



InSpire



NEWSLETTER OF THE STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH

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VALE NOEL DENNIS

(30 June 1930 – 11 May 2024)

(See page 3)

InSpiring

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Why is Religion Important to Spirituality and Vice-a-Versa?

Some months ago, I bought a book because of its title. Not always a wise thing to do. On the front cover were the words, "Spiritual AND Religious: Exploration for Seekers", by Fr Roger Haight SJ. I had previously heard of Roger Haight through his book "Jesus the Symbol of God," a book that caused significant controversy within Catholic hierarchy.¹ So I thought this new book would be worth reading!

For years now, I have heard people say, "I am spiritual but not religious." In fact, I have used this expression myself. Particularly with those who did not have a religious or church background. Only recently have I begun to ask what does that mean? Partly, I have seen in myself and others the desire to continue a religious life while integrating spirituality into life and faith in order to discover a deeper and more meaningful understanding of self and others.²

So, my reflections have led me to some tentative conclusions. First religion and spirituality are different yet complementary ways of relating to the sacred, the divine, human values and what is significant and worthwhile in a meaningful life. Secondly, religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals that are often associated with a particular faith. Many have seen religion as imposed at birth or through one's culture, while spirituality is more a personal and individual experience of the sacred or divine. It is more connected to the earth and the human spirit. Religion can be seen as structured, while spirituality is fluid and individual.

¹ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, after careful study, has judged that the book Jesus Symbol of God (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), by Father Roger Haight S.J., contains serious doctrinal errors regarding certain fundamental truths of faith. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20041213_notification-fr-haight_en.html

² Austin Cline: It's popular, especially in America, to completely separate spirituality and religion. It's true

What's the Difference Between Religion and Spirituality?

I suggest that the reasons many have abandoned religion is because of particular religious beliefs imposed through hierarchical structures (organized religion). The church's belief in God, interpreted in our culture through the Bible seems either irrelevant, dangerous or nonsensical and therefore irrational to the modern mind. And finally, there have been gargantuan shifts from a nominally theocratic society to the secular one since the enlightenment.

So, is it fair to say that the rise in spirituality is a response to the need in most of us to continue the pathway toward a rich and meaningful life in a spirit of being which is sacred to both earth and sky!

I don't think I can do better than quote Austin Cline, an expert on religion, spirituality and atheism, from his article in Learning Religions:

Religion is spiritual and spirituality is religious. One tends to be more personal and private while the other tends to incorporate public rituals and organized doctrines. The lines between one and the other are not clear and distinct—they are all points on the spectrum of belief systems known as religion. Neither religion nor spirituality is better or worse than the other; people who try to pretend that such a difference does exist are only fooling themselves.³

The Continuation of Religion

Many commentators have been either frustrated or surprised at the continued presence of religion in contemporary society. As we know some forms

that there are differences, but there are also a number of problematic distinctions which people try to make. In particular, supporters of spirituality often argue that everything bad lies with religion while everything good can be found in spirituality. This is a self-serving distinction which masks the nature of religion and spirituality. www.learnreligions.com/religion-vs-spirituality-whats-the-difference-250713

³ Cline, *op. cit.*

of modern religion have morphed into new and at times peculiar expressions. Fundamentalism, emotionalism and cults of all kinds and colours. Nevertheless, the desire for a community, and occasions that transcend the profane and the ordinary in worship, reflection and public ritual remain at the core of our humanness. Privatized rituals are not big enough to be the repository of our deepest spiritual needs.

Perhaps spirituality, because it is unbounded, can drift toward the idiosyncratic and meaningless, while the religious can be too binding and unwilling to be experimental, life-affirming and adaptive. As Austin Cline is suggesting, we need both. However, religion cannot claim the upper hand through authoritarianism or historic precedence. Nor can spirituality express superiority through novelty and personal autonomy. Both must not only live together, but must inform each other with the best they have to offer.

On the back cover of Roger Haight's book "Spiritual and Religious" Kaya Oakes writes:

Roger Haight reminds us that religion without spirituality – without the life-giving, evolving, moving of spirit – is not religion at all. In a time when religion and the spiritual are being tugged apart, both by religion and secularism, he carefully and gracefully joins them back together, where they belong!

Life-affirming and new life emerging.

Christopher

SEARCH FOR A NEW MINISTER UPDATE

The process of searching for a new Minister has advanced to the stage where, hopefully, Synod's Placements Committee may soon advance candidates with whom the Joint Nominating Committee can begin conversations.

Our Congregation Profile passed through our Presbytery's Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) despite a little fumble on the way and was

lodged with the Placements Committee in time for it to be considered at Placements' June meeting. The comments added to our Profile by PRC gave our congregation a ringing endorsement and high praise which should encourage suitable candidates to advance themselves for a conversation. Placements are now advertising our vacancy not only among our Synod's clergy but interstate as well.

We now await developments in prayerful anticipation!

Dick Carter

VALE NOEL DENNIS

(30 June 1930 – 11 May 2024)

We were all saddened by the passing of our beloved Noel Dennis on May 11. Since the amalgamation of the Serrell St Church with Ewing in 2015, Noel has been a cheerful and constant presence on Sundays, on the Church Council, and manager of property matters.

We express our heartfelt sympathy to Gwen, and to his children, Greg, Malcolm and Helen.

A memorial and thanksgiving service was held on May 30, officiated by Rev Chris Page, and was well attended by family and friends. The input of Noel's children and grandchildren was beautifully presented.



