

CROSSLIGHT



AUGUST 2026

ON THE PATH

Uni chaplains
step up **P4-5**

Podcast thrives on **HOPE**
P18-19

Faith and **FORGIVENESS**
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“THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, GOD'S KINGDOM IS REVEALED THROUGH SHARED MEALS.”



Reverend
Salesi Faupula
Moderator
Vic Tas Synod

Every so often, God allows us to step into a moment where our own story and the Church's story meet.

Last month, I returned to Tonga as one of three invited guests from the Uniting Church in Australia to celebrate the bicentenary of Christianity in Tonga. Our President, Rev Charissa Suli, the Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod, Rev Faa'imata Hiliau, and I were invited by our partner church, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. All three of us also happen to be of Tongan heritage.

For me, it was more than an official visit. It was, in many ways, a homecoming.

I was honoured to address the General Conference on the theme, '*Ko ha Siasi Mā'ui'ui mo Tupulekina*' - A Living and Growing Church, as the Church marked 200 years since the arrival of the Gospel. Yet the deepest theological lesson came not from the conference floor, but around the tables.

A significant part of the celebrations was devoted to feasting. Through a Western lens it could easily be misunderstood. Head tables, places of honour, members of the Royal Family, fine china and tables overflowing with food. In a nation with limited resources, it could appear way too extravagant, even wasteful.

But that would be to miss what was really happening.

Behind every table stood a village.

Each meal was entrusted to a different community. Families spent days preparing, cooking and transporting their contribution. This was not surplus food. They brought the finest they had. Their offering was not hospitality from abundance, but generosity through sacrifice.

Tongans often say that if your giving costs you nothing, have you really given? True generosity is not measured by what remains, but by what is willingly placed into God's hands. For many, giving their best meant quietly going without, trusting that God would provide.

Watching this unfold, I found myself remembering the widow whom Jesus praised. Others gave from abundance; she gave from her livelihood. These feasts became acts of worship.

What struck me even more was that everyone was welcome. There were no

tickets or barriers. Church members, visitors and passers-by all shared the same tables. Not surprisingly, these meals attracted the largest crowds, and it was around them that many of the conference's key addresses were delivered. The church understood something profoundly biblical: people often gather around a table long before they gather around a pulpit.

Throughout Scripture, God's kingdom is revealed through shared meals. Jesus fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and spoke of the Kingdom as a banquet where unexpected guests found their place. The Lord's Supper reminds us that grace is first received around a table.

As I watched village after village serving thousands, another image came to mind: *piki piki hama, kae vae vae manava*. When canoes meet in distress, they bind themselves together and share the very provisions that sustain life. It is an image of sacrificial solidarity.

The villages were living that proverb before our eyes. Their generosity reflected the rhythm of the Gospel itself. God gives. Christ gives himself. The Church learns to give likewise.

Christianity in Tonga began in 1826 when missionaries crossed the ocean believing Christ had already gone before them. Two hundred years later, that same church now sends its own sons and daughters throughout the world.

My own family is part of that story. For five generations before my father, our family served as ministers in the Free Wesleyan Church. In 1972, the Church sent him as a missionary to Australia. Today, two further generations continue that ministry within the Uniting Church.

I've come back from Tonga deeply grateful, not only for the hospitality received, but for the reminder that the Gospel is never more visible than when God's people prepare a place for others.

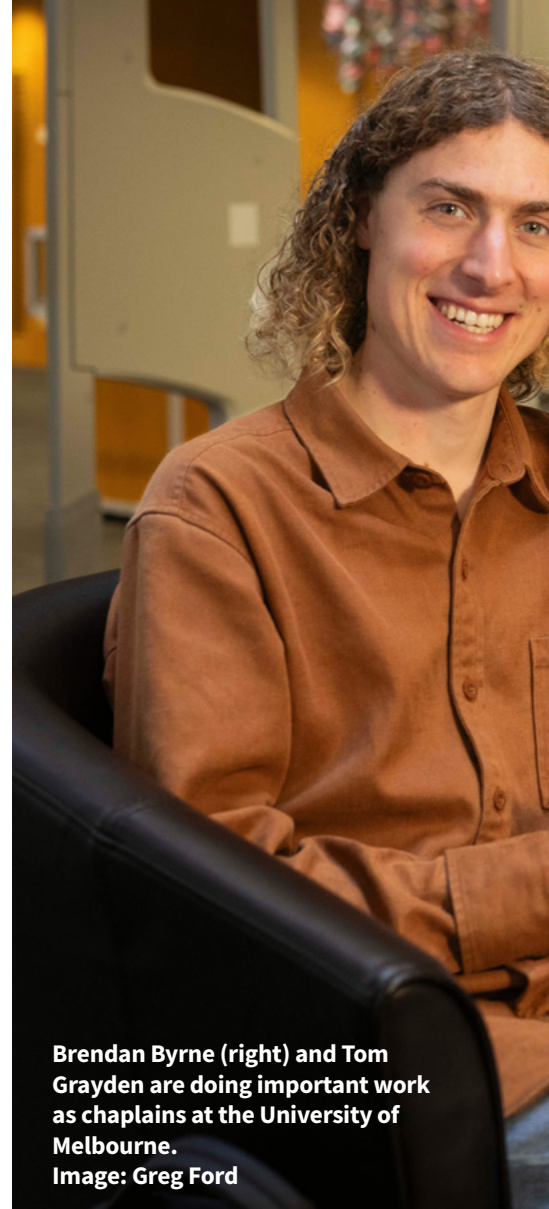
Perhaps that is what pilgrimage teaches us. We inherit faith from those who have gone before us, and we pass it on not only through our words, but through lives of generous hospitality. For every table prepared in Christ's name offers a glimpse of the Kingdom, where all are welcomed, all are fed, and all discover the abundance of God's grace.

Tonga celebrates 200 years of Christianity P9



Chaplains and the art of CONNECTION

As University of Melbourne chaplains, Brendan Byrne and Tom Grayden have a wealth of lived experience to bring to their roles.



Brendan Byrne (right) and Tom Grayden are doing important work as chaplains at the University of Melbourne.

Image: Greg Ford

Initially, Brendan Byrne didn't think he had what it took to be a university chaplain. But ministering to younger adults in congregations eventually prompted a move toward chaplaincy – and a whole new perspective.

"It's been transformative, reshaping my ministerial identity in ways I never previously imagined," he says. "I now have a new understanding of what it means to be a minister and a person of faith operating in a secular environment."

For Brendan's colleague, Tom Grayden, the path to chaplaincy was, by his own admission, slightly "backwards".

"Instead of being a chaplain first and learning about a new context, I was shaped by my context as a university student, and then learned how to be a chaplain."

Despite their different paths into chaplaincy, Brendan and Tom agree on one point: they love the work. While Brendan is the UCA's Ecumenical Chaplain and Chaplaincy Co-Ordinator on the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus, Tom is Chaplain at the University's Schools of Fine Arts and Music campus on Southbank.

Brendan believes his past experience as a union official stands him in good stead as a chaplain.

"Union officials actually spend a good deal of time engaged in pastoral care, in companioning people through down-to-earth everyday issues," he says. "There's nothing performative or pretentious

"MY ROLE IS TO FOLLOW WHERE GOD IS ALREADY WORKING IN THIS COMMUNITY, AND TO SEE HOW MY PRESENCE AND ATTENTION CAN BE A PART OF AMPLIFYING THAT WORK."

University of Melbourne Southbank campus chaplain Tom Grayden

about it. Chaplaincy is in many respects the same."

Tom feels his experience as a student at the school of music means he relates naturally to the needs of the performers and artists in his care.

"I see myself primarily as a listener and witness," he says. "My role is to follow where God is already working in this community, and to see how my presence and attention can be a part of amplifying that work."

Tom and Brendan also recognise the support of the university, as well as their respective congregations of Northcote and Wesley, are also important to their ministry.

Indeed, it's that connection to the Church – and the assumptions it breeds – that can be the most helpful tool in making a connection.

"The moment when a student realises that, 'despite' being a person

of faith, I am also a 'normal' human being like themselves, and that their assumptions and presuppositions about me are unwarranted, is always deeply gratifying," Brendan says.

For Tom, being able to share "soul-level connection" in what can be a highly technical environment can make an enormous difference.

"A cheerful greeting in a corridor may turn into a deep conversation, or a casual chat over lunch may be just what someone needed to feel seen that day," he says. "I am also contacted by people who want a listener, perhaps to name an anxiety they have, or to express a frustration, or to work through a problem."

Brendan agrees.

"I never cease to be amazed by how frequently a casual conversation in a faculty kitchen or a chance encounter somewhere turns into a moment of disclosure, when someone makes themselves vulnerable to you by telling you something about themselves – perhaps something they've never told anyone before," he says. "That's the real value of chaplaincy: the capacity to



connect with people through a moment of trust."

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of chaplaincy is that it sometimes involves resisting the external pressures of our fractured and divided society.

"International conflict, the rising cost of living, incidences of racism or queerphobia – all these cause different parts of the university community to feel afraid or threatened," Brendan says. "Chaplains occupy a difficult middle ground in which we stand in solidarity with suffering humanity, regardless of who they are or what community they come from, and try to persuade others toward self-reflection and respectful dialogue."

Tom says this also sets chaplaincy apart from other forms of care, such as counselling.

"Chaplaincy has a different role to counselling," he says. "Its unstructured, listening-focused, non-diagnostic nature doesn't really have an equivalent elsewhere in the secular care system.

