

| LOVE |

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BLESSINGS

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COMMUNITY



Old Fashioned Community

My husband Phill & I, and our two daughters (10 & 8) live in Albury on a suburban street that was subdivided in the 1950's. We live in an old weatherboard house. Many people on my street remember the man that built our house, the family he raised in it. My eldest daughter is in the same netball team as the granddaughter of the man that built our house. Her family now live around the corner, 10 houses away.

My sister lives two houses down the hill, on the corner of the block. Opposite her on all three corners are people I know from soccer, from work, through friends. On one corner is a family that lost their bunny a few years ago. It had a sleepover with our guinea pigs one night while we located the owner. Since that day, we drive slowly past their corner and wave hi, and the kids wonder how Flopsy is doing. We are more considerate of their driveway and conscious that they have kids moving in and out of the property.

Our area is very safe, full of families, and full of families all travelling to school together on a shared walking/bike track that snakes its way from our suburb to school, about 1km. We've been walking this route to school (and work) for years, and know many of the nanas that water their gardens early in the morning, the grandparents receiving their grandkids for daycare. The Dad's cycling their kids to school and the various characters that live along the path. It's a busy time of morning. We wave hello to the baristas, store owners that are opening their stores along the main street as we walk along each morning.

Now that Phill and I are working from home, the kids do this route on their own each morning, joining the river of families walking and riding to school. Last week, not more than half a block from home, my 10 year old came off her scooter, learning for the first time the limitations of brakes in the wet on a downhill. She was immediately tended to by our neighbours on the corner of the block, a nearly-retired couple that regularly look after their grandkids in the front yard, and were ready to help. The woman picked both kids up in her car and brought them home. Now, they have gone beyond a wave hello in the morning. She will ask, 'Hows your leg?' and my daughter is able to say 'Good - I played netball yesterday'... and the conversations begin.

On all four sides of our home are families with babies under 2 years. On all four sides are dogs. We have neither babies nor dogs, but we do have soundproofing. To be fair, we are loud in our own way, with musical instruments and enthusiastic weekend record-playing...We are taking precautions to not irritate, or be irritated by, our neighbours. We chat over the fence about our families, work, life... we talk about decisions we're making on our property that affects them. But we're all very different, we all have our own friendship circles. There is a boundary that is understood.

Across the street there used to be an elderly Greek lady that I used to visit. She passed away last year, but her son now lives there, and he lets me pick her olives each year and we share the harvest. (And some funny stories about his Mum!)

Communities develop organically, when we are present in them. When we physically participate, listen and allow people to have their own stories, their own lives and ways of doing things. But they also take a little bit of attention, a little bit of care, and a lot of forgiveness.

In an era where many of my communities are dispersed, online, or more 'subcultures' than communities, it has been really grounding for me to be part of a community that is tangible. It has been one of the great gifts of COVID to actually allow us to be physically present in our homes, in our local streets. To see our neighbourhood out walking, to stop on the bike path for a chat. To actually get an update in the flesh, not on a feed.

I have lived and participated in many different communities, and in those I felt worked well, there is a tolerance for all types, an acceptance that everyone needs to get along, to keep the peace. In digital communities it can be too easy to ostracise someone. Same in friendship groups, or any situation where the people in the group have a choice to be there or not.

When the choice is removed, when you've got who you've got, then you learn the real skills of accommodation, of appreciation, of acceptance, of celebrating the diversity, of just being where you are. You become connected by shared experience, shared place, mutual acceptance of the conditions you are in, shared endeavour to make the best of it.

We have been on our street for 5 years, we are the newest addition. Each year we add more names to our phone book. There has been an amazing sense of solidarity in the street this year as we've stood out the front together and looked at the bushfire smoke, chatted over the fence during lockdown, speculated about the fate of an undeveloped lot on our street, shared produce from our fruit trees, and worked at the human connections that were right in front of us.

Last night I had an asthma attack while walking home from town in front of a neighbours house. He was unpacking his truck. He got me a bottle of water, then we chatted. By the end of the conversation he'd made two phone calls, located the owner of the vacant house on our street, and organised it as a rental for us to move into while we renovate next year. He's the newest addition to my phone.

