InSpire

NEWSLETTER OF THE STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH

Vol. 11, no 6 **July 2025**

Café Church, 29 June and Farewell to Christopher

InSpiring

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Grateful Reflections and New Chapter with Rev John Power

After 18 meaningful months of supply ministry at SCUC, the time has come to step away as John becomes SCUC's fulltime minister. Anne and I are grateful for the warmth and friendliness all have shown to us whilst in ministry at our church. Of course, we aren't really leaving; we will remain as members of SCUC. We both anticipate with excitement the journey ahead. We will also have more opportunity to spend time in Venus Bay.

Serving alongside the church council and others in the congregation has been a privilege. The collective wisdom, integrity, and unwavering support for ongoing ministry at SCUC has been inspiring, and has left a lasting impression on me. The congregation has taken responsibility to continue the good work Greg and Dana have previously done. As a community we've worshipped, prayed, laughed, wrestled with hard questions, and witnessed transformation together. These moments are now part of the fabric and memory of our congregation.

To those who have journeyed with us — thank you. Your stories, your trust, and your faith have been special gifts to both Anne and I. You've helped shape my calling in ways I could not have imagined.

As for the congregation's next chapter, I look forward to it being both rewarding and worthwhile. Growth rarely comes without challenge and change, and though saying goodbye from the role of supply minister is hard, I carry forward everything this time has given me.

I wish all God's best for John and his new relationship with our community.

Here's to new adventures, with courage, faith, and a thankful heart.

With love and expectation

Christopher and Anne

THANK YOU, REV DR CHRISTOPHER,

The Sunday service on 29 July was the concluding service in Rev Dr Christopher Page's long term Supply Ministry to us during our Ministerial Vacancy which began some eighteen months ago. He was presented with a card signed by many members of our Congregation expressing their appreciation of his ministry and pastoral care.

In thanking Chris for his wonderful service, Dick Carter also presented him with a book voucher "so that he would have enough reading material to ensure that he would not become bored now that he was going to have more time on his hands!". Dick referred to Chris's dedication, his sensitivity to people experiencing grief and other

difficult troubles, his stimulating and challenging reflections, his service leadership which encouraged interactive participation during the gathering. These remarks were reinforced by a sustained period of applause from those present.

We are indeed fortunate to have Chris and Anne among our membership and to know that he will be available to provide short term Supply Ministry as is sure to be needed from time to time in future. Dick Carter

Here are a few personal appreciations that eloquently express the shared gratitude, in fact the feeling of blessedness that we have experienced during this special period of Chris's ministry. All agree that the Reflections, the discussions, the fellowship at morning tea, leave indelible memories of a great mind and a great heart – and humour! Thank you, Chris. Alison

It is difficult to express how grateful we feel. We've been just so lucky and blessed to have him with us! Clare

Chris' ability to personalise his faith story made it a reality that was so much easier to relate to from one's own experience (as well as so much more entertaining)! Michael and Anne

To me Chris's reflections are always relevant to being fully aware of all life offers, the good, bad and the ugly, and remaining aware of our essential human connectedness to all life, physically, mentally and spiritually. I'm thankful he and Anne will still be part of our congregation. They are both good listeners and can liven up discussions with their insights! Margie

I always found Chris' sermons thoughtful, insightful and helpful. The way that he did this, through relating many stories about his life or about people he has met along the way, made his messages more impactful. I am thankful and grateful for his ministry to us over the past 18 months. Bronwyn

I visit Toorak Uniting Church from time to time and it was there that I first heard Rev Chris Page address a Congregation. He had entertaining stories in his sermons that engaged his audience. He was outside the church dressed in his white ministerial robes and greeted people as they arrived. Then he came to our church and Chris blended with the congregation. When Greg Crowe left there was a question of who would minister to us and Chris stepped up. I am so grateful that he did. Apparently, this was not his intention as he had retired but when asked he willingly did so. He kept the hymn choices similar to what we had with Greg and we had the hymns and order of service well ahead of time. We are so lucky! Cheers, Cheryl

I have particularly enjoyed Chris's church services with poetry and images and stories and time for quiet. He has stimulated our imaginations with words and thoughts to ponder. His warmth and readiness to be 'one of us' endears him to us a friend. We have been so lucky to have his ministry. Lorna

Chris and Anne have made me feel cared for and valued and I do look forward to their continued presence with us. One quality in Chris which I greatly admire, is his openness and honesty about his own personality. At times such truthfulness requires great courage. Kind regards, Jan Riches

We are very grateful for Chris' care, humour, warmth, leadership and insight over the last 18 months. His reflections have been relevant, reassuring and thought provoking. Thank you to both him and Anne for being there. While the supply ministry has come to an end, we look forward to your ongoing involvement with the congregation.
Warmest Regards, Maria and Alan

We have been fortunate indeed to have Chris among us and leading us in examining our Christian faith and fostering Christian fellowship. Every aspect of the Services he has led has reflected the depth of thought and wisdom he brings to his ministry. His contributions beyond

the confines of Sunday Services have been extensive and many of us have benefited from the ready application of his pastoral skills. Best wishes, Alan

Chris has been a wonderful caring minister and I hope you have had that from other members. We are glad he will still be with us. We are lucky to have Terry also with us. Love Jo

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CAFÉ CHURCH AND FAREWELL TO CHRISTOPHER

Sunday 29 June was the last official service conducted by Rev Christopher Page as our long-term supply minister. It coincided with the fifth Sunday and so as customary the service took the form of a café church, when Christopher invited as guest the paediatric surgeon Dr Durham Smith, AO, who regularly appears in our midst.

