



InSpire



NEWSLETTER OF THE STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH

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Keith and Grace McAllister's Wedding Day: 16 February 1955

InSpiring

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

During the absence of Rev Christopher Page, we have been blessed by those who have cheerfully agreed to lead services, including Rev Terry Trewavas, Rev John Power and Rev John Hill. Rev John Power has kindly allowed us to print his reflection from March 9th.

THE CHURCH AND A CHANGING CREATION STORY

Creation stories appear in most religious traditions on Earth. They play a very important role in any meaning system as they usually set the groundwork for the rest of the narrative. They also form a premise upon which later theological propositions are developed, set up a tension that is to be resolved and suggest an orientation of humanity to the physical and spiritual world.

Not surprisingly, this is also true of Christianity. Christians adopted the Israelite account of creation, found in the book of Genesis, as an explanatory backdrop to understanding the life, purpose and teachings of Jesus. However, because the Genesis stories contain outdated understandings of the physical universe, some of the theological arguments based on them are likely to need updating. It is important to remember that the authors of Genesis were not in fact there at the time and, unless we subscribe to the divine dictation view of scripture, what we have is speculation. In contrast, science has in fact given us ways of looking back to the beginning of the earth and even to the beginning of our universe.

Although most mainstream churches have largely accepted evolution as a scientific truth, they have not yet subsequently changed the theology which was based on these stories. Change the creation story and you change the spiritual narrative.

All Christian churches in Australia and across the Western World are now aging and in numerical decline, including the once-growing Pentecostals. When populations enter decline, it may be the precursor to either evolutionary change or extinction. For years, many of us have been hoping for the former but fearing the latter.

To understand why the church in the West is apparently on a path towards extinction we have to understand the nature of religion itself. Religion's primary role is to provide people with an experience of the sacred - a sense of the numinous - and to offer people hope amid the difficulty of life. It does this, first and foremost, by providing a world view which populates the cosmos with sacred beings, meaning and purpose. By naming and describing God and other spiritual entities and situating our lives in relationship to these holy beings, religions offer a spiritual narrative, an identity and a community. They then provide rituals, spiritual quests and prayerful disciplines which enable us to interact with this spiritual world. But all these benefits hinge upon our adoption of the proffered world view; if we do not believe, we cannot receive! This is why we usually refer to a religion as a "faith"; it requires acceptance and trust on the behalf of the "believer". To achieve this a religion has to do two things: it has to roughly fit the facts of the world as the follower experiences it and also offer a vision of a better world. This is especially true in an environment of contested religious ideas. A religion that offers a world view that better fits and explains the universe, offers more hope and an increased capacity to call in God's intervention, will win out.

Having won over Europe, Christianity reigned as a religion in the West for centuries. For all its faults, it provided the dominant, largely unchallenged world view. That is, until the Enlightenment when all that changed; the West produced another child that vied for attention. In this enlightenment world view, rationality reigned over dogma, individual rights over the collective power of the church and the collegial discipline of science over the individual experience of spirituality. When Darwin offered this burgeoning ideology a new evolutionary account of the creation of life, Christianity found its dominant cultural role on shaky ground. This was weakened further in the twentieth century as the principle of evolution was extended to the creation of the universe itself. Here was an alternative belief system which appeared to have much better explanatory power than the traditional Christian one. While it did not offer as much hope in terms of personal prayer and a future in heaven, it certainly offered an easier life here on earth for its followers. Benefits flowed

from this scientific world view in the form of health care and a longer life span as well as all the material benefits of an industrialized society.

The response of the church

Religious conservatism.

The religious conservatives basically resisted and fought the shift in world view brought about by evolutionary theory. They were joined each generation by converts and young escapees from liberalism, fleeing the looming demise of the church. However, this spiritual bargain – retaining a pre-modernist world view in order to maintain the sense of the sacred and the divine benefits that flowed from it – proved fragile. Reality, social change and an aging, declining community proved as hard to resist as the incoming tide. Renewal movements which emphasized and offered new access to the sacred if only people would affirm that old time religion came and went without deeply affecting the church's march to extinction.

Liberalism

The liberal-progressive church tried to go with the times and accept the new world view to varying degrees. However, it soon found exactly what was mentioned above – that the collective and individual experience of the sacred was tied to the world view and struggled to survive when sacred stories were demythologized and turned into metaphors. You really did have to believe to receive! Unfortunately, the all-important creation narrative was deconstructed rather than replaced by a more vital story and the theological house of cards was on shaky grounds. Even if this did work for a generation raised in conservatism, who found a new sense of liberation, it proved almost impossible to pass on to the next.

Neo-Orthodoxy

Rather than resist new thought, Neo-orthodoxy, represented by theologians such as Karl Barth, sought to accommodate modern ideas but to show that in the end they highlighted the human need for God and were best addressed by orthodox faith. An example is Barth's view of the fall, rather than evolution making the notion of a fall obsolete, Barth argued that even if it did not happen in an historical garden of Eden it happened subsequently in the soul of each individual. While neo-orthodoxy helped some church members make sense of their faith in a

new intellectual environment it has largely failed to convince Western society as a whole that new perspectives on the nature of reality could end up with the same conclusions that the old-world view gave.

