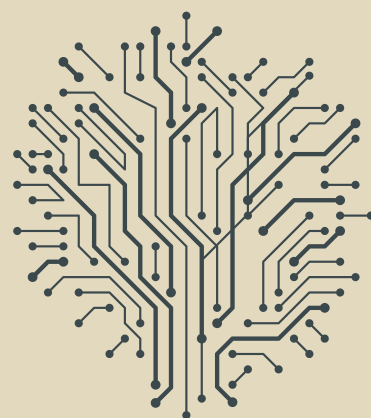


Autumn 2022



SALTBUSH
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

FAMILY



Ruminations

Ruminations is brought to you as part of **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community**. The Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT oversees this work as an encouragement to all rural Christian communities and their leaders, irrespective of size or location. You are invited to share this issue of Ruminations with others.

Editors: Mark Faulkner
Geoff Wellington
Tim Jensen
Monique Potter
Alana Karas



Uniting the Scattered Community

PO Box 221 Canberra City, 2601

0477 720 151

saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au

<https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/>

Please consider donating to support Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community and through it Ruminations. Information on financially supporting can be found on the back cover.

©Saltbush 2021. All articles and images in this publication have been used by permission or purchase. Please get permission before reprinting.

Autumn 2022

What's in this issue of Ruminations?

Editor's Introduction	3
A word from the Moderator	6
Theme Article - Family - Rev. Geoff Wellington	6
Families are Spiritual - Heather Lamb.....	11
Family Journey - Sue Duncan	16
Experiencing the Word - Rev. Nicole Fleming	20
Families as Webs - Ian Sharp	23
In the Midst of Chaos - Rev. Rebecca Lindsay.....	28
News from Saltbush	32

Contributors

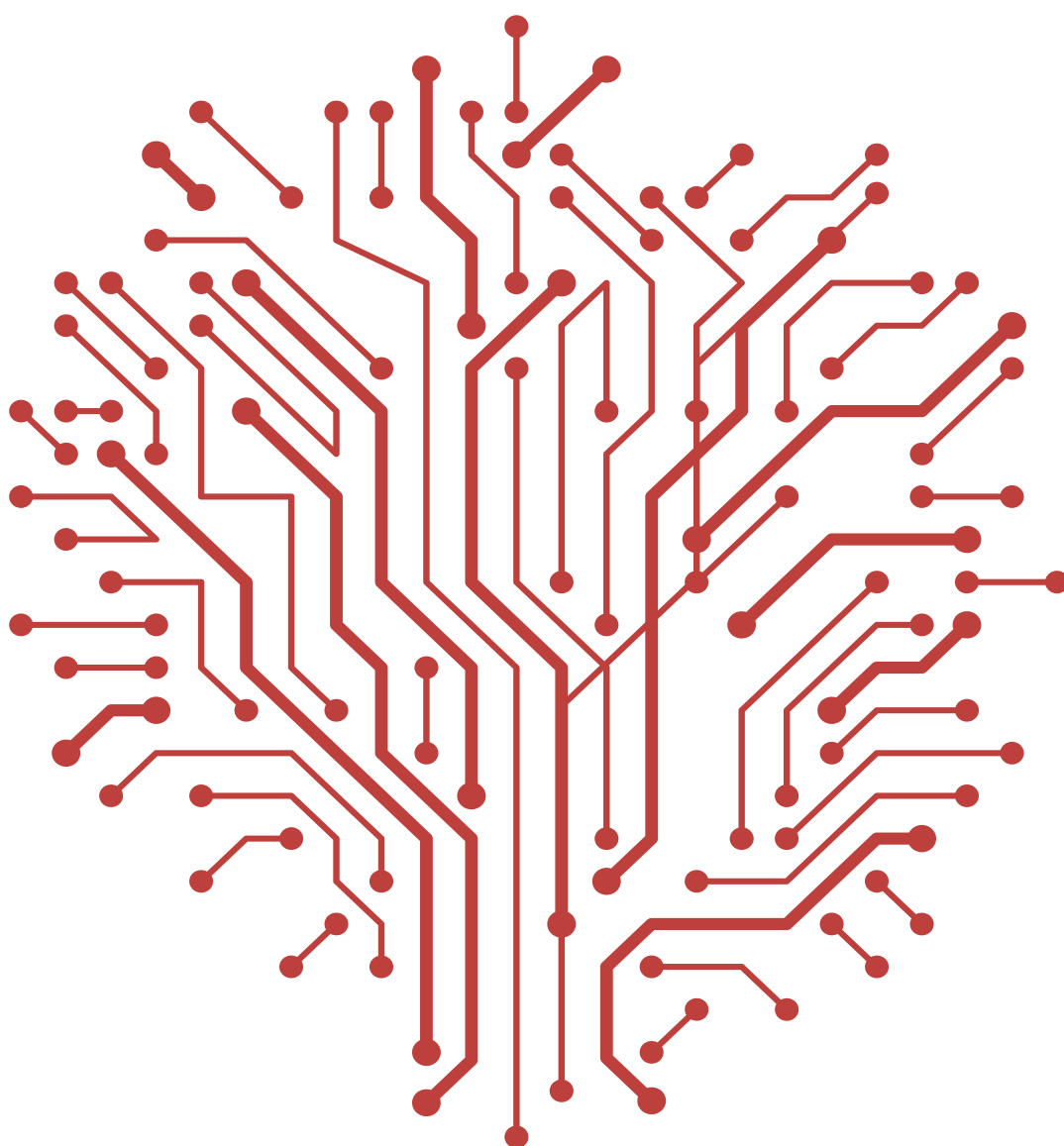
Rev. Nicole Fleming - Nicole is the Candidate Formation Coordinator at United Theological College. Nicole has served in ministry in Dubbo, the Synod Youth Unit, and with the congregation in Balmain. Nicole is enthusiastic about supporting candidates through their formation program and assisting them to integrate academic learning with ministry practice.

Sue Duncan - Sue Duncan began her ministry life as a UCA Hospital Chaplain in Brisbane. On moving to NSW she volunteered as a Pastoral Carer in a local Nursing Home. In 2021 the Far North Coast Presbytery invited her to Supply Ministry at Brunswick Valley and she is currently with the Kyogle congregation at Richmond Upper Clarence. Sue feels affirmed in her grass roots ministry of relationship building and walking alongside folk.

Heather Lamb – Heather is a member of the Gungahlin Uniting Church in Canberra and family life includes being a wife, a mum to three young adults and a carer. She has a background in Occupational Therapy working in mental health and a Graduate Diploma of Pastoral Counselling. Heather is currently working casually as a research officer in the area of lived experience research, mental health and suicide prevention.

Ian Sharp - Ian Sharp is a family man, husband to Carolyn, father to four children and grandfather to three. He enjoys the outdoors and his hobbies are woodworking, photography, fishing and gardening, to name a few. He currently lives with Carolyn in Wauchope where they have resided for nearly 2 and a half years and where he is an active lay leader in the Wauchope Uniting Church.

Rev. Bec Lindsay - Rev. Bec Lindsay is a sessional lecturer at the United Theological College and a PhD candidate at Flinders University. She and her husband are raising two small boys. Bec is particularly interested in the intersection between these spaces - communities of worship, deep engagement with Scripture, and the often-mundane experience of family life.



Editor's Introduction - Family

Rev. Tim Jensen | Saltbush Scattered Community Minister

As I was beginning to write I was struck how even the word 'family' is so powerfully loaded. It evokes such strong emotions and memories. For some it is a place of security and love, for others trauma, maybe confusion, and for some it might be a general ambivalence. I was also reminded of the ways families begin, some very intentional, some by accident either happy or sad and others by adventure. In whatever way our families came into being, what we tend to find is a longing for a place of security, belonging, value and love. If you find these qualities in a gathering of people then you would probably feel you are part of a family.

At the age of 12 I was sent to boarding school to begin grade 8. Being so far from home I was often invited back to the homes of my friends during the long weekends and some term holidays. In each of these families there were levels of harmony and dysfunctionality, messiness and routine and in it all I was still part of the dynamics. As a guest in these homes, I felt a deep sense of gratitude and honour to be part of their family.

I feel the same sense of gratitude and honour as I read from these pages of Ruminations. Each story speaks to us of the strength and fragility of family and how they impact us deeply and inform a lot of how we understand ourselves. Hearing people's stories about family allows us to know that in some way, no matter how different our families are, we share the same traits, the desire to know we belong and are valued. A message expressed in the life and teachings of Jesus and one in which we would hope the church could follow.

