



Surf Coast Uniting Churches
St Francis and the blessing of the animals
 Sunday 11th October 2026



720 Halle Halle

Halle, halle, hallelujah!
 Halle, halle, hallelujah!
 Halle, halle, hallelujah!
 hallelujah!, hallelujah!

Caribbean traditional *arr.* Terry MacArthur 1949-

Welcome

May the Worship bless you

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these unceded land and waters, the Wadawurrung people. We pay respect to Elders past and present. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Call to Worship

In the beginning, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.
 And God called them good.

Come Holy Spirit and cleanse the waters.

The prophet saw a river flowing from the Temple,
 and wherever the river flowed, everything lived.

Come Holy Spirit and renew the face of the Earth.

Jesus cried out,
 "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me... Out
 of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

Come, Holy Spirit and heal your people.

Prayer - Living Water

Holy God, whose Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning, we gather as part of your community of all creation, thirsty for your grace.

We give thanks to you for the gift of water, the veins of our common home, that sustains the cedar and the whale, the pasture and the city.

We are grateful for our local water that nourishes our homelands and our fellow creatures. We give thanks that in your well-watered garden, every drop is a sacred testament to your love.

We confess we have treated Your gift of water as a mere commodity. We have choked the seas with our waste and watched the warming tides rise in judgment.

We lament the cracked earth of the drought-stricken and the salty tears of the climate refugee.

We open our hearts to your grace and love for the land and its water.

Lord of all Life, you promised that wherever the river flows, everything shall live. You stir in us a calling to care for the land and water — to protect and defend the rights of water and honour the dignity of the thirsty.

Lord, your Word is like a spring within us, gushing forth for the healing of the nations.

Lord, You brought water from the rock sustain us in the desert.

Christ, our Lord, You are Living Water and refresh us for the work of restoration.

Holy Spirit, You carry us on currents of grace until justice rolls down like waters and fills our hearts with love for God and God's creation, like an ever-flowing stream.

Lord, we give You our thanks and praise for this wonderful world and all its creatures and water. Amen

Confession

We spend a moment of quiet contemplation where we bring before God what's troubling our hearts

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us

"Your sins are forgiven"

Thanks be to God.

Pet's Blessing – Molly

You were created by God, and you are loved by God.

May you and your human family experience joy and companionship together and continue to be a blessing to each other.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.'

Remembrance of pets and animals who have died

Pause and pray

Hymn 398 Come Down O Love Divine

Come down, O Love divine,
seek now this soul of mine,
and visit it with your own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear
and kindle it, your holy flame bestowing.

Readings

Psalm 23

23:1The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
23:2He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
23:3he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
23:4Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your
rod and your staff, they comfort me.
23:5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with
oil; my cup overflows.
23:6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in
the house of the LORD my whole life long.

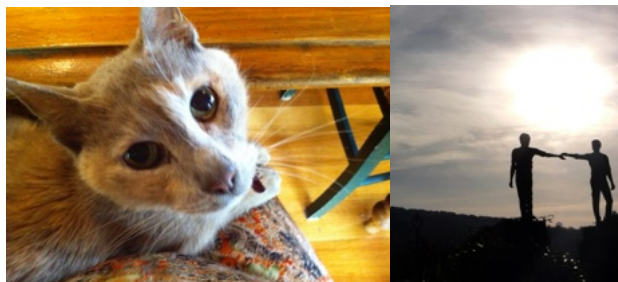
Philippians 4:1-9

4:1Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand
firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.
4:2I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.
4:3Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled
beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers,
whose names are in the book of life.
4:4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
4:5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.
4:6Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with
thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
4:7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and
your minds in Christ Jesus.
4:8Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just,
whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
4:9As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do
them, and the God of peace will be with you.

Quiet moment of reflection

Sermon

In the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen



Today we are offering an animal blessing and remembering St Francis of Assisi who drew close to people and animals and cared for them.

Our readings today, Psalm 23 and Philippians offer us insights and hope

In Psalm, 23 God is a shepherd who cares about us and leads us to still and peaceful places, where our cup overflows with joy and contentment and we feel God's love for us will be with us all our life.