Existentialism

Both progressive Christianity and Neo-orthodoxy were influenced by existentialism. Existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus argued that life was meaningless – all that was left for us was to try to give a personal internal meaning to this supposed meaninglessness. Some Christians found comfort in this approach in the hope that their faith could take this subjective-meaning role. Humanism was one of the products of this movement; even if life had no objective purpose we could choose to be nice to one another. Churches then focused on justice and equal rights for the dispossessed in society. However, while this was a major influence for church goers, it has little appeal to outsiders for the socially concerned did not see the need to add God to the mix. The general population found the lack of external meaning unconvincing. Another stream was the psychologization of faith represented by thinkers such as Carl Jung. The number of clergy who took training in psychology and therapy was high. Existentialism was a response to the doubts raised by the Enlightenment, offering a way of making meaning in a supposed "meaningless universe". It is not surprising then that it was welcomed as a lifeline for those in the church rather than attracting outsiders.

None of these approaches satisfied the outsider who were looking for a sacred world view. A pattern emerged where young people would be converted into conservatism and then abandon it when they discovered it did not work. Few found their way back into the mainstream churches.

Evolutionary theology

The path towards a life-giving sacred world view is important but it is different for the church and for secular society. For secular Western society it is about rediscovering the sacredness of Being and realizing that evolution is not just a blind, random and meaningless process but a way the universe manifests greater complexity and purpose. This is the mission of the church, not to convince society of some outdated pseudo-

scientific creationism but to help it rediscover sacredness and purpose in the becoming of the cosmos.

The church itself has to reconstruct its theology with evolution as the creation story. Thankfully this process results in a vibrant world view that can give an even greater sense of the sacredness of life. The theological changes that result from realignment to an evolutionary world view include:

- * Creation is not complete; it is ongoing and God never rested.
- * There never was a time of perfection and innocence for human beings to fall from.
- * We have never been separated from God nor cast out from his presence; he has continued his loving, creative, evolutionary work in us.
- * Evolution is part of the character and nature of God and he is therefore not “unchanging”, he is “becoming”.
- * Human beings are not a separate and unique creation but are built upon the collective physical, biological and psychological advances of prior evolution.
- * God is not magical. He did not just make the universe appear instantaneously and he still does not work by magic.

These are the building blocks of a sacred world view which can speak to our culture and provide the impetus for the evolution of the church.

KEITH AND GRACE McALLISTER'S 70TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On 16 February 2025 Stonnington Community Uniting Church was honoured to join with Keith and Grace's family and friends to celebrate a joyous, rare and significant occasion: their 70th Wedding Anniversary. According to the “font of all knowledge”, Google, only one tenth of 1% of couples ever reach this milestone!

Grace and Keith have been longstanding, hard-working and dedicated members of our Church community since the Peace Memorial Methodist Church joined the Ewing Memorial Presbyterian Church in 1976, a year before the formal

inception of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977. Keith and Grace met at church in Epping Street in about 1950 and were subsequently married by Grace's father, a Methodist minister, in 1955.



Our Church's celebration of this occasion was particularly special because our member the Reverend Terry Trewavas took great pains and undertook much research to prepare a memorable service which included some of the hymns from Keith and Grace's 1955 wedding service, together with a curated Prayer of Thanksgiving and apt readings followed by Terry's moving reflection. Cheryl Jenkins' superb organ accompaniment was greatly appreciated by all.

After the service there was a delicious morning tea to which everyone was invited. This took place in the Church Hall, which most appropriately includes the stained-glass windows from the chancel of Keith and Grace's original Church: Peace Memorial. Our thanks to Jane Lama for ensuring the Hall was perfectly arranged for a large number of guests. A 70th wedding anniversary is designated as "platinum"; because this is not an easy colour to find, in keeping with the theme of the original wedding party, we decorated tables with touches of gold and sweet-smelling English lavender.

The morning tea was made extra special by an enormous, beautifully decorated chocolate cake which was home-made by Isabelle Roberts. There was a generous variety of special finger food provided by Keith and Grace's daughter, Elizabeth, and members of the Church congregation.

Alan Sandbach welcomed guests to the church and lit a candle to acknowledge the many dear members of Keith and Grace's family and their friends who have passed on but were with us in spirit. Importantly five people who attended the 1955 wedding are still alive and joined Keith and Grace in celebrating their special anniversary.



We were particularly touched that Grace and Keith's recently widowed daughter-in-law, Dianne, and some of their grandchildren and great children travelled long distances to be with them on this wonderful occasion.

Alan drew on some funny personal stories from Grace and Keith's long happy lives together which served well to illustrate the importance of

communication, shared faith, commitment, good humour, loyalty, humility and grace in the face of adversity: their lessons for a happy marriage.

This wonderful event was possible because so many members of the congregation helped in all sorts of ways, from passing plates around to running the dishwasher and stacking chairs. Keith and Grace were very appreciative and grateful for everyone's interest and practical support.

We all feel blessed to have shared in a very special day with such a remarkable couple who have provided support and inspiration to us all. Thank you, Keith, Grace and family!

Maria Sandbach

Watch This Space.....

Many of InSpire's readers will recall Deborah Holmes and Noah Yang's outstanding presentations at the Church's Homelessness Forum in November 2024.

