



# Toorak Uniting Church

## Update 04 February 2018

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Phone: 9829 0300  
Sunday services 9am & 10.15am



### *Re- Thinking – Your brain and 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.

Of course this adds little to the life of the believer and in fact many, even in the Christian tradition, have moved beyond a craving for an interventionist, supernatural being of the type the atheists are fond of debunking. The interest for me lies more in the ways in which Christian and religious practices can be bring

about a meaningful life and encounter with what we call God. It does seem that it is important that we should pay attention to several insights gain through studying the human brain. They are:

- *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 religiously which is more often the product of religious institutions and not of religious experience.*

#### In our thoughts and prayers—

The family of Ryan de Wit, 29, former TUC electrician, who was fatally electrocuted on Monday in a workplace accident at a factory.

Ryan's wife, Emma, is due to give birth to their first baby in April.

#### Prayers for Christian Unity 2018 at 10am

Feb 22	Swedish Church
Mar 22	St Peter's
Apr 26	St John's
May 13-20	Week of Prayer
May 17	12pm, + lunch, at St Peter's
May 31	TUC

**A number of groups** have already booked to meet regularly at TUC in 2018. If you are interested in joining any of them, the Office staff can provide contact details.

Australasian Native Orchid Society	7.00pm 1 <sup>st</sup> Fri of month
Beaurepaire's Bridge	12.30pm Thu
Brown's Bridge	9.00am Wed
Ceramic & Glass Circle	7.00pm 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mon of month
Dickens Fellowship	6.30pm 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed of month
Feldenkrais (various groups)	Irregular bookings, check online calendar.
Ikebana International	9.00am 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tue of month
Le Club Enfants	9.30am Tue
Soozexercises	9.30am Mon & Fri
Tai Chi	10.30am Thu
TUC Dance Classes	Irregular bookings, check online calendar.
TUC Handbells	6.00pm Wed
TUC Morning Group	10am 3 <sup>rd</sup> Thu of month
Weight Watchers	5.30pm Tue
Yoga	9.30am Mon & Thu

## Diary Dates

Sat	10 Feb	TBC	TUC Planning Day	
Sun	11 Feb	10.15am	Baptism of Elizabeth Bell	Church
Tue	13 Feb	4.30pm	MT meeting	Wettenhall Rm
Thu	15 Feb	10.00am	Morning Group	Faichney Rm
Sat	17 Feb	4.00pm	Nickson-Kerr wedding	Church

# Thanks



To our members Lenore Newnham and Jill Williams, who have retired from their long-time reliable help at the fellowship hour, we give our thanks for their commitment and generosity. Special thanks are here recorded also to Jonathan Lancaster, for his on-going behind-the-scene assistance each week.

Thank you, too, to Milton Cameron, Kerrie Cross, Hilary Hall, Julie and Jack Frazer, June Downes, Charmaine Cornford, and Jeanette McArthur who will continue serving tea and coffee week by week after the 10.15 service.

All congregants are encouraged to join together in the Faichney Room for fellowship, to extend the hand of friendship, and to welcome our visitors. The time is set aside; the tea and coffee are free!

*Christine Brown*

### **Toorak Ecumenical Council AGM:**

Due to St Peter's not yet being ready, the TEC AGM will be held on Thurs. 8<sup>th</sup> February at 7.45pm in the Vestry at St John's. The May meeting will be at St Peter's.

Would you, your friends and family be interested in being an audience member and coming to see a recording of Channel Nine's **Millionaire Hot Seat**?

Audience members enter a draw to win \$500 as well as other prizes.

It's a great day out for friends and family, full of laughs and entertainment. See Eddie live in action and experience the thrill of watching Australia's favourite game show.

Bring as many people as you would like. Food, drinks and free parking are provided and we ensure that we make the day enjoyable for all those who attend.

Upcoming recording dates are:

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> February

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> April

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> May



Call Olivia Hains on 9420 3190 for more information or to lock in dates.

## Grief Support Group

Grief has no timeline. It can feel as if a significant part of ourselves has been inextricably wrenched away. A support group can offer companionship and form a united understanding. Mental Health Foundation Australia invites you to attend a Grief and Loss Support Group. It's non-denominational and an open-ended invitation for a monthly meeting. Everyone is welcome. Last Tue. of the month at 12:00, St. Johns Church, 86 Clendon Rd, Toorak. 9826 1422 | [www.mhfa.org.au](http://www.mhfa.org.au)

**Op Shop Report** The Toorak Ecumenical Op Shop had a very successful year where we made \$252,000, of which the Uniting Church distribution was \$84,000 divided among the following recipients:

Avalon Centre	7,000
Berry Street Family Service	2,500
Black Rhino Basketball Club (helping South Sudanese assimilate)	8,000
Broadmeadows Uniting Care	6,000
Harrison Community Services Uniting Care	6,000
HALT (Hope Assistance Local Tradies)	8,000
John Macrae Centre for the Elderly	5,000
Kildonan Uniting Care	6,000
Prahran Mission Uniting Care	6,000
VICSEG-New Future-Programs for Family, Children & Young People	10,000
P.S. My Family Matters	8,000
Manningham LINC (Volunteers Working with Refugees & Elderly)	2,500
Western Tigers Football Club-South Sudanese Integration Program	5,000
TUC Minister's Discretionary Fund	4,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$84,000</b>

We wish to thank all our volunteers who work at the Op Shop, donors who supply marvellous items for sale, and our customers who purchase from us. The Op Shop will re-open on Monday 15 January, at 1A Carters Ave, Toorak.

With our best wishes, *Carlo Jack, Margaret Rees-Jones and Wendy Ritchie*, Committee members, Toorak Op Shop

## 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.