

Retrospective

Jacob's Ladder

This issue of *the Messenger* has a hospitality theme. The editorial committee decided to look back to the 1970s at one of St Stephen's initiatives - the coffee lounge 'Jacob's Ladder' - as a means of helping us reflect on what has been, and what might be possible for the future. It seems that for many the main memory of Jacob's Ladder is that of sadness and pain but some of the following reflections by St Stephen's members and others show that it continues to have a profound positive legacy in Adelaide and beyond.

Upstairs we climbed – 35, 36, maybe 40 steps – it was a lot, anyway, and hence, the name, Jacob's Ladder. Coffee, toasted fruit bread, round or square laminex tables, old, well-loved comfortable chairs, and friendly young people willing to let you be, made it a very pleasant and relaxing place for many.

These are the memories some of our (then) young people have of Jacob's Ladder, an interesting venture in Christian outreach in which St Stephens was involved during the 1970s.



In the late 1960s, the concept of a coffee lounge cum drop-in centre for young people was a popular one. Other church groups had started them, and in the LCA (SA District) both the LSF and the LYSA were keen to start such a venture. With the guidance and help of the then youth director – Pastor Ted Prenzler – they combined their resources and the result was Jacob's Ladder Drop In Centre. The centre was located in Gawler Place, next door to where the Open Book stands today. The centre soon attracted many young people with up to 100 young people visiting on a given evening. As a result it was soon apparent that a director/pastor was needed to provide the leadership and counselling required.

St Stephen's was approached to become involved to a greater degree, as this position was to be part-time only. Following meetings of the congregation, it was agreed that St Stephen's would call a pastor whose time would be shared three-quarters to Jacob's Ladder and one quarter to St Stephen's. Following several unsuccessful calls, a call was issued to Pastor Doug Kuhl, who at the time was located at Swan Hill, Vic. Pastor Kuhl accepted the call, and was duly inducted into our church on 13 January 1974. St Stephen's pastor at that time was Pastor Kevin Schmidt. St Stephen's also purchased the manse at Vine Street, Klemzig, for Pastor Kuhl and his family.

St Stephen's youth became involved to a greater degree as well, both by working in the centre itself, and by sharing in the experience of talking to young people from outside the church on spiritual matters. Pastor Kuhl revelled in the work of the centre, and was very much at home with the young people who came to the centre. Clad in his motorcycle leathers (Pastor Kuhl's preferred mode of transport was his motor bike) he had a passion for those who were lost to God and was determined to bring God to these people. Young people came to the centre because they were accepted just as they were, and because there were other young people there who they could talk to easily and without judgement. Besides, there was also coffee and food – even if the service was a little chaotic at times!



As time progressed (1974) it was evident that Pastor Kuhl's heart lay with his work at Jacob's Ladder, and he had little time to spare for St Stephen's. Following discussions with officers of the SA district, St Stephen's and Jacob's Ladder, Pastor Kuhl resigned from St Stephen's at the end of 1974 so that he could fully concentrate on his work at Jacob's Ladder. St Stephen's youth maintained their contact with the centre by continuing their assistance as before.

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not correct!

The project continued until the premises in Gawler Place changed ownership and the lease terminated. Pastor Kuhl, and a group of fellow workers then moved to premises in the Western suburbs where they formed a "fellowship". So ended this venture in faith for St Stephen's.

How many young people were brought into close fellowship with Christ through the activities of Jacob's Ladder, we may never know. But it was an important experiment in bringing God to young people in a new and different way - and I think we learned that there is a lot of value in at least trying out new ventures.

Rex H Lohmeyer

The Jacob's Ladder Community



I first heard about Jacob's Ladder when I was in the youth at my 'home' church, Mansfield Park Methodist. [1971] After we were married in January 1974, we became increasingly dissatisfied with the Congregation of which we were members... and with another couple who felt similarly, we met each Sunday afternoon in my house in the city, when we would read and discuss the Scriptures, pray and celebrate the Lord's Supper... One Saturday evening, my wife and I went to Jacob's Ladder, and after some talking, we were invited to the Sunday afternoon worship service.