Deborah is the founder and coordinator of the Avalon Centre, a not-for-profit organisation which is conducted from her home at 1936 Malvern Road, Malvern East. Avalon relies entirely on volunteers and is financed by donations and grants. It has been running for over 37 years.

Amongst many things Avalon distributes clothing and bedding to those in need, and purchases and arranges the set-up of homes which are made available to eligible people at a social housing rental.

The work of Deborah and our other Forum speaker Noah Yang of We Are Mobilise (Mobilise) inspired us all!

For instance, Lencie Harding took the initiative to successfully apply for a \$5000 grant from the PWMU Cookbook Fund, which our Church distributed equally between Avalon and Mobilise.

A further consequence is the development of these relationships, including working on the establishment of an "Avalon Cupboard" based at our Church. The purpose of the Avalon Cupboard will be to provide practical resources when

people come to the Church seeking this kind of assistance. With Deborah's advice and input this cupboard would be stocked (and when necessary re-stocked) with some bedding, clothes, non-perishable food and an updated list of relevant local community services. Our Avalon Cupboard may become a model for other churches and organisations seeking to address similar needs and issues.

Noah's presentation focused on Mobilise's major supporter; the extraordinary distance runner Nedd Brockmann who has selflessly donated the proceeds raised from his marathon efforts to Mobilise. Alison Tokita has kindly made available for loan Nedd's recent book *Showing Up*. The Sandbachs have found Nedd's documentary currently on Netflix, and are happy to host a home movie night for anyone who would like to see and potentially discuss (on our aged orange velour couch) how to "get comfortable being uncomfortable". Please contact Maria (0417 511 102) if you are interested, and she will arrange an informal evening for this purpose.

One of Avalon's many initiatives are that it provides a "drop-in centre" for people, including clients and volunteers, looking for a cuppa and a chat. In our increasingly hectic world, social isolation is a real risk. Bearing this in mind, Deborah has agreed to bring her experience to our February Working Group meeting which will launch our 2025 Forum topic, "Loneliness and Connectedness".

Maria Sandbach

A SHINTO PRIEST FROM MELBOURNE

On February 13th, I was privileged to have a reunion with a former student.



Caitlin Stronell first went to Japan in 1984 as a high school exchange student and then studied Japanese at Monash University in the late 1980s, then did postgraduate study in Japan and worked in universities and companies and various NGOs.

Always interested in politics and activism, she became involved in a Shinto shrine that was battling demolition, and decided to train as a Shinto priest, which she achieved in 2004.

Her next move was to India where she lived for eight years. During this time, she did two degrees at the JNU in New Delhi; a MPhil on the impact of HIV/AIDS on sexual subalterns and a PhD on the Indian anti-nuclear movement.

Returning to Japan in 2015, she worked at the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, Tokyo, founded in 1975 by nuclear chemist Takagi Jinzaburo, from a stance of citizen science, recognizing the need to empower citizens. She was editor of *Nuke Info Tokyo*, the English language publication set up in 1987, now free online bimonthly. CNIC became more prominent after the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011, and continues to provide information to a global readership on nuclear issues.

After moving to Miyako-jima in Okinawa during Covid and working remotely, a significant event in her life was the establishment of a university campus on the island; the Faculty of Tourism of Takarazuka University of Medical and Health Care (Kobe). Caitlin was invited to teach in the university so she resigned from CNIC. She has now been appointed as Dean and Professor of the Faculty of Tourism.

Caitlin kindly responded in writing to the following questions.

What are the roots of your spirituality

I think it's really nature. I feel something divine in nature, so beautiful and delicate yet all powerful. So complicated yet the basic root of life.

How did you become Shinto, and then a priest

I first went to the Asakawa Konpira shrine in western Tokyo as a research student investigating one of the very rare examples a citizens' group succeeding in preventing a development project from destroying a beautiful mountain. I met the head priest at the time who had been a kamikaze pilot. He was in his 70s I

guess at the time but he was still bristling with rage at Shinto's role in the war, brainwashing a generation and many of his friends into committing suicide for Emperor and country. I couldn't believe he had become a Shinto priest, but he explained to me that real Shinto had nothing to do with Emperor or nation, it was a celebration of nature and life. A kind of environmental spiritualism. That really resonated with me. There were many non-Japanese who were part of the movement to save the mountain and I decided with an American friend to train as a priest so we could be a bridge and explain to other gaijin what Shinto was really about. Also, I thought that if gaijin could become priests, it would be harder for Shinto to be hijacked again by the right-wing.



What does Shinto mean to you

I've always loved a good ceremony. I think ceremonies are incredibly important to our mental health. They put very complex emotions and life changing events into some sort of order, some sort of form so we can express them and feel them safely. Shinto for me is very much about ceremonies and I love that by following the form of the basic ceremony, you can do a ceremony on anything. One of the norito we had to write during training was in essence a divorce ceremony, but the husband had already died. His wife was getting older and she was worried that when she died, he would be waiting for her, but she hated him and wanted to let him know that their marriage was over, even in the next world.

Of course, I also love that it is grounded very much in nature and community.

What are the basic tenets or principles of Shinto - kegare, animism, nature spirituality?

Kegare is quite interesting because it's not really like the Christian concept of sin. I think sin is more conscious, you knowingly do something that is wrong, leading to guilt and other complex emotions but *kegare* is the idea that just by living in human community in good faith, we can't help but offend each other occasionally, and those often-inadvertent offences build up so we need to sweep them away regularly, which is the purification part of the Shinto ceremony.

