

Leanne Moore talks to Anne Bonnefin about her life, faith, Community of Christ and art.

Anne

Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

Leanne

Well I'll start with some family background for those who don't know me. Daisy and Allen Velt are my grandparents on my Mum's side. Allen was a Patriarch in Melbourne and then later Wingham; and on my Dad's side, my great grandparents Edith and Joseph Barkus built and were the first pastors of the Buranda Church in Brisbane. My Dad, Malcolm Nugent spent much of his church life in Brisbane, growing his vision of Koonjewarre Campgrounds. My Mum, Valmai and Dad were my role models for the power of faith, prayer, love and forgiveness in their lives. I met Wade Moore at a Mountain Hut Leadership Camp and the rest is history. I was ordained a priest in 1990 and a year later moved to Townsville with Wade. We have 3 amazing adult children, Corey, Emily and Bradley... and I love them to bits.

I am a teacher by profession, working in state primary schools in Brisbane and then Townsville since 1986. I spent most of my time in classrooms, then moved into other roles such as Learning Support, Literacy Coaching and Acting Head of Curriculum. My personal mission as a teacher was to make a difference in every student's life. I wanted my students to become the best people they could be, and I tried to be a creative, happy, safe and stable anchor in their lives. I believed that God had placed each student in my class for a reason and it was my job to find out what it was.

Since 2016, I have been on sick leave for Chronic Migraine with Aura, Functional Neurological Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder. There are more, but those are the main ones.

Anne

How do you connect with Community of Christ?

Leanne

As a family, we went to Tiona Reunions every second

year as Wade's work roster allowed. The kids went to Children's Camps at Tiona, and then to youth camps. All 3 kids were fortunate to be able to go to IYF and Spec and they have gone on to support Community Plus events. We received the Australian Herald from some special sponsors and from the Australian Mission and some worship CDs... and I was able to attend this year's Women's Retreat. That was so special.

At home, I would play hymns on the piano and sing and as Emily grew older, she was able to play and sing with me. I know the boys were singing too, but somewhere else in the house, playing it cool. I shared my faith with my family and made sure they knew when I had had a God experience. Wade and I did the best we could, living in Townsville, so far away from any congregation. We did attend the Uniting Church for a few years which really cemented for us how beautifully individual our church was. I remember David Judd would ring us regularly to keep in touch and when our family was needing prayers, Wendy Ballard was always there for us. Drummoyne congregation sent us their congregational news each month and Wingham Church helped us out immensely when we were in need.

Now there are so many on-line choices, I have to pace myself as too much screen time sensory overloads my brain and I become very unwell. This is causing me some dilemmas as to where to focus my attention, but it is a wonderful problem to have. We get the Daily Bread Blog and Church news and I have been attending Sue Palmer's EAT, STUDY and PRAY sessions on Tuesday night, because God made it abundantly clear to me on a plane back from Women's Retreat that I needed to know my scriptures more deeply. A priest from another church sat beside me and immediately asked me which Church I belonged to, and then said I needed to join his Church if I wanted my soul saved. I inwardly said, "Challenge accepted, wish Ben and Sue were here, and ... God be with me and help me to speak clearly and be understood!" I was able to hold my ground, but the effort took its toll on me physically

and Wade had to push the wheelchair and carry the bags the rest of the way home.

Anne

What does this connection mean to you?

Leanne

The connection to church has been my saving grace.

While I was abled, it did not matter to me as much that we were not physically connected because I was living, acting upon and working with my faith, trying to listen to God when He was speaking to me. I would fill up spiritually and have healing prayers at reunion and then come back to Townsville, and occasionally catch up online with World Church and read the Australian Herald.

Becoming disabled has reminded me how much the people and their testimonies, the teachings of Jesus' sacrifice and God's love, the heart-felt prayers and our scriptures are the woven thread of my life. Connection to our faith community is like breathing to me – vital. It gives me the strength to face my life and its many challenges. It nourishes my soul, and strengthens and deepens my faith.

Anne

Could you share a little about your faith journey.

Leanne

Well... I first knew God loved me when I was baptised at 8 in the church font at Aspley, and I didn't drown. I was afraid of putting my face under the water at the time.

When I was 15, I experienced the hand of God touching my side and protecting me from the car that was about to T-Bone me. I woke up on the other side of the road facing the stop sign my driver went through, gasping for air, but only experiencing deep bruising on my left hip. Both cars were right-offs and my car door was crushed into the gear box. I had to be pulled out through the driver's door. I have asked myself every day since, "Why was I saved... and what does God want me to do with my life?" Interesting aside is that the passenger in the other car that hit me is the father of Corey's fiancé, Emma. I know that God has great plans for the two of them.

My faith has been tested at times... I had been admitted to the Mater for an emergency hysterectomy after losing 2 L of blood over- night and collapsing in the shower. I was lying in bed, connected to a drip and the nurse was helping me with toileting. Her name was Mary and while she waited for me, she asked me about my faith and if I ever talked to God and did He talk back? I said all the time, and she asked why she shouldn't ring someone now and tell them I heard voices and have me admitted to the psyche ward? I remember thinking how bizarre, but I can't remember what I said now ... my

blood count was 60, but apparently my response was enough. I never saw her again in the week that I was in hospital... and I often wonder if I just imagined her or she was an angel.

