

CROSSLIGHT

JUNE 2026

KNITTED WITH **LOVE**

Prayer shawl
helps healing

P4-6

NEW APPROACHES to faith
P10-12

Focus on FAITHFUL FUTURES
P28-31



Food For Families. Thanks to you.

Fill a box and help a family this winter.

When the weather gets colder, putting food on the table gets harder for many. Warm meals, full cupboards and practical support can help ease pressure during the winter months.

Here's how you can get involved in Food For Families:

- donate non-perishable food and essential items
- host a collection drive
- be a community drop off point for donations
- make a donation and support people to put a meal on the table this winter.

Mail cheques to:
Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania)
Reply Paid 85995
A'Beckett Street PO
MELBOURNE VIC 8006

Call us
1800 668 426
Visit
foodforfamilies.org.au



Uniting is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.



Uniting

“IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE NOISE, JESUS DOESN'T OFFER ANOTHER COMPETING VOICE. JESUS OFFERS HIMSELF.”



Reverend
Salesi Faupula
Moderator
Vic Tas Synod

We are living in an age of noise.

Voices come from every direction, each offering a way forward. Movements claim to hold the truth. Systems promise some version of life; freer, fairer, more whole.

And into that noise, the words of Jesus Christ still speak:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

John 14:6

Not a line to repeat or a framework to adopt, but a claim, deeply rooted in Himself.

Perhaps that's why it unsettles. It doesn't sit easily alongside everything else. It asks something more of us.

There is no shortage of “ways” right now.

National identity, political movements, social frameworks, all pointing somewhere.

And yet, the way of Jesus seems to move differently.

It isn't built on power or sustained by opposition. It doesn't rely on enemies. Instead, it points toward love of neighbour, even love of enemy, toward humility, toward quiet service.

It makes me wonder: When our paths are shaped by fear, outrage, or the need to win ... are we still close to His way?

Jesus didn't seem concerned with winning as we understand it. He seemed more concerned with what was happening within people.

We often speak of “my truth” and “your truth”, as though truth shifts depending on where we stand. Conviction can easily be mistaken for certainty.

So what might it mean for Jesus to say, “I am the truth”?

Not just something to believe, but something to come under.

A truth that doesn't simply affirm us but also exposes us. That reaches beyond what we say into how we live. Perhaps the deeper question is not whether we know the truth, but whether we're willing to be shaped by it.

Every age searches for life in its own way, through systems, structures and promises of something better.

Some have done real good. Others have caused real harm.

But even at their best, they seem limited. Systems can shape behaviour for a time, but they don't change the human heart.

Jesus speaks of life differently.

Not something built around us, but something that begins within. A life marked by renewal, reconciliation, restored relationship, with God and with others.

What if the life we're looking for isn't something we construct, but something we receive?

In our current climate, faith often becomes closely tied to political or cultural identity.

And yet, Jesus seemed to step away from that. He didn't anchor His message in power. He spoke of a kingdom that didn't fit within borders or systems.

It leaves us with something important worth holding:

If faith becomes closely tied to power, does it still reflect the one who laid His down?

There is a deep longing in our time, for inclusivity, diversity, unity. A desire to belong, to be seen, to be known.

Jesus met people in that longing, but He also invited them further.

His inclusivity wasn't passive. His unity wasn't built on agreement alone, but on truth expressed through love. Truth without love becomes harsh. Love without truth becomes hollow. In Him, the two hold together.

These words, “the way, the truth, and the life”, don't remain distant. They come closer than we might expect.

They touch how we think, how we align, how we live.

- Are we following His way - or something shaped by everything around us?
- Are we open to truth - or only what feels comfortable?
- Are we experiencing life - or still searching for it?

In the middle of all the noise, Jesus doesn't offer another competing voice.

Jesus offers Himself.

And perhaps the challenge is not simply what we believe, but whether we are willing to follow Him.



Light from the DARKNESS

When violence at Bondi Beach prompted swift interpretation and blame, Kate Thompson focused on something else – how people respond, and what that reveals about community, history and care.

By Marina Williams

Kate Thompson was driving when she first heard about an attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney on December 14 last year.

“I was a bit shell-shocked,” says Kate, who has Jewish heritage.

Two gunmen had opened fire on a public gathering marking the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, allegedly killing 15 people, including a 10-year-old child.

As details emerged, it was the public response that stayed with Kate.

Some blamed the government for failing to prevent it. Others framed it as antisemitic or linked it to events overseas.

“As a child, you accept what comes in,” Kate says.

Although she was baptised as a Christian at 15, religious practice was not part of her upbringing. Her connection to Judaism remained cultural rather than observant, informed more by history and identity than by belief.

For the past 20 years, Kate has lived near Aireys Inlet with her husband David, a retired Uniting Church minister. She is actively involved in community sport and, in 2024, was awarded the Order of Australia for her service.

While she does not describe herself

“I DIDN'T FEEL PARTICULARLY DESERVING. THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO ARE WORSE OFF THAN I AM.”

Prayer shawl recipient Kate Thompson

“That frustrated me – the way people immediately tried to turn it into something else,” Kate says. “It was an act of violence.”

Her response is shaped in part by family history. Her parents fled Nazi Germany before the Second World War, eventually settling in Melbourne in 1939.

That history of displacement, survival and rebuilding was part of the environment in which Kate grew up, not as a single story, but as an ongoing awareness. At school in the 1950s, she experienced antisemitism, but as a child did not question it.

as a person of faith, she occasionally attends services at the Surf Coast Uniting Church in support of David.

“I’ve never practised the faith,” Kate says. “People will say I don’t have a faith – but I have a strong commitment to values.”

When people ask how she can be married to a minister and not share his faith, her answer is direct.

“Our marriage is based on mutual respect and trust,” she says. “We have very, very similar values.”

Kate believes people should be able to live without fear.

“I have a very strong belief that

Kate Thompson (left) and Marilyn Wendt with the prayer shawl Marilyn knitted for Kate.
Image: Greg Ford



violence in the community is just not on,” she says.

While the Bondi attack left her shaken and feeling unsafe, she was angered by what she describes as an “it serves them right” response from some within the community.

“There was a sense of ‘here we go again,’” she says.

At the same time, she drew some reassurance from the actions of a Muslim man who intervened to disarm one of the alleged gunmen – a moment that stood in contrast to the assumptions that quickly followed.

After hearing how the attack had affected Kate, Rev Tina Lyndon Ng,



minister of the Surf Coast Uniting Church group of churches, reached out to ask whether she would accept a hand-knitted prayer shawl.

Kate hesitated.

"I didn't feel particularly deserving," she says. "There are more people in the world who are worse off than I am."

**"WITH FAITH, TOGETHER
WITH THIS CANDLE, WE
COULD GET THROUGH ALL OUR
HARDSHIPS."**

Prayer shawl maker Marilyn Wendt

David encouraged her to accept the shawl.

Marilyn Wendt, a member of the church's small prayer shawl group, was asked to knit the shawl – a task she immediately accepted.

Like Kate, Marilyn is not originally from Aireys Inlet.

She and her husband settled in the area about 20 years ago. Of Lutheran faith, she chose to attend the local Uniting Church rather than travel to Geelong for a Lutheran church, to meet people and become involved in the community.

Working from a request to include a candle rather than the group's usual

cross motif, Marilyn developed the design as she knitted, using blues and whites with orange for the flame.

"I was honoured to be asked," Marilyn says. "I was thinking about how to tell a story through the shawl. With faith, together with this candle, we could get through all our hardships."

Marilyn says the candle represents the light of God in the world. Lighter strands emerge through the darker base, reflecting the spread of light.

"The light of the candle was repeated through the shawl until the stripes are stronger than the blue."

For Marilyn, the work is not only about the finished object, but what it carries.

Continued P6

From P5

“We feel they need a hug or some love and protection,” she says.

When the shawl was finished, it was presented to Kate at a church service. The two women had not met before that day.

Afterwards, they sat together and spoke.

“When I met Kate, she had a beautiful smile. She seemed peaceful and accepting – it made it easy,” Marilyn says.

What began after an act of violence has developed into a friendship.

“We just clicked,” Kate says.

For Kate, the significance of the shawl lies not in the object itself, but in the act behind it.

“It shows what strangers can do for each other,” she says. “Without compassion and hope, you’re just surviving.”



Kate Thompson with Surf Coast Uniting Church minister Rev Tina Lyndon Ng.
Image: Greg Ford

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS - BUILDING A PEACE CHURCH

Justice and International
Mission Convention 2026

SATURDAY 25 JULY 2026

9:30 am – 4:45 pm

Centre for Theology and Ministry

29 College Crescent, Parkville

Cost: \$50 for metropolitan participants/\$25 concession and non-metropolitan Melbourne participants

Register by Monday June 29, 2026 at
events.humanitix.com/2026-jim-convention



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

JUSTACT
ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND



Five questions with...

SHENEI PENAI'A TE'O

Sunshine Uniting Church member Shenei Penaia Te'o spoke to Crosslight about what faith and being part of the Uniting Church means to her.

Tell me about your journey so far in the Uniting Church?

The Uniting Church has been part of my life for a long time. My family has been part of the Uniting Church for over a decade, and my grandparents have been part of it for more than 50 years, so faith and church life have always been close to me. My grandfather is a retired minister, my father is a pastor, my mother and older brother are lay preachers, and my sisters serve on the worship team at our church. Growing up around that showed me early on that everyone has a part to play in the life of the Church, and that service can take many different forms.

What has shaped me most is being part of church communities where people can ask questions, learn, and grow in faith together. I've appreciated being in spaces that encourage honest conversations and continual growth.

