



# KNØX CHURCH

love faith outreach community justice

## Pastoral Letter not during lockdown

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5 November, 2021

Kia Ora Knox Community,

As is the Knox custom now, in the months where we don't have a "Knox Life" hitting the shelves, I send out a wee pastoral email newsletter. The pastoral emails aren't designed to be sophisticated theological theses or world-shattering proclamations. They're about keeping in touch. Behold this month's example!

### **Study Leave**

When any Presbyterian parish calls a full-time minister to serve in its midst, one of the provisions the parish is required to make is paid leave for the minister to go away now and then to engage in study. It's meant to keep ministers fresh, engaged and interesting. Study leave is granted at an accumulating rate of one day each month until a maximum accrual, over seven years, of 84 days. Given that I'd served at Knox for over seven years, I'd bumped into the maximum accrual and had started to experience increasing levels of "encouragement" to take some study leave. Taking 48 of the accrued 84 days, I embarked on a reading programme half way through September, returning to Knox just this week.

Given that we, at Knox, had declared ourselves to be a community of peace, I contacted Associate Professor Sung Yong Lee, the course convenor of Otago University's Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies' core paper, "Theories of Peace and Conflict", who happily provided me with a really helpful reading list. He was also happy to meet with me when I managed a wee visit to Dunedin in late September.

The reading material was really stimulating. As I read it, a series of four seminars formed in my brain. By the end of my leave, I had the seminars ready to go, along with some self-written essays, some edited articles, and a whole lot of power-point material. I think the material will help us re-boot our peace agenda that kind of stalled when Covid locked us down last year. The study material will, I think, help us bring some good new thinking to what we do next as a community of peace.

Although it's all ready to go, there's a small matter of Christmas coming and then the summer break. We could run the seminars across four Sundays in February, but it might be better to schedule them after Easter. I'm taking advice on the scheduling issue.

But since the seminars could be really good and helpful, keep an eye out for them.

### **Public Questions and Social Issues**

Just before I went on study leave, Knox Council agreed to the establishment of a Public Questions Group. While I was away, Council agreed the terms of reference for the group. While the group probably won't have any opportunity to work very hard until next year, I do hope to have a wee gathering this year of the people who expressed an interest in being involved. When I floated the idea of the group, I mentioned that a parliament was beginning to process a bill concerning conversion therapy. It has been interesting, since then, to note the general drift of submissions made by church groups. The general drift confirms that Knox has an important role to play in correcting a skewed presentation of Christian position.

Various Members of Parliament spoke in the house at the first reading of the bill. Dr Ayesha Verrall, a Labour Party list member and academic scientist, made what I consider a very good speech. You can find it here, down a screen or two:

[https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb\\_20210805\\_20210805\\_30](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210805_20210805_30)



### **Covid Matters - testing and vax status**

My lovely eldest neice, who lives in Tamaki Makaurau Auckland, turns 21 on Sunday. Initially, two celebratory functions were planned; one for the real people, and one for the various waifs, strays and curiosities who constitute "family". I had a flight booked for the latter function. The restaurant booked for the family "do" has closed. My Jetstar flight has yet to be cancelled, but I'm sure it will be. If it's not, I have no intention of flying to Auckland just now. It wouldn't be the right thing to do. Someone else thought travelling to Auckland was the right thing to do, and brought a case of Covid back down South. Since the person had visited a local supermarket around the same time as I did on Monday 25 October, my Covid tracing app alerted me to possible exposure. While the official advice was that I simply should monitor myself for symptoms, I felt I didn't want to return to work without getting tested. So I was one of the three thousand Cantabrians who got Covid tested on Thursday 28 October. My test result was negative - so all was well. In the meantime, though, a lot of latent anger, irritation, and negativity about "people not doing the right thing" came quickly to the surface. I need to work out what to do with this. In the printed order of service for Sunday 7 November, there's an excerpt from a blog of Karen Nimmo, a clinical psychologist from Wellington. It