A large gathering assembled to bid Christopher and Anne farewell, and to hear about the life and faith journey of Durham, who celebrated his 103rd birthday in May!

Durham's father grew up on a farm near Ballarat, and was a farmer till the age of thirty. The home environment fostered a belief and a trust in a divine essence. He eventually felt a call to the ministry, and undertook private tuition to prepare himself for entry to theological college, and in 1931 became a priest in a number of country parishes in Victoria. He was not an academic theologian, but fostered community engagement, "taking the Church to the people", and forming a cricket team. In those days, there was antagonism between Catholics and Protestants, but Durham's father was friendly with a local Catholic priest and they used to play golf together.

The youngest of three children, Durham attended local schools in Koroit and Terang; from the age of 14, he was awarded a scholarship to board at Melbourne Grammar. Asked when he started to think about doing medicine, Durham recalled that at home he had often been surrounded by visiting missionaries which ignited an urge to serve as a medico. He commenced his medical degree in 1941, but this was interrupted by the war. Although instinctively a pacificist, he decided he should enlist, and was trained as an anti-aircraft gunner assigned to the defence of Melbourne. There was actually little to do in this role, so he resumed his medical course in 1944 and graduated in 1948, to become a resident at the Alfred Hospital. He came to specialize in paediatrics at the Royal College of Surgeons.

In 1946 he met his future wife Dorothy at the university choir and the Student Christian Movement. They married in 1948, and enjoyed 69 years of marriage. She was a Bachelor of Music, a singer and a pianist, and taught at Scotch College Junior School. They had four sons: one a flautist (in the Elizabethan Trust Orchestra, later Orchestra Victoria), one a plastic surgeon, one a general practitioner, and one a sciences teacher and researcher.

Building on his early Christian upbringing, at university Durham was active in the Student Christian Movement, where people actively questioned issues of religious belief such as the miracles, in contrast to the (Catholic) Newman Society and the Evangelical Union. By the age of 46, Durham was entertaining serious doubts about key Christian doctrines, particularly the

incarnation, that is, the divinity of Jesus, and the theology of the Atonement, that Jesus' death was specifically designed for the remission of the sins of the world. He stopped going to church altogether between 1968 and 1997, but he still retained a faith in the existence of a divine entity in the universe who had a purpose for the world.

Then he saw TV interviews with the progressive Bishop John Shelby Spong (1931-2021), who wrote that "the idea of faith is not to make you holy but to make you fully human". Our spiritual life has to be expressed through our humanity. John Spong showed him that the central part of the Christian life was how you live, how you relate to other people. He taught that Jesus was the model of a human person, embodying fully the spirit of God that is available to all living things.

Durham was also deeply inspired by the books of Marcus Borg. This all led to him writing his own book on his new understanding of Christian faith, *Search for Understanding* (2003; rev. 2006, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform). (Copies are available through the church office.) The book is, he said, pitched at a Christian audience, not meant to proselytize non-church-goers.

On prayer, Durham said he could not justify it in intellectual terms, but in practice prayer is very important to him: he prays not to God, but with God.

On progressive Christianity and Anglicanism, he noted that Bishop Spong requested a traditional Anglican funeral service. Durham said he needs much more than an intellectual understanding of faith; he feels the need for worship of God as can be experienced in the Anglican service, even though he might disagree with 80 percent of the words in the liturgy. The symbolism and the ambience created through incense, music and liturgy combine to enable one to enter an emotional dimension of faith.

Asked what were most important things he has experienced, Durham replied that in his understanding of the Christian Gospel he has moved from a personal morality to an imperative of social justice. From the second half of his life he has interpreted loving one's neighbour as advocating for social justice in a society where the treatment of asylum seekers is unjust, and where 20 percent of people are "doing it tough", due to inequalities in wealth, health care and education.

The floor was then opened to questions. Asked why he preferred the Anglican service to ours, he answered that here he feels it is just intellectual, not emotionally satisfying. That was challenged by the next questioner: Isn't that because it is your childhood experience, and so it's comforting? Yes, probably but still…. The next questioner said she grew up an Anglican but finds this church profoundly moving, largely because of the stained-glass windows with their religious messages. Yes, that is a beautiful visual dimension that inspires spirituality.

How many grandchildren do you have? Ten grandchildren, eight are married; none married in a church. All lived together before marrying. Fifty percent of couples in Australia never marry.

What is the secret of living to 103 years? Genes (my parents lived into their nineties, and my sister to 103), diet (protein intake is vital), exercise (even walking when you get too old to play golf), and keeping an active mind.

At this point, the discussion was brought to a close, and was followed by Dick Carter's speech of appreciation for Rev Christopher and Anne Page's ministry at SCUC, and a presentation. Then Rosemary got everyone to stand up and surround Durham and Christopher for a group photo! You should check out her lovely posting of the occasion on the church Facebook page!

(A more detailed version of Durham's illustrious career can be seen on the website of the Royal Children's Hospital, and also the reason he was named Durham!: Alumni : Smith, Edward Durham AO)

KEITH AND GRACE MCALLISTER REFLECT ON CHURCH UNION IN 1977

As the 50th anniversary of the Uniting Church draws closer, there is an opportunity to reflect on the particular, positive experience of our congregation by calling on the memories of some members who were there at the time of Church union.

