

NewView

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Acceptance

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Our theme of 'acceptance' for this issue of *NewView* is a little different from other themes we have had. Acceptance is not, of itself, a value for which I can offer unqualified support, because it is so dependent on content (the *what?*) and context (the *where* and *when?*). It seems to me that I need to be active, and mindful, of what I am accepting. Accepting passively (mindlessly, without thought) should not be an option to me if I want to live The Way, as Jesus did. 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing', Edmund Burke reminded us, and as World War Two Germany demonstrated.

Jesus did not mindlessly accept what had become customary practice, such as the moneychanging for the Temple offerings. He apparently saw this as an abuse of power, and both Matthew and Mark record the overturning of the tables in the Temple forecourt. So I am reminded that although some practices have the stamp of authority, that approval does not necessarily mean they are right (just, or compassionate). I need to judge civil practices on their individual merits. I am fortunate indeed to be part of a (generally) democratic society, in which I can let my leaders know what I think of their actions and policies. I remember one of my asylum-seeker friends was alarmed when I said I had written to my local political representative to complain about his party's immigration policies, and she explained there would be dire consequences - imprisonment - for such an action in her country of origin. So I must not blindly accept, without comment, policies which I feel are unfair and uncaring.

Laele Pepper's poem 'The Two Edged Sword' reminds us there are two sides to this coin of 'acceptance'. And her writing about 'The Priesthood of All Believers' reminds me that if women had not fought for equal rights, the world would have continued to accept the unjust *status quo*, and I, a woman, would not be writing this editorial.

Further, I need to mindfully examine my acceptance of 'the way things are' because that leads to attitudes which dictate my behaviour. 'The unexamined life is not worth living', Socrates said at his trial. Neil recalls the old, accepted attitudes many Australian Protestants once held against Roman Catholics (and vice versa). Today, those same prejudicial attitudes are held, but now against the latest feared group: Muslims. As Neil points out, we can only learn how to love our neighbour by getting to know him. I must not let the politics of fear govern my attitudes, but like the 'Q' Group I must find what I share as a basis for coexistence and co-operation with others.

This does involve acceptance, but of differences. Not merely the superficial differences of appearances, but the deeper differences of cultural practices, of different values, of different beliefs. That is where acceptance bites at my prejudices, and I must learn that there are other equally valid and honourable ways of seeing and valuing the world.

Anne Wren points to the difficulties of accepting change, another area in which we need to be mindful of acceptance, given the rapidity with which change can occur and the difficulties of seeing ahead the full range of its effects.

This issue introduces a new section, 'Letters to the Editor'. I hope you will feel inspired to respond, in writing, to the issues raised, so that a range of positions can be aired, and thoughtful and respectful discussion can take place. Alternatively, you might like to initiate discussion on other topics in this section.

Robin Pope

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Neil's Musings on Acceptance

I was watching the news last night and saw a report following the elections in Great Britain. The reporter was in a city in Ireland and there was a great big wall dividing the city between Catholics and Protestants. I know there is a long and complex history here but I thought how sad that a dividing wall had to be built and still stands today.

This story reminded me of my mother telling me that when she was going to school the Catholics walked on one side of the street and the Protestants on the other, and they called names at each other and shouted belittling rhymes. I am so thankful that in Australia our attitudes have moved so far in terms of Protestant/Catholic relationships. I have preached in a Catholic church, I trained alongside Jesuits, I have shared a marriage service with a Catholic priest and we do many things together today. This church has a good relationship with nearby St Leonard's Catholic Church.



My grandfather had a Catholic family move in next door and he thought that was just dreadful. However, they became the best of friends and this relationship broke down his fears and prejudices. Often getting to know people, and know them well, can break down fears and prejudices and move us toward acceptance. It can help to build tolerance, acceptance and understanding. It can really change our own thinking. Many years ago, one of my friends 'came out' as a gay person and I was forced to rethink my attitudes and what I believed. This process took time but I did go on a journey that led me to rethink and move toward an attitude of acceptance.

More than two decades ago the Uniting Church affirmed that it was a multicultural church. This has been a great gift to the church. At Glen Waverley Uniting we are trying to take tentative steps to be an Intercultural church. I think this language is important for us as we have a dominant cultural group in the church. To be Intercultural means that we are all accepted, all equal, one another's contribution is accepted and valued, all have an equal voice and all are welcomed as brothers and sisters in Christ. This means 'acceptance' in the fullest sense of the word.

