raised to God in heaven. It is this kind of universe which Peter has in mind when he writes his letter. He imagines that what Christ did while he was dead, on Holy Saturday, was journey to the land of Hades and preach to all the tormented spirits, giving them the opportunity to believe and be saved.

Note that Peter reads the Noah's Ark story (Genesis 6-9) as a prefiguring of what occurs to Christians in baptism.

### *Questions for Discussion.*

1. Peter says that baptism ‘saves’ us ‘by the resurrection of Jesus Christ’. What do you think he means by that?
2. If you are willing, share your baptismal story with the group. What does your baptism mean to you now?

### *A spiritual exercise.*

Lent is the season in which the whole church is invited to return to the *School of Discipleship* (or ‘catechumenate’) in which candidates for baptism first learned their faith. It is an opportunity for all of us to *relearn* how Christ claimed us—body, soul and spirit—at our baptism. It is an opportunity to ask God how we ought to *live out* our baptism, in very concrete and specific ways, for the year to come. Spend a few moments now to write down some of the issues of life and faith you would like to work on during this Lenten period. You may like to share some of that with the group.

### *This Sunday’s worship.*

On Sunday we shall be enrolling those who have indicated a willingness to engage in the full Lenten Discernment process in a ‘catechumenate’ or *School of Discipleship*. There are two parts to this liturgy: (1) a call to the renewal of baptismal living; (2) a public promising to spend Lent in a careful listening for God’s call on our lives. As a sign of enrolment, each participant will be given a Lenten bag for the long and difficult journey with Jesus to the Cross. They will be encouraged to travel light, to cast off the sin that hinders and carry only what Christ will give them.

## Week before Lent 2

### **Prayer of the week**

Praise you, God of love.  
You hear the cries of your afflicted ones,  
you reach into our hearts to heal and bless.  
Therefore I will fulfil the vows I made to you.  
I will love and serve you all my life.  
I will never cease from bearing witness  
to your loving kindness.

Based on Psalm 22. 23-25, 31

### **Reading:** Romans 4. 13-25

*Background.* In this passage Paul argues that the covenant we make with God is more like a relationship of mutual faith or trust than a contract with legal clauses. He points out that the covenant with Abraham was like that. God made a promise, and Abraham responded by believing God and behaving as if the promise was already coming to pass. Note how Paul describes the kind of God who initiates the covenant: a ‘God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are’. This is the basis of our hope. What seems impossible to us is possible for God, because God is not one who seems troubled by the apparent non-existence of what is promised.

### *Questions for discussion.*

1. Paul writes ‘[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.’ What does he mean by this?

2. Recall a time in your life when you were surprised by joy, or when God came through when all seemed lost. If you are willing, share that story with the group.

*A spiritual exercise.*

Baptism is like being married to God. God proposes, and you accept. After the preparations, there is a ceremony in which vows are exchanged. There's a honeymoon period, but then you get down to the nitty-gritty of married life, with all its ups and downs. Several years down the track, after a period of renewal in your relationship, you and God decide to renew your vows to each other at the Easter Vigil at South Yarra Church. What would God want to say to you in this ceremony? What would you want to say to God? Do some writing around that. If you are willing, share some of your thoughts with the group.

*This Sunday's worship.*

On Sunday we shall be 'handing on the faith' to all who are part of the Lenten Discernment process. The faith will here be symbolised by the giving of a bible, a book of daily prayer, and a copy of the Apostles Creed. The catechumens will be encouraged to read and treasure these gifts, and carry them with them always.

## Week before Lent 3

### **Prayer of the week**

Lord,  
I am so often blind to own faults  
while others can see them very clearly.  
Forgive my blindness.  
By your mercy,  
grant me the courage to be truthful,  
that my sins may not rule over me.

Based on Psalm 19. 12, 13

**Reading:** Exodus 20. 1-17

*Background.* The Ten Commandments are a short summary of the Law of Moses, or *Torah*, that is so crucially important for the day-to-day practise of the Jewish faith. Christians have always held these precepts in high esteem as well, even though we do not believe that the keeping of *Torah* is able to accomplish our salvation. The Ten Commandments are not simply a list of rules, but also a *theology*, a way of imagining what God is like. Here God is characterized as a liberator from slavery who will bear no rival for Israel's affection.

