

Christ's Mission is Our Mission

by Anne Sutton

Brisbane congregation has been involved in outreach to others in our community since 2003. This ministry started in the local caravan park and now provides food products to attendees through our Foodbank program at Tuesday Connect in the Brisbane Congregation.

I would like to share some of the ways we have been able to encourage and provide ministry to attendees through this Foodbank program:

- Sahar a refugee from Afghanistan via Iran has a family of three. Sahar was referred to us by Foodbank last year She now helps as a volunteer to bag the food for other attendees. She and her family attended our Christmas worship in mid December.
- Danielle with two small children who was in desperate need of food support comes each week to obtain food.
- Shirley an older local lady who cannot drive but has children and grandchildren dependant on her for food. We deliver food to her each week.

This ministry is Christ's ministry in our community and our volunteers feel that in serving others their own lives are enriched.

One might ask what are the prerequisites for engaging in this ministry? From my experience I have found that being willing to listen to another's story without judgment and focussing on the positive aspects of their story permits the one telling their story to experience a sense of worthiness.

Our congregation has had to adapt and be flexible in how it serves and ministers to the attendees of Tuesday Connect. Gathering around a cuppa and chat followed by reflection (usually a Ted talk) and discussion has been put on hold for now due to COVID and we distribute food only from a safe distance outside.

Christ's message is that each individual is loved unconditionally and our response, as disciples, should be to endeavour to see that spark of the divine in each one and encourage them to grow and realise their potential. I have found that maintaining contact via phone calls and texts to enquire after a person's wellbeing has been most helpful during these COVID times.

Such action takes time and patience, however over the years that I have been involved in this outreach program some amazing growth in several lives has occurred. "How you make others feel about themselves says a lot about you!"



Caring

by Shell de Mol

When it comes to caring about others, in truth, I am a mixed bag. I'm not good at keeping in contact with people, for starters. And when I do reach out, although I mean well, my attempt to care can sometimes come out wrong. In other ways, however, caring about others and the world is something that matters greatly to me.

On a personal level, I get a lot of opportunities for this in my work on the railway, meeting people from all walks of life. When people are having a hard time, I know that small gestures don't solve everything, but kindness and compassion are important.

When I worked as station staff, I remember someone alighting from the train with the biggest grin on his face. I commented on how happy he looked and he replied "I'm the happiest person in the world. I've just been released from prison today!" While being glad for him I also really felt for him, because I had heard how difficult it was to rebuild your life after leaving prison. Sure enough, there weren't many opportunities for him and he soon started living rough. It wasn't a lot (far more was needed), but I started cooking extra food and bringing nutritious meals from home for him.

When we moved house and had more space, I bumped into an acquaintance who was without a home, and invited her to stay temporarily, free food and board, to save while looking for other options. This turned into a few months and as time went on we began to understand she had extremely complex needs far beyond what we could assist with. Over time we found some services to assist (highly recommended by others that had used them), but beyond that could not do more as we were starting to feel unsafe ourselves. I share this to highlight that care can often be very complicated and messy. Sometimes what you do is not enough. I still think it's worth doing what you can for as long as you can, as long as you practice self care also.

Sometimes care of a person unfortunately does result in neglecting others or your own care. It can mean reaching a point where you make the uncomfortable choice to change your focus to vital self care regardless of others' needs. For those in extremely difficult positions that is so much more easily said than done, but just like safety instructions on an aeroplane to put your own oxygen mask on before assisting others, so too is self care critical for your own wellbeing to be in more of a position to care about/for others.

It is worth noting here that many people need care due to systemic failures - inadequate mental health services, a welfare system that keeps people in poverty, unaffordable housing, unfair laws, a society focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation and prevention and so on.

To care about more people I think we need to change the system. Caring can mean to be political. Including lobbying our relevant MP for change, making submissions to government bodies when they are open to community consultation, and especially, voting for a party that has a track record of caring about social justice issues.

With climate change, biodiversity loss, animal exploitation and other major world crises, the world is crying out for care at a more impactful level.

The Good Samaritan parable teaches us radical care. I took that to heart fairly early on, but that can feel overwhelming. To help me not feel that way, I take one step at a time as I can manage it. The two expressions that encourage me are "Think globally, act locally", and "don't let perfect be the enemy of good". Our actions matter, one way or another.

Often that has meant challenging my comfort zone, and making choices that might seem completely radical to others. However, I think back to the time of legalised human slavery and how radical it was to choose not to own slaves and to work to abolish it (and how other people thought slavery was okay because it was convenient to think that and because general society accepted it). I wonder what future people will think about the choices of humankind today with justice issues, when they look back to this time. That thought keeps me accountable.

For the planet, other humans and other species, my personal choices (amongst others) have been:

- Divesting from financial institutions that support fossil fuel and other harmful industries;
- Following and supporting campaigns like Give a Dam that work to protect nature;
- Planting native plants in our yard to increase food and shelter for native butterflies, bees, birds and other wildlife and strengthen ecosystems on which we rely.
- Trying to buy local as much as possible to reduce our carbon footprint and support local businesses;
- Reducing our participation in animal exploitation, land clearing and biodiversity loss by eating plant based meals (in Australia the biggest cause of deforestation is clearing for pastoral land. Globally, land clearing and usage to grow crops like soy, primarily for animal agriculture, is also a problem);
- Choosing fair trade to support workers and communities;
- Choosing not to have children.

The first people to show me what tangible care actually meant, were my parents and you, my church community. You first inspired me to care about major social justice issues (including environmental justice) and to act for change. This connection to Community of Christ continues to shape my actions today and for this I am very thankful.