It works naturally with other support services and across disciplines, allowing for fruitful collaborations with other Southbank staff and with student groups."

"THAT'S THE REAL VALUE OF CHAPLAINCY: THE CAPACITY TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE THROUGH A MOMENT OF TRUST."

University of Melbourne Parkville campus chaplain Brendan Byrne

Chaplaincy has shown Brendan that secular society contains many allies for the Gospel, irrespective of an individual or an organisation's underlying affiliations.

"Whether it's building links with student welfare services, or student unions, or on-campus groups, as a chaplain I can engage in collaborations that make a real difference to people's lives," he says.

Both Tom and Brendan agree this is perhaps one of chaplaincy's least understood and yet most important aspects: its engagement with the day-to-day life of the world beyond the

congregational and organisational life of the Church.

"I spend my time simply being part of the daily life of Southbank campus," Tom says. "I feel blessed to be trusted by this community, and I look forward to seeing how this ministry role will settle in to the culture of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music."

"Chaplains are in many ways the public face of the Church," Brendan adds.

"That's why the importance of their ministry needs to be recognised and properly funded and resourced."

Chaplaincy Coordinator Rev Lauren Mosso says chaplains like Brendan and Tom do outstanding work in their respective roles.

"As Uniting Church chaplains, Brendan and Tom offer ministry that meets people where they are by coming alongside them with a supportive presence and deep listening," she says.

"UCA chaplains are known for embracing diversity and offering authentic, compassionate and ethical ministry."



Leading from the FRONT

**"I CAME TO PILGRIM
IN YARRAVILLE ... AND I
IMMEDIATELY FELT THAT
THIS IS WHERE I WANTED
TO BE."**

Lay preacher Dr Ros Harris

Dr Ros Harris returned to formal worship in 2009 after a break of over 30 years. The Pilgrim Uniting Church member is making up for lost time through her role as an inspirational lay preacher.

By Andrew Humphries

When Dr Ros Harris first walked into Pilgrim Uniting Church in Yarraville, she felt immediately at home.

Seventeen years later, she feels just as comfortable there, and is giving back to a congregation, and wider Church, that has given her so much.

Ros completed a lay preaching course through Pilgrim Theological College at the end of last year and is now conducting services at a number of churches around Melbourne.

It's an interesting development, given that for over 30 years she had had nothing to do with religion in any organised form.

As the daughter of regular churchgoers, Ros had remained part of the Methodist Church until she turned 16 in 1977, the year the Methodist Church became part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

As Ros puts it, from that point on she simply stopped attending church, although there was no specific incident which prompted that decision.

"I had this period where I wasn't a church goer at all and I actually thought to myself, 'well I don't believe any of this stuff really,'" she says.

It wasn't until 2009 that a return to formal worship occurred to Ros, thanks to a chance encounter with a friend's mother.

"I came to Pilgrim in Yarraville after

an invitation from this woman and I immediately felt that this is where I wanted to be," she says.

"I still wouldn't have called myself a person of faith at that stage, but I knew that this is where I was being called to be on a Sunday, and I really do think the Spirit was at work.

"I think the turning point for me was that I became involved around that time with the Christian meditation community, and I remain heavily involved with that community.

"It was that experience of meditation, more specifically Christian meditation, that was the tipping point for me because, all of a sudden, I was not trying to think myself into faith. Instead, I was being transformed from the very centre of my being."

As a 12-year-old within the Methodist Church, Ros was a member of Christian Endeavour, a global and interdenominational youth ministry and discipleship movement.

"Christian Endeavor in the Methodist Church involved children about 12 or 13 going into groups with a group leader, but it was children rather than the group leader who led liturgy, so I was effectively doing liturgy at the age of 12 without even fully realising it," she says.

"So I was choosing scripture readings and songs, writing prayers and presenting.





Dr Ros Harris is giving back to the Uniting Church as a lay preacher.
Image: Greg Ford

“Clearly, when I was quite young, I was in a position where I was doing essentially what I do now as a lay preacher.”

Her path towards lay preaching began 10 years ago, thanks to encouragement from Pilgrim’s then minister Rev Rachel Kronberger.

In Rachel, Ros says, she had found a wonderful mentor.

“It started when Rachel actually invited me to lead worship,” she says.

“She gave me really good advice and I really loved the prayerful preparation.

“I loved sitting down and having coffee with Rachel, talking about my thoughts and where, you know, God might be calling me. She was incredibly encouraging.”

As Covid-19 hit in 2020, Ros audited two New Testament studies through Pilgrim Theological College, reigniting her lifelong love of learning.

“I REALLY DO BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD DOES HAVE A DEEP HUNGER TO HEAR ABOUT THE FULLNESS OF LIFE THAT IS POSSIBLE WHEN WE FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST.”

Dr Ros Harris

“When I realised you could study to become a lay preacher, I approached Rachel and said this is what I am being called to do,” she says.

Ros was accepted as a lay preaching candidate in 2021 and finished the course last year.

“It was a wonderful experience and the support from Pilgrim Theological College’s academic staff was amazing,” she says.

With a busy life full of commitments, Ros generally preaches in congregations around Melbourne once a month, but also took services at Pilgrim Uniting Church when current minister Rev Alisha Fung was on maternity leave.

“What I look forward to is actually leading worship in other churches

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because it's just such a privilege and a joy to walk into another faith community, or another congregation," she says.

"These people are open to inviting a stranger in, knowing I will share the word of God with them.

"I've done it several times and it's just been an absolute delight."

A famous quote from American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner captures perfectly what Ros loves so much about being a lay preacher.

"Frederick said 'the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet,'" she says.

"When I read that quote years ago I just loved it because those words around deep gladness is what I feel around this call to lay preaching.

"I really do believe that the world does have a deep hunger to hear about the fullness of life that is possible when we follow Jesus Christ.

"The world might not always articulate it like that, but I feel that so many of the afflictions of our time are because people cannot access that freedom and joy and fullness of life.

"For me there is a deep gladness to be able to belong to a Church that values the contribution of lay people to sharing the good news, and I'm very much looking forward to sharing it beyond my home congregation with the wider Church."

For those considering going down the path to lay preaching, Ros has some sound advice.

"I would say listen, and listen deeply," she says.

"I would also say to go and find some lay preachers and speak to them about it, and that you don't have to see it as necessarily a stepping stone to ordination.

"The call to lay preaching is a call in, and of, itself."

As Ros continues to grow into her role as a lay preacher, she relishes the opportunity to share the joy of worship with other members of the Uniting Church.

"I would hope that members I speak to would feel that they've had an experience of God in some way and that they have felt the Spirit speak to them," she says.

"Depending on the congregation and context, I would hope that they're walking away feeling either comforted or challenged or a mix of both."

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Uniting Church in Australia
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Tonga celebrates 200 years of **CHRISTIANITY**



Moderator Rev Salesi Faupula and President Rev Charissa Suli were part of the celebrations marking 200 years of Christianity in Tonga.

our family served as ministers in the Free Wesleyan Church. In 1972, the church sent him as a missionary to Australia. Today, two further generations continue that ministry within the Uniting Church.

“I’ve come back from Tonga deeply grateful, not only for the hospitality received, but for the reminder that the Gospel is never more visible than when God’s people prepare a place for others.

“Perhaps that is what pilgrimage teaches us.”

Charissa said it was a privilege to join Christians from across Tonga and around the world for this historic occasion.

“It was a profound privilege to gather ... to give thanks for God’s faithfulness across two centuries of Christian witness,” she said.

“At the heart of this historic celebration was the Lord Jesus Christ, who continues to gather us as one body across cultures, nations and generations.

“As Tonga enters its third century of Christian witness, my prayer is that we will continue to lift high the name of Jesus Christ, for whenever Christ is lifted high, the Church finds its unity, the world encounters the hope of the Gospel, and future generations discover the love of God.

“May we bear faithful witness to the Gospel with courage, humility and love for generations to come.”

The Uniting Church in Australia gives thanks for its longstanding partnership with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and for the gift of its wider ecumenical relationships across the Pacific.

As Tonga begins its third century of Christian witness, the Uniting Church prays for God’s continued blessing upon the churches of Tonga as they proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ with courage, humility and hope.

Article courtesy of Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly. 

Representatives of the Uniting Church in Australia, including Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Moderator, Rev Salesi Faupula, travelled to Tonga recently to give thanks to God for 200 years of Christianity in Tonga.

A national thanksgiving service, hosted by the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, brought together the Royal Family, President of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, His Eminence Cardinal Soane Patita Paini Mafi, government leaders, nobles and chiefs, diplomatic representatives, church leaders from across Tonga and around the world, and thousands of worshippers from throughout the kingdom and beyond.

The celebration was a beautiful expression of the unity of the Body of Christ and the enduring witness of the Church in Tonga.

His Majesty King Tupou VI proclaimed the Gospel and preached on the theme, ‘Gathering together to praise the Lord Jesus Christ as Tonga enters its (third) century of Christianity’.

The service reflected on God’s faithfulness over the past 200 years while looking with hope to the future of Christ’s mission in Tonga.

The Uniting Church in Australia was represented by President Rev Charissa Suli, alongside Salesi and NSW-ACT Moderator Rev Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau, former missionaries, ministers, young people and members from across Australia, reflecting the deep and enduring partnership between the Uniting Church and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.

Salesi said his own family has a long connection with 200 years of Christianity in Tonga.

“The story of Christianity in Tonga began in 1826 when missionaries crossed the ocean believing Christ had already gone before them. Two hundred years later, that same church now sends its own sons and daughters throughout the world,” he said.

