

Beyond 2020 Vision

A Publication of Morialta Uniting Church

March 2024

Morialta Uniting Church—follow us on Facebook or check out our website at www.morialtauca.org.au

Welcome to our March edition

Colin Cargill, Editor and Helena Begg, Publisher

We begin the March issue with an article by Rev Dr Steven Koski on the power of (our) laughable faith. Steven was minister at Brougham Place some years ago.

We also bring you a eulogy for Christine Secombe, a report on World Day of Prayer, and several articles of interest to Morialta folk – including ‘A little about me’ by Rev Leanne.

There is information about our AGM in April.

We invite teams and individuals to use Vision as a place to share plans, achievements, experiences, important events or just things that take your fancy.

The deadline for the next Vision will be 29th March. Either drop a copy in to Nicole at the Office or call/email Colin on 0427 122 106 or snout-n-about@bigpond.com

Go well.

The power of a laughable faith

Adapted from a blog by Rev Dr Steven Koski,
First Presbyterian Church of Bend, Oregon.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. The promise of Easter is that suffering, darkness and death do not and will not have the last word. God does. And the word God spoke that first Easter morning was a love that could not be defeated, a love stronger than even death itself.

At Easter we celebrate an empty tomb. But there is more than one story about the empty tomb. One explanation is that Jesus disciples stole his body in the dead of night. Death is death. Accept it. The other story, first told by the Angels and then by the women, is that he is risen. There is a love that can't be defeated. There is a hope greater than despair. Love wins. Love always wins.

At Easter we are reminded of the importance of deciding for ourselves which of those stories is true? Which story will shape the way we live when we love? Thomas Merton wrote, ‘Suddenly, suddenly there comes a point when your Earth becomes laughable. Then you decide that nevertheless you still have faith.’

There are certain days when the darkness is so deep, the despair so overwhelming, evil so pervasive, that it really seems laughable to have faith in something more, to have faith that love wins. It's right there in the Easter story.

Their dear friend was dead. Their hope of a new world where goodness prevailed, where the hungry were fed, where the sick were cared for, where children mattered, where everyone, even the rejected and the outcasts, had a place at the table. That hope seemingly died and was sealed in the tomb with Jesus.

But they arrive to find the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and are told that he is risen. They run to tell the others what they just witnessed.

So again, one story is that Jesus was crucified. Death is death, and the powers of this world won. But the disciples were not willing to accept that Jesus died as a common criminal on a cross. So another story suggests that they created a myth of resurrection.

Now most of these disciples died as martyrs for Christ. Would you give your life for a myth you created yourself? Or would it be much more likely you would give your life for something much greater than yourself. And given the era, would anyone invent a story in which women were the only witnesses? The only plausible explanation is that even though the story might seem utterly laughable, it is true. We gather on Easter to shout Christ is risen and celebrate this impossible story that defies all reason and logic and common sense.

And I suspect we gather on Easter not in spite of the fact that it's laughable, but precisely because it is laughable. We need to believe and trust that in spite of all of the evidence that suggests otherwise, love does win. That's the promise of Easter. Easter isn't about proving anything, Easter is about choosing to believe that love is bigger than any of the grim, bleak crap life can throw at us.

Because if love wins, we keep feeding the hungry. If love wins, we keep praying and working for peace, even when peace seems laughable. We keep fighting for a world where every life is sacred, even though hate seems to be winning. If love wins, we find the courage, the courage to have those brave conversations with those who see the world differently than we do. If love wins, we can sit with our loved ones with Alzheimer's, who don't even recognize us because we trust. We trust that kind of suffering will never have the last word.

For the full blog go to: <https://bendfp.org/2022/04/apr-17th-the-power-of-a-laughable-faith-with-rev-dr-steven-koski/>



Celebrate Easter with us at Morialta UC

Maunder Thursday (28 March) at 7.30pm

Good Friday (29 March) at 10.00am (Live-streamed)

Easter Day (31 March) at 10.00am (Live-streamed)



A little about me...

From Rev. Leanne Davis

I was born and raised in Gawler, growing up in a Christian family. My faith grew in the one church - baptised, confirmed, and married - and was nurtured by my parents, and grandparents (who attended the same church). I was part of the Sunday School, Youth Group, and Elders Council over time.