Thank you, Greg Dennis, for allowing us to include your eulogy delivered at the service.



Eulogy by Greg Dennis

Thank you for coming along today to celebrate Noel's life. He would be impressed. Dad lived a healthy, happy, long life. He lived an interesting life in interesting times. He made his mark. He contributed. He wanted his life recorded and probably celebrated in a mostly, modest manner. His story, in many ways is a story of the 20th century. And today, on his behalf, I want to share his story with you, a story which is both uplifting and full of good times.

Dad was born in Ringwood, Victoria - the second child of Arthur and Ethel Dennis. His sister, Dean, was four years older. As some of you have already noticed, dad's middle name, Leon, was Noel spelt backwards.

Dad's father Arthur emigrated from England in 1921, having served in the First World War. In fact, Arthur was part of the legendary "Old

Contemptibles" who were the first British soldiers to march in to battle in August 1914. Such was their bravery and defiance that the German Emperor described them as "contemptible". Arthur's resilience and stoicism were no doubt valuable life skills that were passed on to his two children, Noel and Dean.

We don't know much about Ethel's earlier life other than her father was a builder of sorts, who constructed the family house somewhere in Queensland. Family legend has it that he constructed their house without fitting the doors so the wildlife just ran through. So, dad's mother was pretty resilient too, but unfortunately, she died in 1964.

In 1932, the family moved to a newly acquired house in Dandenong.

Dad's childhood was shaped by the Great Depression and WW2. He recalls RAAF aircraft flying over his neighbourhood. He imagined shooting down enemy aircraft flying over his backyard. He recalled petrol rationing where there were hardly any vehicles on the roads. He would cycle out to areas like Rowville and Wheelers Hill where he wouldn't spot a car for hours. Rationing also meant a lack of certain foods like chocolate and other confectionary, stuff that kids really wanted. Dad always had a sweet tooth and he blamed it on the war rationing.

Dad clearly recalls selling newspapers for "tuppence" at the Dandenong railway station and local theatre on a Saturday evening. He sold the Sporting Globe and the last edition of the Herald which had the VFL (Now AFL) footy results.

Dad recalls travelling by train from Dandenong to Essendon as a 12-year-old where he'd meet up with his uncle and watch Essendon play footy at Windy Hill. His Uncle Jim was a member of the Essendon Football Club, and he spent a bit of time in the members' bar. He would instruct dad to wait outside and every so often he would hand dad a glass of lemonade, a real "treat" back then. Later, dad would attend Windy Hill by himself. He recalls John Coleman's first match (an Essendon Great) where he kicked 12 goals. And at the MCG he watched Bradman's masterful batting.

Dad attended the local Primary and High schools in Dandenong. Dandenong High School had a

very large catchment area with students travelling from as far as Warragul in the east and Murrumbena to the west. At high school, Dad didn't like Latin and French, but he was good at science and was interested in the new technology of radio. He no doubt made crystal radio sets when he had the resources to do so. He also found it fascinating that sound could travel down a piece of string when two people held tin cans to their ears.

Just before Dad's 15th birthday, he learned that there was a job available at a company called AWA as trainee radio technician. He applied without hesitation and was successful and commenced work in May 1945. Dad travelled by train from Dandenong to his new workplace, in Queen Street, Melbourne. A few months later, dad heard an announcement over the radio that the war in the Pacific had ended. He and his work colleagues, downed their tools and went out into Bourke Street, danced and kissed the girls.

In 1952, a work colleague organised for dad to meet a lovely young lady, Gwen Mackenzie. Dad said that nothing much happened for a while, but after they attended a few functions together, love blossomed, and they married on 12 March 1955 at the St Kilda Methodist Church. They lived in St Kilda for a few years and at one stage their flat hosted meetings of the local branch of the Australian Labor Party.

That all started because dad just said "yes" to things. At work, he was approached to join the Electrical Trades Union. He said "yes". Later, the union asked if he could collect union dues. He said "yes". Due to a split in the ALP a few years earlier, the Union had difficulty filling positions on its State Council. They asked dad would he be a candidate, he said "yes". Somehow, dad ended up as number one on the ballot paper and he was duly elected. He later said, he got the position due to the "donkey vote" as he was unknown amongst the other union members, and he certainly didn't campaign for the position. Next, dad was approached to serve as union representative on the state wages board for employees in the Radio Trades industry – he said "yes". So now dad was helping to determine the wages and conditions of employment for thousands of employees in his industry.

Now that dad is getting known, he was approached by the St Kilda Branch of the ALP to join the party. You guessed it, he said "yes". Now dad is attending meetings and some of the meetings are being held in his home. Noel and Gwen now have their first child, Malcolm. Like all babies, they cry and create a disturbance – even at these home-based ALP meetings. One member, a bloke called Moss Cass (who later went on to become a Minister in the Whitlam Government), bellowed out, "Can't you shut that child up! Undeterred, Gwen offered Moss another sandwich. Now all this "yes" was about to reach a crescendo. One night, the Branch wanted to elect a candidate to stand for the state seat of St Kilda (later abolished to become Albert Park). The preferred candidate hadn't shown up to the meeting and the members were becoming restless. Some were getting agitated and started shifting their alliance. All of a sudden, they asked dad, would he like to be the ALP candidate. If elected at the next state election, dad would be an MP in the Victorian Parliament. So, what did he say? He said "NO"! So, who was the name of that member who was running late? It was a bloke called Barry Jones, who later served in the Victorian and Federal Parliaments. Dad and Barry were to become good friends but with a growing family, dad dropped out of the ALP. I was born September 1961 and Helen June 1964. You know, our dad could've been Premier if he just kept on saying "yes" to things!