Animism I think is very much a part of Japanese culture in many ways, the idea that everything has a soul or is in some way divine. In many ways I think the line between the sacred and the profane is kind of blurred in Japan. Many people in Japan offer water and tea at their kami-dana or butsu-dan every morning but they wouldn't call this 'religious' it's just what you do in the morning. It's also perhaps an acknowledgement of all the people (who have become kami) in the past who have made you what you are today. Ancestor worship is also a strong part of Japanese culture.

Have your Shinto beliefs and practices evolved or changed since your ordination

I think my beliefs haven't really changed that much. I think that the more you practise the ceremonies etc. the better you get. Also more adaptable, maybe, more skilled in incorporating people's feelings into the ceremony.

Is there a mystical aspect to your Shinto?

Yes, for sure. I remember when I was thinking about becoming a priest, I went to the annual matsuri at the Konpira head shrine in Shikoku. It's a wonderful festival which takes place in the evening/night where they escort the god down all those steps that Konpira is famous for so that people who cannot climb the steps can pray to him during the following day in his temporary shrine at the bottom of the mountain. The mikoshi is huge and golden and it takes a lot of people to push/pull/carry it down all those steps. I was at the front of the procession with other trainee candidates in Kannushi robes that I had borrowed on the following day when we were taking the god back to his home up the steps. I looked back at the mikoshi and it seriously seemed to be floating up the mountain. There were no jolts or dips it was totally serene. After our part of the procession reached the honden at the top of the steps, we retraced our steps back to where the mikoshi was, at a particularly tricky part of the

course and everyone who was pulling on the ropes attached to the mikoshi told us to help. When I grabbed one of the ropes, it was like there was an electric current going through it. It felt like this was what was powering it to go up the mountain. Like the devotion and will power of the priests had taken this tangible form. I had never experienced anything like that before but somehow, I wasn't shocked. It all seemed to make sense and that's when I made the final decision that I would join the training.

There are lots of magical things that happen during ceremonies and the training, which is 6 days in the spring for 3 consecutive years, with the proviso that you practice in your local shrine for the rest of the year. The trainings back then would usually be 40-50 people from Konpira shrines all over Japan. We all slept, ate and studied in one of the huge tatami rooms in one of the shrine buildings. Many of my senpai had had mystical experiences and it was fascinating to hear them. Shinto is not big on scripture so I think the mystical side of it is perhaps important for this reason.

How has Shinto informed your anti-nuclear activism

In the same way that it has informed my broader environmental work. I think that when human beings forget that they are a part of nature and believe that they can outsmart it and exploit it for short term profits, then there is bound to be a disaster. This is what happens with nuclear power, but also in terms of climate change or deforestation or indeed demolishing shrines for so-called development projects. For me it is all related and it is all about truly listening to the voice of nature, often embodied in the voice of indigenous people around the world.

How has it changed in the Okinawan context

Miyako has a whole different culture and language from mainland Japan. This includes the type of 'Shinto' present here, which is much more shamanistic. The Yuta-san can communicate with the spirit world and it is quite usual for ordinary people to consult them when things are going wrong in their life or they need advice etc. The Utaki or Okinawan shrines feel completely different to 'jinja.' The ceremonies are also different of course and I need to study them more, but it seems that women are much more involved. The power of women in Okinawa is a very

interesting subject. In many ways they discriminated against but in other ways they are very powerful and strong.

As I am still studying this, I try not to impose my version of Shinto, but I sometimes do o-harai for friends from the mainland living here or at new year parties etc.

I feel as though I am now living closer to nature in Miyako and I keep livestock, two goats from which I get milk, which I make into cheese, and two chickens from which I get eggs. My relationship with the animals has made me think about the border between nature and human intervention. I have a deal with my animals. I provide them with food and protection from typhoons as well as medical help when they are sick. And they provide me with milk and eggs. It's a deal where we all respect each other, but when animals are exploited, for example battery hens, I think this has crossed the line. I feel as though I have found my own balance with nature, or at least with other living beings and I believe this is a very practical side of Shinto.

Alison Tokita

TWO FILM REVIEWS

Maria Sandbach

CONCLAVE

"Our faith is a living thing precisely because it walks hand in hand with doubt. If there was only certainty, and no doubt, there would be no mystery. And therefore, no need for faith."

[Cardinal Thomas Lawrence]

To have faith is to hope and believe in the goodness of humanity: in essence this is the predominant theme of the recent award-winning movie *Conclave*. In the context of our current war-torn world, this film nurtures our faith in love and compassion, and appeals irrespective of whether one is religious or aligned with Christianity or Catholicism.

Indeed, a weighty reflection in relation to a film, described as a "thriller", and which engages, entertains and educates!

Based on and reasonably faithful to Robert Harris' 2016 novel of the same name, the film's contemporary plot revolves around the ancient Roman Catholic ritual of the cloistered Vatican conclave. This is the meeting of the eligible members of the college of cardinals, drawn from around the world (representing approximately 1.39 billion Catholics), to elect a new Pope to lead their Church.