What excites you about being a member of the Uniting Church?

What excites me most is being part of a church community where faith is not only spoken about, but lived out in real and tangible ways. My own experiences of church life, especially through the people I worship with and the communities I've grown up in, have shaped a faith that is grounded and practical.

Those lived experiences have shown me what it looks like to follow Christ in everyday life, through relationships, service, and the way we care for one another. That has been far more formative for me than abstract ideas alone. At the same time, I'm intentional about where I place my foundation. For me, that is in Christ, with Scripture as the truth that shapes and refines how



I understand both faith and justice. I'm still discerning what that looks like as I continue to grow, but I value being in a space where that process is taken seriously.

You recently attended Vaka 2026, a gathering in Sydney based around justice, community and hope: what did you gain from that experience?

I approached Vaka 2026 with a posture of discernment, taking time to observe, listen, and understand the perspectives being shared. What stood out to me was the depth of authentic stories, lived experiences and meaningful dialogue present throughout the space.

Rather than leaving with something entirely new, the experience affirmed what I already value. That meaningful change is often shaped through

listening well, reflecting honestly, and walking alongside communities. Hearing from people across Oceania highlighted the strength and insight that already exists at a grassroots level.

What contribution can younger generations make to the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania?

There's a noticeable movement among some young people toward a faith that is deeper, more grounded and anchored in truth. I think many are searching for more than surface-level belief. They are drawn to theology that is thoughtful, to tradition that carries meaning and to a faith that can hold weight in the real world.

What younger generations can offer is a commitment to pursuing truth with both curiosity and conviction. There is a willingness to ask questions, not to dismantle faith, but to understand it more fully. That curiosity, paired with a confidence to wrestle honestly, can strengthen the Church rather than threaten it.

How do you think the future looks for the Uniting Church?

My hope is that the Uniting Church continues to encourage generations of believers to walk alongside one another, recognising that there is much to learn from each other. Older generations carry the wisdom and authority that comes from lived experience, while younger generations often carry an understanding of the realities and challenges of the present day. I don't think one can truly flourish without the other.

To me, a healthy future for the Church is one marked by humility, discernment and a shared pursuit of truth across generations.





MUSIC TO OUR EARS

Judy Grimm started playing the organ at Bordertown Methodist Church as a 15-year-old in 1951 and is still going strong 75 years later.

By Andrew Humphries

In 1951 Robert Menzies was Prime Minister, Australia, New Zealand and the United States signed the Anzus Treaty and we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Federation.

It was also the year a nervous 15-year-old girl began playing the organ at Bordertown Methodist Church's worship services.

Seventy-five years later, Judy Grimm continues to play the instrument she fell in love with as a child, and is the musical heart of Drysdale Uniting Church services.

Yet none of it would have happened without a conversation the then 11-year-old had with her father.

While the organ held plenty of appeal for Judy at that age, she wasn't so keen on the type of music involved when practising, and that's when her dad stepped in.

"I remember I had a deep and meaningful conversation with him about whether I wanted to continue learning how to play," Judy recalls.

"I said yes I did, but only if I could learn to play hymns."

The rest, as they say, is history and, in 1951 at the age of 15, Judy began playing at evening services at Bordertown before also taking on morning services the following year.

Perhaps modestly, Judy doesn't see anything particularly impressive about someone so young playing in front of a congregation.

"I JUST LOVE THE ACT OF WORSHIP THROUGH MUSIC AND I ALWAYS TRY TO PLAY THINGS THAT ARE APPROPRIATE TO THE THEME OF EACH SERVICE."

Drysdale Uniting Church organist Judy Grimm

"In those days lots of people went to church and many people learnt to play the piano, so a 15-year-old organist wasn't that unusual," Judy says.

"I don't think my age even came into it."

"I do recall being nervous, though, before that first time I played because I wanted to do it well."

Judy says she has played at hundreds of weddings and funerals over the years, and at worship services in many different churches, even Cairns in Far North Queensland while on holiday with her husband Keith one year.

"Wherever we went on holiday



Judy Grimm began playing the organ at Bordertown Methodist Church in 1951.

we always went to church and, this particular Sunday, we were on holiday in Cairns when the minister's wife asked me to play," she says.

"I've certainly had quite an interesting time as an organist over the years."



“I have never aspired to play anything I felt was beyond me, but there is plenty of nice music that can be played,” says organist Judy Grimm.

Judy and Keith moved from Bordertown to Clifton Springs in 1992, having discovered the area two years earlier when visiting during Keith’s role as District Governor with Rotary, and she has been one of the organists at Drysdale Uniting Church ever since.

One of Judy’s highlights as an organist was a visit to the Methodist Central Hall next to Westminster Abbey in London and an opportunity to have a chat with the organist after the service.

She also takes great pride in the fact she played at the large service in Bordertown in 1977 marking the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

“That was a wonderful event with

all of the churches from the district gathered in the town hall and a choir of about 50 people from the various Methodist churches in the area singing while I played,” Judy recalls.

“I can remember the occasion vividly, even down to describing exactly what I wore that day.”

“I’VE CERTAINLY HAD QUITE AN INTERESTING TIME AS AN ORGANIST OVER THE YEARS.”

Judy Grimm

So what is it that brings Judy so much joy when she sits in front of the organ to play?

“I just love the act of worship through music and I always try to play things that are appropriate to the theme of each service,” she says.

“I still get a great deal of pleasure out

of it, although I know I can’t play as well now as I used to.”

The key, she says, is playing some of the more traditional and well-known hymns and sacred music.

For many years she loved practising and playing with the Drysdale choir.

“I have never aspired to play anything I felt was beyond me, but there is plenty of nice music that can be played,” Judy says.

While she turned 90 in February, Judy plans to continue playing at Drysdale Uniting Church on an occasional basis.

“I haven’t actually said I will retire yet, and I do still play on the first Sunday of each month,” she says.

“The congregation has always been appreciative of what I do, so hopefully I can continue for some time yet.”



New ways of GATHERING

In Ballarat and Castlemaine, emerging communities of faith are taking shape – less defined by buildings or tradition, and more by connection, exploration and shared experience.

By **Marina Williams**

Two new communities of faith in regional Victoria are testing different ways of being church – centred on relationships, shared experiences and openness to those beyond existing congregations.

Both sit within the Uniting Church's Faithful Futures strategy, which identifies the creation of new communities of faith as one of its five shared goals.

Initiatives such as the Village Church Network, connecting communities across the Central Highlands, and Yandoit Sacred, a small, place-based gathering near Castlemaine in Central Victoria, offer early examples of this goal. Both are evolving in response to their local context.

Bringing together Ballarat South, Creswick-Clunes, Brown Hill and St Martin's Chapel in Blackwood, the Village Church Network grew from a shared recognition that, with fewer congregations and shifting patterns of participation, no single community could respond in isolation.

Fiona Ross, who works in a creative ministry role and is involved through St Martin's Chapel, says the network began with a clear aim.

"There was a desire to ensure that, within the region, Christian community continues in one form or another," Fiona says.

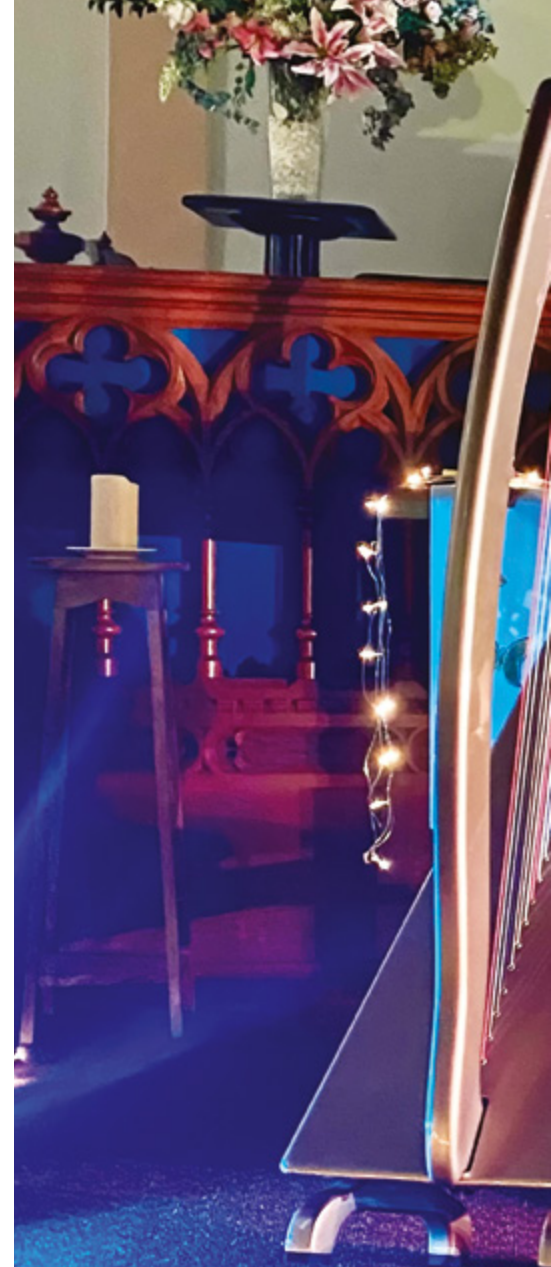
The network does not centre on a weekly service. Instead, it operates through a shared calendar of events across locations – concerts, contemplative gatherings, labyrinth walks, workshops and community activities.

This enables smaller communities to sustain activity without relying on a single congregation, pooling effort and encouraging participation across the region.

More formal coordination began in 2025, though much of the work has developed organically.