Nicole explores how Jesus re-aligns first century understanding of families where a woman's identity was tied to her belonging to a family and children had no rights but found security in a family. With Jesus all are included in the kin-ship of God. '(The Gospel) Mark highlights welcome and belonging in radical ways. The inclusion of women in the family of God is a fine example of this. Within this family the role of women is not limited. Mothers have a vital role to play. Sisters have a vital role to play. Just as brothers have a vital role to play. God is the head of this household and all are welcome to belong and participate.' It reminds us of how big a social shift the teachings of Jesus are, with a radical departure from the understanding of the household where the male was the head and everyone fell in behind this patriarchal system. No wonder Jesus was accused of being out of his mind. What Jesus was suggesting would threaten the power of the elite, the security of those who had no other way of living and tear at the fabric of unjust social structures.

Geoff's theme article explores how our understanding and experience of family has significantly shaped us, no matter to what level of dysfunctionality in which we may have been immersed. From our own Australian historical experience where our families will hold the stories of our cultural background and define much of how we view the world to the Jewish understanding of *betab* (The Father's House). Geoff moves us through how we are influenced by our social and cultural experience to that space of Jesus' radical re-interpretation of what it means to be family. 'In the second Testament Paul and others use this wider understanding of "Family" to convey a belonging to God's family. Jesus calls and welcomes people into the "family" of God. The radical nature of that welcome means that the old expectations of who "belongs" to the family is overturned.' In this new way of being family there are mutual obligations that emphasizes sharing, meeting needs, equality, generosity and an economic ethic. The church of today would do well in following these ways of welcome.

Heather takes us on a personal journey through her own family life and how the challenges of mental illness change the way we perceive the world and how we all may have a very fluid understanding of family. Heather highlights that what she learnt from her parents was 'that love, care, gentleness, generosity and being there is more important than status, income or personal productivity.' This is reflected in the radical nature of Jesus' teaching which 'highlighted the intrinsic value of a human being. He spent time with and recognized women, children, the ill, the vulnerable. And this wasn't about simply feeling sorry for or helping a person in need; it was about being with, listening, empowering, trusting, allowing transformation and even learning from.' Heather's lived wisdom and insights reminds us all of the message of Jesus that we are of intrinsic worth and while it's not always easy to accept, we can move into the space of real hope where we know we belong, we are valued and we are loved.

Beginning with being raised in stable Christian family, Sue shares her story and takes us on a journey of discovering her worthiness in families of different shapes, sizes and permutations. We hear of the family of generational ministers, the move away from extended family redefined Sue's family dynamic, marrying Ross and starting a family. Then the family dynamics of church, the family of hospital chaplaincy, the Emmaus Walk, Camps Farthest Out and in Ross's retirement what family looks like in Brunswick Valley church. So many experiences have influenced Sue in her faith and in the life of church that leads her to conclude: "Families within their many formulas have exercised hard love and care over me for decades guiding me to my place of worth within God's family, this is the greatest love I share with others."

Ian reflects on his own family and the church as family and how we all want to be part of a mob no matter how that is defined these days. With the challenges

we face today, Ian notices the love and care that has been taken in the life of the church to help others with technology. This action of love spans the generation and a kindness and patience permeate this very different looking virtual 'family'. Ian shares with us his observations from nature on one of his bush walks how a spider web is much like a family: "The web seems so fragile, and yet the strands are quite tough. All of the web is required if it is to fulfil its function of providing food for the spider. If even a small part is missing, then the hole it leaves might mean the meal escapes and the spider goes hungry." Recalling his time at a funeral home Ian observes the prerequisites of the job was to be present and listen. Ultimately what we know is that through our lives as church family, birth family or work family that as we journey with a God of grace and love there is hope.

Bec explores the interaction between faith and family in the midst of chaos, and the goodness of God in the middle of all the dynamics of these gatherings of people. Bec recounts her boys' stories and the way they express their own God moments in nature, with friends and with the church. We are also encouraged to remember the ground on which we walk as family and committing ourselves to listening to First Peoples and how to care for this place.

Simon quotes Mark 3 "[Jesus] said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Simon reflects on his own family and how being away from his birth family has made the church family a blessing. To this Simon asks: how do we love our families, our friends? How do we welcome people into our families, offering them a place in the rhythms and rituals of our lives? How do we allow those same rhythms to be disrupted, added to, harmonised, by those who grow close to us, or who have always been so?

These questions help us ponder and reflect on our own understanding of family and what that means to us.

As you read these pages may they help you reflect on your own experience of family and may you know the God of grace, love and hope.

As a Saltbush Team we are so grateful for the willingness of our contributors to offer their time, openness and vulnerability to share something of their own experience of family.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

A word from the Moderator

Rev. Simon Hansford | Moderator of the Synod of NSW & ACT

A crowd was sitting around [Jesus]; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And looking at those who sat around him, [Jesus] said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." [Mark 3:32-35]

Our eldest daughter, Rachel, flies back today to Darwin, having worked there and in Nhulunbuy for the last fourteen months. We have missed her, and will do so, again. I have been thinking how the experience and expectation of our family is very different from that of my upbringing in Sydney, and even that of others in my family and friends, who live there.

Rather than being gathered under one roof into early – and sometimes slightly later – adulthood, our girls left home after year twelve to study, like many rural young people. They have returned home spasmodically over the last decade, and their friendships have often been descriptions, rather than experiences, for us. We miss them both, considerably.

We had moved to our first placement, in Dubbo, when we had only been married for four years, so our marriage matured, and our family grew, four hundred kilometres away from our family of origin. Our thirty years of ministry have always been in the regions, so family has become something more than our childhood showed us, not less.

Our story is not unusual; many families live similar lives. When Grandparents' Day came around at school, honorary grandparents from our Congregation put their hands up. Friends became as close as family, as our children and theirs shared not only growing up, but distant families like ours.

We feel blessed by the friendships, the generosity and the care we have been offered. When crises happened in our lives, it was friends and congregation who were present, because our birth family simply couldn't be.

The joy of our birth sisters and brothers and their families, our parents and grandparents is never replaced, but enhanced by others' graciousness and shared experience.

The constraints of the pandemic have reminded us of the value of those we love. The pain of isolation for people we love, who are most in need, has exacerbated

Autumn 2022

that sense of loss.

So, the question is critical: how do we love our families, our friends? How do we welcome people into our families, offering them a place in the rhythms and rituals of our lives? How do we allow those same rhythms to be disrupted, added to, harmonised, by those who grow close to us, or who have always been so?

It is common to use "family" as a description of our congregations; is that statement of bloodline and tradition, or hospitality to anyone who knocks on our door, or bids us welcome in their turn?

I give thanks to God for all the shapes of our family, for those we are yet to welcome and for those who are yet to welcome us.

Simon

Theme Article: Family

Rev. Geoff Wellington | Saltbush Scattered Community Minister

My friend Narelle would always remind me when I started to talk about family issues "that all families are dysfunctional, it's just a matter of degree". Of course, that is right families are the location of both the intimate place of care, love and identity and the source of much frustration. Our families of origin shape us significantly in every part of our lives, from our mannerisms, habits and attitudes to life and faith personally to how we interact with others socially. Our families are themselves shaped by wider social and cultural influences that go beyond the immediate generations of influence to wider national and religious meta stories.

If your family's story of identity is one that reminds you of coming as a convict to these shores, you may well have a distrust of the legal system and authority. If your family story is one of forced immigration due to war, political oppression or Highland Clearances then you may see this country as one of opportunity free from those influences. If your family story, is one grounded in 10's of thousands of years of care and living with the land and then of dispossession then you may be pursuing justice. If your family story is one of intergenerational integration and engagement you will experience the world quite differently than those who are part of a nuclear family. The influences on how we see and understand what family is, how it shapes us and our view of ourselves, others, the world and faith is complex.

One of the issues for those of us who identify with a dominate culture, particularly one that is based on a colonizing framework is recognizing that our family of origin norms, stories and attitudes are not the only ones that bring meaning and identity. To open ourselves to the learning and the experience of the "other" who has walked a different path, is not always easy. All families and individuals bring ideas about what it means to belong to a family, what purpose it serves to be part of a family and how that shapes our ideals about humanness and our belonging in the world. In Australia we are very slowly coming to terms with the idea that there is no one model of family and that to be "family" in Australia includes many divergent cultural, faith and relationship dynamics. For the "Church" that is challenging as for too long it has tended to convey a very stereotypical model of "family" that reflects more of a secular western modernist view of the world than the wide and different experiences of "family" portrayed in the bible.