In 1954, Queen Elizabeth II visited Australia for the first time. Most of the population turned out to greet her. At the time, AWA had the contract to set up the public address system for the Queen's and other dignitaries' speeches, so dad played a lead role in setting up the PA equipment in Melbourne.

1969 was a big year. Man walked on the moon, Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: a space odyssey* was in the cinemas and dad started work on his garage extension. Dad not only saw Kubrick's film, but he also had some association with the NASA's Apollo program. So, let's start with the BIG ONE – the garage extension.

Dad took 16 years to build the extension, long after the Apollo missions had ended. Each of dad's bricks was laid with absolute perfection, not 1 mm out. NASA could have learned a thing or

two from dad. He was fastidious. Unfortunately, one day when he was on the roof, he fell and broke his ribs. A neighbour noticed dad's fall and jumped the back fence to render assistance. Dad spent the next six weeks sitting in a chair in the lounge room waiting for his ribs to heal. But that didn't stop him from working. He organised a phone extension and a telephone so he could work from home. We think about working from home as a recent development, but dad did it some 40 years earlier.

Dad's garage was full of stuff which grew considerably following the extension. There were TVs, radios and even 2-way radios that had been used in the 2nd World War. There were so many timber off-cuts, it would've easily filled a timber yard. Dad would typically bring this stuff home from work, saying it was either "worth a fortune" or it could be used for a future home extension. Of course, when the house was eventually extended, this timber remained in the garage.

One time he bought home six large wooden crates from work. It took about a week to transport all the boxes in his combi van. These crates were from the old VW factory in Clayton and were used to transport unassembled cars to Australia. Dad then positioned these heavy crates in a long line in the backyard with an extra crate hoisted on top in the middle. We now had a "submarine" and dad's garage radios were part of the props for our WW2 adventures, somewhere in the North Atlantic.

As I mentioned earlier, dad had some association with NASA's space program. His company, AWA had the contract to run the Deep Space Tracking Centre located at Tidbinbilla in the ACT which tracked and communicated with the space craft such as the Apollo missions. As a child, I recall dad staying up late to watch the live TV feed from the moon. He had good reason to be excited as it was AWA that was providing the pictures from Tidbinbilla, which was relayed on to the Parkes radio dish, for transmission to millions around the world.

Around this time, dad somehow got caught up in a mining boom. Dad always had an interest in the share market, and he even ran a "share club" at work. The year is 1969 and dad encouraged the share club to buy a mining stock named Poseidon Nickel. They bought this share for \$1. And the

price started to increase – and INCREASE! This company said that they'd found nickel **everywhere!** When the share price reached \$5, dad encouraged his work colleagues to sell, which they did. But by February 1970, the share price had sky-rocketed to \$280, probably 4 times greater than the average weekly wage of the time. But dad must have smelt a rat because the share price soon crashed. While some made millions from this share market bubble, dad was able to put aside market frenzy and emotion: take a small profit and exit with grace!

Dad loved James Bond movies especially the earlier ones starring Roger Moore and Sean Connery. Both actors were a similar age to dad.

Dad was not immune to the great waves of popular and political culture that swept the country in the 1960s and 70s and 80s. His main source of media and information about Australia and the world was through the ABC. He listened and watched its news and current affairs. He was swept along with fashion and movies. At one stage he was attending his local church in a purple flared suit. He even grew a moustache to look a bit like Robert Redford, who starred with Paul Newman in the movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Like Sean Connery and Roger Moore, Robert Redford was a similar age to dad. I can only surmise that these were dad's archetypal heroes, which we all have.

Dad loved classical music and at times our house and car were filled with the Great Symphonies of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Handel and the cheeky Gilbert and Sullivan. He loved Handel's *Messiah*. Mum told the local Milk Bar owner that dad had built his garage to the tune of the *Messiah* and every time he saw mum or dad, he would break into the Hallelujah Chorus and wave his arms about in a wild frenzy as if he was conducting a mass choir. Word had got around the neighbourhood.

Dad was aware of his lack of formal education, but he did undertake many short courses. At one stage, he attempted to do a Year 12 subject at TAFE. He struggled a bit with the essays, but he managed to pass because he just happened to drive the lecturer home late in the evening after the class. Dad was a natural salesman. He eventually became state manager at work.

Dad just knew how to meet and greet people and make a good impression, and he always had a genuine interest in people. He loved to talk; he had the gift of the gab. Sometimes, he'd go for a bike ride up the street. But he wouldn't get far, maybe 50 or 100 metres before he'd spot someone he knew, maybe in their front garden and have a chat. And there was always time for a chat.

Dad lived through the major technological and social changes of the 20th and 21st centuries. He contributed and participated in major technological developments in radio, TV and two-way radio communications. He repaired radios so people could listen to Bradman play wonderful cricket. He repaired the TVs so people could watch live pictures of man on the moon. He sold, advised and installed radio equipment so business could have better communication. By the time mobile phones had taken hold by the mid-90s, dad had retired after 50 years of solid employment with the one company, AWA.

Of interest, his exit from the company had the hallmarks of a Poseidon nickel saga. AWA had got into strife, partly due to some financial irregularities which resulted in a \$50 million loss in the late 1980s. Eventually an ex-employee was sentenced for fraud in a NSW court. Anyway, parts of AWA were sold off to other companies, including dad's division. But then dad had a hunch that these companies were "crook" and were heading into insolvency. So, with another colleague, they both resigned, claiming all their entitlements, including his 12 months of long service leave. Less than six months later the company folded. Dad started his retirement on a high note.