Fiona, who is also a spiritual director, draws on a background in music and connections in the arts community to organise events.

She describes the network as a "mixed ecology", where existing congregations continue alongside newer expressions of church, including initiatives grouped under The Wayfarer Collective, which draws on the Christian contemplative tradition while engaging



A concert at Ballarat South Uniting Church, part of the Village Church Network.

with other wisdom traditions.

"These are spaces for people who may have no experience of church, or who have moved away from it," she says. "We create experiences that move gently and offer a pathway into meaning-making and spiritual depth. They can be quiet and reflective, creative and expressive, or conversational and exploratory."

In Blackwood, where there is no longer a traditional congregation, this approach has been in place for some time. Community is built through events and local partnerships, with ideas and activities shared across the network. Musicians and facilitators move between locations, adapting what works in one setting to another – for example, a mobile labyrinth used in Ballarat has also been set up in Blackwood.



Fiona says the model reduces duplication and builds on shared experience.

“It’s sharing of resources, sharing of expertise – not reinventing the wheel,” she says.

Participation is invitational, with each community working from its own strengths. “We’re trying different things and seeing what resonates.”

Attendance varies depending on the activity, drawing people from creative communities, those interested in spiritual exploration, and others connected to specific events.

“It’s quite diverse, because the program of events we offer across the network is varied,” Fiona says. This diversity, she adds, reflects the broader change in the context for church.

“There’s such a thirst for places to explore deeper questions of meaning



Fiona Ross is part of the Village Church Network, ensuring a Christian community continues in Ballarat.

“THERE WAS A DESIRE TO ENSURE THAT, WITHIN THE REGION, CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CONTINUES IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER.”

Fiona Ross, Village Church Network

and connection in today’s world,” she says.

In Castlemaine, a different starting point led to the emergence of Yandoit Sacred.

Rev Sarah Tomilson, minister in the region, traces its origins to the closure of the small rural church at Yandoit, between Castlemaine and Daylesford. The building was retained, with the church and local community exploring new ways to use the space.

Continued P12



A gathering at Yandoit Cultural, in the church at Yandoit.

“We just opened the doors and said, whoever is interested in exploring the sacred, meaning-making, healing – come,” Sarah says.

Attendance typically ranges from 12 to 20 people, with a mix of regulars and newcomers from Christian, Buddhist and other spiritual backgrounds, as well as those with no faith background.

“It really is a place where there’s an absolute welcome,” Sarah says.

Gatherings include prayer, reflection and shared themes, but remain flexible, responding to current events and personal experience. At times, people from other traditions contribute practices, such as silence, candle lighting and shared ritual.

“We’re just being an open place for the wisdom traditions that heal us and offer us sanctuary,” Sarah says.

There is also a strong connection to place.

“We talk about letting the land heal us as we heal the land,” Sarah says. “People are hungry for ritual and story.”

Food and informal conversation are part of each gathering, with meals shared around a table or a fire.

“There’s lots of conversation, discussion and laughter – people feel welcome and part of their community,” Sarah says.

Growth has been gradual in both communities, with people and place at the centre of these revitalised forms of church.

“It’s about listening and responding to what is already there,” Fiona says.

For Sarah, that has meant stepping back from directing the content.

“I found that people actually had so much to offer,” she says. “I didn’t have to make it happen.”

Creating space has allowed contributions to emerge more organically, shaped by the experiences and perspectives people bring.

“Something shifts every time we meet,” Sarah says.



From P11

It was one of several church closures in the region, raising broader questions about how Christian community might continue.

“WE’RE JUST BEING AN OPEN PLACE FOR THE WISDOM TRADITIONS THAT HEAL US AND OFFER US SANCTUARY”

Rev Sarah Tomilson, Yandoit Sacred

“Wouldn’t it be lovely if we did something new here – if we still had something of a sacred community and a gathering place,” says Sarah, reflecting on those conversations.

Yandoit Sacred meets alongside the community-led group, Yandoit Cultural, which leases the building and runs events such as music, poetry and film screenings.

The faith community began meeting in 2023, following a period of planning and negotiation with the wider church, and remains a developing partnership.



Rev Sarah Tomilson from Yandoit Sacred, which meets alongside the community-led group Yandoit Cultural.

“THERE IS A NEED FOR TECHNOLOGY CORPORATIONS TO HAVE A DUTY OF CARE TO PROACTIVELY DETECT AND REMOVE DEEPFAKE MATERIAL.”



Mark Zirnsak
Senior Social
Justice Advocate

“Christians believe human beings are created in the likeness and image of God, and they look to the example of Jesus to live their lives. All the recorded encounters between Jesus and children were kind, gentle and respectful. Children were central to the new social order Jesus initiated.”

World Council of Churches, ‘Helping Children Out of the Shadows and into the Light. Resources for Spiritual Life Addressing Sexual Violence Against Children’, May 2020.

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) is creating new words. One of those is “deepfakes”. As defined by the Australian eSafety Commissioner, a deepfake is:

“A digital photo, video, or audio file of a real person that has been edited to create an extremely realistic but false depiction of them doing or saying something they did not actually do or say. Deepfakes are created using artificial intelligence software that currently draws on a large number of photos or recordings of the person to model and create content.”

Deepfakes have been used for humour, creating parodies and memes, for entertainment.

However, deepfakes can be used to cause serious harm, especially when used to create sexually exploitive material of children and adults. In February, UNICEF expressed concern at the increasing use of AI to produce sexualised content involving children. In a UNICEF, ECPAT and INTERPOL study across 11 countries, at least 1.2 million children disclosed having their images manipulated into sexually explicit deepfakes in the past year. In some countries, this represented as much as 1 in 25 children.

In March, the UN expressed concern that deepfake abuse is part of a much broader pattern of digital violence targeting women and girls. They pointed out that sexual deepfake videos make up 98 per cent of all deepfake videos online,

and 99 per cent of them depict girls or women.

UNICEF expressed concern that too many AI models are not being developed with adequate safeguards.

In June last year, the Australian eSafety Commissioner raised concerns that naked deepfakes of students and teachers were an increasing problem at schools. They were being used as a form of bullying or as part of deliberate image-based abuse, causing very real emotional and psychological harm. Victims of deepfake abuse can experience humiliation, shame, distress, fear, anger and confusion.

The Australian Parliament took an important step by criminalising the non-consensual transmission of AI-generated sexually explicit material via the *Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Act 2024 (Cth)*. However, regulation gaps remain in relation to sexually explicit deepfake material, and the regulation of non-sexual deepfake material is addressed only indirectly through older laws not designed for AI. Australia’s legal framework requires broader reforms to address the full spectrum of deepfake harms.

In January, concerns were raised that the Grok AI chatbot on Elon Musk’s social media platform X was being used to create and share non-consensual naked images of people and child sexual abuse material. It was reported that Grok was generating 6700 images of undressed children and adults an hour.

There is a need for technology corporations to have a duty of care to proactively detect and remove deepfake material. AI models should be developed to be safe by design, limiting their ability to generate harmful deepfake material.

The Synod’s Justice and International Mission Cluster has produced resources for anyone who wants to advocate for measures to reduce the harm caused by deepfakes. If you are interested in obtaining copies of the material, email jim@victas.uca.org.au



A week in *the* Life of

REV PAUL BAUER

**Bendigo South Minister,
Loddon-Mallee Presbytery**

MONDAY

Like many in ministry I have Mondays off. There are different things I enjoy doing, but it is always good fun taking my greyhound Roy to the Strathdale dog park or Kennington Reservoir and then having a coffee. They say it's great socialising for a dog, but it is also fantastic socialising for me as well.

TUESDAY

Today was the monthly Standing Committee meeting of the Loddon-Mallee Presbytery, held at the Neale Street Uniting Church in Bendigo. It was a hybrid meeting, with Zoom coming in

handy because the steep rise in petrol prices meant two of our Swan Hill members could join in from home.

At this meeting I was voted in as the Deputy Chair of the Presbytery. Being in my fifth placement, I have been feeling a nudge to step up more, and as I had recently given up a significant commitment in the sporting world, now was the time.

Tuesday is the day it seems for my nursing home services, as I visit three places, either taking monthly or quarterly services, and they are all on a Tuesday. Today was my quarterly service at the Uniting AgeWell Strath-Haven home. They get fantastic numbers at the service, around 45. Bigger than most congregations.

After going home and doing mostly admin with emails and the like I attended the weekly 5.30pm community meal at the Kangaroo Flat Rotary clubrooms. A few years ago, a Rotarian



Rev Paul Bauer (right) loves building relationships as part of his ministry role.

invited me to come and have a meal and chat to people. While it is mostly aimed at those in need, anybody is welcome, particularly if they want company. The meals are superb from the Kangaroo Flat Sports Club and it is all over around 6pm, so not a late night.

WEDNESDAY

There is a popular and long-running craft group at the Kangaroo Flat Uniting Church on a Wednesday morning, with both church and non-church people attending. Most weeks I pop in for a coffee and have a chat to people and be there for their show and tell. They love Roy being there too and he says hello to everyone.

Then it was the once-a-month cuppa and chat I initiated about two years



ago, where we meet at the bistro at the Bendigo Stadium. It started as a place to meet for coffee, but most of us stay for lunch as well. I then went home and began some preparation for the Sunday service, particularly getting the Order of Service together.

THURSDAY

The day began by attending a 7am men's breakfast at a local café. The leader of the group, Bruce Claridge, is a legend in Bendigo, having started the Victory Church and Victory College, which now has over 1150 students on its campus and they are building another campus. Bruce is also the main go-to person locally for sports chaplaincy, which I interact with.

I had to leave early, as I drove to



Paul leads a worship service at Uniting AgeWell's Strath-Haven home.