Scott and I met at the University of Adelaide in the late 1980s while we were both studying computer science, and part of one of the Christian groups. We have been married for just over 32 years.

Twenty-five (ish) years working in IT was accompanied by a life in my local Uniting Church. We both have been involved in church leadership in all councils of the church (not necessarily at the same time) – Congregation, Presbytery, Synod and Assembly. I've also been Sunday School teacher, Youth Leader, Bible Study Leader, Musician, and Preacher. I was commissioned as an accredited Lay Preacher in 2015 and have had the privilege of sharing God's Word with many congregations across the state.

The call of God was (and is) still on my life, and about seven years ago I left the life of IT, and returned to study, this time, studying theology, and at the same time working through the processes of the Uniting Church to candidate for the ordained ministry. I have served as a pastor in supply at Prospect Road UC, and in placement with Plains Community Churches (Owen and Hamley Bridge). After a number of years working through the processes and continuing study, I was ordained as a Minister of the Word in January this year in a wonderful service.

I have an interest in family and church history - and for me, they overlap in a number of places. My thesis for my Master of Theological Studies was looking at some of the stories of colonial South Australian Methodist women (in all of the variants of Methodism at that time). You might be interested to know that Morialta church (as the Magill Wesleyan Church) was mentioned in my thesis. One of the women whose story I chose to tell was Elizabeth Longbottom - who, along with her husband, is remembered in the windows of this church. She had significant involvement in the leadership of this church. As I also do some work for the Uniting Church Historical Society, I am able to continue reading and researching the stories of women who helped grow the church in South Australia.

I hope to be able to tell more of their stories over time.

World Day of Prayer

The World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical day of prayer led by Christian women on the first Friday in March. This year it was celebrated in Morialta Uniting Church in a service led by Rev Jenny Swanbury.



Around 50 people from local churches (St Joseph's Tranmere, Pilgrim Lutheran, Magill Church of Christ, Rostrevor and Montacute Baptists and Morialta Uniting) attended and shared in morning tea.

For decades this global ecumenical prayer service has been an opportunity for local churches in each region to come together to pray, focusing on a particular place in the world and supporting a shared project.

This year the Order of Service was prepared ecumenically by Palestinian women who have been working together for over 4 years. The theme was: *I Beg You, ... Bear With One Another in Love.* (Eph 8:7).

Palestine lies at the crossroads of the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe on land that for over 3,000 years has been significant to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Over 5 million Palestinians live in Palestine and Israel. Most are Muslims and only 2% are Christian. They live in 2 main geographical regions – the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The total land area is 8% of the area of Tasmania.

The Arts help Palestinians to continue to live with hope by keeping their heritage and cultural memory alive. Poetry, visual art, embroidery, dabkeh (traditional folk dancing), theatre and cinema affirm their lived experience and connect them with the world through exhibitions and competitions.

95% of Palestinian children are enrolled in basic education. There are public and private schools. Most private schools are run by religious institutions. The Christian-run schools serve children of all faiths. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees runs schools in the 58 recognised Palestinian refugee camps.

Palestinian Christians have family histories stretching back over 2,000 years. Many of their ancestors lived amongst the locations of the Bible and of Jesus' life! The church in Palestine is a living church with a special mission and vocation. It is rich in heritage and pluralistic in traditions.

Palestinian Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church (75%), as well as Catholic and Protestant churches.

In a message from the Christian women of Palestine they wrote: *We call on you, sisters and brothers in every part of the world, to bear with us in love. We call upon you to unite your prayers with ours for a just and peaceful solution that would bring an end to human suffering. We call upon you to stand in solidarity with us to achieve security and peace for all people around the world.*



Front of the church decorated for World Day of Prayer

Information re 2024 AGM and nominating for Church Council

Every organisation needs appropriate governance support and Morialta UC is no different. Our Church Council, Congregation Leaders and Presbytery Representatives all perform an important function.

As the Annual General Meeting approaches and elections for leadership positions are planned, members of the congregation are asked to begin the discerning process that will identify members with the gifts and graces to undertake leadership responsibilities.