*Questions for discussion.*

1. What is it about idols that makes God so angry? What are the idols in your own life?
2. How does one practise the Sabbath law in our own culture and time?
3. How is it possible to honour one's father and mother in a culture in which children regularly depart from the views and lifestyles of their parents?

*A spiritual exercise.*

Which of the Ten Commandments do you find the most confronting? Write it down, exactly as it appears in the text of Exodus. Say it over to yourself for a minute or so. Now, try to identify what it is in your life which wriggles and squirms so when you hear this commandment uttered. Name that attitude or that practise. Write it down. Now, write the troubling commandment in a more positive form so that, for example, “You shall not murder,” becomes “You shall honour every life”. Does that make a difference to the way you hear this word? Whatever the case, make it your business during the following week to ask God’s mercy and grace in dealing with sin you have named. If you are willing, you might like to share something of this struggle with the group.

*This Sunday’s worship.*

On Sunday we shall ritualise the first of three ‘scrutinies’ and ‘exorcisms’ for those who are part of the Lenten Discernment process. These are not as scary as they might sound! The ‘scrutinies’ are simply a prayer which gives voice to what we have been doing through the whole Lenten journey, i.e. allowing God to question the way in which we live our lives. Here we pray that God will continue to question and call us, and we ask for mercy and courage to follow Christ more devotedly. The ‘exorcism’ is a symbolic casting out of all that remains in our hearts that is *not* of Christ’s way or will. Again, it gives expression to something that we are all invited to do during Lent: to put aside the deeds of darkness and turn, instead, towards the new life which God has promised.

## Week before Lent 4

### **Prayer of the week**

Send forth your word to heal me, Lord,  
for I am poor and afflicted in spirit.  
Give me a voice to praise you with joy.  
Make of my whole life a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Based on Psalm 107. 19-22

### **Reading:** Ephesians 2. 1-10

*Background.* In this passage the author underlines, in case there is any doubt, that our capacity to live a life which pleases God depends not on the power of our own will or effort, but on God’s gift of mercy in Christ. Here the motivation for living a ‘good’ life is converted. No longer do we work for the good because we are trying to earn ‘brownie points’ with God, but because we are thankful for what God has done for us.

### *Questions for Discussion.*

1. The writer of *Ephesians* says that we receive God’s grace (or gift) through ‘faith’. What *is* faith exactly; and what is faith for *Christians*?
2. Do you ever catch yourself trying to earn ‘brownie points’ with God? How does this show itself in the way you live?

*A spiritual exercise.*

The Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich, once wrote that faith is ‘accepting God’s acceptance of us.’ Meditate upon this phrase for a minute or two. Let it seep in. Then compose a little prayer to God,

saying something of how you feel as a result of that meditation. Try to be as honest as you can. Ask God to help you become more open to God's love and care. Perhaps there will be time for some of you to share your prayers with one another.

*This Sunday's worship.*

On Sunday we shall repeat the prayers of scrutiny and exorcism from last week. We repeat them because repentance is not a once-off occurrence for the Christian, but a vocation and a lifestyle.



## Week before Lent 5

### **Prayer of the Week**

O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth shall declare your praise.  
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it.  
The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51. 15-17

**Reading:** Hebrews 4.14-5.10

*Background.* The letter to the Hebrews was written by a disciple of Paul who was concerned to show his congregation of educated Jewish Christians how the coming of Jesus fits into the expectant history of Hebrew prophecy. So Christ is portrayed as a High Priest to end all high priests, as one who offers his *own self* as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. Still, one does not become such a great figure overnight! This passage is full of poignant images of the way in which Jesus had to *learn, yes learn*, how to obey God. On that basis, we are assured that Jesus knows *exactly* the kinds of struggles we ourselves go through as we seek to put aside our sin and live for God.

