**Uniting Church in Australia, Eden Worship Service Sunday 25 October, 2020**

***Uniting in Hope:***

**in support of adult survivors of childhood abuse.**

Instrumental music playing as we gather;

## Welcome:

\* Good morning and welcome to St George’s Uniting Church. My name is Marie, and on behalf of St Georges UC, here in Eden, I wish to extend our gratitude to you all, for joining with us today. . I feel blessed to stand here today, with the help of some of my friends to lead us in this service.

For those with young children, Welcome to (***name the children***)....., today, Lyn, and Paul, who have prepared an art activity for children, outside in our grounds If the children would like to join Lyn and Paul following the children’s talk, both have their current working with children certification.

 We are gathering together, as we normally do on Sunday, to think and talk about how we live our lives and how we understand our faith and the character of God. Each week we consider a different theme or aspect of life, a celebration of a season, or calendar event. We embrace the beautiful and encouraging words of scripture, but we do not avoid the painful and confusing aspects of our journey, and words of wisdom from every source.

\* Our theme today is , *Uniting in Hope* follows the intent of mental health week. The NSW mental health banner promote *Tuning In* and in the A.C.T., *Conversations and Connection*. There is so much that could be said and should be shared but we will limit our focus to one important aspect and the aspirations of *Blue Knot Day*. What is that about?

This leads us into the children’s segment for today,

## \*Children’s Segment - Peter

Tangled knotted fishing line or rope? Difficulty to untangle, needs time and patience, even after it is disentangled it bares the imprint of the knot. The kink, the mark like a scar.

Children exit with Lyn & Paul - **M**etamorphosis – utterly changed, transformed by time and design, making butterflies.

 \* Today, as people of many faiths or none, we are united to grieve, to acknowledge the harm and betrayal of our most vulnerable, and mourn with those who carry the wounds of a broken childhood. I am one of many and some others who join us today, who carries the scars of a wounded childhood. And every scar tells a story, *a story that I have survived,* with scars that continue to heal with hope, with faith, with peace, and with love. Together, we will mourn and reflect in silence, as we light candles and name our hurts. Later in the service I will share my story of survival and hope, and together we will pray for justice and healing. The service will end with a memorial. We will invite you to join us, in completing an artwork- “Uniting in Hope”- to honour the courage and strength of survivors and to let them know we believe them, support them, and stand with them in solidarity.

We acknowledge that the service today, may at times, raise difficult emotions. If you wish to speak with someone, or would like support or some private prayer, Ruth, one of our elders will be available in the church during the service if you feel you need to leave and also after the service, as will Pam. There are others here today who work professionally in the field of mental health who naturally will also be available to talk after the service.

As we acknowledge the presence of our network of human support, it is of course most appropriate in this setting to begin acknowledging the Divine Presence of God. I would like to say a short prayer, for those unaccustomed to prayer, a time of silence

***God of all, your presence is always with us***

***Your purposes are powerful.***

***Your knowledge is complete and merciful.***

***Help us all to connect with your Spirit in this time together.***

***Amen***

## Acknowledgement of Country;

We acknowledge that we are on the lands on the traditional owners of this country- the people of the Yuin Nation, and pay respect to their elders, past, present and emerging. We recognise the continuing gift of their culture to the life and spirit of this Australia.

We also acknowledge that many of their children have been hurt and betrayed, by those who were meant to care for them from within and particularly outside their culture.

I invite someone in our gathering today, as a representative of our First Nations people, to light the first candle, and to pour the first symbolic tears into our bowl, from this jug of water. As the candle is lit, and the tears gather, we remember in silence and mourn together the betrayal, the harm, the isolation, the silencing of the stolen generation; the grief of the First Nation children and their families

(Lighting of the first candle follows)

## Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

We acknowledge the lived and living experience of those impacted by childhood trauma, their carers, loved ones, and the compassionate mental health professionals who support and help them on their journey, including those gathered here today

I invite someone to join me, as a representative of lived experience of the harm and betrayal suffered at the hands of our caregivers, in the lighting of the second candle, and to pour our tears into the bowl, from this jug of water. As the candle is lit and the tears gather, we remember andmourn the childhood that was taken from us. The betrayal, the harm, the isolation, the silencing of our childhood. I invite you to join us, as we observe a 1 min silence as we mourn together.

