

Monthly update

The Uniting Church in Australia

St Luke's Congregation, Highton

December 2022



When you think about Christmas, what are the stories, the images and the memories that come into your mind? I think about times with family, the smell of freshly cut Christmas trees, wonderful food (especially Christmas puddings), the singing of all those carols, and watching the excited faces of the young as they open their presents.

Then I have so many memories of the different ways congregations with which I have been associated have marked this season: ranging from candle-lit services at Wesley Geelong to sharing in a joint communion service with the Anglicans on Christmas Eve in the small country town of Lindenow.

While we think of Christmas as a time of joy, it can also be a time of sadness and pain. Christmas celebrations can be times when the absence of someone special can be particularly real. No wonder this is a time of the year when people light candles in memory of loved ones, when people quietly grieve during carol services or in the space given by a Blue Christmas service.

Christianity, and religion in general, is often derided as out of touch with reality. Marx called religion an opiate: something that numbs the pain but doesn't deal with the problem. But what we celebrate in the birth of Jesus is in no sense about a God disconnected from reality.

The gospel writer John put it this way: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." (1:14) In Jesus, son of Mary, a vulnerable human child, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, God has entered the world as it really is! In Jesus, God shares in the human experience and all that means.

As Jesus shared meals with so many others during his three years of ministry, so the risen One shares in our meals, our Christmas occasions. As Jesus shared in suffering and in death, so the light of the presence of God still burns in the most difficult times in our lives. Through Jesus, we

know that God is always close.

May you hold onto this good news as we mark Christmas 2022 and as we begin a New Year, 2023!

Grace and peace.

Paul Stephens, Minister in Placement

Coming Up

Services:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Thursday 8/12 | Mid-week Worship (including High Tea) | 1:30-3pm |
| Thursday 15/12 | Blue Christmas service | 7:30-8:30pm |
| Saturday 24/12 | Messy Church | 3:30 - 4:30pm |
| Saturday 24/12 | Christmas Eve Nativity service | 3pm |
| Sunday 25/12 | Christmas Day Family service | 9:30am |

Activities:

| | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| Tuesday 13/12 | Contemplative Tuesdays for Climate Justice | 11-11:30am |
| | See details in Church web calendar | |
| Wednesday 14/12 | Coffee & Chat@ St Lukes | 1:30 - 3pm |
| Friday 16/12 | Sewing group | 12 - 2:30pm |
| Friday 16/12 | Collectibles sale | 1 - 4pm |
| Friday 16/12 | Grovedale Uniting Christmas Carols | 7 - 8:30pm |
| Saturday 17/12 | Collectibles sale@Chapel-Ground-Chapel | 9 - 12pm |
| Thursday 22/12 | Christmas Concert (Geelong Chamber Orchestra) | 7 - 9pm |

Annual Congregational Meeting

The St Luke's Congregational meeting was held on Sunday, Nov 27. The community was updated on key areas of Council activity. These were:

- Continuing the Salt & Light project - design planning and financial viability issues
- Addressing options re Barrabool Rd & Roslyn Rd former manses in context of S&L Project
- Working with Men's Shed on an MOU and addressing processes for receipt of grant
- Reviewing role of our Community Worker
- Implementing Essential Safety Measures for the building
- Engaging in conversations concerning Kindergarten maintenance and future directions
- Providing support for new community at Armstrong Creek
- Joining the UCA Geelong Steering Group in addressing current challenges including the need to find leaders, particularly when it comes to governance for the Geelong congregations.

Lack of numbers on Council has been a particular challenge in the past year and concerns were expressed about the inability to attract new members to Council. A proposal was moved and approved: *That a nominating group be created to seek new members for Church Council in the light of the vision of a Greater Geelong congregation.*

Mike Currie,
Council Secretary

Congregation News

Mission Outreach

ST LUKE'S CHAPEL COLLECTIBLES

November was a record breaking month on every count. Who could ever have imagined that we would raise over \$6,000 in one month – all to support and raise funds for newcomers and people in need. Thank you Team.

But now we move into preparing for Christmas and our Chapel is the place for you to buy you special gifts for family and friends. To make shopping easier for you, our Collectibles will be open a week earlier. If these dates don't suit you why don't you tee up a time with Linda or myself to have your own private viewing at your convenience.

Our next opening is:

DECEMBER: Friday 9th. Dec between 12 noon and 4.30pm.
Sat 10th. Dec between 9am and lunch time.

"Cottage by The Sea " will be attending on Friday 9th.Dec, selling their famous jams, sauces and pickles..... plus Christmas cakes and surprises.

Last month we were invited to help pack up a couple of houses, and we were privileged to be offered many items for refugee families and some collectibles.

Call and visit the Chapel this month. We have a table loaded with Christmas gift ideas and while you are looking, you will be surrounded by many items that will evoke your own memories from your parents and grand-parents era.

So here is our monthly question. How can you help?

If you have any unwanted items in your house and you wish to declutter, why don't you think about passing them on to our Chapel Collectibles. (But firstly check with your family beforehand.)

Each month we give thanks for your help and support, but December charges us to remember those who have fled from war-torn countries, fled through persecution and who have gladly found peace and safety on our door step.

Linda Salamy & Rae Anderson – Collectibles Co-Ordinator



Pastoral Connections

MIDWEEK – FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS



The St. Luke's Midweek service grew out of a Study Group almost 30 years ago during the time of Rev Chand Prasad and has continued to grow and be blessed through eight ministerial appointments to the present day when our services are led by Rev Paul Stephens.

