



NEWSBEAT

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PORT PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



December 2024

You're invited!

Christmas activities for everyone!

**MOUNT MARTHA UC
WHITE RIBBON DAY
FORUM**

**PRESBYTERY IN
COUNCIL MEETING**

**ELSTERNWICK-
CAULFIELD SOUTH
PEACE VIGILS**

**ST MARK'S
FUNDRAISER FOR
THE HOMELESS**

**MOUNT WAVERLEY
CHRISTMAS DAY
LUNCH**



Madonna

Wisdom, Grace and Compassion



from
November 18th
until
December 6th 2024

Kinross Arts Centre, 603 Toorak Rd
Gallery open Monday – Friday, 10am – 3 pm
Also open Sat, Nov 23 & Sat, Nov 30 with the artists

Ursula Betka, Madonna and Child with a Pear (2020), Egg tempera and gold leaf on wood panel, 38 x 27cm

A warm invitation to come and join us at:
Mt Martha Uniting Church on Sunday Dec 22

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

A FAMILY FRIENDLY LUNCHEON AND AFTERNOON
CELEBRATING THE CHRISTMAS STORY



- 12.30 Community BBQ lunch (Gold coin donation if able)
- 1.30 A fun family introduction
- 2.00 Take the "Journey to Bethlehem"
- 2.30 Children's Christmas craft and Family Carols on the Lawn
- 3.30 Close

109 Bay Rd Mt Martha

Contact: Peter: 0412030747

 **Glen Waverley Uniting Church**
Corner Bogong Avenue & Kingsway, Glen Waverley

Multicultural Christmas Celebration

SUNDAY 8
DECEMBER
@ 11.30am

Followed by a shared meal
(lunch \$20 per person
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL!
Please call 9560 3580 or email
office@gwuc.org.au for bookings.

**Didgeridoo, Korean
and Indonesian
Dance & Music,
and more...**

All Welcome

and don't forget to come and see our
Christmas Exhibition
Christmas Traditions from around the World
Saturday 7 December from 2pm


CITY OF
MONASH



ST DAVID'S PARKDALE

Christmas Carol Service

15 DECEMBER @ 6PM

Celebrate the spirit of Christmas.
Join with us from **5PM** for a
Sausage Sizzle and Coffee Van.

CHRISTMAS DAY

25

DECEMBER

WORSHIP SERVICE AT 9AM

ALL WELCOME

128 PARKERS ROAD, PARKDALE



FROM YOUR COMMS OFFICER:

Dear friends,

How quickly December has come around this year!

I know that for many of us, this month will feel like a slippery-dip that's gotten hot in the summer sun – in other words, we'll tumble through the month, yelping with surprise, and land head-over heels in January wondering what happened to us!

I also happen to know what an absolute blessing it is to be so busy and so needed in December, and conversely I know what a long and lonely month it can be when the people we have loved the most aren't with us any longer.

In this Presbytery, I have found friends and family at every turn, and congregations filled with vibrant welcome. We are abundantly blessed with hugs and laughter, delicious food and raucous, uplifting song. And we are a people who share our blessings generously.

I want to urge anyone who is feeling lonely this season: remember there are so, so many opportunities to connect in our Presbytery. Browse through these pages for inspiration, and check out all the flyers to fill your diary with lots of fun activities and places to go. Pop down for a delicious Christmas Day Lunch at Mount Waverley Uniting Church, treat yourself to the gift of conversation and community with a VicTas UC Historical Society Membership, or find out about the next annual planting event at the Serpell Family's "Trust for Nature" property.

If, like me, you'll need to take a moment this month to quietly remember the people you are missing this season, look for a "Blue Christmas" event like the one at Murrumbena Uniting Church on 18th December at 7pm.

You are not alone. You are dearly, dearly loved by Christ our Saviour and all those who proclaim His name. May this Christmas be one filled with love, acceptance, family and warmth for all of us.

Naomi Cardwell.

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, PORT PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



GIVE THE GIFT OF A

VICTAS UC HISTORICAL SOCIETY GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

TO A CHURCH FRIEND OR FAMILY
MEMBER THIS CHRISTMAS.

Here's how it works:

1. Contact your friend,
2. Fill in the Membership Form with the person's details noting your name as 'Gift Subscription', and post to:

The President
30 Campbells Road Portsea Vic. 3944
enclosing a cheque for \$45
(concession \$35), or using these bank account
details; BSB 063-194 Account 10031138 Note as 'Gift'.

We will then send a welcome letter to the person, noting your gift. The Membership Form can be emailed to you by request, or downloaded using the QR code.
Enquiries email: ken.barelli@bigpond.com



FAMILY FUN DAY



Christmas is coming!

Saturday 7th December, 12:00 – 3:00 pm

Coatesville Uniting Church

1050 North Rd Bentleigh East

What's on?

- > Carols
- > Craft activities
- > Table games
- > Play equipment
- > Book borrowing for all ages
- > Our famous FREE sausage sizzle!

Performances from local groups starting at 12.30 pm

Including:

- > Clasax Mixed Woodwind Ensemble
- > Rusichi Character Dance Ensemble
- > Hughesdale Primary School
- > Coatesville Church Band

Come and enjoy a free afternoon of relaxing family time amongst your local community. Enquiries - [Tel:95703912](tel:95703912)




High St Uniting Church



16-18 High St Frankston

Christmas Fete

Saturday 7th December
9:00 am - 1:00pm

Christmas Raffle, handmade goods,
Christmas gifts,
Devonshire Teas, sausage sizzle,
coffee, cakes, books, children's activities,
market stalls.