We had the privilege of spending an afternoon with Keith McAllister (our only current Elder Emeritus), his wife Grace, now both living at Regis Camberwell, and Joyce Jenkin. They shared their recollections of the seamless transition to one congregation which was experienced by Ewing Memorial Presbyterian church ("Ewing"), the Peace Memorial Methodist church in Epping Street ("Epping Street") and the Burke Road Congregational church in June 1977, at Church union, and events leading up to it. Grace recalls that Ewing's then Minister, the Rev Alan Parton, "made everyone feel very welcome" and that "we felt we belonged".

For clarification, an Elder Emeritus is an elder upon whom the other elders of the congregation have conferred the title in recognition of their faithful service to the church. The position of Elder Emeritus provides a way of recognising and honouring the service of an elder who has dedicated their time and effort to the church, usually over many years. An Elder Emeritus is released from active administrative duties but may continue to perform the other roles of an elder in ways determined by the congregation.

Keith joined Epping Street in about 1947, where he met his wife Grace and they were subsequently married by her father, the Rev Charles Gallacher, at that Church in 1955. Both Keith and Grace were heavily involved in many aspects of the life of Epping Street: ranging from Keith climbing the church towers to clean off the pigeon dirt, to being a Trustee of the church and ultimately the Secretary of the Trustees and also the Superintendent of the Sunday School. Grace

recalls that for Keith “the Church was his life”. It was the focus of Keith’s extraordinary energy and enthusiasm when he wasn’t overseeing operations at the Choice chocolate factory in Carnegie, where he was manager.

Epping Street joined with Ewing in 1976 (a year before formal Church Union) as their congregation numbers dwindled. They embraced the opportunities offered by the coming union with such enthusiasm that they did not wish to wait until the formal inauguration of the Uniting Church. Keith and Grace were at the forefront of this change and engaged the new congregation with deep commitment, interest, and initiative. Both Keith and Grace’s enthusiasm and experience as Sunday School teachers were well applied at Ewing. Keith spent many hours preparing activities that would interest and engage young children in Bible stories and the Christian message.

Joyce still has the model of the nativity which Keith helped her sons Dave and John build at Sunday School in around 1988-1990, and the family bring it out every Christmas.

Joyce recalls that Keith and Grace’s love extended beyond the Sunday service and they effectively became surrogate grandparents to her daughter, Roz, remembering her birthday each year with a trip to a different McDonalds, ranging as far afield as the Ballarat McDonalds!

The McAllisters’ kindness knew no bounds: in 1997, Michael Sandbach’s first Christmas, Maria recalls Grace dropping by these beautiful blue delphiniums grown by Keith at Labertouche.

While church union had theological objectives, it also revitalised Ewing’s congregation and provided an opportunity for new connections and lifelong friendships. If anyone else would like to share their memories of this time, we encourage you to contact one of the editorial team as we hope to initiate an ongoing series of reflections.

Maria and Alan Sandbach

A BOOK REVIEW

Maria Sandbach

***Reckoning* by Magda Szubanski** (Text publishing 2015)

Magda Szubanski’s memoir is particularly poignant given the recent public announcement of her cancer diagnosis. Her sharing of this confronting news made us all pause and consider the unique contribution of this well-known comedian; and what better place to revisit this than in her autobiography: *Reckoning*.

It is not uncommon to pause in midlife and pursue family history; in this regard Magda reflects that “the only way forward is back”, and so begins the honest, sometimes humorous, painful, exploration of her own past, and the contribution of her Polish and Scottish inheritance.

Magda’s father, known as Peter (1924-2006), joined a counter intelligence unit in the Polish resistance against Hitler, a highly dangerous role which included assassinating Gestapo agents and Polish traitors, whilst living with his family who provided a half way house for Jews. He carried the burden of having killed others in the context of war for the rest of his life. It was this reckoning, a belief that there is always a choice, his guilt and shame that he passed onto his daughter. In her memoir Magda makes her peace with inheriting this legacy by sharing her understanding of his trauma.

Having escaped through a sewer and become a displaced person after the War, Peter ended up in England where he trained as a textile technologist and married Magda's mother. Together they had three surviving children (Magda being the youngest), before migrating to Australia in 1965.

Reckoning chronologically follows Magda's life, from the pain of adolescence to dropping out of Uni, taking herself to Warsaw as a 20-year-old, getting involved in fringe theatre, romantic heartbreaks, finding her strength writing and acting in comedy, taking a pilgrimage with her parents to Warsaw, coming out as gay and sitting by her father's deathbed. Throughout her life as related in her memoir, her parents are ever present. Even when she determinedly keeps her distance, their values, perspectives, and life experiences are a constant reminder and powerful influence.

According to Magda, so much of Polish conversation is commenced with the word "Rozumiesz" which means "you must understand". The irony of this is that one of Magda's father's survival mechanisms was to repress feelings, avoid deconstructing events and to endeavour to forget, and not to try and make sense of his past. Magda's determination to bring his story to light, to deal with unresolved feelings and to "bear witness" highlights the moral complexity of war, which at the time seems very black and white. Her insight and self-awareness of the legacy of intergenerational trauma and of being "the victim of a victim" contributes to the process of accepting herself, with her formidable wit, as an "obese lesbian".

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT
Joyce Jenkin

Rev John Power has accepted our call and will begin his placement with us on 1st July, his Induction will be on Sunday, 6th July and his first service will be on Sunday, 13th July.

Permission has been received from Council to remove the dangerous trees in the grounds of the Ewing manse. The work is scheduled for the end of July.

We are waiting on the revised quote from our gardeners for the work on the garden under the noticeboard. Alan has arranged for a second quote.

