

NEWSBEAT

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PORT PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



June 2026



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Celebrating Years of Faithful Service at Ministry Milestones

by Lukas Harry

Pentecost Sunday was filled with celebration, colour and gratitude at Glen Waverley Uniting Church, as the Presbytery gathered for its annual Ministry Milestones service. It was a joyful afternoon recognising the faithful service of ministers and volunteers across our Church community.

This year, 13 ministers were recognised for a combined 610 years of ministry, with milestones ranging from 30 to an incredible 70 years since ordination. Alongside them, 23 volunteers from congregations across the Presbytery were celebrated for their dedication, service and commitment to the life of the Church and wider community.

Held on Pentecost Sunday, the occasion carried special meaning. Pentecost reminds us of the Holy Spirit moving through people of different languages, cultures and gifts, united in the one mission of sharing God's love. That spirit was beautifully reflected throughout the service.

Songs were sung, prayers were shared, and scripture was read in multiple languages, with a vibrant mix of cultures and ministry expressions represented throughout the packed church. It was a powerful reminder that while the Church is made up of many different people and gifts, it is the same Spirit at work through all.

The afternoon also invited reflection on the many ways God calls and equips people for ministry and service. For some, that calling may come in dramatic moments of change; for others, it grows quietly over years of faithful worship, volunteering and encouragement from those around them.

More than simply celebrating years of service, the event recognised the countless ways these individuals have helped shape communities, mentor others and keep the life of the Church moving forward.

Rev Andrew Hope - 70 years of Ordination



Their dedication stands as an encouragement for others to consider how they too might share their gifts, whether through ministry, leadership, hospitality, music, pastoral care or simple acts of kindness.

As part of the celebrations, Presbytery Chair David Higham reflected on the importance of recognising people who serve faithfully, noting that many of those honoured were first encouraged, mentored or noticed by someone else within the Church community. As the Church looks toward the future, the afternoon also carried a gentle challenge: to continue identifying, supporting and encouraging new generations of ministers and volunteers to step forward and share in God's work.

Stay tuned for next month's special edition of Newsbeat, where we'll further recognise and give thanks for the many ministers and volunteers celebrated at this year's Ministry Milestones service, and the faithful contribution they continue to make across our Presbytery.



“We Make the Way by Walking”

by Lukas Harry

There were tears, laughter, long-held memories and hopeful anticipation as the congregation of St Andrew's by the Sea Black Rock Uniting Church gathered on 17 May for their final service in the building that has shaped generations of faith and community life.

The service marked not an ending, but a transition, as the congregation prepares to continue its journey as part of Charman Uniting Church in Cheltenham.

The story behind this move stretches back several years. In 2023, the Black Rock and Cheltenham-Mentone congregations officially joined together to form Charman Uniting Church after worshipping alongside one another during refurbishment works at the Cheltenham site. What began as a practical arrangement gradually became something deeper

As church members beautifully described, the amalgamation was “a bit like a marriage,” two congregations spending time together, discovering shared values and ministry, and eventually deciding to continue the journey as one community.

That spirit of unity and shared faith was deeply present throughout the final Black Rock service. Stories and memories flowed freely during worship, with members young and old reflecting on the role the church building had played throughout their lives. People remembered weddings, baptisms, playing baby Jesus in Christmas pageants, Sunday School sausage rolls with Marge, funerals of loved ones and the simple moments of fellowship that had shaped the community over decades.

The theme throughout the service was that “the Church is the people.” Minister Rev Greg Fry reflected on the reality that while places, communities and circumstances change, God continues to lead people into new ways of living faithfully.

“We need to find new ways to experience things when things change,” he said. “People move, needs and opportunities change. We let go and move on and look for new opportunities.”

Rev Fry reminded the congregation that the Black Rock church community itself began not in a grand sanctuary but in a living room off Balcombe Road in the 1890s - a reminder that the Church has always been about people gathering together in faith, wherever that may be.