To book a stall contact Church office frankstonuc@gmail.com
or Marg info@margscarlett.com




COME JOIN US

EMBRACING AND CELEBRATING THE CULTURAL
TRANSITION AND FAITH JOURNEY FROM THE
PAST TO THE PRESENT

Hosted by the Synod Intercultural Forum (SIF)

This event is dedicated to celebrating the remarkable journeys of our older members within the Uniting Church Community, who will be the speakers for this event. The theme of our speaking engagements will focus on the intricate journeys of transitioning from one's homeland, whether overseas or right here in Australia.

This exploration will include their journey's social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, highlighting our Uniting Church community's rich diversity and shared experiences. This year's celebration will embrace a festive Christmas theme, inviting our church communities for a day filled with joy, fellowship, and reflection.

RSVP 9TH DECEMBER

Event Details:
Date: Saturday 14 th December
Time: Open at 10:00 AM; event commences at 10:30 AM – 2:00 PM
Location: Trinity Brighton Uniting Church, 15 Black St, Brighton VIC 3186

Join us for morning tea and a delicious buffet lunch! It's a wonderful opportunity for everyone to connect and celebrate the joy of friendship and community.
We look forward to celebrating with you!

For more information, please contact the SIF Chairperson
Jean Palalagi-Gunston
0432 761 354
Jean.ron@bigpond.com

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MOUNT ELIZA CAMP

Taking the Village to the Hills!



The guest speakers, as well as organiser Ruth Stuetngen and Rev Peter Wiltshire of Mount Martha Uniting Church

Listening between the lines

On November 9th, Mount Martha Uniting Church hosted a very special White Ribbon Day forum on domestic violence, organised by, Chair of Mt Martha’s Pastoral Care and women’s advocate, Ruth Stuetngen.

This was the second annual event in a fast-developing tradition at Mount Martha. It was a joy to see the Rose Garden, planted last White Ribbon Day, now in full bloom after a year of growth and care. The roses were chosen for their names, which evoke qualities associated with women: Love, Friendship, Honour, Peace, and Resilience, and many others.

The forum was hosted in the beautiful mud brick church, where huge windows overlooking the rose garden, allow us to see kookaburras and other native birds playing in the treetops of the bush beyond.

Dr. Alex Christou of Monash University School of Business launched the discussion from Zoom in a skilfully executed broadcast. Alex presented a novel perspective on violence against women, discussing the role the workplace can play for survivors.

The workplace is a microcosm of a reality shaped by domestic violence, which is experienced globally by one in three women and locally, in Australia, by one in six. Work “can be a source of refuge, structure, community - a reprieve” for survivors, Alex said. His research recommends a variety of ways workplaces can be responsive to this role, and ways to prevent unwittingly adding to survivors’ difficulties.

Detective Senior Sergeant Tracy Meyer spoke next, offering her perspective after nearly forty years’ policing of Domestic Violence



Local Councillor Despi O’Connor spoke about strength and resilience

policing. Tracy recalled the attitude of police in decades past, when calls to “domestics” mostly resulted in cases being closed with the note “Civil Action Advised” - in other words, she said, “domestic violence was a private matter, internal to families,” and largely overlooked by police. Now, units like hers work closely with colleagues from specialist agencies like Good Shepherd,

and are empowered by legislation which is continually developing to support and empower survivors.

Dr Catherine Baird spoke for the Women's Spirit Project, to which this year's fund raising will be donated. "Trauma doesn't care who you are," she said, and explained that the Women's Spirit Project aims to help women from all walks of life to use wellbeing activities and fitness to re-engage and find their power again. This year's program culminated with the "Frank to Schanck", a three-day walking event over sixty kilometres from Frankston to Cape Schanck. "Some of these women couldn't get out of bed initially," she said. "They have a lot to be proud of."

We also heard from one of the program's own participants, Diana*, who shared about her sense of feeling stuck in trauma after experiencing domestic violence. It had been exhilarating this year, she said, to participate in the program and set goals, challenge herself and re-discover her own strength. "This is a gift that will last the rest of my life," she told us.

Sophie Panigirakis of Women's Community Shelters said seventy-five per cent of women who experience domestic violence also experience homelessness. "The housing system is dysfunctional," she said, "...and abuse is about

power and control." WCS seeks to empower women to restore a sense of control by providing safe, inviting spaces to live and heal. Their program also offers education within schools about respect and consent, and the opportunity for schools to sponsor shelters and play a meaningful role in their support.

Local Councillor Despi O'Connor discussed the reality of institutional inequity, and the power of communities that value women and recognise the vast array of transferrable skills that strong women bring with them into leadership roles. Her ongoing practice of grassroots feminism and her resilience were inspiring.

These were gruelling, complex topics, bravely tackled by powerful women and their advocates, and I particularly appreciated the opportunity to take a breather outside on Mount Martha Uniting Church's Peace Walk, around the beautiful one-hectare property, where the congregation have planted more than 100 species of native plants.

Ruth Stuetgen closed the special day by sharing a little of her own story, as a survivor herself, a former police officer and now a writer and dedicated women's advocate. As we left, she challenged us to find opportunities to look out for other women: "When you leave, what are you going to close your eyes to? Who can you speak to, and how can you listen between the lines when other women speak to you?"



Detective Senior Sergeant Tracy Meyer discussed continually-improving legislation which empowers police and survivors

"Who can you speak to, and how can you listen between the lines when other women speak to you?"



Ruth Stuetgen, event organiser



Fetes, Festivities, and family for *all*

By Lesieli Taulii

The women of the Melbourne Fijian Uniting Church (MFUC) held a fete on Saturday 16th November at St Mark's Uniting Church in Chadstone, to reinforce our ongoing relationship as a community of faith.

Coming together, women lifted up women, encouraging each other to utilise their creative gifts to produce things for the fete – cooking curry and rice, hot dogs, pineapple and coconut keke, sewing homemade dresses, and crafting cultural ornaments, Fijian mats, and jewellery just to name a small selection!

