

CROSSLIGHT



OCTOBER 2026



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PAGES**
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DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY?



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Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



MODERATOR'S FUND
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

“WE MAY DISCOVER THAT GRACE WAS ALREADY THERE WAITING FOR US.”



Reverend
Salesi Faupula
Moderator
Vic Tas Synod

I have described myself as a “colourful mess”.

It is probably the simplest way to describe an identity that has never fitted neatly into one box. Born in Tonga, raised for the first 10 years among Yolngu people in north-east Arnhem Land, and then growing up on the northern beaches of Sydney.

As a teenager, I returned to Tonga thinking, *this is where I belong*. Then I opened my mouth, unable to speak the language properly, and quickly discovered it wasn't that simple.

Over time came the realisation that there was no need to choose one identity over another. Tongan, Australian and the deep influence of an Aboriginal upbringing all belong within the story. At times they sit comfortably together, but other times there is tension.

Maybe that is why I have often found myself drawn to the middle.

Not because the middle is always safe or comfortable. Often it isn't. But there is something about that space, between different cultures, experiences, convictions and ways of seeing, that has shaped much of my life.

Maybe there is grace in the middle.

Not the middle as compromise. Not avoiding difficult questions. And certainly not sitting comfortably on the fence while others suffer.

Rather, the middle as a space where we are willing to stay with one another long enough to listen, wrestle, pray and discern.

Acts 15 gives us an interesting picture of this.

The followers of Jesus faced serious disagreement about the inclusion of Gentiles. People held strong convictions about faith, Scripture, tradition and belonging.

There was debate. People spoke from their experience. Scripture was considered. And somehow, they stayed in the conversation.

Eventually came these words: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...” (Acts 15:28)

They weren't simply trying to work

out who had won. Together they were listening for where the Spirit might be leading.

That feels important for the Church today.

The Uniting Church has been criticised for taking a long time to make decisions.

Our processes are far from perfect. But underneath them is something worth holding onto.

The person who disagrees with us is not necessarily getting in the way. Their voice might help us hear something we have missed.

Of course, grace in the middle does not mean the answer is always halfway between two positions. There is no gracious halfway point between racism and human dignity. Silence can protect injustice rather than peace.

Grace does not ask us to give up our convictions.

Maybe the deeper question is: What are our convictions making of us?

Can truth be spoken without losing sight of the person in front of us? Can justice be sought without turning another human being into an enemy? Can we leave enough room for the Spirit to speak through someone we did not expect?

Perhaps the middle is less about a position and more about a posture.

The story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat comes to mind. The storm is real. The disciples are frightened. But Jesus is there in the boat with them.

Our world has plenty of storms. So does the Church.

Maybe our witness isn't that we agree about everything, but that in Christ we keep learning how to stay in the boat together, speaking honestly, listening deeply, seeking justice, making room for disagreement, and listening for the Spirit.

As Pilgrims of the Spirit, the spaces in between are not necessarily empty.

Relationships can deepen there. We can be changed there.

And somewhere in the middle, we may discover that grace was already there waiting for us.





New chapter opens on COLLECTION

Dalton McCaughey Library staff are celebrating the opening of a new purpose-built home for the library's collection of rare books.

By Andrew Humphries

When some books in a library date back to the early 1500s, it's obviously important that they are looked after properly.

Books of that vintage require housing in a specially controlled environment, ensuring that they can still be viewed for many years to come.

With that in mind, August 18 proved to be an important date for Dalton McCaughey Library staff, as they welcomed the opening of a purpose-built facility in the library's basement for its rare books collection.

The official opening, and an exhibition of the collection, was marked by library staff, Ormond College members, other guests, and representatives from the library's founding organisations, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Society of Jesus in Australia.

The exhibition, 'The Christian Imagination: Persisting Through Time and Space', showcased highlights from the rare books collection, while tours of the new facility provided a behind-the-scenes look at how the library is caring for the collection.

The purpose-designed space will safeguard the library's most significant and fragile books, consisting of about 2100 volumes ranging from 1500 to beyond 1800.

"WE HAVE MADE AN ATTEMPT, FOR THE SAKE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS, TO ENSURE LONG-TERM PRESERVATION OF THESE FRAGILE BOOKS."

**equipping Leadership for Mission
Executive Officer Rev Duncan Macleod**

The collection includes subjects such as theology, church doctrine, church history and philosophy, and also has a liberal arts orientation, including subjects such as geography, the natural sciences and the arts.

Featuring finely controlled climate conditions, specialised storage and enhanced security, the rare books facility ensures that the materials will remain protected, conserved and accessible for generations ahead.

Executive Officer of equipping Leadership for Mission, Rev Duncan Macleod, told those at the opening of a conversation he had overheard which illustrated the importance of preserving the library's theological collection.

"Someone serving in the café next door to the library asked one of our



Library Manager Cindy Derrenbacker and equipping Leadership for Mission Executive Officer Rev Duncan Macleod at the August 18 opening of the rare books facility. Image: Greg Ford



Rev Duncan Macleod and Fr Brendan Byrne from the Australian Jesuits untie the ribbon to open the rare books facility in the Dalton McCaughey Library. Image: Greg Ford

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young theologians a question: 'what happens when people come up with brilliant ideas?'" Duncan said.

"I said that's why we have a theological library.

"We actually write down our ideas and pass them on, and, of course, we want to make sure that those books that we write in are not just for one person to read, but for a whole community.

"We have centuries of philosophical, societal and spiritual development here in this space, so we have made an attempt for the sake of future generations to ensure long-term preservation of these fragile books."

Representing the Australian Jesuits, Fr Brendan Byrne said it was wonderful

"THIS EXHIBITION FOCUSES ON THE IMAGINATION, HIGHLIGHTING IMAGES, STORIES, HEROES AND PLACES DRAWN FROM OUR COLLECTION."

**Dalton McCaughey Library Manager
Cindy Derrenbacher**

to see the library, with which he had enjoyed a long association, ensuring the wellbeing of its rare books collection.

"These rare books have been beautifully displayed for us this evening,

and I must express my great gratitude on behalf of the Jesuits to Cindy and her staff, and to the Uniting Church," Brendan said.

Library Manager Cindy Derrenbacher said the exhibition theme of 'The Christian imagination persisting through time and place' was a nod to imagination, citing "Plato, Aquinas and others who identified the imagination as part of the soul".

"What is the Christian imagination? It is, as 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart has written, to grasp God in all things, to acknowledge God is present in the whole of creation, that even material can become channels or sources of God's grace.

"Objects, places and people can be revelations of grace.

"This exhibition focuses on the imagination, highlighting images, stories, heroes and places drawn from our collection."

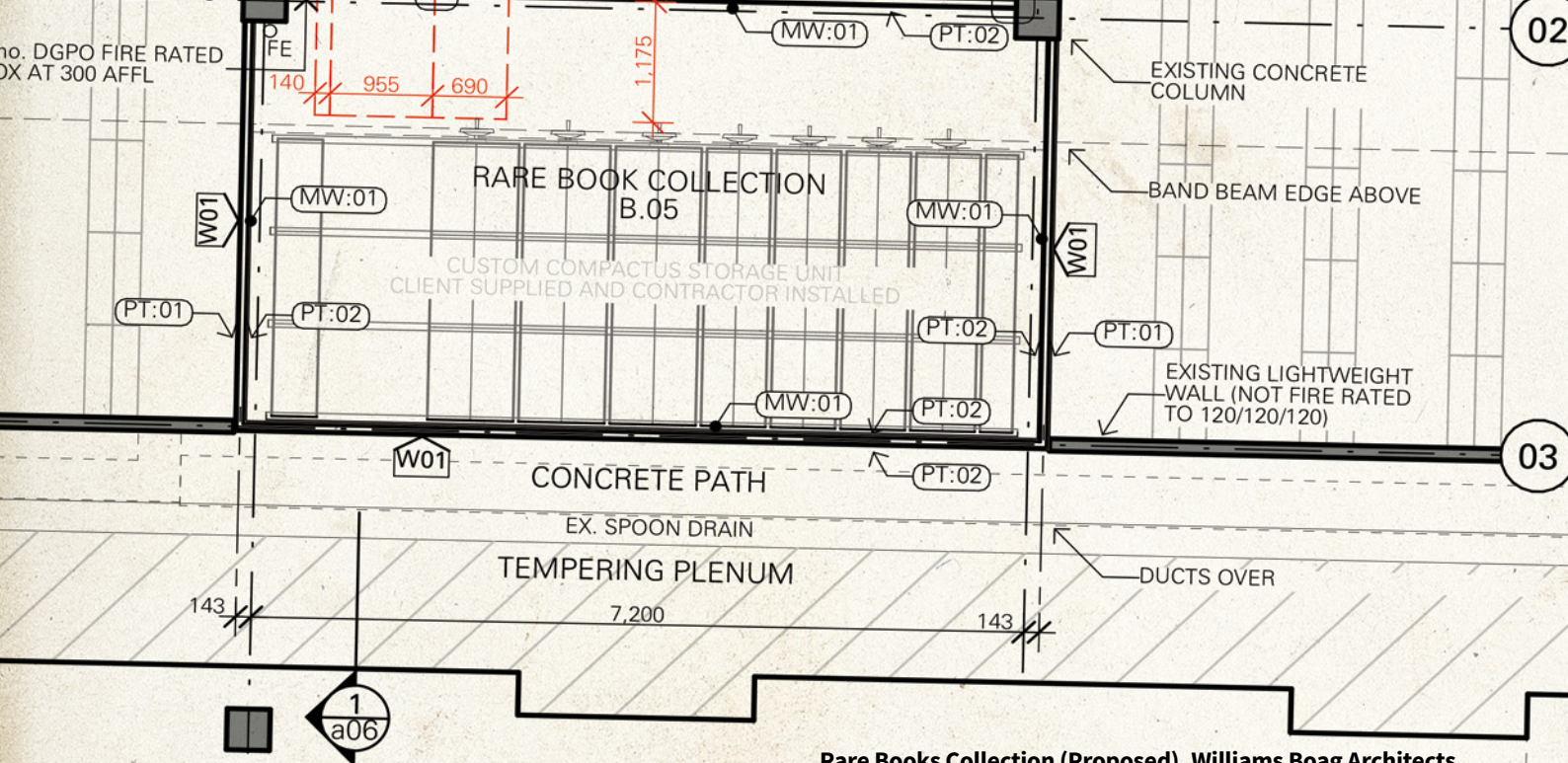
Anyone interested in viewing the rare books or taking a tour of the library is invited to phone 03 9340 8888 or email library@dml.vic.edu.au



Library Manager Cindy Derrenbacher with Rev Amanda Nicholas (left) and Catherine Xenos at the opening on August 18. Image: Greg Ford



**DALTON McCAUGHEY
LIBRARY**



Rare Books Collection (Proposed), Williams Boag Architects

Project required detailed planning

A project as substantial as the one involving the creation of the rare books facility within the Dalton McCaughey Library requires plenty of planning.