The film makes every effort to accurately represent and respect the sanctity and mystery of the conclave; however, this particular fictional conclave is riddled with drama and political intrigue. As with any election, the papal contenders in this case reflect a spectrum of views from conservative to progressive; they have in common secrets and pasts which jeopardise their respective bids for the role. Set against the backdrop of a breathtaking recreation of the Sistine chapel and a marvellous musical score, the cardinals lobby, negotiate and battle it out.

This may sound like a very male dominated screenplay, but quietly attending to the housekeeping needs of the cardinals, the nuns assert the role of women in the Church when Sister Agnes declares: "we sisters are supposed to be invisible, God has nevertheless given us eyes and ears." The nuns are not immune to playing their role in the drama!

After many brilliant plot twists and a surprising election outcome, the film concludes with a message that resonates with humility, grace and acceptance, as the new Pope avows: "I am what God made me", an important salutary reminder for us all.

A REAL PAIN

The 2024 film *A Real Pain* follows the poignant but comic road trip of two estranged thirty-something American cousins of Jewish descent, David and Benji Kaplan. Together the Kaplans embark on an organised Holocaust tour of Poland, made possible because of a legacy left by their grandmother. The film confronts the enormity of the human tragedy that is the Holocaust, and is an acknowledgement of grief, providing a means for both the cousins and the

audience to find a degree of cathartic relief. The story line is semi-autobiographical, being written and directed by Jesse Eisenberg, who also plays the character of David.

David's eccentric cousin Benji has a significant but unspecified mental illness, which is exacerbated by drugs. However, he is desperately social, vulnerable, and painfully honest; his ridiculous antics provide light relief for both his fellow travellers and the audience. By contrast, David is more conventional, married with a child and a job, and is somewhat embarrassed by Benji's behaviour, despite his own neuroses and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The confronting effects of mental illness, the trauma of suicide attempts, and the stress it places on familial relationships are implicit throughout.

The film's title is a play on words. Benji is a "real pain", the cousins' relationship is painful; but more significantly their trip requires the cousins to confront and acknowledge the pain, suffering and genocide in their family's past, which their grandmother survived and left behind. David and Benji's journey also highlight the intergenerational trauma and impact of the Holocaust. It gives us some insight into the ongoing legacy of this human tragedy

As David remarks: "Isn't everyone in pain in some way? I mean, look at what happened to our families, look at where we came from, I mean, who isn't you know, who isn't wrought?"

David's questions are particularly relevant given the disturbing wave of anti-semitism in Australia today.

Lencie has sent in the following two pieces. She writes "I found this in the June 2010 issue of Net Work and enjoyed reading it."

Very relevant to most of our readers!

Prayer of a Seventeenth Century Nun

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself,
that I am growing older and will someday be old.
Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must
say something

on every subject and on every occasion.
 Release me from craving to straighten out
 everybody's affairs
 Make me thoughtful but not moody,
 helpful but not bossy.
 With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity
 not to use it all,
 but Thou knowest Lord,
 that I want a few friends at the end.
 Keep my mind free from the recital of endless
 details;
 give me the wings to get to the point.
 Seal my lips on my aches and pains.
 They are increasing,
 and love of rehearsing them is becoming
 sweeter as the years go by.
 I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the
 tales of others' pains,
 but help me to endure them with patience.
 I dare not ask for improved memory,
 but for a growing humility,
 and a lessening cocksureness
 when my memory seems to clash with the
 memory of others.
 Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I
 may be mistaken.
 Keep me reasonably sweet.
 I do not want to be a saint
 (some of them are so hard to live with)
 but a sour old person is one of the crowning
 works of the devil.
 Give me the ability to see good things in
 unexpected places
 and talents in unexpected people.
 And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.
 Amen

And on an even lighter note...

"I read this in a church magazine and had a laugh":

An elderly woman decided to prepare her will and told her solicitor she had two final requests: First, she wanted to be cremated and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Bunnings. "Bunnings" the solicitor exclaimed. "Why Bunnings?" "Then I'll be sure my family will visit me every week" she replied...

PROFILE: LILY ODRIAN

Lily has been attending church for several months and has been noticed helping in the kitchen and serving at lunches.



I spoke to Lily after church on February 23rd. Here is a slightly edited version of the conversation.

A: Tell me where you were born.

L: I was born in Hong Kong, and I left there pretty quickly as my parents just went to Hong Kong to give birth and then they flew back to Shanghai and I think I was six days old. I still have a passport with my little baby photo in it!

A: So, you grew up in Shanghai?

L: Yes. For 16 years. I lived for two years in Germany when I was a teenager but then I came back to finish school.

A: So, you finished secondary school in Shanghai, and then what about University?

L: Well, I started University in February 2023 here at Monash and it's been great. I'm going into my third year now.

A: What made you come to Monash, to Australia?

L: Shanghai is not that far from Australia, you know. It's just 11 hours, and my parents always loved Australia. We've been all up and down the east coast and even the West Coast a little bit, just Perth and Margaret River, we really just love the country and my parents always wanted to buy a property and settle here. My dad wants to retire here, so they were really open to me coming and

living here and kind of opening up that branch of our family here in Australia.

A: So, you'd been to Australia before?

L: Maybe 10 or 12 times, it's very interesting.

A: So, you're now in third year, doing Law/Arts.