Dad retired 30/06/1995. At his retirement farewell, his speech was full of jokes. While dad wasn't a witty man, he liked to stand up in front of an audience and tell jokes, whether the audience was his work colleagues or a meeting, even a church meeting. He said the best jokes and whacky stories were to be told at church conferences where ministers were often given the "floor" to entertain. Dad even had a file in his cabinet, called "church jokes".

Dad was always involved with his church. He was trustee of St Kilda Methodist church, and when he moved to Chadstone in 1960, he became

involved there. He taught Sunday School. He was also involved with Serrell Street, and of course here. He liked singing in the choir and he was grateful to wife Gwen for showing him how. He was also treasurer of the Clan Mackenzie Association.

On Saturday nights, dad would set up chairs, tables and books in the church hall in preparation for Sunday School. I would often join dad in this task a little later, as the church was only two doors up from our house. After I'd arrived, our black cat showed up as well. This was followed by the neighbours' cats. What happened next was nothing more than a cat circus, with them racing about, playing hide and seek and mucking about!

One time the neighbours' cats turned up to our grandfather's funeral held at the church. We didn't notice this until we saw two black ears appearing over the coffin. The minister, however, gently retrieved the cat and placed it in the sleeve of his ministerial robes and continued the service. The name of this Minister was Reverend Professor Norman Young who only just passed away recently.

Neighbours. Good neighbours. We've always been blessed with good neighbours. They even provided breakfast when we ran out of cereal, especially for dad. On a couple of occasions dad went into the next-door neighbours with an empty breakfast bowl and asked them to fill it up with Weeties, which they did.

As a father to myself, Mal and Helen, his outlook on life was bright and positive. He made sure we had family holidays. He took his annual leave entitlement so we could get away. He played cricket and golf and loved trout fishing. He was captain of the AWA cricket team and member of the St Kilda Church cricket team. He was a lifelong supporter of the Essendon Football Club. He liked a laugh too and that included James Bond movies, The Goons, Spike Milligan and any slightly whacky or irreverent movie. He recorded life, particularly those holidays with his 8mm movie camera. Nowadays, just about everyone is a blogger or vlogger on social media but back 50+ years ago, only a few folks had a home movie camera and editing was an onerous task.

Noel was a wonderful father to Malcolm, Helen and me. Fantastic Uncle to Andrew, Euan, Gary, Mark and Ross. Brother-in-law to Vera and husband David, Ron and surviving spouse, Nancy. Grandad to Lachlan, Lilly, Nellie, Chloe and James. Father-in-law to Donna. Life partner to Gwen. Married 69 years. What's the best way to sum a marriage of that length? Here's a simple story from last month. Dad has just fallen out of bed. Mum is standing around looking at dad on the floor, not sure of what to do next and dad simply says, JUST GIVE ME A KISS. As Ingrid Bergman once said, "A kiss is a lovely trick designed by nature to stop speech when words become superfluous".

Thank you **all** for coming today to share and celebrate Noel's amazing life. Our memories of Noel will be **ours** forever.

Greg Dennis

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT

Joyce Jenkin

Council agreed to proceed with the installation of a fountain beside the Memorial Garden. Sue was thanked for all the work that she has done for us on this project. The congregation will be offered the opportunity to contribute to the cost.

It was agreed that Rosemary Grenness has done an amazing job on the website. We are still following up on including information about, and links to our, regular outside users.

Alison reported that the working party planning a public forum on homelessness had met and considerable progress has been made. The proposed date for the forum is 17th November.

After the recent visit to SCUC by some representatives of the Glen Iris Rd. Uniting Church, a reciprocal visit by some members of our congregation will be negotiated between Chris and Dick and their minister.

Council agreed to make our facilities available to the Higgins Grandmothers Group for a concert later in the year.

SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT *Lorna Henry*

Hugh Mackay, much respected social psychologist and researcher, has recently published 'The Way we Are: Lessons from a lifetime of listening'. This was the book we explored in our meeting in June.

His context for the whole book is his belief that we are born to connect, but lonelier than ever.

We live in a world which has changed greatly from the world of our youth. Hugh MacKay identifies many factors contributing to this enormous change, particularly as they have resulted in increasing stress, loneliness and anxiety. His research over many decades confirms this.

The factors of change he identifies are: shrinking households, a high rate of relationship breakdowns, a falling birth rate - fewer people living together. Then the sharp decline in religious faith and practice. Information technology and social media have wrought huge change. There is increasing mobility of the population, insecurity of work, and a widening gulf between rich and poor.

We have a more competitive culture, a more 'me-culture', and a mental health crisis.

There are no quick easy solutions, and Mackay offers only the advice for things we can do at a local level. Be kind. Be compassionate. Be in touch with people. Look out for the stranger and the lonely.

He also mentions the Grand Human Project, and it sounds a lot like the Gospel message. 'Love one another.'

For our July meeting, Michael Read has kindly offered to start us on a discussion of the different needs and emphases among Christian groups. Why are the more conservative Christian churches flourishing? What do they offer which attracts people? And conversely, why are the mainstream churches apparently declining? Michael will tell us about an article and a book

which have interested him. There will be lots to discuss here!

We will meet on the third Sunday, July 21st at 5.00pm as usual, at 5 Vickery St, East Malvern, and we look forward to hearing from Michael with a hearty discussion in a warm room!