Library Manager Cindy Derrenbacher says numerous meetings were held with the project team, which sometimes included an external architect.

"Library staff calculated the number of rare books, taking into consideration their wide-ranging sizes and the amount of compact shelving needed to house the collection," she says.

"The staff consulted with Special Collections at the University of Melbourne to determine the best location for the facility and the proper temperature and humidity controls.

"The sprinkler system was removed in the area of the rare books facility and an alternative safeguard for fire was found. Lighting was also improved throughout the basement."

Cindy says many books and journals had to be shifted in the basement stacks to make room for the purpose-built facility.

"The rare book materials were shifted to the main floor of the library for safe-keeping during the construction phase and then re-homed in the new facility once complete," she says.

"The staff were assisted by a Preservation Officer trained at the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials

Conservation. She was a tremendous help in ensuring best practices in the moving of the rare books and creating documentation for the staff and patrons when handling such materials.

"The rare books are shelved in two sequences (one for larger materials and one for smaller materials).

"Given the specialised space, some of the larger books, especially those that are in need of repair, are shelved lengthwise to ensure better support and less strain on the bindings. Over time, more fragile materials will be placed in individually created phase boxes for better preservation."

Cindy says having a dedicated facility ensures that the materials are better cared for in the long term.

"The grand opening of the facility was intended to highlight some of the library's rare books and to draw connections between students' current theological study and materials from the past," she says.

"Moving forward, we hope that students and faculty will use these rare books for classroom teaching and research purposes.

"One of our staff members has digitised several of our rare books which have been used in classes related to church history and the New Testament.

"Ultimately, the idea is to both preserve our stakeholder's rare books as well as make them accessible to the public. In today's digital world, there are many who appreciate that which is material."





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

Five questions with...

CHRISSY GAMBLE

As Principal at Kingswood College, Chrissy Gamble drives a culture that aligns strongly with the Uniting Church's own values.

How important is the connection between Kingswood College and the Uniting Church?

Our connection with the Uniting Church is an integral part of Kingswood College's identity. It shapes the values that underpin our community and reminds us that education is about far more than academic achievement. We are committed to nurturing compassionate, courageous and thoughtful young people who lead with integrity, embrace diversity and seek to make a positive difference in the lives of others. That enduring relationship continues to influence our culture, guide our decision-making and inspire a deep commitment to service, inclusion and social justice.



What social justice issues do you think students should be embracing?

I hope our students develop both awareness and agency. The challenges they inherit including (but not limited to) inequality, reconciliation with First Nations peoples, environmental sustainability, mental health and social inclusion require compassion and perspective. We encourage students not simply to identify problems but to become part of the solution through service, advocacy and respectful dialogue. Social justice begins with recognising the inherent worth of every individual and understanding that leadership is ultimately about using your influence to improve life for others. We advocate for and alongside our students and their voice matters.

How do the college's vision and values align with the Uniting Church?

Our vision, 'To Embolden Hearts and Inspire Minds', reflects many of the qualities that sit at the heart of the Uniting Church. We encourage students to think deeply, act with courage, lead with kindness and respect the dignity and integrity of difference of every person. Our values of respect, kindness, courage, perseverance and excellence encourage students to pursue personal growth while recognising their responsibility to others. Alongside the Uniting Church, we believe education should develop both intellect and character, preparing young people to contribute positively to a diverse and changing world.

How do you drive the vision and values in your role as Principal?

Vision and values are only meaningful when they are lived every day. As Principal at Kingswood College, I strive to model the behaviours we hope to see in our students: listening with empathy, making courageous decisions, treating every person with dignity and leading with integrity. We celebrate achievement, and we also celebrate kindness, perseverance and service. Every decision we make, whether about learning, wellbeing or relationships, is measured against our vision and values because culture is shaped by what leaders consistently notice, encourage and prioritise.

What do you hope students are equipped with when they finish their schooling at the college?

Of course, I hope our students graduate with strong academic foundations, but I also hope they leave with something even more enduring. I want them to have the confidence to pursue opportunity, the humility to keep learning and the courage to stand up for what is right. I hope they understand that success is measured not only by what they achieve, but by the positive impact they have on others. If they leave Kingswood College with emboldened hearts, inspired minds and a genuine commitment to serving their communities, my heart will be at peace.





Having a say in DEMOCRACY

Victorians will go to the polls on November 28 to elect their next State Government. Crosslight asked a number of prominent Uniting Church people what issues should be front of mind when votes are cast.



REV SALESI FAUPULA

Moderator, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Why is it important that Uniting Church members over 18 cast an informed vote in November?

For me, voting is about relationship. None of us live in isolation, and the decisions we make affect people we may never meet. My upbringing taught

me that who we are is deeply connected to the wellbeing of others. So, I don't think Christians should be told how to vote, and I certainly wouldn't want everyone in the Uniting Church thinking the same way. But our faith should shape the questions we ask. Who is being heard? Who is missing? Who carries the cost of our decisions? An informed vote takes those questions seriously.

What are the important social justice/other issues that need to be addressed by whichever party wins government?

There are plenty of issues I could name: housing and cost of living, climate change, racism, First Peoples, people experiencing disadvantage, and the pressures being felt in rural communities. But underneath these, I keep coming back to how we see one another. When people become problems to solve, statistics to manage, or groups to blame, something of our humanity

gets lost. I would hope whoever forms government keeps listening beyond the loudest voices. Justice, for me, begins with recognising our neighbour and asking what kind of community we are becoming together.

Do you have confidence we are currently best served by the democratic process?

Yes, I still have confidence in democracy, although I don't think democracy is served well when winning becomes more important than listening. One thing I have learnt in the Uniting Church is that discernment can be messy. We don't always agree, and finding a way forward can take time. Yet there is something important about staying in the room with one another. I think democracy asks something similar of us. I am drawn to that difficult space in the middle, not sitting on the fence, but holding conviction while still listening, wrestling with difference, and seeking the common good.



REV SHARON HOLLIS

Associate General Secretary, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and former Moderator

Why is it important that Uniting Church members over 18 cast an informed vote in November?

Christian faith is incarnational: lived in the world. Faith invites us to participate in building the kingdom of God in our daily lives and the communities we

live in. Faith calls us to the welfare of the communities in which we live and work. Voting in an election is one way we express our discipleship and our desire to be part of building more just and kind communities. Taking time to understand the issues and candidates is an important expression of our commitment to seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation

What are the important social justice/other issues that need to be addressed by whichever party wins government?

One of the most important issues is the ongoing commitment to the Treaty process and the Government's response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations. This includes increasing the age of criminal responsibility, and ensuring recommendations about the child protection system are implemented, guided by Indigenous wisdom, knowledge and practice.

Access to education, health and housing are fundamental human rights and the core of the work of any state government. Ensuring access for all people, and especially those who most need it, is the key to a fair and equitable society that allows people to live fulfilling and healthy lives.

Do you have confidence we are currently best served by the democratic process?

A number of things in Australia support the democratic process, including independent electoral commissions, the ease of voting and preferential voting so that we can have confidence in the election process and the outcome of the upcoming election. However, no system is perfect and our democracy would be enhanced by reforms to funding of candidates and parties, real time disclosure of funding, more transparency about who politicians meet with and support for independent media. Social media algorithms distort the information

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we receive. We are struggling to have discussion and disagreement in a civil way. We are served by a very good system and like all systems, even good ones requires regular improvement, constant vigilance and our willingness to be engaged and informed citizens.



DR MARK ZIRNSAK

Senior Social Justice Advocate

Why is it important that Uniting Church members over 18 cast an informed vote in November?

Voting matters. It decides who will make laws and what services and programs will be delivered in the community. How we vote impacts the lives of members of our community, especially anyone dependent on the support of services that the government delivers or funds, such as mental health services, public and community housing, services for people impacted by family and domestic violence and disability services. Loving our neighbour requires that we take voting seriously.

What are the important social justice/other issues that need to be addressed by whichever party wins government?

Top of our list would be housing. We need a government that will invest significantly in public and community housing to meet the needs of people fleeing family and domestic violence, people with disability and people in financial hardship. Other issues we are focused on are:

- Improving government engagement processes in developing laws, policies and services to give a more meaningful say to those impacted;
- Greater support for people with

disability, including measures to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation; and,

- Measures to prevent crime by addressing its causes and to rehabilitate those who have broken the law.

Do you have confidence we are currently best served by the democratic process?

Society has shifted, and our democratic process needs to change to remain “fit-for-purpose”, to maintain a society for the common good. The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer for Australia continues to show that over the last 14 years, there has been a growing divide in trust in the current democratic system between people in the top 25 per cent of incomes and those in the bottom 25 per cent of incomes. We need reforms that allow for greater, more meaningful mass participation in democratic processes beyond voting and that curb the ability of wealthy individuals to skew the democratic system to their preferences. The final point will meet with strong resistance, because as the saying goes, “when you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression”.



DR JESSICA HATELEY-BROWNE

Uniting Vic.Tas Executive Director
Mission & Equity

Why is it important that Uniting Church members over 18 cast an informed vote in November?

The Christian faith has something meaningful to say about public life, always. Voting in an election is a practical way for us to engage with this notion. An informed vote means thinking seriously about the societal conditions that are most likely to reflect the values



and principles that Jesus calls us to: “the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race”, to quote from the UCA’s 1977 Statement to the Nation. We don’t all need to reach the same conclusion. At election time in particular, we are invited to engage thoughtfully, compassionately and with an awareness of who is most affected by the decisions governments make. I think we should take up this invitation, understanding it to be an opportunity to participate in the common good.

What are the important social justice/other issues that need to be addressed by whichever party wins government?

The continuance of the work of Treaty, including ensuring Gellung Warl (representative body for First Peoples in Victoria) is able to operate independently, effectively and sustainably. This model recognises the expertise of Aboriginal people in their own lives and communities. Imagine



Photo by Jesse Thompson/Getty Images

young people are struggling in the wider community. Some are caught up in the justice system, some are unemployed, and sadly, some are no longer with us. Too often, the voices of our young people are silent or not listened to.

What are the important social justice/other issues that need to be addressed by whichever party wins government?

