

NEWSBEAT

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PORT
PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



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A Home, a Family, a Pantomime: Mt Eliza's Alice in Wonderland

by Leticia Wishart

Mt Eliza Community Pantomime has just completed its sixth annual season, and boy has it been a ride. As someone who started backstage for the very first show of Aladdin, I've seen how it's grown through the years. The Pantomime is something of which we're incredibly proud.

This year, we had the largest cast so far, with 21 cast members scattered throughout the show, but also the largest band size we've had, expanding from four to seven, with more instruments added to the mix.

From the creation of the rabbit hole to the amazing costumes, the painting of the sets, and carving out a hole in the Mad Hatter Table for a Dormouse to hide, the work behind the scenes was just as extensive as the rehearsals for the onstage performances.



Rehearsals started at the end of February, and everyone has worked so hard week in and week out, not just the performers onstage, but doing all the background work as well.



This community has meant a lot to all those involved. For people who are not part of the church, it's meant finding a home and family within, and even finding love, in the case of our Director and White Rabbit, who met through Pantomime a few years ago and are now preparing for a wedding within the church. For those who are part of the church, it's been a way to express their inner divas and support an initiative backed by the church.

More than just the inner community, we've seen an outpouring of support from the wider community. A local knitting group decorates the village with knitted projects to liven up the streets during winter, and this year they made it all Alice in Wonderland themed. We've had local businesses sponsor the show, many of whom proudly displayed the flyers in their windows. Even the bookshop created a display of Alice In Wonderland in their front windows.

My own journey started with this as a way to express that inner child who wanted to perform, and I keep returning because of the people. They've become the group I hang out with for birthdays, or random coffee dates, or even cooking dinners together.



For Rev Cameron McAdam, minister at the Village Church, the value goes further still. “The pantomime community includes a mixture of Village Church and community participants. It gives the church a space to reach out and live its values of building inclusive community, abundant care and transforming lives.

Apart from the joy audiences experience, and the fun that cast and crew have along the way, what makes this such a good ministry are the stories and experiences of the cast and crew. They find in this pantomime community friendship, healing, inclusion, and, as some will say, a home.”



This show has been a massive success, selling out four out of five shows and I know people are eagerly awaiting the news of what next year will hold!



Learning About Korean Christianity - A Student's Inspirational Trip

by Reyner Boshoff
From St David's Parkdale UC

As a first year ministry student, I had the wonderful privilege of travelling through South Korea for nearly two weeks during April with an incredible group of 12 consisting of ministers and students like myself from across Melbourne. Led by our organiser, minister and multicultural ministries coordinator, Rev. David Dong Won Kim, we spent time in Seoul and Busan. We focused on learning more about Australian Christian missionary history, Christianity in an Asian country, communicating with people from different backgrounds, and traditional foods across South Korea.

From the moment we arrived, I was amazed by the generosity and kindness of Korean people.



One of the many conferences we attended as a whole group.

Everywhere we travelled, we were welcomed warmly by churches, universities, ministries, and local businesses. Every single conference we went to, they gifted us with cultural items and food to show their appreciation of our attendance. At each university, church, and organisation we visited, they fed us and gave us presents. I feel great gratitude for their generosity.

During the many conferences we attended, the most common theme was learning about the past Australian missionaries who devoted their lives to sharing the gospel in a war-torn and under-developed country just before the 1900s. We learned about individuals such as the first Australian missionary Rev. Joseph Henry Davies, who spent months travelling by ship from Melbourne with the goal of sharing the gospel in Korea only to die shortly after his arrival from pneumonia and smallpox.

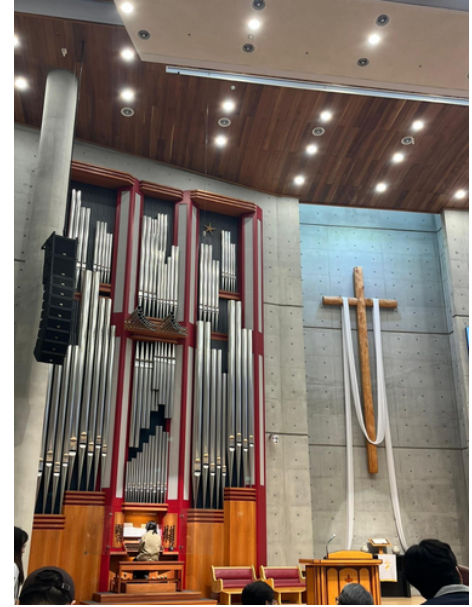


Rev. Joseph Henry Davies (the first Australian Christian missionary).

Some of his family members and many more missionaries to come would then continue where he left off. The Korean people were very pleased to be meeting us and showed great gratitude for the missionaries who set the cornerstone of Christianity in Korea. This was one small reason they gave us so many gifts and treated us so well.

Our group attended Korean church services filled with passionate worship and prayer. The faith and energy of the Korean people was inspiring. We toured Han Shin University in Seoul and joined a service in the chapel which features a massive pipe organ worth roughly a million dollars. Throughout the trip and especially at every service in churches and chapels, Rev. David Dong Won Kim and Rev. Hoensung Mike You translated from Korean to English so we could all feel more involved. Both are originally from South Korea.