What does it mean for the Church of today to love your neighbour? Are we truly willing to embrace and embody Jesus' teaching? 'Acceptance' within the Church will continue to be tested in our constantly changing society. The Church will have to face the issue of same sex marriage in the near future. Is the Church willing to embrace Inter Faith relationships and dialogue? As I said, we live in a constantly changing world and the Church has to live with change as well if we want to have a prophetic and challenging voice into our community.

Rev Neil Peters

Acceptance: Change, & Choices

WHAT PRICE CHANGE IN HONG KONG?



Bill and I have just returned from a holiday in Hong Kong. The contrasts, and evidence of change in lifestyle are quite phenomenal and pose the question: What is gained and what is lost in the move to the Consumer Society?



Are rows upon mind-numbing rows of expensive high rise, small squareage apartments better than old houses in back alleys and apartment blocks in bustling small business and market areas? Are glitzy shopping malls with designer labels, where suited shop assistants stand waiting for customers who never come, better than street markets with cheap everything,



butchers with meat hanging in the open, and old ladies sweeping the laneway. Is it better to own an Audi, Merc, Maserati, or Rolla than ride a bicycle to work?

It's one of the questions of the twenty-first century that many of us grapple with. Most would choose comfort over old back street living quarters. In Australia, the privilege lies in having a choice.



Not knowing any Hong Kong high-flyers, we can only say the people we encountered were courteous and helpful, and surrendered their train seats to the two elderly foreigners exploring their territory.

Anne Cook

A Two Edged Sword

Choice, free will
Call it what you will,
We can choose good or ill.
It is a two edged sword.

Since mankind realised that every tool
He held
Could be used for good or ill,
He had a choice.
Cain murdered Abel with a stone.

Fire, a two edged sword.
Warms us, cooks our meat,
Drives our engines, lights our nights.
Tamed, a slave forgotten.
But let it loose on forest, houses,
Fields, cities and bombs.
It devours, heedless of alarms.

And the knife...
With blades we cut and trim,
We shave and slice, we tidy up,
And we kill.

The internet, the modern tool,
The great uniter across all lands.
The way forward?
But given to the minds
of evil men, with other codes,
who choose ill deeds,
corruption, exploitation,
A frightful thing indeed.

Free will, or choice,
The two edged sword,
Must be a thought-of gift;
Needs tender handling.

Laele Pepper

Acceptance, and Change

The Priesthood of All Believers

The Protestant Reformation spread an idea relatively new to the church of its day, the priesthood of all believers. Previously only the anointed could presume to approach God, who was to be feared and served humbly and faithfully. The Old Testament Jews set aside the tribe of Levi to provide priests to serve God and to approach the tabernacle in fear and trembling on behalf of the people. Levites were consecrated to this service and stood between the deity and the people. Their earthly leader was the High Priest, a man of great rectitude, such as Aaron. Like many human institutions this role became corrupted by some, but never fell into disuse in OT times.

The early Christian church believed that Jesus became the High Priest whose life and death were sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. By this reasoning a class of priests, other than Jesus, was not really necessary. But faiths do not develop through logic, so the idea of a priestly class separate from ordinary people was taken up and reified by the Roman church under the Popes.

Only men could be chosen to act as intermediaries between God and humankind. Women need not apply. The exception was the mother of God, BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary). She was favoured with the adoration of humans as one who had suckled the Lord and taught him His early childhood lessons. She was a holy woman favoured above all others, so was fit to approach God on behalf of believers.

The idea of her apartness was encouraged by the Roman church. The church of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome was dedicated to her as early as CE 352 and paid for (ironically) by a childless Roman patrician and his wife. The church transmuted a pre-Christian birth goddess, Juno Lucina, into a Christian mother figure associated with the Virgin Birth. The deification and adoration of BVM was thus made acceptable.

But otherwise women were to be seen as temptresses, originators of sin, who led men into temptation. The sixteenth-century paintings of Hieronymous Bosch show 'woman the temptress' very clearly and there are many accounts of women in early Italian cities reduced to prostitution to stay alive.

Post New Testament times, and excepting the adoration of the Virgin, women were never allowed to be close to the Lord nor to serve Him directly as priests. This distinction was maintained for nearly two thousand years and exists to this day in many places. This apartness was in clear contradistinction to Acts where Luke shows women fully involved on the early church. For example, 'Saul...was harrying the church...seizing men *and women* and sending them to prison' (Acts 8:1).