Here were people who took the Bible seriously in their worship and teaching and preaching. Here one could hear about 'Christ, and Him crucified', something sadly lacking in our previous congregation. Here were people who obviously didn't all have a 'nice Christian upbringing'. There were even some people we already knew, from Holy Trinity Anglican Church and from Scripture Union Beach Missions. And they were serious about something near to my heart: reaching 'street kids' with the good news about Jesus.

Some of the things I remember from those days:

- Doug Vogelsang on his hands and knees, scrubbing the carpet ready for Coffee Shop... [Doug is a member of Bethlehem]
- The 'Colours' worn by the Bike group...
- The Baptism of my wife...
- Doug V coming around a few days after the birth of our first child and hanging out nappies...
- Going out into the streets and pubs to tell the Good News, and offer help if anyone needed it...
- The year our Yellow Pages listing was inserted under 'Ladders & Steps'...
- The friendly home meetings for Bible Study, prayer and fellowship...
- 6:30 am Church Council meetings (I was a member)...
- 60 minute + sermons...
- Church camps...

I think the thing that most attracted us about Jake's was the overall 'loveliness' of the people. Their Christianity was down-to-earth and practical, and there was no hint of sham or hypocrisy. Faults and sins were confessed and forgiven, and we knew in our lives the healing and forgiveness that comes from God.

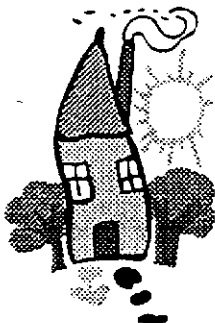
I am still sorrowful that some of our people, who needed the support of a close-knit community for their Christian walk, seem to have 'fallen through the sieve' after the demise (or suppression) of the Community. When we needed help and asked for it, it was largely refused - an opportunity to minister to a large sub-culture in SA has been missed.

David Southern,
Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Jacob's Ladder was an amazing experiment in outreach to the community. My best friend Vera became a Christian around that time. Graham and I asked, "What can we do to support each other?" and decided to live communally. We were pleased to find a house in Croydon in Jacob's Ladder territory. Up until then our church experience was pretty useless for us, but once we joined this group we felt like we had arrived with like-minded people.

I was expecting Marcia (daughter) and found out that Simeon (my first child) was terminally ill. The community rallied in an exceptional way. We never felt alone.

Hospitality was the order of the day. It was the cutting edge of our faith and we could begin to process our conversion experience



in the light of our new found community. In community faith was seven days a week. It showed us about opening our home which I think is the core of renewal.

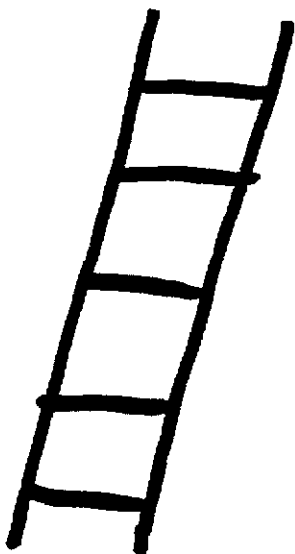
This is something that I think I'm still learning. If our homes are closed our hearts are closed.

Doug's idealism drove people to joy, praise, faith, commitment. I think there was more idealism than sense, which was probably reflected in the marriages within the community. We had lots of street kids coming in and marrying each other. They had come from troubled family backgrounds and still had lots of issues to sort through, so once children came along the pressures started to take their toll. A friend estimated that there was a 50% breakdown in marriages within the community.

*Trish Bryce,
Blackwood Uniting Church*

- from a conversation with Leigh Newton-

REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNED AT JACOB'S LADDER



Adult Education theory highlights a model of learning called work experience. This model suggests that we learn some theory, put it into practice, reflect on our experience, do some follow up training and then put it into practice and continue to repeat the cycle. Jacob's Ladder was certainly an experience for the LCA

from which many valuable lessons can be learned.

Looking back, one thing that I value was the opportunity to put what I had gleaned from the Scriptures into practice. As a group we sat down and worked through the gospel of Luke, looked at the kind of lifestyle Jesus Christ was talking about and made some fumbling attempts to put it into practice. That led to no small amount of theological controversy and animated meetings at the District and National offices!