Leadership positions to be filled are:

- Elder on Church Council
- Chairperson of Congregation
- Secretary of Congregation
- Wimala Presbytery Congregational Representative

Previously, the nomination process required those being nominated to sign before the nomination form was submitted. This time, members of the congregation are asked

to identify those from our number who have the skills to undertake leadership within our community. You do not need to seek permission from those who you nominate and it is entirely appropriate for you to self-nominate if you feel you have the skills and ability to undertake the role.

Once nominations are received those named will be approached, and it is hoped, will accept nomination.

If you have any questions, please seek clarification from our present leaders.

The AGM will be held on Sunday 21 April 2024 after morning worship, in the church.

Nominations will open on Sunday 24 March and close Monday 15 April. Nomination forms will be available in the foyer and should be returned to the collection box there marked “Nominations for MUC office bearers”.

An Easter reflection: Jesus was a victim

Adapted from a post on Patheos by Rene Albert

In today’s political climate, victimization seems to consistently find its way to the forefront of trending conversations.

When a topic is trending online, many will often hop on the bandwagon and express their solidarity to an idea that resonates with them. I can understand why some would push back against such movements. A phrase popularized by conservative speaker Ben Shapiro says, “*Feelings rule facts, and victims are heroes.*”

While there may be some truth in his critique, this could be one reason for the response ‘innocent until proven guilty’ approach. Unfortunately, slogans like Shapiro’s are often used to silence conversations rather than approach them with nuance.

What I find discouraging is how many Christians I’ve encountered show little empathy for those who share experiences or views that conflict with their own. Sadly many of us who claim Christlike virtues sometimes behave more closely to those who would have been among the crowd shouting, “*Crucify Him!*”



Image credit: pixabay.com

This mass reaction by crowds is a further reason why movements such as #MeToo and #EveryChildMatters exist. They give victimized people an opportunity to use their voices and share what weighs heavy upon them.

As I reflect upon the meaning of Good Friday, I’ve often asked myself, how can a day someone experienced one of the most horrific forms of torture be ‘good?’ He was brutally mocked, scourged, violated and impaled before an entire community.

And yet, He had done nothing to deserve such extreme punishment. Here we have an all-knowing, all-powerful God who wouldn’t alleviate His own suffering to prove who He is. But this is the paradox of the victimhood of Christ. Although He suffered and died unjustly at the hands of wicked people, not only did he rise above victimhood, He removed the power from His abusers and conquered death itself.

The idea that all human suffering is meaningless in the broad scheme of the universe is a hopeless nihilism. It’s kind of reminiscent of how those who have not experienced abuse themselves would often be ignorant of the pain of an abuse victim’s own experiences. For many, the only way they empathize with somebody else’s pain or trauma is to experience it personally. And this is what separates Christ from all other gods. His humanity makes Him a divine being who understands our suffering on a personal level.

It’s worth considering how victimhood implies a state that isn’t meant to last forever. It is a state that Christ Himself understands well. As Christians, we strive to imitate Christ as our primary example of virtuous character. Even in death, Jesus forgave His oppressors as He cried, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!*” Forgiving those who have wronged us is easier said than done for many who have been victimized. But difficult as it may be, forgiveness removes the power our abusers exert over us.

Personal circumstances do not define the identity of an individual, though they can shape and transform a person’s character for better or for worse. As Christ rose from the dead, His scars remained on his hands and feet as a reminder of what had happened to Him days before — but the power of evil and death had no grip upon Him.

And like Christ, we are not bound to be victims forever.

Christine Secombe (1948 – 2024)



Christine was born on 10th Jan 1948 to Ewen and Glenys Sparrow. She was the eldest of 3 daughters. She began life living with her maternal grandmother until the family moved to their war service home in East Glenelg. After her mum died in 1964, her father married Peggy in 1966. Peggy brought with her Greg and Pamela, to expand the family to 5 children – ranging in age from 4 to 18.

Her high school/early teen years were hard without a mother's guiding hand and as the eldest daughter, Christine was expected to step up and take some control of the household and look after her younger sisters. Her Auntie Marion was their lifeline.

As a youngster, Christine spent a lot of time with her paternal grandparents. On many occasions Christine would drive to Melbourne with them to visit her Aunt Joan and Uncle Ron. They had a flip map and Christine loved watching for the mile markers and other landmarks.