(Lighting of the second candle)

Acknowledge hurts were caused by people who used the name of God.

We gather today, followers of many faiths or none.

We acknowledge that some of those hurts were caused by people who used and abused the name of God.

I invite Pam to join me, as a representative of the Christian church, to light the third candle with me, and pour tears from the jug into the bowl. We light this candle, to represent the anger, the grief and the pain in our hearts, as we remember, the betrayal of our vulnerable children, the harm they suffered, by those whom they trusted in our churches and places of worship.

(Lighting of the third candle)

***Pam:*** *In the presence of God, there are insufficient words to do justice to the pain which lies in the hearts and the voices of those who have been abused and betrayed. Their grief will always surpass our own regret and pain as we recognise these grave crimes.*

The water in this bowl gathers the tears of the abused. *(Pour water from jug into bowl)*.

We join our tears with theirs, and hold them in our love, as we face the future together.

## Music-“Who can sound the depths of sorrow” Graham Kendrick

## Prayer of Confession

**Marie:** Gracious and loving God

We confess and acknowledge that your children have been hurt.

We confess that the family home, has not always been a safe place for innocent children, and that here abuse has occurred.

**\*Pam & congregation Response:**

**Care and nurture was betrayed, by adults who were meant to care and protect.**

**We are sorry**

**Marie:** We confess, that churches, schools, institutions, and other agencies have not always been safe places for children, and that here abuse occurred.

**Response:**

 **Care and nurture was betrayed, by the adults who were meant to care and protect.**

**We are sorry**

We confess that we failed to listen and believe the voices of children when they told us of their abuse

**Response:**

**We failed to listen, we failed to believe.**

**We are sorry**

**We confess the neglect of our responsibilities, our failures.**

 **We resolve to reform our lives, to address our failings,**

**to commit to positive change for those who have been betrayed and harmed**

**We pray that we might act for justice, find strength, be instruments of healing and resilience.**

**God hear our prayer**

**Marie:** Why do we confess?? Hope of change....etc discuss

## Words of Assurance - Bob K , verses from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible

  But if we confess our sins, our failings, to God, He can always be trusted to forgive us. 1 John 1:9a

Jesus Christ, gave himself to rescue us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. He wanted us to be his own people and to be eager to do right. Titus 2:13-14

Thank God for his gift that is too wonderful for words! 2 Corinthians 9:15

 AMEN

Marie , thanks Bob, later in the service we will pray more directly for those who have suffered as a consequence of abuse. This next song tells its own story

## *Concrete Angel Martina McBride*

## Sermon Pam Skelton

The song we just heard tells its own story. A sad story.

Abuse takes many forms, physical , mental or emotionsl abuse or neglect. It is a complex subject that many people dedicate their whole lives to understanding and combating. Having said that , there are certain principles we can pull out of this song that we would do well to note.

Would anyone like to suggest what they might be?

Listen

Believe

Do something

Before it is too late and further tragedy ensues. Other suggestions

Learn more and keep learning

Not just what we know but what action we take.

Many voices have been silenced. Many stories have not been told. Many who have found the courage to speak, have been met with disbelief, blame, and condemnation?

Preditors have been protected by the powerful at the grave expense of the abused. The powerful silence them by lies by cover –ups and clever legal representation. Abuse upon abuse;destrying innocence, faith and corrupting justice.

Movie this week, ***Don’t Tell*** 2017 Australian, based of the true story,

With help from a local lawyer, a young abuse survivor finds the courage to speak out when having a voice is her only option.

Song *If They Say Don’t Tell Don’t Listen*

I couldn’t find this song again, this title underscores the dark reality that many young victims are conned or threatened by further harm and so keep ‘their secret’.

