



creating connection

by Marshall Leaver



building inclusive & meaningful communities

Drummoyne Branch has been running an alternative program to our regular Sunday worship services starting mid-2023 with plans to continue to mid-2024. These have been held on the fourth Sunday of each month with an emphasis on the physical, spiritual and social needs of our steadfast congregation. This initiative was a natural progression and adaptation developing from the work of Anne Bonnefin, Robert Thompson and I with the Weekend of Wellbeing (WoW) programs that have been running since 2017.

Creating Connection/ Mind, Body, Spirit starts with a Tai Chi lessons for 45 minutes. These have been led by Master Aaron Khor of the Australian Academy of Tai Chi and the gentle movements are designed to restore energy and vitality and whilst we have had diverse ages present in this program was also incorporated the notion of being appropriate to our seniors group.

Master Aaron comments on our classes:

'The Tai Chi sessions at Drummoyne church are very engaging and aim to improve health and well-being. Those attending learn about their bodies, whilst enjoying the interaction and fun when doing partner work. The group's progress in learning is great as the movements are so easy to perform and most do not have any difficulty.'

Jan & Ray Haworth shared:

'Attending the Drummoyne Congregation Tai Chi has been helpful for us with the gentle exercise, flexibility and balance as well as a greater awareness of our breathing as Aaron explains the different movements - it helps us focus and concentrate. We have really enjoyed these special times shared together.'

Val Morley joined in the Tai Chi and her perspective was:

'Too often we rely on words to fulfill our worship yet this activity was certainly a form of worship. It was wonderful to experience the peace and serenity that flowed within this endeavour.'

From Lisa Godwin:

'Paul will come to this, he loves to connect with everyone and the Tai Chi is great for his Multiple Sclerosis. It's a wonderful initiative.'

Pat Harrisson shared:

'I began learning Tai Chi over ten years ago and attended classes weekly until Covid interrupted that routine. The benefits I had gained were lost to a certain extent, but resuming the practice now as part of the mind, body, spirit emphasis is something that I really feel to be of benefit to every aspect of those three things. When we delve into the spiritual aspects of life and sharing with the group it is so meaningful and beneficial to me and our group is expanding as we share together.'

Following each Tai Chi sessions our group sits together to explore ways to investigate inspiring ideas for the mind and the spirit. The format is typically sharing poetry followed by a reflective conversation on a particular theme. These sessions are inspired to pursue our Enduring Principles and have included:

- First Nations worldviews and ways to build cultural sharing and understandings.
- Conversation with our Youth Leader to understand the needs and ways of connection which younger generations use in their lives and their faith connections.
- Understanding adversity and ways to resolve these issues in our lives.
- Urban life and the impact of loneliness.
- How to pursue peace in our lives and in the world.

From the Mind Spirit session on adversity Lisa Godwin shared:

'It is so important to consider holistically the connection between mind and body. Through my research and work I'm aware of the scientific research into the role of the polyvagal nerve which identifies the link between experiences of trauma and the impact these have on the body. To appreciate that trauma can sit in the body and have real health impacts delivers significant understandings which can shape ways of healing in both children and in adults.'

Pam and Allan Law shared:

'Tai Chi for Sunday morning at Drummoyne! What's happening? That's not 'our thing' instead of worship! Is this what God wants?' This was our initial feeling as the suggestion was presented for a trial period to be held on the 4th Sunday of each month. However, we did choose to support the enthusiasm of those who initiated the beginnings of a programme that was to include care for the Body, Mind and Spirit.

"We'll see how it goes..." we thought. We are so blessed that we did!

As we continued to share in this evolving activity, we have experienced the joy of witnessing the growth that is happening in this Sunday' morning worship with a difference. Gods' Spirit shines through each participant, from their experience of sharing in the Body, Mind and Spirit activities, to our fellowship morning tea. This growth can spread into the community as our outreach options continue to evolve. 'Where will God lead us next?' Let us listen and be ready to follow.'

Comments from Janine Wood:

'Mind Body Spirit is an evolving ministry but no less valuable than more usual forms, and offers us new opportunities to expand our connection within

our local community as well as globally, under the *Creating Connection* banner. Tai Chi with participants aged from 20's to 90's and the reflections period following has been exploratory: both an experiment and a different expression of being a congregation. It has allowed us to invite friends to a non-judgemental setting and explore challenging community and global issues in a reflective manner through poetry, music and discussion, under the skilful coordination of Anne and Marshall. My strong conviction is that we need to continue our journey of engaging with our local community in this and other ways as we grapple with what we really have to say, and what our response will be to the important issues facing the world today.'

One poem that was shared to deliver a First Nations worldview was:

Be Still

by Miriam Rose Ungenmerr-Baumann

Be still, wait, do not rush things.
 Let life happen by itself.
 Work with it, trust in the spirituality and wisdom
 that is around you.
 With confidence, we wait for God too.
 His time is 'right time'.
 Wait for Him to make His Word clear.
 'Right time', gentle time, don't rush.
 Sometimes waiting is painful.
 Sometimes it's a struggle.
 But, circle is always turning.
 'Right time' will come.
 Be patient.
 Be still.
 Listen.



The reflective sharing in small group conversations has had many positive and thought provoking contributions and really demonstrates the trust and love that is shared in our congregation. We often close this session with a prayer or blessing.

Participants were then welcome to share in sustainably sourced refreshments: coffee, teas and snacks, with the opportunity to review and discuss the morning sessions and share in news from our daily lives. In 2023 the money raised from donations for morning tea are given to the youth program to support their activities. This year donations help with the costs for our Tai Chi instruction

Creating Connection at Drummoyne is a different way of coming together on a Sunday morning. It is church, but maybe not as we know it. The congregation is dealing with the loss of John Taylor, our Pastor and with a group that is ageing it was felt we might explore different ways of programming that utilised both professional expertise and work with the strengths of our current group as well as reaching out and supporting the youth in our network. This program has run for 9 months and we are conducting an ongoing review of our programs and also considering future directions for the branch. Our building is very large and is also heritage listed and there are significant challenges with maintenance and general upkeep – though we have recently certainly made real progress in that respect. We are exploring options of hiring out part of our facilities again and also considering ideas and proposals for conversion or development of the space that would include the branch retaining a presence in Drummoyne. Like so many branches of the Community of Christ we are dealing with existential realities on a range of levels, however, in the spirit of transformation currently being enacted in the wider church community we are exploring opportunities and juggling with what might be conceivable for the future life of the congregation.

Drummoyne is a much loved space and place of worship and we respect the vision of the builders who have come before us, yet we are challenged with how to utilise that legacy and make it work for our current and future community life.

Creating Connection, began as a network of inclusive Community of Christ communities across Canada that share in authentic conversation, promoting meaningful activities, fostering holistic wellness practices, and fostering compassionate action. At Drummoyne we are working to expand this vision within Australia.