Our goal is to support and encourage participation from the young and old alike in our programs, fostering the bonds within our community at the same time as reaching out to the communities

around us, no matter what denomination, ethnicity or status.

The MFUC Women's Fete was a huge success and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended or participated with a stall. We hope to grow this initiative to showcase the talents and skills of the women of our congregations, and more importantly to build positive relationships within and around our communities.

This success has set in motion a joyous momentum toward Christmas, with the Mount Waverley Uniting Church (MWUC) Christmas Day Lunch coming up on Christmas Day 25th of December, where the congregations are looking forward to coming together again for another big project.

And everyone is invited!

Our objective for the Christmas Day Lunch is to share the love of Jesus Christ to the world – Jesus,

the Prince of Peace who humbled himself to be born in a manger on Christmas Day, whose birth we celebrate every year regardless of the chaos around us and innocent lives lost to war and social injustice. This is the seventh consecutive year we have held this event, which brings so many together.

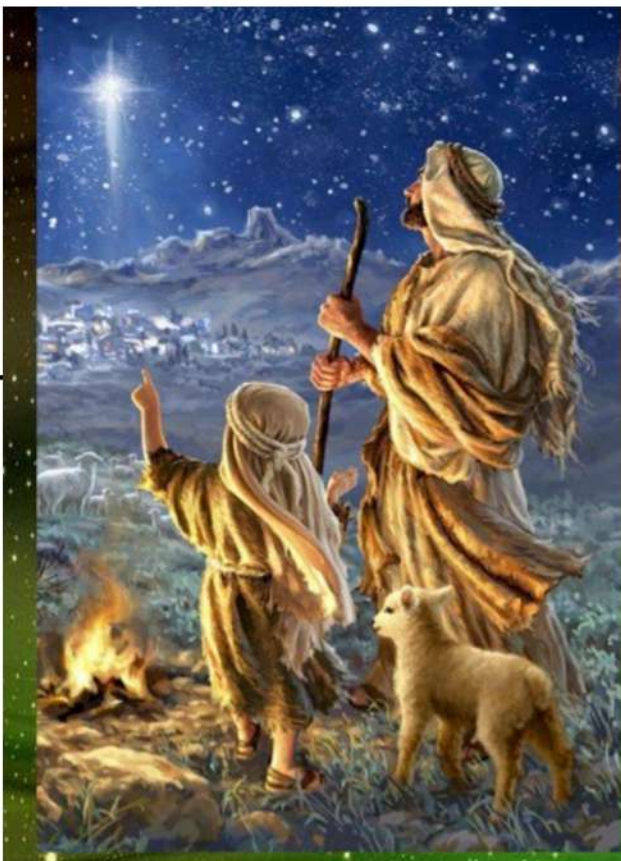
Despite strong winds and heavy rain, our 2023 Christmas Day Lunch went ahead, reflecting our commitment to fostering connection and belonging within our congregations and the wider community. The MWUC warmly welcomes everyone into our church family, creating a space to share stories, meals, and music. Young and old people alike enjoyed DJ Jodee's music, with carols like Jingle Bells and Santa Clause is Coming to Town getting everybody singing and dancing together!

Loneliness is a silent killer, particularly among the elderly and attendees without family in Australia. Last year we were delighted to absorb into our extended family Yuki, who is from Japan and has

no family over here.

Christmas reminds us every year of the urgent need to address loneliness and homelessness, challenges that compel us to reflect on our shared humanity and responsibility. We are all relational beings, in need of each other through the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

We extend our deepest gratitude for the outpouring of ongoing support of the members of MWUC. In addition, thank you to the Social Justice committee, Men's group, MWUC Café, Melbourne Fijian Uniting Church, and lastly Rev. Semisi, Ratu, Josh, and Uata who tirelessly assisted in cooking, serving, cleaning, and setting up the hall in preparation for this festive event. If our congregations can be a vehicle for transformation, it is our people who will be at the heart of the solution. Our Christmas Day Lunch may not solve social injustice, but it is a wonderful, joyous opportunity to open our hearts to others and make a difference in their lives.



You are invited to join the celebration of a Christmas Day Lunch with our Mount Waverley Uniting Church family and friends.

Feel the joy of the festive season and connect with the wider communities with people from all walks of life.

**Address: Mount Waverley Uniting Church
482 High Street Road, Mount Waverley**

Date: 25th December 2024

Time: 12 midday

Book by: 20th of December 2024

Contact Rachael: 0429 073 704

MWUC Office: 03 9887 8239

Rocking the Peninsula

St Mark's Mornington combats homelessness with tea, tunes and togetherness!

By Naomi Cardwell Photography by Geoffrey Brown



Band The Heartbreak Trail's fantastic "Outlaw Mountain Country" music rocked!

St Mark's Uniting Church in Mornington is a well-known force for good on the Peninsula, with a strong social conscience and a zest for mucking in with the local community.

Following the enormous success of their fundraiser in support of Ukraine last year, this year's Combating Homelessness event offered the chance to enjoy some great live music, delicious treats, and learn about the work of two local organisations.

Walking up to the church in the heart of the cool beachside town-

-ship, we could hear the music rocking from the street and saw all comers being welcomed heartily as they arrived.

The event fused a classic Aussie afternoon tea and live music, and I quickly decided that cups of locally-produced Commonfolk tea and coffee, homemade scones, and a side of rock n roll are a marriage made in heaven.

Proceeds supported two local homelessness charities, and perhaps best of all, the day offered the opportunity for locals from the church, the wider community and its charitable organisations to



Gemma Bell of youth charity Fusion

really galvanise their relationships in this special, unique little town by the sea.

We sat at long communal tables in the airy church hall, with doors thrown open to the street outside. Between music sets, we heard from Gemma Bell of Fusion Mornington Peninsula, and Ben Smith of the Mornington Community Support Centre. Fusion's youth accommodation in Mount Martha's ex-Army barracks provides the only youth-focused housing on the Peninsula.