He also acknowledged the changing nature of church life in modern times. “There was a time when all you needed to do was open the church doors and people would come flooding in” he reflected. “Things have changed. The Church now needs to adapt and find new ways to connect.”

That sense of movement and adaptation became one of the strongest themes of the day. The congregation expressed that they were “not closing, but moving,” with one phrase emerging for the community moving forward:

“We make the way by walking.”

There were visible reminders throughout the service that while the congregation is entering a new season, much of its story will continue. Several treasured elements from the Black Rock building, including stained glass windows, crosses and memorial plaques, have now been incorporated into the refurbished Charman Uniting Church building, allowing the light and history of the congregation to continue shining in a new space. As Rev Greg Fry said, “I’ve been in to see the new building and the light now shines through the beautiful stained glass windows in a new way.”

For many, the building carried generations of personal history. I connected with congregation member Frank Mindum after the service who reminisced on the deep connections held within the space. “Melanie’s parents married in that building. We were married in it, our children were baptised in it, and we said farewell to family and friends there too.” He described it as “a space of comfort, peace, fellowship, warmth and walking a deep faith journey within.”

“Referring to the strong sense that the congregation’s story was never really about bricks and mortar alone, he said “The building itself isn’t the Church. It’s definitely the people that make it a church.”

Frank said that familiar pieces from the Black Rock church help bridge the grief of leaving with the hope of beginning again. “There’s an incredible sense of familiarity in the new space” he said. “These items perpetuate the long history of those who gave their hearts and souls to this faith community.”

While there was much sadness in saying goodbye to a beloved building, there was also excitement about what this new chapter may hold. Frank spoke warmly about the opportunities ahead, not simply to continue existing ministries, but to expand community connection and reimagine what church life can look like.

"Strong fellowship will continue and people will continue to support each other, but I think the exciting part isn't what continues, as that is pretty much our baseline. It's the new elements that will start to be introduced. How we can branch out and do more, reach further out, bring community in, and share this new chapter beyond the doors of the church. Build our visibility, remove preconceptions of what people 'think' we're about. Yes, we'll talk about and focus on faith but there is so much more that we can offer, including on a secular level with the simple purpose of showing that we're the same - we watch footy, we play music, we drink coffee, we look after people, enjoy a laugh, get angry, we make mistakes and get it wrong.

But in this new space at this time of such uncertainty, I hope that we can offer simple peace, calm, ears that will listen and not judge, offer service as needed, simply do what Jesus did to whomever is in need. That's what excites me and what I hope happens as we move forward."

As the final service had come to a close, one message shared from Pastor Di Paterson captured the spirit of the day perfectly:

"You as a church will go on stronger as a community."

And so, after more than a century of worship in Black Rock, the congregation now steps forward together, carrying its memories, faith and story into a new season at Charman Uniting Church. With Greg Fry as the full time minister and DI Paterson as part time Pastor.





Feast for Freedom

by Lukas Harry

Good food has a way of bringing people together, but at Stonnington Community Uniting Church's recent Feast for Freedom, the meal served a much bigger purpose.

Around 60 guests gathered to share food, conversation and stories, while raising vital funds for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), supporting people living with ongoing visa uncertainty and hardship. The event raised approximately \$2,000 for the ASRC, while also helping to build awareness of the challenges many refugees and asylum seekers continue to face in Australia.

Guests enjoyed a feast inspired by recipes from the ASRC Cookbook, prepared by talented volunteers led by cook Nadine and her daughter. The church hall was transformed with autumn-themed decorations, while people from across the congregation and wider community contributed food, time and hospitality to make the day possible.

Yet the heart of the event lay not only in what was shared on the table, but in the stories shared around it.



A highlight of the afternoon was hearing from Amir Brand-Abdi, who arrived in Australia by boat from Iran in 2013 alongside his brother. Following months in immigration detention and years living on temporary visas, Amir was granted permanent residency in 2022 before later becoming an Australian citizen.