We can embrace the communities we are already in by accepting and celebrating who is around us, finding real ways in which to connect to each other, while allowing space for difference.

**ANNIE
FALCKE
ALBURY**

What essential elements help build community?

When we arrived at Beagle Bay on the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome, Aboriginal Elders asked us to sit in a half circle around a small fire. A 'Welcome to Country' ceremony followed. Words of traditional language were spoken, and stories of ancestors and sacred land were shared. A digeridoo played as we were invited to be cleansed by smoke from the fire. Then hands were warmed through the flames and laid on us to offer welcome and blessing. I found the whole experience profoundly personal and spiritual.

I was visiting several remote Aboriginal communities with a group of senior executives from business and government. Each community we visited had their own unique way of welcoming us yet there were similar elements to each. Those elements have also been a part of my life journey in family and the faith community.

The first essential element of community building for me is welcome. What made the experience at Beagle Bay so moving was the warmth of welcome we received. In early life my parents and church community modelled that same warmth. Our home was a safe place of love where the visitor and stranger were always welcomed. Mum and dad would often have visiting ministry stay with us, invite people for a meal or offer to pick someone up who needed a lift to church. My parents 'fostered' two teenagers for a time as they sought to overcome times of hardship. When my grandfather and uncle died in a car accident that also seriously injured my parents, the church community took me and my sisters into their homes.



We were welcomed as family.

The next key element for me is acceptance. Our family moved between several capital cities over my formative years. Wherever we moved the church community was my extended family. They accepted me for who I was and helped raise me. Along with my parents they taught me Christ like values that modelled love, forgiveness and respect. My parents encouraged us to accept people from a variety of backgrounds and to resist being judgmental. I have tried to model that behavior in my own life and family.

Shared values are another key element of building community. The church institution has been birthed and sustained through the shared values of its founders and members. Over time sadly some have found difficulty in reevaluating our beliefs while still affirming the values that underpin our movement. I have always enjoyed the exchange of ideas with others in the faith community and work environment. While not accepting some others beliefs, I have found connection and community with others outside our denomination who share similar values.

A final element important to me in any community is sacred story and symbol. A strength of Aboriginal culture is their ritual and sacred story telling. This is true of every faith community too as they celebrate heritage, ancestors and the sacredness of life and creation. For me this element points us to purpose and identity beyond ourselves and helps connect to people throughout history. Our enduring principles 'the worth of all persons' and 'sacredness of creation' are an invitation to connect with all humankind in one sacred community. Where division and separation are promoted, we see the fragmenting of community and society in general. Sacred stories and symbols shared respectively promote healthy communities of love, joy, hope and peace.

To be in community is a precious and sacred gift and this 'belonging' helps shape our identity. I have no doubt every person craves community, it is in our DNA! Section 161 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 3c provides an important reminder of its importance:

"Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called. Be courageous and visionary, believing in the power of just a few vibrant witnesses to transform the world. Be assured that love will overcome the voices of fear, division and deceit."

I pray I will be faithful to the example of others in my life as I seek to promote the Community of Christ.

**PETER
LONSDALE
PERTH**

♥♥ THE ULTIMATE TOUCHSTONE OF FRIENDSHIP IS NOT IMPROVEMENT, NEITHER OF THE OTHER NOR OF THE SELF. THE ULTIMATE TOUCHSTONE IS WITNESS, THE PRIVILEGE OF HAVING BEEN SEEN BY SOMEONE AND THE EQUAL PRIVILEGE OF BEING GRANTED THE SIGHT OF THE ESSENCE OF ANOTHER, TO HAVE WALKED WITH THEM AND TO HAVE BELIEVED IN THEM AND SOMETIMES JUST TO HAVE ACCOMPANIED THEM FOR HOWEVER BRIEF A SPAN, ON A JOURNEY IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCOMPLISH ALONE. ♥♥

David Whyte



We can be the spirit that nurtures community.