*Questions for discussion.*

1. Verses 8 & 9 imply that Jesus was not always 'perfect,' that he had to learn how to obey God through trial and error, like the rest of us. How does this sit with your view of Jesus?
2. Think of a time when you were most troubled about the imperfection of your Christian discipleship. How did you feel? What did you do to move on?

*A spiritual exercise.*

The word 'obedience' is not particularly fashionable today. In some circles it is even a no-no for *parents* to enforce the obedience of their children. While most of us would agree that it is right to obey God, we must still deal with the fact that God rarely communicates God's word and will in a form other than that of humanly produced artefacts, e.g. the bible, the liturgy, the arts, the human voice. At the beginning of Christian monasticism, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE, it was common for Christians to journey into the desert and place themselves under the authority of an 'Abba' or 'Abbess,' a father or mother in the faith. For the disciple, the voice of this father or mother became, simply, the voice of God.

Do you have a father or mother in the faith? Do you have a spiritual guide, a mentor who is perhaps a little older and wiser, who cares for you and helps you to discern God's will and way? Write down some of the possible candidates. How would you feel about approaching one of them to become a companion in the faith, a kind of spiritual guide? How does one decide who is a suitable spiritual guide and who is not? What are the criteria? Talk about these questions in the group, and then resolve, if you will, to perhaps approach someone in that mentor role (if you have not already).

*This Sunday's worship.*

On Sunday we shall repeat the prayers of scrutiny and exorcism for a final time.

Week before Passion Sunday

**Prayer of the Week**

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;  
do not let me ever be put to shame;  
in your mercy deliver me.  
Incline your ear to me;  
rescue me speedily.  
Be a rock of refuge for me,  
a strong fortress to save me.

Psalm 31.1-2

**Reading:** Isaiah 50. 4-9

*Background.* This is one of the famous "Suffering Servant" passages of Isaiah. The precise identity of the servant is ambiguous. The servant could be the prophet himself, or another prophet to come, or an elaborate personification of the true vocation of Israel. Whatever the case, Christians have always read here a description of the career and suffering of Jesus and his church.

*Questions for discussion.*

1. Can you identify in this passage some kind of ethic for how Christians are called to behave in a time of persecution?
2. Have you ever felt attacked for being a Christian? If you are willing, tell the story in the group.

*A spiritual exercise.*

Imagine you were an ordinary Christian villager during the raids of the militias in East Timor immediately following the vote for independence from Indonesia. You are afraid for your life, and with good cause. You

are afraid for your family. Where do you turn for strength and hope? What Christian practices or rituals would you call on to get you through this awful time? Do some writing around these questions, and then share something of your reflections with the group.

*This week's worship.*

The week ahead is very important for Christians. "Holy Week," as it is usually called, is that time of year when we remember the last few days of Jesus' life. On Maundy Thursday we remember Jesus' last meal with the disciples. On Great Friday we recall his arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. But in the late evening of Holy Saturday, and continuing on into the early hours of Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in a Great Vigil of Easter. As part of this liturgy, those who participated in the Lenten *School of Discipleship* will renew their baptismal vows. But not them alone. Anyone who has been baptised is invited to do the same.

## **Chapter 3 – Daily Spiritual Exercises**

The following Spiritual Exercises are designed for daily use by individuals throughout the Lenten season. They may be used on their own, or in conjunction with one of the orders of daily prayer provided by the Church in *The Guide to Daily Prayer*. In the later case, it is recommended that the exercise is used following the Psalm, at the part where you are invited to observe a period of reflection on the coming day (p 26) or upon the day that is now past (p 44).

Each exercise takes the form of what is traditionally known as the *Lectio Divina* or 'sacred reading'. There are several ways to do this, but we recommend the following process:

### ***(1) Come to quiet***

Sit comfortably in a quiet place. Light a candle. Watch the candle-light and repeat the phrase "Come, Lord Jesus, Come" over and over until you feel relaxed in body and quiet within.