The young people who come to stay have endured significant

trauma and hardship, and helping them find their feet is a uniquely demanding job.

“How devastating it is,” Gemma said, “That a little person of around 16 years old could be so crushed by this world.” Fusion works to restore young people from their trauma, and give them a place to belong. Gemma herself has lived and worked in this demanding role for sixteen years, and shared with us the moving story of one resident who has now found stable housing and a job she loves, but still returns to visit every Mother’s Day.

Ben Smith spoke next. Mornington Community Support Centre offers food relief, referrals, no-interest loans, financial counselling, crisis accommodation, and more to anyone who walks through their doors. “Between one hundred and

one hundred and fifty people are sleeping rough on the Peninsula right now,” he said, explaining that people sleep in cars or tents at the foreshores, or in unstable environments where they may not feel safe. “That’s pretty extraordinary,” he continued, “in a community like ours, where there are so many empty houses and so much affluence”.

St Mark’s is a congregation who choose not to look away, and instead put their shoulders to the wheel when it comes to making a difference.

The event was filled with lively conversation, a silent auction at the back of the room, and set after awesome set from the band, The Heartbreak Trail, whose time was also donated. Sponsors included Bunnings, Coles, Woolworths,



Ben Smith of Mornington Community Support Centre

Bakers Delight, and Commonfolk Coffee. It was great to see St Mark’s bring the big hearts of the Peninsula together once again, this time to search together for grassroots solutions to local problems happening right under our noses.



The fantastic volunteers slinging coffees and serving up laughs and treats in the kitchen!

A Covenant with Creation



By Geoff Serpell

Nestled in the heart of Victoria, our family has been blessed to care for a 40.7-hectare (100 acre) property—a former sheep run that now serves to fight Climate Change and bring people together. In 2004, the property was sold to the Serpell family by “Trust for Nature,” an organization dedicated to protecting Victoria’s unique ecosystems. The family is covenanted to improve the biodiversity and increase the quantity and quality of the vegetation and habitats on the land. Through future generations or other future owners, I am proud to know that this work will continue into perpetuity.

Over the past two decades, we’ve planted nearly 2,000 seedlings—understory shrubs, bushes, and grasses—and installed over 75 bird nesting boxes to provide shelter for native wildlife.

Our property has also become a gathering place. Several church picnics have been held here, and we’ve welcomed volunteers from Leighmoor Uniting Church, Moorabin, a Five Leaf Eco Award congregation, for annual planting days. The property has become a place for all of us to practice good stewardship over God’s creation together, and to think beyond ourselves into the future.

At the time of writing, *The Age* newspaper advises that Australia’s average temperatures have risen by 1.5 degrees for the first time since records began, and the world is on track to overshoot the Paris Accord’s aim to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

As the world faces stark environmental challenges, including rising temperatures and reduced rainfall, our covenant with “Trust for Nature” reminds us that small, faithful acts can have a lasting impact. Protected areas managed by Trust for Nature store over 12 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in Victoria—equivalent to removing 2.8 million cars from the roads each year.

While the challenges of climate change affect us all, they also call us to act together, drawing strength from one another and from God. Caring for the earth is not only a responsibility, but also a reflection of our gratitude for the beauty and abundance of creation.

For more information about Trust for Nature and their work, visit www.trustfornature.org.au.

Prayers for Peace

By Cathy McNicol

St John's Elsternwick-Caulfield South has a long history of connecting with the community through social justice issues. We have used our site on a major road for installations, noticeboard displays, invitations for people to write prayers to hang on the peace tree and quiet contemplation in the peace garden next to the tram stop.

Over the last few years, St John's has profiled the International Peace Day on 21 September. In October 2023, we had prayers for people affected by the results of the Referendum on the Voice to Parliament, and following the outbreak of violence in the Middle East.



Peace garden and noticeboard at the front of St John's

This year, there was a strong desire to be a visible presence calling for peace – whether personal, within the community, or in the wider the world. Our installation around the word PEACE was a great focus for a six-hour peace vigil, which included prayers and songs. Pedestrians and motorists engaged in positive conversations and nods of affirmation as we sat quietly next to the footpath offering the words “peace be with you,” to all.

Responses included: “Peace is so important.”, “Fabulous! If only there was peace.”, “Thanks for doing this. It made me cry.” and “Silence is nourishing.” There was a sense that the prayers were important and appreciated by the community, so vigils have continued for an hour each Wednesday evening.



Community members have been welcomed to sit in the church, listen to reflective organ, piano or guitar music, light a candle and pray.

Coincidentally, there have been Jewish festival days when people walking to our neighbouring synagogue expressed appreciation for our efforts.

We pray that we are able to continue to share the peace of God, and that people will be able to pass the peace to all they meet.

Wags and worship!

Heatherton-Dingley Uniting Church celebrate their annual Thanksgiving Day for Dogs

By Naomi Cardwell



Heatherton-Dingley Uniting Church held its annual Thanksgiving service for Dogs on 17th November, bringing together a delightful mix of congregation, community, and cuddly companions!

The relaxed, informal service was held in the church hall, with wagging tails and joyous barking punctuating hymns like *All Creatures Great and Small*.

The close-knit congregation's fondness for their furry friends was

clear, with "regular" pets circulating to greet newcomers, and everyone behaving extraordinarily well. Outside, the church maintains a beautiful memorial bench on its grounds, which is dedicated especially to the memory of departed pets. "We are never alone, thanks to our friends," Peter Campbell said, as he led the service. "Their love reminds us that even when we don't deserve it, God forgives us too."

Glenys Needham from Lions Hearing Dogs Australia was a

special guest speaker for the occasion.