L: Yes, but specifically, PPE, which is Politics Philosophy Economics. I think I'm graduating 2028. Just law is already four years.

A: So, could I ask you what drew you to our church? What made you decide to come here? Because you were living in Clayton which is not that close-by.

L: Well, I first decided to go to church. It must have been at least a year into me living here. I started reading the Bible and I just wanted to feel more connected. So I went to a church in Clayton for a couple of months but I just found it to be a different experience to what I would like, what I imagined church to be like and so I had a bit of a look around and I found the Uniting churches and this group of churches I felt really aligned with who I was and the belief that I held and I looked for the closest one, and this was the closest one.

A: Really? We were lucky. I don't know whether we were really the closest but I'm glad you found us.

L: It was convenient to reach.

A: Having come here, what is your understanding of the approach of our church?

L: Well, if I'm understanding it correctly, I think the core of this church is its openness, that everyone can be here, and also the learning and the teaching that these Reverends offer; they teach the scripture in a way that is accessible, also relating it to real world events that are happening. I quite enjoyed that. It made it seem more solid for me. Also, the church that I went to previously in Clayton didn't sing at all, and so, when I came here and started singing together, I felt like it was a real open community and anybody can walk through these doors, you know,

A: Do you like singing?

L: I do. I'm not a great singer, but I do like to sing.

A: That's really interesting! Now, I haven't really understood your church background or your religious background.

L: Well, my parents are both Christians. My dad is Catholic, my mom's Protestant and I was baptised and grew up in the faith but very on the edge. We went to church once a year at Christmas, and at home we never spoke about faith or anything like that, but then when I became an adult and moved here, I was kind of alone. I was kind of exploring and going back to the Bible and reading certain verses and just kind of figuring out what exactly clicked with me and what my faith was. And that's what led me here.

A: That's fascinating, because I think that as our age cohort is so different from what you would normally be looking for, we're kind of amazed that you keep coming - we're delighted of course! So, I'm so glad to hear that you found something here that resonates with your faith journey, that's great. Do you feel that there is something else that we should offer to people like you? I wonder if we're offering everything that they really are looking for.

L: I'm happy, I'm satisfied and that's clear. I definitely think the lunches are great. I'm not sure, because I guess there aren't that many young people in the church, so you can't have like a youth group or something like that. I'd have to think about it. Maybe let me get back to you on that. But I think you do have a lot of events going on. But sometimes for me, specifically, they're difficult to attend because of the scheduling. Like, Thursday 10 o'clock, there's a craft group. I'm a knitter, and I would love to go but I'm not sure if I can make it at that time, so I guess maybe it's the timing that holds me back, but then again, I'm just one person, and I'm not sure about everybody's schedule.

A: Yes, most of the people here are retired, so obviously we tend to schedule things during the working day.

L: I wouldn't want to change that either, but I'm just thinking out loud, but I'd like to get involved as well, and see what I can kind of bring to the table.

A: Well, would you be interested in coming to the meeting for organising the next Forum? It's scheduled for Friday 28 at 10 AM. I've also created a zoom link if that was more convenient.

L: Yes, that's great actually. But I think Friday at 10 o'clock, I can make it!

A: I also find it interesting you said you'd started reading the Bible again. Kai said that too when he first came here. Maybe we should be having some kind of Bible study group?

L: I think that would be good, because I think it's difficult to get into the Bible, to know where to start, when I read the Bible often, I just flip it open to a random page and have a look at what I can pull and have a look.

A: Or places you were familiar with already...?

L: Exactly. Probably later tonight I will go back and read the verses that were spoken about in the sermon today, and just read a few pages before and after. Yeah, Bible study would be great, actually!

A: Thank you, Lily!

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT *Joyce Jenkin*

It is proving to be difficult to find a new organist so the following interim arrangements have been put in place while the search continues:

First, third and fifth Sundays the Ensemble will lead the music.

Second and fourth Sundays Errol Fernando will play.

Cheryl Jenkins will fill in occasionally.

We will aim to have the choir once a month and definitely Easter Sunday.

Following complaints from members of the congregation about problems with the sound system in the Ewing church, advice has been obtained and as a result a new ultra-sensitive microphone will be installed as well as some work done on the speaker circuits.

As Martin Lama has resigned from the role of setting up for morning teas and the monthly lunches we need to find a replacement. This will be a paid position involving approximately an hour on Saturday afternoons but two hours to set up for the monthly lunch. If you know of anyone who might be interested, please speak to a member of council. We express our thanks to Martin for the great work he has done for us over the past year.

Alison reported that we will hold another public forum, probably in August and the topic this year will be Loneliness and Connectedness.



Feast *For Freedom*

We will be holding the **Feast for Freedom** at our April lunch on Sunday 6th and you are invited to come along and support Asylum Seekers.



[Feast for Freedom : Home](#)

SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT *Lorna Henry*

We are making a delayed start to the year, as we had no meeting in February. Apologies for that.

Since we have not met since November last year, and in the awareness that much has happened in those past four months, we will meet this month for a sharing session, let's say of our delights and our concerns.

These delights and concerns might be personal, local, national or international.

You may be heartened, encouraged, delighted by what has happened, or you may be disturbed, challenged or saddened.

This is all very general, I am aware, but I look forward to sitting with friends of like mind, in a group where we trust each other, tell our stories and talk about life.