Alison reported that as well as a panel of speakers at the Forum on Loneliness in August, there will be an Expo in the hall during afternoon tea.

The Coffee Catchup – Alison has surveyed those who have attended and the outcome is that it will continue but move to the third Tuesday of the month.

There was a discussion on a paper about Church futures and it was agreed that we should consider having more interaction with the Gardiner and Glendearg Grove congregations.

Music – The new arrangements seem to be working out. The 2025 carols service is set for 21st December and Alison will consult with Rev John Power once he has had a chance to settle in.

SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT
Lorna Henry

In our meetings in May and June we have enjoyed wondering and talking about what spirituality means to us.

Alison presented many thoughts to us in May, touching on what we experience as The Sacred, Spirituality, Meditation, the Breath (Ruach and Spirit and Wind) and Mysticism. These are matters of the inner life, but they also bring a connectedness with a larger reality. We were reminded that these practices or experiences belong also in the other world religions. It seems these are an essential part of being truly human.

Chris presented to our June meeting John O'Donohue's 'The Art of Developing a Beautiful Mind'. Here are a few sentences from his presentation:
"It is not simply with your eyes but with your mind that you see the world. Your mind is your greatest treasure. . . . . how you see others, what you think the meaning of life is. When you beautify your mind, you beautify your world. Beauty is all determined by the style of mind you have.' And 'When you learn to see differently, secret possibilities and invitations begin to open before you.

And so, we went on to the key question of Spiritual Experience: Where and how do you find a nourishing Spirit and a beautiful mind?

Because the Spirit is liberating and free, the beautiful mind will not readily be found in doctrines and prescribed belief systems, but rather (and I quote Chris here) 'through art, film, music, poetry, nature, reading, story, meditation, prayer, the Bible and your personal experiences of spiritual depth.'

Many thanks to Alison and Chris for stimulating our imaginations and prodding us to be serious about spiritual practice, to seek the Spirit, and to open ourselves to the possibilities it offers.

With these thoughts in mind, Harvey Cox's book, 'The Future of Faith', looks relevant. He believes that Christianity is moving into the 'Age of the Spirit'. What does he mean?

I will select the main ideas of that book for us to talk about in our July meeting!

We'll meet again on Sunday July 20th, 5pm, at 5 Vickery St., East Malvern.
You are very welcome!

LIBRARY NEWS
Faye Pattinson

Maria Sandbach joined us at our gathering on 19 June to ask if the Library could take part in the Expo she is planning to hold in conjunction with the Forum on Loneliness and Connection on August 24. This display of group activities will draw the attention of the community to the activities available in our church. We agreed to do this so watch this space!

Some of the books shared at Book Chat this month were:

Mr Einstein's Secretary, by Mathew Reilly. The novel centres around a fictional character, Hanna Fischer, who becomes Einstein's secretary and experiences a life filled with espionage, romance, and encounters with historical figures during World War II.

Too Much is Never Enough, by Mary L. Trump, a memoir that offers a critical look at her uncle, Donald Trump, and the Trump family dynamics. Mary, a trained clinical psychologist, analyzes how her family's history, particularly the relationship between Donald and his father, Fred Trump, shaped Donald's personality, and behaviour, despite attempts by the Trump family to block its publication.

Shoes were for Sunday by Molly Weir. The post-war urban jungle of the Glasgow tenements was the setting for Molly Weir's childhood. From sharing a pull-out bed in her mother's tiny kitchen to running in terror from the fever van, it was an upbringing that was cemented in hardship.

Rebel Women who changed Australia by Susanna de Vries. From Lillie Goodisson, pioneer of family planning, to Eileen Joyce, world-famous pianist, Enid Lyons, our first female cabinet minister, Stella Miles Franklin, who endowed our most celebrated literary prize, and Catherine Hamlin, who has given hope to thousands of women through her fistula hospitals in Africa, these are women who have made a difference. They are the women who helped to forge the Australia we know today.

An interesting mix!!

The next Book Chat will be held on Thursday, 21 August at 10.30 am. All welcome. Come and

enjoy morning tea and hear what everyone has been reading.

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY TABLE

Lencie Harding

The Op Table was most successful once again on Sunday 15th June

Treasurer Jan Riches has reported that a total of $217.50 was made from Sunday's takings. Goods for sale included baked treats, jams, and marmalade. Generous donations also contributed to the amount raised.

A significant amount came from the sale of Isabelle Roberts' delicious baking. Have you tried her chocolate cake?

Thank you to Isabelle, Michael, donors and to everyone who generously supported the Fellowship Opportunity Table on Sunday.

All being well our next Op Table will be held on Sunday 20th July.

SAMMY STAMP

Lencie Harding

Thank you to Grace & Keith McAllister for a donation of stamps which included some from Kenya.

Please keep in mind that from 17th July 2025 the Basic Postage Rate will increase by 20c from $1.50 to $1.70. The postage for large letters up to 125g will increase by 40c from $3 to $3.40.

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

A miserable day outside as I write this report, but come Winter or Summer, Sammy's helpers keep on, receiving a steady flow of stamps, Albums, coins and other bric-a-brac, including a board game associated with a recently donated Olympic Games stamp collection.

Thanks to all out there, please keep it up.

Sales continue quite well. Up to 31/5/2025, sales had reached about $12,442 (same time last year, $10,667.)

A grant of $4,000 was approved to Deaf Ministries International towards setting up an Agriculture and Livestock Centre in Tanzania, which involves drilling a well, setting up a piggery and small housing for a farm worker.