All are welcome.

LIBRARY NEWS

Faye Pattinson

Our next Book Chat will be on Thursday, 18th July at 10.30 am in the Margaret McKinnon Room. All are welcome, with or without a book to share. Come and enjoy the conversation and morning tea.

Two books have recently been donated to the library and are now available for borrowing. They are:

“The Happiest Man on Earth” by Eddie Jaku. Eddie Jaku always considered himself a German first, a Jew second. He was proud of his country. But all of that changed in November 1938, when he was beaten, arrested and taken to a concentration camp.

Because he survived, Eddie made the vow to smile every day. He pays tribute to those who were lost by telling his story, sharing his wisdom and living his best possible life. He now believes he is the 'happiest man on earth'.

And

“Toilet Warrior” by Mark Bella. *During a business trip to India, the author made an unexpected discovery, a discovery that was to turn his understanding of our world upside down Toilet Warrior is an important description of a vital element in global sanitation and hygiene - the availability of toilets world-wide.*

AFTERNOON FELLOWSHIP

Lencie Harding

A stamp trimming afternoon for the UCAF Stamp Fund ‘Sammy Stamp’ was held on Monday 17th June.

Our small group trimmed 185.5g of stamps while chatting. A cup of tea or coffee followed with a variety of treats which even included gluten free cupcakes.

Thank you so much to the ladies concerned who agreed that it was a most enjoyable and productive afternoon.

Podiatrist, Rosemary Grenness, will be guest speaker at our Monday 15th July meeting. Her topic will be ‘The vintage foot’. Rosemary last spoke to the group in 2016. It will be great to have her with us again.

AFTERNOON FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY TABLE

Lencie Harding

On behalf of Treasurer, Jan Riches, I am delighted to report that the Opportunity Table held on Sunday 16th June 2024, raised \$234, with thanks to all who brought and bought.

Special thanks to Isabelle Roberts and Michael Williams for their generous contributions.

SAMMY STAMP Lencie Harding

Thank you to Sue McGrath who regularly makes a donation of stamps.

Anne Don, a volunteer at The Archives, Serrell Street, has given me a large number of stamps donated by members of the Murrumbeena UC congregation. Margaret Duncan of Glen Waverley UCAF Group has also given me a large quantity of stamps for Sammy.

A delivery to the Sammy Stamp volunteers at the Trinity UC Brighton will be made one Thursday morning this month.

The following is from Allan Clark's report for the July 2024 issue of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship's magazine *Net Work*:

Well, we are already heading down towards Christmas but the Sammy Stamp merry band of helpers keep working on. If you are interested in being a volunteer for Sammy, e.g. if you have recently retired, or you wish to trim or sort stamps, or volunteer your time on Thursday mornings, please join us on a Thursday morning at 15 Black Street Brighton to see what we get up to.

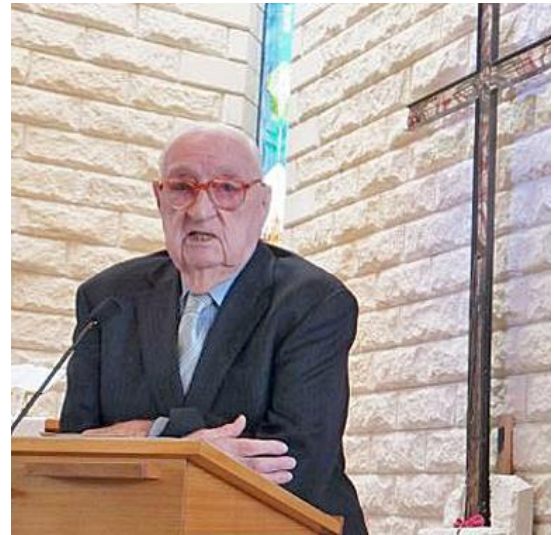
Up to and including 6/6/2024 Sales have reached about \$10,867 (same week last year \$14,103). Two further grants have been approved: one to the Mission Liaison Group of \$5,000 to assist in transporting charitable items to our Pacific neighbours. The second, \$5,000 to Uniting VicTas. in support of their winter appeal, bringing the total to \$21,000 in grants so far this year.

Many philatelic items keep flowing in for which we give thanks. Keep the used stamps, post cards and other postal items coming in to 44A Seventh St., Parkdale Vic., 3195.

Allan Clark.
Convenor.

Rev Bill Morgan

Members of our congregation will remember Rev Bill Morgan who provided supply ministry at Ewing Memorial for six months prior to the call extended to Rev Keith Allcock to be the settled minister of the parish from 1st March 1991.



The following was prepared for the July issue of the UCAF magazine 'Net Work'.

A Very Special Celebration

A wonderful and moving 'Service of Thanksgiving in recognition of the 80th Anniversary of Ordination of Rev William (Bill) Morgan' was held at Glen Waverley UC on Sunday 2nd June 2024. Bill was joined by members of his family for the service during which he was presented with an Anniversary Certificate by the Moderator, Rev David Fotheringham.

Bill was born in Seddon on 23rd October 1915. As children, Bill and his three brothers attended Sunday school at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Footscray. The entire family was involved in the church. In 1924 he became a student at Scotch College and was School Captain in 1935. He was also Rowing Captain and ruckman for the school's 1st 18.

Since childhood Bill has been a keen supporter of the Footscray Football Club which in late 1996 became the Western Bulldogs.

Around 1933, Jesus, who had been reserved for Sundays, became very important in his life and he wanted to share the story.