A community has something in common. It may be locality, values, beliefs, age or just genetics. I have felt part of a community at rural Swan Creek, Grafton Community of Christ, South Grafton High School, Ulmarra tennis club, Newcastle University, Newcastle Zion's League, Mountain Hut Leadership camp, Reunions, Temora Musical Society, Years 3, 4 and 5 classes at Temora Public School, Temora Uniting Church Kids Club, Temora Uniting Church Bible Study Group, Patches of Heaven(work), Yamba yoga group and an environmental group in Yamba. These are physical communities. I also have a family community, a faith community, a quilting community, a friendship community and a spiritual community. They may overlap one another. I am not an island.

Did I build any of these communities or did I just sidle into them? Both. If I started a group, like a kids club or classes, I could set the rules of engagement. A group that is long-established has its spoken and silent rules that you try to fit in with. Are all communities healthy? I would say no.

Sometimes I have tried to sidle into a group but felt pushed out or unwanted. As this was very uncomfortable emotionally for me, it has motivated me to acknowledge newcomers and try to make them feel that they really don't have to audition to become part of this group and that there is room for them. It's easy to say all people have 'worth', but to ask for someone's opinion or let them participate to their level of ability in your group is signaling to them and the rest of your group that they really do have worth.

In my latest transition to 'active retirement' in my fifth location in NSW, I had to find my new 'tribe'.

My yoga tribe was born after my teacher ordered

me to "open up my heartspace" instead of "put your shoulders back". And as the knots of upheaval from my past life were worked out of my muscles by a masseuse who loved the environment, I found my environment-loving tribe. Both these tribes are made up of people of differing ages, personalities, beliefs and backgrounds. Their common thread is that if you love what they love and value, you are welcome.

As I reflect, I realize that our world is increasingly being broken into more and more micro communities. Even within a house, a family may be separated and rarely comes together. Preschool/kindies, infant and primary schools, junior and senior high are generally separate entities. Universities and Aged Care facilities stand alone. But what joy is there when guileless young ones interact with our honoured elder citizens? What valuable knowledge and skills are passed on by a mentor?

Churches can be the perfect host for communities to thrive. We are the church. We can be the spirit that nurtures community. A friend once commented that churches are often made up of misfits. How often do we think of ourselves as being misfits? Isn't everyone else the misfit and I and my friends are the normal ones? Our ability to see the thing that is our 'oneness' with our community of misfits is the driver of our healthiest interactions. In our acknowledgement of oneness is our recognition of the worth of all other beings. Otherwise, I too have no worth. But I know I am worthy as my most valued community has told me I am.

**HELEN
GRANLEESE
YAMBA**

A perspective on community

In a recent Good Weekend article in the Sydney Morning Herald, Penelope Seidler, architect, accountant, and wife of the late Harry Seidler, was asked if she was religious. She answered that she was not, leading the interviewer to ask “if not from religion, where do you get community?” She responded with “the architecture community; the arts community. I’ve got plenty of community”.

Perhaps more than a little overused, “community” has become one of our contemporary society’s buzzwords, along with others such as “connectedness”, “well-being” and even “spirituality” with advice and exhortations about the importance of ensuring that we are all well connected in our communities to ensure our physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs are being met.

Very recently, as our lives have become more localised, some people seem to have found solace through online communities in different forms. My brother-in-law, Steve, sent through a link to his community orchestra’s online performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7 (strange to see him in 2 of the screens: playing viola in one and cello in another!) But for me, the online version hasn’t been a very satisfactory or relevant experience of community, although I did do an online German course through Sydney Community College, in lieu of the unavailable classroom version, and become part of a very small community of 3 students and an online tutor for 8 weeks, which was unexpectedly enjoyable.

Where I have been fortunate is in belonging to a rowing club that has been able to remain open for some level of activity over the past few months, despite the restrictions. It is one of the few that managed to do this through careful planning, good management and generally a high level of compliance from its members to the new requirements. It has enabled me to continue having some of those other

aspects of wellbeing met: connecting at an individual level with others, even while other facets of my life, like most people, continued in online-only form for a while, including work. For some years I have been a committee member of this club, regular competition rower, and have appreciated the social aspects of weekends away at regional regatta events. Of course, this all requires time and commitment - to crews for training, to the committee for meetings, governance and planning, to the well used boats for ongoing maintenance. Like any community, the rowing club has its pettiness and bickering from time to time. Inevitably some people feel they are better rowers and more deserving than others - of the better boats and of the fitter, stronger crews when competing and training. Which of course means that others will have the opposite. It’s often not easy to ensure that ideals of fairness and generosity are lived up to in any context where competition is the dominant theme. But perhaps unsurprisingly, as many communities have found, club members have generally worked together cooperatively and patiently during these recent unusual conditions for the benefit of all.