She shared insights into the vital work of service dogs, highlighting how Hearing Dogs can alert owners to household sounds like a crying baby or a boiling kettle. Crucially, they can also respond to emergencies, such as smoke alarms, by persistently alerting their owners. For Type 1 diabetics, service dogs are trained to fetch medical equipment or even call for emergency services by pressing special buttons with their paws,



Glenys Needham speaks about Lions Hearing Dogs Australia

should an owner become incapacitated. During prayers, we thanked God for the work of these special dogs, and for the brave dogs and their masters serving in the army, police force, and search and rescue services, whose work saves lives.

It was wonderful to spend a Sunday

reflecting on these special friends and praising God for these gifts of creation, who mean so much to each of us.

Many beautiful companions made themselves known during and after the service—calm, curious little souls who said hello with sniffs, wags, and the occasional gentle lick.

Their presence made the service so friendly, as their owners planted affectionate little pats on their heads throughout the service and doted on them during afternoon tea, where treats abounded for dogs and humans alike!

It's hard to keep your walls up when there are dogs about, and the warmth at the service was truly something to be proud of.

Heatherton-Dingley Uniting church are a wonderfully welcoming bunch,

whose love for their companions immediately puts newcomers at ease. A dog's love is such a pure and welcome common ground, and the day reminded us that the bond between humans and their pets is a little glimpse of the love and connection we're all created for—both with God, and with one another.



For over 40 years, Australian Lions Hearing Dogs (ALHD) has been providing Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing with a set of 'furry ears' free of charge. In 2020, ALHD delivered to just over 650 Australians a professionally trained Hearing Assistance Dog.

Follow the QR Code to learn more or to donate.

If you would like Glenys to speak at your service or event, email glenysneedham7@gmail.com.



Growing together in Faith

Facilitator Brad Denniston reflects on the growth and mission of Ormond Uniting Church's thriving Learning Hub

By Brad Denniston

Photo Supplied

The Ormond Learning Hub began in 2020 at Ormond Uniting Church, the brainchild of our then-minister Andrew Boyle. The timing of the Hub's inception, amid the COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne, shaped its purpose and format.

As people grappled with isolation and uncertainty, the Hub became a place to connect, learn, and reflect together. Since then, it has blossomed into a vibrant space for faith formation, offering participants the opportunity to explore theology, scripture, and life's big questions.

We have grown to offer three courses annually: two short courses at either end of the year, and a longer course on Zoom during the winter months. We've explored topics around pastoral care, Uniting Church theology, ageing through a theological lens, the history of Genesis, and we've grappled with

the intersection of faith and climate change.

Each session incorporates small group discussions, thought-provoking reading materials, and diverse media such as art, music and video.

For some, it's about finding answers; for others, it's about uncovering new questions. But for all, the focus is on how faith intersects with real life.

We are passionate about making the Ormond Learning Hub a place where people can grow in their faith journey and feel part of a community that

nurtures their spiritual curiosity.

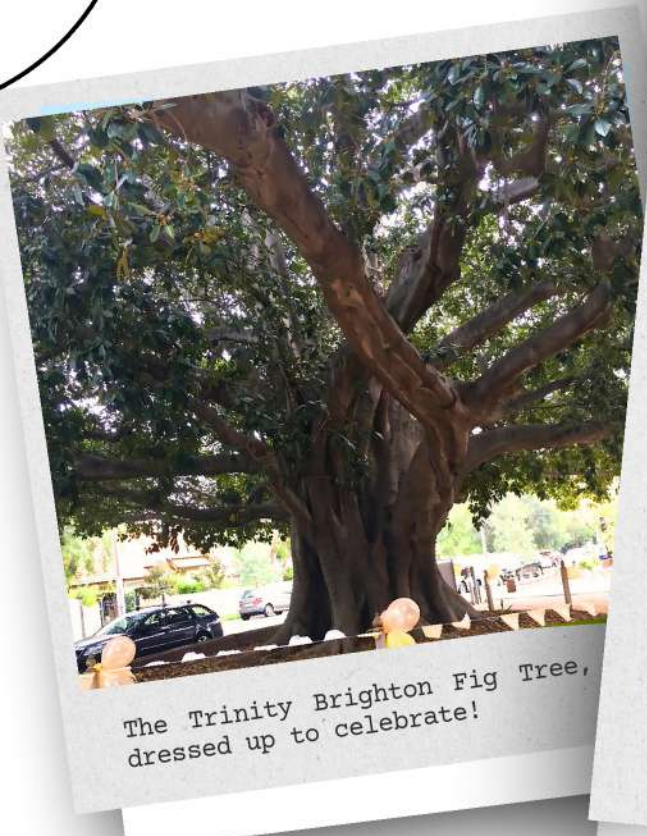
Looking ahead, for 2025, If you're looking for a place to explore your faith, ask big questions, or simply connect with others on this journey, the Ormond Learning Hub is here for you.

Stay tuned for information regarding our upcoming courses in the next addition of *Newsbeat*.

If you have any questions or would like to join our mailing list, please email:

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au





The Trinity Brighton Fig Tree, dressed up to celebrate!



A clipping of a story about the tree, published in The Herald Sun, provided by Jen Verwoert

Trinity's oldest friend awarded

With thanks to Jen Verwoert, Trinity Brighton

Trinity Uniting Church Brighton has a new claim to fame, with their beloved 155-year-old Morton Bay Fig Tree securing third place at the National Trust's 2024 Victorian Tree of the Year Awards.

"We are a small congregation, but in typical Trinity tradition everyone rallied around," writes Jen Verwoert. Friends, family, golf buddies and next door neighbours of the congregation were all too pleased to vote for the beautiful landmark, in a campaign that saw the congregation branching out (!) to their community. In the end, the famous fig finished the competition with a healthy 14% of the public vote, where the second place winner received 17%.

