

Toorak Uniting Church

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Still thinking: This is your brain of prayer – Christopher Page



Dr Andrew Newberg has worked for many years developing a field of research called *Neurotheology*. This field of enquiry takes seriously contemporary studies on the human brain and the history of Christian and religious theology, particularly the mystical approach and tries to understand why human beings are so predisposed to ideas and experiences of “God”.

Attempting to bring a coherent approach to this discipline,

Newberg produced a book in 2001 titled, *Why God Won't go*

Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief and more recently in 2009, *How God Changes your Brain*. Both are fascinating reads, albeit a bit technical at times.

Simply put, over a period of years Newberg studied the brains of people in the act of meditation, prayer and visualizing religious experiences. Using an Electroencephalography, (EEG) machine, he gathered data on the changes in particular areas of the brain when the subjects engaged in “spiritual” activities. He found that the parts of the brain that “lit up” during these experiments were associated with the limbic system.

The limbic system is the part of the brain that contains the amygdala, hypothalamus, and hippocampus and limbic cortex. It is found on top of the brainstem. This system as a whole is responsible for our feelings of love, fear, anger, jealousy, embarrassment, pride and elation and the emotions needed to ensure survival including sexual pleasure and memory. The cerebral cortex lies above these structures. That's the technical part, what is important is that this area is the oldest structure in the brain and it is the location of our religious and spiritual feelings.

When a person prays or meditates the limbic system in the brain is activated and with sustained practice the individual can have two competing experiences, either a depth sense of calm and peace or a strong sense of union or oneness with God. Newberg is quick to remind his audience that he is measuring only the human physiological response to an encounter or experience of the “holy”. This neither proves nor disproves the existence of God in the same way that he can measure a person's response to eating a sandwich which neither proves nor disproves the existence of the sandwich. But what it does do, perhaps for the first time, is to show that humans are predisposed to religious and spiritual experiences, beliefs and rituals and that our brains are in fact “designed” by evolution to be open to the holy, sacred and divine.

So some tentative conclusions are as follows:

We all need rituals that connect us with our world and the “ground of our being.” The practices that we do together, communion, worship, prayer, singing and general attendance at church gatherings do find a receptive place in our minds, “hearts” and lives.

We should think about our faith. Most studies suggest that religious thought and experience is not static, but rather evolving. Our cognitive process and our emotional limbic system work together to produce healthy religion.

The quest of the human mind and the processes of the brain developed over millions of years is progressing toward what theologians call the mystical rather than just rule based religiosity which is more often the product of religious institutions and not of religious experience.

Fellowship lunch: You are warmly invited to participate in a hearty soup and cake lunch following the Whole Church Family service on **Sunday, June 26th**. Please RSVP to the church office or Barbara McKinnon if you would like to attend. Please also let Barbara know if you would like to contribute a cake or soup to the lunch.

CONGREGATIONAL UPDATE – ELECTION DAY FAIR 2 JULY 2016

Michael Kenihan and Jon Sennitt have preparations underway to ensure that once again our Fair is a great success both in terms of an opportunity to welcome thousands of people to TUC and to raise funds.

Stalls and Stall Co-ordinators

BRIC A BRAC	Lenore Newnham	9509 0496 newnham.brian@gmail.com
CRAFT & SEWING	Nina Mumford	0422 228 416 nina.mumford@optusnet.com.au
CAKES & PRE-SERVES	Lyn McAlister	9822 2832
2 ND HAND BOOKS, CD'S, DVD'S	Stan Laughter	0427 401 299 stanlaughter@acslink.net.au
SAUSAGE SIZZLE	Jon Sennitt Michael Kenihan	0478 809 678 jon.sennitt@gmail.com 0412 885 896 michael.kenihan@lifecare.com.au
MANSE GALLERY CAFE	Raz Psonis	9829 0341 meetatmanse@gmail.com
CRAFT WITH SPIRIT	Studio 1 KASC	n/a

Donations

BRIC A BRAC	Please deliver to the office during office hours prior to 2 July or contact Lenore to make alternate arrangements.
CRAFT & SEWING	Please deliver to the office during office hours prior to 2 July or contact Nina to make alternate arrangements.
CAKES & PRESERVES	Please deliver to the stall on the morning of 2 July or contact Lyn to make alternate arrangements. Please ensure all donations are labelled with ingredients.
2ND HAND BOOKS, CD'S, DVD'S	Hard backs and paper backs accepted. Books published in the last 15 years. CDs & DVDs in original covers/cases. Please use boxes that can be handled easily by one person Deliver to the office during office hours prior to July 1st or contact Stan to make alternate arrangements.