Of course, matters of faith and religious expression are central to those ideas

Autumn 2022

and how families are formed and their function. When considering “family” in the biblical witness, we need to be careful not to project either our current modern view of family on to those situations or to imagine that somehow the current experience of “family” should be or could be the same as thousands of years ago. The influences are different, the social, scientific, political and religious ideas and knowledge are now different. But we can learn and shape our life and theology from these sacred writings.

In the Christian tradition we receive the experience of the Jewish culture where the “Tribe” (Sebet/Matteh), the “Clan” (Mispaha) and the “Father’s House” (Betab) form the structure of society. While individuals are part of the “Tribe” of Israel the belonging to the “Clan” and to the “Father’s House” is what shapes *“identity as a member of the covenant people of Israel”*. In our own times we may grasp some of this by identifying as Australian, belonging to a particular cultural group but our family is the real tangible reality of identity and belonging. In the ancient times we have just heard about the “Father House” was not a nuclear family as we may experience it but it included an old male head of the house, their wife or wives, concubines, children, their wife/s children, slaves, workers, those welcomed into the family etc. You get the point that this is a group of people inter related by blood, relationship, employment and the like. It is in this “Family” that individuals learn their responsibilities and roles, to be- long, to be taught the religious faith as well as finding support and love. It is this family structure that bonds the “Clan” and the “Tribe” together in an interwoven structure of belong and identity together, connected to the “Land” and in relationship with God.

In the second Testament Paul and others use this wider understanding of “Family” to convey a belonging to God’s family. Jesus calls and welcomes people into the “family” of God. The radical nature of that welcome means that the old expectations of who “belongs” to the family is overturned. It is the “household” (oikos) / “family” then that is the primary location of the “church” (ecclesia). The “church” is both public and political (polis) and private and intimate (*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends. John 15: 15*). This “church” though remains at household size and follows the pattern of the Hebrew tradition as it belongs to the wider “clan” and to the “tribe” of the “followers of the way” (Acts 9: 2).

There are ways to act within the relationship of the household/family/church that requires mutual obligations to one’s “family” that emphasizes sharing, meeting needs, equality, generosity and an economic ethic (Acts 2: 42-47). This is the “fellowship” (koinonia) of practical life together in the “family” This radical inclusion of life in the “family” overturns the dominate patriarchal model to include women in leadership of the “family” (Lydia Acts 16: 14-15, 40 and

Priscilla 1 Cor 16: 19). It also includes those rejected by their families of origin in their response to the gospel. The scripture witness to the family indicates that being part of God's "family" in this way was a radical way of life that drew people into relationship with each other and with God (Acts 2).

In our own time I don't think we should be shocked that "church" the "Family of God" is small, local and includes both those whom we are related to and those who are welcomed in. That leadership emerges from within these communities and that such leadership is called to serve and guide the household codes of mutual life together. These codes I would suggest include a radical welcoming into the family of God. A practice of life that includes sharing, equality, generosity and an economic ethic. If we accept that the "church" relates strongly to this model of the "family" then faith starts in the household church. Paul may have used letters and actual visits to keep these "families" connected and it strikes me that Zoom does a fine job of that too. With the added benefit of it coming right into people's homes. The "family" as a model for church is not new but it does remind us that it is the "family" household where we find our identity, our purpose and our belonging to that tribe of God's Family.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seth". The signature is stylized with a large, looped 'S' and a cursive 'H'.

Families are Spiritual

Heather Lamb | Canberra

Families are spiritual. There is a bond which cannot be fully explained which traverses the distance of time and space and separation. There seems to be a natural yearning, for at least some time in everyone's life, to be with, know about and connect with family. Whether the current reality of relationship is one of togetherness, absence or even the complete unknown, people appear to be drawn to family. Whether the experience is positive or negative, full of joy or trauma, people appear to be drawn to family. So many desires, hopes, disappointments and blessings are wrapped up in family. There are expectations, individual and cultural, helpful or not, around what a family looks like, could be or should be. And, of course, families are so often the place of everyday and ordinary life.

Families are diverse and unique. Family members may be genetically related or not, fostered, adopted, separated, blended, partnered in various gender combinations, or single friends joined to create their own family. I recognize all of these. Some people consider a group where they experience a strong sense of belonging as

their family; perhaps a church, a gang, a tribe. Communities and societies influence the way families can be, grow and develop.

I grew up in a "mum and dad with four kids" family; there were aunts and cousins too. Now I am "me, wife, mum" in a "mum and dad with three young adults" family. These are some of my reflections.

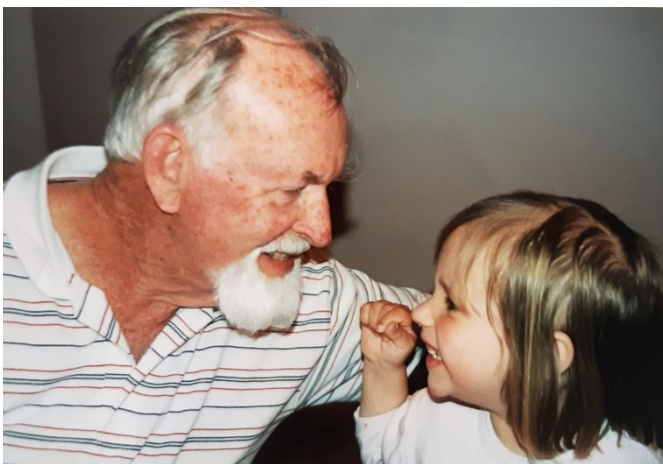
Growing up I found Mother's Day really hard. Choosing a card for my mum was difficult. I'd find a beautiful picture that I knew she'd love then the words inside just didn't fit. All the cards talked about thanks for being a great mum, for everything you do for us, listing all the achievements "a good mum" fulfilled. Cards and society (then as now) seemed to equate value with what someone could do for you; tangible tasks, work and achievements. To be honest, I loved Mum deeply but, in many ways, took her for granted and didn't consider her to be "a good mum". As I matured, I

began to feel very differently and can now appreciate all she has given me.

For all of my life, Mum's ability to function independently in self-care, household and family tasks was severely restricted by her mental health. She had a debilitating lack of motivation which saw her spending most of her waking hours in bed, and was regularly preoccupied with "the voices" (hallucinations) and unreal, often troubling thoughts (delusions) related to her schizophrenia. So, no, she didn't meet the "good mum" standards on the Hallmark cards!

Mum was unable to work or pursue her considerable artistic talents, drawing and painting, which had been her joy in life. However, she always maintained contact with family and a few long-term friends through phone calls, letter writing and cards. She was generous to people in need. Enjoying her grandchildren was a great blessing and I realized later, as a young mother myself, that when most nannas were busy out working, my mum had endless time to spend with us and enjoy her grandchildren. This was a blessing. This is family.

Mum needed care herself though; we needed to follow up health needs, wrangle with the delusions, drive to appointments, help with banking, finances, shopping and arrange continued care after Dad (her carer) passed away. My dad would have been seen as very average to anyone else but to me he was an amazing man. He married later in life, a beautiful vibrant artistic woman whom he had met in their workplace, but ten years and four children later, his wife was being repeatedly hospitalized and unable to care for herself. Dad raised four children virtually alone, alongside caring for Mum. He was always there for us, quietly supporting. This is family.



As I sat with Mum in her dying weeks (she was 87 y.o.), I felt somewhat bitter and distressed looking back on how much of her life had been consumed by the mental ill-health which afflicted her but that didn't seem to be her focus. Mum was calm and peaceful and I was amazed when she said to me "I've had a wonderful life, a good husband and four children". This is family.

And what I have learnt from my parents is that love, care, gentleness, generosity and being there is more important than status, income or personal productivity. While all those things can be nice, there is a balance. In saying this I don't mean to diminish the struggles that people today have with poverty; we were privileged to grow up in a time where we could live within our means, we owned our home, Dad could retire early from his "average" job to look after us, and a university education was free. This gave us stability and set us on a path to later provide for our own families. We didn't have to contemplate hunger or homelessness as so many families do today. Dad had no intergenerational wealth behind him but could provide for us. Sadly, this wouldn't be the case today.