Racism and discrimination are not acceptable anywhere in Australia, no matter where it happens or who it is directed towards. Since the Voice referendum, many Aboriginal people have felt that racism and discrimination have become more open and noticeable. When something happens because of a person's race or Aboriginal identity, we need to ask: Why is this still happening in Australia? No person should think it is okay to hurt, threaten, abuse or treat another person badly because they are Aboriginal or because of their cultural background. We also see racism affecting people from many other cultural backgrounds. As Australians, we should not accept this behaviour. We need to speak up against racism and discrimination wherever we see it and work towards becoming a country where everyone is treated with respect.

Do you have confidence we are currently best served by the democratic process?

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, (the democratic process) means us having a real say in the decisions that affect our lives, families, communities and Country. Issues such as Covenant, Voice, Treaty, Truth and equality are important because Aboriginal people should be part of the decisions being made about them. But I think we still need to ask some important questions. Does our democratic process really give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a voice and real decision-making power? Are Australians prepared to listen to First Nations people and walk alongside us, rather than governments always telling us what is best for us? We want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a voice, to be listened to, and to be part of making the decisions that affect our own people, communities and future.

what we can learn - as a society, as Second Peoples, as the Church.

There is no shortage of specific issues relating to poverty, trauma and disadvantage that have my attention in 2026. My hope is that no matter what form the next Victorian government takes, they'll take action on these issues drawing on a common set of principles: do what the evidence shows works, pay what it takes to implement consistently at scale, and embed lived expertise into decision-making processes.

Do you have confidence we are currently best served by the democratic process?

I believe in the democratic vote for collective decision-making. It's fair and everyone gets a voice. But the democratic vote alone is not equitable. Those with power and privilege get many more opportunities to influence government decision-making, directly and indirectly. A healthy, equitable democracy requires more than just free and fair elections. Civil participation, independent media, trustworthy institutions (built through transparency, accountability and separation of powers) and strongly safeguarded human rights are all important pillars of a healthy

democracy. I do not have full confidence that we have all of these pillars firmly in place right now.



REV WILL PICKETT

UAICC Victoria

Why is it important that Uniting Church members over 18 cast an informed vote in November?

I think it is important that everyone has a voice. In particular, young people need to be represented in our communities. They should also be able to speak up in their churches, among their friends, in their culture and for the people they represent. We also know that many





Uniting Vic.Tas promotes election focus on

FAMILIES

Victorians head to the polls on November 28, and Uniting Vic.Tas is calling on all parties contesting the state election to invest in the future of Victorian families.

By Erin Craven

Uniting Vic.Tas' priorities ahead of the Victorian election include initiatives that support vulnerable children and families and reduce demand on child protection agencies and youth justice systems.

As a contemporary expression of the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice and community care, Uniting Vic.Tas actively participates in influencing community and policy conversations, working with government and other organisations in the community services sector to support people in need in the community. The experience of the people Uniting Vic.Tas works with, its relationships within the wider sector (including the UnitingCare Australia network) and its knowledge of public policy inform its advocacy work.

The Uniting Vic.Tas Victorian election platform 'Earlier Support for Stronger Families' calls for an investment in proven intervention supports, particularly in regional Victoria, where access to services is low and demand is increasingly high.

Uniting Vic.Tas has seen and heard first-hand from staff and consumers about the challenges people living in regional Victoria face in accessing support, along with the increasing complexity of support needed by those accessing its services.

Families and individuals are being

pushed closer to crisis because the systems designed to support them are increasingly unable to respond. Meanwhile, government agencies face growing demand across homelessness, health, child protection and justice.

Together, a number of initiatives can create a continuum of support, from prevention and early intervention through to intensive family support, treatment and reduced demand on crisis services.

Establish family wellbeing connections

Families often say that the hardest part of accessing support is knowing where to start.

Uniting Vic.Tas is calling for dedicated family wellbeing connectors to be placed in its 103 early learning programs across 62 Victoria communities. These highly skilled professionals would be expertly placed to support and identify vulnerable families before they reach crisis point and help them navigate the supports available to them.

A 2025 survey of families who accessed Uniting Vic.Tas' integrated family services showed that 51 per cent of families found that difficulty navigating services was a barrier to accessing support.

The 'Uniting Families Report 2025: It takes a village to raise a child',

developed in partnership with Uniting NSW/ACT, Uniting Vic.Tas, and Uniting SA, also highlights the importance of providing connectors to care where families gather.

Connecting families with support earlier can strengthen family wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of later crisis intervention.

Provide a Victorian kinship guarantee

Across Victoria, 82 per cent of children and young people in out-of-home care live with relatives or family friends rather than foster carers.

These kinship carers step in to provide care, love and stability, often with little notice and with significant personal and financial sacrifice.

Despite the vital role they play, Victorian carers currently receive significantly less financial support compared with carers in other states and territories, with many forced to use personal savings or income to meet children's needs.

Kinship carers also have access to less therapeutic and practical support than foster carers, even though many of the children they care for have experienced similar levels of trauma and disadvantage.

Kinship care is also the preferred model for First Nations children and young people who are placed in out-



Vulnerable children and families are the focus of an advocacy campaign by Uniting Vic.Tas ahead of November's state election.

of-home care. Eighty-two per cent of Aboriginal children who are placed in out-of-home care are placed in kith or kin arrangements. As part of Uniting Vic.Tas' election ask, it has engaged with the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) and called for an investment in an Aboriginal model of kinship care as part of this ask. This kinship model would ensure safe, culturally connected out-of-home care.

A Victorian kinship guarantee would provide kinship families with the financial security and integrated support they need from day one, creating a fairer and more sustainable out-of-home care system in which every Victorian child has the support they need to thrive, regardless of whether they are placed with kith and kin or foster carers.

Roll out Meals for Change program

Victoria is facing growing levels of youth loneliness, social isolation and social disconnection, with young people in regional Victoria particularly at risk.

For more than a decade, Uniting Vic.Tas' Meals for Change program has provided young people in Ballarat experiencing, or at risk of, social isolation, disengagement, homelessness and other forms of disadvantage, social connection and belonging by partnering with local cafés and restaurants to provide affordable meals in a community setting.

By rolling out the 'Meals for Change' program across other areas of regional Victoria, including Wimmera and Gippsland, more young people will have the opportunity to build better connections and access support before problems become entrenched.

Government investment in Ruby's Reunification Program

Family conflict is one of the leading causes of youth homelessness.

In Ballarat, one-fifth of young people presenting for homelessness support report experiencing family-related issues.

Ruby's Reunification Program offers an innovative response for young people aged 12-17 at risk of homelessness due to conflict at home. The program provides a safe, short-term place to stay, alternating between short-term accommodation and remaining at home, when it's safe to do so, creating a circuit breaker from conflict while maintaining family connection.

Through whole-of-family therapeutic support, Ruby's also helps to address the underlying causes of conflict and works towards family reunification.

The program has already been successfully run in South Australia for 25 years, by Uniting Communities (part of the UnitingCare Network). Uniting Vic. Tas is proud to have been able to bring Ruby's to Victoria with funding through the Kilmany Trust, and is asking for State Government investment to secure future operations.

Expand Catalyst rehabilitation into regional Victoria

Many regional communities experience disproportionately high levels of alcohol and drug-related harm, yet access to treatment remains limited.

For the past 15 years, the Uniting Vic. Tas Catalyst program has supported more than 3000 people in metropolitan Melbourne to make positive and lasting changes to their substance use. The program's non-residential model allows participants to continue to care for

family members, maintain employment and remain connected to their communities while they are receiving treatment.

The program has also run in Hobart, in partnership with Hobart North Uniting Church. It has also won the Organisation/Program Award for Excellence from the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Council Tasmania

Expanding Catalyst into regional Victoria would address significant treatment gaps and ensure that regional Victorians can access support close to home.

Families shouldn't have to reach crisis point before being offered meaningful support. Intervening earlier to strengthen families will help prevent children from entering out-of-home care and youth justice systems, delivering better outcomes for children and savings for government.

These five election requests provide a watershed moment for the next government. Supporting people earlier leads to better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

As an organisation, Uniting Vic. Tas remains committed to reducing the impact of poverty, trauma and disadvantage. It does this in response to the call to stand in solidarity with the marginalised and to participate in God's restorative work in this time and in this place. Uniting Vic.Tas' advocacy reflects its identity as a contemporary expression of the Uniting Church.

Access the full election platform at shorturl.at/JlqRM



Uniting

“RESEARCH SHOWS THAT INCARCERATION LARGELY RE-TRAUMATISES THESE YOUTHS.”



Mark Zirnsak
Senior Social
Justice Advocate

As a film buff, I have been fascinated by the increased inclusion of Christianity in films and series in recent times, and by how they portray Christian theology. Two contrasting films recently caught my attention for their themes of rehabilitation and transformation: the French film ‘Jean Valjean’ and Hugh Jackman’s ‘The Death of Robin Hood’.

‘Jean Valjean’ covers an early part of Victor Hugo’s novel ‘Les Misérables’. We learn Bishop Bienvenu’s backstory. He becomes a bishop after being jilted and focuses on serving the wealthy while living in luxury himself. An encounter with a hermit, a former revolutionary, changes his life. They discuss social justice and love for all people. The bishop explains, “That man reconciled me to the world”. He gives up the bishop’s mansion to turn it into a hospital and serves those in financial poverty, living simply himself.

The character Jean Valjean is used to highlight how unjust systems corrupt people. He is imprisoned for five years with hard labour for stealing bread for hungry children and serves another 14 years for trying to escape. The brutality of the prison system in turn shifts Jean from kindness to brutality. Released on parole, he must show his papers as a released convict to authorities as he travels looking for work. The discrimination he experiences makes Jean even harder.

On a wet night, denied a room at the local tavern, Jean is taken in by Bishop Bienvenu with baffling kindness, given a meal and a bed. Bienvenu reminds Jean that God is his host everywhere and not to refuse what one might yet become. Jean repays the kindness by stealing the silverware and slipping away in the early morning. The police capture him and return him to the bishop, who thanks them but says the silverware was a gift to Jean. He also gives Jean the silver candlesticks. Bienvenu’s kindness causes an internal rehabilitation for Jean, who goes on to act with kindness and generosity to others.

‘Jean Valjean’ holds out the hope that kindness and compassion can lead to redemption. Victor Hugo’s criminal justice system is rigid, bureaucratic, cruel and vindictive. Meanwhile, mercy is radical. Grace refuses to play by society’s rules; it is not only disruptive, but it’s also dangerous to power-over structures.