### ***(2) Read the text set for the day over, slowly and carefully***

Actually, this means reading the text twice. Read it once, all the way through; but then read it again, slowly, until you settle on a particular word or phrase which seems particularly significant for your own life at present.

### ***(3) meditate upon the meaning of the text***

What does this word or phrase mean for you? What is God wanting to say? Writing or drawing may help to give shape to your thoughts.

### ***(4) move into a space of contemplation where your mind is emptied in order to listen for God's voice***

Gazing at the candle again, chant your word or phrase over for a couple of minutes. Then be quiet and listen for at least five minutes, and longer if it seems right to do so.

Praying in the manner of the *Lectio Divina* will perhaps feel strange if you have never done it before, but by the end of Lent it is likely to have become second nature.

### ***Where the texts come from***

You will note that that a portion of the *Covenant* of the South Yarra Church is included as a regular reflection piece throughout Lent. The *Covenant* is included for the benefit of all who wish to discern an answer to the question: 'Is God calling me to covenant with others in the church this year?' The full text can be found in the appendix.

The rest of the texts provided are derived from three main sources. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor and theologian who was martyred for his faithful resistance to Hitler during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. His book, *Life Together*, was written out of a radical experiment in communal living when Bonhoeffer directed the theological school of the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde. Here the students lived together, prayed together, worked together and studied together. In the midst of this community, they learned how to be disciples of Jesus even unto death.

Another major source is the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, a collection of oral traditions from the men and women who journeyed into the desert in search of a simpler, more radical discipleship than the comfortable urban churches of the ancient Roman empire could give them. The 'abbas' and 'ammās' (fathers and mothers) of the desert are revered by the Church in both East and West as the founders of one of Christianity's most radical forms of discipleship: monasticism. They

have much to teach us about discipleship, community, prayer, and the formation of a more Christian self.

A final source is the New Testament, and particularly those passages that deal with our treatment of other people. The basic message in all of these texts is at once very simple, but very challenging indeed: love each other as God has loved you!

## **Daily Texts**

### ***Feb 26 – The gift of Christian community***

It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brothers and sisters is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be very brief indeed. Therefore, let the one who until now has experienced the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian sisters and brothers!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 9, 10

### ***Feb 27 – Idealisations of Christian Community***

The person who fashions a visionary ideal of Christian community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brothers and sisters and God accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brothers and sisters. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds people together. When things do not go his way,

he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community coming to ruin. In this way he becomes, first an accuser of the community, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p 16

### **Feb 28 – *My sins run out behind me***

A brother of the community committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go. So the priest sent someone to say to him, ‘Come, for everyone is waiting for you.’ So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water, and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, ‘What is this about, Father?’ The old man said to them, ‘My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, yet today I am asked to judge the sins of another.’ When they heard that they said no more to the accused brother, but forgave him instead.

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 138

### **March 1 – *Love your enemies***

Jesus said: ‘Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not stop him from also taking your shirt. Give to everyone that asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others what you would have them do to you.’

*Luke 6.27-31*

### **March 2 – *Strength for community***

A brother questioned Abba Matoes saying, ‘What am I to do? My tongue makes me suffer, and every time I go amongst people, I cannot control it, but I condemn them in all the good they are doing and reproach them with it. What am I to do?’ The old man replied, ‘If you cannot contain yourself, flee into solitude. For this is a sickness. The one who dwells with other people must not be square, but round, so as to turn himself towards all.’ He went on, ‘It is not through virtue that I live in solitude, but through weakness; those who live with integrity amongst people are the strong ones.’

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 145

### **March 3 – *Be merciful***

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be called sons and daughters of the Most High, because God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful as your Father is merciful.

*Luke 6.32-36*

#### **March 4 – *Desert Spirituality***

We do not go into the desert to escape people but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good . . . the truest solitude is not something outside you, nor an absence of human beings or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the centre of our own soul. And this abyss of interior solitude is a hunger that will never be satisfied with any created thing.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pp 80, 81

#### **March 5 – *The Covenant, first agreement***

With God's help, we endeavour to worship together each Sunday and on other principal dates in the church calendar, gathering prayerfully around the Eucharist to encounter the Christ who gives himself to us, calls us to follow and nurtures us for the journey.