Why ? Blue Knot Day figuratively, tangled lives, are tangled beyond the ability of victims and survivors to disentangle alone.

We share a responsibility to reach out and support those who often suffer in silence. We are responsible to use every creative ability to bring a spotlight into this dark place.

(NB the movie ***Spotlight,***

We must engage in conversation and connection with those who are isolated and lonely

In a sense there are no words which can do justice to the pain which lies in many hearts in response *to abuse – but a*nywhere and everywhere this story is one replicated in some form in the very places where such actions should be completely foreign – in places where love and trust should be sacred and true; in homes, in schools, in churches, social clubs and institutions like orphanages and foster homes. The list goes on and on foreign shores and lawless places unmitigated harm is perpetrated.

So despite insufficient time and inadequate words how should **we** in this time and place respond?

By continuing to listen to the truth and committing to play whatever part we can to bring about positive change; towards eliminating the ghastly problem, and for healing and recovery of all those subjected to abuse .

As Christians we believe that such transformation, indeed utter, even miraculous metamorphosis can take place by the grace, time and design of God. This is our certain hope,

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*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* [Hebrews 11:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+11%3A1&version=ESV)

Ultimately, Christians look forward to the revelation of all things perfect, a distant but final resolution, as we read in the book of Revelation, a time when

*“He (God) will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.” Rev 21:4 GNT*

For others, that is ‘pie in the sky’, too hard to fathom, beyond believe, beyond imagination.

In the present, in the meantime, let us all be open, truthful and gracious and compassionate in our understanding of hidden trauma. We are perhaps better in our understanding of the consequences of other physical injury. Physical injury is for the most part more visible. Someone who loses a leg eg endures a terrible loss but with support can gain a meaningful and spiritual life. Their loss is in your face so to speak.

 Yet, similarly, one scarred by abuse may also live a lifetime with the consequence of injury and loss. However the consequences both physical and psychological may be less visible and less well understood. Overcoming such challenges involves both the determination of the individual survivor and the ongoing commitment to learning and support within our community.

Brokenness’ may remain, but can be transformed to something positive.

Christians believe that,

*in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[*[*i*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+8%3B28&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28145i)*] have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28*

I acknowledge this is a concept hard to accept, difficult to understand and needing a broader picture.

The early Christ followers were no strangers to sufferings. They drew some comfort from the practice of prayer, as Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, the first chapter verses 2-8;- (Bob K read )

*2I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!*

*3Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. 4He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. 5We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives. 6We suffer in the hope that you will be comforted and saved. And because we are comforted, you will also be comforted, as you patiently endure suffering like ours. 7You never disappoint us. You suffered as much as we did, and we know that you will be comforted as we were.*

*8My friends, I want you to know what a hard time we had in Asia. Our sufferings were so horrible and so unbearable that death seemed certain. 9In fact, we felt sure that we were going to die. But this made us stop trusting in ourselves and start trusting God, who raises the dead to life. 10God saved us from the threat of death,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians+1&version=CEV#fen-CEV-26715a)*] and we are sure that he will do it again and again. 11Please help us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks for the blessings we receive in answer to all these prayers. 2 Cor1; 2-8*

*(This is an intro to our next song, which we will listen to in part can fade out at 2.30 mins...),*

## Music- “Beautifully Broken” – Plumb (*fade out at 2.30 mins)*

 Here today, we gather in unity, we are here for this reason; we pray that we can hear clearly, the voices of truth, the voices of the abused. And we pray for open and respectful relationships, where the sacred in every heart is honoured with love and with wisdom. Now we will listen to a voice that was once silenced.

Marie will share her story......

## Marie this is my story......

It is a story of hope, of transformation from a place of darkness and despair to a place of self-acceptance, growth and empowerment. It is my journey of rebuilding a life that was taken from me. Moving from darkness towards light and in the process, finding the little girl inside, lost, hidden, betrayed, hurting, broken, seeing her, hearing her, holding her as she holds me, her courage, our strength, as we emerge united because of our brokenness because of our strength, our beauty, our hope, my life.