Sharing new and different foods provided special, enjoyable moments on the journey. The very first meal I ate upon arriving was a plate of raw beef. Along with their well-known Kimchi, noodles and Korean barbecue beef, this set a trend for the rest of the trip with many barbecues along the way. I ate eel for the first time, had raw chopped up and STILL MOVING octopus, and snow ice cream at a famous dessert bar. Korean food is one of my new favourites.



The pipe organ found in the chapel of Han Shin University Seoul

A major personal highlight was being invited to share a short testimony on-stage at Busan Presbyterian University, in the south of the country, in front of around 200 students and staff members. Speaking publicly about my faith in another country was both nerve-racking and rewarding, but it became one of the defining moments of the trip for me.

I thank Jesus Christ for guiding us on our visit to South Korea, and I am grateful to Rev. David Dong Won Kim, who spent months organising the journey and wrote hundreds of emails to make the trip possible for the entire group.



Mount Waverley UC: Our Intercultural Future Has Begun

by Kathy Ferguson, Usaia Soqoiwasa, Matai Ravuduadua & Paul Kirton

Our Rev Semisi Taulai'i wrote an article titled, "Mount Waverley UC: A Vision for an Intercultural Future", published in Newsbeat September 2023. His introduction included:

"Where to from here? is the 21st century million-dollar question. Our congregation understands that change is coming and we are learning how to embrace it. A difficult task at hand, but we are doing our best to embark on this new journey with the best of our abilities. Nothing is promised apart from the continuation of the mission of Christ at Mount Waverley and beyond. We commit to welcoming and building relationships with people of all cultures ... with hospitality as the centre of our mission as the community of Christ. While we witness the transition, we continue to build community and relationship in this time and space. We believe in hope and walking in God's grace will keep the church on the way to a promised end."

We are very proud of our two former congregations who amalgamated in 2021. They had the courage to embrace a new vision of an intercultural future following much discernment and very good spiritual guidance from our two ministers at the time.

We are pleased to announce that, two years later, our intercultural and intergenerational future began taking shape and was formalised at a special service on Pentecost Sunday 24 May this year. Our new members formerly belonged to the Fijian Wesleyan Methodist Church that was previously located in West Brunswick. We were very fortunate and pleased that they decided to join Mount Waverley Uniting Church.

There are now combined services held monthly with communion, and on the other Sundays an English language service and a Fijian service. We also have a fortnightly youth service.

Our inaugural Fijian Language Service was held on Pentecost, led by our Fijian Minister, Rev Duncan Turuva. This was a day of joy, celebration and deep gratitude, where 208 people came to observe and participate in the Commissioning of six Fijian Leaders and the confirming of 38 new members and 13 young members from the Fijian Wesleyan congregation into our Mount Waverley Uniting Church and the Uniting Church of Australia. Many of our current Elders participated in the service and welcomed the new members with a warm handshake. Bula!

Pentecost reminds us that when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, people from many nations and languages heard good news in their own tongue. Having this service on Pentecost Sunday was especially meaningful for us. It marked a moment of renewal for our congregation, breathing life into the church, gathering families across cultures, generations and languages.



From left: Rev Duncan Turuva; Virginia Lavaki, Synod Younger Generation Multicultural Communities; Rev Salesi Faupula, Synod Moderator; Rev Vini Ravetali, President UCA Fijian National Conference; David Kim, Synod Multicultural Ministries Coordinator.

The hymns, sung in Fijian, beautifully rang out throughout the Sanctuary of Mount Waverley and UC Youth presented a musical dance.

Messages from all guest speakers - Rev Vini Ravetali, President of the UCA Fijian National Conference; Rev Salesi Faupula, Moderator of Synod of Victoria and Tasmania; Matai Ravuduadua, Fijian Elder; and Colin Adam, Chair of Church Council - were inspirational.

Following the service, we gathered in the Marriott Hall for a ceremonial presentation of the Tabua (whale tooth) to Colin. It is the highest ceremonial gesture of respect and honour, acknowledging someone's status and expressing deep gratitude. The Tabua is considered a binding token of good faith. A wonderful dinner was provided by the Fijian members, and a cake was cut to commemorate the occasion.



From left: Usaia Soqoiwasa, Church Councillor; Rev Salesi Faupula, Moderator; Paul Kirton, Chair Congregation; Matai Ravuduadua, Elder; Colin Adam, Chair Church Council.

Our first Fijian member, Usaia, joined our congregation last year. He is now a co-opted member of our Church Council and recalls:

“Mount Waverley was seeking to encourage younger families and younger generations to become active in congregational life. As a family, we felt called to help contribute to that vision and become part of building continuity for future generations.

Over the following ten months, we intentionally welcomed and invited new attendees, particularly younger families and youth. Through these conversations, I became more aware of families who had travelled from Melbourne’s Southeastern suburbs to Brunswick for many years.

Having travelled that journey for 14 years, many had simply accepted it as normal. Yet conversations revealed the challenges involved — financial pressures, travel time, and a desire for a church community closer to home.