#### **March 6 – *Only Christ can tell me what love is***

I do not know in advance what love of others means on the basis of the general idea of love that grows out of my human desires—all this may rather be hatred and an insidious kind of selfishness in the eyes of Christ. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what love towards my sister or brother really is. Therefore, spiritual love is bound solely to the word of Jesus Christ. Where Christ bids me to maintain fellowship for the sake of love, I will maintain it. Where his truth enjoins me to dissolve a relationship for love's sake, I will dissolve it, in spite of all the protests of my human love. Because spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother or sister.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p 22

#### **March 8 – *The freedom of the other person from me***

God did not make the other person as I would have made her. He did not give her to me as a sister for me to dominate and control, but in order that I might find above her the Creator. Now the other person, in the freedom with which she was created, becomes the occasion of joy, whereas before she was only a nuisance and an affliction. God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the image that seems good to me, that is, in my own image; rather, in her very freedom from me God made this person in his own image. I can never know beforehand how God's image should appear in others. That image always manifests a completely new and unique form that comes solely from God's free and sovereign creation. To me the sight may seem strange, even ungodly. But God creates every person in the likeness of his son, the Crucified. After all, even that image certainly looked strange and ungodly to me before I grasped it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 71, 72.

#### **March 9 – *Loving One's Enemy***

Do not be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he or she is *your* enemy. Perhaps they are your enemy because they think you are a savage. Or perhaps they are afraid of you because they feel you are afraid of them. And perhaps if they believed you were capable of loving them they would no longer be your enemy.

Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is an enemy of God just because he or she is *your* enemy. Perhaps they are your enemy precisely because they can find nothing in you that gives glory to God. Perhaps they fear you because they can find nothing in you of God's

love and God's kindness and God's patience and mercy and understanding of the weaknesses of human beings.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 177

### **March 10 – *Who is mad?***

Abba Anthony said, 'A time is coming when people will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack her saying, "You are mad, you are not like us."'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 6.

### **March 11 – *Love***

We are obliged to love one another. We are not strictly bound to "like" one another. Love governs the will: "liking" is a matter of sense and sensibility. Nevertheless, if we really love others it will not be too hard to like them also.

If we wait for some people to become agreeable or attractive before we begin to love them, we will never begin. If we are content to give them a cold impersonal "charity" that is merely a matter of obligation, we will not trouble to try to understand them or to sympathise with them at all. And in that case we will not really love them, because love implies an efficacious will not only to do good to others exteriorly but also to find some good in them to which we can respond.

Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, pp 169, 170

### **March 12 – *The Covenant, second agreement***

With God's help, we endeavour to meet together at agreed times each week for activities which include: developing our understanding of the faith; developing our ability to worship; studying the bible together; praying together; and sharing with and encouraging one another in our quest to live our lives in the Spirit of Christ.

### **March 13 – *Only Christ can save my brother or sister***

Because Christ stands between me and others, I dare not desire direct fellowship with them. As only Christ can speak to me in such a way that I may be saved, so others, too, can be saved only by Christ himself. This means that I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, or dominate him with my love. The other person needs to retain his independence of me; to be loved for what he is, as one for whom Christ because human, died, and rose again, for whom Christ bought forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Because Christ has long since acted decisively for my brother or sister, before I could begin to act, I must leave him his freedom to be Christ's; I must meet him only as the person he already is in Christ's eyes. This is the meaning of the proposition that we can meet others only through the mediation of Christ. Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what she is, and what she should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love recognises the true image of the other person which she had received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 22, 23

### **March 15 – Judging others**

One day Abba Isaac the Theban went to a monastery. He saw a brother committing a sin and condemned him. When he returned to the desert, an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell and said, ‘I will not let you enter.’ But Isaac persisted saying, ‘What is the matter?’ and the angel replied, ‘God has sent me to ask you where you want to throw the guilty brother whom you have condemned.’ Immediately Isaac repented and said, ‘I have sinned, forgive me.’ Then the angel said, ‘Get up, God has forgiven you. But from now on, be careful not to judge someone before God has done so.’