"Our tree is (from) one of the many hundreds of seedlings that were distributed by Baron von Mueller in the mid 1850's," writes Jen, and only a few are left standing today. Von Mueller was appointed government Botanist for the colony of Victoria under Charles La Trobe, and went on to become the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne.

The Trinity Fig tree, therefore, shares its provenance with the beauties we all enjoy in those gardens, as well as those at the Melbourne Zoo. How delightful to imagine this gentle giant presiding over generations in Brighton as they attended church. Congratulations to all at Trinity for their splendid effort and their love for God's creation.

Presbytery in Council

Preparing for Advent and *beyond*

By Ennis Macleod

Photos By Anneke Oppewal



On the evening of November 20, Sandringham Uniting Church hosted the November Presbytery in Council Meeting, bringing together members to share resources, prepare for Advent and Christmas, and attend to Presbytery business.

The evening was marked by inspiring moments of worship, creative resource sharing, and acknowledgment of good news from all around the Presbytery.

A warm thank you to Belinda Clear for hosting us at Sandringham and leading a worship experience that enriched and uplifted.

We were treated to a visually stimulating video from Skit Guys, a poetic reading of John 1:1-5 written by Sarah (Are) Speed at Sanctified Art, and the

opportunity to reflect on several art works using *Visio Divina*, as well as different special spaces that offered unique reflective activities.

For those seeking more information, Presbytery Secretary Anne Kim can provide access to the handouts and other resources shared on the night.

The evening began with a welcome from Rev Jay Robinson, followed by Rev Cam McAdam stepping in as chair for the evening as we had received apologies from both the Chair and Vice Chair. We acknowledged the custodianship of the Bunurong peoples on whose land we met, and joined in singing Susan Wickham's reimagined version of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. The hymn's first verse reframes 'captive Israel' as all people whose lives are taken captive by darkness and fear.

Key business matters included

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and fill our lives, all dark and fear
dispel,
as once an exiled peoples you found,
redeemed, restored and set on holy
ground.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to us and in our
hearts will dwell.*

Susan Wickham's reimagined verse of
"O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

approving the 2025 budget and celebrating Di Paterson's contribution to the Lay Preachers Association, with Peter Woodbridge now taking on that role. Excitingly, we look forward to Daniel Sihombing's ordination on 1st December and his induction as a lecturer at Pilgrim Theological College in February 2025.

The evening also highlighted updates from key projects and regions. Moderator David Fotheringham provided a video with insights into the Synod's Faithful Futures Project, which is preparing the Church for a rapidly evolving future.

Presbytery Ministers, Jay and Robin, presented reports from Casey Cardinia, which is gathering momentum in its movement towards regional cooperation, and Bayside as it continues to explore how congregations in the area can cooperate to accomplish God's mission.

A major focus of the evening was providing resources for congregations preparing for Advent and Christmas, especially for those led by laypeople.

Advent and Christmas materials curated for this purpose by MLDC were introduced, featuring ready-to-use themes, orders of service, and links to multilingual music, videos and carols. Follow the QR code to access these fantastic materials.

These resources aim to support ministry and mission across the

Presbytery, ensuring even the smallest congregations can celebrate these seasons richly.

By the time supper was served, we had attended to the evening's business, and looked forward to the shared worship experience, which reinforced the theme of the event: celebrating shared accomplishments, equipping one another with tools and encouragement for ministry, and looking ahead to this Christmas and beyond.