Ballarat to visit three horse racing stables, an excursion run by OTI Syndications, with around 30 attending, most of them bused from Melbourne. It was a wonderful insight into the operations of a horse racing stable and what they deal with, all the highs and lows. OTI is the leader in thoroughbred welfare, with regards to the care of their horses beyond their racing career.

Then it was home after a nice lunch at the Lake View Hotel in Bendigo. One advantage of being 0.8 is that I can take some other time out to do something special that arises.

I had a siesta when I got home and then went to goal umpires training with the Bendigo Umpires Association. I have been goal umpiring in Australian Rules football since 1994. From 2014 until the end of last year I was coaching the goal umpires as well. It has brought a lot of joy and kept me in touch with people

Continued P16



Paul and his dog Roy at Kangaroo Flat Uniting Church.

From P15

outside of the church, although there are many Christians in the group in Bendigo.

Then to complete a big day, I went to hear the guest speaker, Bishop Philip Huggins, at the Bendigo Interfaith Council annual dinner. My Uniting Church cluster gives \$500 towards the speaker, so it was fantastic to hear him.

FRIDAY

On Friday mornings, I go to the emergency relief run at the Kangaroo Flat Uniting Church. It is the major outreach of the congregation, helping those in need with food.

Friday afternoon, I got into the sermon writing for Sunday, as well as other aspects of the service. I have taken up doing the PowerPoint as our much-loved secretary died last year, and many of us had to take up jobs she was doing.

Then late Friday afternoon, I watched a couple of the races at Bendigo. It was their first race meeting for around five months as they had a major track renovation, so I thought I would pop out, as I have had some discussions with the Bendigo Jockey Club to be their voluntary chaplain.



Paul has been a goal umpire since 1994.

On Friday night I was MC at the awards night for the Marong Cricket Club. A Kangaroo Flat Uniting Church member introduced me to Marong a few years ago, and it is good fun dabbling in the C-grade team.

SATURDAY

On Saturday morning I went out to Lockwood, as the community use the church and the grounds to run a monthly mini market. I hadn't been for over a year, so it was good to take the opportunity to go out there.

I then goal umpired a practice match at Marong, then it was home to watch some sport, and finalise everything for the Sunday services.

SUNDAY

Apart from one Sunday a month, when I go to Lockwood, I lead worship at two places, Kangaroo Flat at 9.30am and then Chum Street – Golden Square at 11am. Overall, I do notice the declining attendances because of the age demographic.

I got home around 1pm, after which I could relax and, following in the footsteps of Martin Luther, have a Sunday afternoon siesta.

When I accepted the call to come to Bendigo, I was attracted to the groups and the opportunities to join with others and chat to people. Like somebody said recently, that is my A-game, getting alongside others.

Trip strengthens South Korean ties

In April, a group of Uniting Church members from Victoria travelled to South Korea as part of a week-long study trip. Rev David Dong Won Kim reports on what was gained from the experience.

The contextual learning group's visit to South Korea from April 13-20 was made possible with great support from the VicTas Synod, equipping Leadership for Mission, local congregations and leaders and many individuals.

The group was warmly welcomed by nine hosting organisations in Seoul, Busan, Masan and Changwon.

This exposure trip offered 11 participants a rare chance to experience firsthand the legacy and ongoing mission works of Australian missionaries who have served in Korea since 1889, a history both rich and largely unknown to many. Along the way, the group also built a bonding and binding fellowship and embraced the adventure of sampling unfamiliar, yet wonderful, local foods.

For one participant, the trip became a moment of personal reckoning. She admitted she had grown comfortable within her usual boundaries, and this experience was a deliberate choice to push beyond them. What surprised her most was her evolving understanding of colonisation, a word she had always associated with harm.

Learning about the courage Australian missionaries showed during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), and witnessing the genuinely positive impact Australian missionaries who endured hardship along with the oppressed Koreans had during the colonisation and Korean War (1950-1953), offered her a fresh perspective.

Indeed, several Australian missionaries became living hopes among the suffering Koreans during the darkest and hardest time in Korean history.

They refused to remain confined within church walls. It reached outward into society, confronting real social issues rather than retreating into the church. One of the participants shared that he believed the church would intentionally, yet faithfully, take both a responsibility and an opportunity to engage with the challenges facing communities today. He left with a renewed commitment to bring



Rev David Dong Won Kim (front row, far right) and contextual learning group participants gained wonderful insights during their week-long visit to South Korea.

those lessons home, particularly the work being done with young people.

One of the group members who works in a hospital was deeply moved by the work of (missionaries) the MacKenzie sisters: their dedication to education and their fierce advocacy for women during an era when such advocacy carried real risk. She found their stories not just interesting, but genuinely inspiring.

Another participant was genuinely astonished to discover that despite attending a Christian school, he had never once been taught about the history of Australian missionaries in Korea. Learning about how they spread the Gospel across a foreign land was revelatory. He found the on-site context provided at each location particularly valuable in stitching together the broader story of faith and culture.

The nine participants had multicultural backgrounds, so the trip delivered an unexpected broadening of perspective for them. Having focused largely on their own congregation and immediate surroundings, the group became aware of a much larger story. As the children of immigrants, they felt the

experience speak to them personally.

It reinforced their belief that owning one's identity means embracing all of it: Australian heritage and ethnic roots alike. The lesson they carried home was a simple but powerful one - ignorance is never an excuse and the past is something to learn from, not ignore.

One thoughtful participant offered a striking observation about the exposure trip as a whole. The overlapping stories heard at different sites and groups of people - the same history told through different voices and perspectives - reminded him of the four Gospels: one essential truth, illuminated through multiple perspectives. He found this layering deeply enriching rather than repetitive.

On behalf of the group, I want to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who supported and prayed for us.

We've gained more than inspiring memories and cultural experiences; we've also found a sense of calling, purpose and a commitment to serve in our Church, particularly with the next generation.





ACCESS ALL AREAS

As disability awareness increases, Victorian and Tasmanian Uniting Church congregations are embracing the need to provide better access for those with disabilities.

By Andrew Humphries

From worship services suited to neurodivergent people to social gatherings for those with intellectual disabilities, Victorian and Tasmanian congregations are answering the call to improve disability access.

With one in five Australians living with disability, every congregation is almost certainly home to people navigating obstacles others may not notice, says the Synod's Disability Inclusion Advocate Elga Rodriguez.

Those people's needs must be catered for, says Elga.

"Full participation in worship, community and ministry is not a privilege, it is a right," she says.

"The Church is called to welcome every person, regardless of physical, sensory, cognitive, psychosocial and other access needs.

"When barriers prevent someone from taking part, we lose their gifts, their voice and their presence, and we overlook the human diversity that strengthens the Body of Christ."

At **Murrumbeena Uniting Church**, minister Rev Andreaana Reale says congregation members continue to promote ways in which people with a disability can feel an important part of the congregation.

"In our congregation we have quite a few children, as well as a lot of neurodivergent people, so I try to design worship services that are as inclusive as possible for people with different needs," she says.

"For example, a lot of people struggle with long, wordy liturgies and sermons, so we focus on story-telling and lots of dynamic movement and drama.

"We also use tactile ways of praying and engaging with ideas."

Andreaana says her own experience as a mother to a six-year-old child who is neurodivergent is helpful.

"I need to design things so that he's happy to be in church," she says.

"Currently we are working on having a number of adults he feels safe and comfortable around, which means he's less likely, for example, to do dangerous things with the candles while I'm preaching, or run laps of the pulpit.

"Having a neurodivergent-friendly worship service is a matter of survival for me."

Andreaana says the free Android app called Google Live Transcribe is particularly useful during sermons.

"It uses AI to transcribe the voice of anyone speaking and we have started

Left: Highfield Road Uniting Church has a number of features in place to make access easier for Jill Mills, pictured with her husband Marshall.

setting it up for a woman who is hard of hearing,” she says.

Church Council member David Crothers is autistic and the congregation paid for him to attend the neurodiversity conference ‘Belonging by Design’ last year.

“I think there is more we can do, and I’m really glad David attended that conference, so we can keep making changes to make church as inclusive a place as possible,” Andreaana says.

At **Launceston North Uniting Church**, Crossroads group members celebrated its 32nd birthday in October last year.

With the assistance of congregation members, Crossroads has been able to provide an ongoing social setting for people with a disability.

Launceston North minister Rev Caro Field says it’s a privilege to be involved with the group.

“They are a bunch of wonderful human beings, who are kind, affectionate, hilarious and thoughtful in their own ways,” she says.

“Many of our members have intellectual disabilities, more so than physical, but it’s a bit of a mix.

“I also find that I receive just as much from them as I give, in terms of love, support and spiritual guidance.

“Having the Crossroads group as part of our ministry at Launceston North has helped me as a minister, and a human being, to be more aware of what life is like for people with disabilities, and that they need to be seen, to be respected and loved ... just like anyone else.

“It’s been a significant journey for me to learn from them how to respectfully support them, without falling into the trap of being inadvertently ableist.”

Caro says that recent changes in the disability sector mean that Crossroads may not continue after this year.

“When Crossroads first started, there were few, if any, social activities available for people with disabilities to get involved with outside of their group homes and formal care environments, so Crossroads filled a gap and met a need,” Caro says.

“But now, with the flexibility and variety that has been introduced through the NDIS, where clients are able to use their NDIS funds for a variety of approved activities, the need for the things that Crossroads provides has kind of diminished.”



Church Council member David Crothers was able to attend the ‘Belonging by Design’ neurodiversity conference last year thanks to funding from his Murrumbena Uniting Church congregation.