The way a society is structured and the values it holds impacts people and families, particularly those who may be vulnerable. Jesus made radical statements for his time and, through his actions, highlighted the intrinsic value of a human being. He spent time with and recognized women, children, the ill, the vulnerable. And this wasn't about simply feeling sorry for or helping a person in need; it was about being with, listening, empowering, trusting, allowing transformation and even learning from. Jesus tapped into the spirit. This was radical for the time and he also laid out a vision for community as family.

Today we seem to know everything and yet still nothing about the enormity of what it is to be a person, let alone understanding a number of persons combining to be a family and then more broadly a community and a world. Our greatest minds have explored the microscopic to the massive; the depths of the tiniest cells in the human body to the expanses of the universe and despite all the wonderful discoveries, there is still so much unknown.

In the Bible I am told that I am known by name, even before I was formed in my mother's womb and that my every thought is known by God even before I know it myself. For me there is light and darkness but God's light shines through all darkness. I am loved and I cannot escape God's presence wherever I go. But these things are beyond comprehension and too wonderful for me to know. This is what the Bible and my Christian faith tells me.



Still, part of being human is curiosity; the desire to know and to understand. My desire to understand mental ill-health stems from the impact it has had through my family life. The link between human disease and genetics was identified in the early 1900's and by the mid 1980's we were able to identify individual people by their unique DNA. We continue to explore the brain and how the chemicals and hormones in our body interact. Messages passed along nervous systems influence our thoughts and feelings. Our brains have the capacity for complex executive functions but our primitive fight and flight responses kick in a little faster. We know that health is influenced by not only biological but psychological, social, environmental and spiritual factors. Advances in research are exploring epigenetics; not changes to the DNA sequence itself but the expression and activation (or not) of the genes which can be influenced by lifestyle, stressors and the environment. New areas of research explore how trauma may be passed down from one generation to the next as sensitivities, even when the person in that new generation hasn't been exposed to the trauma firsthand. (Have a look on the internet about the Cherry Blossom Experiment if you are interested). This is an overwhelming prospect to contemplate but thankfully researchers are also identifying ways of reversing this intergenerational trauma. That gives us a lot to think about as individuals, as families and as a society. My mind wanders down the path of whether epigenetics could lead us to further understandings of our spiritual connections too but that is a whole other topic!

Inclusion, engagement, sense of belonging, commitment, spirit, love; these all influence a person's experience and perception of life, health and wellbeing. A person can live a good life even in the presence of adversity and illness. I am not trying to gloss over or diminish the struggles but instead link to hope. We can harness the power of the spirit wherever people find themselves disconnected, excluded or

apart. This can be a central function of family, friendships, churches, health and community services. The value of including lived experience in the codesign of services is increasingly being recognized as essential to their engagement and effectiveness. As individuals we can put our faith into action in our lives, communities and workplaces. We don't need to be bound by the walls of our churches although they can be a place and source of renewal and hope for our own lives.

How to end these reflections? When I think about my faith and its central place in my life, I always come back to one message: Love God - Love One Another. The values and actions that Jesus demonstrated some two thousand years ago are still relevant today. Every person has intrinsic worth. It is important to shine a light in the darkness. I'm not suggesting it is always simple. I have learned that to be effective in loving and caring for others, I really need to practice good self-care, be gentle with myself and be aware of my own limitations. Family has had an enormous impact on my life. I'd like to think that we live in a society that is compassionate and values all people equally but there is a long way to go. In my opinion, our current societal and economic structures make little space for us to care for people and families in flexible ways; rather it seems we are stretched to fit a system which undervalues and underestimates the unpaid care needs in families. While I am enormously thankful to be living in Australia, I am interested in initiatives such as New Zealand's "well-being approach" which may provide evidence for a more balanced and encouraging society. I am so thankful that in my family life I have had opportunities and choices in the midst of challenges. My hope for the broader community is that there is increased equity so that all people and families may enjoy a good life.

Family Journey

Sue Duncan | Far North Coast

'God always sees us as worthy. We are placed in families by God, to learn that we are worthy, so we can, in turn, help others appreciate their own worthiness.'

(Rev. Sue Ellis, Lay Leaders Liturgy 31st Oct 2021)

This is my reflection on the permutations, shapes and sizes of the different families that have guided, questioned, cared, distracted, appreciated, discarded, pushed, and stimulated my experiences of being worthy.

A stable, conservative Sydney family was my foundation with a hard-working Dad, Mum, and brother Rob. Being summoned to meet the Infants School headmistress in Yr1, Week2 was frightening enough, but to find Mum in the office as well was doubly scary. I was about to discover just what a disadvantage being left-handed was. This was a tough lesson in being outside the family protection umbrella and metaphorically, I got decidedly wet that year.

Church activities came with high visibility and included a loving church family, who knew my every move. Dad was a Congregational church deacon, Mum the Sunday School Supt and expectations placed on the shoulders of my brother and I were high, even thinking about skipping a High School RE lesson was a family offence.

A long history of Congregational Revs in a gentle grandfather and three ordained uncles set the family tone but when my uncle became our new minister brother Rob and I joined his throng of five and blended into the definition of 'minister's kids', giving us a little respite. Interestingly even though combined family holidays were a great fun week, the uncle, once home again and in his dog collar was, without exception, the untouchable Rev.

Duty called Dad and he moved his family to Brisbane to build Naval Patrol boats. Initially, it was shattering for us all without any form of family or social connections,

church became spasmodic due to distance and transport and the loneliness was long remembered. Everywhere and everything was strange, Peanut butter became peanut paste, and slices of bread were rounds!! Worst of all, I missed chatty Saturday mornings with my beloved Nan.

Ross and I met two years later through a social network of young people at work. I married into a large family where everyone was totally accepted and get togethers were frequent. Cousins still maintain enjoyable contact with each other. Ross's Mum explained every family hiccup away with 'they are family, no judgement.' Acceptance and being included became a glorious part of everyday life.

As our own family grew, we experienced many school concerts and sporting activities with our two kids, took them on camping weekends and I worked part time during school hours but chose not to become involved in the local Uniting Church. When Dad died as I turned 39, I responded to that niggling need to return to church. I aimed to sit in the back seat and escape quickly at the end of each service, which did not last for long. This church family knew many of my moves as I explored different facets of church life and loved their encouragement as I taught Sunday School, lead the Snr Friendship Group, became an Elder, established a Craft Group and then studied Pastoral Care and Hospital Ministry with their complete blessing.

Eventually, Hospital Pastoral Care as a volunteer and Supervisor of students led me to a Uniting Church Chaplaincy position where I was extended beyond anything I could do within my own strength or ability. A gentle Supervisor guided me in 'getting out of the way' to let God do his own work. Life was not comfortable particularly within my assigned Intensive Care Ward and deaths and dying were intense. So, with Jesus occupying the empty chair before I arrived, I 'got out of the way and 'let God be God' and in doing so discerned I was exactly where He wanted me to be and loved it, well maybe with the exception of the 1am call outs. This was a family that pushed every button, lovingly but with very strong passions.

Within the same time frame and after a lot of cajoling and encouragement I became a pilgrim on an Emmaus Walk. This was my time, and I accepted the love of God, supporting, laughing, pushing, and loving ME, all at once. The Emmaus family was a commitment of love I wallowed in for 10 years as I 'walked' towards becoming a Lay Leader. I experienced the all-encompassing nature of volunteer team members as we cared for each other and for every pilgrim on our yearly Walks.

Camps Farthest Out was and remains a wonderful family grouping within three states of Australia. It began in America out of a great desire for world peace and spiritual harmony. Qld family members and I stay in touch regularly and the CFO

daily 9pm prayer connects us all round the world :-

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

I settled into this life until Ross announced his approaching retirement with a dream of fishing, golfing, and gardening in a total lifestyle change. Initially, even though with a tinge of excitement, I balked and found myself questioning leaving family and young grandkids behind. This would spread our precious family out, over three states, Qld, Tasmania and now us in NSW.

If God had anything to do with this move then surely, He just had to have something in mind...

He did, and initially it was time out to adjust so I enjoyed learning to spin fleece and create beyond knitting and crocheting. I had joined a local Arts group, a most interesting family of highly creative yet non inclusive ladies who honed my skills in acceptance and tolerance, in abundance.



Becoming a volunteer Pastoral Carer in a local Nursing Home was a wonderful family time, until Covid. Community living is a huge change for many residents and listening to their stories, at times was all consuming. We celebrated birthdays with gusto, anything above 90 was a regular occurrence but turning 100 was recognized in the local paper. What a beautiful family to be part of but conducting their funerals although always a privilege was tinged with an extra element of

personal sadness.