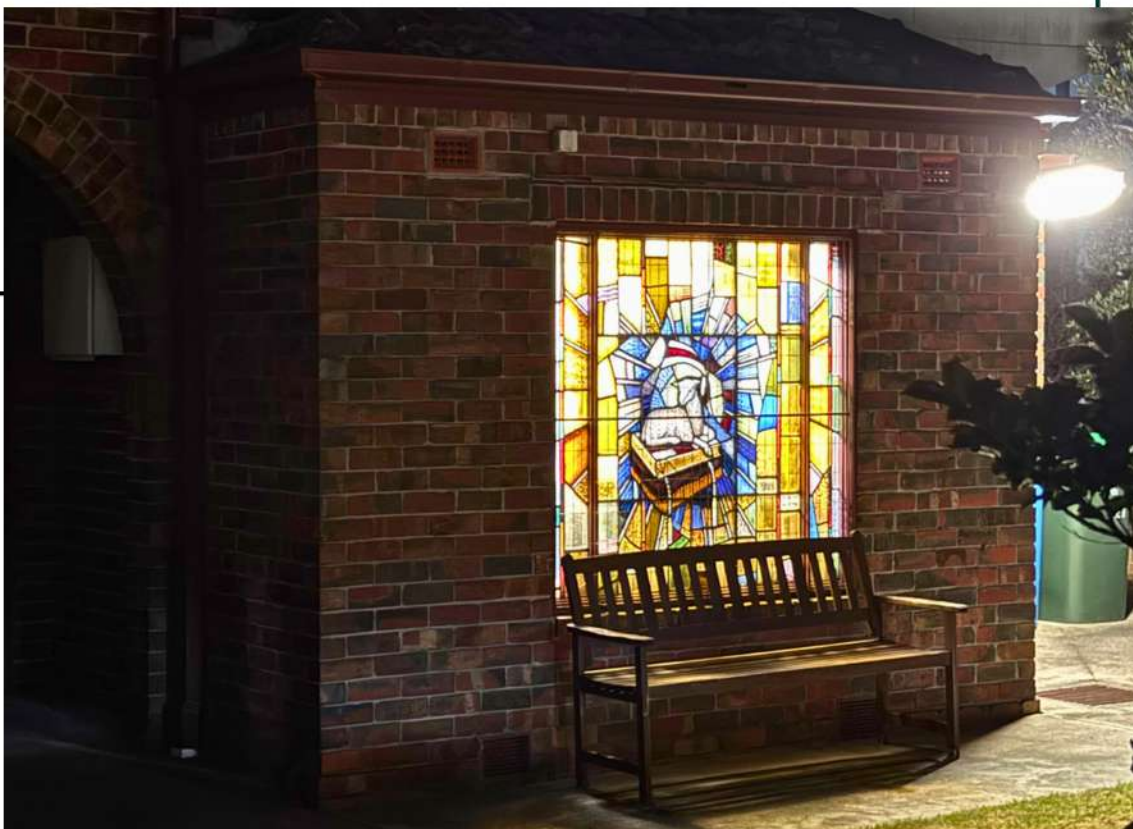


MLDC Advent and Christmas resources



Rev Cameron McAdam

“A major focus of the evening was providing resources for congregations preparing for Advent and Christmas, especially for those led by lay people”.



Sandringham Uniting Church looking merry and bright



Village Church decamps to the hills!

By Rev Cameron McAdam Photos Supplied

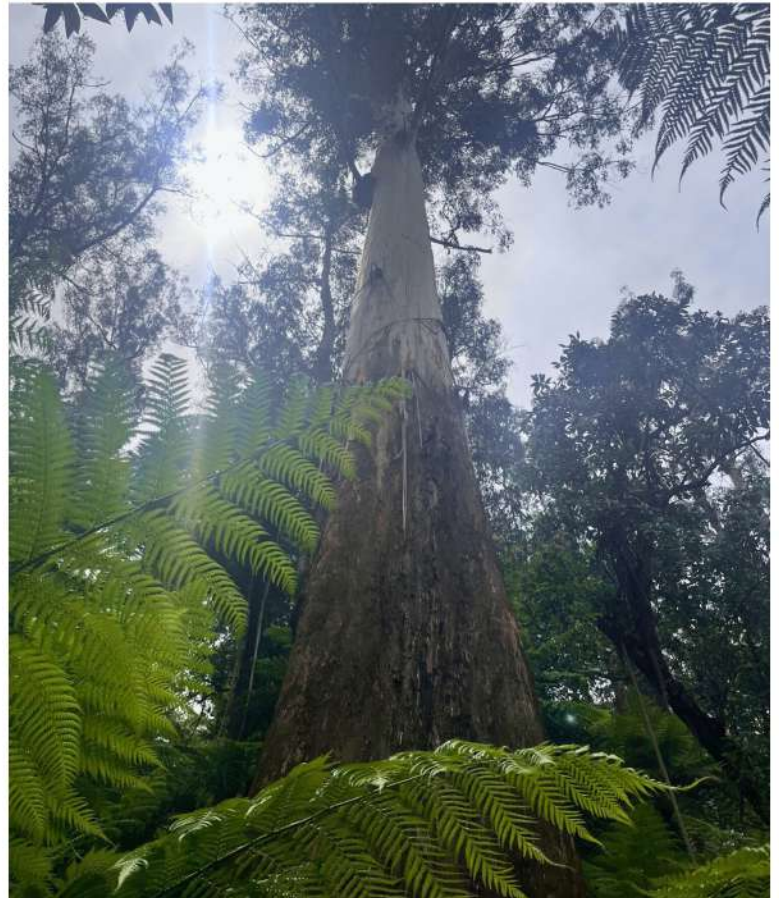
Church camps have always been a big part of the life of the Village Church, Mt Eliza.

These camps offer an intentional opportunity to build intergenerational community, where activities, shared meals, and worship create space for people of all ages to explore life and faith together.

For many years Village Church camps were held at church-run camp sites. More recently, however, we've moved to campgrounds and caravan parks which offer a wider variety of accommodation styles and activities for people of all ages.

This year marked our third camp at Healesville, a beautiful setting amongst towering gums on the banks of Badger Creek.

Village Church camps offer a relaxed, companionable





break time filled with rest, fun in the park facilities, and best of all for quiet conversations and community building. This year the weather was hot, so time in the pool and creek were crucial. A picnic and walk to Badger Weir shaded by the surrounding forest, was a special experience. And, as always, the annual spit-roast on Saturday night, followed by singing, is always a big feature of our community time.

With an unexpectedly early change in the weather, the rain meant a pivot was required from the planned Sunday Liquid Worship, another intentionally intergenerational style of church, to an undercover time of singing, prayer and sending for the community.

The camp is an important part of what the Village Church calls 'Community Month' in November, a month dedicated to building and celebrating our intergenerational community life.





(L-R): Bex Hinton, Aunty Vicki Thomas, and Ceridwen Foran celebrate in front of the finished mural.

Art for Our sake

By Dennis Freeman

Throughout Term 3, Cornish College primary visual art students were fortunate to have Aunty Vicki Thomas, an Indigenous artist, working with them in the primary art studio, to create a new mural for the College.

Aunty Vicki is a Bunurong/Trawlwoolway artist who feels a strong connection to her cultural stories through art practice. Her art can be found in many private collections, on AFL football jumpers, the Bunurong Land Council uniform, and one of her works was gifted to the College's sister school in Japan.

After walking the property, Aunty Vicki shared her visual story of Cornish College with the Prep to Year 6 students. Students were then encouraged to express their interpretation of the Cornish College environs through artwork. Students from Years 3 to 6 contributed to the mural, painting alongside Aunty Vicki and their art teacher Bex Hinton.

The mural reflects the physical Indigenous aspects of

our 100 acres, with its border of manna gum branches, which embrace the mapping of the school journey within. We see the path students take as they move (left to right) through the school from the Early Learning Centre, primary and secondary school hubs, their footprints marking the way for those who follow. Within we see the waterhole, our wetlands, and dotted through the surrounding branches are ten of our favourite birds, all watched over by Bunjil.