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers, p 110*

### **March 16 – Solitude**

There are Christians who cannot endure being alone, who have had some bad experiences with themselves, who hope they will gain some help in association with others. They are generally disappointed. Then they blame the fellowship for what is really their own fault. The Christian community is not a spiritual sanatorium. The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, however spiritual this diversion appears to be. He is really not seeking community at all, but only distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time, the very alienation that creates the most deadly isolation of human beings.

*Let the one who cannot be alone beware of community.* Such a person will only do harm to himself and to the community as well. Alone you stood before God when he called you; alone you had to answer that call; alone you had to struggle and pray; and alone you will die and give an account to God. You cannot escape from yourself; for God has singled you out. If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ’s call

to you, and you can have no part in the community of those who are called.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, pp 58, 59*

### **March 17 – Only God can help**

A woman had an illness they call cancer of the breast; she had heard of Abba Longinus and wanted to meet him. Now he lived at the ninth milestone from Alexandria. As the woman was looking for him, the blessed man happened to be collecting wood beside the sea. When she met him, she said to him, ‘Abba, where does Abba Longinus, the servant of God live?’ not knowing that it was he. He replied, ‘Why are you looking for that old impostor? Do not go to see him, for he is a charlatan. What is the matter with you?’ The woman spoke of her suffering. The old man made the sign of the cross over the sore and sent her away, saying ‘Go, and God will heal you, for Longinus cannot help you at all.’ The woman went away confident in this saying, and she was healed immediately. Later, telling others what had happened and mentioning the distinctive marks of the old man, she learned that it was Abba Longinus himself.

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers, p 123*

### **March 18 – No discipleship without others**

*Let the one who is not in community beware of being alone.* Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the last day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the brothers and sisters, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you.

We recognise, then, that only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only the one that is alone can live in the fellowship. Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in the fellowship. It is not as though the one preceded the other; both begin at the same time, namely, with the call of Jesus Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p 58

### **March 19 – *The Covenant, fourth agreement***

With God's help, we endeavour to devote some time to prayer each day, either alone or with others, and within that time we will use some agreed common patterns of prayer and Scripture reading.

### **March 20 – *True silence***

Abba Poemen said: 'A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing except what is profitable.'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 171

### **March 22 – *Humility***

When Abba Macarius was returning from the marsh to his hermitage one day carrying some palm leaves, he met the devil on the road with a

scythe. The devil struck at him as much as he pleased, but in vain, and finally said to him, 'What is your power, Macarius, that makes me powerless against you? All that you do, I accompany you in; you fast, so do I; you keep vigil, so I do not sleep at all; in one thing only do you beat me.' Abba Macarius asked what that was. The devil replied, 'Your humility. Because of that I can do nothing against you.'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp. 129, 130

### **March 23 – *Peace through affliction***

Abba Isidore, the priest, spoke to the people one day saying, 'Brothers, is it not in order to endure affliction that we have come to this place? But now there is no affliction for us here. So I am getting my sheepskin ready to go where there is some affliction, and it is there that I will find peace.'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 173

### **March 24 – *Forgiveness***

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, ; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you should put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger, do not sin': do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold . . . Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen . . . Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form

of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

*Ephesians 4.22-27, 29, 31-32*

### **March 25 – *The ministry of bearing***

‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ (Galatians 6.2). Thus the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining. The sister is a burden to the Christian, precisely because she is a Christian. For the pagan, the other person never becomes a burden at all. He simply sidesteps every burden that others may impose upon him.

The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother or sister. She must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother or sister, and not merely an object to be manipulated. The burden of human beings was so heavy for God himself that he had to endure the cross. God bore the burden of human beings in the body of Jesus Christ. But he bore them as a mother carries her child, as a shepherd enfolds a lost lamb that has been found. God took human beings upon himself and they weighted him to the ground, but God remained with them and they with God. It is the law of Christ that is fulfilled in the cross. And Christians must share in this law. They must suffer their brothers and sisters, but, what is more important, now that the law of Christ has been fulfilled, they *can* bear with their brothers and sisters.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 77, 78

### **March 26 – *The Covenant, third and fifth agreements***

With God’s help we endeavour to offer welcome and hospitality to anyone who wishes to share in the life of our church, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or life experience . . .