The confessional became a method for the priestly class to hear the sins of the penitent and to hand out penances 'on behalf of' God. Thus the sinner was relieved of his sin by the intermediary, the priest, who could ask for forgiveness on his behalf if he truly repented and give him or her penance. During the Renaissance and probably to fill the papal coffers and pay the artists commissioned by the Popes, penance could be mitigated by payment to the church. This situation quickly led to abuses and scandalised many worshippers.

Acceptance

The Priesthood of All Believers cont.

An imaginary pamphlet to the Pope by Reginald Pole, cousin to Henry VIII of England, speaks of 'benefices ...bought and sold...uneducated youths...ushered into the priesthood as the best place to serve Mammon... and whores...followed up and down by...men from the households of cardinals'. (*The Courtiers Tale* p.88). This indictment of renaissance practices is doubtless based on truth, as records from the Papacy at Avignon show. Martin Luther also spoke against these abuses at Wittenberg.

The priesthood of all believers was therefore a revolutionary idea. It removed the need for a consecrated group to approach God on behalf of others. It opened the way to include ALL people, men and women, in the daily working out of every detail of their lives and in all aspects of the church.

It also meant that we must be personally responsible for our prayers and our actions. They are heard and seen by God for themselves, naked. What we see, say and do comes directly to Him, without any human intermediary. It is an awesome responsibility to face up to God ourselves.

If we are Christian believers, we can ask only for mercy from God, leaning on the ceaseless intercession of Jesus who is our sole High Priest. A Protestant minister has the task of explaining and expounding the theology which undergirds our faith but he, or she, should never stand between God and ourselves, or try to be a Levite. As Protestant Christians, men or women, we individually come face to face with the Might and Majesty of the Deity if we truly believe in the priesthood of all believers.

Sources:

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Luke, *Acts of the Apostles*, in *NEB New Testament*, 1961.

Laele Pepper

On the Way

Living life in the now;
in the light seeing,
in the dark hearing,
bodies edge touching –
breath smelling
tongue tasting
ego striving.

Is this the end,
the beginning,
or on the way,
out of this body bag life –
past gender, culture,
and ego satisfaction,
to what?

To a freedom;
in scale, large
beyond comprehension,
in detail microscopic,
within and without.

The timeless in time,
the transcendent in the now
the imminent moment;
found, but hard to hold
past the therapy of now,
the caring, that
treats transcendence.
Breaking the grip
of this touch of beyond,
this timeless in time,
for the journey
back to the now:
Just in time.

P. G. Baker

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

For some years I have been reflecting on the incidence of clapping in church, and have hesitated to start this letter. I write the following as a potential discussion starter, and certainly not as a polemic to upset people. The following opinions are mine, but are reflected in many conversations I have had. Some have indeed disagreed with my opinions, and I hope that they will put pen to paper to argue their views.

Our theme for this *NewView* is 'acceptance'. I have always argued that we should 'accept and affirm' each other and I want to do that here, but also to put the point of view that this is a mutual obligation.

So why is clapping in church an issue? For the very reason that not all of us approach worship with the same set of expectations, and we therefore need to accept that others will differ from us.

But just what is church worship about? We come to church to worship God. You may have other motivations, which if they give you a sense of belonging to the community of fellowship are well and good, but I think we would all agree that our primary focus is as an act of worship and God is the focus of our worship!

We sing hymns to the praise of God to celebrate his goodness; we listen attentively to the Word of God to better understand His message; we collectively pray to God that His grace may enlighten our lives; and we share together in communion that we become committed to God's family. All about God.

So clapping in church is not about showing our appreciation to the choir or the preacher or the children's address person. The glory and praise is to God, not the 'performer'! Clapping in response to a specific act of worship is out of place.

Now I do draw a distinction when we recognise the personal milestones or accomplishments of members of our congregation, such as anniversaries, awards or achievements. When we welcome others, such as visitors, into our community, we acknowledge the commitment they have made to come together with us. There we rejoice with them as part of God's family and recognise that each of us has a contribution to make, a gift to celebrate and an uplift of the soul. Great stuff!

But that is not part of our worship to God. It is a celebration of God's family and as such sits outside the intention of our worship service. Clapping to honour those accomplishments and milestones is good, and serves to bond us as God's family.

So please, folks, when you hear or see a moving or uplifting or insightful revelation in church, think about the glory it gives God and not the 'performer', refrain from clapping, and murmur 'Amen' to yourself. We shall all be enriched in our acceptance of God's glory, and the affirmation of our part in worshipping Him.