The mural was unveiled by Aunty Vicki in front of the whole College on the first day of Term 4 and now sits welcoming people to our Village Green.



Above: Aunty Vicki and the children working on the mural together

Letters to the Editor

May we all do better

‘As I step down (as Archbishop of Canterbury), I do so in sorrow with all the victims and survivors of abuse’. You have to ask whether the Catholic Church in this country shares Justin Welby’s sorrow for the victims and survivors of abuse when they seem hell-bent on avoiding taking responsibility for the horrendous child abuse which occurred in the Ballarat dioceses.

There is such a thing as moral culpability.

- Nick Toovey, Beaumaris UC.

On the responsibility to Curate our Influences.

A recent 4 Corners TV program highlighted the power of social media ideas distorting truth and creating violence. My response is a resolve to select carefully the content that comes into my phone and email. I have used daily meditation and reflection sites and followed people like Richard Rohr or the reflections of Eric Clayton. Another excellent resource is the Australian Centre for Public Christianity (CPX). The current e-newsletter features diverse articles on 'The Crisis of Masculinity', 'Sexual abuse and the Church', and others, as well as a library of podcasts, often featured in The Age, The Australian, The Guardian newspapers and on the ABC 'Religion and Ethics report'.

A recent CPX event was the delivery of the Richard Johnson lecture by the novelist Tim Winton, who discussed his passion and motivation for taking climate action. A selection of quotes from Tim Winton have stayed with me:

“Just before his death at the hands of the Nazis Bonhoeffer wrote ‘The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves to its children’”

“We have renounced our relationship with, and dependence on creation. . . We have turned our back on ‘The holy mystery of life,’ [Karl Rahner]”

“We must respect the wisdom of the First Nations people of Australia – 50,000 years of wisdom . . .”

Human prospects are dependent on country, living in a relationship of restraint and responsibility for care.”

“Listen to the children – crying for justice- our society is punishing those who protest e.g. a young mother in Perth wrote three words on a public walkway. This led to her home being raided at 3 am by the anti-terrorist squad. They used a tactic of fear, going through her home, getting her children out of bed . The three words she wrote were ‘No New Gas.’ Written in chalk!”

“Hope is a discipline and determination, a refusal to submit. We need a focus on children and beauty in solidarity with other people . It is a faith. A calling . Prophets do not have a comfortable life, but they keep going - proclaiming faith.”

The words of Tim Winton can add to our collective faith, hope and action. For me this is a powerful example of high-value thinking on the internet.

- Dr Vivienne Mountain, St Leonards UC.



Email your letter now!

Notices

Surplus audio equipment will be available from Mount Waverley Uniting Church as we close our High Street site.

For details, phone Jim: 0400789543 or email hjaylmer@bigpond.com.

Are you subscribed to 'Newsbeat'?

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You're invited...

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER

LET'S CELEBRATE!

a Starry night
Murrumbeena's Annual Christmas Party

5.30pm - 8pm
Murrumbeena Uniting Church Community Garden and Hall
117 Murrumbeena Rd
Makers Market, Kids Activities, Food trucks and Carols

8.15pm - 9pm
Murrumbeena Train Station (outside)
Lighting of the Christmas Palm tree and Carols

9pm until late - After Party!
Murrumbeena Wine Bar
77 Murrumbeena Rd

A Starry Night – Friday 6 December, from 5.30pm
Murrumbeena's annual Christmas party! Food and festivities in the Community Garden, moving to Murrumbeena Station and Wine Bar.
In partnership with Local Sundays and others.

Blue Christmas – Wednesday 18 December, 7.30pm
A space to bring the pain and grief that sometimes comes up at Christmas time.

A Night of Carols – Christmas Eve, 7.30pm
Choir! Orchestra! Costumes! Come along for a glorious night of music and celebration.

Christmas Day Celebration – 9.30am
Hear the Christmas story anew in this short morning gathering.

www.murrumbeenauniting.org.au
03 9568 8177

December Church Services

22nd December – 7.00pm

Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

featuring the Bayside Singers and Guest Artist Susan Batten, Oboe

24th December – 5.00pm

Christmas Eve Nativity Show

*Venue: St Stephens Anglican Church, 111 North Road, Brighton

25th December – 9.30am

Christmas Day

Holy Communion Service

Trinity Uniting Church Brighton





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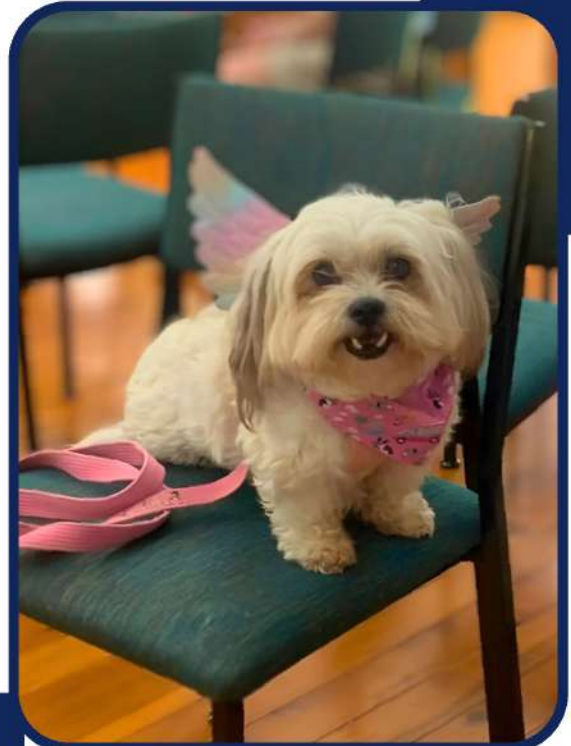
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*Another furry friend at Heatherton-
Dingley Uniting Church*