“My own family is part of that story. For five generations before my father,

Take it as READ

An educational project which began in 1992 bore fruit earlier this year for Dr Theo Read, who is convinced that divine inspiration helped him reach the finishing line.

By Andrew Humphries

St Mark's Uniting Church (Mornington) member Dr Theo Read fulfilled a long-time dream earlier this year with the publication of three important secondary school Earth Science textbooks.

It was a project he began almost 35 years ago and one which faced more than a few setbacks along the way.

Theo is convinced, though, that divine inspiration, when it was most needed, smoothed his path towards the project's eventual success.

Its inception came in 1992 when Theo and his family moved to Darwin from Melbourne.

He began teaching at Kormilda College, based on a recommendation from fellow St Mark's congregation member Dr Derek Moore, who had just returned from Darwin.

"Derek was passionate about encouraging me to take the job there and it's the best thing I have ever done," Theo says.

His time at Kormilda College brought him into contact with many First Nations boarding students from remote areas of the Northern Territory.

"I had absolutely no intention of teaching in a private school, let alone teaching Aboriginal kids," Theo says.

"It was simply not on my radar, however three weeks later there I was not only teaching in a private college, but also teaching Aboriginal students from remote traditional communities."

As he began teaching, Theo realised there was an obvious problem with the standard Earth Science textbooks in use at the time, particularly for First Nations students.

"Many of the students there from these remote communities had these

extra layers of (Aboriginal) culture," he recalls.

"We were using a standard general science textbook at the time, but there was nothing in it that made reference to Aboriginal culture.

"So I thought it would be fantastic to have a book that combined Aboriginal culture and Country with earth sciences.

"I turned things around by using the concept of country, hence the earth sciences, with people and culture as the framework for the textbooks, and within that were relevant bits of Western science, like geology and chemistry."

Theo firmly believes a higher power helped him on the journey towards publication.

"The project was essentially immersed in Christianity from the very start," he says.

"It started at St Mark's Uniting Church in Mornington, and Kormilda College was jointly run by the Uniting and Anglican churches.

"I initially resisted going to Kormilda but once I got there and saw the hurdles the Aboriginal students had to overcome, it felt like I was being directed towards doing something by someone pretty powerful.

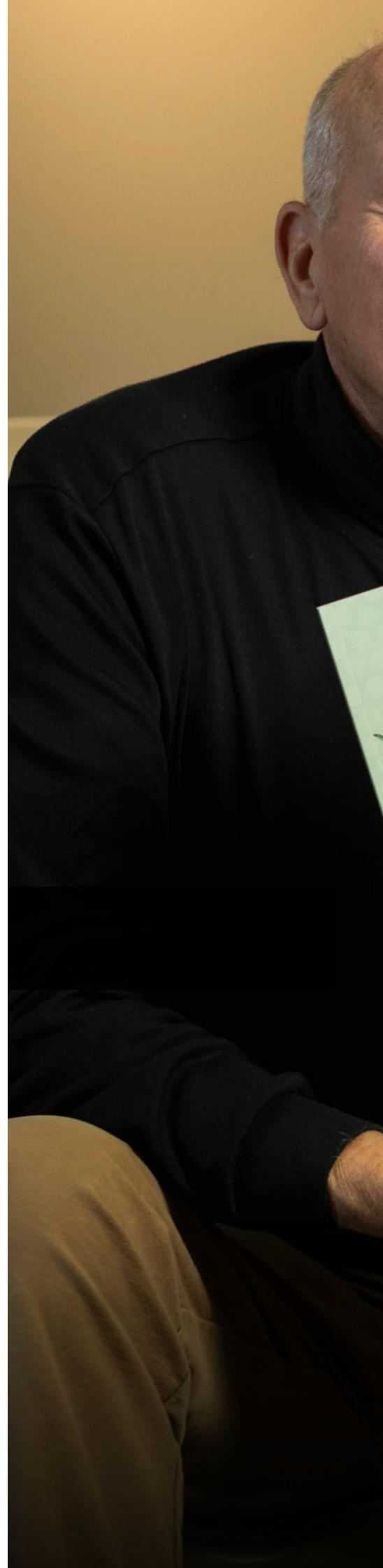
"I really believe there has been some form of divine inspiration that has propelled me along the journey to publication."

In 1996, the financial burden involved with the project almost caused a halt to Theo's dream.

"It was a very costly exercise at that time, but I believed so much in what I was doing," he says.

Then, from left field, came a financial saviour.

"Out of the blue I got a phone call





Dr Theo Read has published three Earth Science textbooks focusing on Aboriginal culture.

Image: Greg Ford

from someone in Rio Tinto's Aboriginal relations unit, who were supportive of the work being done at Kormilda College," Theo says.

The result was Rio Tinto's decision to support him financially for all of 1997, allowing him to work fulltime on the project and do intensive fieldwork with the Gunbalanya and Walungurru Communities in the Northern Territory and Victoria's Gunditjmara Community.

Theo is understandably proud of what he has achieved and the fact that the textbooks are now widely used by both indigenous and non-indigenous students.

"I can remember saying to an Aboriginal mentor of mine that it was so important that Aboriginal students had a science book which showed their own culture as being relevant to our world, as is Western science," he says.

"He pulled me up straight away, though, and said, 'no, these aren't just for Aboriginal students, they are for non-indigenous students as well.'"

As the textbooks continue to be rolled out to schools around the country, Theo says they serve two distinct purposes within education.

"The textbooks strengthen self-identity, pride and resilience among First Nations students by showcasing their culture and traditional knowledge in an accurate, relevant, sensitive and respectful way," he says.

"Their content material breaks away from the educational deficit model because First Nations people see their culture and traditional knowledge as being important when positioned alongside Western science.

"They also introduce non-indigenous students to the Aboriginal world view, providing a deeper, richer and more complex concept of this land we now call Australia."

It might have taken nearly 35 years to get the textbooks published but, as Theo suggests, sometimes the journey is just as important as the destination.

"The more I delved into what I was doing, the more I realised the importance of it," he says.

"(In the process) many of these Aboriginal people became dear friends, and I was privileged indeed to become an extended family member." 

"I REALLY BELIEVE THERE HAS BEEN SOME FORM OF DIVINE INSPIRATION THAT HAS PROPELLED ME ALONG THE JOURNEY TO PUBLICATION."

Dr Theo Read



Still open, STILL SERVING

St Paul's Uniting Church in Ballan once faced possible closure. Now, as it marks 160 years, its small congregation is sharing the historic church, hall and grounds more fully with the community around it.

By Marina Williams

St Paul's Uniting Church in Ballan is marking 160 years with a renewed sense of purpose as a place of worship, welcome and community connection.

At its April anniversary celebration, the milestone carried more than historical significance. Less than three years earlier, the stone church, with its arched windows, red door and tall spire, had faced the prospect of closure.

"AS A CONGREGATION WE FELT IT IMPORTANT THAT THE COMMUNITY KNEW WE WERE STILL OPEN AND OPERATING IN THE COMMUNITY AND PROVIDING ALL THE SERVICES WE COULD."

Uniting Church secretary Dorothy Shaw

Church secretary Dorothy Shaw says the turning point came in late 2023, when council members were ready to retire and numbers were small.

The congregation initially decided the church would close. A month later,

however, "a slight majority" voted to keep going. By then, the church grounds and hall were already being opened to the community, helping members see St Paul's still had a purpose beyond Sunday worship.

"It was felt it was too important a community asset to be sold off," Dorothy says.

The worshipping congregation has since grown to about 10 people, but Dorothy says St Paul's serves many more as a place of connection for local groups, community gatherings and people who might not otherwise come through its doors.



The church's history reaches back to Ballan's early years as a grazing district. Its foundation stone was laid on February 15, 1865, and St Paul's opened as a Presbyterian church on July 22, 1866, according to Australian Christian Church Histories.

More than 50 people attended the April 26 celebration, held ahead of the church's July anniversary to make the most of more inviting autumn weather.

Robyn Zanon, a lay worship leader, led a 10am thanksgiving service open to the wider community.

During the service, people from Ballan Community Friendship Garden, the local Farmers Market and Dog Chewition spoke about what the property means to them, while the Men's Shed sent a contribution. Descendants of the family connected with the laying of the foundation stone were also welcomed.

"As a congregation we felt it important that the community knew we were still open and operating in the community and providing all the services we could," Dorothy says. "It

Lay worship leader Robyn Zanon led a thanksgiving service to mark the birthday celebration.
Image: Michael Rigby



St Paul's Uniting Church members celebrated its 160th birthday in April as it continues to be an important part of the Ballan community. Image: Michael Rigby

was a celebration acknowledging we are still here."

Afterwards, visitors and congregation members gathered for morning tea in the hall, where visitors were invited to register as friends of the church.

The links with community groups had begun taking shape before the vote to continue, when the Farmers Market moved onto the church grounds and into the hall.

"It was proving to be a very popular monthly event and provided an opportunity for the church to be open for the wider community to appreciate the beauty of the building and its historical significance," Dorothy says.

Keeping St Paul's open required practical change.

"To continue we needed to form a council with all new members stepping up," she adds.

The new council included farmer

James Anderson as chair, with long-time members Dorothy and Gary Shaw serving as secretary and treasurer.

The congregation changed its rhythm. A traditional service is held on the second Sunday of each month, led by lay ministry workers, while a 'chat and chew' social gathering is held in the hall on the fourth Sunday.

Dorothy believes the changes have helped St Paul's continue to meet the pastoral and spiritual needs of its congregation, while keeping its

buildings and grounds open to the wider community.