John Hurst

Thanks

We want to say a big thank-you to the sixty-two people who took the time and care to fill in the *NewView* survey recently.

It enables us to understand our reading public and their interests a little better. It confirmed what we had suspected, but for which we had no proof: that the main interest comes from the older (aged over 60 years) part of our congregation. Only 8 respondents were under 60, and they were all between 41-60 years

The survey has also given us an insight into what readers enjoy the most, what we should continue to do and what we should work on more.

We thank you for the positive support we received, and especially for the constructive suggestions which were made. One of these has been followed through already in this issue, in a new section called 'Letters to the Editor', to encourage people to engage with issues of concern about our church, our faith and our communal life. We hope that people will respond in writing to the letters in this new section. Letters need not be long - indeed, they should be less than 300 words. They must be signed, though; no anonymous letters will be printed. If you feel inspired to write at greater length it can be published as a longer article!

One of the most exciting aspects is that two more people have volunteered to assist Robin and Laele with the production of *NewView*. We will get together in the next week or two to work out how we will work together, as well as looking at those constructive suggestions offered and deciding what can be done. With a greater pool of ideas and effort we look forward to improving our output.

Thanks again. And if you have any further ideas please approach any of us: Robin Pope, Laele Pepper, Graeme Frecker and Peter Stewart.

Getting to Know Our Church: 'Q' Group

Friday Morning 'Q' Group

The 'Q' group meets each Friday morning (as regularly advertised in the weekly notices). We aim to study the teachings of Jesus beyond the confines of the regular gospels and Church doctrines, particularly in relation to Jesus' time, our current world and other religions. We share a common concern for the future of the Church in a world that is rejecting current teaching or searching for meaning in some very strange places.

As we sit in our cars driving along, our attention is drawn to the red brake lights. We all know that they are 'red' because when we were babies our parents taught us our colours and we know that this colour is 'red'. We do not question it.

Christianity is similar. As Christians, we were brought up in a 'denomination' and accepted the doctrine of the Church without question. We did not dare question; the Church was right. Unfortunately, many grew up sure their doctrine was right and others were wrong. This created a terrible prejudice that is hard to break and which can make us intolerant and cause us to refuse to accept other doctrines or points of view. Divisions like this are found in many religions, not just Christianity. There is an unspoken assumption that religious organisations are like political parties; you either accept the party/church line or get out.

In the Friday Morning 'Q' Group we question. If it can't stand questioning it isn't worth having. We also take very seriously the Gospels that were rejected at Nicaea, such as the Gospels of Thomas and of Mary Magdalene, and others.

Once you start questioning you open your mind and are forced to accept that just maybe you were wrong and someone else's ideas may be right, and are worth considering. Recently one of our group came across a passage from a Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hank which says:

Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless absolute truth. Avoid being narrow minded and bound by present views. Learn and practice non-attachment from views in order to be open to receive other viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.

As Christians, we do not have the sole possession of right and wrong, but as humans we do have the ability to think. When we look at various points of view, particularly when we consider the teachings of Jesus, we develop the most important thing a person can have – a conscience. A conscience guided by the teachings of Jesus helps us live with love and compassion in a very imperfect world and helps us to accept the world with all its problems.

Bill Norquay, writing on behalf of The Friday Morning 'Q' Group

Getting to Know Our Church

English Conversation Classes at GWUC

We have two English classes that meet at our church. The Beginners Class meets on Wednesdays at 2 pm. This group is having a break until July 5. The more advanced group meets on Thursdays during school terms at 11.15 am. Both groups have 16-20 members.



When the classes started, most of the participants in the Beginners Group had little or no English. It is hoped that they will be ready to join The Hub conversations later in the year. This group practises basic English phrases, and has learnt letters and numbers. Sheila and Angel are doing a great job leading this group.

The more Advanced Group has a different topic each week. Topics that have been covered include: Australia, travel, shopping, schooling, law, music and sport. We have nine tutors. Some lead the weekly sessions; others are happy to be helpers. Many of the students attend conversation sessions at

The Hub. All students are given the chance to speak at every session - either answering a question or talking about the topic for the week. Students are also encouraged to do some writing and reading.

The participants in both groups are very enthusiastic and it is exciting to see them improving week by week. We look forward to watching their progress between now and the end of the year.