Throughout years of uncertainty, Amir pursued higher education and captained Australia's blind football team. His story served as a powerful reminder of the resilience, determination and potential that exists within people seeking refuge.

The congregation also heard updates about the current work of the ASRC and the ongoing challenges faced by many people still navigating Australia's asylum system.

The event reflected one of the core values behind the Feast for Freedom movement: that sharing a meal can create understanding, break down barriers, and foster genuine connection.

People travelled from several congregations to be part of the day. New friendships were formed, old friendships strengthened, and conversations unfolded around themes of justice, compassion and belonging.

Organisers noted that while raising funds was an important goal, another key aim was creating opportunities for people to engage more deeply with refugee and asylum seeker experiences. By all accounts, the day achieved both.

As guests lingered over dessert, accompanied by music from the newly formed SpiritSong Choir, the atmosphere was one of warmth, generosity and hope.

The Feast for Freedom was a reminder that hospitality can be a powerful expression of faith. Through sharing food, listening to stories and standing alongside those seeking safety and belonging, communities can help create a more compassionate future for all.

The success of the day was made possible through the extraordinary efforts of many volunteers, whose planning, cooking, organising and welcoming helped turn a simple meal into an opportunity for connection, awareness and meaningful support.



Curious about what was on the menu?
<https://ucappep.org/feast-for-freedom-menu/>



Cranbourne Food Truck Continues to Change Lives

The Cranbourne Uniting Church Food Truck ministry continues to grow, bringing not only food and practical support, but also connection, community and hope to many across the region.

One exciting new development is the recent purchase of a mini-bus, which will help transport people from Lyall Street to the church for the Monday to Thursday drop-in sessions and evening meal services. The vehicle will also assist with collecting donations, including large weekly food pickups that help keep the ministry running.

All evening Food Truck sessions will now be hosted at Cranbourne Uniting Church in Lesdon Avenue. Meals are currently offered on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday evenings, including a monthly Saturday music night. While the local Anglican community will begin running Tuesday night meals. The inter-church collaboration, expanding the number of nights people can access food and support.

Each week, the ministry now serves around 145 meals and distributes more than 130 food parcels, including 40 family-sized parcels every Tuesday. The Monday to Thursday drop-in sessions also provide lunch-making facilities, hot food, tea and coffee, fruit and snacks, creating a welcoming and supportive environment for around 20 people each day, with everyone joining in setting-up.

But as Food Truck Coordinator Phill Start shared, the ministry is about far more than food.

When asked what the drop-in sessions mean to them, clients described the space as one of “welcoming, acceptance, community and friendliness..” Some shared that without the Food Truck they would often go without meals, while others said it provided their only opportunity for meaningful conversation and connection during the week.

One participant reflected that the support and sense of belonging they found through the Food Truck helped them through an especially dark period in life. Another confided that their doctor had noticed significant improvements in both their physical and mental health, crediting the Food Truck community for helping restore a more positive attitude and wellbeing.

For many, the Food Truck has become “an oasis in their week.”

The ministry stands as a powerful reminder that while food is important, a sense of belonging, dignity and community can be just as life-changing.

New partnerships at St Leonard's Brighton Beach

By Vivane Mountain (for LEAF)

There was a new sense of connection established on Sunday 19 April at St Leonard's church when a community meeting was held in our new building.

The meeting was initiated by Christina Rearick, a member of our church community, linking our church's environment group St Leonard's Environment and Action in Faith (LEAF) with a local environment research and conservation organisation, and supported by the Brighton North Rotary Club.

The topic for the meeting was "The Dolphins of our Bay'. The guest speaker was Dr Kate Robb, the Director and head researcher of the Marine Mammal Foundation.



She spoke of the wonder and beauty of a special pod of dolphins who live in Port Phillip Bay. This group of dolphins has been identified genetically as a unique species, a rare and amazing thing.

We learned of their social life, their individual identification markings, and distinctive individual language sounds.

There is concern for the dangers they face and Dr Robb encouraged everyone to care for them to ensure their survival. We are blessed to have these intelligent, wild creatures living beside us.

