

NEWSBEAT

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PORT
PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



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Bearing Fruit

by Lukas Harry

Fifteen years on, seeds planted in Timor-Leste are bearing fruit.

In June a group from High Street Uniting Church in Frankston arrived in the mountain village of Cucara, they were met with a guard of honour. The whole school, teachers included, lined up alongside village leaders to welcome them, before treating the group to morning tea, lunch, and a proud tour of something the village didn't have a decade ago: running water.



Before a piped water system reached Cucara, families walked to a nearby spring and carried water back by hand, for drinking, cooking and washing.

The system, now reaching homes, the school and the church, was made possible through the vision of two members of the congregation. For the group visiting this year, seeing it in person, and being welcomed so warmly because of it, was a highlight of the trip.

It was one part of a ten-day visit to Timor-Leste led by Tim and Mandy Lake. They took eight members of the congregation to meet people they'd been supporting for years, some of them for over a decade, without ever having met them face to face.

Tim has been travelling to Timor-Leste since 2010, initially bringing student groups from Beacons Hills College and Cornish College. Alongside that work, High Street's CHAOS group has, for around fifteen years, chipped in support at their monthly dinners to help a handful of young Timorese people Tim came to know along the way.

This support led to opening doors for these young Timorese people High Street has come to know: Ancha has finished her nursing course; Cannia is completing midwifery; Cezza has finished studying journalism; Elvie trained as a teacher and now teaches English; Rocky is a police officer; Zely finished school, married, and was supported until her husband found steady work.

“It warms my heart to see people sharing some of our relative 'wealth' with one of the poorest countries and some of the poorest people,” Mandy says. She's noticed something else too: the support hasn't just changed individual lives but ripples out to entire families. And each of these young people has chosen work that gives back to their own community, meaning the support keeps multiplying long after it was first given.

The trip also introduced the group to Julio Dos Santos, the local organiser who made much of the visit possible. Julio has his own story of hardship from Timor-Leste's past and now works to build a more positive future for his country through tourism and education. For Tim, Julio's determination is its own quiet evidence of where God is at work.

The relationships built over the past fifteen years haven't come to an end with this trip. High Street continues to hear from people in Timor-Leste hoping to further their education or improve their circumstances, and the congregation is working through how it can keep offering support.





The Gift Goes Both Ways

by Lukas Harry

After a year of knowing each other only through a screen, Matthew and Kerry finally met Minda in person this year, on the recent trip to Timor-Leste by a group from High Street Uniting Church Frankston.

Tim Lake first met Dr Aminda Borges, known as Minda, back in 2012, and the congregation has supported her ever since. In June 2025, Minda was one year away from graduating as a doctor. She mentioned wanting to learn Korean to open up scholarship opportunities overseas. Matthew, a Korean member of High Street's congregation, had long wanted to help Timorese students learn Korean for exactly this reason.

The two connected online the very next day, spending three hours together that Sunday afternoon. Neither of them had experienced a lesson quite like this before, and both came away having learned plenty. The continued sessions led to a new computer, internet access, and a variety of books being sent to Minda.

Earlier this year, Matthew and Minda realised that improving Minda's English might serve her more immediately than learning Korean. Matthew, whose own second language is English, enlisted Kerry, a native English speaker, to help with pronunciation and conversation. The sessions ran over Zoom, often through rain hammering on Minda's corrugated iron roof, with no ceiling to soften the noise. The internet connection was prone to dropping out mid-sentence, and there was plenty of laughter along the way over mispronounced words.

"Those hours together became much more than language lessons," Kerry says. "As Minda learnt English, I learnt about her culture, her life, and her faith. It was a wonderful reminder that God's work is often a two-way journey, where we are all both teachers and learners. The gift goes both ways."

This trip gave Matthew and Kerry something no Zoom call could: the chance to sit across from Minda in person.



Uniting By the Bay on the Move

by Eric Smith

Sunday 7 June 2026 saw almost 60 people worshipping in Chelsea UC to bring to a close a long wait.