At **Highfield Road Uniting Church**, the congregation is committed to providing suitable access in a variety of ways for people with a disability, says minister Rev Dr Christopher Page.

“Access is the ability to come into God’s presence through contact with our faith community, the local community and the opportunity for outreach,” Christopher says.

“While physical access varies widely between congregations, there are several themes that consistently show up.”

Christopher says the congregation has prioritised entry ramps, a disabled parking space, accessible toilet, and a mobility friendly layout inside the building.

“This was challenging with an older building and council building regulations, but, after a disability audit, congregational consultation, planning and fulfillment of council regulations,

construction was completed in about two years,” he says.

“We have an open door policy and our building is used extensively for community activities, special events and, of course, congregational gatherings.”

Christopher says offering access beyond just worship provides all people with mobility issues the opportunity to meet and greet friends and other members of the community.

“Research shows that people involved in face-to-face communities tend to experience higher social cohesion, civic engagement and wellbeing, compared with the general population,” he says.

“Friendship groups, morning teas and worship experiences can be especially valuable for people who are isolated or living with disability, and access to our building and community supports quality of life, independence and emotional wellbeing.

“A simple ramp into our church building, toileting facilities and internal building layout far exceeds the physical (dimension), it gives opportunity to spiritual wellbeing.”

In Tasmania, a dream to build supported accommodation for people with a disability, through the **Kingston Uniting Church**, became a reality over a decade ago with the construction of Rowallan Park.

The dream was made possible with funding from the Federal Government’s Supported Accommodation Innovation Fund, enabling construction of four spacious single-bedroom independent



Launceston North Uniting Church has shared a wonderful association with the Crossroads group for over 30 years.

From P19

units, two two-bedroom units and 'The Big House', which consists of four huge bedrooms, a couple of living rooms, a bath, and overnight sleeping accommodation for staff.

Across the driveway is the community centre incorporating a large flexible worship space, huge foyer area, commercial-grade kitchen with disability-access benches, meeting room, offices and a large hall.

Minister Rev Michael Duke is incredibly proud about what the community has been able to create at Rowallan Park.

"Intentional Community has been the primary calling of Kingston Uniting Church/Rowallan Park for so long it has become imbedded in our DNA," Michael says.

"We have learned that accessibility goes far beyond ramps and rails. Last year, KUC/RP launched a neurodiverse-focused youth group with an intentional awareness around how we furnish and light our spaces, some to facilitate activity, and others to provide calm to help our participants regulate if needed.

"KUC/RP also runs a monthly Red Dove Café where we provide free barista coffee and cake, opening up the café experience to members of our community who survive on pensions or minimum wages.

"Our splendid neighbours from the supported accommodation are crucial to making it all happen, providing much appreciated muscle and help to clean it all up.

"Each year we are treated to a Tenebrae service where readings are brought to us by people who live with



Elise Romaszko enjoys time in the garden at Rowallan Park in Tasmania.

Down syndrome, autism and acquired brain injury.

"The joy of providing service is a lesson many able people in our society could really learn from our splendid people who live with a disability."

Elga says congregations can provide disability access in a number of ways, often at little cost.

"Meaningful change does not have to be costly," she says.

"Congregations can begin by asking people with disability what would help them participate more fully.

"Practical steps include providing large print materials, ensuring accessible pathways, car parks and bathrooms, using microphones consistently, and offering quiet spaces for those with sensory sensitivities.

"Sharing information in multiple

formats including text, audio, video and images, and using plain, inclusive language also makes a real difference."

Elga says people with a disability can offer much in the way of leadership within congregations.

"Leadership and culture matter just as much as buildings, and (congregations can) include people with disability in decision making roles, train volunteers to engage respectfully and regularly review programs to identify where people may be unintentionally excluded.

"Access begins with attitude, and belonging begins with being genuinely seen."

Congregations wanting further assistance around disability access can email Elga at elga.rodriquez@victas.uca.org.au





JOIN US AT PILGRIM

Enrol now for mid-year intensives and semester 2 courses

Find out about our scholarships

Pilgrim scholarships cover up to 80% of unit fees for undergraduate or postgraduate units.

Apply through our website by July 20, 2026 at pilgrim.edu.au/cw-scholarships. For enquiries, please contact scholarships@pilgrim.edu.au. It is also possible to audit select units for only \$450.

Deepen your faith and understanding with Semester 2 units

Interested in study that will support your discipleship or your ministry? Join us for the coming semester. Pilgrim offers units that will support initiatives in congregations and presbyteries across the Synod on *Faithful Futures*, such as forming communities of Christian witness, as well as a whole range of learning opportunities—whether you are new to Pilgrim or returning for some continuing education!

We have upcoming units on Christianity's Big Ideas, Mark's Gospel in Context, the Bible and Ethics, History of Peace and Justice, Practicing a Missionary Church, Queer Theology, Liturgy and Worship in Multicultural Contexts, pastoral care, and spiritual care, and more!

And, if you've been wondering about taking your study further, why not test the waters with a Research Methodologies unit this semester?

For more details visit: study@pilgrim.edu.au or www.pilgrim.edu.au



TEQSA Provider: PRV12135 | CRICOS Provider: 01037A



Pilgrim is the theological college
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania



UNIVERSITY
OF DIVINITY

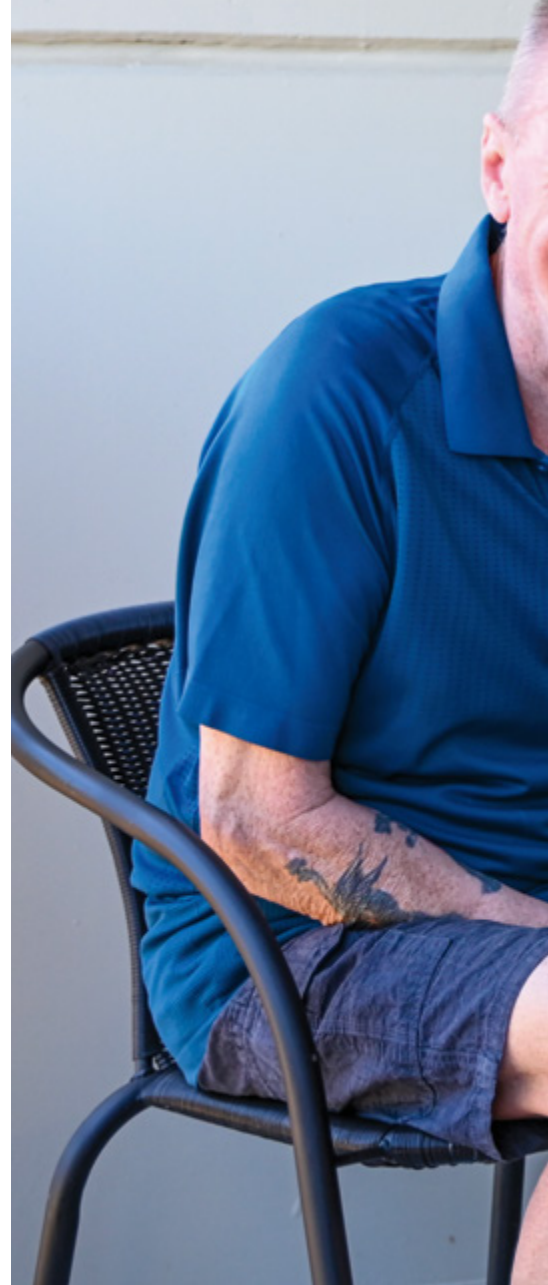


New residents, Trish and Phil, enjoy a cup of tea on their balcony.



Doors open to a **BETTER LIFE**

As cost-of-living pressures continue, Meg Hocking reports on how Uniting Vic.Tas' regional housing program, and annual Winter Appeal, are helping Victorians secure accommodation in Bendigo and Ballarat.



Uniting Vic.Tas' new \$44 million community housing development in Bendigo has provided homes for 130 tenants since February.

Its 73 one and two-bedroom units, constructed on previously underutilised land owned by St Andrew's Uniting Church on Myers Street, have been designed to support people on the priority housing waitlist.

This includes people and families experiencing homelessness, living with a disability, victim-survivors of family violence, women over 55 and those living in unsafe or unsuitable housing.

Among them is 71-year-old Myers Street resident Trish, who has moved house more than 40 times in her life.

She's raised two children as a single mum, worked countless jobs, and now cares for her husband Phil, 67, who lives

with a disability after a series of strokes.

"I've never really been stable," Trish says. "Never owned a place. I raised my kids in commission houses (and) always lived week to week."

Originally from Bendigo, Trish convinced Phil to move from Melbourne 15 years ago, though they soon found the regional rental market offered little improvement.

"Our last place, they put the price up again and we just couldn't afford it," she says.

After spotting the Myers Street community housing on the Uniting Vic. Tas website, Trish put in an application and was thrilled when they were offered a place.

"I've never lived in brand new housing before, it's beautiful (and) it's the thing I'm most excited about," she says. "As

long as we pay our rent, which we can do no problem, we'll be here until they take me to the cemetery."

Trish and Phil are now happily settled into their new home. As neither drive anymore, being within walking distance to the train station and shops makes life a lot easier.

"Phil loves it now, he wouldn't want to be anywhere else," says Trish. "To be able to walk to everything is fantastic. I love the op shops and can just toddle down the street."



Another resident, Sheree, who is the single mum of two energetic boys, aged one and three, was living a daily nightmare of not knowing where her family was going to sleep at night.

Originally from Yorta Yorta Country (Goulburn Valley), an unstable family life meant she was unable to seek refuge there. Engaging with a number of support services resulted in a referral to Uniting housing in Bendigo.