So, we have approved $10,000 in grants so far this year.

Allan Clark
Convenor

SCUC COMMUNITY FORUM 2025

The Community Forum on the theme **LONELINESS AND CONNECTION** will take place on **Sunday 24 August**, 3.00pm in the Church. The Forum will be a thought provoking, and enjoyable experience, which includes afternoon tea! It is an event for all ages and is intended to encourage discussion.

HAVE YOU PUT THE DATE IN YOUR DIARY YET?!!!

The Forum aims to raise public awareness of loneliness as a social issue, and to provide an opportunity to connect and volunteer. We will set up a **mini-Expo** in the Hall to draw attention to the many community resources available to enable connectedness and overcome loneliness and social isolation. These include our own offerings such as Book Chat, Common Threads, Something for the Spirit, and also groups associated with the church such as The People's Choir. We will also profile opportunities beyond the church community, such as the Avalon Centre and Chatty Cafés – curious?!

Confirmed panellists: Dr Pei-Chun Ko (sociologist, Monash University). Debbie Holmes

(Avalon Centre), Kerri-Anne Brussen (JoCare), Lily Odrian, and Michael Sandbach.

Associate Professor Rosanne Freak-Poli has had to withdraw from the Panel for personal reasons. Let me share with you some of her research that she shared in a Webinar on Social Health on 21 May 2025: *Loneliness to the heart; as deadly as smoking.*

It was stressed that loneliness is subjective, felt as unpleasant and distressing, while social isolation can be measured objectively, in terms of the number of one's social contacts. Rosanne's research has found that social health is linked to cardiovascular disease risk, and that it is important to invest in social health after a heart event. In other words, loneliness might increase your risk of heart disease.

Best outcomes for combating loneliness after a heart event are seen in those who are married or partnered. For women, antidotes for loneliness include having three or more friends you feel close to, can discuss with, and can call on for help, and doing childminding or other informal care-giving. For men, it is important to have between three and eight friends or relatives you can talk to, do volunteer work, or attend a class or a men's shed.

Rosanne spoke about the practice of "Social Prescribing", a system in which a health professional does not only address medical issues, but makes a holistic needs assessment advising on social issues such as loneliness. The GP will "prescribe" social connections and activities such as community groups, hobby courses, skills development, arts and culture, forest therapy, and so on.

Further examples of social prescribing activities:

- **Physical activities:** Walking groups, sports clubs, exercise classes.
- **Arts and culture:** Art classes, museum visits, theatre groups.
- **Social groups:** Book clubs, coffee mornings, gardening clubs.
- **Volunteering:** Opportunities to contribute to the community.
- **Nature-based activities:** Walks in nature, gardening, outdoor exercise.
- **Practical support:** Advice on finances, housing, and other practical needs.

It is with this in mind that our Forum on Loneliness will include a mini-Expo drawing attention to such community groups and activities in our local area.

Alison Tokita

SCUC COMMUNITY FORUM 2025 QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you to those who returned the questionnaire! The responses are very interesting. Here are the results. They are printed as received, below.

To what extent do you think loneliness is an issue in our society?

Loneliness is a significant issue in our society. I think it always has been.

Yes, I certainly do think loneliness is an issue in our society.

I think loneliness can be seen in the faces and body language and heard in the voices of humans and animals across our society. The check out chick at the supermarket, the fashionable executive waiting for the lights to change at an intersection, a dog barking in a distant house. Is it an issue? Well, it certainly is for that dog waiting for its master to return from work.

As a symptom of problems not dealt with, it is not usually visible, and I believe not admitted to,

as to do so can feel like admitting further failure. But sometimes a sense of defeatism in a person's manner or conversation suggests loneliness is also present. Anecdotal reports seem to indicate loneliness is a significant problem in Australia including our local community especially for adolescents & elderly people. A quick internet literature search turned up a statistic suggesting 25% of Australians report problematic levels of loneliness in national surveys in 2018 (Refs: "Aust Loneliness Report" 2018 Aust Psycholological Soc; "Young Australian Loneliness Survey" 2018 Vic Health; Office for National Statistics 2018).

Intuitively, I would guess it is an issue in society as communities becomes less connected - less of a "community" than just physical shared geography

I think it is very widespread & one of our biggest problems in society – both young and old and both genders – look at all the dating apps and scams – people really want to meet other people. Times of the year Birthdays, Christmas, Easter, New Year can be extremely hard for lonely people when everyone else seems to have endless invitations and places to go. Also texting and social media perhaps mean people don't meet in PERSON so much anymore.

I think loneliness is a serious and widespread problem in society today. While it is something people don't always talk about openly, it can affect anyone regardless of age, background, or how "connected" they seem. In many ways I think loneliness can be linked to other issues like anxiety, depression, isolation, physical health or mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic really highlighted how easily people can become isolated. Lockdowns, remote learning, and reduced social interaction made many people feel cut off, with a great feeling of isolation which has exacerbated the sense of loneliness.

Even though we live in a world where communication is easier through technology (e.g. facetime, texting, Facebook, Instagram), I think meaningful connection has become harder. People might have hundreds of online friends but still feel alone. Loneliness isn't just about being physically by yourself—it is about not feeling understood or deeply connected.

How would you define loneliness?

A feeling of isolation, exclusion.

How to define, not sure. But it's a bad sad feeling for sure

Is it aloneness, isolation, lack of structure or framework (a building without a roof looks pretty lonely)? Is it lack of purpose, direction or lack of connectedness, like a cork on an ocean? Even the cork is at least in touch with the water...

