

Report on Sacred Edge Festival, Queenscliff – 29 April-1 May 2022

As in previous years, Judy and I attended the **Sacred Edge Festival** held at the Uniting Church, Queenscliff, which is an amazing inclusive and caring community.

The Festival was based around arts, music and story-telling with an overall theme this year of “Diving Deep into Diversity”. This theme was explored through wonderful sessions focussed on First Nations, Refugees, LGBTIQ, Earth and Ocean, and Wellbeing. It featured many people living on the edge of society, but who were prepared to tell their stories in a very caring, supportive environment

One of the speakers the first night was a Tamil man **Nithi Kanakkarathin** who came to Australia as an asylum seeker fleeing violence from Sri Lanka during the civil war. After living in harsh Asian refugee camps, he finally made it to Australia at the third attempt. After detention, he was finally declared a genuine refugee. But after more than 10 years in Australia, he has no permanent visa, and has to apply and go through the whole refugee assessment process again every 5 years. Many give up under this non-caring immigration regime, and suicides and grave mental health issues are not uncommon amongst asylums seekers and refugees. In contrast, he told us about people who had helped him, and the joy of hospitality which comes through sharing food. He and his Tamil friends cooked a wonderful Tamil meal for the nearly 200 Festival attendees on the Saturday night.

There were two wonderful presentations by exceptionally talented experts on the topic of climate change and the current and likely future impacts of global warming on our earth and society. They were:

- **David Karoly** - An eminent Australian climate scientist, ex CSIRO, who has been a representative for Australia on the UN IPCC climate change committee, but is now an activist seeking changes in government policies. He said climate change is not just a major global issue, but a global emergency. We are currently on track for at least 3oC global warming, even though all governments, including Australia, signed off with agreement to the 2021 IPCC report. He accused our government of lying, signing the report but with no intention of meeting the 2030 targets necessary to limit the global warming to 1.5oC. The impacts in terms of fires, floods, heatwaves and other natural catastrophes will just continue to become more frequent and more severe as they are now locked in.
- **Professor Mike Clarke** - Mike is a committed Christian and expert ecologist at Latrobe University who spoke with passion about the fact that due to climate change we are facing an ecological crisis. There are already severe impacts on animal and plant diversity which will have an effect on all our lives. He believes we are simply part of nature, which is sacred, and nature is not just a source of commodities for humans to be consumed endlessly. His argument, or any Christian's rationale should be, “earth belongs to the creator, not us. We have a god given responsibility to care for the earth. Thou shalt not steal (our young peoples’ future), and we should do unto others as we would have others to do unto us”.

Ro Allen, the Victorian Human Rights Commissioner, led an amazing panel discussion on a Trans and Gender Diversity with three young teenagers, each accompanied by one of their parents. Each young person has transitioned and they courageously told of their personal stories and spoke about the challenges, stresses and legal obstacles they and other trans people have to face. They and their

parents have all become advocates for trans and gender diverse communities and are prominent in the LGBTIQ community.

There was great music and stories from **Scott Darlow**, a Yorta Yorta man who is a high profile indigenous songwriter, guitarist and didgeridoo player. His key word is "FLUTE" (Forgiveness, Love, Understanding, Tolerance and Empathy). He suggested "We are all Australians, it is our country, our mothers' earth. It is as much ours as it is for indigenous people, and we are part of 65,000 years of lived existence". So, we should think of us all in Australia as one, not divided in any way.

We had some wonderful music from three great singers and musicians, namely **Kerryn Fields, Kavisha Mazzella and Aine Tyrell**. Aine is from Ireland and a folk singer. As well as singing and playing guitar she told stories. She talked about the many Irish "refugees" who were forced out of their country by the powerbrokers over history and by famine. She feels that in many ways they can relate to Australian indigenous people who were dispossessed, and which is why Irish musicians often want to tell their painful stories from the past through music.

Joel McKerrow is an award-winning writer, speaker, educator and one of Australia's most successful performance poets. He read some of his best poems, but equally made some up some poems on the spot when given a single word or idea from the audience. His latest book, "Woven: a Faith for the Dissatisfied" is a personal journey of losing a faith (formed in the Sydney Anglican Diocese) that was too small (and looked too much like us) to a faith that is much grander, more holistic and inclusive. A brilliant performer.

There were many other wonderful speakers, performers and breakout sessions, details of which can be found on their Festival website: <https://unitingqueenscliff.org.au/sacrededge-festival/>

The Festival is an annual event and Judy and I can highly recommend it – it is a great sharing and learning experience, causing you to think about the lives of others living on the edge of our communities.

As our great Uniting Church friends Don and Helen Bartlett wrote after the Festival:

"There is no other single event that has had such a transformative impact on us and we would not miss it. To have an opportunity to meet those beyond our experience changes us in ways we could not have imagined. This is a faith community that really gets it, empowering the wider community to also make a difference."