Christine and John were married in 1970 on 29th January and it was 54 years to the day that she moved to the Mary Potter Hospice.

Paul and Julie were born during the first half of the seventies and Christine was immensely proud of her children, their partners Bek and Kelly, and her 2 grandchildren Henry and Vivienne.

Although family circumstances and paternal values of the day resulted in Christine starting her first job at the bank after leaving high school, as a mature age student she obtained her Bachelor of Accounting, rising above her fear of exams.

Christian hope was important to Christine. In her youth, she was part of the Brighton Methodist Youth Group and as an adult, Christine served in many areas of local church life. These included Pastoral Care, Social Justice and Action Committees, and church councils, including as Secretary of MUC for several years.

Christine was a passionate and faithful participant in wider church councils and activities. She served on Pastoral Relations Committees of the SA Synod and the Wimala Presbytery, was the coordinator of the Urban Mission Network and was the first Secretary of the Wimala Presbytery. Her work with the Urban Mission Network was particularly important to her.

Christine's faith had much to do with her deep passion for social justice. She joined Amnesty International in the 1970s, serving on the state and national boards, speaking to local groups, and attending an international meeting in London. She met some amazing people who helped her to further shape her thinking and her faith.

Those of us who journeyed with Christine on the MUC Social Justice Team remember her passion and dedication. One of her 'big' campaigns was 'the release of children held in detention.' She delivered a soft toy weekly to Christopher Pyne's office over many months. Christine was always well-informed and conversant on issues before acting.

She also delighted in using her considerable handwork skills in making woolen garments for Australians Knitting for War Affected Kids (AKWAK) for distribution to children in refugee camps in the north of Syria. Other organizations to benefit from Christine's passion for justice were Mothers & Babies, the VIEW Club, supporting the Smith Family, and Delta Therapy Dogs.

Christine played netball and tennis for the Dunleath Gardens Methodist Clubs as a child; tennis at Brighton UC as a young adult and social tennis with friends from Tea Tree Gully and MUC. Christine also loved watching sports and was a keen follower of the Adelaide Crows and the South Australian Cricket Association.

Diagnosed with one of the worst cancers imaginable – Christine was stoic and brave. When treatment options were exhausted this was accepted with the same stoicism and dignity while still caring about others.

Son Paul queried what would happen to the memories – would they be lost like tears in the rain? But as he mused ... "Perhaps not ... there are some immutable laws in the universe ... such as the 1st law of thermodynamics – energy is not created or destroyed but merely changes forms. The force of life, the energy that was Christine – wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandma, friend, colleague, confidant – remains; it must, this is what the 1st law of thermodynamics tells us. It may no longer reside in the shell that carried it for 76 years, but it remains in the universe." It surrounds us, it envelopes us, and it continues to make all of our lives the richer and fuller for having walked with Christine on our own journeys.

Christine – thanks for everything.

Friendship Group

Our first meeting of the year was held in February, on a beautiful evening at Thorndon Park Reserve where 16 members met for "A Picnic in the Park".



Photo: Ruth Pitt

We also discussed the program set out for the year ahead. Our time of fellowship continued as we moved across to the Rezz Hotel for coffee.

The next meeting, on Thursday March 21st at 10.00am, will be a visit to the Weald View Fuchsia Nursery, followed by morning tea at the Cherry Bomb Cafe. More details to follow in the church newsletters in March.

Please contact Ruth Pitt if you would like to join us for the outing – all welcome.

The survivor tree

Adapted from a blog by Rev Dr Steven Koski,
First Presbyterian Church of Bend, Oregon.

I want to present you with a beautiful image of resurrection. It is called the Survivor Tree. The Survivor tree is a Calorie pear tree. It was near the Twin Towers in New York City on 9/11. This tree was sheared in half, most of its limbs severed.

It was burned and scarred. Miraculously, it somehow was still rooted in the ground, buried under the smoking rubble for a month. A month after it was putting out leaves. It was laughable that any tree would sprout leaves in October in New York City, let alone a tree sheared in half, buried under smoking rubble.

In the words of an arborist, "The only kind of tree that puts out leaves in October is a tree that wants to live and wants you to know what she's made of." It was the last living survivor removed from the 9/11 destruction site.