With God’s help we endeavour to be accountable to one another for the integrity with which we live out our prayer and the fidelity of our relationships with Christ, the creation, and other people.

### **March 27 – *How to live as a Christian***

A brother asked Abba Poemen, ‘How should a Christian behave?’ The old man said to him, ‘Look at Daniel, no one found anything in him to complain about except for his prayers to the Lord his God.’

Another brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, ‘If I see my brother or sister committing a sin, is it right to conceal it?’ The old man said to him, ‘At the very moment when we hide our brother’s fault, God hides our own and at the moment when we reveal our brother’s fault, God reveals ours too.’

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp 174, 175

### **March 29 – *Authority in the community***

Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, and proclaiming is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether ‘spiritual’ nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian

community; indeed, it poisons the Christian community. The desire we so often here expressed for ‘episcopal figures,’ ‘priestly men,’ ‘authoritative personalities’ springs frequently enough from a spiritually sick need for the admiration of human beings, for the establishment of visible human authority, because the genuine authority of service appears to be so unimpressive. There is nothing that so sharply contradicts such a desire as the New Testament itself in its description of a bishop (1 Tim 3.1ff). One finds there nothing whatsoever with respect to worldly charm and the brilliant attributes of a ‘spiritual’ personality. The bishop is a simple, faithful person, sound in faith and life, who rightly discharges his duties to the Church. His authority lies in the exercise of his ministry. In the man himself there is nothing to admire.

Genuine authority realizes that it can only exist in the service of him who alone has authority. Genuine authority knows that it is bound in the strictest sense by the saying of Jesus: ‘Only one is your master, the Christ, and all of you are sisters and brothers’ (Mt 23.8). The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the community . . . The Church will place its confidence only in the simple servant of the Word of Jesus Christ, because it knows than then it will be guided, not according to human wisdom and human conceit, but by the Word of the good shepherd.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 84, 85

### **March 30 – *Silence is listening for the Word of God***

There is an indifferent, or even negative, attitude toward silence which sees in it a disparagement of God’s revelation in the Word. This is the view which misinterprets silence as a ceremonial gesture, as a mystical desire to get beyond the Word. This is to miss the essential relationship of silence to the Word. Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God. We are silent before hearing the Word because our thoughts are already directed to the Word, as a child is quiet when

she enters her father’s room. We are silent after hearing the Word because the Word is still speaking and dwelling within us. We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God. We keep silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honour and receive it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp 59, 60

### **March 31 – *a moment of grace***

It was said of Abba Macarius the Egyptian that one day when he was going up to town from the monastery with a load of baskets to sell, he sat down, overcome with weariness, and began to say to himself, ‘My God, you know very well that I cannot go any further,’ and immediately he found himself at the market.

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 130

### **April 1 – *Listening to others***

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brother or sister is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that he not only gives us his Word but also lends us his ear. So it is God’s work that we do for our brother or sister when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

The one who can no longer listen to his sister or brother will soon no longer be listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p 75

### **April 2 – *The Covenant*, sixth agreement**

With God's help, we endeavour to contribute individually to the finances of our church, pledging ourselves in advance to give at or above a level determined by a formula we have agreed on together (unless otherwise arranged).

### **April 3 – *Acceptance and anger***

Some people came to Abba Poemen and said to him, 'When we see brothers who are dozing in church, shall we rouse them so that they can be watchful?' He said to them, 'For my part, when I see a brother who is dozing, I put his head on my knees and let him rest.'