It also led to an influx of new Christians. Many of these came from the streets and had a lot of growing to do. At one stage some 20 households of churching young people and former street kids were banded together to form a community in the inner northwestern suburbs.

The coffee lounge proved to be an effective (and challenging!) meeting place between the church and the world. The community houses brought all of us face to face with the pain of broken lives and our reliance on Jesus to bring hope and healing.

Now that the dust has somewhat settled, something that was personally significant was a rediscovery of what St. Paul calls the obedience that comes from faith. (See Romans 1:5) Later discussions with church leaders confirmed this belief as we examined the Book of Concord in reflecting on what had happened at Jacob's Ladder in the light of the Lutheran Confessions. Granted, works righteousness is always knocking at the door, nevertheless, the new obedience can not be ignored. (cf. Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship). It is a common theme in the gospels and the New Testament letters. How many believers fail to grow in faith and fruitfulness through lack of knowing how to respond to the grace of God? The Reformation taught us never to lose sight of justification by faith, but this was never meant to be the exclusion of obedience.

At Jacob's Ladder my somewhat dormant faith began to grow through really hearing the Word and taking a few tentative steps of obedience. A real key was repentance - a radical change of direction in response to the overwhelming love of Christ demonstrated on the cross - a gift that He worked over a period of time, which led to a fresh revelation of what He had done on the cross and to an outpouring of His Spirit.

These days not too much time passes before I come across some of the many hundreds who came into contact with Jacob's Ladder. They can be found in many of our congregations, in many denominations and in mission organisations. Sadly, some are disenfranchised from the church. The same yearning for spiritual and practical reality still exists among young people today.

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It is exciting to see mission teams going out. Coffee lounges have returned in the form of cafe's. Could we see it all happen again? Hopefully we, the LCA, will have learned a few lessons.

It wouldn't be too difficult to write a book of reflections on lessons learned at Jacob's Ladder. Here are a few that stand out:

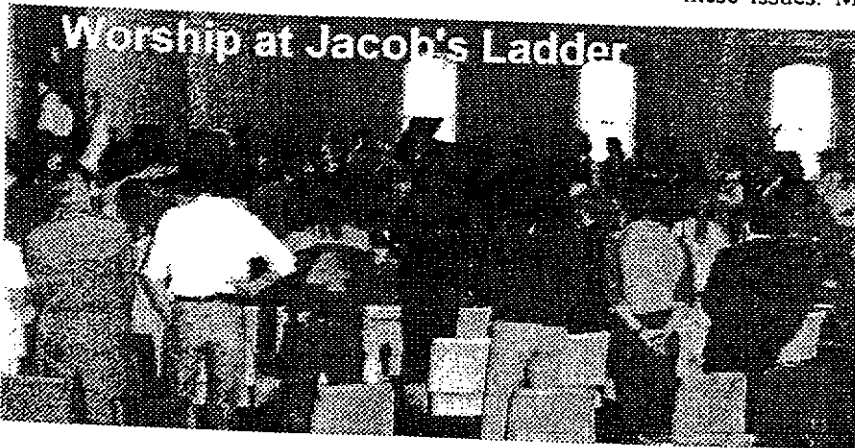
- The importance of mission teams and teamwork as means of proclaiming the gospel.
- The need for accountability through designated shepherds, rather than through hierarchical structures.
- The need for teams to operate within agreed mission plans and core values.
- The tendency to see your own particular group as one of the few taking the gospel seriously.
- The need for confessional cohesion while refraining from sectarianism.
- The reality that we can't live out the gospel in our own strength.
- The need to 'get real' with God and each other.
- The reality that we are saints and sinners at the same time.
- The reality of spiritual warfare.
- The necessity of prayer and intercession.