I wear a bracelet on my wrist, it is old and worn, and you may say it looks damaged, broken, sort-of like me. I use it for grounding, to centre myself when I am feeling overwhelmed, when my past and present merge into a nightmare of confusion and despair. And while, the bracelet appears old, damaged, it contains the core of my strength, my Hope. Two simple, yet powerful words - "FEAR not"- it is a Bible verse;

Isaiah 41:10 *Fear not for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'.*

Hold that thought….

My story may be distressing for some, while for others it is too familiar. And while I will not go into the particulars of the abuse, I will discuss its impact on my life.

 And I remember – “Fear not”

My story begins with the betrayal of trust. At a very young age, at a time when I was too young to care for myself, too young to even talk- the adults, into whose care I was entrusted committed their crimes upon my small child’s body that were horrific, that were unspeakable. I learnt, at a very young age that to trust meant to be harmed. And the pain they inflicted on me, silenced me in a pit of darkness and despair. So extreme was the pain, that before my 9th birthday, I had already tried on two occasions to end my life – many more were to follow. The abuse perpetrated on me, was by adults who in perpetrating the abuse, professed God’s name. And so, I learnt to hate God, and to blame Him for my abuse. And the abuse continued for many years- the only thing that changed was the faces of the perpetrators.

 The impact of the abuse felt like a life-sentence. I grew up feeling very vulnerable with an expectation to be hurt- I believed that was my purpose in life. A belief reinforced by those who were meant to care for me. When an adult betrays trust, a child cannot feel safe. Fear grows and festers. I did not understand what it meant to feel safe; inside my home, inside my body, in the community, school, church, hospitals.

Even today, when fear is around, I feel trapped and can't get out. I do things I don't want to do and I am stopped from doing things I want to do. And I think about things I don't want to think about. When someone hurts you, normal everyday things, can bring fear back. Being in my home, my bedroom at night is no longer safe, but a place where fear comes. Being around people makes me feel differently- I don't understand what they are saying, I feel that I don't belong – an outsider. When I am in my community, I'm busy looking around because fear tells me to stay alert. I feel alone, isolated; yet silently I pray for companionship and friendship. My body feels as if it doesn't belong to me- I cannot connect to it, but rather view it from above. Sometimes, the face I see in the mirror is not the same as the face on my driver's licence. I feel scared, confused and sometimes my body shakes or sweats or hurts- my ankles and wrists burn, my stomach and pelvis aches, and my chest feels as if it is being crushed. And I feel dizzy and its hard to breathe and I can hear and feel my heart beating fast and loud. And I hate myself, my life and the pain I live in- and I plead and beg for my life to end.

But my bracelet reminds me that fear is not always around. – Fear not, for I am with you

It's hard to remember what it means to be safe when you live in so much fear. I learnt about fear at a very young age, when I should have been playing with toys. I coped with it by learning how to disappear inside myself. My body didn’t belong to me- it was a broken vessel, for others to inflict pain; a body that I learnt to hate. I hid from my emotions, disconnected, fragmented.

 But my spirit, my spirit they couldn’t touch. The evil, perpetrated by those adults, could not touch my inner light, pure and intact, my spirit belonged to God. I discovered through my healing, that God did not cause my abuse, my pain. I learnt that God loves His children so much, that He has given us free will. And God cannot interfere with free will, even when it involves abuse of His precious children. But I know that He was there with me. It was in the pain of the abuse that Jesus wept with me, suffered with me, and through His peace, showed me a way out. In the gospel of St Mark, Jesus said, “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me- to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone where hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea “Mark 9:42. God saw His child hurting, and He gave me the spirit and the courage to heal. He placed people in my life, people who I learnt to trust, people who helped me to heal- I call then, my “Beacons of Hope” that light my path, when I feel lost.

As I hold onto my bracelet, grounding myself, I say out loud, “Fear not, for I am with you.”