For more information on the work of the Marine Mammal Foundation search:

<https://www.marinemammal.org.au/>

Primary School of the Year – Excellence Awardee Winner

By Dennis Freeman



Cornish College has been named an Excellence Awardee in the prestigious 2026 Australian Education Awards for Primary School of the Year (Non-Government).

This national recognition celebrates schools demonstrating excellence in teaching and learning, innovation, community connection and continuous improvement. We are immensely proud that our primary school has been recognised among the leading schools in Australia.

This achievement reflects the systemic strength and health of the College. It acknowledges the collective leadership of our College team, the dedication and expertise of our staff, and a culture that actively nurtures student growth, capability and wellbeing.

The award also recognises our ongoing commitment to professional learning, innovation and strong partnerships with students, families and the wider community. Together, these relationships help shape the vibrant, connected and forward-thinking learning environment we continue to build every day.

As part of the awards process, the College submitted extensive evidence outlining the achievements and impact of our primary school, which was assessed against rigorous national criteria. The recognition affirms excellence across several key areas, including

- High standards of teaching through rigorous and effective academic frameworks
- Strong student outcomes, supporting academic, social and emotional growth
- Innovative curriculum design and forward-thinking learning environments
- Deep community connection and meaningful collaboration with families, staff and the broader community

Being named an Excellence Awardee for Primary School of the Year (Non-Government) by The Educator is one of the highest honours an independent primary school can receive in Australia, and we are incredibly proud of this recognition for our College community.

Faith, Fun and Friendship: Youth Gather at Endeavour Hills

By Lukas Harry



After several years apart, the young adults of Endeavour Hills Uniting Church recently gathered for a long-awaited catch-up.

Attempts had been made over the years to reconnect following the disruptions of COVID, but busy schedules and changing circumstances meant plans never quite came together. That made this gathering all the more special.

The evening was filled with laughter, stories and plenty of catching up as everyone shared what life has looked like in recent years, from work and study to new opportunities and challenges.

Games and conversation helped quickly rekindle old friendships, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere throughout the night.

While there was plenty of fun, the evening also provided space for deeper reflection. The group shared a thoughtful discussion about the role young adults can play within the life of the church and how they can continue to contribute their gifts, energy and faith to the wider community.

The gathering concluded with a devotion and time of reflection, reminding everyone that while life may take people in different directions, faith and community remain important foundations.

It was a simple but meaningful evening, and a hopeful sign of renewed connection among the next generation at Endeavour Hills Uniting Church.

Get in touch!

As we look ahead to future Newsbeat's, We'd love to continue sharing the inspiring stories, creative moments and glimpses of where the Spirit is moving across our Presbytery!!

If something meaningful is happening in your congregation or community, big or small, please don't hesitate to reach out at comms-officer@ucapnep.org.

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PORT PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY STAFF



1 Allan Street, Noble Park VIC 3174
www.ucappep.org
secretary@ucappep.org • (03) 9558 4710

PRESBYTERY MINISTER - TEAM LEADER

Rev Jay Robinson
t: 0410 465 836
e: pm-tl@ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY MINISTER - PASTORAL CARE

Rev Anneke Oppewal
t: 0437 298 454
e: pm-pastoral@ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY MINISTER- CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Rev Robin Yang
t: 0416 190 723
e: pm-cd@ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY SECRETARY

Anne Kim
(Tuesday - Thursday)
t: 0438 181 812
e: secretary@ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY COMMUNICATIONS

Lukas Harry
e: comms-officer@ucappep.org

Website: www.ucappep.org
Facebook: facebook.com/ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY CHAIR

David Higham
t: 0405 435 644
e: chair@ucappep.org

PRESBYTERY TREASURER

Jeff Gardner
t: 0419 886 659
e: treasurer@ppe.victas.uca.org.au

*Newsbeat edited by Lukas Harry and
Judith Haskins*



**A great turnout for the Feast for Freedom
at Stonnington Uniting Church**