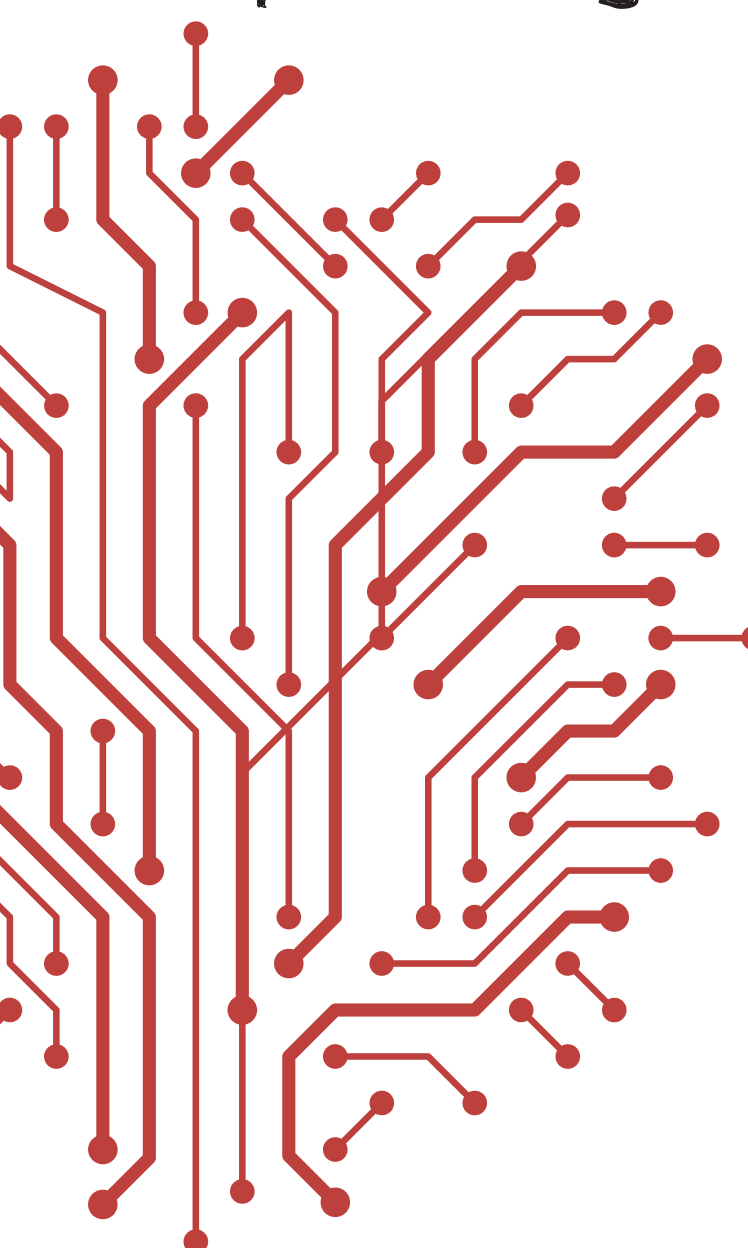
Additional to that, within His grace a little family was formed when my then, 'new' friend, June and I were seated together at a local church day for Ladies. By the end of the day together we took up the challenge to 'grow' Ladies Day and encouraged other ladies to join us. Our team brought Ladies Days to the Far North Coast with hospitality, song, intentional fellowship, and much laughter for the next nine years. Unfortunately, Covid intervened, and we still wait to celebrate our 10th anniversary.

When Covid lifted in November 2020 Brunswick Valley churches became my home for the next twelve months in a journey of discovery only God could have planned. I joined in community activities, encouraged, and cajoled others to participate within worship, sadly conducted their funerals and joyously became one of them. This church family accepted and loved me and despite occasions of lockdown we shared an inspiring year, together. Their care of me stimulated significant self-reflection and within that reflection I have found affirmation in who I am and to whom I truly belong.

Families within their many formulas have exercised hard love and care over me for decades guiding me to my place of worth within God's family, this is the greatest love I share with others. Henri Nouwen wrote that it is important for *'people to see the peace of Christ reflected in your eyes, your hands, and your words. Only He can call us - : "My beloved child, my favorite one, my joy."* I am blessed.

Experiencing the Word

Rev. Nicole Fleming | Uniting Church Minister



In the popular children's book *Just The Way We Are*, Anna, Chiara, Henry, Izzy and Jack each tell the story of their family. Each of their families are different. In Anna's family are her mum, dad and her grandpa who meets her at bus stop after school and turns every walk home into an incredible adventure. Chiara feels really lucky because she has two dads. Henry and his brother live in two houses, one with his mum and another with his dad. Izzy's family is special in its own way. She lives with Jenny and Aaron, her guardians, and two brothers and a sister who also needed a new family to live with. Jack doesn't have a big family, it's just him and his mum. None of these families look the same but that's okay because each of them are perfect, just the way they are.

Family is an important part of life. We're all aware now that families look differently for different people. As explored in *Just The Way We Are*, we know that the notion of a family 'norm' - a mum, a dad and 2.5 kids - is no longer. Many people talk about their 'family of choice' and may have little or no connection with their family of birth. When people marry, they often speak of forming a new family. We also know that people have very diverse experiences of family, both wonderful and horrific. Yet, families remain a significant part of life for most of us.

Family in the Jewish culture of Jesus time was the most important thing in life. Family was absolutely central and meant caring for and being there for each other. Family gave a person worth and identity, especially if you were a woman or a child. Responsibility, identity, stability and opportunity were all tightly bound with family structures.

So, it's pretty significant when Jesus' family turn up in Mark chapter 3:21 saying 'He has gone out of his mind'!

Jesus' family turn up in a section of passage that is known as a 'Markan sandwich'

Autumn 2022

– or a pericope, which is a set of verses that form one coherent unit or thought. If you look at the passage in chapter 3 starting at verse 19 and concluding at verse 35, you might notice that it starts and ends with a narrative about family. In the middle of this Jesus speaks in parables.

This passage appears early in Mark's gospel. Prior to this Jesus has appointed the 12 disciples and has been teaching and healing. In this passage he is being mobbed by crowds. In fact, the crowd is so thick Jesus and the disciples can't even eat. The authorities have started to realise he's a bit of a problem and some threatening behaviour is already beginning to start. The crowds, his teaching and his active healing all form a basis for Jesus' opponents to accuse him of demonic activity.

This is when his family turn up and they try to grab hold of him. They think he is beside himself. They say he's not behaving like himself, that he's utterly changed. There's something about Jesus that is no longer recognisable to them.

At the same time the Scribes have come from Jerusalem (we know there's conflict to come with them later). They've come from a big city to a regional town because they are so concerned. They feel quite threatened by Jesus and so declare him satanic – 'he is possessed by Beelzebul', the chief of demons, they say. This is a serious charge as it amounts to a charge of practicing sorcery which was a capital offense.

Jesus refutes this accusation. Firstly, he appeals to common sense – 'how can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand'. Then Jesus upholds that Satan cannot be in league with the Spirit within him, for the Spirit in Jesus is binding the strong man – is binding/tying up Satan

This is the work of God's Spirit in Jesus not Satan. Jesus brings to the forefront the nature of the Holy Spirit as the centre, the foundation of all he does. It is then that Jesus moves to talk about sin and forgiveness.

Not recognizing that it is God's Spirit at work in Jesus is equivalent to identifying the Holy Spirit with the unclean spirits of the demonic world. It is this blasphemy that Jesus says is so grave, so offensive it is unforgivable – the only unforgivable sin.

At this point Jesus family reappear. His mother and his brothers are outside the house. Jesus sits inside with the crowd and disciples.

'A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you. And he replied, 'who are my

mother and my brothers? And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (NRSV, Mark 3:31-35)

Through Jesus, Mark utilises insider-outsider language to show that the message of Jesus in this new day calls for a new family. Those who hear the voice of Jesus form his new family, they constitute his new alignment. These are the people to whom responsibility, identity, stability and opportunity will now be tied.

Mark is tying family together through a spiritual bond. Whoever sits with Jesus, whoever follows the will of God becomes members of Jesus family. These people are his brother and sister and mother.

Here Jesus mentions his mother and brothers yet not his father. This seems unusual in a society embedded in a patriarchal model in which male-descendancy and male-placement in society were the norm. As I wrote earlier, family gave you worth and identity especially if you were a woman or a child. Children have no rights, but in a family unit they were secure unlike orphans or widows who had very little or no security at all.