By contrast, the Robin Hood in ‘The Death of Robin Hood’ is a mass murderer who has realised he has trapped himself in a cycle of lethal violence. After being wounded, a prioress nurses him back to health. He learns he murdered the husband and son of the prioress. The tale offers no redemption. Racked with guilt, Robin confesses his crimes to the prioress and then begs for her to help him take his own life. The script paints a bleak picture: some people are evil and beyond redemption, even when they realise their errors.

These assumptions play out in our society. Our assumptions about the nature of people and the causes of their behaviour will influence the kind of criminal justice system we seek.

Emeritus Professor Ross Homel has pointed out that the small group of teenagers responsible for serious violent offences are much more likely to have suffered serious trauma while growing up, including emotional, physical or sexual abuse, all kinds of neglect, household substance abuse or mental illness. Research shows that incarceration largely re-traumatizes these youths.

Getting serious about stopping serious repeat youth offenders means helping them to develop psychosocial maturity. That means helping them develop skills to control their impulses, weigh the consequences of their actions, consider others’ perspectives, delay gratification and resist peer pressure.

(Both ‘Jean Valjean’ and ‘The Death of Robin Hood’ are available on YouTube)



FAITHFUL FUTURES

work steps in WITH HOPE



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 shaped around five shared goals: Respecting Country, Coordinated Ministries, Intercultural Leadership, All-age Growth and New Communities of Faith.

Faithful Futures Project Lead Karen Roberts (pictured) explains that each goal has a corresponding Goal Group that will help to shape implementation of the goal through exploration, discussion and action.

"Some of the latest work of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee has been to invite people to participate in a Goal Group," Karen says.

"I'm pleased to report that we received an enthusiastic response to our call out for expressions of interest. The Steering Committee members are delighted by the breadth and variety of people responding, including diverse voices and people who have not previously been involved in a church committee at this level."

Karen advises that the Steering Committee has affirmed the Goal Group memberships and the first meetings have been arranged.

So, are there still opportunities to get involved?

"Yes! As we progress, there will be other ways for anyone interested to contribute, so if you feel passionate about a goal, please do get in touch."

"The team are also particularly keen to hear from more people aged 40 and under who would like to contribute to

bringing the Faithful Futures goals to life at a local level," Karen says.

"And everyone can take part, in your own way, by holding the Goal Groups in your prayers as they start meeting and embark on the next steps of the Faithful Futures journey."

To read more about Faithful Futures visit: victas.uca.org.au/faithful-futures/ and you can contact the Faithful Futures project team via FaithfulFutures@victas.uca.org.au or 03 9116 1472.



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**



Stepping in with EXPERTISE

Introducing additional members of the Faithful Futures Steering Committee.

Crosslight recently spoke with three members of the Steering Committee to learn about their experiences observing Faithful Futures in action.



REV TEMUKISA AMITUANA'I-VAELUAGA

Temukisa is the appointed member from the Presbytery of Port Phillip West on the Steering Committee. She is the Minister at Western Heights Uniting Church in Herne Hill, a suburb of Geelong.

How is Faithful Futures coming to life in your presbytery?

The Spirit is moving gently, swiftly and mysteriously in the life of the Port Phillip West Presbytery. It is doing so through its openness among the faithful in adopting and weaving together the strands of Faithful Futures that are already captured through the presbytery's 'Regenerating the Church' strategy. The presbytery strategy has specific focus on prioritising new and renewing communities, strengthening intercultural life, seizing the fresh opportunities provided by digital church, and collaborating with all-ages together in mission.

How have you seen the Faithful Futures goals in action already?

(We have seen) the intentional prioritising of intercultural and intergenerational resourcing of lay leaders. This is a strength that is witnessed through the first lay preachers' course facilitated bi-lingually to equip Samoan lay leadership across presbytery boundaries – with up to 11 accredited lay preachers in its first program.



'The Youth Connect' is another vibrant initiative by young leaders meeting monthly crossing presbytery and denominational boundaries to worship and celebrate their life and faith in Christ.

As you work with the Faithful Futures Steering Committee and see the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) come in, what inspires you about Faithful Futures?

That the Church (locally, presbytery, Synod) is taking ownership of the Faithful Futures goals. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways, including diverse members expressing interest to participate in the Goal Groups.

"THE SPIRIT IS MOVING GENTLY, SWIFTLY AND MYSTERIOUSLY IN THE LIFE OF THE PORT PHILLIP WEST PRESBYTERY."

**Rev Temukisa Amituana'i-Vaeluaga,
Minister at Western Heights Uniting Church**



REV SYLVIA AKAU'OLA TONGOTONGO

Sylvia is the appointed member from the Presbytery of Port Phillip East on the Steering Committee. She is the Minister at Toorak Uniting Church in Melbourne.

How is Faithful Futures coming to life in your presbytery? How have you seen the Faithful Futures goals in action already? As you work with the Faithful Futures Steering Committee and see the EOIs come in, what inspires you about Faithful Futures?

Faithful Futures is a living part of the anatomy of the organisational spirit and culture of Port Phillip East Presbytery. It's very much part of its vision, its mission, discipleship and operations.

Faithful Futures is witnessed through the leadership team: Presbytery ministers, chairperson and standing committee, collaboratively leading with clarity of purpose and direction with empathy for and understanding the needs of the congregations. Recently, the Presbytery invited Rev Dr Julian Hamilton from Ireland to lead a couple of seminars exploring how discipleship and mission inform one another, and how they might take shape across the congregations in our presbytery.

"FAITHFUL FUTURES IS INSPIRATIONAL AS A WAY THE CHURCH RE-DISCOVERS AND RECLAIMS ITS DNA."

Rev Sylvia Akau'ola Tongotongo, Minister at Toorak Uniting Church

Faithful Futures is inspirational as a way the Church re-discovers and reclaims its DNA. Our journey as 'Pilgrims of the Spirit' calls us to not only pick up our paddles and start rowing our canoe, but also to synchronise our paddles, for the rhythm of heading in the right direction. It's heartwarming to receive the expressions of interests for the Goal Groups.

DR DEAN SHIRLEY

Dean is the appointed member from the Presbytery of Loddon Mallee on the Steering Committee. He serves as Secretary of Bendigo Central and Axedale Uniting Church.

How is Faithful Futures coming to life in your presbytery?

Faithful Futures is creating learning in two directions. Loddon Mallee Presbytery is learning with other presbyteries about how to discern and share a direction for the whole Church. At the same time, it is asking what Loddon Mallee's experience of being the Church in dispersed, ageing, rural and regional communities can offer the wider Synod.

"FAITHFUL FUTURES INSPIRES ME BECAUSE IT GIVES THE CHURCH COURAGE AND FREEDOM TO IMAGINE FORMS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY THAT CANNOT BE PRESCRIBED IN ADVANCE."

Dr Dean Shirley, Secretary of Bendigo Central and Axedale Uniting Church

How have you seen the Faithful Futures goals in action already?

We are beginning to see congregations drawn to the All-Age Growth goal through the possibility of renewing dormant relationships between congregations and their surrounding communities; relationships that often remain active in other dimensions of community life such as sport, social organisations and commerce.

As you work with the Faithful Futures Steering Committee and see the EOIs come in, what inspires you about Faithful Futures?

Faithful Futures inspires me because it gives the Church courage and freedom to imagine forms of Christian community that cannot be prescribed in advance but must emerge through faithful engagement with particular places and people. Its greatest promise is not that it already has the answers, but that it may help the Church discover them together, including possibilities that could only emerge through the life and witness of local communities.

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



From teacher to PREACHER

Almost 20 years after beginning theological study, Silvia Yang has been commissioned as a Korean lay preacher – a milestone in a journey across teaching, migration, multicultural ministry and women’s leadership.

By Marina Williams

When Dr Heejeong ‘Silvia’ Yang was commissioned as a lay preacher at the Korean Church of Melbourne in August, she knelt surrounded by ministers and mentors who had supported her through almost two decades of theological formation and church service. Members of her eight-women cell group watched in tears.

The moment was significant not only for Silvia. For many in the congregation, the service also introduced the Uniting Church role of lay preacher – a ministry unfamiliar in Korean church tradition.

“This commissioning is not an ending but a beginning,” Silvia says. “My journey from teaching to preaching has only just begun.”

For Silvia, the milestone connects directly with questions she was asking a decade ago about the place of women in Korean churches.

In 2016, she told Crosslight that Korean women were highly active in congregational life but could have limited opportunities in areas such as preaching. She says women remain central to church life, but that contribution does not always translate into leadership or decision-making.

“Many women of my generation were taught that faithfulness meant being obedient, serving quietly and supporting others rather than speaking publicly or exercising leadership,” Silvia says.

“My hope is that future generations will see leadership not through the lens of gender, but through the lens of calling and gifts.”

Silvia’s own call to preaching took years to emerge.

She began a Master of Divinity at

Whitley College in 2007, studying one subject a semester and completing the degree in 2014.

That year she received a scholarship to attend a women’s leadership program at the Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey in Switzerland. On the final day, 33 women from around the world shared their stories and hopes.

Silvia recalls saying at the time that her life in Australia would move “from teaching to preaching”.

The words stayed with her, but preaching did not immediately follow. Instead, she became more involved in Synod committees and multicultural church life while continuing her career in education.

Then, while walking the final stages of the Camino de Santiago in 2022, the phrase returned.

“THIS COMMISSIONING IS NOT AN ENDING BUT A BEGINNING. MY JOURNEY FROM TEACHING TO PREACHING HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN.”

Lay preacher Silvia Yang

“I had been asking God what ministry He was preparing for the next season of my life,” Silvia says.

As she walked and prayed, she became convinced preaching was that ministry. On the same day, Korean Church of Melbourne minister Rev Han Song sent a text asking if she would preach to the Sunday School the following January.

“For the first time, there was no hesitation,” she says. “I simply replied, ‘Yes.’”

Becoming a lay preacher still required formation in worship, preaching, the Uniting Church and the Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers. Having spent most of her Christian life in Korean-speaking congregations, Silvia says learning Uniting Church worship traditions was a challenge.

Her preaching also draws on more than three decades as an educator and 14 years working in broadcasting in Korea. She now teaches Spanish language and Latin American Studies at the University of Melbourne.

“Teaching focuses on understanding and knowledge, while preaching involves prayerfully listening to God’s Word and proclaiming it in a way that invites people to encounter God in their own lives,” she says.

Her experience of migration and living between cultures also informs that ministry.

Born in South Korea, Silvia moved with her family to Paraguay in 1975, aged 12, before returning to Korea for university. Her elder sister had settled in Melbourne and joined the Korean Church of Melbourne in 1979.

While living in Korea, Silvia became concerned about the intense competition surrounding secondary education. In 2001, she sent her eldest daughter to school in Melbourne; her younger daughter followed two years later. Silvia later joined them and made Melbourne home, while her husband continues to live in Korea.