Jan Clear



Ruby Anniversary for Sammy Stamp This Year

Sammy Stamp continues on quite well this year. Up to, and including April 6, 2017 sales have reached about \$9,529 (\$11,409.77 same time last year).

Some of the interstate customers, over for the International Stamp Exhibition in late March-early April paid a visit to Sammy Stamp and opened their wallets/purses. In the process they cleaned out some of our stocks of stamps, but swelled our day's takings.

Thank you to all out there for your continuing support. Please keep those stamps rolling in, but *please please* leave the stamps attached to the original paper and leave a 3mm (1/8 inch) surround of paper, so buyers can handle them safely without damaging the stamp. Without the border, they have to be discarded.

Dorothy Graham (for Alan Clarke)

Getting to Know You: Colin & Jacqui King

Colin and Jacqui King, now married for more than thirty years, began their lives a world apart: Colin on a farm in Victoria, Australia and Jacqui in the village of Milngavie, Scotland, about 10 km from central Glasgow. Their two lives have faced more devastating loss than most, yet despite this they have succeeded in learning to live with these experiences and have continued to share their lives by involvement with others.



Colin was born third child of a sheep-farming family near Violet Town. It was a happy childhood, with many hours spent with his brother, who was only two years his senior. He remembers the annual holidays spent at the beach, a highlight for families living inland, when the week or two spent in Chelsea, or at Macrae or Metung were gloriously different from life on the farm. He attended the local state school, and later, Benalla High School, aware of the assumption that he would 'naturally' progress to a life on the land. He left high school with this purpose in mind, and eventually went into partnership with his brother to take over the family farm from their father.

This was an era when depression was still rarely spoken about, and was often perceived as a weakness. Sufferers were expected to 'get on with it' and to 'pull themselves together'. Colin knew his brother was depressed, but was unaware of its seriousness. When his brother committed suicide in 1981 Colin was shattered, both for the loss of his dearly loved brother, but also because of the realisation of his brother's lonely suffering. From that time his interest in staying on the farm diminished, and he began the slow process of separating himself from his former life and envisaging a different future for himself - not an easy time, knowing that his parents were unhappy with his decision.

Colin's country life encompassed many activities within the community, living out the dictum of helping one's neighbour. He was a member of the local CFA and he spent many hours attending sporting matches for St John's Ambulance. At the local Methodist Church he assisted with the youth group and participated in the building of new tennis courts, and of a new nursing home for local residents. As a tennis player he represented country tennis, and for some years was President of the Strathbogie District Tennis Association. He also served as President of the Benalla Camera Club, and was a member of the Australian Photographic Society. In his spare time he engaged in rifle shooting as a sport!

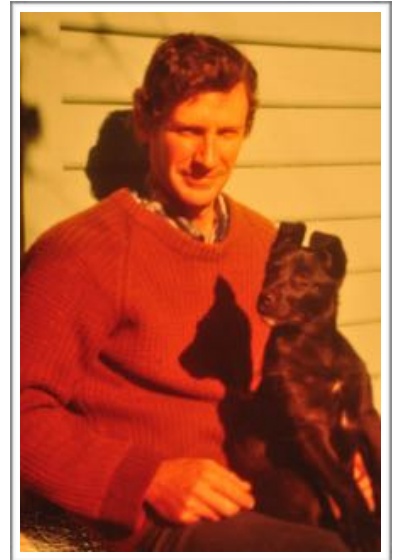
While Colin was enjoying childhood on the farm, Jacqui was growing up in Milngavie, attending school and looking forward to a possible future as a language teacher. In 1963 she was preparing to sit for final high school exams when, to her horror, her ambitions were eliminated in one stroke when her parents announced the family was about to migrate to Australia to provide a better life for their three children. The memory of the first six weeks spent at the migrant hostel in Broadmeadows are principally of the loneliness of being in a strange environment without the support of any friends. Things improved when the family moved to Ormond, where new friends were made and she obtained work in a bank. She succeeded in obtaining a broad range of experiences there and after a few years was able to move to the Children's Hospital, with a more responsible position in accounts, working with the finance manager. Sadly, her father died suddenly at this time so Jacqui's mother planned to return to Scotland. However, by then Jacqui had met her first husband, Robin, and they planned to be married in the Ormond Presbyterian Church, with Bill Morgan officiating, so Jacqui's mother changed *her* plans.