Each second Saturday, the Farmers Market continues to draw people into the church grounds and hall. The CWA has a stall and serves Devonshire teas in the main hall, with the Men's Shed displaying its work in a smaller hall. A church member opens St Paul's, inviting visitors to step inside, ask about the building's history and learn when services are held.

Dog Chewition brings people to the site most weeks, with certified dog scent work instructor Simone Daley leading sessions that offer dogs mental stimulation and owners time to connect.

"The beautiful trees provide shade for those waiting their turn," Dorothy says.

Behind the hall, the Community Friendship Garden brings people together on Tuesday and Friday mornings to



St Paul's congregation members have embraced their role as part of the wider community. Image: Michael Rigby

St Paul's opened as a Presbyterian church on July 22, 1866.

Image: Michael Rigby

From P13

tend the beds before moving inside for “a cuppa and chat”.

The garden is shared by a disability group from Bacchus Marsh, the local Scout group, nursing home and playgroup, each with its own beds. The playgroup meets outdoors each week, moving into the hall when the weather turns. Wombat, a local art group, occasionally holds art sessions in the hall.

Dorothy says the 160th celebration recognised the long history of St Paul's but also pointed to its future: a small worshipping congregation and a wider community using the site throughout the week.

“We are very open to different groups using our premises and make our property accessible to all the community,” she says.



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Five questions with...

TIM MOLINEUX

As part of the Synod's Justice and International Mission Cluster, Tim Molineux is doing important work around promoting social justice issues.

What has been your journey with, and connection to, the Uniting Church?

I wasn't born into the Uniting Church. Indirectly, my first connection would be through youth group in Port Augusta, the remote town in South Australia where I grew up. Youth group was an ecumenical affair, and I remember running around the Aboriginal Christian Congress as a *nupirti yakarti* ('naughty child' in Adnyamathanha). Years later, in my mid-20s, through an unusual connection to Lincoln College in Adelaide, I serendipitously joined a UAICC-led Easter pilgrimage to Oodnadatta. From having no real connection to the Uniting Church, on that trip I learned deeply about the Church and Covenanting through Deidre Palmer, who was Moderator at the time. Within a couple of months, I became Deidre's personal assistant at the SA Synod's Secretariat.

What makes the Uniting Church so special?

Our communities, our Covenanting, and our heresy (bear with me).

It's our **communities** and not our Synod, presbyteries or buildings that hold the beating heart of inclusivity and multiculturalism. **Covenanting** and the UAICC are unique to the Uniting Church and built on over 40 years of practice. I say **heresy** to be unnecessarily contentious, however other denominations may agree with the sentiment. The Uniting Church holds apostolic succession through living witness, and not (primarily) a bloke in a frock. Our ecclesiology of not having bishops speaks directly to the importance of community holding the Spirit rather than anointed individuals



set above us. This theology also informs our special understanding of how God revealed God's self in Australia before colonisation.

What does your role as Social Justice Officer entail?

Beginning in 2019 when I moved to Melbourne, the Social Justice Officer role was originally a support role for two full-time JIM Cluster staff. However, over the next seven years my prior knowledge and experience of Covenanting have been increasingly relied upon by the Church. While the 'JustACT' bimonthly newsletter and accompanying resources are a core part of the role, Crosslight's readers may also be familiar with my other work like the 'Statement from the Heart Study Guide' or 'Covenanting Pathways Toolkit'. Committees play a much bigger part these days, the most recent being my appointment this year to the UAICC Victorian Regional Committee where I'm also its secretary.

Why do you think the role is so important within the UC?

I'm deeply grateful to be working with Dr Mark Zirnsak to do the work we need to on behalf of the Synod and to resource members in Victoria and Tasmania.

Perhaps more based on who I am rather than the role itself, I'm fortunate to have the unique experience of walking faithfully alongside truly remarkable UAICC leaders and members for over 12 years now, and to bring what gifts I've been given to serve UAICC's vision to reconstitute itself in Victoria and be part of that revival.

What are the social justice issues that should be at the forefront for UC members?

'The' social justice issue is always going to be choosing to do whatever acts of kindness we can for each other where we have the capacity to do so, and to build relationships and community based upon this foundation. Given the polarisation of society, the growing inequality between those who have wealth and those who don't, and the political access wealth permits to influence our democracy, we need to remember that we're stronger together. The Church is one of the last egalitarian places where people from all walks of life gather to form a community. Crossing pews to know your neighbours is just as important as crossing the political divide, however, we benefit from a common faith and traditions to help us hold the tension, and each other, more gently.

But, for the sake of not missing a tag line: modern slavery in supply chains, global peacebuilding, and strengthening democratic participation and institutions.



A week in *the* life of

PAOLA ROJAS

**Program Officer, Faithful Futures
and schools engagement**

MONDAY

The week begins with an early touch base with the Faithful Futures Project Lead Karen Roberts to review key milestones and finalise preparations for the Secretariat SMO meeting, where Faithful Futures was invited to present a brief update to all the Secretariat team.

Faithful Futures is at an important stage, and these activities are great opportunities to ensure we are communicating clearly and keeping people involved in its progress.

TUESDAY

Although Tuesdays are usually focused on schools engagement, the morning begins with Faithful Futures preparations for the Secretariat SMO meeting, including testing an interactive game, organising materials and ensuring everything is ready to go.

The meeting itself offers a valuable opportunity for the Secretariat team to gather, discuss and reflect together on new ways to live out the goals in our workplace.

WEDNESDAY

The afternoon shifts into schools engagement work. Planning continues for our August 18 event: refining the agenda, coordinating with partner organisations and distributing communications across our network.

I close the day with a meeting alongside Karen to align priorities and confirm next steps before she heads on leave. Being part of two projects involves juggling diverse activities and not having a monotonous day.

The morning begins with a call to the Director of Chaplaincy and Connections, who is attending a national UCA conference in Queensland. Together we confirm that locally printed resources will arrive on time, a small but important detail in supporting our representation at the conference.

The rest of the day focuses on keeping work moving for the Faithful Futures project. I update minutes and key documents from the most recent Faithful Futures Steering Committee meeting and upload them to SharePoint, so our committee members remain informed. Coordination with the EA Policy Coordinator ensures terms of reference are stored in the right place.

Later, I continue developing a high-level report that captures data from the Expressions of Interest process, a key process to continue establishing key stakeholders who will support the implementation of Faithful Futures.

THURSDAY

Today brings the quarterly SMO Administration and Governance gathering, connecting colleagues from the Centre for Theology and Ministry and Wesley Place. These meetings provide space to share procedures and process updates, exchange ideas and strengthen the systems that support our work.



Paola Rojas is doing vital work on the Faithful Futures project and in encouraging engagement with schools associated with the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.



Paola is also an important member of the team at the Centre for Theology and Ministry.



Paola and Faithful Futures Project Lead Karen Roberts at Wesley Place.

Held at CTM, the setting offers a welcome contrast to the pace of the city and, surrounded by gardens, it creates a natural pause for reflection.

The afternoon continues with work on the schools engagement program, brainstorming ideas for our upcoming newsletters and planning our program calendar for 2027 events.

Alongside this, I have begun preparing a maternity leave handover, capturing key information and ensuring a smooth transition so the work can continue well.



The week closes with a bright Melbourne winter day and a continued focus on Faithful Futures, this time from my home. I begin by preparing the weekly report for the Associate General Secretary, who is supporting the Project Lead role during this period.

A key milestone this week is the progress of Goal Group formation, so I spend time analysing Expressions of Interest applications and preparing a report to support next steps.

The day continues with updates to the Faithful Futures website and coordination with the Communications and IT teams, ensuring we keep the wider Church informed and engaged as this work continues to grow.





Faith placed in PODCAST



A new podcast created by Rev Sandy Brodine is focusing on how faith communities and congregations within the Uniting Church can be best equipped to thrive.

By Andrew Humphries

When Younger Generations Education and Strategy Coordinator Rev Sandy Brodine kicked off a new podcast at the end of June, it was easy to settle on a name for it.

With the aim of encouraging growth within Uniting Church congregations, the title of 'Thriving' seemed most appropriate.

"The purpose of the podcast is to showcase ways in which we can grow thriving church communities," Sandy explains.

"More than that, though, it's about creating thriving missional and worshipping communities, with an emphasis on thriving discipleship and faith formation and growing healthy and flourishing communities of faith."

In the podcast's first episode, Sandy explained to Discipleship and Advocacy Director Rev Nigel Hanscamp what she hopes will emerge from the weekly podcast.

"The one thing we want to do is to grow communities where discipleship thrives and where people are coming to know and love Jesus, to share the love of Jesus with others, and help to grow themselves as Christians, but also to grow a healthy and thriving community," she told Nigel.

With a background in ministry and faith formation within the Uniting Church, as well as extensive broadcast communications experience, Sandy is perfectly equipped to see the podcast thrive.

"Thriving' and 'flourishing' seem to be the two words presbyteries are using around this particular space at the moment, which is why 'thriving' is

such an appropriate word to capture the podcast's intent," she says.

Sandy says there isn't currently a podcast elsewhere in Australia that focuses on growing faith communities in this way.

"It's trying to meet the needs of congregations that are looking for ideas to grab hold of (that will allow them to thrive)," she says.

"People who listen to a specific podcast episode will hopefully come away with a few ideas on how their own congregation might grow or thrive.

"Each episode will be framed around a particular subject congregations might be interested in, so one might be on Messy Church, or all-age communities or neurodiverse children.