Donations outside of office hours can be placed in the kitchenette next to the Wettenhall Room.

More **Bric A Brac** needed for the Election Day Stall please!

Election Day Cakes, Jams & Produce Stall

Please start thinking about what you can make, bake or pick for the stall. Small chocolate orange or fruit cakes are much in demand – also shortbread and loaves. Gluten free goods are in demand, also lemons and herbs. NOTE: All items are required by OH&S to be well-sealed and have all ingredients listed on the label, with the initials of the maker. We have pre-made labels which you can collect from the office or Lyn McAlister. If you have queries about anything including pricing, contact Lyn on 9822 2832.



****NEW** Election Day Stall - 'Craft with Spirit'**

The 'Craft with Spirit' stall will offer handcrafted objects, small woven baskets, artist's books and works on paper made by the group of artists/art therapists who occupy Studio 1 at Kinross Arts & Spirituality Centre.

The Studio 1 group offers weaving workshops, journal making, sensorimotor art therapies and individual art psychotherapy sessions.

The members of the group are practicing artists and hold a Masters in Creative Arts Therapy with professional body registration.

In our thoughts and prayers:

Angela Abbott, coping with treatment for cancer.

Jean Allison following the death of her sister.

Victims and survivors of the Orlando massacre, their families and friends.

Congratulations to Rev Rob Gallacher on receiving an OAM for services to the Uniting Church and religious education

You, your friends and family are warmly invited to the JMC concert!

23 JUNE at 1:45pm (guests to be seated by 1.30)

Followed by refreshments at the John Macrae Centre.

RSVP to Katrina at JMC: 9829 0320

Help Needed

We are looking for helpers to assist on the Bric a Brac and Sewing Stalls. Please contact Lenore and Nina if you can assist on 2 July.

We are looking to borrow large umbrellas to shield the stalls and out-door furniture and umbrellas as weather permitting, we will set up tables and chairs on the lawn. Please contact Michael or Jon as soon as possible if you can assist. We are looking for helpers to assist in packing away the cakes, bric a brac, craft and 2nd hand stalls from 3pm – 5 pm on 2 July. Please contact Michael or Jon as soon as possible if you can assist.

Diary Dates

Mon 20 Jun	10.30am	Drop in card day	Faichney Room
Tue 21 June	7.30pm	Finance Committee	Wettenhall Room
Wed 22 Jun	6.30/7.45	Hand Bell rehearsal	Wettenhall Room
Thu 23 Jun	10.30-12	Clyde Old Girls' Jumble Sale	Hall
Thu 23 Jun	1.30pm	JMC concert & refreshments	Church, then JMC
Sun 26 Jun	10.15am	Whole Church Family service and lunch	
Mon 27 Jun	11.00am	Fellowship Morning Coffee	Faichney Room
Thu 30 Jun	10.00am	Prayers for Christian Unity	Swedish Church
Sat 02 Jul	All day!	FEDERAL ELECTION & TUC FAIR	
Sun 17 Jul	11.45am	Interment—Anne Parratt	Memorial Garden
Thu 11 Aug	7.45pm	Toorak Ecumenical Council	TUC

Welcome to Toorak Uniting Church

We welcome all people irrespective of race, religion, political views, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, or age. Wherever you are on your faith journey, wherever you have come from and wherever you are going to; whatever you believe, whatever you do not believe, you are welcome here at Toorak Uniting Church.

Please come and join us after the service for fellowship and a cup of tea or coffee.