A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, 'What does it mean to be angry with your brother without a cause?' He said, 'If your brother hurts you by his arrogance and you are angry with him because of it, that is getting angry without cause. If he plucks out your right eye and cuts off your right hand, and you get angry with him, you are angry without cause. But if he separates you from God, then be angry with him.'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp 179-180, 184

### **April 5 – *The Covenant*, seventh agreement**

With God's help, we endeavour to take on one task each necessary to the ongoing life and ministry of the church, its activities and its property . . .

### **April 6 – *Seeking vengeance***

A brother whom another brother had wronged came to see Abba Sisoës and said to him, 'My brother has hurt me and I want to avenge myself.' The old man pleaded with him saying, 'No, my child, leave vengeance to God.' But the brother replied, 'I will not rest until I have avenged myself.' So the old man said, 'Brother, let us pray.' Then he stood up and said, 'God, we no longer need you to care for us, since we do justice for ourselves.' Hearing these words, the brother fell at the old man's feet, saying, 'I will no longer seek justice from my brother; forgive me, Abba.'

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p 212

### **April 7 – *The Covenant*, eighth agreement**

With God's help, we endeavour to participate fully in the Lenten School of Discipleship as we seek to discern the shape of God's call on each of our lives for the next year.

### **April 8 – Maundy Thursday**

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on  
                    darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama  
And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away—  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between  
                    stations  
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen  
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing—  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

T.S. Eliot, from 'East Coker' in *The Four Quartets*.

### **April 9 – Great Friday**

Just at the right time, when we were powerless in our sins, Christ died  
for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone be willing to die for a good  
person, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we  
were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*Romans 5.6, 7*

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may  
increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any  
longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ

Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him  
through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from  
death through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

*Romans 6.1-4*

### **April 10 - Holy Saturday**

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

T.S. Eliot, from 'Little Gidding' in *The Four Quartets*.

## Appendix

### The Covenant

*Drawn together by the generous and unconditional love of God, present in all creation and made known to us in Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves to God and to one another under the banner of the South Yarra Community Baptist Church. The primary purposes of our gathered life are to join prayerfully with the faithful of every time and place in the worship of God, and to actively seek to further our formation as Christian people, that we may follow Christ in his absolute openness to the Spirit, living as God-bearers in the world and destined for complete union with the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.*

Recognizing that any church can only exist where a team of people covenant together, binding themselves to Christ and to one another in seeking to fulfil the purposes of the church, we commit ourselves to being that Covenant Team within this congregation.

We hold in common the belief that in Jesus we have seen both the fullness of God and of human potential and so, acknowledging him as Lord and Christ, we entrust ourselves to him to be formed and guided by his Holy Spirit into the fullness of life and love for which we were created.

As a Covenant Team, we make the following covenant agreements with one another and commit ourselves to seek to live together by them.

With God's help, we endeavour to:

- worship together each Sunday and on other principal dates in the church calendar, gathering prayerfully around the Eucharist to encounter the Christ who gives himself to us, calls us to follow and nurtures us for the journey.

- meet together at agreed times each week for activities which include: developing our understanding of the faith; developing our ability to worship; studying the Bible together; praying together; and sharing with and encouraging one another in our quest to live our lives in the Spirit of Christ.
- offer welcome and hospitality to anyone who wishes to share in the life of our church, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or life experience.
- devote some time to prayer each day, either alone or with others, and within that time we will use some agreed common patterns of prayer and Scripture reading.
- be accountable to one another for the integrity with which we live out our prayer and the fidelity of our relationships with Christ, the creation and other people.
- contribute individually to the finances of our church, pledging ourselves in advance to give at or above a level determined by a formula we have agreed on together (unless otherwise arranged).
- take on one task each necessary to the ongoing life and ministry of the church, its activities and its property.
- participate fully in the Lenten School of Discipleship as we seek to discern the shape of God's call on each of our lives for the next year.

We commit ourselves to these common disciplines, depending on the grace of God and of one another, and trusting that through our endeavours to live by them we will together be drawn more fully into the life of God in the world.

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Compiled by Garry J. Deverell for the  
South Yarra Community Baptist Church  
12 Surrey Road, South Yarra, Victoria 3141, Australia.  
church@laughingbird.net  
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