"It might be something a congregation can do a bit differently to help it thrive, with the podcast providing information about what that is and who might be able to offer guidance around establishing it within that congregation.

"The topics will all be very different, so people might not want to listen to it every week, but they can listen to an episode that might, for example, focus on preaching to intergenerational communities."

Sandy has a wealth of interview subjects, including some overseas, she plans to engage with to keep the podcast fresh and relevant.

"I will be talking to these people about the different ways they help communities thrive overseas and what we in Australia might be able to learn from that," she says.

"I have a number of friends in Australia and around the world who

are very heavily involved in youth and children's ministry and intergenerational ministry, and also in growing missional communities, so I've got a number of people who are really excited to join me.

"I'm hoping that a bit further down the track there will be good examples of communities within the Uniting Church where things are starting to happen around Faithful Futures which we can showcase."

Sandy says obvious signs of growth within Victorian and Tasmanian congregations, rather than just the number of listeners, will mean the podcast is a success.

"If we can see evidence that there are a number of communities where shoots are growing and things are happening as a result of people listening to the podcast, it will be achieving its aim," she says.

"I'm more interested in people listening to it and taking something from it that encourages them in practice than I am about listener numbers themselves.

"There are plenty of examples of good things happening in the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania, so I'll be looking forward to having some opportunities to talk with some of those people about what they're doing, why they're doing it, and how the rest of us can learn from them."

Sandy is keen to hear from any community that has an idea around one of the Faithful Futures goals they are trialling.

She can be contacted at Sandy.Brodine@victas.uca.org.au and the podcast can be found at thriving.castos.com/



Rev Sandy Brodine's new podcast 'Thriving' is aimed at helping congregations and faith communities grow.
Image: Greg Ford



"IT'S TRYING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CONGREGATIONS THAT ARE LOOKING FOR IDEAS TO GRAB HOLD OF (THAT WILL ALLOW THEM TO THRIVE)."

Rev Sandy Brodine

Well worth A LISTEN



ROOTS FOR CHURCHES PODCAST

A weekly show hosted by Melanie Cave designed to help church leaders and congregations build intergenerational, relevant and authentic faith communities. It explores practical theology, modern worship, evangelism and children's/youth ministry.
shorturl.at/WHZ50



SPIRITUAL MISFITS PODCAST

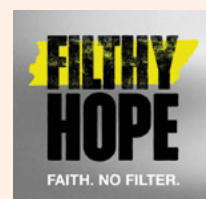
This is a safe space for those on the fringes of Christian faith. It's about creating conversations, affirmations, meditations and other resources to support people on their spiritual journey, letting them know that they are not alone, even if they feel like a spiritual misfit.
shorturl.at/7g0JB



FILTHY HOPE.

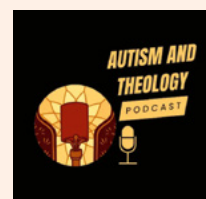
Faith. No Filter podcast

A safe space for conversations about Jesus, life and the grey areas in between. Rev Ness, Rev Jon and guests explore tough and taboo topics, like doubt, hardship, trauma, shame and finding hope through it all. shorturl.at/B8emG



AUTISM AND THEOLOGY PODCAST

An interdisciplinary show produced by the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Autism and Theology. It explores how faith communities and academic spaces can adapt to enable autistic individuals to flourish spiritually and socially.
shorturl.at/BhPqm





Are you a Uniting Church person with a finance, accounting or risk background?

We have a volunteer opportunity for you!

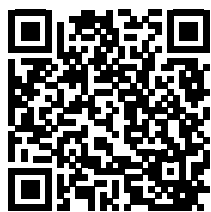
We are seeking expressions of interest for membership of two key Synod committees:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Finance Committee

The two committees support the governance functions of the Synod's Property and Operations Committee.

Working in a professional, friendly environment our committee volunteers make an important contribution to financial/risk governance across the life of the Synod.

Hours: 4 - 6 hours each month (except January).



To learn more or request the Terms of Reference, please email Lynda Nel at Lynda.Nel@victas.uca.org.au

To express your interest, please complete the form via the QR code or at: victas.uca.org.au/committee-expression-of-interest/

UCA embraces diversity and equal opportunity. We welcome applications from all volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds, First peoples and all others regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

UCA is committed to providing a safe environment for all including children. Successful volunteers are required to undergo a National Criminal History Check and sign a Keeping Children Safe Code of Conduct. Successful volunteers will also require a Working with Children Check.



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

“OUR STARTING POINT FOR BUILDING A HEALTHIER SOCIETY SHOULD BE DEEP LISTENING AND CURIOSITY TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER.”



Mark Zirnsak
Senior Social
Justice Advocate

“If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him-work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you’ve made a friend. If he won’t listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again.” Matthew 18:15-16

The advice that Jesus gives in Matthew’s Gospel to address conflicts in early Christianity aligns with the advice many negotiators, conflict managers and behavioural psychologists would give today. However, our society is losing the ability to engage in healthy public discourse and conflict, and the churches are not immune.

In their book ‘Conflict Resilience’, Robert Bordone and Joel Salinas point out that conflict is not comfortable, and we often prioritise comfort and feelings of psychological safety over engaging with people with opposing viewpoints. They argue that the benefit of engaging in respectful conflict is long-term trust-building that strengthens our relationships, builds better-functioning organisations, and fosters a healthier society.

Genuine social cohesion is when a society has the collective capacity to engage in respectful conflict in pursuit of the common good. A society that seeks to impose a single view on all its members is oppressive and unhealthy.

Anton Jäger, from the University of Oxford Department of History of Political Thought and Political Theory, argued in his 2023 book ‘Hyperpolitics’ that we have entered an age of both antipolitics and hyperpolitics among parts of our society.

Antipolitics are those who have become so cynical about the democratic system that they see no point in taking it seriously. They are susceptible to voting for any political party or movement that claims to oppose the political establishment. Often, these parties or movements bear the label of being populist. German philosopher Jan-

Werner Müller has helpfully defined populist politicians as seeing only the people who vote for them as being the “real” citizens of a country. Further, in a healthy democracy, the opposition party or parties in a parliamentary system seek to hold the government of the day to account for the good of society. In contrast, populist politicians see politics as war by other means and happily seek to destabilise society in the pursuit of power.

Hyperpolitics involves people getting involved in short-term cycles of hype and outrage, often facilitated by the online world. However, with a decentralised and community structure backing short-lived extreme politicisation, it becomes a fruitless stream of outrage with little or no practical lasting consequence. Hyperpolitics further feeds cynicism towards the democratic system which further destabilises and hollows out democratic institutions that would otherwise mediate conflict within the public sphere.

In her latest work, ‘The Common Good Economy’, Professor Mariana Mazzucato offers a positive response to the situation we find ourselves in that churches could align with our theology. She urges the church should reclaim the term “the common good” to replace the more malleable “public interest”. Mazzucato argues that democratic governments need to reshape markets to serve the common good over privatised profits. Further, she argues that to revitalise our democracies, we need to collectively pursue measures that will deliver transparency of government, and accountability for those in government who make decisions and mass participation for ordinary people.

Our starting point for building a healthier society should be deep listening and curiosity towards understanding each other, which will help build mutual respect and trust. 🌍



A bed for the NIGHT

Congregations are helping provide warmth, food and safety for people sleeping rough through winter, while recognising that emergency shelter is only one response to a much larger housing crisis.

By Marina Williams

When winter settles in, a church hall can become more than a place of worship. For someone sleeping rough, it can mean a warm bed, a hot meal, a shower, conversation and a night without having to search for somewhere safe to sleep.

North Ringwood Uniting Church and St Andrew's Uniting Church in Sunbury are just two congregations responding to homelessness through winter shelter, emergency relief, meals, referrals, advocacy and practical care.

For Maidie Graham, Senior Manager Homelessness Services – Intake and Prevention at Uniting Vic.Tas, congregation-led responses are compassionate and important in the moment, even as they point to a larger housing crisis.

"That direct response as a result of people's faith is really important," she says. "It's fabulous that people respond in this way, but I think we have to be very focused on the need for structural change."

Maidie says winter shelter can offer guests a proper meal, warmth, sleep, dignity and the knowledge that their belongings are safe. Some tell volunteers they have never felt so cared for, or cannot believe people are giving their time to help them.

However, Maidie says programs such as winter shelter are a caring crisis response, rather than a solution to homelessness.

"They don't solve homelessness," she says. "They're a lovely band-aid, a lovely caring response."

At North Ringwood UC, Maroondah Winter Shelter began in 2018 after local ministers from different denominations discussed how churches could respond to homelessness.

The program was influenced by Stable One, the Yarra Ranges model that has helped inspire church-based winter shelter programs in other communities.

About 10 churches are connected with the program, with seven providing venues across the week.

"IT'S NOT JUST THE PEOPLE SLEEPING ROUGH THAT ARE HOMELESS. THERE ARE MANY MORE AS WELL."

Uniting Vic.Tas' Maidie Graham

North Ringwood UC hosts guests each Saturday night through to Sunday morning during winter. Venue coordinators Jenny Smith and Rosemary U'Ren say the church provides sleeping accommodation, a three-course evening meal, conversation and friendship. About 60 per cent of the team comes from the congregation, working with people from other churches and the wider community.

"We have seen many guests join the program, often in a diminished state, and over the course of their stay with us, their dignity, health, self-confidence and ability to function better is significant," Rosemary says.





Maidie Graham from Uniting Vic.Tas is on the frontline addressing the issue of homelessness.