Status of a woman was tied to a male relative. A woman's identity and social belonging were situated outside herself and her gender. A married woman was offered a safe and well-protected social state of being. What Jesus says about family in chapter 3 of Mark's gospel, radically shifts the status and identity of women. Mark highlights welcome and belonging in radical ways. The inclusion of women in the family of God is a fine example of this. Within this family the role of women is not limited. Mother's have a vital role to play. Sister's have a vital role to play. Just as brother's have a vital role to play. God is the head of this household and all are welcome to belong and participate.

In this new family Jesus is not just lifting up the place of women, he is asserting a whole new way of relating to each other. In God's kin-dom, Jesus says, we are not simply joined to each other by birth and biology, we are not bound to each other by traditional kinship, rather we find our identity, our kinship and community in and through the relationship we share in God.

All those who live in and work for God's kingdom are family.

The way into this kinship, the way to belonging in this family is to acknowledge you've been caught up in a new reality. Jesus sets only one criteria, doing the will of God.



Families as Webs

Ian Sharp

Families are interesting: each one with unique members, and different in size, the way each operates and the way the members interact. No two are the same, yet many are similar, and the perception of what makes a family has changed over time. Each family has its own story to tell about belonging, or being excluded. In a society where some want to stand out from the crowd, many crave the security of being part of the mob.

The experience I am keen to share at this time concerns my immediate family. I thought at the end of 2021 I had things pretty well sorted out, and planned to get a few projects completed at the start of, or early in 2022. As fate would have it though, just before Christmas my wife sustained a broken foot, a sprained ankle, and a cracked rib in a fall. As one could imagine, this changed all my plans, and there are many chores that need doing in a household! It's a time when families do pull together and help each other. It's a time too, where we need to change our priorities, because there were trips

to the hospital, doctor's appointments and a wife that couldn't drive because of the injuries sustained. Added to all of this, she has been having trouble with her vision for a while now. To cut a long story short – after many tests and examinations on her eye she has just recently had cataract surgery. So far this has proved to be a great outcome and she can now read the writing on the captions on the television again! It is at such times that one needs to cater to the needs of others and let the less important things wait for a future time. We are fortunate that our family is a family that does help each other out when needed.

The sharing of happy times and concerning times doesn't just end when your children leave home either, it continues by various means when needed. Our children know that, "as the saying goes", our door is open at any time so they can communicate with us with their joys and concerns.

Telephones are an amazing invention in the way that they connect families. We

live many kilometres away from our grandchildren, but we have just been sharing time on the phone with our daughter and grandson who live in Orange, NSW – it's wonderful that we can continue to share in his growth and development and both he, and we, get to know each other better so that physical meetings seem a continuation of the conversation, rather than occasional times of getting in touch. Not everyone can do this, and we are thankful that we are able to use such a facility.

Christmas has just passed and it's a time of celebration as a family unit for many families. Every second Christmas our children spend with their in-laws as we live too far apart to visit everyone on the day. 2021 was one of these years, however we did manage to spend time with each family member over the Christmas and New Year break, as our children needed accommodation when they travelled to various parts of the country. It was wonderful to celebrate and spend a few days with our family, especially our three small grandchildren. It is a time where we can share a few stories and experiences and laughs in a way that lifts one's spirits. As usual, there was plenty of food consumed and now those extra kilos need to be shed.

Of, course, we can belong to more than one family at once. We can also belong to a church family and people in our church families have adapted in different ways so that people in the congregations are spiritually fed. As the Body of Christ we have each been created in our own unique individual way, each having a special gift that is used to complement the gifts of others. There is a song called "Different Gifts" by Maggie Russell, and the first little bit goes like this, *"Different gifts, yet we are one, one in Christ's body. Each of us uniquely made; different yet the same. Celebrate our differences, working together; needing each one's special gifts to make the body whole"*. I believe that this expresses what a family is as well, both at home and in church. We are all different, but we can each use our unique gifts we have been given to make a family unit function in harmony, utilising the greatest gift of all: that of love.

In our church families, people have always had to adapt as society changes, but change was especially noticeable during the covid season, due to the speed with which this needed to occur. It has opened up new avenues of worship for many. Rather than only going to the local church, people have been able to experience worship from other towns and cities and even overseas. They have also been able to explore other denominations, as well as sharing paper-based services, emails, television and ZOOM (or the equivalent).

The older generation has found it much more difficult, but it has been heartening to see many of these people accept the change and embrace the many different forms of being able to meet together. It must be difficult to let go of things

that have been done a certain way for years and then to suddenly find this is no longer possible and there is a need to look at another way of working around the situation. Often the younger generation has been able to mentor the more mature people through the challenge that technology is to many. It must give people a sense of joy that they can actually meet together, physically or virtually, with the technology we have at our fingertips these days. Even those who have not been able to embrace technology have been catered to by people being flexible and willing to change.

On our journeys where we have seen people helping other people, one cannot fail to notice the beauty in these caring and loving actions. Similarly, it is also hard not to notice the beauty of creation that surrounds us and the breathtaking beauty that is in the bush and forests all around us.

God gave us an awesome creation to take care of. When I get a chance, I like to bushwalk and sit somewhere for a rest and take stock of the beautiful plants and animals that surround me. Each has a story and each has a different role to play in the function of the world, and as part of creation: as do we. As part of God's family "The Body of Christ" we have been given a responsibility, and that is to care for creation to the best of our ability with love. I have included a picture of this spider in a web that I photographed in Port Macquarie. I found it an intriguing part of creation, that a creature so small can create a thing of such intricate beauty.



The web reminds me of a family. It seems so fragile, and yet the strands are quite tough. All of the web is required if it is to fulfil its function of providing food for the spider. If even a small part is missing, then the hole it leaves might mean the meal escapes and the spider goes hungry. Church families are the same: they require all members to be playing their part and it leaves a hole when one is not there.

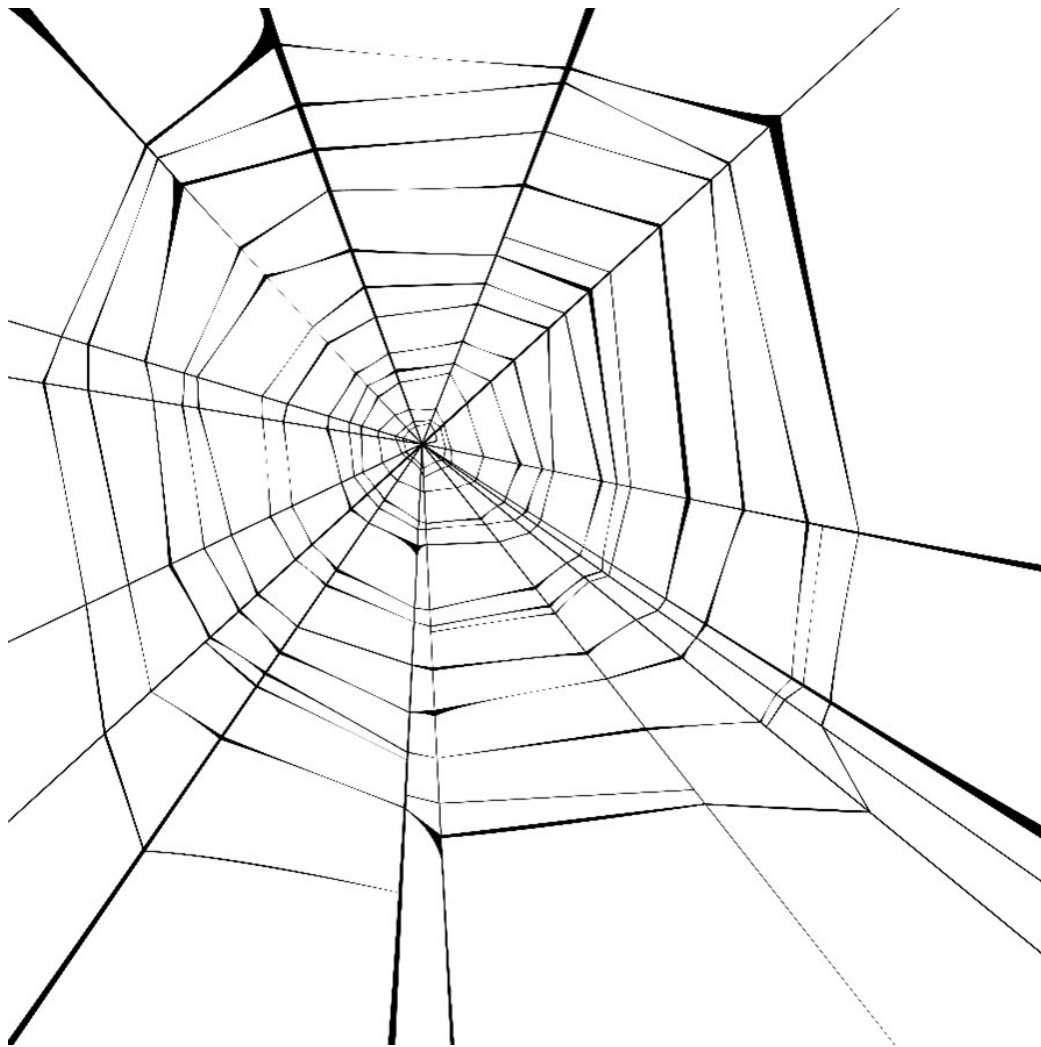
There are many ways though, that we can interpret the word family. Not only the family unit, and our church family, but there are also workplaces that are like a family where employees support each other.