In Philippians, we can stand firm in the Lord and thank God for our loyal companions who may be humans or animals or both. We can rejoice and find courage and be able to be gentle towards others and animals, because the Lord is near to us and gives up courage and hope. We do not have to be anxious and afraid about our future. The Lord is near.

There is something about our pet or animals unconditional love for us that reminds us, the Lord is near.

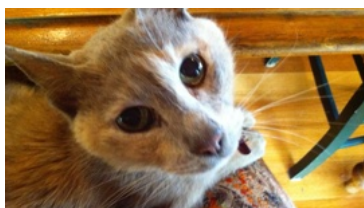


If you have a pet or had one you know or may remember the times you came home after being away from the house and opened the door and were greeted by a happy little face and a warm welcome. When you're watching TV they sit on your lap. They follow you and don't judge you or bear grudges or try to hurt you. They are simply there for you and present to your needs. They know when we need cheering up and do their best to please you. And you know when they die it leaves an enormous hole in our lives we cannot fill. They depend on us to care for them, to feed them, give them water and shelter or to exercise them, and most of all to love them. They offer hope, comfort, love, that is like a light in our life and shows us the way to love one another.

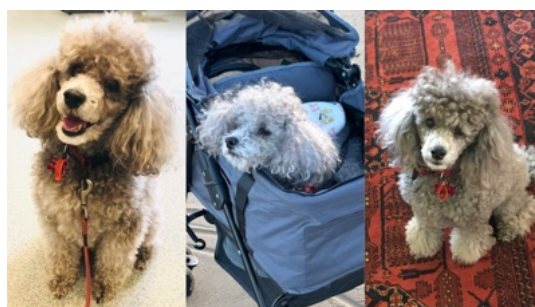


We do need to care for them.

I was walking Moses in the park one evening and saw a couple dumping something wrapped up in a white towel in amongst the trees. Next day I was walking Moses my dog with my granddaughter, and we saw a red chook walking out of the toilet block. It's a miracle the foxes hadn't got it. I figured it may have been what the couple dumped the night before. A dad and his two sons were walking by, and I asked them to help me catch the chook, while my granddaughter held Moses. We'd surround the chook and be ready to try and grab her and she'd run between our legs. We did this numerous times, while the boys and my granddaughter laughed their heads off. We tried everything. Then I had an epiphany. Why didn't we corner her in the toilet block and throw my jacket over her. It worked. We got her. Then I offered the chook to the dad and his two sons. They said: *No thanks. We were just in it for the chase.* So, I was stuck with a chook. I took her home and called her Mable. I didn't have a chook pen or food. I gave her veggies and water, and she slept in the cubby house. Next day I searched for the owners and tried a seed farm near the park. Then I tried another small farm beside the Yarra. They had chook pens and the same kind of chook. She wasn't one of theirs, but they offered to take her. I put her in the pen, and she started eating the food non-stop while another chook was pecking her on the head. She didn't care. She had found a home, a safe place, food and an instant family.

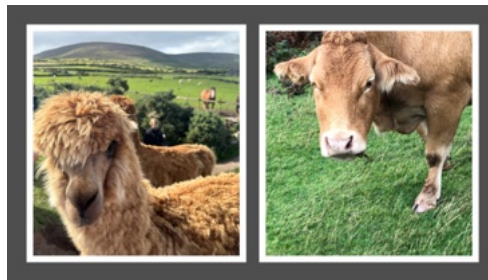


This is Misty, my daughter's cat that I ended up caring for. Look how she is looking at me with love. She outlived three pets and lived to 18 years. Towards the end she had kidney problems and I was taking her to the vets every month or so, to be put on a dip. I think I was struggling to let her go. I went on holidays and she died when I was away. I felt so bad I wasn't there for her.



This is Moses. Most of you know him. He was a pup when I began as a minister and loved morning tea, visiting, coming to meetings and putting on a show every Christmas at aged care centres. He was my companion in ministry. Towards the end I'd wheel him along the beach in a pusher. He died peacefully one day, in his bed. Now he has gone it's like there is a big hole in my husband and my life. He gave us so much love and joy. Whenever I felt discouraged, he comforted me. He was like a little angel sent by God to bring light and love.