It is Gods gentle voice that speaks within me, guiding me forward, giving me hope. I hear His voice in the wind and the crashing of the waves upon the rocks. I see it in the flower that pushes through the dry soil. I feel it in the warmth of the rising sun and in the coolness of the night in the soft glow of the moon. And I see it in the eyes of my young grandchild as he looks in awe at the beautiful colours of the butterfly that has found a place to rest, from its journey, on his leg.

 We are all connected to life. We are connected through the earth and through each other. And I believe we are created in praise of our Creator. We all experience pain and fear. But for some who have walked a road like mine, the pain, the fear, the despair, the hopelessness, spirals into the very depth of agonising anguish and silent paralysing screams that are my own private hell. Acknowledging that you need help and being able to ask for it, without fear of punishment, without shame of being vulnerable, without stigma, without ridicule, harassment or discrimination, being heard, being seen, being believed.

I never gave anyone permission to hurt me. I do give myself permission to feel, to grieve, to grow, to love, to live, connecting with others, as I ground myself by connecting to my body, to the earth, to my God.

**\* In knowing the unconditional love of an all loving God, I am learning to love and forgive myself, and those who have hurt me.**

**I am learning to be reclaim my life – to be me, a child of God.**

**Pam; T**hankyou Marie for this story of **hope, of transformation** from **darkness** to **light.,**

Thankyou for helping us to hear, to understand and to believe.

## Prayers of Intercession: - Ruth & Marie

Prayers for church and world (not in big detail, just overview)’

**Ruth** We pray for those who have lost their lives, because of abuse; for loved ones left behind, who now carry the pain and for those who as adults are only now discovering the source of their pain. We pray for comfort, kindness and peace,

**Marie** God hear our prayer

**Ruth** We acknowledge with gratitude the strength, courage and resilience of survivors

**Marie** We give thanks

**Ruth** We pray for family and friends, for carers and professionals, who walk beside survivors to provide care and support. We pray for wisdom and courage

**Marie** God hear our prayer

**Ruth** We acknowledge with gratitude those who have supported survivors in their healing

**Marie** We give thanks

**Ruth** We acknowledge our need to change. Strengthen us Lord, to act with love and justice towards survivors, to listen to our children and to implement policies to create safe communities

**Marie** Change our hearts LORD

**Ruth** We commit ourselves as your Church, to be places of safety, free of abuse and exploitation, We commit ourselves as your Church, to be places where people can flourish in life-giving ways of trust and love.

**Marie** Change our Hearts LORD

**Ruth** Through Christ we pray. Amen

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**Ruth** We pray that the water of our tears will bring to life new blossoming of hope

(**Marie** place flower in bowl or water )

**Ruth ;** We pray for all who have suffered abuse, in childhood or in youth

May they know that we care for them and stand with them as they face the pain of abuse

(**Marie**  a flower is placed in the bowl)

**Ruth** May we also pray for those who are both abused and abusers of others

Heal and transform their wounds, and bring them to a new way of being

(**Marie**  a flower placed in the bowl)

**Ruth** We pray that all people of faith and community will help bring justice to the abused, and the abusers will never destroy another life

(**Marie** a flower is placed in the bowl)

**Ruth:** Loving God, open our ears to hear those who cry out, and eyes to find those, who can’t find a voice to share their pain

**(Marie** a flower is placed in the bowl)

**Ruth** May we truly be your people, acting in faith and truth, and be present in love for all who need us

(**Marie** a flower is placed in the bowl)

**AMEN**

## Music- I am Not Alone- Kari Jobe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbbCGqK6uNc&ab_channel=TheCatLadyJ>

Full 5.25 mins

## Offering

Most of us who are regular attendee here at St George’s support our work on line, for which we continue to be grateful . However today we are also appealing for donations for the work of the *Blue Knot* foundation.

