

# DUNEDIN METHODIST PARISH

*Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone*

[www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz](http://www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz)



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## PARISH BULLETIN

3 April 2022

### WORSHIP FOR Sunday 10 April March 2022

9.30am	Mornington	David Poultney
10.00am	Mosgiel	Elaine Merrett
11.00am	Glenaven	Helen Watson-White
	St Kilda	TBA

### DATES TO REMEMBER

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April @1.30pm – Mosgiel Methodist Women's Fellowship  
 April 17<sup>th</sup> – Holy Communion will be celebrated on Easter Sunday

## HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communion in each of our churches will be celebrated on Easter Sunday (April 17<sup>th</sup>). We will hold off celebrating it before then.

Thank you



## GOOD FRIDAY

There are services at Mornington and Mosgiel on Good Friday, they are at the usual Sunday service times; 09.30am and 10.00am respectively.

## MOSGIEL METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Tuesday 5th April 1:30pm in our hall lounge when we launch our "special project" all welcome.



## STORIES FROM THE MISSION

### Taituarā a Hāpori Ōtepoti

Claudia had met a single mother of two from Little Citizens at the start of the year who had been required to leave her rental property with little notice. Claudia supported her in working through her WINZ entitlements. She was very determined to work through this situation to find the best solution for her children. The family moved into emergency housing, and she engaged herself in searching for suitable accommodation whilst seeking out support from agencies. She secured a new rental property in the middle of this month. The children have now moved on from Little Citizens and we wish her the best.

**If you would like to support the Mission's work with a donation, please visit [www.givealittle.co.nz](http://www.givealittle.co.nz) and search for The Methodist Mission.**



## **Information and experience: how to become more loving and compassionate**

We are reminded frequently of the problems present in society, both in New Zealand and overseas: insufficient income for many to make ends meet; massive inequalities in assets and incomes with the gap growing wider; loneliness; homelessness; unemployment; illiteracy; substance abuse; a variety of illnesses including viral infections, dementia, heart disease, cancer, and mental illness; violence; suicide; and war, both within and between countries. Humans have the capacity to be indifferent and cruel to some other groups of humans. As a species, we can dehumanize others and to try to exclude them from our lives with guns, bombs, machetes, placement in jail where life means life, or, if released from prison, being sent to Coventry for life because the victims of crime have to suffer for life.

There are no simple answers to all of these problems and their causes are complex and multifactorial. However, one of the suggested solutions for helping many of the problems is for us to become more loving and compassionate. The title of the Connections for 13 March 2022 by Trish Patrick was ... *But the GREATEST of these is ... love!* Similarly, the penultimate sentence in the front-page article of the March 2022 Touchstone, *Freedom? Freedom for what?* by Rev Norman E Brookes was "... and now abide three things, faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." The column by President Rev Andrew Doubleday in the same Touchstone, *Rights and freedoms or love and compassion*, finishes with a similar sentiment: "Please friends, let's hold

the course. Let's continue to exhibit the fruit of the spirit, that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control that God invites us to be the hallmarks of all our living. We will get through this. We need to do it together." Doubleday's list of virtues comes from Galatians 5: 22-23, given in the *Holy Bible: New revised standard version with Apocrypha* 1989 as: "By contrast the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

It seems evident that if there was universal love and compassion to all people we would have no war and the problems related to inequalities would be lessened. The question is how we can we become, both individually and as a species, more loving and compassionate. One approach is that we can be provided with more information about the nature of God, the world and ourselves and of the word of God in the Bible. Trish Patrick, in her Connections article notes that "Maybe the point of remembering Lent and Easter, is the incarnational intent of the gospel. 'God' cannot intervene to stop carnage and mayhem ... history has shown us that." She observes that we ask "God! Where are YOU in all this chaos and grief?" and that what we have is "God's spirit, alive in loving creative solidarity with the brokenness of the world."

The Rev Brookes notes about seven references in the Bible to freedom which he considered were able to give us guidance as to how we as Christians should respond to the current situation of protest regarding Covid mandates.

The Rev Doubleday frequently suggests that we experience the Spirit of Jesus or God. His view is that the Spirit of Jesus is alive today and that we can experience this Spirit by giving our lives over to Jesus. For example, in his sermon on YouTube for 3 April 2022, he speaks about Mary anointing the feet of Jesus using about \$40,000, in today's money, of nard, an intensely aromatic, amber-colored essential oil perfume with a thick consistency made by crushing and distilling the rhizomes or root shoots of a flowering plant of the honeysuckle family that grows in the

Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India, at an altitude of about 3,000 to 5,000 m with small, pink, bell-shaped flowers. Because Jesus had restored her brother Lazarus to life after he had been dead for four days and was already decaying with a stench, an offensive or foul smell, Mary was willing to trust her future to Jesus, including using all the expensive perfume which Doubleday suggests might have been her dowry for ensuring a good marriage. Doubleday suggests that we might similarly turn our lives over to Jesus with the implication that Jesus is alive today as a spirit who can be with us and guide us. In previous YouTube sermons, Doubleday has spoken of our being able to communicate with God by praying and then quietly waiting. He regards the thoughts which come into our mind while in this stage of quiet waiting as coming from God. Doubleday is suggesting that transformation, becoming more compassionate and loving, and experiencing life in all its abundance, comes from the experiences that follow actions, such as consciously giving one's life over to Jesus or listening for thoughts coming from God, rather than just as a result of receiving information.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, it is noted that speaking of love or in the tongues of angels, without showing the behaviour of love is empty. The behaviours of love are listed as being patient, kind, and not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. The presence of love results in a person not insisting on having their own way and not being irritable, resentful or rejoicing in wrongdoing. Rather a person with love rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never stops being like this.