Feeling alone, emotionally or mentally, in a negative way. That is to say, feeling no joy in being alone. Being alone and enjoying the experience is the opposite of loneliness.

I quite like John O'Donohue's description - "when you become acutely conscious of your own separation". Another is "A subjective feeling of being alone, separated or apart from others".

I see loneliness as detachment from other people who care for one's lives and wellbeing

Wanting or needing someone to share your problems/joys/ life in general and someone to hug (physical contact) & maybe not having this person in your life or at the time you need them, having someone to share meals with – often older people who eat on their own don't cook just for themselves and their health suffers.

To me, ***loneliness*** *isn't just about being physically alone—it is more about feeling emotionally disconnected. It is the sense that no*

one really understands or knows you, or that you don't have someone to talk to who genuinely cares. You can be in a crowded room and still feel lonely if the people around you don't feel close or meaningful.

It is not always obvious from the outside, but loneliness can feel heavy—like you're carrying something invisible that no one else sees. It is that gap between the kind of connection you wish you had and what you actually experience.

Loneliness is an internal, subjective feeling of lacking meaningful connection. It is about what a person feels, not necessarily what others are doing. However, everyone can take a responsibility to reduce someone's sense of loneliness through being aware of the deeper connections that can be made and showing interest in others.

I think everyone feels lonely at some point, but when it lasts for too long, it starts to affect how you see yourself and the world.

What different kinds of loneliness are there?

Social loneliness. Feeling unappreciated in the workplace. Romantic loneliness. Feeling the odd man out.

Don't know. (But I do know that often people in a bad relationship, although not actually alone can feel lonely, likewise very much so in a big city, especially with language barriers).

Loneliness can be experienced fleetingly; over a short time; a long time; or profoundly, or somewhere in between.

Loneliness can be experienced when one feels ignored; unwanted; unjustly treated with no-one to fight for you; disregarded; misunderstood too often to bear; jilted; forgotten; friendless; or an outcast.

I believe the depth of one's experiences of loneliness depends on the frequency of the negative experiences; one's learnt or innate resilience to hardship; one's understanding of self and human nature; one's ability to see knock-backs as a learning experience rather than personal slights; and one's self-confidence.

Maybe there is only one kind but there are many possible causes eg depression, social anxiety, quality of life, autism, bereavement, shyness, rupture of relationships with family members, to name some.

I see four forms of loneliness - physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual

Feeling left out, isolated, not popular – not enough things in your calendar when others do not seem to have a minute without being out and about or travelling.

There are several types of loneliness based on events or your personal situation.
Loneliness is an internal, subjective feeling of lacking meaningful connection.
Loneliness can occur if you have an absence of a close emotional attachment (e.g. the loss of a partner or friend, moving away from family or friends etc...).
Or if you lack a wider social network or belonging to a group.
Or you may be part of a group, but you don't feel deep connections within the group.
A person can feel lonely even when surrounded by others. It is not about being alone but not having meaningful relationships, which can be very distressing.

Loneliness can also occur if you have a deeper, philosophical sense of isolation—feeling fundamentally alone in the world. This might occur if you are feeling spiritually disconnected or not sure of your meaning in life.

Are you affected by loneliness

Yes, sometimes. I think everyone can be.

Yes, these days, during one of life's big transitions, I am affected by it.

There was a time when the answer was yes, not now, I know that I am inextricably connected to a nebulosity of people, places and knowing.

Me? Rarely and briefly.

No, fortunately, & not at any stage of my life.

I am not affected by loneliness - I have my family, i have a few friends who share similar intellectual interests, I have other friends whom I can discuss spiritual matters, I have a companion dog. I talk to strangers who share an interest in dogs as I walk my companion each day. I still work and stay "engaged" professionally.

Yes – my husband died & I retired to look after him – I lost him, my sense of "Work worth", seeing workmates 5 days a week all at once which left me feeling very vulnerable.

There have been times when I have been affected by loneliness but have tried to put in place some of the strategies below about which I have talked.

Do you know people who are?

Yes, I do.

Yes, I do know people affected by it. But generally, we're too embarrassed to admit it! Not very logical.

Not really. I believe most people keep loneliness a secret because it is like admitting one is a failure in this area of life, or they feel it is their own fault they are lonely. But I sometimes suspect loneliness is silently present when woes of another kind come up in conversation.

I don't know anybody who tells me they are lonely. But then, almost by definition, people who are lonely don't talk about their loneliness - that's the isolation that defines loneliness.

Yes – even yesterday at Church coffee someone asked me if I was lonely (we were discussing the Forum) and told me that she was which surprised me as I thought she would be surrounded by people and activities. I also know of people who feel lonely in an Aged Care Home as a lot of the people she meets there do not have communication skills.

I think that people often don't want to talk about their feelings of loneliness, and I personally am not aware of many who are lonely.

What are the antidotes to loneliness

Being aware that everyone feels lonely at times, it's not only you. Keeping busy. Take up a hobby/pastime that you enjoy. Get a pet. Read a book. (An associate goes out and visits Op Shops when he feels lonely). Be an office-bearer. Volunteer. Join a church/club.

The antidotes seem to be getting out and involved with other people, whether in interest groups or otherwise. Social connection is terribly important! We can never overestimate the value of friendships to make life worth living. And having the company of a pet is great, always!

I think addressing loneliness can take many forms.... it's a bit like kindness ... you can choose to look wide... or not.....or somewhere in between. I think maybe some church people with a few years under their belts might have had a bit more practice and do it well without knowing.