Getting to Know You: Jacqui & Colin King

Jacqui joined the choir at the Ormond Presbyterian Church, and made friends with other young couples. She and Robin moved to Mulgrave, where daughters Melinda and Louise were welcomed in 1971 and 1974. But in 1975 Robin became ill and the following year he was diagnosed with a brain tumour, although following the medical wisdom of the day he was not told of the gravity of his condition. He had always wanted to open his own brake and clutch business, and he still went ahead with the idea, successfully fulfilling his dream through a partnership, and with Jacqui doing the accounts. But in 1980 he needed another operation and his health steadily declined over the next two years. Eventually Jacqui was unable to care for him at home and he was transferred to Bethlehem Hospice, with Bill Morgan a regular visitor until his death in 1983. Jacqui had enjoyed only a few years of marriage without the worries of Robin's health, and now she was alone with two girls aged 12 and 9.

In 1984 Jacqui met Colin for the first time and over the next couple of years the friendship grew and many miles of travel between Violet Town and the city were travelled. They were finally married in July 1986, with Colin moving with his ready-made family into the house at Wheeler's Hill where they still reside. By 1989 Colin had finally sold the farm, although he kept his hand in by buying a small property in Neerim North. It proved to be therapeutic for Jacqui too, as she loved looking after the cows and establishing her rose garden. They maintained the farm for some years until it became too difficult to manage remotely and it had to be sold. Meanwhile, Colin had also established his occupational sea change by qualifying at Burnley Horticultural College in landscape gardening and horticulture and learning the trade before setting up a business in partnership with Jacqui.



They attended both the Wheelers Hill and Mulgrave Uniting Churches which then worked closely together. Lindsay Mann was another attendee there, involved with Jacqui in the music and youth work. Jacqui was on both the Parish Council and the Congregational Council, and assisted in the Family Centre. In keeping with his earlier community involvement, Colin, and Jacqui, were charter members of the Wheelers Hill Lions Club, with which they have had a 24 year association. Colin was twice president and has been Zone Chairman. They helped establish a Leo Club for the under-25s. He and Jacqui joined the UK Settlers' Club and took up ballroom dancing until Jacqui's knees prevented continued participation. During that period they organised three fund-raising dances for the Lions Club.

In 2009 Colin and Jacqui made the move to Glen Waverley Uniting Church, where their heavy schedule has continued. They joined a Fish Group and Colin attends the Monday Bible Study Group and is on the rosters for Bible Reading, Communion and Prayers for the People. He is a member of the Faith Development Committee, and has recently become one of the committee running the Men's group. (He noted that they needed a committee of five to do what Malcolm Chamberlain had done single-handedly!) Bird watching and classic cars continue to be an interest.

Meanwhile Jacqui joined Probus and UCAF, where she did a spell as President. She has derived great enjoyment from her participation in Uniting Voices, and additionally she is a member of the Monash Chorale. 'Music restores my soul', she notes. She has battled health problems in recent years, but continues on the morning tea roster. She has had to adapt to her more restricted physical capabilities in recent years, but notes that frequent exercise has improved her overall condition. Tennis and dancing are now off the agenda, and since a stroke in 2014 she has had to give up her role as concert manager of Monash Chorale, although participation in the singing is a continued source of nourishment. But they still continue to find new activities.

Getting to Know You: Jacqui & Colin King

In recent years they have enjoyed travel overseas to Canada and New Zealand, and in 2013 a special visit to Scotland enabled Jacqui to renew old contacts. They have also enjoyed houses in Port Douglas and Blairgowrie which have been bolt-holes over the years. However, Jacqui maintains that the best part has been the last ten years, being involved as grandparents to Melinda's two children - Mac, 10, and Lucy, 8 - and being a part of their young lives.

They might be slowing down *a little* now. Colin is semi-retired, keeping his hand in by continuing with just a few clients and a landscaping project at Brentwood High School. He says he has the 'scrap-heap syndrome', but their continued participation in community volunteering seems a far cry from the scrap heap!

In speculating about the future of the church generally, Colin feels churches need to learn how to speak a language which is relevant to people outside the church, as so much of our communication is couched in 'church language' which is meaningless to those outside our walls. Meanwhile, he and Jacqui will continue to share with their neighbours and enjoy the engagement with others that is the hallmark of their living faith.

Robin Pope



Winter Solstice

Winter Solstice – longest night
a time to test that learnt from light.

From the darkness you came
and to dark will return;
your time in the light
escape from the night,
is your time to change
to learn about light.