For about 10 years there have been conversations about renovations to the building formerly known as St Andrews UC in Sherwood Avenue, Chelsea. Over that period, a fire gutted part of the building; worship at the Carrum UC, ceased with members joining in at Chelsea; and the Edithvale UC congregation also joined with Chelsea when their church property was sold, with the Edithvale manse demolished and four units built on the site. Combined, we have become Uniting By The Bay.

Throughout all this the Parish Op-Shop remains at Carrum and is going 'gang-busters'.

Now, tenders have been sought and contracts signed for the renovations to the church in Sherwood Avenue. These renovations will be paid for by insurance from the fire damage, a bequest and some of the proceeds of sale of the Edithvale properties.



On 7 June, we said farewell to the Chelsea worship space while work proceeds. The Bible and the Christ candle led us out of the church, and the following Sunday, 14 June, the same symbols led us into worship at Chelsea Church of Christ, just two blocks away in Blantyre Avenue.



There, we are making our new home, we hope for no longer than 9 to 12 months.

This opportunity came because, a couple of months earlier, the Church of Christ congregation went into what its people hope will be only a temporary recess and since then several of them have joined in worship at Sherwood Avenue. Uniting By The Bay has been welcomed into their extensive premises.

The congregation is feeling very relieved that all the renovation negotiations are finally over and that work is about to begin. We are looking forward to getting on with some new initiatives when we resume our customary place in Sherwood Avenue.



When a Church Becomes Home for a Whole Community

by Lukas Harry

For Hampton Park Uniting Church, the difference between coexisting with a community and truly belonging to it comes down to a simple shift in question. As Moderator Rev. Salesi Faupula put it, it's not about asking newcomers, "who are you," but discovering "who are we."

That spirit was on full display on 26 July, when Hampton Park marked two things at once: winning the 2026 Casey Environmental and Sustainability Champion Award from the City of Casey, and the Uniting Church's Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday, held each year on the third Sunday of July to celebrate cultural diversity within the church and explore ways of building relationships across the neighbourhood.

The award recognised years of outreach that goes well beyond a single program: a community garden, English classes, free legal services, free health checks, food relief, a community kitchen, and an art show among them.

Behind it all sits a volunteer effort of around 70 people, a number that speaks to just how many hands it takes to keep a program like this running.

The community garden has become a particular source of pride, alongside the church's art classes, originally set up with a focus on mental health and drawing around 18 regular participants. When funding for the classes ran out, volunteers kept them going anyway. Some of the very people who once sat in the classes as students have since returned as volunteer teachers themselves.

Local MP Gary Maas has seen that spirit firsthand. "Hampton Park UC is a special place. You get a sense of that as soon as you walk through those doors, no matter what day," he said. "It's God's work." He called the church's outreach "extraordinary," adding that the award was "true recognition of the work HPUC do."

Casey Mayor Cr Stefan Koomen JP echoed the sentiment, describing the church as a place that "captures all parts of our community" and "feels like home." He pointed to something he sees as rare: people without any connection to the church walking in for the community and staying on as volunteers. "You can see why people, maybe not even of the same faith, come here," he said. "There aren't many places that do it so well like here."

The celebration opened with a haka performed by young members of the HPUC congregation, a striking way to set the tone for the afternoon. Partway through, guests were treated to a beautiful performance on the violin from Seong Young Chung. The celebration closed with the Samoan Choir, whose vocals and harmonies brought the formal part of the afternoon to a fitting close.

Afterwards, guests shared afternoon tea together, with tables set up around the church showcasing the different programs on offer. Giving people the chance to wander through, ask questions, and see firsthand the work behind everything they'd just heard about.

Hampton Park is one of seven churches working together across the Casey-Cardinia region, and its story is increasingly being held up as an example of what's possible.

Rev. Faupula described it as an intentional effort to build real relationships between churches and their neighbours, "not about existing alongside each other."

At the celebration, a long list of thanks was read aloud, a reminder that none of this was achieved by Hampton Park alone. From local government to community organisations, other churches to individual volunteers, the church's work has always depended on people and partners well beyond its own walls.