Bill went on to study at Melbourne University where he played rugby and was selected to play for Victoria with 'Weary' Dunlop.

Three years at the Presbyterian Church's Theological Hall followed with his exit appointment at Clare in South Australia in 1943.

Bill was ordained in the Malvern Presbyterian Church on 26th April 1944 and was the ordained assistant to the Minister, Rev R J Howie.

He married R J Howie's eldest daughter Joan and they moved to a placement at Trafalgar/Moe. A placement at Shepparton followed in 1953 where very sadly he lost his wife to illness when the youngest of their three children was three years old. He had to become both mother and father to the children.

In 1960 he became the first full-time Chaplain at Scotch College, Launceston and then in 1962 moved to Ormond Presbyterian Church where he remained until he retired from active Ministry in 1984.

In 1971 he served as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church's Victorian Assembly.

Bill met his second wife Jessie after first meeting her in S.A. many years previously. They married and were together for forty years.

From 1984 to 2024 Bill's Pastoral Ministry included Ewing Memorial East Malvern, Box Hill, Bendigo, Toorak, Coatesville, Portland, Vanuatu Presbyterian Church, Cumberland View Retirement Village and Glen Waverley UC.

Bill attributes his longevity to the Grace of God.

Bill is included in The 100 Project (<https://www.the100project.com/centenarian/rev-bill-morgan/>)

(With thanks to Synod Archivist Jennifer Bars, Rev Peter Aumann and Joanne Boldiston, Office Manager, Glen Waverley UC, for their help with this article).

Ed. The latest issue of *Great Scot* magazine also featured Bill as the oldest known living as at May 24 2024) old Scotch College boy, where he was School Captain in 1935.

THE WESTAR INSTITUTE & US CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Dick Carter

Heather and I were fortunate to be able to visit USA recently to attend the Westar Institute's conference, "Confronting Christian Nationalism: Speaking Up & Speaking Out", in Salt Lake City, Utah. Not being ones to miss an opportunity, we also added on to the visit a touring holiday of the North West quarter of the United States.

Over the last twenty years many readers of *InSpire* will have heard the Westar Institute mentioned often during our church services and at *Something for the Spirit* gatherings as being the source of much ground breaking material produced by its Scholars which has contributed to the development of the wider Progressive Christianity movement.

What is the Westar Institute? "The Institute began in 1985 when [Robert W. Funk](#) invited 30 New Testament scholars to join him in a new, collaborative inquiry about Jesus as a figure of history. The project was called the Jesus Seminar. The focus was on identifying evidence about what, in all probability, Jesus actually said and did without privileging any traditional religious claims about him. The invitation included a commitment to making the results of the inquiry available to the general public as a contribution to religious literacy.

Bob Funk believed scholars of religion have an ethical responsibility to report their findings to the public, openly and clearly. And he argued that there is a large lay constituency eager to join scholars in public conversation. The continued vibrancy of Westar has proven him right. Over the years, Westar has had a profound effect on the public awareness of scholarship in religion and has helped inaugurate a new kind of academic environment that is both collaborative and cumulative.

Since its founding in 1986, Westar has conducted a series of innovative seminars on the historical Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles, the apostle Paul, and other topics. Currently, Westar scholars are conducting seminars on the origins of the Christian tradition, God and the human future, and on the image of Christ as a liberating metaphor. Westar is not affiliated with any

religious institution or denomination and does not advocate a particular theological point of view.

Westar relies on collaborative scholarship that is open to the public, accessible, and rigorous. Its academic seminars engage leading scholars from accredited institutions worldwide.” (Source: Westar Institute web site www.westarinstitute.org).

The Westar Scholars have been prolific authors. Many of them have visited Australia and New Zealand on speaking tours arranged by Common Dreams and the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria, including Bishop John Spong, Dom Crossan, Brandon Scott, Marcus Borg, Hal Taussig, David Galston, Joe Bessler, Robin Meyers, Gretta Vosper, and Diana Butler Bass. Our church library has a good representative collection of these authors’ books which *InSpire* readers may borrow.

There are two divisions of Westar membership: “Scholars” having advanced academic degrees (Ph.D. or equivalent) in religious studies or related disciplines from accredited universities worldwide, and “Associates” are those, such as Heather and I, who are interested in the Scholars’ work. Associate members have the benefit of Westar’s regular publications and access to an extensive range of regular on-line presentations and discussion groups.



Westar Scholars Who Have Visited Australia
Rear L-R: Dick, Marianne Borg, Joe Bessler, Dom Crossan, Hal Taussig, David Galston
Front: Robin Meyers, Heather, Susan Coles, Brandon Scott

Let us turn now to consider Christian nationalism which is very much an American phenomenon. “Christian nationalism is all the rage”, says Brandon Scott in his paper *Christian Nationalism: Deep Roots* to the conference and he goes on to ask, “But what is it and where did it come from?”. He goes on to say there is no essentialist definition of what is Christian nationalism but that it is rather a more dynamic ideology incorporating a number of beliefs and values which he distills into four characteristics:

1. Christian nationalists identify as [politically] conservative.
2. They blur the distinction between church and state. America should be a Christian (ie, protestant) nation.
3. They adhere to a literalist fundamentalist view of the Bible.
4. They support an American imperial view which they identify with the kingdom of God.

In what follows I paraphrase and condense Brandon’s explanation of these characteristics.

Conservatism stands for the status quo. That is, the rights of the elites, the ruling class, or in American terms the rights of whites. It rejects as abstract principles the “rights of men”.