And it not only survived, it thrived. It might seem laughable, but a Dove, the symbol of peace, made a nest and a home in the centre of that tree. And years later, when they were building the Memorial in the place where the Twin Towers fell, the tree was replanted at the site. And that's where it is today. Living, thriving, blossoming.

And if you look at this tree up close, you can see where the tree is rough, where it is gnarled and scarred and that's never

going to go away. The trauma that that tree endured is always going to be part of that tree's story. But you will also notice new smooth branches growing out of the gnarled stumps. That's new life, that's resurrection. Easter isn't a fairy tale with all the pain and the difficulties erased.

Easter is a story that embraces everything we've survived, every scar we have, every hurt and trauma we carry and says that isn't the end of the story. The fact that this tree survived and is thriving is laughable.



Seedlings from that survivor tree are given each year to three communities that have endured tragedy. Seedlings were donated to Oslo (Norway) where 73 people were killed by a gunman. Seedlings were donated to Haiti devastated by an earthquake that killed over 20 people. Seedlings from the survivor tree have been donated to Ukraine.

Friends may the seedlings of a foolish faith be planted deep in your hearts today; may that love which is stronger than even death itself, rise within your hearts on this Easter, and give you the courage to prove with your life that love wins. And if love isn't winning it just means the story isn't over yet.

Steven Koski - minister at Brougham Place UC 1990-1999.

Book Reviews

Contributed Joan Wagner

'The Dry' by Jane Harper

I love a book that is hard to put down, and this one is riveting and captivating from beginning to end!

It hasn't rained in Kiewarra for two years. Tensions in the farming community become unbearable when three members of the Hadler family are discovered shot dead on their property. Everyone assumes Luke Hadler committed suicide after shooting his wife and son.

Because of a drowning, Federal Police investigator Aaron Falk returns reluctantly to his hometown for the funerals of his childhood friend Luke and family. He becomes an innocent suspect and is unwittingly drawn into the investigations.

Falk joins forces with the local policeman, even though he is treated with animosity, and with many twists and turns they pursue issues and unravel the truth of the surprising, different perpetrators of all crimes.



'Force of Nature' is another book by Jane Harper and it is also on our shelves in the library. The film of this was being shown in February at the Regal Cinema, Kensington Road.



Thank you from the Library Team

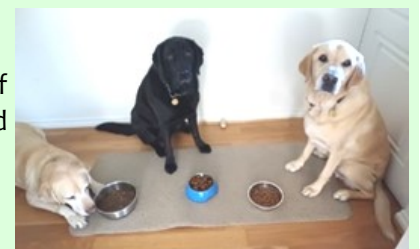
Both of the above books and many others are kindly donated to the library for others to enjoy. The library team Miranda, Jill and Joan have working bees to catalogue them on the computer, label and shelve them alphabetically.

We also appreciate the gifts of the lovely homemade jams, pickles etc and the lovely gift cards made by Joan Morrison, Julie Lomman and Jill Kerr placed by the library door. All of the above mean our library exists and is alive and welcoming with no cost to our church budget.

We are richly blessed to belong to this loving family of God.

A dog's life

As we know dogs, and in particular labradors, love food. But under the care of Margaret and Ray Clogg the three dogs in our photo exhibit great restraint and discipline!





Congratulations...

to Anne, who celebrated her 70th birthday with a garden party attended by her many friends.

Congratulations...

to Graham and Heather, who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary!



Congratulations...

to Kathryn and Damien, who married recently at Morialta UC. Kathryn and her family have long been connected to Morialta through our netball club.



Visitors from Mexico...

Steve and Helena enjoyed a visit from son Ian, his girlfriend Brenda and members of her family who are visiting Australia from their home in Mexico.



Harvest thanksgiving at Morialta UC

Our sincere thanks to Jan and Rhonda for their creative talents and care. The generous donations of food items from the congregation were gratefully received by Uniting Communities at Clayton Wesley, for distribution to people in need.

Uniting Communities has regular times for distribution of food assistance, as well as visits from Food Bank and Orange Sky Laundry.

They are always grateful to receive non-perishable food donations (especially ones that do not need cooking), as well as toiletries and sanitary items.