Crossing countries, languages and

Silvia Yang and Korean National Conference chairperson Rev Kevin Kim at Silvia's commissioning as a lay preacher in August.

denominations has also influenced how she communicates.

"You cannot simply speak; you must learn to listen, adapt and build bridges," she says.

Silvia wants her preaching to be accessible across cultures and generations. She is particularly conscious of second and third-generation Korean Australians, and believes Korean churches need to consider how inherited cultural traditions can adapt if younger generations are to remain engaged.

A turning point in her wider church involvement came when she attended a Uniting Church women's conference in Adelaide and worshipped alongside women from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

"For most of my Christian life, my faith community was almost entirely Korean," she says.

The experience expanded her sense of the "wider church" and prompted her to create similar opportunities for Korean women. In 2016, Silvia organised the Uniting Korean Women's Forum.

In 2018, she also led a Contextual



Silvia Yang and Rev Jay Robinson at the commissioning service in August.

Learning for the Next Gen program to South Korea, focused on mutual relationships, respect and learning about different ministry contexts.

A decade later, she says four women who attended the 2016 forum have become ministers – three in the Uniting Church and one in the Baptist tradition.

Silvia now wants to explore how Korean cultural traditions and the Gospel interact, particularly for women and

younger generations. For her, the commissioning is about more than one new role: it can also open conversations about who is called to preach, who participates in decision-making and how a Korean diaspora church can honour its traditions while adapting for the future.

The impact was apparent almost immediately after the commissioning service.

A woman in her 30s who had only recently joined the congregation messaged Silvia to say she had arrived unaware a commissioning was taking place but left feeling as though she had received "a gift" herself.

What moved her, Silvia says, was not simply the commissioning but the

story behind it – 35 years as an educator and almost 20 years preparing for ministry.

The message helped Silvia see that the significance of the day might extend beyond becoming a lay preacher.

"God does not waste any part of our lives," she says.

"We do not always see the whole picture. We simply take the next faithful step and trust God with the rest."



The strange beauty of PREACHING

Theologian, author and Pilgrim Theological College lecturer Rev Dr Sally Douglas was a guest speaker at the recent National Lay Preachers' Conference, reflecting on the personal God who calls to each one of us by name and what this might mean for our preaching.

There is a great deal that is odd about Christian faith. Sometimes we forget this. Here is one example. In popular imagination the dominant image of 'God' is a fearsome, unpredictable Zeus figure, perched on a cloud with thunder and lightning. However, this is not the God that we give our trust to. The God we trust in as Christians is not aloof, nor does our God have to be placated or bribed. In contrast we give our trust to a personal God: God in Community, God in Three Persons, Holy Mystery, Holy Word, Holy Spirit. Not only this, we proclaim that this God in Community chooses to dwell with us in person in the Word made flesh (John 1:1-18).

That is, we dare to proclaim that God chooses to walk towards us in person in Jesus, wading into our joy and suffering, bearing life beyond dreaming.

The personal does not stop here. We also proclaim that through the Spirit this personal God is calling each of us by name to join in with the work, nudging us forward to share our gifts. The 'Basis of Union' expresses this elegantly: "the one Spirit has endowed members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and there is no gift without its corresponding service" (Para 13).

One of the many ways in which people share their gifts in the Uniting Church is in responding to the call of

God to become lay preachers. Thanks be to God for lay preachers who accept this sacred call in the Church, engage with formal study and participate in ongoing learning as they share their gifts. I recently had the honour of meeting with lay preachers from around Australia, many of whom had travelled huge distances, in Naarm (Melbourne) for the National Lay Preachers' Conference.

At the gathering I reflected on this personal God who calls to each one of us by name and what this might mean for our preaching. I shared my conviction that preaching is unlike anything else. Preaching is not

Rev Dr Sally Douglas says preaching remains a sacred, relational practice that cannot be reduced to information sharing or efficiency.
Image: Nicole Cleary

simply about conveying information or teaching. Preaching is not like running a bible study, offering political commentary, or a lecture on theology. In a world of soundbites, influencers and rants, preaching is a call to do something very different. Preaching is vulnerable and relational. Preaching emerges from our personal God, calling specific people to share a distinct word with particular people. Trusting that the Spirit is at work and that our sacred texts still speak into the messy realities of life, preaching is this holy responsibility in which a “word moment” is able to emerge.

In asserting that preaching is personal, I am not suggesting that we can get up and say whatever comes to mind at the pulpit. When people turn up for worship they are giving their most precious gift, their time and attention. People deserve that preachers, lay and

ordained, have worked thoroughly to prepare. In order to engage seriously with this kind of preaching, preparation needs to include wrestling with the biblical text and our questions, engaging with theologies from around the globe, reflecting on what is happening in our beautiful, broken world and listening for the movement of the Spirit. Whenever I

relationship with the Source of all. This is why authentic preaching cannot be outsourced to AI. This is why authentic preaching cannot be about downloading someone else’s sermon from the internet and pretending it is our own. Each preacher is called to bring their whole clunky self to the Living God, to stand close to the fire

(possibly get burnt), and to tell about it, inviting people into the mystery.

In a world that is increasingly captive to plastic, easy answers and the idol

of efficiency, may we continue to hold to the strange beauty of preaching. May we dare to carve out time for the unseen work of being in relationship with the personal God, the Holy One-Sacred Three, pouring over ancient biblical texts, wrestling with theology, attending to the world around us and listening for how the Spirit is calling us to speak to her precious people. 🙏

"IN A WORLD THAT IS INCREASINGLY CAPTIVE TO PLASTIC, EASY ANSWERS AND THE IDOL OF EFFICIENCY, MAY WE CONTINUE TO HOLD TO THE STRANGE BEAUTY OF PREACHING."

Rev Dr Sally Douglas

prepare for preaching, after reading the set biblical passages I pray: “What do you want me to say to this group of people dear God?”. And then I try and shut up and listen.

Unlike other speaking tasks, preaching is not about being perfect or performative, or having all of the answers. Preaching emerges from the particularity of being in dynamic



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Uniting

Project opens **CHURCH TO ALL**

When St Michael's Uniting Church members wanted to make their place of worship fully accessible to all, they knew only a major revitalisation project would fit the bill. Four years later, they have a building that truly welcomes everyone.

By Andrew Humphries

St Michael's Uniting Church on Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD has a long and proud history, calling people to worship for almost 160 years.

An extensive revitalisation project, which was marked with an official opening in August, means the church is now set up perfectly for another 160 years.

Church Council Chair Laura Beckett says the revitalisation project emerged following extensive discussions in 2022 among the congregation, Church Council and minister Rev Margaret Mayman about the sort of church they wanted to be a part of.

The answer that came back was a place of worship that was welcoming, affirming and inclusive to all.

With that aim came the realisation that any church congregation promoting itself that way had to offer a building which matched their ambition.

"The reality was that anyone with any sort of disability found it difficult to navigate their way around the church," Laura says.

"We realised that, in fact, we were not welcoming to all because people with a disability were not able to fully participate in the life of the church.

"So, while we had this mission around offering radical hospitality, we weren't

able to be true to that mission."

The conversation then shifted to considering what making the church safe for people of all abilities would entail.

"That discussion progressed into the knowledge that to achieve our mission we would have to make significant changes to the church," Laura says.

Once the congregation decided to go down that path, the green light was given to an extensive revitalisation project.

"IT TOOK FOUR YEARS, WITH A FEW HICCUPS ALONG THE WAY, BUT WE NOW HAVE A MAGNIFICENT CHURCH WHICH WELCOMES EVERYBODY."

Church Council Chair Laura Beckett

Project work began in August last year, after the final service in the church was held on July 20, and congregation members then moved to the church hall for ongoing worship.

The project involved levelling off a large central section of the otherwise steep floor and making it accessible without steps, the installation of



Church Council Chair Laura Beckett at the August 2 official reopening.
Image: Greg Ford



A service on August 2 marked the official reopening of the revitalised St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne's CBD. Image: Greg Ford



gender-neutral bathroom facilities inside, rebuilding the organ console and refurbishing pipes on the grand organ, updating assistive listening, and installing improved heating, lighting, audio and critical facilities encouraging greater sustainability and reliability.

Laura says part of the work was funded thanks to a significant bequest from long-time congregation member Dorothy Claire Harvey-Kelly.

"Financially we were in a strong position to realise our ambition of creating a welcoming space for all," she says.

Continued P26

(from left) Moderator Rev Salesi Faupula, Rev Deacon Dr Andy Calder, Rev Will Pickett and Rev David Fotheringham at St Michael's. Image: Greg Ford



A large crowd embraced the opportunity to attend the official reopening of St Michael's on August 2.
Image: Greg Ford

"We celebrated Christmas in the church hall, and I found it was a really good time, a bit like spending time in the wilderness where we had a particular way of bonding together as a congregation ahead of this move back into the new space," David says.

"The revitalisation really represents a new chapter for us, and there is a huge amount of potential for St Michael's as a growing and inclusive congregation.

"There are a whole range of people I can see us engaging with, and a great opportunity for the congregation to grow."

Laura says the changes made during the project met the congregation's brief perfectly.

"In fact, it went over and above the brief, and we now have a warmer and more inviting space, which is a lovely place to be in for the congregation," she says.

"The end result is that we feel, as a congregation, that we are properly fulfilling that mission of being an inclusive and welcoming church for all." 🌟

From P25

"It took four years, with a few hiccups along the way, but we now have a magnificent church which welcomes everybody."

Laura says congregation members ensured worship in the hall felt just as meaningful as worship in the church itself.

"We moved the piano, altar and other items from the church into the hall and were able to create this beautiful place of worship," she says.

St Michael's supply minister Rev David Fotheringham says the project's completion opens a new chapter for the congregation.

David commenced as supply minister in December last year, after the revitalisation project had begun and worship had moved to the church hall.

He said that rather than be seen as an annoyance, the move to the hall had, in many ways, brought the congregation closer together.

Embracing worship SINCE 1866

The original chapel at St Michael's was built in 1839 and was the first permanent building constructed expressly as a church in the Port Phillip Settlement.

The church was founded by Congregationalists (also known as Independents), and the chapel served the townsfolk and the farming community in the vicinity.

The first chapel was demolished in 1866 to make way for the church building that exists today.

The church was designed by Joseph Reed who also designed the Melbourne Town Hall and Melbourne Exhibition Building. The church is classified by the National Trust with the highest heritage rating.