One of my occupations over the years has been to work in a funeral parlour. There were occasions when we would have to change how duties were managed when someone was away, or help someone who was struggling a little with a task. For me it was a feeling of being part of a small family that helped each other in times of need. One of the pre-requisites of being employed in a funeral home is to be able to listen, simply because families are experiencing grief through the loss of a loved one, and need to be listened to. Not only was there the aspect of working together helping each other, there was also the aspect of meeting with families from all walks of life, often with family members coming from many different places. It's a situation where family members mostly want to do all they can to help each other.

Listening to each other is an integral part of any family unit. Taking time to listen creates the harmony that is needed to operate as a family and is one of those words that we use frequently. Quite often we hear the words "I haven't got time to do this or that". It begs the question: "Do we need to make the time?"

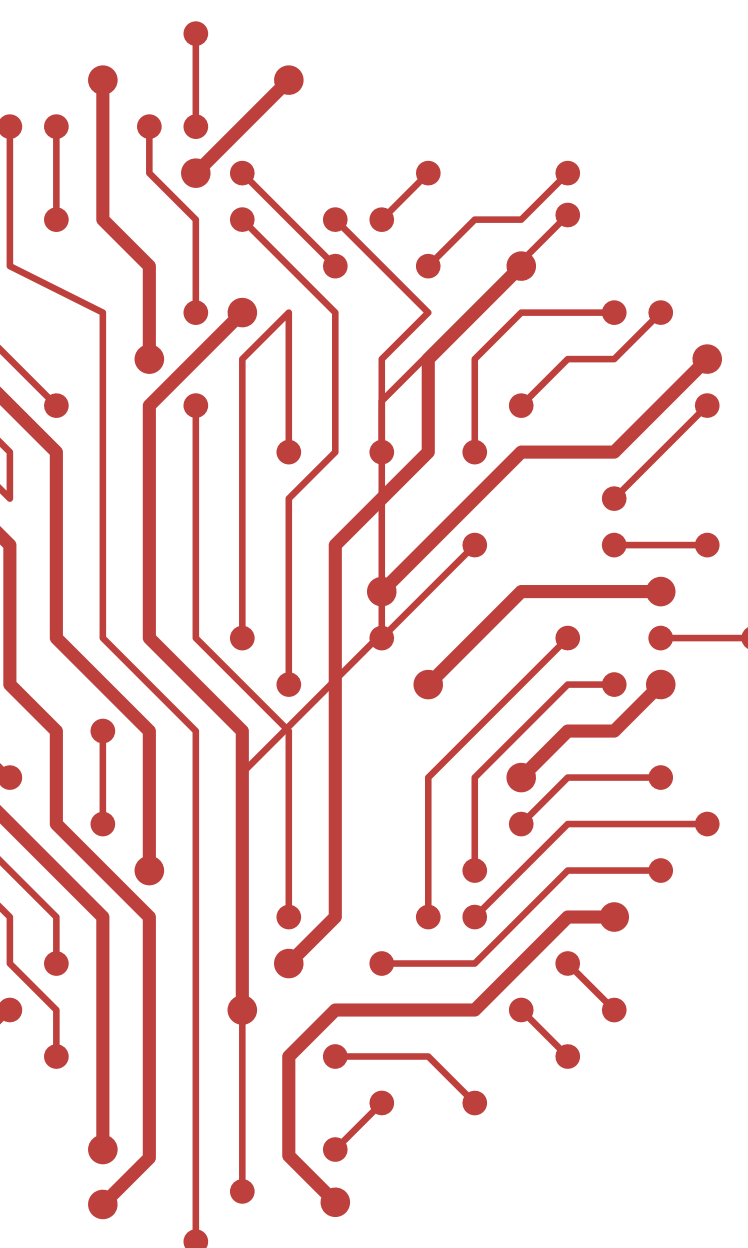
Families require a space to be a family but that space in our lives is often invaded by trying to do too many activities. Sometimes I think there is too much hurry and worry in the world: perspective is lost, and everyone is so frantic. It's so easy to become engrossed in our own lives and be so busy that we simply don't make the time to be a family ... of any kind. My 91-year-old mother, who is in care in Sydney, was an avid stitcher and has over her years created several cushions. One of them has the words stitched on the front of it, "Don't hurry, don't worry, take time to stop and smell the roses". There is much wisdom in these words. Often it is helpful to take time to stand back for a while and take stock.

I feel very fortunate that I belong to multiple loving caring families. We have been on a see-sawing journey with covid, along with many other things, but in the God of grace and love, there is hope. As can be seen with my own personal situation as a family, there is hope. As a family we are able to prioritise and help out when needed. May we all take time to stop and look at the community around us, see what is needed and be the answer to prayer.



In the Midst of Chaos

Rev. Rebecca Lindsay | Uniting Church Minister



I have set aside time to reflect and write. But in a societal moment when kids aren't allowed to be sick, one boy has a head cold (RAT negative) and the other is teething (5-at-once-OMG). Another day disrupted, enmeshed in the emotional rollercoaster of stop-start work, deadlines that will no longer be met, and the negotiation of which parent gets to stay home with two children whose energy levels is higher than their snot levels would suggest. The peaceful parents left long ago, about the same moment as sleep stopped being possible in units longer than an hour. The summer isocation didn't help, where holiday was replaced with the shared (extended) family experience of covid, quashing the much longed for break. I stop, read back my words, and find the parent-guilt of not-wanting-to-look-after-sick-kids joined by the guilty recognition of privilege. I am a knot of anxiety, imposter syndrome, and tiredness. I'd like to be calm and centred, the non-anxious presence I've occasionally witnessed in others. I take a breath. God is breath. Spirit-wind-breath. The Psalmist calls

out to me: "Let everything that has breath praise God" (Psalm 150: 6).

Covid made me reflect on the ways our family inhabit our faith together. When there was no longer a physical gathering of communal worship it felt like our faith practices were as scattered as the members of our community. I had always thought that family is a key place for living out our discipleship but when it was just us, in the smallest way of counting 'us,' our family struggled to mark our days with rich signs and symbols of God's presence. How would we recognize new moments of wonder in Creator God, formation in the stories of Scripture and of faithfulness in the community, and practices towards acting with justice and embodying grace. Gatherings via zoom or livestream worship failed to engage the toddler and the preschooler (ok, and the grown-ups found them challenging as well). I want for our family to find ways to share in faith together. I want my children to know the strangely beautiful and complicated stories of the Bible, that they would wrestle with them as Jacob wrestles with the stranger, never letting

go until there is blessing and life (Genesis 32: 22-32). I want them to encounter the Risen Crucified Christ and follow after him on the Way. As afternoon moves towards evening, after the daycare pick-up, when everyone is tired and hungry, the wrestle is much more of wills than of stories.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore, a feminist pastoral theologian who writes on motherhood, children, and family named her book on the practice of parenting *In the Midst of Chaos*. She wrestles with how to hold children, work, family, contemplation, silence, noise, chaos together in practices of faith that seek out the goodness of God in the middle of family life. Silence, quiet, and contemplation have an important place—after all, God speaks to Elijah not in the wind tearing at the mountains, nor the rupture of an earthquake and fire, but in the whisper of a delicate, whispering voice (1 Kings 19: 11-12) and Jesus of Nazareth would often slip away to wilderness places to pray (Luke 5: 16). But I also hear the noisy God, in wings sweeping over water and words spoken to create and birth all things (Genesis 1). I wonder if God laughed a big, delighted belly laugh when noticing how good creation was (is)? Or sang and danced in joy. I desire times of quiet, meditation, peacefulness and the focus and calm they bring, but I am not ready to let go of how to find God in the mess and noise of a small room where everything has been turned out upon the floor. I offer some vignettes of life in-the-midst of chaos.