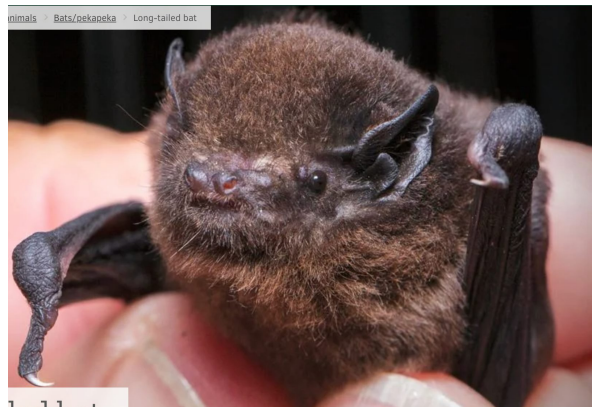
names some of these things. You can read it at:  
[http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz/data/oos/202111070000\\_2021.11.07 - Cong.pdf](http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz/data/oos/202111070000_2021.11.07 - Cong.pdf)

By the way, if it helps you feel safe and comfortable in terms of my conduct of ministry here at Knox, be aware that I am indeed double vaccinated, use the contact tracing app regularly, and wear a mask whenever in public.



### **This year's "Bird of the Year" Competition**

It's sometimes hard to assess the reliability of online surveys and polls, but I think technology is better now at revealing when some kind of rorting or rail-roading is going on. I seem to remember that last year's "Aotearoa Bird of the Year" poll was audited for bot-voting and unscrupulous practice. One imagines, therefore, that this year's results would be fairly solid. A new entrant



in the race this year for our favourite bird was the "long tailed bat", which is not a bird. Certain commentators, noting that the bat was not a bird, wished the bat well for its flight into taxinomical disqualification! Despite its technical lack of qualification, the poor little bat persisted in the ranks of preference. Just the other day it grabbed the victor's trophy and flapped its way off to its cave. No doubt, it then assumed an upside down sleeping position and enjoyed the sleep of if not the just, then at least the lucky.

I actually like living in a country where we are happy for bats to be birds. Laurel Hubbard, a Kiwi transgender weight-lifter, suffered a whole lot of comment of the sort "you're not a woman". There are multiple other examples of society telling people just to stay put in their "boxes". In the meantime, our country has welcomed a bat to birdhood!

### **Guy Fawkes - a puely personal reflection**

As I write, it's 5 November, observed here in Aotearoa New Zealand as Guy Fawkes. As a wee boy, I loved Guy Fawkes. Because the Jacks lived on a quarter acre section in an almost country-like environment (plenty of room), while other parts of the family lived in leafy but squeezed suburbs of Auckland, the whole extended family tended to come to our house to celebrate the state sanctioned torture of a Catholic rebel who'd tried to blow up up Westminster Palace.

I loved the fire-works and the huge bonfire down the back of the garden. I loved the gathering of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The only thing I ever struggled with was the burning of the Guy. Each year we put love and attention into creating a human effigy, who ended up wearing clothes only recently retired from our wardrobes. The wardrobe inheritance meant that Guy always ended up looking a bit like "one of us". Also aggravating the situation was the fact that Jack children were incapable of making any human likeness without putting a huge smile on its face. So every Guy Fawkes, I ended up watching a happy little Guy, looking like my brother or me, thrown onto a fire. I don't know that I ever cried; I do know that I hated it.



These days, I think about animals that are frightened by fireworks. I think about fires that are caused accidentally. I spend some time thinking about alternative celebrations that have more to do with us down here in the Pacific, rather than about the violence and hatred of the culture from which Guy Fawkes comes. I suspect that Guy Fawkes, as a Kiwi celebration, has had its day.

**Material for Knox Life:** If you have any material you think might go well into the Christmas edition of Knox Life, just send it to the office. Deadlines will be advised through the Sunday notices.

*Arohanui, Matthew.*

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