Before that Sheree and the boys were making do in motels and camping

"TO BE ABLE TO WALK TO EVERYTHING IS FANTASTIC. I LOVE THE OP SHOPS AND CAN JUST TODDLE DOWN THE STREET."

New Myers Street resident Trish

cabins after leaving Echuca where she'd struggled to meet private rent for two years.

"I've been in fighting survival mode for a long time," she says. "I feel like I'm coming out of a hell hole and a new phase is beginning."

Within two months of moving to Bendigo, Sheree has enjoyed the safety and calm her new community has to offer.

"There was a time when I withdrew from the world but here, I'm much better," she says. "I've been to the fun parks and the pool with the boys. It's better on my mental health."



"THE CONGREGATION WAS READY FOR A WAY TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY IN A SUBSTANTIAL MANNER, AND THIS WAS THE OBVIOUS THING TO DO."

Bendigo Central and Axedale congregation member Dean Shirley

The land itself, valued at \$3.7 million, was contributed by Uniting's Bendigo Central and Axedale congregation via a ground lease.

Congregation member Dean Shirley has been heavily involved in the project's development since it was first conceived 10 years ago.

"The congregation was ready for a way to give back to the community in a substantial manner, and this was the obvious thing to do," he says.

"Nothing replaces the practical experience of a resident who finds a home. Someone who suddenly, out of nowhere finds a home, and it changes their life."

For Dean and the congregation members, the purpose of the project was always clear: provide the community with safe and affordable housing.

"I think the congregation had faith that something would happen," Dean says. "So faith was really at the heart of this."

Situated in the centre of the town, within easy reach of shops, public transport and everyday services, the development offers a well-connected base for the new and growing community.



New resident in Bendigo, Sheree, is enjoying the safety and calm resulting from having secure accommodation.

From P23

"Living here has been a real eye-opener. There are some lovely people here. It's something better, something fresh, something safe."

Funding for the project included a \$4.25 million philanthropic

contribution from local couple Carol and Bill Holsworth, alongside support from Homes Victoria through the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which contributed more than \$26.3 million. Uniting Vic.Tas also provided \$10 million.

Uniting



Edith calls the Street2Home van “magical”, turning up with food, warm clothes and care when she needed it most (image is an actor representation).

Finding hope AND A HOME



At 73, Edith* should have been enjoying her retirement. Instead, she found herself homeless, living in a campervan in isolated bushland with no electricity or running water.

“It was the first time in my life I was actually frightened,” she says.

“It’s a sense of hopelessness. You don’t know what to do or where to go. If it wasn’t for Uniting Vic.Tas ... I don’t know what I would have done.”

Unable to secure work due to her age, Edith lived off an aged-care pension that barely covered her basic needs. She was unable to afford a private rental.

“You go to a real estate agent to see if you can rent somewhere — anything,

something cheap you can afford. And they just look at you as though you’re crazy,” she says.

“The minute they find out you’re on a pension, you’re looked at as though ‘just forget it’”

Sadly, Edith is not alone in her experience.

Older women have become the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, with more than 400,000 over 45 at risk. That represents more than 165,000 women aged 45-54 and 240,000 women aged over 55 teetering on the edge of homelessness. Most of these women have never been homeless before.

A lack of superannuation, unaffordable rental markets and gender pay gaps compound, leaving women at greater risk.

Edith’s age, income and poor health made the harsh realities of homelessness even more pronounced. She struggled to afford food, get the healthcare she needed, fight off loneliness and survive summer and winter’s cruel weather.

“There were bad storms in the middle of winter,” she says. “Gale force winds, floods, water over my ankles ... I’m going to cry ... I don’t want that kind of life for anybody.”

Uniting’s Street2Home team in

Continued P26



The Street2Home van and its supplies make a real difference for people facing homelessness.

From P25

Ballarat found Edith while doing outreach work in the region. Operating across Ballarat and Wimmera regions, the teams actively go out into the community, seeking those in need of support who are sleeping rough, living in their cars or experiencing instability without a permanent home.

Street2Home Outreach Worker, Luke, says it took the team some time to build Edith's trust.

"A lot of people have lost trust in services and processes," he says. "So, building rapport allows us to get to know the person, get to know the situation and help where needed, even when they're not as forthcoming."

For Edith this support was vital.

"I got to know them", she says. "They were so nice. They were compassionate. Nothing was any trouble. They were always offering me something. Sometimes food or comfort. They gave me a lot of hope.

"I knew I could talk to them if I had a worry or I just needed to talk. And when they said that they might be able to find me housing, I trusted them that they might be able to do that."

Edith had given up on public housing because she'd been told there was an eight-year waiting list. But the Street2Home team helped her fill out a Victorian Housing Register application. They advocated for her to be housed quickly. Within months, Edith was approved for a home.

"I cried," she says. "I was just so happy. I cried over everybody's shoulder. I was just so relieved. The weight just left me, starting at the top of my head, going right down through my legs to my toes.

"To think that I no longer had to worry about wind, rain, cold and heat. The fear of the unknown, of the future. It had gone. It was just pure bliss."

The Street2Home team helped Edith with rental bond payments, moving costs and furniture. It has now been three months since Edith moved in.

"I'm so happy," she says. "I thought that I would have to wait another seven years to get a home. I get up every morning and I look out my back window ... and I go, 'oh thank God.' That's all I say, 'Thank God for Uniting'"

Edith says she's grateful to Uniting's

supporters, adding that none of this would be possible without their generosity.

"I love you. I just do. I don't know where these amazing people come from," she says. "I really don't. They are just wonderful, sympathetic, compassionate, empowering people. They empowered me to look to the future."

Street2Home relies on donations to cover the full costs of delivering services for people like Edith.

A gift to Uniting's Winter Appeal will help Luke and the team provide essential support like emergency food, housing costs and being a trusted friend when times get tough.

To donate, visit www.unitingvictas.org.au/winter-appeal-donate/

***Edith has generously shared her story. Her name and image have been changed to respect her wishes and protect her safety.**



Uniting

EDUCATION AND FURTHER STUDY ASSISTANCE 2026



Limited Funds still available for

- Youth ministry projects
- Children & Families ministry projects
- Scholarships for children of soldiers
- Students undertaking tertiary and secondary studies
- Ministers with children attending primary or secondary school
- Children from Uniting Churches in the Bright and Beechworth areas associated with Uniting Churches in the Bright and Beechworth areas
- Education for lay people, including lay preacher candidates and pastors
- Continuing education for ordained and lay people in placement with the UCA
- Women undertaking study who are currently working within the UCA or with the intention of service within the UCA.

APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN

Educational Grants, Scholarships and Bursaries For details, guidelines, closing dates and application forms visit:
victas.uca.org.au/resources/grants/educational-grants-scholarships

For assistance, email grants@victas.uca.org.au or telephone **03 9340 8800**



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



equipping Leadership for Mission

2020/06_UCA_UK



Live life your way with Uniting AgeWell



Support at Home

Services to keep you safe, well and independent



Health and Wellbeing

Stay active through allied health and social connections programs



Retirement Living

All the comforts of home in a supportive community



Residential Care

Specialist 24/7 care and support, with respite stays welcome

We can support you to live well with choice and peace of mind. Contact us today.



Uniting AgeWell

📞 1300 783 435

🌐 unitingagewell.org

Faithful Futures:

HOPE

expressed in five

SHARED GOALS

The Faithful Futures project began with a consultative process spanning over three years. It was adopted at the Synod meeting in 2025 and has now been endorsed by all eight presbyteries across Victoria and Tasmania. So, what exactly is Faithful Futures and how can we get involved?

Faithful Futures Project Lead Karen Roberts describes Faithful Futures as an opportunity for the church community to celebrate ministry that is already underway. It's also a call to step with purpose into new possibilities for ministry and mission in local contexts over the next five years, guided by five shared goals.

"Faithful Futures is particularly pertinent as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia, reflecting on the history of how the Church came into being and discerning its future shape and mission," Karen says.

"I'm pleased to report that the Faithful Futures Steering Committee has already met four times this year."

Rev Isabel Greenall chairs the Steering Committee and is joined by a member appointed by each presbytery and two members from the Synod Ministries and Operations executive team. (Over the next few issues of Crosslight, you'll meet the Steering Committee members.)

The Steering Committee is spending deliberate time exploring each of the five shared goals in detail, identifying the starting points for goal-focused groups who will dive deeper.

"This next phase brings an opportunity for you to get involved with Faithful Futures," Karen says.

"We are delighted to invite people to submit Expressions of Interest joining a goal-focused group. They'll be helping to shape the future ministry and mission of the Church in Victoria and Tasmania."

Group members will work together to identify how congregations and presbyteries might be supported to implement the goals in ways that are discerned to be best for the local context.

Terms of Reference for each of the goal-focused groups are in process.

"Please look at the Terms of Reference and have a think about how you might make a contribution," Karen says. "We're keen that the goal-focused groups will be made up of people with



diversity of experience and a passion for discerning and living the ways of Jesus in the contemporary world."

URL to Expressions of Interest form
www.victas.uca.org.au/ff-eoi

Should I express my interest? Who are we looking for? We want to hear from you!

These are some examples to get you thinking about your gifts and skills:

- You might be a regular church attendee who has a passion for deepening intercultural connection in worship, witness and service.
- You might have a loose connection with a church community and work as a history

Shared Vision

Following Christ, walking together as First and Second Peoples, seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation.