Christian nationalists’ blurring of the line between church and state is part of a conservative rejection of the Enlightenment and of the American Constitution as an Enlightenment document, as they insist that America is and should remain a Christian nation.

Protestant fundamentalism in America arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to efforts to “modernize” Christianity. In the aftermath of these controversies the 1910 General Assembly of the Presbyterian adopted what came to be known as the “Five Fundamentals” (see below) and those who adhered to them were called “fundamentalists”:

- The inerrancy of Scripture.
- The virgin birth of Christ.
- The belief that Christ’s death was an atonement for sin.
- The bodily resurrection of Christ.
- The historical reality of Christ’s miracles.

Imperialism is baked into Christianity. In the early years of the fourth century the Emperor Constantine and his successors favoured Christianity and made it the Roman Empire's official religion. In return Christianity supported the Empire and ever since Christianity has pursued an imperial path. Jesus teachings about the "kingdom of God" have been misused by the church to infer that he supported the structure of the church along imperial lines which, of course, is the complete antithesis of his Gospel's intention.

A paper delivered by Westar Scholar, Prof Chad Venters, *The Christ of the Ku Klux Klan*, unexpectedly provided further insights into US Christian Nationalism. As he says, "Reading the Klan's beliefs, from their own sources, demonstrates that far from being a relic of the past, their beliefs, and their depiction of Christ, are shockingly relevant [today]".

The Klan was formed in 1866, one year after the end of the Civil War, in Tennessee "in an effort to prevent Reconstruction as the process of integration came into the South. The Klan engaged in a series of activities intended to ensure the White Americans maintained control of society, reviving the spirit of the defeated Confederacy."

The KKK declined in significance during the 1870s when it became clear that its efforts to frustrate Black suffrage had largely succeeded. However, it enjoyed a revival in 1915 inspired by the continuing ideals of white supremacy and the release of a silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*, that glorified the Klan as saviours of the South. The revived Klan accepted only "white gentiles" as members thereby excluding Jews and Catholics. Members also had to be citizens born in the United States and there was a strong anti-immigrant focus in its propaganda. Christianity was central to Klan ideology - "It must never be forgotten that America was founded upon the principles enunciated by Jesus Christ. True American principles are his principles."

There was a further surge in Klan membership following the passing of the Civil Rights Act by Congress. At this time a new propaganda tool emerged which used accusations of Communism against groups pushing for social equality, making the Klan protectors of America from the

Communist threat. The Klan targeted the National Association of Colored People for being a communist entity since racial equality was, by the Klan's reckoning, a communist ideology, particularly when it came to voter registration and putting Black workers on a level field with white workers. Jewish people and foreigners were also declared communists, though the Catholics were spared the communist moniker as they were engaged in a separate, non-communist conspiracy to "destroy America". Readers of InSpire will recognise that many of these views are still being expressed today by certain sections of American politics

Speaking to Prof Venters after his presentation I disclosed my ignorance and said that I was under the impression that the Klan had been largely suppressed and was no longer of great importance. He agreed that this was true enough but he then said that this had happened because the Klan's views had become the mainstream views of the Christian right. A rather chilling assessment, I think.

FORWARD NOTICE

A Community Forum

"Homelessness and Housing"

A dedicated Working Group is planning a Community Forum on the topic of "Homelessness and Housing", to be held on Sunday 17 November from 3.00 to 5.00 pm.

Confirmed speakers are Mr Noah Yang, CEO and founder of a support organisation for homeless people, "We are Mobilise", and Ms Debbie Holmes, Director of the Avalon Centre in Malvern Rd.

One of the Working Group members, Maria Sandbach, has kindly written a review of a book that gives an account of the experience of homelessness.

'The Salt Path' by Raynor Winn

(published by Penguin in 2018)

Raynor Winn's beautifully written, raw memoir 'The Salt Path' explores two areas that are of current interest to some members of our

congregation: homelessness, and the power of a transformative journey.

As a result of disastrous litigation, and in their mid-fifties, Ray and her husband Moth find themselves unexpectedly homeless after losing their family farm in Wales. Despite Moth's diagnosis of a terminal illness (corticobasal degeneration/ CBD), they throw caution to the wind and embark on walking Britain's South West Coastal Path: Somerset to Dorset via Devon and Cornwall. Ray and Moth's gruelling 630-mile journey along the Arthurian trail, originally established to provide a means of monitoring the many smugglers' coves, becomes a metaphor for the pilgrimage that is life.

Like "stranded turtles" they each carry an inadequate eight-kilogram pack, wild camping, they survive on a meagre government payment of 48 pounds per week. Practically, this translates to tinned mackerel, Mars bars and noodles with an occasional regrettable ice cream splurge. The rich descriptions of glorious woodlands, gnawing cold, and mouth-watering vicarious meals as they watch others eat, are palpable. When emotional space allows, Ray and Moth ponder what could be termed a masochistic meditation, each physical step provides a sense of purpose and a stake in an unknown future.

Along their way they encounter others outcast by society's limited simplistic dismissal: that homelessness is self-induced because of some form of drug or alcohol addiction or mental illness. In fact, this is as much the result of homelessness as one of its causes. Ray and Moth are rejected as social pariahs if they dare to share their personal story. They take comfort and manage their private grief in their own lie: that they are between homes and on a "midlife adventure".

While Winn's account may be confronting, it is infused with empathy, kindness and inspiration; and concludes with finding hope: learning to live with a death sentence, and a generous unexpected offer of a personal space the couple will be able to call their own.