I think particularly of the national and international situations, news of which astounds us each day, and want to find our responses to these - even if we feel helpless. Do we have all the information or are we getting biased reports? Where should we look to find the truth these days?

Perhaps we can organise it so that each of us tells of something delightful from our lives, and then of something of concern.

If the latter are of a wide relevance, some of them might become areas for future discussion.

So, for this we will meet on the third Sunday as usual, March 16th, at [REDACTED], from 5.00 - 7.00pm. Everyone is very welcome, and I really look forward to our meeting.

LIBRARY NEWS **Faye Pattinson**

Our first Book Chat for 2025 was very well attended. We were pleased to welcome Hiro, Alison's husband to our group. As usual the range of genres and titles was diverse and interesting.

At the end of the Chat, a question from Lorna about the Australian author Tim Winton provoked a lively discussion. This has led to the idea of having a similar section at the end of each Book Chat. So, suggestions will be welcome. One suggestion already canvassed was perhaps a topic of our opinion of a book made into a film?

A few of the books from our Book Chat this time were:

Marie: "From the edge" by Mark McKenna. March 1797. Ninety-Mile Beach, Victoria. Five British sailors and twelve Bengali seamen swim

ashore after their longboat is ripped apart in a storm. The British penal colony at Port Jackson is 700 kilometres to the north, their fellow-survivors from the wreck of the Sydney Cove stranded far to the south on a tiny island in Bass Strait. To rescue them and save their own lives, they have no alternative. They set out to walk to Sydney. What follows is one of Australia's greatest survival stories and cross-cultural encounters

Jo:(1) "A Fortunate Life" by Albert Facey. Despite enduring unimaginable hardships, Facey always saw his life as a fortunate one. A true classic of Australian literature, Facey's simply penned story offers a unique window onto the history of Australian life through the greater part of the twentieth century – the extraordinary journey of an ordinary man. *(A beautifully illustrated copy of this book is held in the church library)*

(2) "Frank and Red" by Matt Coyne. Frank and Red are a mess.

Frank is a grumpy old curmudgeon. A recluse whose only company is the 'ghost' of his dead wife, Marcie. He is estranged from his friends, his son, and the ever-changing world beyond his front gate. And then Red moves in next door. Red is six. A boy struggling to adjust to the separation of his mum and dad, a new school, and the demonic school bully. Red is curious, smart, he never stops talking, and he's got a trampoline. From the moment Red's blonde mop appears over the top of the fence that divides their two gardens, the unlikeliest of friendships is born. And it is a friendship that will change both of their lives forever.

Alison: "Honeybees and Distant Thunder" by Riku Onda and Philip Gabriel. Deeply compelling and compassionate, a Japanese bestseller about four friends pitted against each other in the drama of an international piano competition. This is the unflinching story of high-level competition, love, rivalry and friendship.

Our next Book Chat will be on Thursday, 17th April, just before Easter, in the Margaret McKinnon Room at 10.30 am. All are welcome!!

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY TABLE

Lencie Harding

The first Fellowship Opportunity Table for the year will be held on Sunday 16th March 2025 to follow worship. Donations of goods will be gratefully accepted. To comply with health regulations, please label all homemade goods with the name of the item, ingredients, date made and name of the cook.

Please support the Op Table to ensure a generous donation to Prahran Mission's Winter Breakfast programme.

SAMMY STAMP *Lencie Harding*

Thank you to Dr Jane Yelland for donating a collection of African stamps and to Jane Lama for a large donation of stamps from around the world. It was disappointing to receive so few Christmas stamps which the buyers snap up but I'm hoping to receive some from Murrumbena UC.

The following is Allan Clark's report for the March 2025 issue of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship magazine 'Net Work'.

Yet another year has rolled around and Sammy Stamp's busy helpers are at it again, trimming, sorting and selling the stamps and other philatelic items (also coins) that all you generous people out there forward to Unit 64, Bert Newton Retirement Village, 4 Pioneer Walk, HIGHETT VIC 3190.

Are there any folk out there, who are recently retired and or who would like to come and join us on a Thursday morning to trim and /or sort stamps when able. The motto is, come when you can, go when you must. For more information, please contact Allan Clark on 03 9557 1008.

At January 31, 2025, sales had reached about \$1,338 (same date last year \$1,355). Two grant applications have been received over the Christmas period and have not yet been dealt with.

Provisional total sales for 2024, stand at \$35,579 plus interest. A final report will be prepared when figures are available.

Allan Clark, Convenor
(03) 9557 1008 / e: jumayclark@gmail.com

SCUC COMMUNITY FORUMS 2025

Following the inspirational Forum on housing and homelessness held in November, Church Council wishes to hold further Forums in 2025.

Would you be interested in being part of the planning process? If so, please contact Alison or Joyce or Alan.

The suggested theme for the next Forum is **LONELINESS AND CONNECTEDNESS**, a natural sequel to Homelessness.

Meanwhile, we are building on the connection we formed with Debbie Holmes of the Avalon Centre and will create opportunities for further interaction and collaboration.

Alison Tokita

EASTER CAROLLING

Let's celebrate Easter on April 20 with joyous song and harmony.