Winter Solstice – longest night
a time to test that learnt from light.

Light sometimes longer
sometimes stronger,
time to find
the light within
knowing that
darkness will come.

Winter Solstice – longest night
a time to test that learnt from light.

Will you have enough light
when the darkness returns?
Only by testing
your light in the night,
in night's shadow
of lingering light.

Winter Solstice – longest night
a time to test that learnt from light.

Then it's done; as
your light becomes,
light to find light
in the dark
at the end
of your light time.

P G Baker

Getting to Know Church Events: UCAF

Exhibition of Crafty Creations

As has been the custom for many years, Glen Waverley Uniting Church Adult Fellowship held its annual fund-raising luncheon on the first Tuesday in May. This year we were fortunate to have Gemma Jones, from Craft Victoria, as the speaker. She spoke of the history of Craft Victoria, including its various 'homes'. The philosophy of the group is to involve communities from all over the state in a wide variety of craft. Her visual display emphasised this variety. Most people were intrigued how basic skills and up-to-date techniques involving 3D printing are being combined. Gemma is also involved in helping crafters to market their products, through courses she conducts state- wide.

About 130 people attended the function. They were free to walk around the sanctuary where fourteen crafty people exhibited their work. Half of the exhibits were static, and the other half had skilful people demonstrating their crafts.

The quality of the work was awe-inspiring. A very young 94-year-old was very willing to show and explain her unbelievable hardanger work; another showed us how to make a beautiful flower arrangement; and two men showed products of their woodwork skills, including stools, palm crosses, and a chess set. There were paintings, clothes designs, patchwork quilts, spinning, and embroidery. Demonstrations of making stars (for the One Million Stars to End Violence project) invited visitors to add their stars to the collection.



Vintage Chic bag



Of course an excellent lunch followed. The handcrafted table decorations left us all in wonder of the diverse gifts possessed by many members of our congregation, gifts which they gladly share. We were delighted to make a profit of \$1634 which will be donated entirely to selected charitable causes.

Geraldine Fleming

Photos: Verity Cormack



Church Activities: Second Annual Walkathon



The stoic 8 am group



9.25 Departure

On Saturday 29th April, we held the second walkathon at our church. We are hoping that this will become an annual event. Each lap covered 5 kilometres, beginning and concluding at the church. The complete course was 20 kilometres (four laps). Some walkers, including Neil and Lynn Peters, Mike Foo and Debbie Leigh completed the whole four laps. Walkers were sponsored by friends and relatives.

The proceeds from the walk (about \$3000) will be given to the Chaplaincy Program at the Glen Waverley Secondary College and will also support the breakfast program at the Secondary College, and Lynn in SRI programs at various primary schools.



There was a break between each lap when walkers could relax and enjoy drinks and food. There was also a refreshment stop outside the home of Lorraine and Warren Bartlett in Waverley Road.



11 am departure



Final lap

Children's activities, including an obstacle course, were set up in the foyer. A small group of children enjoyed these challenges.

We congratulate those who participated and look forward to next year's event.

Jan Clear (photos & words)

Book Review: Charles Birch, *On Purpose*

In chapter four of his 1991 book *On Purpose*, Professor Charles Birch mentions a number of conceptions of God which different people might hold. He is not personally attracted by any of them.

Here are the views he rejects:

1. The God who can do anything by intervention, but seems not to prevent catastrophes eg nuclear war.
2. The great mechanic God who set the universe going in the first place, then left it, apart from occasional miraculous interventions.
3. The God of the gaps, brought in to explain what we do not understand, who must necessarily grow smaller as our knowledge increases.
4. The telephonist God who sits at a great telephone exchange connected to all of us and who will take our requests and alter circumstances according to our personal requests.
5. The autocratic God who requires praise, or sacrifice.
6. The martial God who is on our side in wars and favours our armies above others.
7. The God with the big book who rules by fear, judges us all, and dispenses rewards and punishments post mortem.

He comments that the early Christian church in its conception of God was influenced by social organisation in Middle Eastern and Roman societies of the time, where an autocratic ruler reigned supreme, dispensing decisions based on human whims and on position. This tradition became reified in the growing, Romanised church, and determined our view of God for many centuries, as some of the above views show.