It's a fitting picture of what the day was really celebrating: not one congregation's achievement, but what's possible when a church, its neighbours, and its local community decide to work together.

That message, of intentional presence rather than passive proximity, is one Hampton Park's team hopes will spread further.

For Hampton Park, the recognition is welcome, but it's clearly not the point.

The point is the impact they've had, the community they've helped build, and what happens when a church decides its neighbours are not people to serve from a distance, but people to belong alongside.





Concert For Peace

by Cathryn Peppiatt

Elsternwick Caulfield South Uniting Church (ECSUCA) hosted its third Concert for Peace on the afternoon of Sunday, 21 June. The event brought together more than 40 performers from the Melbourne Community Cellists and Get Noted Music Enterprises, representing a wide range of musical experience from beginners to advanced players. The youngest performer was nine years old, and all musicians were supported by experienced ensemble leaders: Sharon Leibowitz, Director of Melbourne Community Cellists and Anne Shirley-Peel, Director of Get Noted Music Enterprises.

More than 100 people attended this vibrant and uplifting event, which raised over \$766 in support of Australia for UNHCR.

The Concert for Peace is part of ECSUCA's ongoing commitment to peace-building, justice, and community connection — a commitment that began in a significant way in 2024. That year, the congregation decided to hold an all-day Peace Vigil on 21 September, the UN International Day of Peace, expressing its deep desire for personal, community, and international peace. Since then, ECSUCA has held weekly peace vigils on Wednesday afternoons for almost two years, maintaining a visible and consistent witness for peace in the local community.

The latest concert took place at the beginning of '100 Days of Meditation, 100 Voices of Peace', an initiative of Religions for Peace Australia, which commenced on 13 June and continues until the UN International Day of Peace on 21 September. That day ECSUCA will host its next Concert for Peace, which will feature jazz, expanding the musical diversity of the Peace Concert series.

The concert was facilitated and MC'd by Cathryn Peppiatt, Community Engagement Facilitator at ECSUCA. Cathryn highlighted the many dimensions of peace: not only the absence of war, but also inner peace, and the peace that comes from food security, climate justice, and the wellbeing of communities. At the halfway point of the concert, many audience members took up the invitation to light a candle for peace while information about the work of UNHCR was displayed on the large TV screen at the front of the church.



The event also drew attention to the work of JustAct, particularly its Peace Building Fund. This aligned the concert with broader Uniting Church justice initiatives.

Following the concert, attendees were welcomed to an afternoon tea, generously supplied and served by members of the ECSUCA congregation. It provided a warm and relaxed opportunity for audience members to mingle, connect with one another, and meet the performers. The hospitality offered by the congregation contributed significantly to the sense of community and shared purpose that defined the event.

This Concert for Peace was a meaningful and inspiring gathering that combined musical excellence with a deep commitment to justice, compassion, and community connection. With over 100 attendees, more than 40 performers, and significant funds raised to support Australia for UNHCR, the event strengthened ECSUCA's ongoing peace-building mission and deepened partnerships within the wider Melbourne musical community.



Winnie Xu performs a violin solo with musicians from Get Noted Music Enterprises.



Staying connected

by Leticia Wishart

Village Youth at Village Church in Mt Eliza has been growing its programs for some time now. What started with a high school aged program on Friday nights, has grown to Sunday morning programs, Senior Youth dinners, and the 18+ young people lunches.

Originally, young people would graduate school, and then there wasn't anything specifically for them to keep engaged and connected. So we started sporadically meeting for lunches whenever schedules align. We meet together after church, some having been in the service and some joining us directly afterwards, decide on a place to walk to in the village, and off we go.

There's never any pressure to order food. The goal was to create a place to catch up and stay connected in a way that wasn't an expectation to spend heaps of money on dinner, or an expectation to drink, as a lot of social opportunities immediately post high school are either study related or drinking and partying related.

It's a small group, and different people every time, but it's growing slowly, and in the meantime we're having meaningful connections and conversation with each other. Grandma's Boys has become the favourite location, but we're often trialling different cafes all throughout the Mt Eliza village.



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*A beautiful moment between
Kerry and Minda*