Shared Goals



**RESPECTING
COUNTRY**



**COORDINATED
MINISTRIES**



**ALL-AGE
GROWTH**



**NEW
COMMUNITIES
OF FAITH**



**INTERCULTURAL
LEADERSHIP**



**"IT'S ABOUT ALL OF US
OPENING OURSELVES TO
RESPOND TO THE MOVEMENT
OF THE SPIRIT AS WE LOOK
TOWARDS THE FUTURE
WITH HOPE."**

Faithful Futures Project Lead
Karen Roberts

or geography teacher with some ideas about how to help others explore and tell some of the histories of Country in collaboration with First Nations people.

- You might have recently had a positive experience of joining with other congregations in your regional area to respond to a particular missional need and this has inspired you to help other faith communities to do the same.
- Or, you might know somebody in your family or community who you think could contribute to one of the goal areas. Please encourage them to get in touch!
- Please note that you don't need previous experience on a church committee to get involved.

Karen explains that Faithful Futures is the work of the whole church. "It's about all of us opening ourselves to respond to the movement of the Spirit as we look towards the future with hope."

"Putting your hand up to participate in a goal group or support one of these goal areas might also be an opportunity for you to grow in your own discipleship journey."

If you have questions about how you might get involved, please email us at Faithful Futures email: FaithfulFutures@victas.uca.org.au or you can call Karen on 03 9116 1472.

To read about Faithful Futures visit: victas.uca.org.au/faithful-futures/ 

Stepping into HOPE: introducing three members of the **FAITHFUL FUTURES** **STEERING COMMITTEE ...**



REV ISABEL GREENALL

Isabel is the Chair of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee. With experience of both congregational and presbytery ministry, Isabel currently works as a Spiritual Care Coordinator with Barwon Health in Geelong.

“I think it is fantastic that at the last Synod meeting, members agreed to five Faithful Futures goals for us all to work on in our presbyteries and the Synod. For me, it means that we have permission to give solid focus to these and, in time, potentially see the benefits of working together on these areas of focus across different parts of the life of the church in Victoria and Tasmania.”

“All of my life the Uniting Church has been changing as it has sought to be faithful to the ways of Jesus in the present day. Faithful Futures builds on where we have been, takes into account our contemporary world, and gives us shared goals to shape our direction as a Church. Why wouldn't you get involved?”





"THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION HAS BEEN DISCERNED, BUT THE JOURNEY IS STILL TO BE TAKEN. FAITHFUL FUTURES NOW INVITES ALL PEOPLE ACROSS THE CHURCH INTO THAT SHARED JOURNEY OF PRAYER, IMAGINATION AND PARTICIPATION."

Member of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee
 Rev Chris Rowney

REV CHRIS ROWNEY

Chris has been appointed by the Presbytery of Gippsland to be a member of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee. He is currently working as a Presbytery Resource Minister, and brings interdenominational experience to the Steering Committee having previously provided leadership within the Church of Christ and Baptist traditions.

When asked how people across the church can be involved in Faithful Futures, Chris says: "The strategic direction has been discerned, but the journey is still to be taken. Faithful Futures now invites all people across the Church into that shared journey of prayer, imagination and participation. There are likely to be many different ways that can take us from here into our Faithful Future. Some ways may be familiar, but some are trails yet to be blazed. That will only happen as people

take up the invitation to help shape the kind of church we hope to become together."

BRONWYN BALLESTY

Bronwyn is the appointed member on the Steering Committee from the Presbytery of Western Victoria. She is currently working as the presbytery's Administration and Finance Manager.

Bronwyn reflects on why people across the life of the church should be involved in Faithful Futures: "Jesus' teachings often emphasise a vibrant, purpose-filled life, encouraging His followers to live with deep joy, active service, and spiritual passion rather



than passive existence. Come and connect with others who share that same sense of purpose so you can journey, collaborate and learn together."

You will meet other members of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee over future editions of Crosslight.

Faithful Futures website: victas.uca.org.au/faithful-futures/



A wider COMMUNION

For Sione Hehepoto, attending an international youth Christian conference has become more than a milestone – it has reshaped his sense of calling, community and the Church’s role in the world.

By Marina Williams

When Sione Hehepoto returned from the Christian Conference of Asia’s Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (AEYA) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, he brought back more than memories of the five-day gathering.

From April 17–21, the assembly drew together young Christian leaders from across the Asia Pacific, expanding Sione’s understanding of faith and reshaping his sense of what ministry might require.

“Unity, I learned, is not about uniformity or ‘oneness’, but about togetherness,” he says.

Born and raised in Ivanhoe in Melbourne, Sione is of Tongan heritage and grew up in a family where church life was central. His parents were deeply involved in Canterbury Balwyn Uniting Church, with his early years structured around Sunday services, Bible studies and small groups.

“Much of my faith has been shaped by my parents and the community around me,” says Sione, who is in his final year of formation in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

“Growing up, my sister and I were usually ‘dragged along’ and immersed in church life, whether we fully understood it or not,” he says.

His understanding of faith shifted significantly as a teenager.

At 17, during a youth Bible study, a passage from Ephesians 2:8-9 reframed his thinking.

“It meant that God had freely given me salvation – grace is a gift,” Sione says, “and I was called to live with grace and thanksgiving.”

But that moment did not immediately translate into a clear vocational path.

“THROUGH ENCOUNTERS WITH DIVERSE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES, I HAVE FELT EXPOSED – YET IN THAT VULNERABILITY, I HAVE FOUND MY VOICE.”

Sione Hehepoto

“In many ways, I did not pursue ministry – God pursued me,” he says.

At 18, Sione stepped into youth leadership and found a deep sense of purpose, alongside what he describes as a persistent “niggling” – a growing sense of call. Choosing to pursue ministry meant relinquishing control and stepping into unfamiliar territory.

He describes the experience as formative.

“Through encounters with diverse people and communities, I have felt exposed – yet in that vulnerability, I have found my voice,” he says.

Central to that development is a growing sense of faith as relational.

“We do not walk this life alone. We are relational beings – with one another, with creation and with God,” he says.

Sione describes participation in AEYA as both an honour and a responsibility.

“I felt both privileged and humbled,” he says, conscious of authentically representing himself and the voice and spirit of the Uniting Church in Australia.

What stood out most during the gathering was the breadth of experiences shared. Conversations centred on economic inequality, forced migration, political repression, ecological crisis and the pressures shaping young people’s lives.

Living in Australia, he says, brings freedoms not guaranteed elsewhere – the ability to speak, worship and move without fear. For some participants, even peaceful protest carries significant risk; for others, social media is the only safe space to express dissent.

“These realities are not confined to one region,” Sione says of recognising shared concerns.

“They resonate across contexts, including my own experiences and



Recent attendance at the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly in Thailand has expanded Sione Hehepoto's understanding of faith.

those of young people in Tonga, the Pacific and Australia."

One conversation that resonated was with a delegate from Indonesia, who asked how to navigate patriarchal gender roles within the family. Sione described a household where traditional expectations had been reworked – his mother the primary breadwinner, and his father, who lives with a disability, taking on caregiving responsibilities.

"Relationships are rarely equal in a strict 50–50 sense; they are like a dance – shared effort and mutual support," he says. "Genuine love leaves no room for ego."

Sione was also invited to lead small-group Bible studies, facilitating conversations among peers.

"The trust the Christian Conference of Asia organisers placed in me was both surprising and affirming," he says. "As I prepared carefully, reflecting on what I could offer, it became clear that I received far more than I had given."

More broadly, AEYA has reshaped his view of ecumenism as connection



Sione was privileged and humbled to attend the Thailand gathering as a member of the Uniting Church in Australia.

"THE TRUST THE CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OF ASIA ORGANISERS PLACED IN ME WAS BOTH SURPRISING AND AFFIRMING."

Sione Hehepoto

across difference, influencing how he now views the role of the Church – not only to offer care, but to stand in solidarity with those on the margins and oppose injustice.

"It calls me to be more intentional and proactive in my ministry," he says, including how he uses his voice.

As he approaches the completion of his formation, Sione sees ministry less as something confined to particular settings and more as something lived out in everyday interactions.

"Ministry is not private, it is a public proclamation of Jesus Christ," he says.

The experience has strengthened Sione's commitment to listening, particularly to young

people and those often overlooked, and to further ecumenical engagement.

"We are called to use our gifts, privilege and influence not for ourselves, but for others," he says.

"The only way I know to honour those I encountered is to live faithfully, honestly, truthfully and with love in my ministry."

Read all ABOUT IT

Retired Uniting Church minister Rev Lynden Broadstock is an avid reader, meaning his volunteer role at Dalton McCaughey Library is a weekly highlight.

By Andrew Humphries

As he gets ready for his weekly volunteer shift, retired Uniting Church minister Rev Lynden Broadstock admits to feeling like a small child in a lolly shop.

For the lifelong reader, his volunteer role at the Dalton McCaughey Library in Parkville is about as good as it gets.

So good, in fact, that Lynden says his work reshelving books sometimes takes a back seat to enjoying the books themselves.

Lynden is part of the small team ensuring the theological library maintains its status as one of the world's best.

It's a role he stepped into in late 2014, when he retired from full-time ministry.

Beginning as a minister with the fledgling Uniting Church in 1977, Lynden served numerous congregations and, while officially retired, he continues to offer his services as a supply minister to a number of congregations in Melbourne.

As an avid reader, Lynden's volunteer work at the library is a perfect use of his skills and interests.

"I love libraries, I love books and I read a lot," is his simple explanation for why he loves his role so much.

"Libraries are places I have always loved, so it's a wonderful opportunity to be able to connect with this library as a volunteer.

"I have always enjoyed reading books on theology, including here as a student, and we are lucky enough to have a library with a brilliant collection, something that I value a great deal."