My family like to unflatteringly call my involvement in rowing “the cult of rowing”! Perhaps others have their own version of a “cult” that has helped them through difficult times in their lives. My rowing club isn’t a perfect community, but sometimes out on the water early in the morning, either alongside others rowing single sculls, or now that we can again, rowing in crew boats, I’m reminded that it is worth persevering with that particular community.

**JANINE
WOOD
SYDNEY**



Photo - Janine Wood - Sydney

♥♥ COMMUNITY. SOMEWHERE, THERE ARE PEOPLE TO WHOM WE CAN SPEAK WITH PASSION WITHOUT HAVING THE WORDS CATCH IN OUR THROATS. SOMEWHERE A CIRCLE OF HANDS WILL OPEN TO RECEIVE US, EYES WILL LIGHT UP AS WE ENTER, VOICES WILL CELEBRATE WITH US WHENEVER WE COME INTO OUR OWN POWER. COMMUNITY MEANS STRENGTH THAT JOINS OUR STRENGTH TO DO THE WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. ARMS TO HOLD US WHEN WE FALTER. A CIRCLE OF HEALING. A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS. SOMEPLACE WHERE WE CAN BE FREE. ♥♥

Starhawk, in Spiritual Literacy, p. 471



I am now in my 20th year of being an employee of Community of Christ. I remember the day I was told I had the job, because it was a day of elation and it was also very liberating in a lot of ways. My then supervisor told me to think of my role as not only within the walls of the church, but to Pastor my Community. That has remained my sense of call ever since.

I live in many ways, in a small community compared to some who live in the city. Forster Tuncurry and the Great Lakes Area has a population of 34,400 people and yet it is still an area where you can walk down the street and see lots of people you know, and have shared with in different settings, certainly that is my experience. I feel like I share in a number of different communities within the wider community and some of those overlap into another and as a consequence we can support and be supported by one another. We build relationships that enrich our lives.

Having served as Pastor at both Tuncurry and Green Cathedral Ministries has given me a platform to move out into the community, through sacramental services, weddings, blessings of children, also funerals and memorials. Our Community Choir too has reached out to many. It is absolutely a community within a community, we share something very special as a group, we take that with us into the wider community and we are all blessed. Our communities include Nursing Homes, Service Groups like Quota, Pink Ladies, Rotary, Carols by Candlelight, Retirement Villages, Shopping Centres, and more. My role as Chaplain at our local hospital means I also get to meet lots of people who share their story and often their faith or yes sometimes their lack thereof. It makes for interesting conversations sometimes. I also have opportunity to speak at community events and meet people from different walks and life experiences and this blesses my life.

When I recently found the above quote on

community, I thought yes!!! this is the kind of community I want to be part of.

In my experience building community doesn't happen overnight, it has been about growing relationships, being available, being authentic, sharing in the good and the not so good times, listening, and as we do these things, something happens, we grow, we connect, we experience something beyond ourselves. It is my belief that we have to be open to the fact that as people we are all different, a melting pot of life lessons and experiences, that make up who we are, and how we are, as a people and that is OK, matter of fact it makes life way more interesting.

I think within us, there is a deep need to belong, at least there is in me. I enjoy being part of and belonging to a community, I absolutely love belonging to Community of Christ, and I love sharing about what this community means to me, with others. Not everyone wants to join of course, but every now and then you get someone who says, "I'd like what you're having, I'd like to belong, I'd like to hear your story and share with you mine. I would like to be part of who you are and who you proclaim, I want to be part of the community " and we celebrate those times and say Hallelujah! There are other times too, when we might be able to reach out and support someone else, or some other group, for no other reason than they are someone of worth in the sight of God, they have a need we can help with, and in my opinion, that's what it means to be community, and within community comes friendship, comes connection, comes possibility, comes change, comes togetherness, comes hope.

Praise Be to God!!

**WENDY
BALLARD
FORSTER**