- The significance of the gifts of the Spirit as equipment for ministry.
- The need for a wholistic approach toward spiritual, rational, emotional and social growth of new Christians.
- The need to anchor new Christians in the Word of God and to teach spiritual disciplines over an extended period of time.
- The importance of cultural relevance in communicating eternal truths.
- The significance of indigenous, spirit filled worship styles.
- The need to maintain unity in the cause of the gospel (Philippians 4:2-3)
- The need for teamwork between people with apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching gifts.
- The effectiveness of coffee lounge/café style ministry in relational evangelism.
- The need to maintain balance in reaching the unchurched rather than be overwhelmed by attempting too much too quickly and without appropriate planning.
- The need for a healthy parent body to support outreach with prayer and pastoral support.

Those of us involved with Jacob's Ladder went through many highs and lows, joys, tears and moments of sheer exhaustion in the process of wrestling with these issues. Much could be said in relation to each

point. It was a steep learning curve which I have always valued, hopefully without becoming too sentimental about it.

*Karl Brettig,
Small Groups Co-ordinator,
Good Shepherd, Para Vista*



*This feature on
Jacob's Ladder
will be
continued in the
next edition of
St Stephen's
Messenger....*

Jacob's Ladder

Retrospective

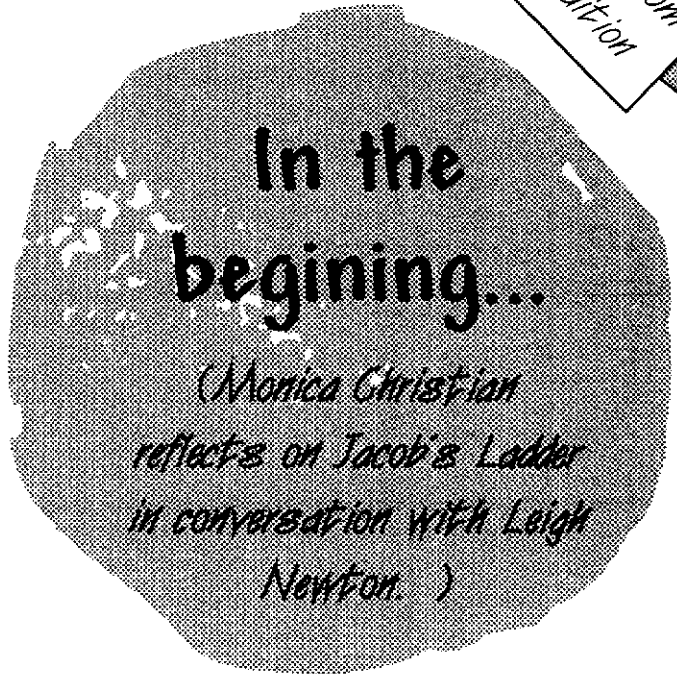
continued from
last edition

The idea for Jacob's Ladder started in our lounge room at a Dorian Society meeting.

The Dorian Society was formed by Geoff Strelan, Milton Eckerman and me in mid 1968 before Ivan and I were married. It was soon after Milton had returned from National Service. Roger Burger later became involved.

We were concerned that young people were leaving the church and we were hopeful that we could encourage the use of young people's gifts in the church, hence the name Dorian from Dorus (Greek) - 'gift'. Geoff, Milton and I had a meeting with Pastor Ted Prenzler who was very encouraging.

We met every week starting in May '69 and looking back on it we achieved quite a lot. The Dorian Society was influential in the first contemporary youth service, held in the Adelaide Town Hall in Sept 1969 as part of a national Lutheran Youth Assembly where Geoff Burger preached. My diary says it was "stupendous". Contemporary services are regular events now but this event was incredibly innovative and important in providing something different in worship for Lutheran youth.



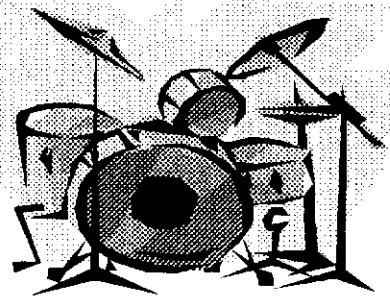
We had a social evening at the Glenelg Town Hall where we practised a hymn set to different music. Pastors Jim Wiebusch and John Juers told us to stop - presumably because it was seen to be irreverent. Milton, Roger Burger and Geoff Strelan had to front up to General Church Council to explain what they were doing.