Getting to Know the Regular Users of our Church

YUKARI ECHO CHOIR

Japanese Ladies Choir of Melbourne

Yukari Echo celebrated its 40th anniversary with a gala concert in our church in 2022 (delayed by one year due to Covid). The choir members are Japanese residents of Melbourne who love singing. Their repertoire includes popular and nostalgic Japanese songs and also popular Western songs, sung a capella or accompanied by piano and other instruments. They rehearse on Wednesday mornings in the Church Hall. Membership is not limited to Japanese ladies, but some familiarity with Japanese language is desirable! It is an important network for the Japanese community in Melbourne.



MUSICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

On Sunday afternoon, 9 June, the MSV held two consecutive concerts at 2:30pm to 3:30pm, then after afternoon tea the next concert started at 4:00. The church was a lovely setting for the young artists, ranging from three years old to late teens. Two lovely programmes of music for piano, violin, cello and trumpet.

On Friday July 12 the MSV will hold a special soirée concert from 6.30 pm. It will feature young children who are new to MSV and want to experience performing in front of audiences. We welcome anyone who is AMEB grade 6. The charge for audience members is \$5.00.

COMMON THREADS

At our meeting on Thursday 27 June, we welcomed a new member, and had a drop-in visit from Faye Pattinson with a handful of books, and wearing a beautiful new pink jumper knitted for her by a friend.

Lots of handiwork was displayed and everyone applied themselves to working on individual projects.



The 90-square rug! Joint effort by Jo and Alison.



This is only 56 squares but Alison was showing it off...



Just one of the several rugs Jo completed in June.

Next meeting: Thursday 25 July

COFFEE SOUL-SEARCH

Tuesday 9 July from 2 pm

New Venue: Mr Sister Café

Our informal gathering over coffee on the second Tuesday of the month will try a new venue, the **Mr Sister café at 81 Waverley Road**, at the corner of Douglas Street, very close to the church. This weirdly named café is a light and sunny venue and the coffee is good. Please feel free to drop in on Tuesday 9 July from 2 pm for a chat and a catch-up. They are open till 3:30 pm.

All welcome, regardless of age, gender, dietary preferences etc.

JUNE 30 CAFÉ CHURCH

Rev Chris Page and Alison Tokita held a dialogue on aspects of Japanese spirituality as seen in the arts associated with Zen Buddhism, and raised questions about possible similarities with Christianity.

The aesthetic of Zen-influenced arts is one of simplicity and naturalness, an austere but unpretentious beauty, evocative of poverty and humility. These characteristics are encapsulated in the Japanese term *wabi*. One of the Zen-influenced arts is the Tea Ceremony and one of

its principles is the precious and unrepeatable nature of an encounter between host and guests.

Two videos were shown, one showing the pure form of *wabi* style tea, and the other showing a woman's tea pilgrimage as she gathered random participants to partake of tea and a meal with her in different locations. The spontaneity, graciousness and naturalness of her actions are impressive. You can find this beautiful video easily on YouTube: Tsuruko's Tea Journey.

In this spirit, Japanese tea and traditional sweets were served, after which our guest, Lindsay Dugan, performed for us on the shakuhachi flute a piece that has been performed for centuries by a sect of Buddhist monks as a meditative practice.



JUNE 30 HYMNS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Later the same day, a rousing festival of hymn singing was held, led by Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood and a substantial ad hoc choir. Most of the hymns were familiar and all were delightfully singable. Notably, a majority were composed to be sung in unison, not harmony, unlike most 19th century hymns. Dr Wood gave fascinating introductions to each hymn and their composer and poet.

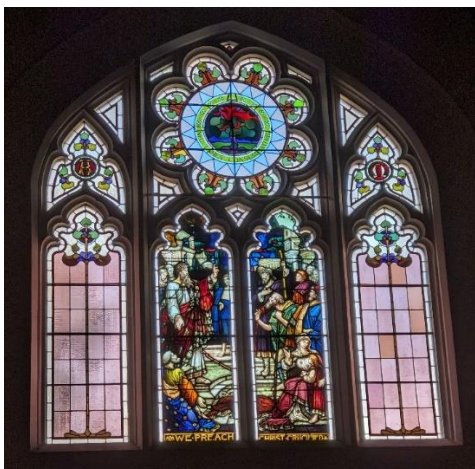


Bruce McCrae's creative accompaniment complemented the enthusiastic singing of all assembled.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Please feel free to send me your news items and photos for *InSpire*. We also welcome letters and articles, so if you feel inspired, do write about any topic of interest to you to share with our readers. *Letters to the Editor are also welcome.* We can also promote your events at a modest or no fee!

Deadline for the **August 2024** edition of *InSpire* is **Monday, 29th July**. Articles should be emailed to the Editor, Alison Tokita, at alison.tokita@inpire.org where possible, or they can be given in person.



CALENDAR JULY 2024

SUNDAY 7TH	11 AM	EUCHARIST & COMMUNITY LUNCH
TUESDAY 9TH	2.00 PM	COFFEE & SOUL MR SISTER CAFÉ, 81 WAVERLEY RD
SUNDAY 14TH	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE
MONDAY 15TH	2.00 PM	AFTERNOON FELLOWSHIP
THURSDAY 18TH	10.30 AM	BOOK CHAT
SUNDAY 21ST	10.30 AM 5.00 PM	CHURCH SERVICE SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT
THURSDAY 25TH	10.00 AM	COMMON THREADS
SUNDAY 28TH	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE