

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

Season of Creation 4

26th September



WORSHIP AT HOME

This week as we continue to mark the Season of Creation, we give particular attention to the relationship of Australian indigenous peoples with the land. Their essential, natural and deeply spiritual relationship with country is what we need to recapture a sense of. They are a beacon for us and as we are seeking to give “attention” to the natural world through the Season, we also will do well to give attention to their way of being.

Pam White offers a reflection today on indigenous peoples’ relationship to country.

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Psalms 124

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Creator God,

We thank and praise you for your good gift of creation. For your rivers, mountains, soils, skies and seas that sustain life, bring joy and heal.

We marvel at the diversity and wondrous complexity of life you have called by name. The beauty of relationship between all you have made, designed to live and flourish together.

We thank you Father God for calling us into relationship with you, commissioned to care for your good creation. To nurture, protect and join with all creation in singing your praise.

We ask your forgiveness Lord for our failure to love your creation as you do. For our complicit actions and complacent hearts that have chosen profit over protection. For our desire for comfort over concern and compassion for others. For our refusal to heed the warnings given to us over and over again. For our failure to acknowledge our total dependence on you Lord.

In a warming world, witness to floods, droughts, heat waves and fires we cry out Father God. We seek your holy wisdom of a Jubilee for the Earth. For rest and renewal of the relationship between us and all your creation. For your land to be healed, balance returned and the precious diversity of your creation sustained.

Lord, we ask you for courage to take up our cross and follow you. We pray that we would not be overcome by a spirit of despair. That we would not grow weary or feel overwhelmed by the work

ahead. Instead Father God we ask you to awaken your church with a spirit of hope, a spirit of courage and a spirit of love. We pray you would embolden us to speak out for justice for our vulnerable neighbours, our children, future generations and all your creation.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-12)

Monique Hughes – Common Grace

Esther 7. 1-6, 9-10, 9. 20-22

So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, ‘What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.’ Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.’



The Coronation of Queen Esther, from the 1617 Scroll of Esther from Ferrara, Italy.

Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?’ Esther said, ‘A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!’ Then Haman was terrified before the

king and the queen. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, 'Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high.' And the king said, 'Hang him on that.' So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

The Gospel according to Mark 9. 38-50

John the disciple said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.'



'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown

into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

‘For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’

Reflecting

One fine warm day in 1966 I found myself wandering around the base of Uluru , or Ayers Rock as we called it then. My Teachers’ College friends were all climbing the monolith and I had felt a bit of a wimp by bailing out of the climb, partly because my over cautious mum had implored me not to and from my own sense of unease, or funk. That day has come to be among the most utterly awe-inspiring experiences of my life.

As I scuffed through the red sand, all alone, I was filled with a sense of wonder. I could not put it into words and I did not discuss it with any of my fellow travelers.

There was a sense of the Other all around me. I could hear it whisper on the breeze, I could feel it in the radiating warmth, I could touch it in the solidity of rock. It was beyond me in the vastness of the land and it seemed within me, as intimate as my own breathing. It was a presence.

I was awe struck. It was indeed holy ground.

I am so glad I did not climb the Rock that day, partly because I now understand how offensive that is to the Anangu First Peoples and also because I had that depth of experience which I think helps me to understand at least the rudiments of Indigenous, Aboriginal, First People’s Spirituality.

A Yorta Yorta woman Hyllis Maris who lived between 1934 and 1986 wrote of it thus:

I am a child of the Dreamtime People
Part of the land like the gnarled gum tree.
I am the river, softly singing
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea.
My spirit is dust devils
Mirages, that dance on the plain
I’m snow, the wind and the falling rain.
I’m part of the rocks and the red desert earth
Red as the blood that flows in my veins.
I am eagle, crow and snake that glides
Through the rain -forest that clings to the mountain side.
I awakened here when the earth was new.
There was emu, wombat, kangaroo.
No other man of a different hue
I am this land
I am Australia.

We can see in her expression the overlay of white education as she makes the rhyming patterns of European poetry. What she expresses is the interrelationship she has with the land, with Country. It is her oneness with everything. She does not just belong to the land but she is part of its very self. It is part of her.

This is part of the essence of Indigenous spirituality, that one's being is embedded in belonging both to kin and country. This is manifested in the ways in which the people are interrelated with the animals, the plants, the terrain, rocks, earth, rivers, sea and sky.

My experience that day at Uluru did not grant me that sense of belonging but it did give me an entrance into some understanding of how it might be for First Peoples.



I experienced it again when we lived in WA, not quite as strongly, but the Presence was there. As part of my studies through Murdoch University I had to explore my local area, understanding something of its geology, flora and fauna and history. As I wandered along the salt flats and near the mangroves alone with my camera and in the oppressive heat, I had a small sense of what it might mean to belong to that place. The place was quite alien to what I was used to, the much softer hills of the Dandenongs and the beaches of Port Philip Bay .

Although I was not far from habitation there was a profound sense of being alone in the vastness and yet somehow surrounded by some sense of presence of, I know not quite what.

No way could I have found water to drink nor recognize the plants that would sustain life nor be able to kill a kangaroo for food. And if our family's lack of fishing prowess were anything to go by, we would not have been able to live on fish.

With hindsight and developing knowledge I had also a sense of emptiness, a vacancy on that day. The Original Peoples no longer lived there. Iron Ore and Natural Gas companies had followed on from pastoralists in utilizing and exploiting the land. The First Peoples who had lived there had not survived this, only their art, stenciled on rock walls remained and that fortunately was kept hidden by the few people sensitively aware of the rich legacy.

If the Spirits of the original people from the past were there still, they remained hidden. These past people, the old ones, are part of the kinship that is integral to Indigenous spirituality. It is about knowing who your mob is, to whom you belong, from whom you descended, both human and Dreaming Creator creatures. It is to these spirits that Indigenous people return upon their death and then later reappear as another part of the Creation.

Perhaps the spirits were hidden, watching on in the Karratha Court House when several policemen were on trial for the murder of Aboriginal man, John Pat, kicked and beaten to death while in custody. Did the Old People spirits mutter in abject horror when the police were acquitted?

Did these spirit people come on the bus excursion with bush children soon to enroll in the town secondary school? As part of the excursion the kids were taken inside the Dickensian Old Roebourne jail, complete with its shackles on the walls, to see what happens to youths who run foul of the law, laws they often have little hope of being able to keep?

Or did the spirits laugh and swim in the waterhole with the other kids, the carefree ones who chose not to go to school?

Did they congregate at the Victoria Pub on Friday nights, seeing their cousins from other areas drinking and fighting until they too were locked up in the jail yard?

Western people usually scoff at the idea of ghosts but many other cultures have a rich resonance with the people from their pasts. A Melbourne clergyman Rev Gary Deverell who identifies as a Trawlolway man, descended from the Aboriginal peoples of Northern Tasmania, speaks of his experience of hearing the voices and understanding the language of his forbears. He experienced them dancing, chanting and singing as he approached a particular beach in Tasmania. He saw them on the beach with their dark skin, animal robes and ochre paint, but when his contemporary walking companions caught up with him, these ancestors vanished. They had been a real experience to Gary and he came to understand them as having come to encourage him on his exploration of his Indigenous heritage.

You might want to dismiss this as a flight of fancy, but Gary sees this experience as being a part of the Dreaming, the lore of his people's history and spirituality, their relationship with the whole environment and with their rich past that connects them to the land and to each other.

The Dreaming has past, present and future dimensions. It is everywhere and always present in everything all around. While it holds the mythological stories of the First Peoples it also sustains them, like the air we breathe or the water that fish swim in. It is kept in the People's awareness by their Storytelling. The Dreaming is told in song, in dance, in repeated story, in initiations and rituals, in art on cave walls.

And is not this the way it is for us and our spirituality, our faith? We tell the story of Jesus and the story of God's people, over and over, through our rituals, through painting and sculpture,

through our songs and in some places even through dance and movement. In Jewish faith the celebration of Purim commemorates the way the brave and clever Esther saved her minority people from extermination in the Persian kingdom.

We even have some sense of connection beyond earthly life. We embrace the Holy Spirit as being the presence of the Risen Jesus with us 2000 years after his death. It should not be difficult for us to appreciate the ways of Indigenous spirituality with its Dreaming that explains Creation.

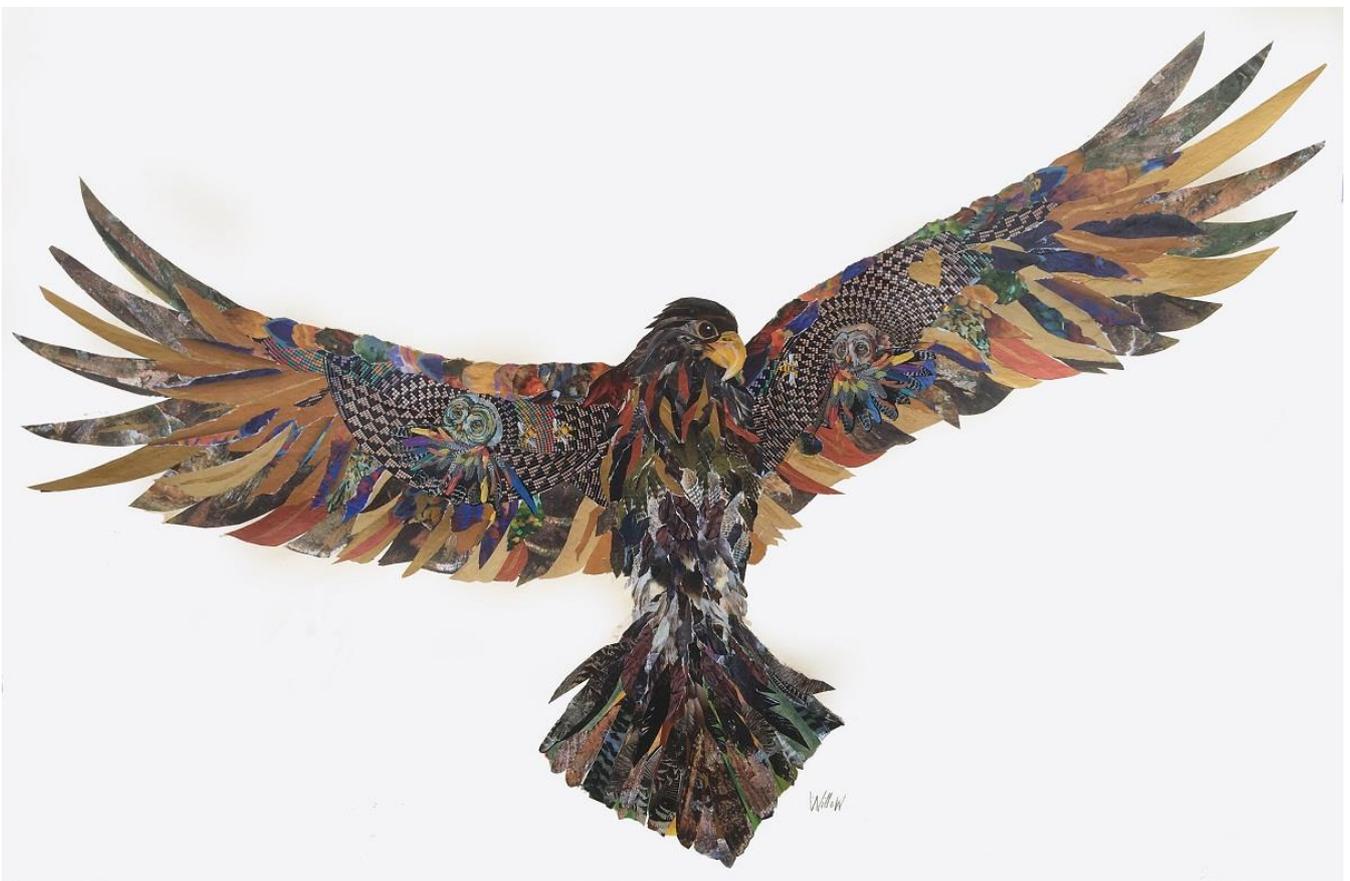
Just as there are different branches of Christianity and Islam and Judaism, the Australian First people's spirituality has some variations. There were some 250 Aboriginal nations when colonization began in 1788. Being spread across such a vast land it is natural that their Creation stories, their Dreaming, will have differences according to the landscapes and the animals present.

There are similar but varied threads running through the belief systems. The Creator Spirit was often called Baiame the sky father for such peoples as the Wonnarua, Kamilaroi, Eora and Wiradjuri.

Some Tasmanian First People relate to Moinee who made people from dirt and modelled them on Tarneer, the kangaroo -creator.

Other peoples, such as the Kulin, claimed Bunjil who created people by breathing into the clay figures he moulded. Does this not have a familiar ring to us as God breathed into the figure of Adam, made from the dust?

Other spirit ancestors include the Crow Waa, a trickster figure.



Some Peoples like the Yanyuwa speak of how the spirits of the dead are often attacked by crows who are angry at being chased away from camp sites. The spirits are saved by hawks and falcons. There are many, many stories which explain aspects of life descended from the Dreaming.

With colonization many First peoples were banned from speaking their language or practicing their rituals. Many were driven from the land which held their Dreaming and was so intricately connected with their being. Language was lost and children grew up without knowing the richness of their heritage or initiation rites and they grew up dislocated from all that was important to them ... their kin, their Dreaming and their land. And as these Peoples were barred from their land so the land was denigrated, exploited, swamps drained, rivers polluted, seas overfished, reefs bleached, plains overgrazed by introduced animal, many of which have become feral, forests razed, land features blasted to expose the mineral wealth the colonizers so coveted.

It is safe to say that very little of the ways of the Old People remains intact. Only in pockets, way beyond our cities is the affinity with the land still regarded as part of the very fabric of being. Missionaries, our forbears, made sure so much was taken from the First peoples, even their own names not to mention their ways and beliefs. This can be compared with the genocide that so threatened Esther's people as Haman plotted to exterminate the Jews. Genocide is a very ugly word but this is what we Second Peoples must own.

Yes, we can see that some missionaries were genuinely wanting to obey the command to make disciples, to bring Christ's ways to these people whom they regarded as ignorant savages. However, all too often this went hand in glove with paternalistic government policies which were bent on seeing the First peoples disappear, die out. This was coupled with avaricious business models that rode rough shod over the people's lifestyle, eliminating their food sources as well as desecrating their sacred spaces. Little time or effort was spent in learning the ways and understanding the beliefs of the First Peoples. This was never entertained, that the First Peoples were neither ignorant nor savage, but had their own complex system of beliefs and ways, ways that honoured the land and did not exploit it because it was their Mother. Even today a mining company can destroy a sacred space and little is done to remediate it. Nothing can bring back what has been so comprehensively destroyed.

Can we draw some reparation from Jesus' remark in Mark's Gospel, 'Whoever is not against us is for us'? Even recognising that I take this out of its context, might it be a word of healing in the reconciliation process that many Australians believe is necessary if we are to go ahead as a nation of First and Second Peoples together? The disciples were affronted at anyone not of their group being able to do the work, be at Jesus' mission. Yet Jesus was not at all bothered by these interlopers.

Many Australians from all backgrounds hunger for reconciliation, for a new Creation to occur in our land.

But we have to ask ourselves why? If it is so Second Peoples can feel better about the past that was inflicted upon the Aboriginal Peoples and have the guilt of this corporate past expunged, then the First Peoples will see little benefit in it. Why would they?

In Jesus' words, that anyone who is not against us is for us, we can read a breadth that goes way beyond sectarianism, perhaps beyond Christianity itself. We know that there is goodness in faith

systems and that also all can be applied abusively. There will need to be acknowledgment that much of what happened in colonization was certainly not done in love.

Probably it is impossible for First Peoples to return to the state that they lived in before 1788. So much has been lost. Many First Peoples have embraced Christianity. Many now live lives similar to the Second comers. Many have embraced western education. Yet many of these people still feel a strong connection with their Dreaming ancestry, whatever their skin colour. In order to be reconciled with each other Second Peoples, us, will have much work to do in listening to how the First Peoples imagine our future together.

We will need to listen in our church structures, in our ways of government across the land, in our health systems, in education, and how both children and older people can learn and in the justice system. We will need to listen with respect and humility and we will not be able to wave away the wrongs of the past.

We will need to see through different eyes: to see where the land is integrated into the very fabric of being. We will need to see the night sky and identify a dark emu in the Milky Way.

We will need to feel the pain of the land where it has been ravaged. We will need to really be sorry for the way First Peoples have been treated.

Perhaps if we heed Jesus' words of being together in the same sense of mission, we will reach reconciliation. We will find satisfactory ways of recompense. We will not impose European values and ways that too often stem from our greed and our arrogance, but we will appreciate that there may be a different way, a better way for the Earth and her family. We may be able to acknowledge or even be upon the sacred places like Uluru and be aware of the Other, the One whom we name God, the One who personifies Love and perhaps then we will be healed.

This is my prayer.

Pam White

Prayer

Creator God,

We yearn to see once again magnificent towering gum trees, spreading their branches wide – accepting the birds and insects that take up residence there.

We long to hear the beating of the huge surf waves on the south coast of Victoria, crashing with thunderous roars.

We can scarcely remember the smell and taste of the fantastic menus created at our favourite restaurants – all from the bounty of your earth.

Our faces feel the beginnings of warmth on them and we are thankful

We remember that you love us God, as you love the whole created earth.

Jesus, friend of the outcast,

We grieve that vaccines are not available yet for all the peoples of the world and know that the people on the edges of society have been left till last.

We think particularly of those in Victoria who have been influenced by poor “scientific” information, and those who have little access to information in their own language.

We know that these people have a greater chance of being infected by COVID and of needing hospital assistance – we pray for the hospital system as it grapples with the effects of this non-information or misinformation.

