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## MEDIA RELEASE

# Rituals for Life, Love and Loss

## Dorothy McRae-McMahon

**“This book is written in the belief that many people think their life events are relatively insignificant. A ritual says that is not so -- that our life journeys and events are to be honoured, respected, grieved and celebrated because they are special. Although rituals do not solve things, they are acts where we gather support around ourselves, name what is happening and create a sort of ‘salvation moment’ which can be remembered in our tough times.”**

**– Dorothy McRae-McMahon**

*Rituals for Life, Love and Loss* gives us the words, symbols and meditations we need to make the everyday sacred, be it celebration or grief, in public or in private. Internationally renowned for her work with ritual, Dorothy McRae-McMahon has prepared most of these for groups and individuals over the last five years.

These are rituals for the whole community, regardless of faith. Using her skills as a creator of religious rituals, Dorothy McRae-McMahon recognises that most Australians are not attracted by institutional religion, yet long for ritual in their lives. To that end, Dorothy affirms in these rituals a sense of the spiritual without using religious language.

Some of the rituals included are: the blessing of a home, the welcoming of a child, facing illness or death, a simple funeral, a marriage, and a ritual and meditation for forgiving yourself or someone else. There are rituals of healing and to celebrate the survival of abuse or violence. There are ceremonies for community life, such as recognising local heroes and heroines, rituals relating to the drought and fire, and one to celebrate Australia and our life together here. Some of the rituals include the story of its origin, and all the rituals have notes on preparation and clear scripts for the procedure.

Inspired by her own life journey and the amazing people she has met, Dorothy believes there are things we will express ritually which we would otherwise never share with each other. “I have tried to prepare honest rituals which do not lightly leap into celebration or trite solutions and statements,” says Dorothy. Her rituals are not flowery or wordy, not gimmicky or over-elaborate – the power is in the simplicity, the silent moments and the symbols.

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# Dorothy McRae-McMahon

Many personal life experiences have informed the rituals in Dorothy McRae-McMahon's book: the death of her sister and her sister's husband when they were both 21 years old, the intellectual disability of her son, the loss of a cousin who is still a missing person, living under a frightening attack for two years (1986-88) from a neo-nazi group in Sydney, and working for ten years with Sydney's homeless, ill and abused.

Born in Zeehan, Tasmania, Dorothy grew up in Victoria but has lived more than half her life in Sydney. Her working life has been varied, beginning as a pre-school teacher and followed by 16 years at home caring for her children, especially her eldest son who has an intellectual disability. For eight years she was the associate executive secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council, organising its international aid appeal and developing education programmes.

Dorothy is perhaps best known for her 10 years as the Minister with the Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney. She also served as the national director, Mission for the Uniting Church in Australia, for five years. Now retired, Dorothy spends her time writing liturgy and other books, and is part of the editorial team of the *South Sydney Herald*. She also continues with her speaking engagements and occasional broadcasts for ABC religious programmes.

Her international work has taken her to 32 countries for various councils and committees. In 1998 she was the first woman to moderate the World Council of Churches Assembly Worship Committee, which gave her significant experience working with ritual life across many cultures and languages. She created the service, held in St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, to welcome Nelson Mandela shortly after his release from prison.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon is the author of eight other books, and the recipient of many awards, including the Jubilee Medal from the Queen for her work with women in NSW (1977), the Australian Government Peace Award (1986), the 1998 Australian Human Rights Medal and an Hon Doctorate of Letters from Macquarie University for her work with minorities and contribution to the spiritual life of the community (1992).

Dorothy embraced her sexuality in 1987 and came out publicly in 1997, which led to both attack and support. She lives in Sydney with her partner, Ali, has four children and three grandchildren.

**DOROTHY McRAE-McMAHON IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW. TO ARRANGE A TIME,  
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