Some guests have found employment or ongoing accommodation, while others have returned year after year, showing how winter shelter can provide care and respite without always offering a pathway out of homelessness.

Jenny says the program demonstrates that the church is “for the community not just itself”.

In Sunbury, the overnight accommodation program St Andrew’s UC helps deliver is in recess, but Sunbury Winter Shelter continues to provide broader outreach and practical support for people experiencing homelessness.

Since 2018, the congregation has been involved in local responses, including Sunbury Winter Shelter, another Stable One-inspired program run by local churches. In its full overnight format, churches provided venues and volunteers for meals, social connection, overnight support, breakfast and cleaning.

Dianne Moon, chair of the St Andrew’s Uniting Church Council and project coordinator of Sunbury Winter Shelter, says the overnight accommodation hiatus is due to a lack of access to church buildings. Under council requirements, the program can operate for only one night at one site, meaning it relies on several venues being available across the week.

Meanwhile, Sunbury Winter Shelter works alongside the Sunbury Salvation Army, attends the Sunbury Community Kitchen each Monday night and maintains contact with local police and protective services officers, who can refer people when they find someone needing assistance.

In her role with Sunbury Winter Shelter, Dianne developed an information sheet listing local services for meals, food, bill relief and accommodation support, including Vincent Care’s contact details.

Dianne says cost-of-living pressures, rent increases and relationship breakdowns are among the local factors placing people at risk.

“More families are finding themselves in need,” she says. “Some who have stable living have found increased rents

Continued P24



North Ringwood Uniting Church winter shelter team members (from left to right) Rosemary U'Ren, Rob Ryan, Laura Roccella, Robyn Clarke, Eric Stone, Joan Marshall, Robert Marshall and Jenny Smith.

From P23

have forced them to find alternatives.”

Dianne says the work remains grounded in faith and practical care.

“The Church has a mandate to care for people, spiritually and physically,” she says.

Through the years, the volunteer work has given people of different ages practical ways to serve, from volunteering and cooking meals to washing linen, listening and talking with guests.

“We are still in contact with some past guests, walking alongside them to a brighter future,” Dianne says.

After almost 30 years in the sector, Maidie says homelessness is becoming more complex and more difficult to resolve.

“They’re getting worse,” she says.

Earlier in her career, a family experiencing homelessness might move from a motel to transitional housing and then public housing. Even the crisis end of that response is under pressure, with services not having enough funding to provide motel accommodation for everyone who needs it. Today, Maidie says, transitional housing can last for years, and many people never reach long-term housing.

Services are also seeing people who have never sought help before, including private renters pushed into crisis by job loss, separation, rent increases or property sales.

The larger answers, Maidie says, lie in more social and affordable housing, adequate income support and better

support for people with complex needs so housing, once found, can be sustained.

She also cautions that rough sleeping is only the visible part of homelessness. Many more people are hidden from view, sleeping in cars, couch surfing, moving between relatives and friends, or living in overcrowded or substandard housing.

“It’s not just the people sleeping rough that are homeless,” Maidie says. “There are many more as well.”

Maidie says the strongest congregation-led responses are those that move beyond hospitality alone, connecting people with specialist services and helping congregations advocate for change.

In Maroondah, volunteers’ direct experience with guests led to the establishment in 2019 of an advocacy group focused on homelessness. The group has lobbied politicians and local

council departments, run forums and supported other community events related to homelessness.

The work has also changed congregations themselves. Jenny, Rosemary and Dianne say such projects have brought churches together across denominations and reminded members that homelessness can happen to anyone.

“Any one of us could be a step away from losing our housing security for many different reasons,” Jenny says.

Maidie says the challenge is to respond with compassion to the crisis in front of people, while pushing for the structural change needed to prevent homelessness in the first place.

“Those individual caring responses are really important,” she says. “But it’s always really sad at the end of the time when there’s a number of people who are still homeless and they just go back to sleeping rough again.”



St Andrew’s Uniting Church Council chair and Sunbury Winter Shelter project coordinator Dianne Moon.



Discernment Evenings 2026

Stories and pathways of ministry in the church and in the world

Join us for two online evenings exploring ordained ministry, lay ministry, and the many ways people live out God's call in their communities, workplaces and everyday lives. Hear stories, learn about ministry pathways, and discover what support is available as you discern your own calling.

12 October | Stories of Ministry

Hear from six people serving in ministry across the VicTas Synod, from a range of locations and ministry settings. They will share their stories of ministry in the church and in the world. There will be opportunities to listen, ask questions and engage in conversation through breakout rooms and group discussion. Speakers on the day include:

Rev Salesi Faupula

Moderator, VicTas Synod

Andrew Shearer-Cox

Ministry of Pastor

Rev Deacon Sandy Boyce

Executive Officer,
Victorian Council of Churches

Maiava Alesana

Ministry of Lay Preacher

Rev Deacon Heather den Houting

Minister

Dr Miriam Oxford

Lay chaplain

19 October | Pathways and Processes

Learn about pathways for those exploring ministry and leadership within the Uniting Church, including:

- Pilgrim Theological College units available in 2027.
- The Period of Discernment and how to begin.
- Ministry pathways in the church and the wider world.
- Support available through your Congregation/Faith Community, Presbytery and the Synod.
- Timeframes associated with different pathways.
- Frequently Asked Questions.

October 12 and 19

7-9:30 pm AEDT

Online on Zoom

Cost: Free

Please register your interest to attend by Monday 5 October:

events.humanitix.com/discernment-evenings-2026



Enquiries to pod@victas.uca.org.au



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



equipping Leadership for Mission



Faith and the act of **FORGIVENESS**

Forgiveness lies at the heart of Christian faith but, as Rev Associate Professor Robyn Whitaker outlines, for many wronged people it is not a straightforward concept. This article mentions domestic and family violence. If you need support or advice, please call 1800 737732 for 24-hour confidential support and counselling.

My first ministry placement as a newly ordained 24-year-old was in a Victorian rural town. I was one of only two female clergy for quite some distance and something strange started to happen a year or so into that placement.

Women started seeking me out, coming to speak to me about things they weren't comfortable sharing with their male pastors. These women, from a range of denominations, all had something in common — they had survived domestic violence or childhood abuse and they wanted to know how 'to forgive' their abusers.

Familiar themes wove throughout those conversations about forgiveness. Many were resistant to the idea because they thought forgiveness meant forgetting; that forgiveness meant going back to an abusive marriage; that forgiveness meant no accountability; that forgiveness meant being unsafe. Yet, they also had been told that to be a good Christian you had to forgive.

Forgiveness lies at the heart of Christian faith. The gospels portray Jesus announcing 'your sins are

forgiven' through his ministry, something we continue to proclaim on Sunday mornings in liturgies around the world. Forgiveness is central to our own experience of God's grace and to our relationships with one another.

But, for survivors of domestic and family violence (or other abuse), forgiveness can be a problematic area of Christian theology. For some, forgiveness is a profound, life-giving grace that allows them to move on. Others talk about feeling the pressure to forgive and not knowing how. How do you let go of anger, resentment or hurt after abuse? In the worst cases,

forgiveness is coerced or even part of the pattern of abuse.

Julia Baird notes the problematic possibilities of forgiveness in her book 'Bright Shining' writing, "the assumption often tends to be that it's good to forgive. Even that you must forgive. Even if, in many cases, forgiveness can be poison for the abused".

The 'poison' Baird points to is one that has been well documented. It is what happens when the abused are told they have to forgive, that it is their responsibility to reconcile, and that they must model Christ's grace

THE
WESLEY
CENTRE



**IN LATE 2026, THE WESLEY CENTRE
WILL RELEASE A BOOK OF SELECTED
PAPERS FROM THEIR 'GENDERED
VIOLENCE' CONFERENCE**



In the Japanese art of kintsugi, broken pottery is repaired with gold rather than concealed, creating beauty from the visible traces of its history.

to those who harm them. We know women have been told this by church leaders even when their abusers may not be remorseful or willing to change. And, worse, they have been told that forgiveness means not pursuing justice or remaining in an unsafe relationship.

Partly due to these complex dynamics, forgiveness was the topic of one of the panels at The Wesley Centre's sold-out 'Gendered Violence' conference earlier this year. The conference was the first of its kind for The Wesley Centre. The goal was to bring together theologians, church leaders, researchers and survivors to explore how faith intersects with gendered violence and how (good) theology can help combat violence. Other conference panels explored theologies of gender, how to handle biblical texts that are violent or have been interpreted in harmful ways, and even how pornography is shaping young people's views of sex in alarming ways.

But, what did we learn about forgiveness?

Firstly, that we must uncouple forgiveness from repentance. Both are important and desirable in biblical teaching, but they are not necessarily connected. Forgiveness belongs to the victim or wronged party. Repentance, on the other hand, is the work of the person who does harm. It involves seeking to understand the harm, recognising the wrong, changing behaviour, and, when appropriate, making amends. And all this work is done without expectation of forgiveness, but rather because it is



the right thing to do when you harm someone.

Secondly, forgiveness does not mean forgetting. Forgiveness does not mean a lack of accountability or a return to an unsafe environment. That is paramount. You might forgive an abusive spouse but still leave the marriage and still seek justice in the courts.

Lastly, if we understand forgiveness does not negate justice, we might appreciate it for the spiritual gift it is. One of the biblical Greek words translated for forgiveness (aphiemi) means 'letting go' or 'releasing' (the other is grace, charis). Forgiveness then, can be a way of letting go of the hold that an abuser has over one's life, a way of releasing the anger and hurt. Forgiveness can be healing. That is the good news we proclaim. But... only if we don't conflate it with forgetting.