Lynden's current role involves returning the books to their proper place within the library's extensive shelving system, a task that always brings with it a sense of discovery.

"I have had a number of roles since I started and I'm now the 'shelving guy,'" he says modestly.

"That's absolutely fine because I'm always discovering new things to read.

"I have to confess that sometimes my shelving work slows down because I have found an interesting book to explore."

Lynden says the library's stellar reputation is well deserved.

"It's a great place and a fantastic space full of incredible wisdom and learning," he says.

"The staff are wonderful and I think everyone who comes here finds it to be a welcoming space."

Lynden admits to one regret, though, when it comes to his volunteering.

There simply aren't enough hours in the day to enjoy the library's vast collection.

"I keep finding books that are so interesting but I know I won't read before I die," he says.



"Every time I come here I go home thinking there is so much I don't know that is still waiting to be discovered.

"I'm always amazed at the quality of the material here and that is what I find so exciting about a library like this."

Lynden says his library role is also useful in providing ideas and subjects he can use in his supply ministry role.

"So much of what I read feeds into my preaching and informs my own theological thinking," he says.

Lynden hopes to remain with the library for some time to come, allowing him to continue to give back to the Uniting Church.

"That kid in the lolly shop is a perfect description of what it's like to work here," he says.

"I love coming here and I'll keep going until I'm not able to lift some of the bigger books.

"I think my library role, and supply ministry, allow me to continue to contribute to the life of our Church." 🙏



Rev Lynden Broadstock loves his volunteer role at Dalton McCaughey Library in Parkville. Image: Sarah Hellyer

Theological resources at your fingertips

The Dalton McCaughey Library (DML) was founded in the early 1970s and honours Fr William (Bill) Dalton and Rev Dr Davis McCaughey.

The library was formed by merging the collections of Ormond College and the Jesuit Theological College and is an ecumenical collaboration between the Uniting Church in Australia's Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, the Australian Jesuits (Society of Jesus) and Trinity College (Anglican).

The DML houses approximately 143,000 monograph volumes and a growing ebook collection featuring a broad range of theological and philosophical scholarship with strengths in Biblical studies, practical theology, and church history.

A rare books facility has just been built which houses approximately 2000 rare books, the oldest dating back to 1500.

The Dalton McCaughey Library is open from 9am-5pm Monday to Friday, and further information about using its resources is available at dml.vic.edu.au/



DALTON McCAUGHEY LIBRARY



Kirk Robson Theology and the Arts Memorial Fund

WHAT IS IT?
The Fund (up to \$5000) animates the conversation between theology and the arts. It supports creative initiatives engaging communities and artists in collaborative projects seeking social justice. Indigenous participation and inclusion is encouraged. Theological reflection will form a key aspect of the project, articulating the learnings and experience of the community as they engage in it.

WHO CAN APPLY?
You are an individual, a community, small group or an incorporated body. You are an artist or a group of artists, researcher/s, congregation, school or agency.

WHO WAS KIRK ROBSON?
Kirk was a charismatic performer, musician, UCA elder and Artistic Director of Melbourne-based theatre company The Torch project. His Community Cultural Development approach sought to embody reconciliation with Aboriginal people and to listen to those whose voices are often not heard, and encourage diverse communities to create powerful theatre. Kirk died in 2005, aged 27.

WHEN DO APPLICATIONS CLOSE?
September 30

WHERE DO I GET MORE INFORMATION?
Email: grants@victas.uca.org.au



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



The information stalls were a popular attraction at the carnival held to welcome residents of the new housing development in Bendigo.

Tim Angus
Member of the Victorian Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and UCA VicTas Walking Together in Covenant Committee

As a member of the Bendigo Central and Axedale Uniting Church congregation I was glad to attend the carnival held to welcome residents of the new housing development in Myers Street in Bendigo on April 16.

I saw a good variety of people enjoying what was on offer - the stalls, the coffee, the ice creams, the quilts, the welcome bags of information, the talk from the architects, and so on.

There was a great buzz of conversation and a sense of celebration and welcome.

I was especially delighted that the day included a welcome from Uncle Jason and the smoking ceremony he invited us to participate in.

He spoke of respect, for elders, and Country, and for each other, and of walking shoulder to shoulder in step to build a thriving community.

I was glad to notice First Nations families among the residents. Alongside the provision of secure housing and supportive community, it is good that the congregation has for many years flown the Aboriginal flag on the site, that the church has a sign

publicly acknowledging that it is set on Djaara country and that each Sunday the congregation includes an Acknowledgment of Country in its worship.

These are small but significant signs of the intention that the new residences be homes where people feel culturally safe and, as Jason reminded us, the respect and welcome and inclusion is offered to one and to all.

For me the day and its welcome ceremony, along with the flying of the flag and sign, are an embodiment of UCA congregations and agencies Walking Together in Covenant, and in partnership with the wider community, a response to the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together for a better future.

I hope the carnival becomes an annual event. 🙏



We want to hear from you.

Email your thoughts to

Crosslight@victas.uca.org.au

Please do not exceed 200 words and include your full name, address and contact phone number.

CROSSLIGHT

Crosslight is a bi-monthly magazine produced by the Marketing and Communications team of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Opinions expressed in *Crosslight* do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the policies of the Uniting Church.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work, gather and worship, and we pay our respects to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that the Church throughout this Synod meets on land for which First Peoples have ongoing spiritual sovereignty and custodianship, and we commit ourselves to respecting Country and to working for a more just future together.

While *Crosslight* endeavours to publish all articles in a timely manner, they may be held over for a variety of reasons.

Advertising

Crosslight accepts advertising in good faith.

Acceptance of advertising does not imply endorsement. Advertising material is published at the discretion of the publisher.

Advertising deadlines for August, 2026 Issue:

Bookings

June 4, 2026

Copy and images for production

June 19, 2026

Print ready supplied PDF

July 9, 2026

See crosslight.org.au

for full details.

Distribution

Crosslight is usually distributed the first Sunday of alternate months.

Circulation: 13,000

Editor

Andrew Humphries

Ph: **0439 110 251**

andrew.humphries@victas.uca.org.au

Graphic design

Sarah Hellyer

UCA Synod Office

(Wurundjeri Country)

Level 2, Wesley Place

130 Lonsdale Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000



Feedback and correspondence

crosslight@victas.uca.org.au

ISSN 1037 826X

Next issue: **August 2026**



ucavictas

Your
Say

CROSSLIGHT

READER SURVEY 2026



The Synod Marketing and Communications team included a Crosslight reader survey in the February 2026 edition of the magazine.

Director of Marketing and Communications Sophie Marcard said that the number of responses received was overwhelming. "We were delighted by the 435 paper responses and 48 online responses.

"Our sincere thanks to Crosslight readers for taking the time to give feedback. Not only were there 483 completed surveys, but of these there

were 247 responses to the open-ended question seeking suggestions to improve the magazine's visual look or stories," Sophie said.

"Comments ranged from compliments about readers' favourite sections to constructive suggestions about the inclusion of more theological perspectives," she said. "There were several comments about the size and repetition of photos.

"We will pay attention to the feedback and work to make enhancements over future editions."

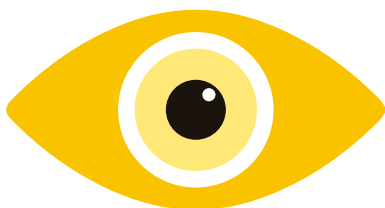
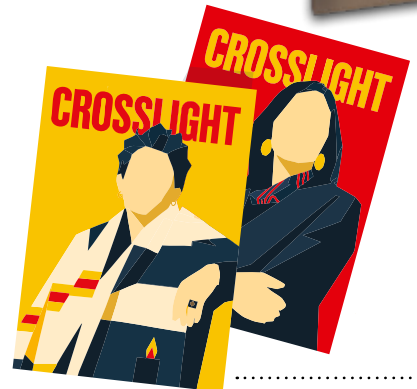
SURVEY SNAPSHOTS



The **age group** of readers is older or elderly.

215 READERS (44.5%)
said they read all the stories in the latest edition.

261 READERS (54%)
reported they read all six editions of Crosslight in 2025.



ALMOST 5%
of readers have difficulty reading printed text.

419 READERS (86.7%)
said they pick up a hard copy of Crosslight at their church.

64 READERS (13.3%)
reported they receive Crosslight by mail or view it online.





A cross-section of COMMENTS

“ Our Bible study group begins each week with 20 minutes of 'Crosslight Time' reading and reflecting together on one story before we engage with scripture. ”

“ The magazine seems focused on the metropolitan issues of social justice and immigration. [But please note that] Rural Victoria is alive and well. ”

“ Be careful of over long stories. ”

“ The colour and illustrations ... invite you in and cheer you up. ”

“ I would like more articles on the theological issues facing the Church at this time. ”

“ Keep providing insights into country areas and their faith journeys. ”

“ With all the aged members in our churches you must use good contrast. Never print in pale grey. Beware that some people with low vision may be trying to read it. ”



289 READERS are interested in opinion pieces and columns.



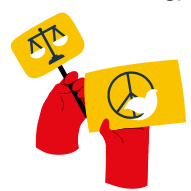
352 READERS are interested in faith and theology.



370 READERS are interested in church news.



234 READERS are interested in environmental issues.



292 READERS are interested in social justice.



353 READERS are interested in profile articles about church people.



3.76 / 5
Overall satisfaction with Crosslight

Share the warmth this winter.

Donate today

Call us
1800 668 426

Visit
[unitingvictas.org.au](https://unitingvictas.org.au/share-appeal)
/share-appeal



Scan to
donate



Uniting is the community services organisation
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.



Uniting