Greetings from Adelaide Male Voice Choir

Bill Shaw and the members of the AMVC would like to thank MUC for hosting the choir for afternoons of music over the last few years. They are impressed with our professionalism and enthusiasm in organizing what they refer to as the “snout-n-about concerts.”

Bill Shaw has recently retired from his position as Conductor and Director of Music, after serving 39 years in that role. Bill will be 82 on his next birthday and although he continues to have lots of energy and new ideas, he feels that now has been the right time to leave. We will miss Bill when the choir return to Morialta in October.

The choir had a very successful year in 2023 and it is in great shape. Bill can hand over with pride and leave on a high note!



30th Birthday celebrations!

Katrina and Mitchell were in Adelaide recently to celebrate their 30th birthdays with their family and friends. The photo shows them celebrating Mardi Gras with their church friends in Sydney.

Assembly Circles

From the UCA Assembly website

Assembly Circles are a platform for learning and sharing, where you can contribute to the national work of the Uniting Church. They are spaces for deepening faith and listening to where God is leading us. Together we can make a difference in God's mission in the world.

There are 7 Circles that you can choose to join. These are:

- Walking Together as First and Second Peoples to Explore our Covenant relationship as First and Second Peoples;
- Working for Justice - Reflect and act on issues of social justice;
- Being a Multicultural Church - Build on our commitment to live faith and life cross-culturally;
- Discipling the Next Generations - Connect with and support young leaders in our Church;
- Growing in Faith - Explore how we grapple with faith in 21st Century Australia;

- Seeking Common Ground - Be in relationship with people of other faiths, no faith and with our Christian brothers and sisters from other denominations;
- Transforming Worship - Learn about and contribute to vital, healthy worship in our Church.

Once you join a Circle, you will be invited to join Circle conversations on Facebook. You will also be connected via email communication. New Circle members receive a Welcome Pack outlining the values of your Circle and other important information.

An Advocate has been appointed to each circle to nurture and encourage activity, conversation and input from circle members. They are supported by Panel Members - people with particular gifts and expertise in that area of interest.

Circle members must be 18 years or older and agree to abide by our Circle Code of Conduct.

We plan to highlight one of the circles each month beginning with Justice.



The "G" word in high places

Adapted from an essay by Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox

Along with climate change and the move from religion to spirituality, another sign of our times is the rise of the G word in high places. I am speaking of course of Greed.

It was not so long ago that religions criticized greed and proposed it was not good for the individual soul or for the community at large. That greed and the common good were considered incompatible. That idea became almost quaint when some economists suggested that "Greed is good".

Another name for it was Neo-liberalism, which in essence says that one of the Seven Deadly Sins – greed – wasn't actually a sin at all. Greed was not "a base human impulse that had to be controlled lest it destroy society," but rather a means to ensure prosperity for all.

The new truth – greed is good – flowered in the 1980s and was based on the idea that "the sole task of executives was to enrich the shareholders." Cultural critic David Korten says that "Greed had a field day" in the 1980s. From 1987 to 1994, the number of billionaires in America rose from 145 to 358 and the inequality between countries and rates of unemployment also soared. But greed respects no limits. To accept the reality of physical limits is to face the need to limit greed and acquisition in favour of economic justice and sufficiency.

Does religion have an answer to Greed?

Thomas Aquinas says that "the greed for gain knows no limit and tends to infinity." But greed cannot last forever in an individual since individuals die – but in corporations there are no limits. Corporations are immortal and if corporations are "people" (per Thomas' jurisprudence) then greed can live on forever.

Hildegard of Bingen creates a dialog between Avarice and Contentment. Avarice speaks: "I take all the things I want and acquire all of them with my own craftiness." Contentment responds: "All the things that have come into existence from the sun and moon are sufficient for me. Why should I desire more than I need?"

It would seem that love is not compatible with greed. Neither is kindness. Or compassion. Or justice. All these words have been identified with Divinity or God or Christ or Buddha or Truth over centuries and in numerous religions.

People who say they believe in the Bible ought to take notice and rediscover what justice and compassion and the kingdom that Jesus spoke of are all about. The G word does not apply.