'Be Still and Know that I am God' is a mantra for me and just recently I felt myself compelled to stand at the side door in our house, listening to and watching our neighbour's violent argument. While standing there, suddenly I saw the man pin his wife to a door with his arm and heard her screaming. From out of nowhere came a very loud, forceful, clear voice, asking if the two of them were okay. It interrupted the moment and the fighting stopped. I was very surprised that the strong clear voice had been mine because I was feeling very anxious at the fighting and my speech had been faint and stilted beforehand.

Anne

How has your faith helped you navigate life? Can you share a little about overcoming anxiety and fear?

Leanne

In my Patriarchal Blessing, God promised me that when I needed Him all I had to do was ask Him to 'Stand by me' and He would be there... sounds like a song, doesn't it? Well... I have tested that promise ... often ... and I know that God has stood by me every single time. I know that God will be there for me and that has given me the confidence to step out in faith and meet my fears head on.

I have Generalised Anxiety Disorder, including panic attacks. I have high-functioning anxiety as I have been successful in my profession, and used coping strategies to live a 'normal' existence. These coping strategies included being thorough and organised with back up plans for my back up plans... and asking God to stand by me, especially in times of conflict. I am an introvert by nature, and so I need time to myself to recharge my social battery, and singing praise songs was my go-to strategy. I was in denial for a long time about having anxiety, but God knew and hence His promise to me.

I have plenty of scary moments in my new disabled life where I can have severe migraine pain and pass out for 3 hours; be paralysed for up to 12 hours; have multiple non-epileptic seizures in a day, choke on my food, or forget the steps in how to brush my teeth. In 30 mins, I can go from walking with a stick, to pushing my walker, to being pushed in a wheelchair. My loss of independence, speech and language affects me the most, emotionally. God is here in these moments with me, answering my prayers and keeping me calm and safe.

Anne

Tell me about why you became interested in exploring your creativity through art? How does it help you?



Leanne

My favourite form of therapy so far has been art therapy. I knew that I liked to be creative, but it wasn't until I stopped working and attended art therapy that I discovered that being creative is necessary for me to be me. Being able to 'let it flow' in the moment has been the total opposite to my perfectionism, and I have been amazed at some of the pieces I have created. My art therapist is a gem and watches how I go about tackling the problems that come up as I work my way through the piece, often it looks nothing like the picture I started with in my head, and I have learnt that that is okay. I love the chance to sit with others in similar or worse situations, working on our pieces and sharing our experiences. It is so helpful to know that I am not alone.

I belong to a group called FND Australia Support Services and I have shared my art with them. It is so special to make physical a disorder that is invisible by capturing our experiences in art. One of my pictures was used on the bottom of a published NSW Mental Health Report for FND and another is about to be used in a book for newly diagnosed FND patients, along with my story.

Anne

Tell us about your Turtle painting. How did you create it? What does it say to you?

Leanne

I was looking at a site on Facebook called 'Paint by Numbers' and saw the turtle, I thought I could save myself some money and draw it freehand, and I was quite pleased with how it turned out [another thing I learnt was ok at art therapy]. Instead of using acrylics, I used watercolours which I love. I used the Fb photo as inspiration, but I generally let the colour choice happen... still pinching myself that I did that... and very humbled that it is being featured this month.

The turtle is me... I have always identified with hiding in my shell, being anxious and afraid, being a loner, and being slow to process situations and come up with an answer. I am finally working my way now towards the light from the depths of the sea where I have been hiding in isolation; hiding from people, fear, myself, life in general. This is the next phase of my life and what happens when I break out through the water is ... well it's the exciting next chapter.

Anne

You have shared a little about overcoming your anxiety and fear what guidance do you have for others going through anxiety or fear at this time of world crisis?

Leanne

I live in self-isolation all the time, but this Coronavirus means now I can't even go out on weekends. I cope by writing a TO DO list for the day, especially when my anxiety is high and I am fusing with my thoughts

rather than observing, noting and sorting. It stops me from running around in circles, starting lots but completing nothing. Having projects to do, something to work towards is vital. Art and gardening are two of my favourites at the moment.

Having a purpose is profoundly important, so I connect with my FND group on Facebook on a regular basis and help support newly diagnosed patients. Leanne Johnson keeps me busy by setting me art tasks for Women's Retreat each year. I try to meditate each day. I find my best form of meditation is while I am painting, but breathing and mindfulness, being present in the moment, are super important too. You can practise mindfulness while washing up or eating even. There are great meditation sites available. I started with Headspace, but I am now listening to Oprah and Deepak meditations... brilliant and free until May. Keeping in contact with friends and family is also super important. Having a friend like Leanne Johnson who I can giggle with, who understands my silliness and still loves me has helped me to keep my light shining.... And don't forget to exercise. I do hydrotherapy in my pool, walk to my letter box and chair dance while watching a Body Groove video. Movement is good for your mental and physical health.

I have a distraction technique that works really well for me; it's called Tapping [EFT] and it helps to change the way my brain is thinking and interrupts the loops I can get into. It works really well for children too, and is often used with PTSD warriors. Laughter, singing, sharing on Facebook, self-care, self-acceptance, self-compassion and of course talking to God are also high on my list.

Anne

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Leanne

Yes...some words President Stephen Veazey said this week that have stuck with me -

God wants people who live by faith. No matter how hard it becomes the righteous shall live by their faith. When I am thinking 'enough already', 'no more, I can't take it!', 'God are you listening?', 'Do you even care?' that is when I need to stand still at my gate, positioned to watch and wait, to hear what God will say to me and be ready to do what God will need me to do.

Self-isolation is the perfect opportunity to be still... and find out who we really are and what is truly important to us. It is okay to be anxious.... We are never alone. Have faith.