Rev Associate Professor Robyn Whitaker is Director of The Wesley Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Policy and Associate Professor New Testament at Pilgrim Theological College.

Everyone has a Voice

In inner Melbourne, Sophia's Spring is exploring an eco-feminist model of church where worship is shared, language is inclusive and every voice is invited into the life of the community.

By Marina Williams

At Sophia's Spring, the shape of worship reflects the shape of the community.

There is no pulpit, raised platform or single voice set apart. Each Sunday at CERES in Brunswick, chairs are arranged in a circle around a central table carrying symbols connected to the gathering's theme, season and natural world outside. At a recent Pentecost service, butterflies were suspended as an image of the transformative Spirit descending on the community.

Pastor and Ministry Coordinator Christina Rowntree says the circle is intentional.

"All voices in the room are invited and encouraged, so the liturgy is always shared between the voices in the room," she says.

Gatherings are prepared by members of a small liturgy group, with Christina preparing liturgy twice each month. The person leading worship writes the Order of Service, prepares a short reflection and invites others in the circle to respond.

"We are a learning community that doesn't rely on the minister to be the one who does theological reading alone," Christina says.

The story of Sophia's Spring reaches back to Fitzroy Uniting Church, where feminist theology, social justice and inclusion had developed before the community moved from its bluestone building in 2009 to CERES, a setting

better aligned with its "eco-feminist values and priorities".

Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom and draws on a biblical tradition linking wisdom with creation and life, reclaiming feminine language for the Divine. The "spring" points to the Spirit as a source of renewal, grounded in creation.

**"FOR US, HONOURING GOD'S
GOOD CREATION IN OUR
WORSHIP LIFE INFUSES ALL
WE SAY AND DO, ALL WE
SING AND CELEBRATE, IN THE
LOCATION WITHIN WHICH WE
GATHER."**

**Sophia's Spring Pastor and Ministry
Coordinator Christina Rowntree**

Christina says the community draws on scripture, early church sources and theologians such as Rev Dr Sally Douglas, whose writing on Jesus Sophia has helped make Woman Wisdom accessible in practice and prayer.

"For us, honouring God's good creation in our worship life infuses all we say and do, all we sing and celebrate, in the location within which we gather," Christina says.



**Sophia's Spring participants
pictured at a Pentecost service
in May.**

CERES sits beside the Merri Creek, where frogs and birdlife are part of the soundscape.

Sophia's Spring meets on Sundays at 10am, except on the third Sunday of the month, when participants gather at 4pm. Each service begins by acknowledging Country, Wurundjeri elders and the Kulin seasonal cycle.

Scripture is read alongside contemporary writing, poetry, ecological reflection and other sources of wisdom, with inclusive and gender-neutral language used throughout. Shared joys and concerns replace formal intercessions, and the sermon is replaced by a short, prepared reflection followed by shared responses.

"This is a key feminist principle," Christina says. "The Service of the Word is not done by one person standing and speaking down to those seated."

Instead, people offer reflections into the circle. Sometimes they break into small groups. Sometimes silence is allowed to sit. Different viewpoints can be held without needing to be resolved.

For participant Sue Pyke, part of Sophia's Spring for more than a decade, shared reflection and inclusion are central to its life.



"I didn't think this church existed anywhere other than in my imagination," Sue says of her first visit.

After years of "church-hopping", inclusive language was a "massive drawcard" and "a relief". Sophia's Spring, she says, has kept her connected to the Church and become "an anchor" for her faith practice.

"No one is the thought expert," Sue says. "Everyone responds in a different way, and so your own understanding of your faith is informed by a whole lot of perspectives around the circle."

Sue says a gathering may follow a familiar church shape, from welcome through to blessing, but can shift in response to a theme, question or facilitator: "Everything is kind of, let's give it a go."

Since moving to regional Victoria, Sue usually joins by Zoom. Sophia's Spring moved online during COVID, then kept hybrid access so people who are ill, travelling or in aged care remain connected. For Sue's hearing-impaired mother, captions also make participation possible in a way many physical church spaces do not.

The online connection continues



Christina Rowntree and Sue Pyke are part of eco-feminist worship group Sophia's Spring.

mid-week through a Centring Prayer gathering, with acknowledgement of Country, joys and concerns, readings, silence and prayer. The readings are

"I DIDN'T THINK THIS CHURCH EXISTED ANYWHERE OTHER THAN IN MY IMAGINATION."

Sophia's Spring participant Sue Pyke

not always biblical, Sue says, but are "deeply rooted in respect for the sacredness of place".

"It's just beautiful," she says. "It's a reminder of something greater than just myself."

The inclusive model of church is not without challenges, Christina says.

Collaboration takes more time, and a feminist, participatory structure does not remove disagreement. But listening, learning and continuing to make space

are part of a life drawing on feminist theology, First Nations voices, ecological writing, art, music and creative liturgical resources.

For those questioning more clergy-led or hierarchical models of church, Christina believes Sophia's Spring offers another way to gather.

"The community of Sophia's Spring is warm, vibrant and hospitable," she says. "We delight in our shared life together, and joyfully welcome newcomers and seekers to our gatherings."





Stepping in with **PURPOSE**

Introducing additional members of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee.

The Faithful Futures Project is a collaboration across Victoria and Tasmania's Synod, presbyteries and congregations to discern priorities, direct resources and ensure the Church is equipped for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The project is guided by five shared goals: Respecting Country, Coordinated Ministries, Intercultural Leadership, All-age Growth and New Communities of Faith. Each goal has a corresponding Goal Group that will help to shape the implementation of the goal through exploration, discussion and action.

Crosslight spoke with three members of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee to learn about their aspirations for the project.



REV TANYA WALKER

Tanya is the appointed member from the Presbytery of North East Victoria on the Steering Committee.

What are you enjoying about being part of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee?

I am enjoying getting together with people representing different parts of our Synod and presbyteries to be able





What is Faithful Futures and what is it not?

Faithful Futures is a strategic direction of the Synod and presbyteries and therefore is a way of giving vision and hope to the whole church of a shared way forward into the future that is sustaining and transforming. Faithful Futures is not the whole answer. It is not the fix it all or the magic solution to all the challenges that may exist across the breadth of the church.

Finish this sentence: Faithful Futures is our way of ...

... creating opportunities to move forward as a Church who are a pilgrim people on the way to a promised goal.

CHRIS BARNETT

Chris is the appointed member from the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra on the Steering Committee.

What are you enjoying about being part of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee?

I'm enjoying the sense of collegiality, collaboration and shared excitement as we engage together.

What are you looking forward to with Goal Groups commencing?

I'm looking forward to more people being intentionally engaged and whole-heartedly committing to the Faithful Futures process.

What do you believe is at stake if we don't engage in Faithful Futures?

If we don't engage enthusiastically and creatively with Faithful Futures, we miss an opportunity to be part of a new and exciting future for the Uniting Church across Victoria and Tasmania.

What is Faithful Futures and what is it not?

Faithful Futures is an attempt to align the councils of the Uniting Church



"I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO MORE PEOPLE BEING INTENTIONALLY ENGAGED AND WHOLE-HEARTEDLY COMMITTING TO THE FAITHFUL FUTURES PROCESS."

Member of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee Chris Barnett

to work together on the important parts of what makes up our diverse church.

What are you looking forward to with Goal Groups commencing?

I hope that we have some committed people who will be able to work on enacting this vision that has been stated. The Goal Groups will do the real work to enable our congregations to be able to be sustaining, transformative communities of worship, witness and service in their local context.

What do you believe is at stake if we don't engage in Faithful Futures?

What is at stake for congregations if we don't engage in Faithful Futures is that there will be a loss of connection to the wider vision and purpose of the whole Uniting Church. Congregations are local expressions of communities of faith, but to be connected to the whole body of the church means they can be supported, resourced and enabled to live out their ministry and mission in their local community.

From P31

around a coherent pathway toward a more faithful future. It is not a panacea for all the challenges facing congregations, presbyteries and the Synod.

Finish this sentence: Faithful Futures is our way of ...

... working toward flourishing ministry and mission that is lifegiving for all those serving and being served.

REV DUNCAN MACLEOD

Duncan is on the Steering Committee as the eLM Executive Officer from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

What are you enjoying about being part of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee?

I'm enjoying the opportunity to see connections between people who brought the Faithful Futures goals to the Synod meeting in 2025, and a new set of people who come with fresh eyes.

What are you looking forward to with Goal Groups commencing?

The development of strategy and implementation that grows out of on-the-ground experience.

What do you believe is at stake if we don't engage in Faithful Futures?

Taking part in Faithful Futures at a local level increases our chances at encouraging innovation and learning, in small and large congregations.

What is Faithful Futures and what is it not?

Faithful Futures is about learning and leading together in the call of God for the Church. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach or a bid to maintain the institutions of the Church.

Finish this sentence: Faithful Futures is our way of ...

... breathing life into the Uniting Church movement, listening and responding to the work of the Spirit of God.

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

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



"I'M ENJOYING THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT THE FAITHFUL FUTURES GOALS TO THE SYNOD MEETING IN 2025, AND A NEW SET OF PEOPLE WHO COME WITH FRESH EYES."

