**Meaning of community**

By Janet Soo

Approximately 10 years ago I was “adopted” by some residents of a local retirement village.

I would often see a group of them having coffee at the nearby shopping centre.

Our friendship grew and I would stop for a coffee with them. They then asked if I would like to join them on Friday nights for their evening meal.

About 90 to 100 people gather in the community centre each Friday. There is a roster system for serving meals and cleaning up afterwards and years ago I volunteered as a helper and continue to do so - it’s a great way to get to know people.

I was also invited to their weekly devotions service at the village. The first time I attended I was “blown away” seeing 70 people attending the service.

The idea for this service was started many years ago and the local clergy are happily rostered to give a message during the service. A team of pianists take turns accompanying our singing and once a month an organist and pianist join forces for an absolutely wonderful sound.

During the service a report is given on those who are unwell and those who may be in hospital. Two of the ladies keep in contact and visit, when possible, those who are unwell.

There is a different worship leader each week and I’ve recently been asked to do this.

What a privilege it is in this community-minded village.

**Reflection:**

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

**Who is responsible?**

By Bill Pugh

The recent news of the threat to use a banned bomb in the Ukraine shocked the world.

How could anyone do that? Is the designer and maker responsible? ls the soldier who planted the bomb? Is the officer who gave the order? Is the dictator who started the war? It’s very difficult to name a single cause. The result is a shared responsibility in various degrees. No one is devoid of guilt.

In the Easter story at the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate washed his hands before the crowd, saying “I am innocent of the blood of this just person”. But is he? And many others undoubtedly believed the same.

Probably most Russians would say Putin is the one guilty of crimes in the Ukraine. And yet many others committed crimes in the Ukraine. Is ever a nation free from guilt?

To admit wrongdoing is never easy. We don’t like to own up. We make excuses, shift the blame. Guilt haunts us. Confession is soul-cleansing medicine.

Growing up, we had ways of avoiding punishment. We made all kinds of excuses. Parents and teachers confronted us with the evidence of our wrongdoing. And we were punished and, hopefully, we grew morally stronger as a result.

Nations and citizens share responsibility for actions taken. Honesty and acceptance of mistakes is a way forward.

**Reflection:**

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

The Hymn puts public confession thus:

“Dear Father, Lord of humankind, forgive our foolish ways, reclothe us in our rightful minds, in purer lives, thy service find, in deeper reverence praise.” (Tis 598)

**Depression stalks us**

By Bill Pugh

At the moment it’s like some dread disease permeating the world. It is no respecter of persons. Who would have ever thought that the educated class would suffer, but doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers and engineers are not immune.

True, we have psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors, with special skills to help the afflicted, but why is this problem cosmic, destroying lives? Thank God for the skilled health workers who confront this problem.

But maybe there are things we can do to alleviate the problem before it needs professional treatment. The Bible lists six days for labour and work. The seventh is the time to switch off. A day for rest, recreation and spiritual refreshment.

It’s not like any other day. The stress is there still. We can’t switch off and relax. Blood pressure rises. Let’s try another tack. Let’s consider nature. The seasons change to deal with the moods of nature. There are messages for us in many forms.

Nature’s diary has messages in the natural world to change our moods. The movement of the sun, the patterns of the clouds, and the plants and trees speak to us. Observe the sky after rain, the scudding clouds racing across the sky. And the sun peeps through and lightens the day.

We need to walk with nature to see how it works, controlling its moods and adapting to changes.

The psychology of nature is at work dealing with the moods and swings of the created world, and we have worked against it.

Maybe it’s time to open our eyes and listen with our ears and learn and work with nature.

We could do much to ease the load of the professionals if we listened and worked with the natural world. And our health would be in good hands. Walking with friends is a way to share and celebrate the gift of life. Paul advised us to put things in a special order when dealing with depression.

**Reflection:**

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4;6,7)

**Just around the corner**

By Bill Pugh

In our country parish lived an old lady who was going blind. She was a bit of a character. Knew all the gossip.

Her home was always closed up. She was a Catholic by profession, I think, but always stayed at home as it was too unsafe to venture out.

She expected the clergy to visit her on summons. Afternoon tea was served and because of the darkened room one was never sure of a clean cup.

She was always kind and welcoming. I wonder why she cultivated both clergy. Maybe she was being nice, wanting to have a chance both ways in getting to heaven?

Perhaps a good mark from the Protestants would get her out of purgatory, if that was her fate? In any case she was genuinely kind to her visitors, who made her afternoons social.

**Reflection:**

Heaven is not gained by earning points on a scale. In the Father’s house there are many lodging places, room for all. Access begins with humble and contrite steps down here.

“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

And the door is always open.

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except by me.” (John 14:6)

Speaking of clergy, read Hebrews 4:14-16

**Surprising who you meet in the garden**

By Bill Pugh

It was Monday. The minister’s day off. A distressed lady came to the front gate of the manse.

A man was working in the garden.

“I need to see the minister,” the lady said.

The man directed her to the front door. She knocked and anxiously asked to see the minister. The lady at the door kindly invited her into the study, promising to fetch the minister as soon as possible.

And she waited in the quiet of the study, surrounded by books. Finally the minister came in. Clerical collar, different shirt. He had the same kind face as the gardener.

He held out his hand, invited her to sit down and said “Good afternoon, my name is … How can I help you?”

And he listened. He understood, prayed and promised to help.

**Reflection:**

Ministers are ordinary men and women who do ordinary things. Yet they are called to extraordinary service. They need our prayers. They are called to a vocation and like all of us need a vacation to recharge their spiritual batteries.

Read John 20:11-1B