- *Time spent listening to another person;*
- *Time with another person sharing in an activity;*
- *Time with another person who listens to you in a non- judgmental way;*
- *Furthering one's knowledge of human nature*

and nurture;
• Involving oneself in community concerns such as activism or volunteering for charitable causes;
• Taking classes in just about anything remotely interesting; •Joining discussion groups where skills or interests or opinions are freely shared;
• Seeking professional psychological advice if all the above challenges don't help.

Increased positive social contacts perhaps facilitated by sympathetic people ("neighbours") or agencies.

Reaching out to others to talk about loneliness is a form of re-attachment. That may help. Having a few friends and family you can chat with - even if it's by phone (because of geographical separation) - can help.

Joining groups, Friendships, Animals (walk the dog and meet people in the park or just talk to and hug the cat), Relatives – especially if you have grandchildren. Also volunteering work BUT this can be difficult for those who do not drive to get to and from locations. WhatsApp can be of assistance to keeping in touch with groups of friends – I do this with at least two groups I used to work with and we try to meet in person every 3 months.

Using the strategies of active listening and meaningful conversation to help build emotional connection, empathy, and trust.
Feeling heard and understood are important in developing deep connections with others.

Engaging in meaningful roles can strengthen self – worth and a sense of belonging.

Joining groups, clubs or social action projects provide regular interaction.

Joining programs that link youth with older adults (e g. aged care) foster mutual understanding and reduce isolation.

Does the church have a role to play in addressing loneliness in the broader community?

Definitely, it can. Our own church and others help by making their premises available to the community for various activities, for community meals for instance. (I think St John's Anglican has or had English classes available for overseas students.)

I can't see that the church would have a role in addressing loneliness in the broader community, at least our own church. Our own old age issues are a priority! But we can make sure our friends and families are ok, not too lonely. That's very important, I think.

I think people within the church and outside the church have a role to play, in ways that they may or may not realise.

•Provide opportunities addressing many areas already mentioned, such as venues for groups to meet, or starting groups not catered for in the vicinity (or promoting groups that do, such as Men's Sheds or book groups, poetry, or table tennis groups, or simply a 'cuppa, biscuits and relax' open door venue.
• Provide open classes in 'changing the world or changing oneself', 'Human Nature: creative or destructive?' or 'Human failings and potential' or 'optimism and pessimism', or 'Facing our Fears' or 'Fight or Flight-or is there a better way?' etc etc.
• Open sermons and discussions on the relevance of Jesus' teachings and life in today's world. On a Sunday or any other advertised day, and in social media.
•The church must become more open to criticism and more creative considering contentious ideas. We are too protective of what we have, and too sentimental over things that are transitory, such as traditions, and buildings that need redesigning to meet today's needs, and attitudes like 'the poor are always with us' as a reason to do nothing.

Yes, definitely, if one accepts Jesus's admonition that "we should love one another". It's an extension of our commitment to pastoral care.

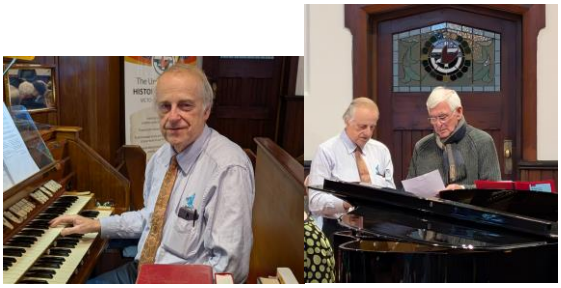
I believe the church can play a big role in addressing loneliness.
Churches can offer such things as group activities, youth groups, senior lunches, and volunteer opportunities.
There is a consistency in social engagement which addresses both emotional and social loneliness.

Faith leaders and pastoral care teams can provide great support too.

A church may provide a visitation program to places such as aged care homes, hospitals, or prisons.

THE JOY OF SINGING AT SCUC

On Sunday 22 June, the church rang with the sound of massed voices singing hymns and psalms on the theme of creation and the environment. It was the fourth annual hymn fest led and curated by Rev Dr Darcy Wood for the Uniting Church Historical Society (VicTas). Led by an occasional choir, and accompanied by our own Colin Prohasky on organ and Bruce McCrae on piano, the assembled, including some Ewing stalwarts, revelled in bellowing out an extravaganza of familiar hymns – with the old familiar words as well!



COMMON THREADS
Alison Tokita

Common Threads on 26 June was visited by Maria Sandbach, who introduced the Loneliness Forum and invited us to create a display for the accompanying mini-Expo. Following that, we enjoyed the usual convivial gathering with new faces and old, sharing expertise and advice on arcane technical problems.

Jo commented later in the day in an email:

"People were enjoying this morning and in no hurry to leave! Thank you."

Next meeting on 24 July. Looking forward to seeing you there!

***

Jo wrote the following reflection about KOGO, the main outlet for Common Threads work.

See Kogo (kogo.org.au)

WHAT IS KOGO

KOGO stands for Knit One Give One.

The group KOGO enhances social inclusion through Volunteering and providing hand knitted clothing of warmth and rugs and toys to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of the Australian Community. Through such groups as Red Cross

and St Kilda Mums who give baby needs to needy new Mothers.

Alison takes me to the Beth Weizman Jewish Community Centre in Hawthorn Road, Caulfield, where KOGO rents space for its activities. Though not a Jewish organisation, it clearly has the support of the Jewish community.