The Dorian Society also took contemporary services to country towns to try and involve kids. "Singout" also came out of The Dorian Society, run by Geoff.

Church coffee lounges were in vogue by about '66 or '67 and were at Unley and Glandore amongst others. There was a coffee lounge at Bethlehem where they used to darken the lights and I remember that the elders used to switch on the lights.



Jacob's Ladder was a melding of the two ideas of using gifts and hospitality. A centralised Lutheran Youth coffee lounge where you could sit and talk and perform was seen as a way to bring it together. Robin Stelzer (an accountant, now Pastor at Rochedale, Qld but wasn't in seminary at the time) became involved and helped with the financial books and also Chris Rothe, Karl Brettig (in 1971) and Judy Schultz (from Bethlehem).



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Jacob's Ladder..... continued

In searching for a venue the Beckermanns suggested that it could be in the front of their house in Unley; but Milton, Geoff and I found the Gawler Place upstairs site where it started in Sept or Oct 1970. It was named because of the steep flight of stairs as well as because of the Biblical reference. The owner, a Mr Tomlinson, asked only a minimal rent as it had been empty for ages and was happy for it to be used.

We went to a hotel that was closing down and bought the carpet. Robin Stelzer organised that; he was really good with money and design. Geoff and I were the dreamers. Geoff got very enthusiastic and inspired. Alwyn Seidel and Ivan's dad spent hours scrubbing the walls as did lots of Unley people. We had a 'tent' made out of hessian hung from the ceiling that made a smaller area for more private talking. Alcohol wasn't in the coffee lounge scene so some of the "Jac's" menu was fake cocktail drinks

Jacob's Ladder was in a good position as one of the goals was outreach to people in the city of Adelaide. We were wanting to witness to "bikies" and "street people" in a non-threatening way. Ivan remembers going out on the streets, getting into conversation and inviting plenty of "bikies".

Milton thinks that worship services commenced soon after Jac's formation. Some people, including Paul Stolz and Garry Doecke started taking services to McNally's (a boys' prison at that time) Workshops also happened at Jacob's Ladder.


It wasn't started as a "Charismatic" place but as a central place, permanently set up where Lutheran youth from all over town could come and meet. Goodness knows where the money came from - people probably gave it, as one of the things about the Dorian Society was that if you had the gift of money you gave it. I know that Milton and Irwin Dutschke who managed the books gave a considerable amount. Aside from Geoff, the rest of us weren't of "Charismatic" nature.

He had an amazing spiritual experience in about '69 and he was very much a leader. Geoff worked in the Public Service for years and I think is now a lecturer at Tabor College.

I ran the kitchen most of the time but I remember having a very significant conversation with Rob Proeve when he learnt he had cancer. He was clear that he was going to die and I remember feeling disbelieving that this could happen to someone in our age bracket. Youth groups were later rostered for working in the kitchen and cooking toast.

This was at the same time that Norm Habel was telling us that we could worship in a contemporary style. The 1st contemporary service at St Stephen's was 12th July 1970 (my 21st birthday). Norm was over from the USA and he taught us some songs now in the green book. He wasn't allowed to preach from the pulpit but he preached from beside the lectern. We had a scratch band pre-Kindekrist. It was also the Vietnam Moratorium days. One night we were at Jacobs Ladder doing our thing and then at midnight went to get Robin Mann from the watch house.

My involvement with "Jac's" stopped with a nasty car accident in 1971 which put me in hospital for a long time. I was 19 when it all started and Milton was probably 21. I kept a diary during that period and am amazed at how young we were and how it all happened. Milton was involved until 1973 when he married Janet and went to Hermansburg. Milton and Janet were responsible for Ivan and I going to work in Hermansburg and Alice Springs which has been very significant in our lives.