*Blue Knot helps to raise awareness of childhood trauma and the support they provide to thousands of survivors thought their telephone counselling service, referral service, and their survivor workshops. There are tins at the door or you can give online, the details are on our website Eden Uniting Church* [*https://eden.uca.org.au/about-us/*](https://eden.uca.org.au/about-us/)

## Invitation to extinguish the candles

**Marie and Pam & Justine**

We extinguish the flames of past hurts (blow out candles) but we carry the fire inside us, the flame continues to burn, it is the flame of Hope.

 **Marie:** Before we leave with a final brief prayer,

We invite you to join us, in completing our artwork- “Uniting in Hope”. As we exit the hall, Steve will carry the canvas outside and we invite you, keeping in mind co vid physical distancing, to place a handprint, write the name of a survivor known to you, as we honour their courage and strength.

Out handprints make the statement, ‘We believe you, we support you, and we stand with you- Uniting in Hope.

We also remind you of the printed resources available and encourage all to connect and converse about today’s theme. Contact details for additional help are on our final slide.

## Commissioning and Benediction

**Marie:**

Go out and listen for the voice of our Creator

Know that when he calls, you will recognise him

For Christ always calls us to the place of love

To the place of hope even in the midst of darkness

Go in God’s grace and with God’s blessing

In the name of the one who calls us

Amen

**Exiting song**

Music – Sound of Surviving – Nicole Nordeman - farewell to fear. Fear<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaOExJJa_YA&ab_channel=NicholeNordemanVEVO>

4.06 mins

[Instrumental music 1](#_Toc54463999)

[Welcome: 1](#_Toc54464000)

[\*Children’s Segment - Peter 1](#_Toc54464001)

[Acknowledgement of Country; 2](#_Toc54464002)

[Acknowledgement of Lived Experience 2](#_Toc54464003)

[Acknowledge hurts were caused by people who used the name of God. 2](#_Toc54464004)

[Music-“Who can sound the depths of sorrow” Graham Kendrick 2](#_Toc54464005)

[Prayer of Confession 3](#_Toc54464006)

[Words of Assurance - Bob K , verses from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible 3](#_Toc54464007)

[*Concrete Angel Martina McBride* 3](#_Toc54464008)

[Sermon Pam Skelton and second reading Bob K 4](#_Toc54464009)

[Music- “Beautifully Broken” – Plumb Fade at 2:30 5](#_Toc54464010)

[Marie this is my story...... 6](#_Toc54464011)

[Prayers of Intercession: - Ruth & Marie 8](#_Toc54464012)

[Music- I am Not Alone- Kari Jobe 9](#_Toc54464013)

[Offering 9](#_Toc54464014)

[Invitation to extinguish the candles 9](#_Toc54464015)

[Commissioning and Benediction 10](#_Toc54464016)

[Music – Sound of Surviving – Nicole Nordeman - farewell to fear. 10](#_Toc54464017)

Resources:

**Preparation:**

Baptism bowl - blue ribbons with knots cascading from this towards floor

2 X Jugs of water –

4 X Coloured Candles

Lighter

Cut flowers on stem from community garden

Art Canvas with pre-painted tree trunk and words; “Uniting in Hope”

Paint pots X 5 with brushes

Gloves

Coloured Markers eg Sharpies

**For children’s activity-**

Hand cut outs / coloured cardboard for children to draw their hands & cut out

Butterfly cut outs

Paddle-pop sticks

Assorted Art supplies

**Music**

***I am Not Alone- Kari Jobe***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbbCGqK6uNc&ab_channel=TheCatLadyJ>

***Sound of Surviving – Nicole Nordeman***  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaOExJJa_YA&ab_channel=NicholeNordemanVEVO>

4.06 mins

 ***Beautifully Broken – Plumb***

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ce6PT-3sQGg&ab_channel=Plumb%28official%29>

***Concrete Angel : Martina McBride***

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HojUPCqH0cQ&ab\_channel=kuntrysongwriter**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HojUPCqH0cQ&ab_channel=kuntrysongwriter)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuChMrQFpPs&ab_channel=DanMusselman>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtNYA4pAGjI&ab_channel=martinamcbrideVEVO>

***If Her Tears Were Stars***