Teams of volunteers collect the items and knitted squares and prepare them for distribution.

After going through strict security and signing in we reach several sorting rooms. My destination is where I collect sorted bags of knitted or crocheted squares for me to sew into rugs. I also get more wool for my friends to knit into 8" by 8" squares.

Alison also delivers other items that our Common Threads Group have made such as toys and knitted beanies. They and the rugs are delivered to a different room.

We find it interesting to see all the lovely knitted articles being sorted and prepared for distribution.

We then depart through security and signing out.

Jo Miller

PERSONALS

Wedding of Rev Paulo Kwajakwan's daughter, Kwobi, 22 June

Hiro and I were privileged to be invited to the traditional Sudanese-style wedding celebration of Kwobi, the daughter of Rev Paulo Kwajakwan on 21 June. People will remember Paulo when he was attending SCUC from 2022 until he was called to Mulgrave, and now Benalla since 2024.

The celebration was held in the hall of St Louis de Montfort's Catholic Church in Aspendale. Wave after wave of groups of male singers and dancers and female singers and dancers processed in double file around the space in traditional dress. The energetic flow of rhythm and melody and the ever-changing costume groups created a splendid and highly charged atmosphere.

One of the female groups

One of the male groups

The Sudanese community really came out in style and great numbers to celebrate the wedding of Kwobi and Emmanuel. After a good two hours of different groups adding their part to the event, finally the bridegroom's group of family and friends appeared, followed by the bride's group. The wedding party then processed to the stage and received blessings and congratulatory speeches.

The bridal party on stage for the blessings

The ceremony was followed by a generous meal. The official church wedding will be held a couple of weeks later.

Elizabeth Terrell

We were saddened to hear of the death of Elizabeth Terrell at Regis Camberwell on 12 June.

Elizabeth and her husband Tom moved to Ewing when the St Andrews Gardiner congregation closed in 2016. Elizabeth was a generous and active member of Ewing, a regular at Afternoon Fellowship. She continued coming to church after Tom passed away late 2021, but had several health interruptions. She moved into Cameron Close retirement village in 2023, where she held a big celebration for her 90th birthday in February 2024. Earlier this year she had an extended stay in Cabrini, then went to respite.

I remember Elizabeth as sprightly and energetic at Gardiner – she always wore to church a butterfly brooch pinned on her left shoulder. As a former Brownie leader and an avid traveller, she had a strong sense of adventure.

We will hear more about Elizabeth's life and achievements at the funeral service at SCUC on Thursday 3 June, 10.30 am.

Message from Kai Yuan in Sydney

I've had a solid first half of the year here in Sydney. Classes and exams for the first semester are now complete, and I'm currently in my second hospital placement (renal and transplant ward), with one week to go. I'm really enjoying it and wish it could last longer! After this placement, I'll be eligible to work as an Assistant in Nursing (AIN) to gain more clinical experience.

In April, I was fortunate to take part in a Department of Health and Aged Care–sponsored Road Trip to explore healthcare careers and lifestyle in regional areas. It was a fantastic journey—four days and over 1,500 km! We visited many hospitals and even a very cool ambulance station. I had the chance to meet passionate rural health professionals who shared their career paths and lifestyles—both of which are very appealing to me. I even felt like I might have found the place I want to spend the rest of my life. I hope to explore more through my rural placement next year, and with some luck, secure a graduate position there.

I've continued my weekly volunteering at Ronald McDonald House Charities Greater Western Sydney, which is right next to the Sydney Children's Hospital and my campus. The house provides incredible support for sick children and their families—accommodation, meals, transport, and early education for siblings. I'm very happy to be able to contribute in a small way.

At church in Sydney, I've really been enjoying weekly Bible study, and I also continue to read the Bible on my own. Just like at SCUC, I help with IT, though here I'm more involved with the video and camera work.

I also restarted my marathon training. Running in the wilderness brings me so much joy and peace.

Thank you again for keeping in touch. Sending warm wishes to Hiro and everyone at SCUC.

MONTHLY CAFÉ CATCH-UP
NB Change of date!

Tuesday 15 July from 2 pm
Venue: Mr Sister Café, 81 Waverley Road

From July, this regular cosy catchup will take place on the **THIRD** Tuesday of the month. Same place, same time.

This is the place for talking about all those things that can't be discussed at morning tea after church or in formal meetings. It is great place to get to know people in an informal setting. On sunny wintry afternoons, we can enjoy sitting in the sun-drenched glassed-in area at the rear. The service is lovely and friendly.

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

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks to all for your contributions to the issue. We welcome letters and articles, so feel free to write about any topic of interest to you to share with our readers. *Letters to the Editor are also welcome.* And we can promote your events at no fee!

Deadline for the August 2025 edition of *InSpire* is **Monday 28 July.** Articles should be emailed to the Editor, Alison Tokita, at [redacted] where possible, or given in person.

ROSTERS JULY 2025

CALENDAR JULY 2025

SUNDAY 6th	**2.30 AM**	**INDUCTION SERVICE OF REV JOHN POWER**
SUNDAY 13th	**10.30 AM**	**CHURCH SERVICE**
TUESDAY 15th	**2.00 PM**	**CAFÉ CATCH UP AT MR SISTER CAFÉ 81 WAVERLEY RD**
SUNDAY 20th	**10.30 AM** **5.00 PM**	**CHURCH SERVICE** **SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT**
THURSDAY 24TH	**10.30 AM**	**COMMON THREADS**
SUNDAY 27th	**10.30 AM**	**CHURCH SERVICE**