But God is not static and unchanging in the sense of 'not responding to us'. Birch goes on to argue that God gives free will, choice, to all His creatures, depending on their nature. Humans, with an apparently unique capacity to predict future consequences of their actions, have more choices open to them than, say, cells, bodily organs or trees or even animals. So at any one time there are literally millions of choices being made and acted upon, in which God does not interfere. Yet at the same time He infuses the whole of His creation with a deep yearning for harmony. He is immanent, as our New Testament clearly states again and again.

So what does this mean? Is God with us, but passive? Birch does not agree with this position either. God is the same from age to age and yet adaptive to our choices. In this sense, we make God according to our times, and yet God is also unchanging, always the same. Perfect love; accepting of us despite our failings; forgiving; seeking peace and harmony.

There are things a God of Love cannot do by definition. He never tries to use coercion if persuasion fails; He never forces entry into our lives. Holman Hunt's image of the One who stands at the door and knocks shows how God seeks and responds to us. The Divine is a persuasive agency, not a manipulative one, and we respond accordingly, begging forgiveness for our failures to respond to the power of Love. Birch calls this image of God 'the ecological worldview of the Divine'. As early as 1930 Whitehead also remarked: 'The life of Christ (and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) is not an exhibition of overruling power. Its power lies in the absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at that point in time.' (Birch, p.95).

How does this marvellous, loving and forgiving Creator help us?

The response of ordinary people to manufactured disaster is generally one of spontaneous compassion. This reaction reflects the kindness of God to His creatures in distress. He will never force His attentions on us but will respond to our needs when we ask for relief, showing great compassion and giving us strength to cope with what has befallen us.

We are led to believe that God is close within us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and is at the same time watching over all of His Creation. Like a good Father He guides and protects us and all creatures, allowing us by our choices to stumble but also helping us when we do. So we retain our freedom to act but we can also be confident in His help when we ask it in humility. The opening words of the Lord's Prayer, 'Our Father', are Christ-given for a reason.

To return to Birch. God is within us and moment by moment aware of us, responding to us but also allowing our choices. This is a God who shines on the world through us, not a far away Entity to be bowed before in fear and trembling. One to be treated with great love and respect, but also One who reveals His Presence to the world through our choices and actions. Therein lies our great privilege and responsibility.

References:

Birch, C. (1991) *On Purpose*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Whitehead, A.N. (1930) *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Laele Pepper

From the Justice and International Mission Unit

Rev John Rickard writes the leading article in the May issue of *JustAct*, the publication of the Justice and International Mission Unit of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania:

Fifty Years On from the 1967 Referendum - What's Changed?

It has been 230 years since the first tall ships appeared at the mouth of Sydney Harbour and our forebears invaded this wild and beautiful land.

But it was not until 1967 - fifty years ago - that a referendum was passed that included Aboriginal people in the census and allowed the Commonwealth government to make laws for Aboriginal people. It was only five years earlier that Aboriginal people were given the right to vote.

The church has struggled to make right the relationship we have with the First Peoples who lived and occupied this place before we came.

We've passed justice recommendations in the councils of the church, we've encouraged the formation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), and we've acknowledged First Peoples in the constitution of the UCA.

All fine and well meaning things.

But what we, as a church, have never done is conduct this special relationship with respect and dignity. It has always been a one-way street, from us the coloniser to them, the colonised; from us the church, to them, who need conversion.

We have acted as though it is us who control God's grace, it is us who know all the theology and doctrine, it is us who are the blessed ones.

When we arrived, we acted as though we had it all, we even had it all to give. We acted as though these First Peoples had nothing to give us.

The time has long past when we of the dominant culture need to realise that these First Peoples have a lot to give us. A lot of great value, that will not only address the paucity of our identification with this land, but expand our spiritual horizon, deepen our comprehension, even our encounter with the one we claim as God.

It is time the cultural clash between the First Peoples and the dominant culture of this land became a two-way street. For we 'white-fellas' have a lot to learn. Only then can we begin the true process of reconciliation.

If you're interested in hearing more about the Covenant relationship between the UCA and UAICC, and want to explore what this might mean in your local context and community, you can join the Synod's Covenanting Network, by contacting Jill.Ruzbacky@victas.uca.org.au or phone 9251 5266

for everything there is a season
and a time for every matter under heaven...

We record with sadness the deaths in the past months of members of our church family and we extend our support and sympathy to their families

Geoffrey Stephen LAMBLE

Maurice Alwyn WAHNER

We celebrate the marriage of

Martin Christopher CURRY & Jessica Anne NELSON

We record with joy the baptisms of

Ayla Grace CORNALL

Ava Lynne JONKER