Midweek is a service open to whoever feels moved to share in a midweek monthly worship service. We meet on the 2nd Thursday of the month (except in January) at 1.30pm, with communion celebrated five times throughout the year. Following the service an afternoon tea of homemade biscuits (provided by ladies from the Sunday congregation) is served. With an average monthly attendance of thirty members, we have been privileged this year to welcome several ladies from the Charles Brownlow Retirement village.

Highlights during 2022 have included the celebration of three 90th birthdays, raising money for Uniting at our Pancake afternoon tea, and special afternoon teas in June and at Christmas.

Our dates in 2023 are as follows: February 9th, March 9th, April 13th, May 11th, June 8th, July 13th, August 10th, September 14th, October 12th, November 9th, December 14th.

The Midweek co-ordinating team leaders are Lyn & Max Robertson, Dorothy & Terry Ayrton, Alison John, Joy Hicks, and Mark & Pam Seller. However, all worship services are supported by many 'behind the scenes' helpers and Midweek is no exception. Our generous helpers are much valued and appreciated. For further details contact Pam on 0407 557 933.

Pam Seller

ELECTION CAKE STALL

With St Luke's again being a polling booth for the recent State Election, we took the opportunity to hold a cake stall and sausage sizzle to raise funds for flood relief. With the generosity of many supporters, including proceeds from the November Coffee & Chat afternoon, we raised over \$2550 to assist affected communities.



PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayer requests received during Prayer gatherings throughout November 2022. Please use these prayer points as a reference for your personal reflection time.

Praise and Thanksgiving.

- Praise God for the blessing of nature witnessed during the month of November. Beautiful sunrises, the moon eclipse, brilliant rainbows, and angry, violent storm clouds. All part of God's creative power.

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- We are reminded and thankful of the joy and anticipation of the Advent season. The preparation for and the sharing of the good news of Jesus coming.
- Thankyou Lord, for the simple joys that we share each day and for opportunities that are created, when we take time to stop and listen to other people's stories.
- Continued praise for the volunteers who work with those less fortunate providing meals, shelter, and advice.
- Praise for the Election Day cake and BBQ stall results. All money raised will go to support the UC Victorian Flood relief work.
- We are thankful that God leads us as we move forward in positive ways, and we are ever mindful of His will.

General Prayers

- Again, we offer our ongoing prayers for the people of Ukraine as winter sets in, especially for the brave medical and community leaders who work in dangerous circumstances to support the people in so much need. We prayed for all those innocently caught up in conflict zones around the world.
- Our love and prayers are with those of our congregation who are unwell, receiving treatment, are experiencing grief or loneliness. Grant them peace and strength especially as Christmas arrives.
- We prayed for young people transitioning from Year 12 into further studies or into the work environment.
- Prayers were shared for shop owners, farmers, those managing government infrastructure such as schools/ovals/transport and the exhausted SES plus the army of volunteers working with these towns' people to recreate their communities following the devastating floods that have impacted so many regions.
- We pray for groups within our fellowship such as Messy Church, Coffee and Chat, Men's Shed, Mid-week, Advent services, House Church, Seekers, Refugee support work, as they prepare for Christmas and plan their way forward into 2023.
- Our thoughts and prayers are for those who find Christmas a difficult and lonely time. May the Blue Christmas service be a source of peace and encouragement for those who attend.

ALL PRAYER REQUESTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL NAMES ARE MENTIONED ONLY WHEN SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED.



THE WORDS OF ADVENT.

Hope - Light the candle of love, He brings hope to every heart.

Peace - Light the candle of peace, He brings peace to every heart.

Love - Light the candle of love, He brings love to every heart.

Joy - Light the candle of joy, he brings joy to every heart.

Our prayer is that we can bring hope, peace, love and joy into the hearts of family, friends and strangers.

UCA News

2022 ASSEMBLY ADVENT CALENDAR

Advent is a time when we gladly, but patiently, anticipate and prepare for the coming of God's hope, peace, joy, and love among us. For many of us, this preparation largely takes place at

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home. You might have a candle lighting ritual, daily reflections you engage with or other spiritual practices which are personal or shared with others you live with.

This year, the Assembly is excited to release an intergenerational Advent Calendar <<https://uniting.church/2022adventcalendar/>> to help you enter into the Advent season in your home and neighbourhood. With an entry for each day across the four weeks of Advent, you'll find interactive activities, prayers, songs, short reflections, videos and questions to engage with. They are designed for all-ages.

The calendar includes contributions from across the life of the Uniting Church, from our national agencies to the Assembly Circles, Uniting Church ministers, Synods, Presbyteries and people who resource intergenerational ministry across our Church. There are also contributions from other denominations and in other languages (see credits below).

We pray this Advent Calendar will accompany you through this season as you anticipate anew the Good News of Jesus' coming and its hope for the world. **The Calendar went live on Sunday 27th November.** Begin with number 1 and follow the month. It can be downloaded as a PDF [here](#).



Readings for the Month

| | <i>1st Reading</i> | <i>Psalm</i> | <i>2nd Reading</i> | <i>Gospel</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| December 11 Advent 3 | Is 35:1-10 | Ps 146:5-10 | Jas 5:7-10 | Mt 11:2-11 |
| December 18 Advent 4 | Is 7:10-16 | Ps 80:1-7,17-19 | Rm 1:1-7 | Mt 1:18-25 |
| December 25 Christmas Day | Is 9:2-7 | Ps 96 | Tit 2:11-14 | Lk 2:1-14 (15-20) |
| Jan 1, 2023 Christmas 1 | Is 63:7-9 | Ps 148 | Heb 2:10-18 | Mt 2:13-23 |
| January 6 Epiphany | Is 60:1-6 | Ps 72:1-7,10-14 | Eph 3:1-12 | Mt 2:1-12 |