We pray for the people in power who are managing the response to anti-vaccine marches, that they will choose wise paths to assist the protesters to understand the need for a vaccine double dose.

We remember that you love us God, as you love the whole created earth.

Spirit and comforter,

We pray for the people of Melbourne who are again experiencing lockdown in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

We think of the people who have been placed in greater risk of abuse by partners, of those who are currently living by themselves, of those who are quarantining, of those struggling with the mental torment of being separated from community.

Breathe your breath of comfort on them, draw close to them, assure them that you love them as you love the whole created earth.

Our Father in heaven ...

Blessing

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Early prayer:

Uluru photo: Photo by [Photoholgic](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Cup of water: Photo by [Manki Kim](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Indigenous totems by Chern'ee Sutton

The Coronation of Queen Esther, from the 1617 Scroll of Esther from Ferrara, Italy.

Institution: National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

Rev. Andrew Boyle

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NEWS AND NOTICES

AFTER WORSHIP CHAT – ZOOM LINK emailed

For those wishing to catch up after this Sunday's worship service, there will be an opportunity to stay online to chat afterwards on **Sunday 26th**

September 11.00am to 12.00pm. Zoom Link is being emailed to the congregation and you can phone in on:

By dialing 7018 2005 (Melbourne) using Meeting ID: 863 1757 2219

Passcode: 934943

FRONTIER SERVICES BBQ

Join us to hear from Marian Bisset

– Frontier Services Chaplain



Saturday 2nd October from 12.30pm

As noted in the September edition of Pathfinder we will hold our annual Frontier Services BBQ on Saturday 2nd October. Given the continued COVID restrictions this will be an online event, though. We have arranged for Frontier Services chaplain, Marian Bisset to come online with us and talk about her work in the early part of the afternoon so we hope you will be able to join us.

The demand for the work of Frontier Services continues to grow. The stress on people in remote Australia, particularly farmers, continues to be felt. Parts of Australia have been facing the longest drought since European settlement, some areas have been overrun with colossal mouse plagues and the effects of the 2019-2020 bushfires continue to be felt. While government and agency supports are often provided promptly for people affected by these circumstances, the traumatic impact of these events continues to be felt for years, if not decades. It is with people in these circumstances that Frontier Services chaplains work. This year they plan to recruit a further six chaplains to meet the needs of remote Australians. This is an opportunity to support and value this ongoing work founded by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

Donations to Frontier Services work can be made online at:

<https://greatoutbackbbq.com.au/donate-to-a-bbq/>

In the **Search** field type in Ormond Uniting Church to contribute to our joint effort.

You can participate in one of two ways on the day:

- Join in for lunch at **12.30** – we will create breakout rooms so you can join us and be allocated to a virtual space to chat with a few others while you have lunch.
- Join us at **1.30** to hear from Marian.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/84063082160?pwd=cUd3Z2l5OFFGsk41dTU1MIU3TDVWQT09>

Meeting ID: 840 6308 2160

Passcode: 180887

Dial in on: 7018 2005

Meeting ID: 840 6308 2160

Passcode: 180887

THE ORMOND LEARNING HUB



THE BIG STORIES OF OUR FAITH

Sometimes reading the scriptures can be strange and confusing. When a story seems a bit strange to us, we can rightly ask: Why this story? Where does it fit? Across the ark of both the Old and New Testaments there are some big stories into which much of the scriptures fit. Understanding these important stories and themes can make sense of particular passage's meaning.

In this third course for 2021 we will explore the big themes of the scriptures. Some of these will include:

- Bondage and Liberation, Exile and Return and Sin and Forgiveness.
- We will explore the question: Does the violence of the crucifixion really redeem us?
- What does the event of the resurrection mean?

We will draw our material from the series *Living the Questions* and allow generous time for small group conversation.

When: Thursdays 21st, 28th October & 4th November, 7.30pm.

Where: Online by Zoom (if we are able to meet face to face, we will advise at the time)

Cost: \$30 for the course

Who: led by Rev. Andrew Boyle

Enquiries and booking to: learninghub@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

PATHFINDER REMINDER for Articles and photos:

Due Date for submissions for the October edition of Pathfinder is this

Monday 27thSeptember to Dianne and Gary.

With thanks.

Reminder re update to Church Office contact details

Church Office Phone: [0411 958 127](tel:0411958127)

Minister – new work email contact (Rev. Andrew Boyle): ajmboyle@outlook.com

Note: Any general queries can still be directed to the office email which remains the same: office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au