**Our next edition will
feature reflections from
some of the members of the
Jacob's Ladder community
in Bowden Brompton.**

Retrospective

Jacob's Ladder

Street Work

Our Lutheran youth group in Toowoomba had a coffee lounge. We'd sing four part choral arrangements and give people smiley badges as they came through the door. Then with uni students in Brisbane we were involved similarly. Walking with a street gang one night in 1972 a bomb exploded inside the pizza shop when we were only 50 metres away from it! A time of the Whiskey-a-Go-Go bombing and gang warfare. That same year I met Jakes people at an LSF conference in Canberra.

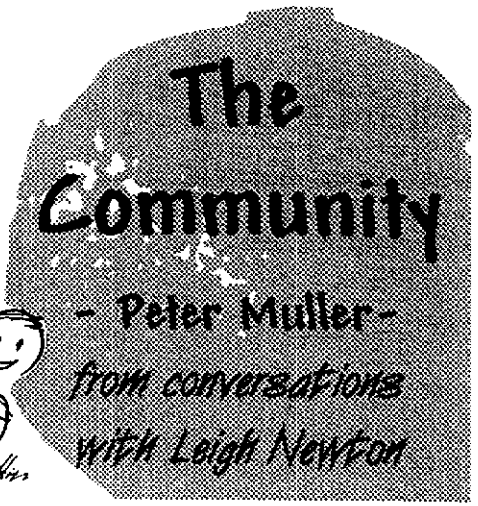
When I came to Adelaide in 1974 for Luther Seminary I started helping at Jakes on Friday and Saturday nights. In 1975 I moved more into street work. We'd meet people, converse with them and help them when we could. Soon after Rundle Mall was completed we used to perform street theatre and music near its fountain.

Houses

In 1975 eighteen people moved into a large mansion in Queen St, Norwood. This was too large to manage so the Jakes community decided to form smaller households with diverse special functions, placing people according to their skills and needs. Some street people didn't even have basic cleanliness skills. The community people were also moved about for their leadership and faith development. I was in a house with Ruth and Steen Olsen (currently president of the LCA NZ District), Peter Jasprizza, Margo Polkinghorne and street kids. Then I led a house in Croydon. About fifty people moved through the house that year and it was not unusual to have 100 people each week as visitors for meals. Everyone had to attend the 6am devotion and we had 9pm vespers most nights. I sometimes would pull kids out of bed in the morning and even carry them to devotion. We insisted on an empty house during the day to encourage a search for jobs.

Each house had an official function or an agreed norm. For example, Karl Brettig, Doug Kuhl, Ian Wade and Geoff were good at relating to older people like bikers so they formed a house with that emphasis.

People would start in a contact house then progress to a family house. There were 38 core members, 70-80 people in houses, 25 kids and some people moving through - 120 all up.



Sometimes it seemed totally chaotic and absolute folly with the personal and emotional pressures, but it was very well organised and highly professional with a lot of people benefitting.

Neither Lutheran nor Ecumenical?

Worship was very modern and innovative, creating its own tradition rather than being beholden to any other. There was real conservatism in uncompromising and unshakable faithfulness to the scripture. Some things were quite strict, for example being right with your neighbour before communion. Worship would sometimes be stopped and communion postponed (for 45 minutes!) to allow reconciliation if there was a feud within the community.

At that time women's leadership was fairly revolutionary. Eldership was still men, but the real leadership included women, especially in the running of the community houses.

By 1976 efforts were being made to normalise the relationship with the LCA. Doug Kuhl was a Lutheran ordained minister working half time with Jakes through St Stephens but Jakes was becoming less and less 'Lutheran'. Being ecumenical, the community saw it as a contradiction to be worshipping as a separate church and that there were dangers in having an ordained leader. Doug was forced into a position of making a choice between his ministry and ordination. He couldn't leave the ministry but neither could he be an ordinary member of the community. In the end he decided to leave.

Many people couldn't see anything wrong in starting their own denomination. Others of us were very concerned at not being members of a local church and the danger of becoming a sect. Doug was starting to be idolised. His leaving hastened the community decision to wrap up the whole thing.

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A Covenant Community

Instead of being empowering, covenanting into a formal community seeded Jakes' demise by becoming a means of keeping the world out. The community split three ways: the covenant group, the "core" community and the rest. Efforts to rapidly include as much of the community as possible ultimately failed as the community began fracturing with energies pulling in contrary directions. Expectations of what was meant by community and what it could provide differed enormously.