By God’s timing, a conversation at a Fijian wedding held at Mount Waverley UC and conducted by Rev Duncan, sparked a new possibility. It became clear that families had been travelling past Mount Waverley for years without realising there was an opportunity to establish something closer and more sustainable.

A plan was developed that allowed for a gradual and respectful transition, leading to a meaningful farewell at Brunswick.

Throughout this process, the youth had already begun building relationships and integrating through regular weekend practices and gatherings. As a family, we remain grateful for the journey so far and look forward with hope to seeing how God continues to guide and grow this community at Mount Waverley.”

One of our new Fijian Elders, Matai, added these thoughts:

“As we prayerfully searched for a church closer to home, we visited several congregations. While we appreciated many of them, we did not quite experience the sense of connection we were seeking.

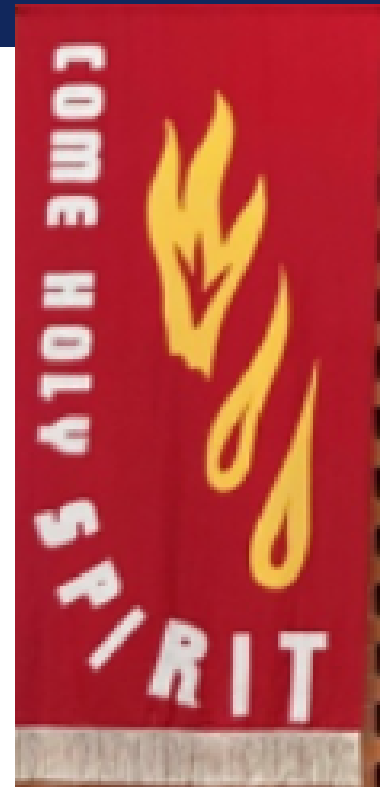
Then we met Rev Duncan and shared our story with him. He invited us to consider Mount Waverley and spoke about the congregation's vision of becoming a multicultural and intercultural church where hospitality, belonging, and faith formation are deeply valued. It was a vision that resonated with us.

One of the things that particularly touched us was the value placed on children and younger people within the life of the church. Rev. Duncan shared that, although the congregation is ageing, there are many people with wisdom, professional experience, educational backgrounds, and life skills who are willing to invest in younger generations and help guide them in life and faith.

More than anything, we experienced kindness, openness, and genuine care.

Rev. Duncan, together with Usaia, helped us discern whether Mount Waverley could become our church home. Together with Rev. Semisi, they showed genuine pastoral care not only for us but also for our children. Their encouragement, leadership, and willingness to walk alongside us gave us confidence that this was where God was leading our family.

Today, we are thankful to be part of the Mount Waverley congregation. We have found a community that has welcomed us warmly, cares for our children, and shares a vision for the future. We look forward to worshipping, serving, and growing together in the years ahead.”



“Vinaka vakalevu for welcoming us into your church family.”





Sharing Cultural Diversity at St David's

by Rev. Esteban Liévano

As a Minister from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, it is sometimes hard to express this aspect of my identity in my weekly Services. I am aware and often reminded of my cultural difference when I make mistakes in my English or say or experience something out of the norm, but rarely do I have the opportunity to really share from my cultural identity in the community in which I serve.

I am also aware of so many in our mainstream churches who have a similar experience. So, when the opportunity came up to celebrate our diversity at St. David's Parkdale this year as part of our Pentecost Service, our worship team sought to get as many people as possible from the different cultures represented in our community to participate and share that aspect of their culture.

We celebrated Pentecost at St. David's Parkdale with a unique Service that celebrated the diverse community we have in the congregation. We focussed on the fact that the Apostles were preaching in the various languages of the people who were gathered in Jerusalem that day (Acts 2:1-12). The bible reading was done in some of the languages of our community (in alphabetical order) Afrikaans, Italian, Sinhala, Spanish, and Welsh. Later in the Service, I was privileged with the opportunity to preach in my mother-tongue of Spanish, with my wife Kemerli translating into English.

Many in the congregation expressed that it was a moving experience and one person said that they felt transported to the streets of Jerusalem by the experience.

We also had guests from Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal de Chile en Melbourne in attendance. They normally meet at Oakleigh Uniting on Sunday afternoons and reported that it was the first time for many of them to connect with a mainstream Christian community. The experience brought to mind an event that was celebrated by the Synod of South Australia called 'One Great Sunday of Sharing'. That event was intended as an opportunity for churches to reach out to the local community and find ways of connecting, but for most churches it became an opportunity to recognise the diverse communities in which they found themselves and to make connections across cultural barriers.

As a member of the Synod Intercultural Forum I was very proud of St. David's Parkdale's invitation and inclusion. For those who participated, it was a chance to be seen in a way that they had not experienced before. One of the bible readers read in Welsh and an older member approached me after the Service, quite moved, She shared that her parents spoke Welsh and that she had not heard the language in decades, but on that Pentecost Sunday, God spoke to her in the language of her parents.

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Judith Haskins*



*Another look at some of the amazing
costumes from The Village Pantomime*