Matthew Fox holds a doctorate in spirituality from the Institut Catholique de Paris and has authored 40 books on spirituality and contemporary culture that have been translated into 78 languages. Fox has devoted 45 years to developing and teaching the tradition of Creation Spirituality. His work is inclusive of today's science and world spiritual traditions and has awakened millions to the much-neglected earth-based mystical tradition of the west.



Pig cafés

Contributed by Tom Cargill

First there were cafés that allowed pets. Then came cat cafés, where lattes took second place to feline interaction. The latest craze in Japan is the pig café.

The pigs are surprisingly quiet, although they do snort now and then. They don't like to be alone, making for great companionship. Unlike the stereotype, they're very clean and don't smell.

Customers pay 2,200 yen (\$21) for the first 30 minutes in the company of the pigs. A reservation is required.

Each pig is unique. Each one has his or her own personality. Some appear strong-headed, and others are more gentle.

The Mipig Café in fashionable Harajuku is among 10 such pig cafes the operator has opened around Japan. The first one opened in Tokyo in 2019. Two more are in the works for later this year.

Maybe my dad will open one in Magill!



Could God recognise you?

Contributed by Wayne Curtis

A 54-year-old woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near death experience. Seeing God, she asked: "Is my time up?"

God said, "No, you have another 43 years, 2 months and 8 days to live."

Upon recovery, the woman decided to stay in the hospital and have a face-lift, liposuction, breast implants and a tummy tuck. She even had someone come in and change her hair colour and brighten her teeth! Since she had so much more time to live, she figured she might as well make the most of it.

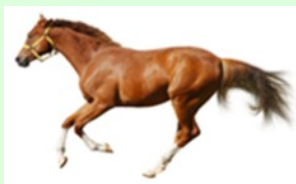
After her last operation, she was released from the hospital but while crossing the street on her way home, she was killed by an ambulance. Arriving in front of God, she demanded, "I thought you said I had another 43 years? Why didn't you pull me from out of the path of the ambulance?"

God replied: "Sorry, but I didn't recognize you!"

Do racehorses even know they are 'racing'?

Adapted from an article by Cathrynne Henshall - Lecturer, School of Agricultural, Environmental and Veterinary Sciences, Charles Sturt University – published in the Conversation

One of my favourite pastimes on a cold Saturday afternoon is to watch the horse races on TV with the sound off. Horses are such magnificent beasts and having spent every Tuesday and Thursday



afternoon for half a year in an anatomy lab, dissecting out their muscular structures and exploring the routes of nerves and blood vessels, I appreciate the magnificent way they are assembled.

I was intrigued when I found Cathrynne's article as TV personalities, professional pundits, and those who claim to know, write confidently in form guides about the favourite's "will to win". In close races, the equine contestants "battle it out", demonstrating "heart", "grit" and "determination".

But do horses even know they are in a race? Based on decades of experience and everything known about horse behaviour, Cathrynne thinks the most plausible answer is "no".

From a horse's perspective, there are few rewards for winning a race. Reaching the end might mean relief from the jockey's whip, but the same is true for all the horses.

So while winning can be crucially important to the horse's human connections, there is very little direct, intrinsic benefit for the horse.

Running (cantering or galloping) is a quintessential horse behaviour and horses voluntarily run together in a herd when given the opportunity. As a young vet, driving along roads past horse studs in the Upper Hunter Valley, I often enjoyed watching a herd of horses galloping just for the fun of it.

Horses are social animals. In the wild, they synchronise their movement with other horses in their group to minimise their individual exposure to predators. They maintain similar speeds to each other, being alert to the positions of their own body and their neighbours to avoid collisions, and adapting their speed to the terrain. In the wild, "winning" – or arriving first, long before other group members – could even be a negative, exposing the "winner" to an increased risk of predation.

Although horses learn through prior experience and training what is likely to happen, and what to do during a race, they most likely have no concept of being in a "race".

And with jockeys and trainers who understand the individual preferences of their horses to maximise their chances during the race, there will always be one horse that reaches that 'line' before the other horses in the group.

But as for horses understanding they are there to "win"? It's far more likely it is the combination of natural ability, physical fitness and jockey skill that accounts for which horse wins, rather than any innate desire by that horse to get to the 'line' first.