Member of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee Duncan Macleod



EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST ARE NOW OPEN

For people interested in joining the Goal Groups for All-age Growth or New Communities of Faith. Read the Terms of Reference at victas.uca.org.au/faithful-futures/#goal-groups and apply at victas.uca.org.au/ff-eoi/

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New life for ZOE FLATS

A celebration service last month offered a chance for St Luke's Uniting Church congregation members in Morwell, and the wider community, to recognise an important milestone.

The July 12 service and ribbon cutting celebrated the completion of a major refurbishment of the Zoe Flats, a 50-year-old building with a long connection to the Morwell community and the Uniting Church.

St Luke's secretary Anne Camier says the refurbishment had given new life to the building.

"No one remembers how this building got the name 'Zoe', but it means 'life'," Anne says.

"It has always been the intention of the St Luke's congregation that the Zoe Flats should provide life-giving opportunities for people, and that our prominent site on Princes Drive should be used for the benefit of the Morwell community."

That intention began in 1976, with construction of the Zoe Flats as a hostel for apprentices.

The accommodation was operated through to the late 1990s by St Luke's and then Fusion Australia.

"Subsequently, with hostel-style accommodation becoming less popular, it was used for several other church and

community programs," Anne says.

"These included 'Luke's Place' offering activities for marginalised youth, then office and storage areas supporting the Gippsland Uniting Presbytery, the 'Arts Billabong', annual arts festival, darts club and Men's Shed."

In 2022, St Luke's obtained professional design drawings of a preferred development of the entire site, involving consultation with Uniting Vic.Tas and Latrobe City Council planners.

"As part of this the Zoe Flats were proposed to be refurbished for affordable accommodation, comprising six self-contained units, including some caretaker and community amenities," Anne says.

"It was recognised in August 2023 that this was a priority and could be done by St Luke's, without external funding sources, by using proceeds available from the sale of the church's former manse in Doherty Avenue plus congregation donations.

"Local builder Tactor Builders has undertaken this work, with contributions from other Morwell suppliers and contractors, volunteers from Mobile Mission Maintenance and the St Luke's congregation."

Anne says the refurbishment was



The refurbishment of the Zoe Flats has given new life to a building with a long connection to Morwell and St Luke's Uniting Church.



Rev Dr Robyn Schaefer leads the dedication service on July 12.



Janet Swash and Ron Camier cut the ribbon to mark the refurbishment of the Zoe Flats.



stage one of a wider plan to transform St Luke's Princes Drive precinct into a vibrant community hub, adding housing and social spaces to the existing Men's Shed and op shop.

"The second stage may involve partnership with a private developer to facilitate about 15 small home sites at the rear of the property," she says.

"In addition, an upgraded community building would link the hall and op shop with the church, including new toilets and a café seating area adjacent to the existing commercial kitchen and community/fellowship room."

Anne says St Luke's congregation members are proud to continue their

longstanding contribution to the community.

"This is a project which is being achieved by and for our Morwell community," she says.

Anne's husband Ron says the redevelopment has always been about more than restoring an old building.

"It's not about buildings, it's about people," he says.

"We're not just putting roofs over people's heads."

In a region facing increasing housing affordability challenges, St Luke's hopes the Zoe Flats will offer more than a place to live: they aim to provide a place where people can belong.





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Crosslight's June article on long-time organist Judy Grimm highlighted one of the many dedicated people who play the organ as part of regular church services.

SINGING THE PRAISES OF OUR CHURCH ORGANISTS

Joy Freeman
Charlton Uniting Church

Church organists have been a dedicated group of (mostly ladies) who have given many years in various churches to provide our lovely organ music for regular and special services.

Lots of them, including my mum, were skilled pianists but had to teach themselves for the different keyboards of church organs, as well as dealing with stops and multiple pedals.

I am, of course, relating to mostly small country churches or, in many cases, local halls as many services were held in these due to distance and/or locality.

Large pipe organs in big city churches would have been a much greater challenge and many hours of diligent practice would be needed.

Voluntary service is a wide and varied dedication in lots of disciplines, but as I speak of church work, we depend on our local congregation members for readers, pastoral visits, money managing, welcoming and encouraging attendance.

We have had five (as I recall) regular organists over a number of years and their musical expertise is very much appreciated.

Our small but dedicated congregation enjoys worship and fellowship together weekly, spiritually and socially connected and supporting each other in God's name.



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.

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Donations feed

HUGE DEMAND

By Meg Hocking

Right now, as you read this, one in five Australians are skipping meals or whole days of eating just to get by. This is what a national food security crisis looks like. With living costs climbing, wages stalled, and housing and energy bills out of control, food is often the first thing to give.

On the frontlines of this crisis, Uniting Vic.Tas is seeing more people than ever turn to its services, many reaching out for the very first time.

"The people who access food relief at Uniting come from all different walks of life," says Ella, Uniting Vic.Tas Emergency Relief Support Worker in Prahran. "Big families, single parents, pensioners, people who are sleeping rough or don't have a fixed address."

"We really see a wide variety of people. It makes you realise that anyone can be struggling."

In times like these, Uniting Vic.Tas' emergency relief food pantries are a critical lifeline for people in crisis, providing relief, care and hope.

Rudi, aged 66, is one of the 13,000 people who turned to Uniting Vic.Tas for emergency support last year. Financial stress and housing insecurity have gripped much of her life.

"I have been homeless three times, once with a 10-year-old," Rudi says. "Not knowing where your kid is going to sleep is just ... (my daughter) doesn't remember how scared her grandmother and I were."

Rudi was sceptical when her disability support worker suggested she visit Uniting Vic.Tas in Prahran.

"Asking for help is hard," she says. "In the past when I needed help it wasn't there. I was treated as an inconvenience, a non-entity. None of that is true at Uniting Vic.Tas. They have been amazing."

To meet the surging demand, Uniting Vic.Tas relies on food donations and volunteer support to keep pantries stocked and staffed. This need is particularly pronounced during the colder months.

"WE REALLY SEE A WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE. IT MAKES YOU REALISE THAT ANYONE CAN BE STRUGGLING."

Uniting Vic.Tas Emergency Relief Support Worker Ella

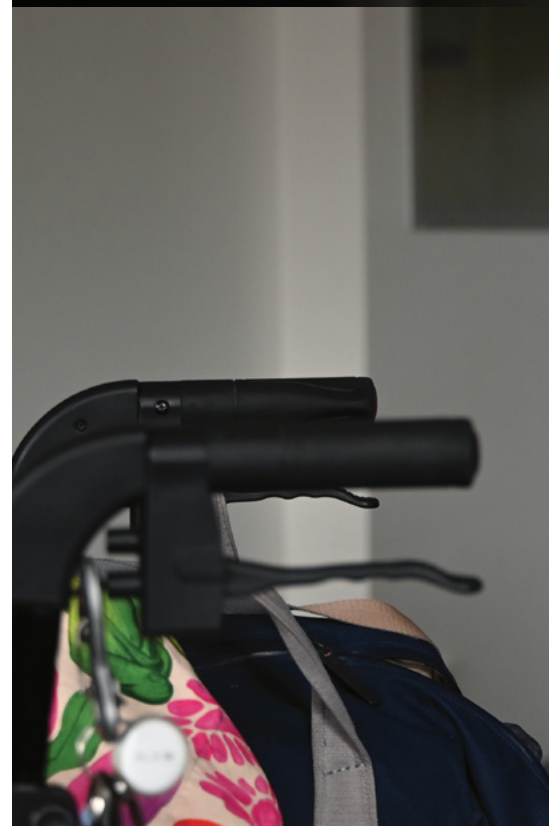
"During winter it gets very cold in Victoria," explains Ella. "Bills go up ... people need to keep the heating on, the gas on. And sometimes they can't afford food that month because those bills are so high."

The Uniting Vic.Tas Food For Families program, which collects donations of non-perishable food and essential household items, is crucial in keeping shelves stocked. Last year, one in four donated items at Uniting Vic.Tas in Prahran came from Food For Families.

"By giving people food relief, we also give them a bit of hope," Ella says. "If they're sleeping rough or they're a single



Rudi regularly visits the Uniting Vic.Tas facility in Prahran for a warm meal and food relief support.





Uniting Vic.Tas emergency relief volunteer Birjees (left), and staff member Ella, stock the Prahran food pantry with Food For Families donations.

parent trying to keep their head afloat, it gives them that hope because they can use that money for something else. They don't need to pick between eating that night and keeping the lights on."

Unlike pre-packaged food hampers, food pantries ensure choice and dignity for all people who come in. Families and individuals can select food that meets their dietary requirements, cultural needs and personal preferences.

"Having a choice of food gives people the autonomy they need," Ella says. "In the pantry they get to walk out knowing that everything in that bag, for them or their family, they'll be able to eat."

For many individuals and families, the challenges they face extend beyond food insecurity. That's why the Uniting Vic.Tas food pantries play an important role as a first point of connection to further support services.

"Some of the people who come to us for food have bigger issues," explains Uniting Vic.Tas Emergency Relief Volunteer, Birjees. "Based on their needs, we refer them to other services: mental health, homelessness, family services or financial counselling."

Food donations through the Food For Families program help ensure Uniting Vic.Tas can continue supporting people not just with food, but with access to the right services at the right time.

"Anything you can put towards emergency relief is valuable," Ella says. "That bag of pasta or laundry powder ... that's going directly to someone who needs it and can't afford it. It's going to really impact someone and make their struggles a little less hard."

Help people in need today. Your food donations help keep pantries stocked, give people the dignity of choosing their own food, and ease everyday pressures for families and individuals doing it tough.

Visit foodforfamilies.org.au/ or email, FoodForFamilies@unitingvictas.org.au



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