Have you ever experienced this from a person or animal?



There are also livestock who need care. Horses and sheep are high maintenance. Horses are used for therapy with humans wanting to heal. Horses like to please their owners. I used to have the job as a kid of finding half frozen lambs in the field and putting them in the warmer of the wood fire stove. They came back to life. I learnt a lot about caring.

Which brings me to this statue of two people reaching out to each other.



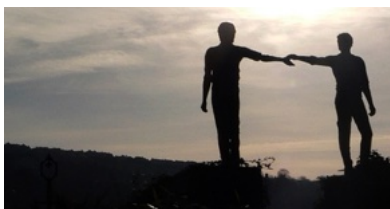
Animals can teach us how to love and bridge the gap between people. They can show us how to break down barriers between people.

Remember the lockdowns when you could only go 5 k from home. It was like the whole community was there in the local park. A dog was a great icebreaker. People were so desperate to talk to anybody. No one liked the isolation. We are such social creatures.

Today we are remembering Francis of Assisi who loved people and animals. You probably have seen pictures of him with animals and know about his care for them and how they were not afraid of him.

St Francis came from a wealthy family and enjoyed parties, expensive clothes and dreamed of becoming a knight. He used to pass lepers and avoid them and hold his nose. It was a time when a lot of churches ran hostels, hospitals and homes for lepers. He may have asked a servant to give a donation. He ended up fighting in a war, in prison and when released returned home ill. This experience changed him.

One day he was riding a horse with three friends and saw a leper and got off the horse, gave him money and offered the kiss of peace by kissing his hand. The leper kissed his hand too. Then he visited a hospital and cared for the patients by washing their feet and wounds and changing their bandages. He described this as care without distance. The people he once avoided and struggled to look at became the people he was willing to touch. People lived in a society that excluded and ostracised lepers. Francis insisted on drawing close to them, rather than being afraid of them.



This statue of two men reaching out to one another speaks of Francis of Assisi's journey. The very people he feared and avoided became the very people he cared for. He chose to close the gap between people.

Some of us have been involved recently with a pastoral care study and sharing. We are learning about how to close the gap between people. How to journey alongside another and put ourselves out of the way, so we can truly hear their story and listen with our heart. We are learning how to give others the time they need to unburden themselves and find their own way forward, to wholeness. That is the pastoral journey.

We have a buddy system here Torquay Uniting, where each of us does our best to close the gap between each one of us so we can journey with one another, being a listening friend, being patient and caring, giving time, being present and offering God's love, as best we can. There is humility in accepting we are vulnerable and wounded healers and what we cannot do, God can, when we pray for one another.

We are simply there for each other, when needed, like Francis of Assisi who gave of himself for the sake of another.

The Lord be with you

Recorded song – Louis Armstrong – It's a wonderful world

Offering – Lyn and Molly

Lord, as your Spirit moved over the deep, we thank you for the gift of water. The waters on the Earth, and under the Earth, the waters above us, and within us. Make us mindful of the care of all the planet's waters, that it may richly sustain life for us and for those who come after us. Accept the first fruits we offer here. Bless and multiply these gifts to our nurture and the care of your creation and church for the sake of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayers of the People

Pray for world peace, the hungry and homeless, for our community, families, our loved ones
and our needs

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive
those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn 659 The Lord's my Shepherd

The Lord is my shepherd, and I want to follow
wherever he leads me, wherever he goes.
Over the mountains, the waters and by-ways,
valleys and highways he's waiting for me.

*I want to go to meet him there,
to lay myself down in his love.*

*The Lord is my shepherd and I want to follow
wherever he leads me, wherever he goes.*

Brian Kerry Boniwell 1949-based on Psalm 23

Blessing

May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all, fill you with the knowledge
of God's presence in Earth and the pulsing of Christ within you.

Go in peace! Serving Christ and loving all creatures!

We go in peace, serving Christ and loving our animal kin

Hymn 755 You shall go out with joy