Some people wanted a security blanket. Others wanted a platform from which to launch into the world. Should we live the same lifestyle with the same amenities and the same type of toilet paper (bleached or pastel, eco-sensitive or merely convenient and efficient)? Some people had the expectation that being a real community meant subsistence agriculture and self-sufficiency. To others it meant L'Abri-style service to the disadvantaged. To others it meant an almost closed devotional community. Combining all the competing visions of the church universal was far beyond one community to fulfill!

The Lord's Anointed

The flirtations with Pentecostal and charismatic ideas had a profound influence. The effect of a prophetic word on a close community could be very powerful. When a significantly large percentage had tendencies towards creating a closed community it could be dramatic or downright dangerous. One of the less appealing doctrines to emerge from the Pentecostals was the doctrine of "the Lord's anointed" - a particular person, a Moses-like leader in a community, with special

prophetic gifts. To argue against this idea or the designated person was almost equal to sacrilege. Unfortunately even some of the more mature members gave some credence to this bit of mumbo jumbo. Asking Doug to resign the ministry and come in as an ordinary member was an attempt to create a circuit breaker, to diffuse the impasse with the LCA and neuter the unhealthy "Lord's anointed" nonsense. It failed. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Significance of Jacob's Ladder.

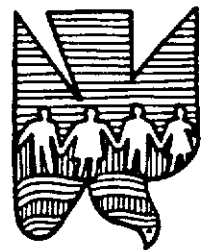
Getting involved with Jakes was for me like "going home". Looking back, I recognise its significance. Some people have come up to me over the years and told me I was the reason they became Christian. I still hear from people, heroin addicts at that time and now changed people saying that Jakes was a part of that change. Bonnie Gibson was a street kid who came into the community and became a wonderful witness. He could talk easily to anyone.

One night at the Pancake Kitchen, Bonnie and I were sitting at a table and over several hours a stream of people came in and sat beside us to talk about life and faith. Towards the end one entered saying, "Now it's my turn." It seemed they had been talking to each other out on the street. I can't really speak for people who were touched by Jakes but those working in the community developed their faith enormously.

Peter and Lyn Muller and children are now active members of Port Adelaide Uniting Church.

(Belated) Thanks to Dr Grope

from Norman Habel



Monica Christian wrote a wonderful account of the story of Jacob's Ladder in the last Messenger. I too recall the heady days of coffee houses in America where we would create poetry on the spot. I recall too how we wrote the text of Create in Me, the first Folk Liturgy in the Lutheran Church as far as I know, with teenagers at a retreat in the Ozarks of Missouri. Would you believe one house church in Chicago still uses this liturgy quite often?

I was delighted in 1970 when St Stephens agreed to present this liturgy with Dr Grope's blessing. I did not preach from the pulpit in 1970, partly to offer a fresh approach. Anyway, there were young people sitting everywhere that day, even in the pulpit. The time when my request to preach from a Lutheran pulpit was rejected was a rather sad occasion in a different Lutheran church (which shall remain nameless to spare the relatives). St Stephens has always been supportive even when some congregations were not. For the support of St Stephens, including that of Dr Grope and Wayne Zweck, I am very thankful. To say nothing of the goodwill of our current pastors.

Dr Grope even remembers one of the main points of my sermon in 1970! Amazing. The point? "Why look so glum after the Eucharist?" I said. "Why stare down at the carpet or floor on such a joyous occasion? How can that inspire you? The risen Lord is present. So look up, celebrate, smile and greet one another as you leave the Lord's meal."

My thanks to Monica for her great article and to Dr Grope for bringing back good memories. By the way, the song Send Your Servant Down the Road, which many still sing, was written for that folk liturgy about 35 years ago.

Editorial note:

Doug Kuhl has offered to write something for us about the Jacob's Ladder experience. It has not yet been received. All material provided by the various contributors will be retained as valuable historical documents about an important era in many people's faith journey. We anticipate this *Messenger* will be the last to include memories of Jacob's Ladder.