Do you miss the choir that was led by Colin Jenkins once a month? The singers certainly do. It has been suggested that we prepare an anthem or a choral piece of some sort to contribute to the service once a month. It is not likely to be too difficult, so if you feel like having a sing at Church, please join us.

Easter in particular invites musical celebration, so April 20 is an occasion to work towards.

All voices welcome!



The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc is delighted to inform you of our new joint venture with HeartWell and arrangements for the first two meetings of the year.

HeartWell, based at the Avenue, Surrey Hills 3127, in Melbourne, is a congregational church, part of Churches of Christ Victoria/Tasmania. They are fully affirming and fully committed to being a safe place for all people regardless of gender, sexuality, family background, or economic situation.

HeartWell is open to learning from other faith traditions, to exploring what it means to be church in this era and to be doing so on land stolen from its traditional owners.

The joint venture with HeartWell is intended to infuse new vigour and enthusiasm into the PCNV's activities.

The first two meetings of the year will look at Lent and Easter through a progressive lens. The meetings will be 1pm on Sunday 23 March and 27 April and will include a time for brief focussed questions and responses from the session leader. Both in-person attendance and Zoom participation will be available. A link will be sent later.

The presenter will be Dr Brian Macallan. Brian has been the Ministry Team Leader at HeartWell since 2024, previously he was a lecturer in Theology at the University of Divinity. Brian is currently an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Divinity and Fellow of the Wesley Centre for Theology, Ethics and Public Policy and continues to pursue his research and writing as well as leading the worshipping community of HeartWell.

Best wishes

PCNV Committee

COMMON THREADS

Alison Tokita

Our second meeting for 2025 was held on February 27th. As this was after the copy deadline for *InSpire* in this shortest of months, I can only show four of the rugs Jo Miller has joined up since last meeting for KOGO. Jo has five bags of squares from KOGO to work on. Bravo, Jo!



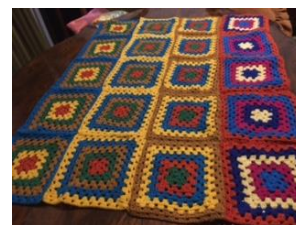
"Latest big square rug"



"Little squares"



"Lots of colours: 6 by 6"



"Beautiful crocheting"

Next meeting will be on Thursday 27th March at 10.00am.

MONTHLY CAFÉ CATCH-UP
Tuesday 11 March from 2 pm
Venue: Mr Sister Café, 81 Waverley Road

The regular cosy catchup is the place for talking about all those things that can't be discussed at morning tea after church or in formal meetings. It is great place to get to know people in an informal relaxed setting. If it is hot, we get a table in air-conditioned comfort; if cold we sit in the sun-drenched glassed-in area at the rear. The service is lovely and friendly.

Hope to see you there some time. Contact Alison if you need a lift.

AUDIO TEAM 2025

Keith Heale is looking into upgrading our audio system! That will be a great help, thanks, Keith.

Thank you again to the technical support team for setting up the audio equipment for services: Doug Connell, Zhuoran Wei, and Michael Williams.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

This was received as an email from Jo Miller, but I am taking the liberty of taking it as a Letter to the Editor for *InSpire*. Jo writes:

Once again thanks for the huge effort of compiling and writing *Inspire*. Always most interesting.

I was especially interested in Gwen's life story. She and Noel came here for a meal once but I had no idea she had done so much in her long life. She did not get much of a word in edgeways.

Thank you,

Jo Miller

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

It has been really helpful having Assistant Editor Alan Sandbach on board! And Maria comes with the deal, which is wonderful.

Thanks to all for the many contributions in this issue. Please keep sending me your news items and photos for *InSpire*. We also welcome letters and articles, so feel free to write about any topic of interest to you to share with our readers. *Letters to the Editor are also welcome*. And we can promote your events at no fee!

Deadline for the April 2025 edition of <i>InSpire</i> is Monday, 31 March . Articles should be emailed to the Editor, Alison Tokita, at  where possible, or given in person.
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ROSTERS MARCH 2025

STEWARDS:

Sunday 2 ND	Heather Carter, Michael Williams & Doug Connell
Sunday 9 th	Terry Trewavas & Alan Sandbach
Sunday 16 th	Richard & Sue Nelson, Luke Leembruggen
Sunday 23 rd	Graeme Lord, Jill & Barry Rogers & Alison Tokita
Sunday 30 th	Clare Pilcher, Anne & Michael Read

MORNING TEA:

Sunday 9 th	Barbara Wolstenholme & volunteer
Sunday 16 th	Joyce Jenkin & Isabelle Roberts
Sunday 23 rd	Bess & Terry Trewavas
Sunday 30 th	Café Service

CALENDAR MARCH 2025

SUNDAY 2nd	11 AM	EUCARIST & COMMUNITY LUNCH
SUNDAY 9TH	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE
TUESDAY 11TH	2.00 PM	CAFÉ CATCH UP AT MR SISTER CAFÉ 81 WAVERLEY RD
SUNDAY 16th	10.30 AM 5.00 PM	CHURCH SERVICE SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT
SUNDAY 23rd	10.30 AM 1.00 PM	CHURCH SERVICE PCNV MEETING (IN PERSON & ZOOM)
THURSDAY 27TH	10.00AM	COMMON THREADS
SUNDAY 30th	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE