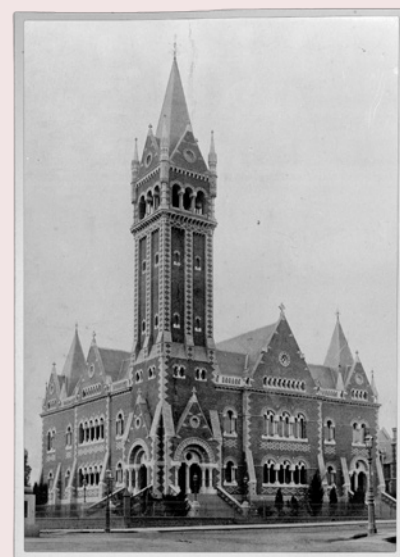
The design of the church reflects Reed's admiration for the Lombardic

style – the polychrome brickwork exterior, open cloisters on the side of the building and Romanesque arches.

The interior of the church was strongly influenced by the minister of the day, Rev Henderson's request for a setting in which all members of the congregation could both hear and see the preacher. The result is an interior very reminiscent of a theatre.

Many of the materials used in the construction of the church walls are materials normally used for houses, shops and factories, rather than major churches. This includes multi-coloured bricks from Hawthorn and cast iron for the pillars and gallery.

The stained-glass windows were created by artist Klaus Zimmer and installed on the ground floor of the church in 1988.



The Independent Church, Collins Street, 1875-1880. Image courtesy of St Michael's Archives.

The windows tell of each person's journey and the journey of humanity. From the experience of aloneness, alienation and questioning, they move along several pathways to the symbolic gateway of the New Jerusalem.

Information courtesy of St Michael's Uniting Church website. 🌟



Charman Uniting Church members are excited about what lies ahead after the redevelopment of the church. Image: Alan Moyle

Charman congregation CELEBRATES OPENING

A significant redevelopment of Charman Uniting Church in Cheltenham was celebrated last month, opening an exciting new chapter for the congregation.

By Andrew Humphries

While an official reopening last month marked the completion of a major renovation of Charman Uniting Church, minister Rev Greg Fry believes it's just the start of an exciting journey for the congregation.

The congregation celebrated the opening of the church's revamped headquarters in Cheltenham at a ceremony on September 20.

Charman Uniting Church represents the coming together of four distinct congregations from Cheltenham, Mentone, Herald Street and Black Rock.

Herald Street Uniting Church and Cheltenham Methodist Church formed a joint Cheltenham Church Council in 2000. The Cheltenham and Mentone congregations began worship together in 2014, before joining together with the Black Rock congregation in 2023, after a strong bond was formed during a period when the Black Rock congregation hosted them as construction work took place on the Charman Road church.

As part of the transition, the mission centre at Black Rock was sold, marking a new chapter as the combined congregations held their inaugural worship service at the Charman Road site in May this year.

The redevelopment at Charman Road has created a unique opportunity to have restored and relocated significant stained glass from the Black Rock church building to the new mission

centre, blending new features, refurbished elements and cherished existing pieces to achieve a versatile, multi-functional space.

Greg says the result is a place of worship which holds particular significance for congregation members.

He says while there was an option to knock the existing two buildings down and begin a new development from scratch, he is glad the congregation's decision was to repurpose those existing buildings.

"The redevelopment using the existing buildings has allowed us to go on a journey and grow into a new future," Greg says.

"It's a journey based around dwelling, discerning and exploring, and redeveloping the old buildings allowed us to grow into seeing what the buildings could be in the future.

"I think that whole process has actually shaped us, and having a mix of the old and new allows us to celebrate our history and the flexibility to move into the future.

"I don't know that we would have had that insight if we were designing a new building from scratch."

Greg says the new headquarters now offer a place of connection for people in the community.



Charman Uniting Church minister Rev Greg Fry, Moderator Rev Salesi Faupula, pastor Di Paterson and Presbytery of Port Phillip East chairperson David Higham at the opening on September 20. Image: Alan Moyle

Diversity, community and **CONNECTION**

Zimbabwe-born minister Rev Liena Hoffman is a strong advocate for building both multicultural and interfaith communities in the north-west of Tasmania.

By Andrew Humphries

At a time when recent events in Australia have created fear and division, north-west Tasmanian Uniting Church congregations are working hard towards bringing all parts of their community together.

Led by minister Rev Liena Hoffman, the strong message being promoted by the Cradle Coast Uniting Church group cluster of congregations is that social cohesion is possible when community members embrace the benefits of diversity.

It's not an easy message for some people to hear, though, as several recent online incidents relating to the region's Muslim community illustrate.

When north-western Tasmanian Member of Parliament (for Braddon) Roger Jaensch joined the gathering to farewell departing emergency doctor and Iman, Ahmed Hassan and his family, the photo and article posted on Mr Jaensch's Facebook page received some negative comments.

Liena and members of the Devonport, Burnie Regional, Penguin and Wynyard congregations are determined to ensure that such reactions become less frequent as community connection continues to grow.

Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Liena

has always been a strong advocate for both multicultural and interfaith communities.

She says fear of the unknown is often what drives tension between people of different cultures and faiths.

"The reality is, though, that there is nothing to fear," she says.

"Other people may worship differently to us, and that is a fact we should be comfortable with."

It's why Liena is one of the driving forces behind a gathering next month aimed at bringing the wider community together.

It's hoped the November 7 interfaith lunch in Devonport will be a catalyst for improving social cohesion in the region.

"OTHER PEOPLE MAY WORSHIP DIFFERENTLY TO US, AND THAT IS A FACT WE SHOULD BE COMFORTABLE WITH."

Rev Liena Hoffman

"At a time when global and local misunderstandings can isolate people, this open and vulnerable dialogue between different faiths will serve as a vital step toward building a community where everyone feels a profound sense of safety and belonging," the invitation to the event states.

"By bringing everyday citizens together with advocacy groups, we want to move past passive tolerance and equip our community with practical

tools to actively combat discrimination, allowing north-west Tasmania to lead by example and set a powerful precedent for regional harmony."

The November 7 event is one of a number of initiatives, made possible thanks to a grant from the Tasmanian Government, aimed at promoting social cohesion in the Cradle Coast region.

"The purpose is to encourage people to make friends with their neighbours, and particularly Islamic people, and to get to know and embrace them," Liena says.

The State Government grant will also fund the creation of a video in which members of the community, including those of Islamic faith, share their stories and highlight what brings them together in a spirit of cooperation.

As a leader within the Uniting Church, Liena says she has a responsibility to encourage the sort of conversations that lead to a stronger and more united community.

A well-known quote from South African bishop and theologian, Desmond Tutu, sums up Liena's approach.

"Desmond Tutu famously said 'I am a good ecumenical because I am a good Anglican,'" Liena says.

"Well, I'm a good interfaith leader because I'm a good Christian, and I believe if we have confidence and

Rev Liena Hoffman (left) and North-west Tasmania Islamic Association vice-president Astri Kirkland are working together to build social cohesion in the region.

comfort in our own faith, and we don't feel threatened by another faith, then we should promote interfaith dialogue and respect people of another faith.

"As a leader I should be encouraging conversations and actions that promote this.

"Sometimes that conversation or action starts with a cuppa and, from that, great friendships are built."

As motivation, Liena only needs to reflect on Jesus' exhortation to "Love your neighbour as yourself" and "Do to others as you would have them do to you".

"We are called, not only to know our neighbour, but to be a good neighbour, and part of our role as Christians is to say it's not okay for somebody else to abuse somebody because of their faith or because of the way they dress or because of the way they look," Liena says.

"Let us be those good neighbours, opening ourselves up to conversations that promote respect and cohesion." 🌍



Tasmanian Presbytery stands with **MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

In early September, the Presbytery Standing Committee of the Presbytery of Tasmania issued a statement following incidents which had impacted the Muslim community.

The Uniting Church stands with people of all faiths, cultures and backgrounds. We affirm the dignity of every person and reject all forms of racial and religious abuse.

We are particularly concerned by recent expressions of Islamophobia in Tasmania, including online threats and damage to Islamic community and worship spaces. We stand in solidarity with Muslim communities who have been affected.

At the same time, we reject all forms of racial and religious hatred, including

antisemitism, wherever they occur.

These harm individuals and communities and have no place in our society. These actions are contrary to the values of love, justice and respect that faith in God calls us to uphold.

In the parable of the good Samaritan in the Bible, Jesus chose a Samaritan as the example of the neighbour who showed compassion, reminding us that neighbourliness crosses boundaries of ethnicity, religion and social identity. In a time when divisions exist between different religious and cultural groups,

kindness and mercy are values that will encourage harmony and respect in communities. The Samaritan saw a person in need and responded with care, generosity and courage. Jesus invited his followers to do the same.

As Christians, Jesus calls us to be good neighbours to all. We are called to stand alongside those who experience racism or religious vilification and to help build communities where everyone is safe, valued and respected. In doing so, we reflect God's love for all people. 🌍

The gifts that KEEP GIVING

High Street (Frankston) and Ringwood and Heathmont Uniting Church congregations have been tireless supporters of the people of Timor Leste, embracing the call to make a positive contribution to one of Australia's nearest neighbours.

By Andrew Humphries

In 2010, school teacher Tim Lake was asked whether he was interested in taking a group of Beacons Hills College students to Timor Leste.

Tim said yes and the trip had such a profound impact on him that he has been back 14 times since then.

The High Street Uniting Church (Frankston) congregation member says that first trip turned his life upside down, in the best possible way.

In the 16 years that have followed, Tim has become a staunch advocate for a country that had seen more than its share of conflict before gaining independence in 2002.

"The people there are amazing and incredibly happy to be independent and free, and that is something that just rubs off on you," he says.

"During that first trip we had this amazing five or six days in that community, living in the middle of it and attending school every day and getting to know the people.

"It just blew me away pretty much."

Ringwood and Heathmont Uniting Church members have also established a strong connection with the people of Timor Leste, through a partnership with Hosanna Church in Dili which began in 2010.

Apart from a number of years impacted by Covid-19 restrictions on travel, members from Ringwood-

Heathmont and Hosanna have visited each other every year on a reciprocal basis.

Hosanna Church members visited Melbourne last year, while Ringwood and Heathmont members were scheduled to spend a week in Dili last month.

Ringwood-Heathmont congregation member Lyndal Greenwood has made the trip a number of times and says the congregation greatly values the strong rapport it has established with Hosanna Church.

She says creating a partnership that is based on self-determination and empowerment is an important part of the connection established with Hosanna members.

"Seeing the development of Timor Leste since 2010 has been an amazing experience," Lyndal says.

"I HAVE A VIEW THAT AS A CHURCH, WE SHOULD BE DOING THINGS LOCALLY, BUT WE SHOULD ALSO BE LOOKING EXTERNALLY, TO BROADER WORLDS."

Lyndal Greenwood



Tim Lake (back left) with other High Street congregation members and villagers in Timor Leste.

"Over time a level of trust and a real relationship have been developed, which is really lovely."

It's a sentiment shared by Tim, who estimates he has taken about 10 groups of students from Beacons Hills, and more recently Cornish College, to Timor Leste and relishes the opportunity to witness what each one takes from the experience.

"In 95 per cent of the cases the students have an amazing time," he says.

"What I have really enjoyed is taking students from fairly well-off middle-class backgrounds in Australia to Timor Leste and seeing the positive impact the experience has on them."

Tim again travelled to Timor Leste in June this year but this time, instead of students, he took with him a group of Frankston congregation members.

The trip was an opportunity to show the group what their ongoing support for Timor Leste meant to its people.



Since 2011, Tim says the congregation has raised about \$40,000 for the people of Timor Leste.

“This year I said to these friends of mine, ‘you’ve been helping me support all these people over there and I’ve talked about it until I’m blue in the face, so how about we take a trip and you can experience it all yourself,’” he says.

“Eight of us went over and it was a chance for them to get to meet and know the people who they’d been supporting.

“The first person we supported is now a mum of three kids, and the second one we supported was her brother, who is now a policeman in the village he grew up in. We’ve also supported a doctor, a mid-wife, and a nurse through their studies.

“What I wanted was for my group to meet as many, if not all, of the people that we’ve been supporting over the last 15 years.

“I contacted them all and said, ‘hey,

Continued P32



High Street congregation member Kerry and Minda meet for the first time after spending many hours together on Zoom as Kerry taught English to Minda.



(Left image) High Street congregation member Matthew works with a group of students at Railaco English Language Study Centre. (Right image) Rev Lucas Taylor praying with a Hosanna Church member who had a stroke and was unable to leave his living quarters.

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how about you come together for an afternoon tea? We'll book out this little restaurant, provide some afternoon tea and we just want you to come along and meet the people that have been supporting you'.

"So they met face to face the people whose names I had been mentioning for years and years, and it was a wonderful afternoon where we were able to celebrate our relationship."

Lyndal says the story of the good Samaritan often resonates with her when she thinks of what the connection formed with Hosanna Church means in terms of her faith.

"It's a story that has stuck with me right through childhood, and it's something that I think of when reflecting on what we've established with our friends in Timor Leste," she says.

"For me it's always about looking out

for others and displaying compassion and support for them.

"I have a view that as a church, we should be doing things locally, but we should also be looking externally, to broader worlds.

"This partnership, for me, was a really great opportunity to join in to that and to learn about another culture, and to see how people manage their faith, particularly faith in adversity, which

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Tim Lake isn't looking for a pat on the back for the work he and others have carried out in helping one of Australia's nearest neighbours.

As far as he is concerned, it's all about offering a hand to those in need, heeding the biblical command to love thy neighbour.

"Part of the reason for telling the story is because there's a hell of a lot of need over there and Australia has a unique, and complicated, relationship with Timor Leste," he says.

"(Because of that history) I think we have a bit of a responsibility to one of our closest neighbours to do whatever we can to support them."

That support has come in many ways over the years.

One example Tim highlights occurred about a year after his first visit to Timor Leste, when he was approached by a retired water engineer and his wife, a retired school principal, who were looking for a project to get their teeth into.

"I had just visited a small and remote village outside Dili which had no water supply apart from a natural spring about 3km away, meaning the village's children had to walk to the spring before starting school to fill up plastic bottles with water," Tim says.

"I invited this couple to visit the

village and see what they could do to help, and that started off a train of events which resulted in a proper water supply being established to the school, and a number of other points in the village.

"So in one year the village had water and toilets put on and the government provided electricity, so that village was transformed."

It's just one example of many, says Tim, illustrating the commitment to the people of Timor Leste.

"It's about continuing strong friendships with the people we have a relationship with, and doing what we can to improve their lives," he says. 

Ringwood and Heathmont UC members Lyndal Greenwood (second from left), Kerry Gosbell (far left) and minister Rev Lucas Taylor (second from right) with Hosanna Church members.

many people in Timor Leste have experienced.

"It's our faith that connects us, and it's been a real privilege to be able to participate in that with the people of Timor Leste and to learn from them."

Tim says he is rewarded in many ways every time he visits Timor Leste.

"It's a gift that keeps on giving and one that works both ways," he says.

"We go over there and offer our support, but the gift that gets given back to us is often greater than the gift that we have given.

"I get so much out of it because I know that we're helping the country's people, and it just makes me feel really positive and hopeful about life."

Lyndal hopes the connection with Hosanna Church, and the people of

Timor Leste, will continue for many years, representing an inspiring example of a faith-based partnership in action.

"It's been a wonderful thing to establish friendships and connections that continue over the years," she says.

"HELPING IS REFLECTED IN THAT SENSE OF BEING CALLED, ANSWERING THAT CALL AND THEN DOING SOMETHING."

Tim Lake

"Because we have been friends for so long, it does feel like we're just picking up from where we have left off each time we meet.

"The people of Timor Leste continue to inspire us."

Every time he visits Timor Leste, Tim sees proof of God's grace in action.

"It's a story about the hope that

comes through in people who have been through incredible adversity," he says.

"Every Timorese person over there has a story to tell about how difficult times have affected them but, despite that, they are incredibly positive and hopeful about the future.

"It's a hard and difficult road for them, but they are really working their guts out to try and make a

better life for themselves and for their country.

"For me as a Christian, helping is reflected in that sense of being called, answering that call and then doing something.

"It's very much a part of my faith to respond to the need that I see over there and God is in the midst of it all." 🙏

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Faith, friendship and **A CHANGING CHURCH**

Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood and Rev Bruce Barber met in 1948 and were ordained together 18 years later. This October, they mark 60 years since ordination.

By Marina Williams



D'Arcy Wood and Bruce Barber met at Wesley College in Melbourne in 1948, when D'Arcy was 11 and Bruce 10.

When the form teacher read out Bruce's surname, D'Arcy wondered if his new classmate was the son of Rev Professor Calvert Barber, who taught theology at Queen's College.

He was. Bruce had grown up on the college grounds, surrounded by theological students he admired.

"In a room of 30 boys, I happened by chance to take a seat in front of D'Arcy," Bruce recalls.

They were often in different classes but stayed friends. D'Arcy sometimes holidayed with the Barber family. Bruce was best man when D'Arcy married Janet in 1961, and D'Arcy later played the

organ at Bruce and Leonie's wedding.

Their paths into ministry differed.

D'Arcy grew up immersed in Sunday School, youth group and choir. He first felt called to ministry at 16 but waited until 1958 to offer as a candidate. Professor Colin Williams later encouraged him to undertake doctoral studies at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Bruce's own direction became clearer in 1955 through a Student Christian Movement study group, where he encountered Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'The Cost of Discipleship'.

"It was a stunning experience," he recalls.

Later, while working for an oil company, Bruce read and reread

Bonhoeffer's 'Letters and Papers from Prison', becoming, he says, "something of a theological student before becoming one officially". His call to ministry grew from wanting to share those questions with his own generation.

Ministry became part of their conversations during theological training.

"I don't remember Bruce and I discussing the ordained ministry when we were young," D'Arcy says. "But during theological training, in residence together with other candidates, discussions about the Bible, preaching and our future in Methodist Circuit ministry were frequent."

Before ordination, Bruce spent nearly three years studying in Europe and



Rev Bruce Barber



Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood

America, returning to Australia in mid-1965 to undertake two three-month placements in Kew and Burwood, replacing ministers on long-service leave.

Both were 29 when ordained at Wesley Church in Melbourne in October 1966. D'Arcy recalls 26 ordinands at the service, during what he describes as a "boom time" for the Methodist Church. They are the only two ministers from that ordination group still living.

"I felt I was at last embarking on my life's work and had the blessing of my family and the Church," D'Arcy says.

D'Arcy's father, Rev Dr Harold Wood, a Methodist minister and former missionary in Tonga, joined local minister Rev Stan Weeks in laying hands

"I FELT I WAS AT LAST EMBARKING ON MY LIFE'S WORK AND HAD THE BLESSING OF MY FAMILY AND THE CHURCH."

Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood

on him. Bruce's father, Rev Professor Calvert Barber, also participated, nine months before his death.

Bruce's future wife Leonie was in the congregation, although they did not meet until two months later.

After ordination, their ministries took them in different directions.

D'Arcy says parish ministry "book-

ended" his working life. He began in the Ballarat South Methodist Circuit, later serving City Church Canberra and Bentleigh Uniting Church.

The Ballarat appointment carried a family connection. His great-grandfather, Rev Theophilus Taylor, had been the first Wesleyan Methodist minister appointed to Ballarat.

"It was during the gold rush, and he lived in a tent," D'Arcy says. "A little over 100 years later I took up ministry in a small part of the large circuit he served. His ministry was brief, as he died at age 29."

Between parish appointments, D'Arcy taught theology at Parkin-Wesley Theological College in Adelaide for 15 years and worked in liturgy and church

Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood and Rev Bruce Barber celebrated their 50th anniversary of ordination in 2016.

From P35

"D'ARCY HAS BEEN THE TEAM'S RUCKMAN, PRESENT AT EVERY BOUNCE. I, ON THE OTHER HAND, MAY PERHAPS HAVE BEEN A WINGMAN ATTEMPTING TO ROVE THE BOUNDARY."

Rev Bruce Barber

music. He later served as Moderator of the South Australian Synod, president of the Australian Council of Churches and President of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Bruce's appointments also included Frankston-Karingal, a theology lectureship and college chaplaincy in Perth, North Melbourne Mission and the United Faculty of Theology, where he was Dean until retiring in 2001.

He describes that role as "a ministerial role of unprecedented privilege".

Their ministries often kept them in different states, but their Church work repeatedly brought them together.

"Whenever we did meet it was very easy to take up the friendship again," D'Arcy says. "We have always seemed to understand each other very well."

They collaborated as examiners for the Melbourne College of Divinity and later held complementary national roles in the Uniting Church, D'Arcy in liturgy and Bruce in doctrine and church polity.

"My wife Janet even did a theology course with him at one stage," D'Arcy says.

He admires Bruce's theological ability and his "probing and somewhat restless faith".

Bruce reaches for a football analogy to describe their different approaches.

"D'Arcy has been the team's ruckman, present at every bounce," he says. "I, on the other hand, may perhaps have been a wingman attempting to rove the boundary."

Their long friendship and ministries



have also given them a view of how the Church's place in Australian life has shifted.

"The Church has changed greatly since 1966," D'Arcy says. "We are a smaller denomination. Society generally takes less notice of what we do and think."

Candidates for ministry are also generally older than in the 1960s, "which is not a bad thing", he says. "They have life experience."

"WHENEVER WE DID MEET IT WAS VERY EASY TO TAKE UP THE FRIENDSHIP AGAIN. WE HAVE ALWAYS SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER VERY WELL."

Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood

Bruce sees 1966, in hindsight, as the end of a period of relative stability and apparent flourishing for the churches. At Frankston, he regularly conducted three Sunday services and a fourth each month, even as social changes were beginning to reshape congregational life.

Bruce says that shared concern extends to the national Church bodies in which they served.

"I think it to be true that we both lament the disappearance of these fundamental bodies in later decades of the life of the Church," Bruce says.

He says subsequent decades have borne out what he describes as Bonhoeffer's warning that "the age

of religion" is over. The continuing challenge, Bruce adds, is how to speak about Christian faith in a society increasingly identifying with no religion.

In 2000, D'Arcy and Janet retired to Gisborne, moving to nearby Riddells Creek in 2015.

"We have found the Gisborne congregation, and others in the Macedon Ranges, to be very supportive," he says.

On Sunday, October 18, the Gisborne congregation and other churches in the Macedon Ranges Partnership will mark D'Arcy's 60th anniversary of ordination.

Bruce and Leonie, who live in Ascot Vale, will be in Brisbane with immediate family.

"The timing is such that we couldn't negotiate dates," Bruce says. "So we will try to remember the date up there."

D'Arcy, who turns 90 several weeks later, says he feels fortunate to have conducted worship and served the Church for so long.

"Over the years my faith has only strengthened."

Bruce looks back with a similar sense of gratitude.

"This anniversary brings home to me the fact that my whole life has been one of unmitigated privilege," he says. "I have wanted for nothing, and I have been offered everything."

Rev Ian Turnnidge Fairfield Uniting Church

One of the best things about working together in ministry is the opportunity to help one another. At Fairfield Uniting Church (St Andrews) we keep in step with our neighbours in Banyule, Brunswick and Northcote.

If any of these neighbouring churches are doing something we can join in with, we will promote it with joy. Being connected means that a relaxed conversation at the Cafe of Dangerous Ideas at Heidelberg's Sycamore Tree cafe opened up an opportunity for sharing excess resources.

When the Aden Crescent Uniting Church of the Banyule network closed, they shared many resources with neighbour churches. Here at Fairfield, our ministry was crippled by the need to replace the existing kitchen, but without the funds to make it happen alone. Rosanna Uniting Church offered us their kitchen cabinetry. With that in hand, we contacted our Presbytery Property Committee and Natalie Brown at Synod Grants to see how we might apply for a capital grant. We had never applied for a grant before, but we engaged with the online information sessions and found the advice from the Presbytery really helpful.

In our context, Fairfield Uniting had originally housed a kindergarten.

When that closed in 2020, the Church Council found itself with an empty building. With the help of some of the creatives in the congregation, a dream was hatched: to enable the facility to become a community arts centre. In the repurposing of the facility, we soon realised we faced Occupational Health and Safety issues, including an old and dangerous kitchen. In addition, we have a building with asbestos, which made all our plans cost-prohibitive.

When we were advised our application was successful, we were able to then meet the 'dream team' from Property Services who arranged competitive quotes and worked with our tight booking schedule for the facility to avoid disruption to the community arts project. Our grant application enabled the rehabilitation of our kitchen and a further repurposing of a child's washroom into a usable meeting room.

As Coracle Community Arts at Fairfield Uniting Church, we are home to 35 groups: including two community choirs, various U3A, Pilates and yoga classes, children's art classes, and individual musical and drama groups.

We are so grateful to the whole Church who made this project possible for us: truly an example of the interconnected nature of our Church, and how we can work together for mission in every Uniting Church location, together. 🙏

David Greenall St Leonards Brighton Beach Uniting Church

I read the article ('Tonga celebrates 200 years of Christianity', August Crosslight) where Rev Charissa Suli, the President of the Uniting Church (a Tongan) said "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". I experienced this hospitality first-hand.

When we first arrived in Tonga in 1993, the Free Wesleyan Church's (FWC) financial secretary, Tevita Haukinima, drove us from the airport to our accommodation at the FWC's Queen Salote College (1000 girls) in Nuku'alofa, where my wife Lyn, was an emergency teacher.

I was the honorary external auditor for a period of one month each year until 2006, with occasional visits since then: in 2025 the QSC teachers who taught in the 1990s arranged a reunion for us.

Thank you Crosslight for publishing the article, which I'm sure the UCA Tongan congregation in Canterbury would appreciate. 🙏



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CROSSLIGHT

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The power of PROTEST

Theologian Michael Mawson's recent Northey Lecture revisited the anti-racist activism of Australian and New Zealand Christians in the 1970s and 1980s, and asked what that history can teach churches today.

By Marina Williams

When nine Christian leaders and students interrupted a morning service at Waitangi in 1983, they were challenging more than a government ceremony.

The service had been planned as a celebration of national unity. The activists argued Waitangi should instead be a day of repentance – and a time for Pākehā New Zealanders to learn about the country's history and the dispossession of Māori.

For theologian Michael Mawson, the small but controversial protest shows how Christian theology could move beyond church discussion and into anti-racist action in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s.

That history was the focus of Michael's Northey Lecture at Pilgrim Theological College on September 2, 'Faith in Protest: Liberation Theologies and Activism in the 1970s and 1980s'. The lecture explored the theological ideas that moved Christians into anti-racist activism – and what that history might offer churches now.

"There were rich theologies and ideas that were developed in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s," Michael says. "These played a central role in some of the wider social and political changes of these decades."

An author and Pākehā theologian at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland, Michael grew up in a small New Zealand town before

moving to Wellington to study history and religious studies. He became involved in community work and social justice activism, later moving to the United States for doctoral studies in Christian ethics. He previously worked at the United Theological College in Parramatta. His recent books include 'Standing Under the Cross: Essays on Bonhoeffer's Theology'.

Living and studying in different places has informed his work.

"I've lived in lots of places and always tried to attend to and learn from those around me," he says.

"RICH THEOLOGIES AND IDEAS THAT WERE DEVELOPED IN AUSTRALIA AND AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1970S AND 1980S ... PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN SOME OF THE WIDER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES OF THESE DECADES."

Theologian Michael Mawson

His research grew partly from concern about what he describes as a resurgence of white racism following Covid-19 and political challenges in Australia and New Zealand. He points to the election of New Zealand's coalition government and the failure of Australia's Indigenous Voice referendum in 2023 as part of that context.

While the project is historical, Michael says its purpose is not simply to revisit the past. It is also about attending to "the work and witness of a previous generation" and asking what churches can learn from it today.

Central to the lecture was the World

Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, launched in 1969.

Internationally, it supported civil rights activism in the US, anti-apartheid movements in South Africa and revolutionary groups in South America.

The program financially supported anti-racism activists, particularly Indigenous groups, and liberation movements. It became best known for anti-apartheid work, but Michael says its influence in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand is less well understood.

It supported and learned from Māori, Pasifika and Aboriginal activists and helped create networks between campaigners around the world.

The program often worked with the Australian Council of Churches and New Zealand's National Council of Churches. But its more radical

approach also put pressure on those organisations and churches to commit to change.

That approach was controversial. Critics accused the program of fostering violence and supporting terrorism, particularly through its involvement with liberation movements in southern Africa.

The 1983 Waitangi protest illustrates how theological ideas could translate into public action.

The protesters were significantly influenced by liberation theology and the writings of emerging Māori activists and academics. While the protest was small, it generated considerable public



Michael Mawson says churches facing racism and other challenges can learn from the achievements, and limitations, of earlier generations.
Image: Greg Ford

debate and, Michael says, helped challenge and shift the views of many Pākehā Christians.

The history also complicates the idea that change happens mainly through dramatic acts of protest.

“Much of the anti-racism work that took place over these decades was slow, unglamorous and close to the ground,” Michael says.

Behind the high-profile protests were smaller workshops, resources and actions that helped prepare people and institutions for change.

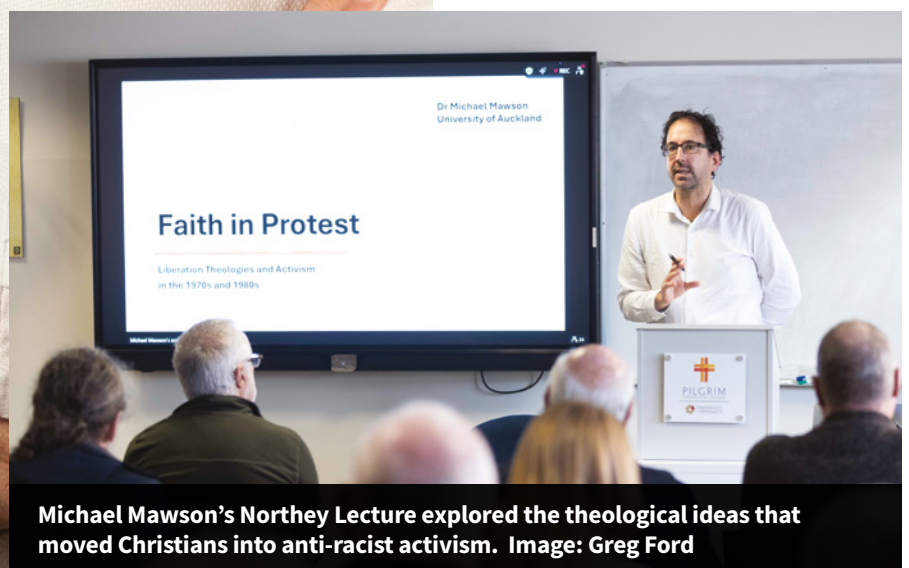
Nor was the movement without tensions. Michael says there were disagreements within and between activist groups, and idealism sometimes led to issues being framed in sharp terms that limited the effectiveness of the work.

“It was messy and fraught – nobody had it all figured out.”

He believes messiness is part of the lesson. Churches facing racism and other challenges today can learn from both the achievements and limitations of an earlier generation.

“In our attempts to respond to some of the threats that are facing the world today – racism, the rise of authoritarianism, climate crisis – we don’t need to start from scratch,” Michael says.

“There are examples and work that we can learn from and build upon.” 🙏



Michael Mawson’s Northey Lecture explored the theological ideas that moved Christians into anti-racist activism. Image: Greg Ford

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