It is probable that persons will be more likely to be attracted to being part of a church if they experience a loving response from the people there rather than being given information of a theological nature, such as on the incarnational intent of the gospel. Being treated in a kindly compassionate manner with a degree of forgiveness for our natural fragility and an understanding imagination being brought to our less impressive moments can be experienced as reassuring. Experiencing something, as a result of our actions or the actions of other, may have

more effect on our becoming more loving and compassionate than just receiving information that these are desirable virtues that we should develop.

Karen Armstrong has written on 12 steps that may be taken to develop a compassionate life in *Twelve steps to a compassionate life* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, a division of Random House; 2010). She also underlines the need for action with repeated practice rather than just receiving information. As Alain de Botton noted, we forget almost everything. Our enthusiasms and resolutions can be counted upon to fade like the stars at dawn. Nothing much sticks. We need to go back over things, maybe once a day, certainly once a week. Armstrong notes that impartial universal love is not something that can be developed overnight. It takes longer to reorientate our minds and hearts. This type of transformation is slow, undramatic and incremental. Each of her 12 steps builds on the disciplines practiced and the habits acquired in those that have gone before. The effect will be cumulative. She advises not to skip any of the steps because each one is an indispensable part of the process. Armstrong states that we should not leave a step until the recommended practices have become part of our daily routine. Each step asks more—and more—and more. Her experience is that if you follow the programme, step by step, you will find that you are beginning to see the world, yourself and other people in a different light. The chapter for each of the steps in the book is 5 to 14 pages long and there is not space here to do justice to the content of each step but the chapter headings for the steps are: 1. Learn about compassion; 2. Look at your own world; 3. Compassion for yourself; 4. Empathy; 5. Mindfulness; 6. Action; 7. How little we know; 8. How should we speak to one another?; 9. Concern for everybody; 10. Knowledge; 11. Recognition; and 12. Love your enemies.

As noted in the section on small groups in the webpages for the Methodist Church in the UK, early Methodist gatherings were called “societies.” John Wesley encouraged different kinds of small groups to

develop, so that both the leaders and the members of the societies could receive support and challenge in their faith. These groups, called “classes” and “bands” met regularly, and the idea was to be accountable to each other about how each person was living the Christian life. So people had to be very open and willing to be changed by the experience. In the twentieth century, it became less common for classes to meet in this way. However, recently, many Methodists have been trying to reclaim this tradition. The supportive small group has been found to be one of the most powerful ways for people to feel that they belong and to learn and grow. Many Methodist churches have home fellowships, Bible studies and house groups. Increasingly they are seeking in various ways to renew and expand the opportunities for Christian conversation about the things that matter. A leaflet called *Resurrecting the Classes* is available at:

[disc-new-resurrecting-the-classes-180610.pdf](#) ([methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk)).

*Resurrecting the Classes* explores the tradition of small groups in Methodist history, explains how they connect with the more recent development of cell church and gives lots of practical advice about doing small groups well.

Our parish has a tradition of exploring topics with small group and larger meetings as with the courses on Lenten studies, meditation studies, Explorers’ group, and Open Education meetings. Perhaps consideration could be given to a course based on Armstrong’s book of developing a compassionate life with a small group structure, either church or home-based. The UK pamphlet on cell meetings suggests the cell does not just meet at one home but meets in all the homes possible to spread the load of hosting the cell and encourages the gift of hospitality. The cells should start small (5–8) to allow growth and should not usually grow bigger than 14. One cell of 14 can multiply into two cells of seven. One format suggested is the 4W one with four different people leading the cell on 1. Welcome; 2. Worship; 3. Word; and 4. Witness. The Cell leader’s job is to see that the four W’s are done, not to do them themselves.

After John Wesley's Aldersgate experience on 24 May 1738 when his heart was "strangely warmed" and his decision in Bristol in 1739 to preach in the fields, the first seventy years of the Methodist movement were marked by remarkable growth. However by 1815 or so, the Class Meeting was being replaced by prayer meetings. By 1850 Methodism had begun to decline as a proportion of the English population. It has never regained neither its initial vigour nor its Class Meetings. Some churches have been re-thinking the whole way their church is structured, and have put small groups at the centre, through Cell Church. A cell member described their experience in a cell as: "Cell is a really good place for seeing my gifts developing and other people's gifts and talents are emerging. It's amazing! That the community is not just a meeting is really important—it develops genuine relationships. The smaller group is better than the larger previous group."

Should we as a parish, in assisting us to become more loving and compassionate, accept that the effects of information may be bolstered by experience and consider offering the chance to study further the twelve steps to a compassionate life suggested by Armstrong through a church or home-based small group structure?

Bruce Spittle