

BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY

Anne Bonnefin talks with Julian Archer & Andrea Putting

Anne: For several years you have been involved with the team that plans and organises Tiona Reunion - can you share a little about your involvement?

Julian: Wendy approached me many years ago to see whether I would join her on the organising committee. My immediate reaction was 'no I don't want the responsibility' but I after mulling it over for a few days I knew it was my time to step up and give back. I've been on the organising committee ever since. Each year I've taken on a bit more responsibility in the organising of reunion to the point that Jan, Dione and I are now very much partners sharing the responsibility equally.

Anne: What is it that motivates you?

Julian: Tiona Reunion is part of my soul. I've been every year of my life except 2. My mum went every year of her life, and dad went a lot growing up as well. Dad has given a lot of time to the campgrounds and reunion over many years. My nanna and granddad (Dave and Agnes Johnson) also went all their lives, and Granddad was involved in organising reunion a lot as well. So, it is a part of me! I couldn't imagine being anywhere else over Christmas and New Year. It bookends to my year in a way that enriches my soul and grounds me.

So, to answer your question, I'm motivated because I want Tiona Reunion Camp to keep going for as long as possible for selfish reasons (because I couldn't imagine my life without it) and because I want it to bless the lives of others like it has mine.

Anne: I'd like us to talk a little about the enduring principle Blessings of Community How do you see this lived out at Tiona Reunion?

Julian: Well, a big part of the reason I love it so much is the sense of community; you know that feeling you get (usually at the end of the week but sometimes after a moving service) of your heart overflowing with love and joy for others? You know that feeling of intense deep belonging and love? That feeling! I always feel it every year at some stage. Is there a better feeling in life?

Anne: What do you value most?

Julian: Well apart from the sense of community, it's also about the place. That moment at the end of Sunset Reflections when I walk down to the lake edge to watch the sunset – it makes me feel so whole, so joyous and at peace. Or when I go for a solitary walk on the beach at night and look at the Milky Way and just think FAR OUT!

And it is also about the fun. Gosh, I've had so much fun with friends over the years. So much laughter. Some stories I could tell...

And isn't it nice just to get back to basics and feel a part of nature? No TV. No internet. Replaced by beach, stars and critters.

I also really value the working relationship I have with Jan and Dione. We all work so well together and are so supportive of each other. We each have very different skill sets, so as a team we really complement each other. We also bring different perspectives, which strengthens us as a team. We've become very close over the years through being on the committee together.

Anne: How do you think we can create communities of Christ's peace where ever we gather?.... what values or elements do you think are most needed?

Julian: Love and inclusion. People just need a loving place to belong. It's really that simple.

Anne: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Julian: Everyone should come to our next Tiona Reunion at the end of 2022. And plan to be at the one following at the end of 2023 as it will be 100th anniversary of Tiona Reunion. And check out our website! <https://www.cofchrist.com.au/tionareunioncamp>



"When people come together and work together, amazing things can happen in the world."

Anne: For several years you have been involved in creating community both online and in person. Can you share briefly about a few of your initiatives?

Andrea: Chocolate and Coffee Day for Religious Harmony has been my starting place that opened my eyes to the importance of community to me and for me. For community to develop, people need to connect with each other. Chocolate and Coffee Breaks have evolved as a way for communities or groups to connect with each other. This allows them to grow together and create something of value. It has been an absolute joy to see new communities take on this initiative to introduce themselves to new people and build their community with a social impact purpose.

I have also been involved in other communities that have had to find new ways of connecting and staying together when the pandemic has pulled them apart.

Anne: What is it that motivates you?

Andrea: The idea of community really drives me. It is something that is embedded in everything I do. It is where we find a sense of worth and purpose. When people come together and work together, amazing things can happen in the world. For us to create the world we want to live in, we have to work together.

Anne: I'd like us to talk a little about the Enduring Principle Blessings of Community.

How do you see this lived out in the communities you are involved with? Can you share an example?

Andrea: In Melbourne, we have endured the longest and most lockdowns in the world over the past 2 years. People have been isolated, and depression and anxieties about the future have soared. Being involved in communities determined to keep their people together and support them through these times is where we have seen the real blessings of community. Reaching out to someone and sharing on a Zoom, may not be our ideal way of connecting. However, with the genuine intention of building and sustaining community, it can be effective. It has enabled us to feel not so alone. The connection of community with heartfelt intention has been essential for our survival.

It makes me think about and appreciate the blessings I have received from the communities in which I live

and breathe. Whether in-person or online, they make me who I am today.

I have been on courses during this time that has connected me with people from all over the world. A strong emphasis on people working together in small groups and allowing time to connect beyond just the given tasks has given rise to friendships, working relationships and communities.

Anne: What do you value most?

Andrea: I could say chocolate, coffee and conversation, as it really has opened up so much to me and helped me to discover what is so important to me. My top values are the worth of all persons and community. Everything in my life evolves from these. I value the diversity of people, their individuality, and the greater potential when they work together as one. It is powerful.

Anne: How do you think we can create communities of Christ's peace where ever we gather?... what values or elements do you think are most needed?

Andrea: Building community has 3 main components: Acceptance, Belonging and Contribution. When people feel accepted, find a sense of belonging, and an opportunity to contribute, they stick around. This is the foundation of community. Incorporating time for people to connect on a personal level and build relationships is the starting point of any community. It has been missing in many of the online opportunities that have arisen in the past couple of years. However, it is possible through careful planning to build-in real connections with lasting impact.

Anne: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Andrea: Chocolate and Coffee Day for Religious Harmony is coming up on the 15th of December. It is a great way to reach out to someone different to you and help them feel accepted for who they are. It is also an opportunity for us to open up to our broader community and show that we walk our talk accepting all for who they are. More details on how to get involved can be found on www.ChocolateandCoffeeBreaks.com