Acknowledging

A note here on who I am and where I reflect from. Because the last paragraph tells you that I have somewhere to live and that my children have things to throw around on the floor. The faithfulness to God that I must learn in this space includes the recognition of my place in the world and its privilege and trappings. Families have scars. Scars hold embodied hidden stories which may be beautiful but may also be violent. The families whose stories form the biblical texts are full of pathos, terror, courage, hope. My own family has its scars, the fault-lines that can catch us at any moment, leaving us breathless. The lament and wailing of the Scriptures buoy me as I am cast again on waves of grief. On All Saints Day we remember our loved ones to the God whose life goes even beyond death. We light three candles. They are blown out with much gusto and spit.

Reflecting on the Gadigal and Bidjigal lands upon which I live, I recognize another scar, that of colonisation of land and people and the continuing legacy that entails that I benefit from. To follow God in this place will mean to acknowledge and confront and dwell in these truths, and to find ways to be an ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across generations in healing. Wakka Wakka Christian leader Brooke Prentis and Sandra Crowden, a Major in the Salvation Army, describe Jesus as the great Un-Settler breaking damper made by the first bread-makers (Prentis and Crowden, 2017, 'Learning to be guests of ancient hosts on ancient lands'). The interruption to life-as-normal over these last few years

opens opportunity to be intentionally unsettled by God in listening to the wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians and their encounters with Christ. Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion's books *Yarta Wandatha* and *Anaditj* are generous offerings to begin with. I put my feet in the sand, next to the feet of my husband and the two boys. We ground ourselves here, acknowledging that we were not the First Peoples that Creator God put in this place. We commit ourselves to listen for how to care for this place.

Prayer

Recently my five year old neighbour told her Mum that she loved best of all to eat dinner in our house with our family. I was surprised. When she and my son decide they're having dinner together it's a last minute affair in which they usually eat plain pasta with some cucumber and tomato on the side. It wasn't the food that she meant. She was fascinated by the practice of saying grace. We have usually said a prayer before meals but created more of a ritual when trying to include our children in the words of blessing.

One: Thank you God for

All: FOOD

One: Thank you God for

All: FAMILY AND FRIENDS

One: Thank you God for

All: TODAY. AAAAAAAAAAAAAAMEN.

We hold hands and take turns in leading the prayer. My neighbour has even taken a turn at leading the prayer at our table with great delight painted across her face. Later, her mother related that she had taught their whole family how to say the prayer insisting on full participation. Small moments to puncture the day with remembering to look beyond our small family may not be so small.

Wonder

When he was very young my eldest child could discern the softest call of a bird even out of the busy traffic noise where we live. If I stopped, I would hear it too. He used to sing to the trees, lying on his back, looking up at the sky. Lying alongside him I realised I hadn't seen that view of our park before. My youngest child has recently discovered cicada shells. He will point to the tree where they can often be found and in a whisper say "cicada." And then there are the stars. How wonderful it is to see the stars again through a four year old's eyes. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

As our family tries to find rhythms and patterns of faith-in-the-everyday that make sense to us and remind us of the expansiveness of God's love, I wonder what this next season will look like for the blended family we call the church. There are

many reasons why we don't always gather as communities bound together in Christ. Some of these reasons are even good ones —physical distance, a lack of resources, a global pandemic, or the inability to get everyone ready to leave on time. I am reminded that the gathering of disciples, no matter how irregular, is at its best when there are moments for noise and mess among the silence and stillness. The liturgy of mess and that of beauty can coalesce in a community that knows into whom it has been baptized and so along whom it struggles to be vulnerable about frailty, honest about the things that do not align with God's declaration of creation's goodness, and companions (bread-sharers) in finding the way of Christ together.



We share in communion via Zoom. "The bread and the juice, the bread and the juice" proclaims the four year old. This is his favourite moment in church. This is what forms him into the bigger family of God. He is lucky. His congregation love him even when he runs through the pews at what I would consider to be the wrong moments in a service of worship. "The bread and the juice, the bread and the juice!" We try to suggest patience, reminding him that the presiders on the screen are going to tell the story that shapes our family, the big one and the small one, and then we can eat. Finally, it is the moment. "The bread and the juice, the bread and the juice!" He breaks off small pieces for each of us and we dip it into our cup. Then, with a cheeky grin, he scoffs the rest and drains the cup. The carpet is full of breadcrumbs strewn among the distractions that got us to this moment in the service. I take a breath. God is breath. Spirit-wind-breath. The Psalmist calls out to me: "Let everything that has breath praise God" (Psalm 150: 6).

News from Saltbush

Rev. Mark Faulkner | Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives



How wonderful that 2022 seems to be allowing us back onto the road again to reaffirm the Saltbush understanding of our work as being both online and on ground. It is a privilege for the Saltbush team to gather online with people from all the corners of the land as we explore life and faith together, but it is encouraging also to meet with people in diverse locations for worship, conversation, hospitality and to sit with the challenge of being intentional Christian communities in the places we find ourselves.

Autumn 2022



In December of last year, the Saltbush team led one of our Scattered Community Gatherings in the Far North Coast in Lismore. At that time, we brought together people from the whole region, celebrated the induction of Rev. Peter Overton as the Regional Saltbush Scattered Community Minister, ate together and explored further conversations around the future of the church. Now, as I write this, the place where this photo was taken, Lismore Uniting Church, has been inundated with flood waters and a whole community of people are confronted with struggle and loss. We are very mindful of the work of many who make up the church and wider community in supporting others.

Saltbush has begun 2022 with another Scattered Community Gathering in Coonabarabran and like all our gatherings this year, they are for people to attend both online and on ground. It was good to be back on the road, boil the billy, and be with people in their own places as we explore *Intentional Christian Community*, which is the theme of all our gatherings this year.



Our other gatherings throughout 2022 will be in in Narrandera (May), Lismore [or up north if Lismore is unavailable] (July), and Tathra (October). We are also holding a retreat for rural/coastal Ministers (June) and a gathering for UTC students/candidates in Wagga (November)

In addition, the Saltbush team have gathered Ministers in rural/remote regions from across Australia as we have done over the past years. We have also participated in the International Church's Association 24-hour online conference of support and prayer – talking about our work, rural Ministry in the Australian context and leading a Saltbush worship time.

As we focus this year on *Intentional Christian Communities of Practice*, we continue to urge the wider church to ask the difficult questions about the aspects of Christian life that shape us as Christian communities. It's only from unfolding who we are as a Christian people and being patient in our consideration of the ongoing work and way of God that we can participate in shaping the future. Of course, mostly the church will rely on strategy, planning, projects, programs, business cases and meetings, but we will only

Autumn 2022

look back on them for the most part as wasted opportunities. Our year ahead, with Saltbush, will try to shake open more and more the questions of who we are as Christian people and communities joining with God in the days in which we find ourselves.

As part of this foundation is exploring life and faith together and so we continue to offer our online Saltbush Cafes and Saltbush @ Night gatherings and you are always welcome to come along as you are able.

To find out more about Saltbush you can use the QR code to take you there:



Peace to you all.

Mark .

Thanks for your donations to Saltbush!

Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage congregations and people in scattered communities of faith.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

Bank: Uniting Financial Services

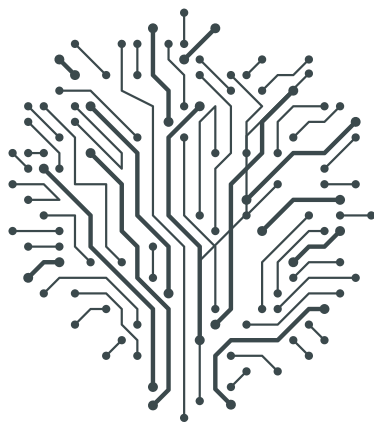
Account Name: UCA Synod Office

BSB: 634-634

Account Number: 100009463

Payment Reference: **"Saltbush"**





SALT BUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Ruminations 37