

Monthly update

The Uniting Church in Australia

St Luke's Congregation, Highton

December 2023



Bringing Good News!

Christmas is such a wonderful celebration. The coming of Jesus ... the birth of the child which the Gospel writer Matthew calls "Emmanuel ... God with us" ... is good news indeed. C. S Lewis (of *Chronicles of Narnia* fame) went as far as to write that the "... birth of Christ is the central event in the history of earth — the very thing the whole story has been about."^[1]

But as we discussed in worship the other Sunday so many in the wider community do not know, have forgotten, or do not see as significant this story of the birth of Jesus.

As I told the congregation, this was brought home to me when I was looking around in a book shop the other day and saw there was a special display of suitable books for children at Christmas. When I went and examined the display, I was somewhat amazed to discover that there was not a single book about the birth of Jesus. The closest I could find to a story with some Christian resonance was a version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." Other family members have had similar experiences.

The challenge for us as a church is to keep telling the story. When I asked the congregation how we might do this, people suggested that church community members could share the story through symbols placed in front windows ... a bit like putting Teddies in windows during the lockdowns in the worst days of the Pandemic.

A star, a candle or even a nativity scene were all suggested. And those who attended agreed that they would do this. And indeed, the Church's own nativity scene will be set up.

We spoke too of inviting family and friends to Christmas services. (These are noted in other places in this newsletter.) The Christmas Eve Messy Church Nativity Service, for

example, will be a special opportunity for children (and anyone else) to hear and get to share in the story of the first Christmas.

It seems simple but sharing the story can make a real difference to others ... because at heart the message of Christmas is all about genuine joy, peace and hope.

As Paul notes in Romans 10: 15 (paraphrasing a passage from Isaiah 52:7), "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."

Paul Stephens

Minister in Placement

[1] [C.S. Lewis has a different take on Christmas. Here's what he had to say - Deseret News](#)

Coming Up

Services:

Sunday 3/12	9.30am	Sunday Service: Advent 1 (Paul)
Thursday 14/12	1.30pm	Midweek service (Paul)
Sunday 10/12	9.30am	Sunday Service: Advent 2 Holy Communion
Sunday 17/12	9:30am	Sunday Service: Service of Lessons and Carols
Sunday 24/12	3pm	Christmas Eve: Messy Church Nativity Service (This is a service for young and old. It will include an acting out of the story of the birth of Jesus and the whole congregation will be invited to get involved.) (This is the only service at St Luke's on Christmas Eve.)
Monday 25/12	9:30am	Christmas Day celebration
Sunday 31/12	9:30am	Christmas 1/New Years Eve (Paul Stephens)

Activities:

Friday 8/12	12pm - 2pm	Sewing group
Wednesday 13/12	7:30pm	Seekers Christmas focus
Friday 17/11	12pm - 4pm	Collectibles
Saturday 18/11	9am - lunch	Collectibles

Council News

- Administration position: hoping to appoint someone in the New Year
- Information Booklet nearing completion
- Trivia Night a great success - hosted by St Luke's and organised by Presbytery in aid of the Armstrong Creek plant - approx \$1 000 raised
- Shaghek's new position is Pastoral Ministry Worker - Non Placement Pastor - Level 3 - 0.4 Part time - (16 hours per week)
- Cleaning: cleaning contract to be followed up: employment of window cleaner for windows that are on the high side to be sourced
- LSL forms for Paul next year have been accepted by Council
- Collectibles contribution to our Mission work noted, particularly to refugees
- Men's Shed continue to be busy involving themselves in a variety of projects
- Uniting Events newsletter prepared by Wesley: news items from community welcomed
- Synod: Steve Singline and Isabel Greenall attended - will share outcomes
- Greater Geelong Steering Committee: Mike Currie new rep
- NOTICE BOARD on door outside Fellowship Room - please use to write down any concerns or maintenance items requiring attention
- SPRING CLEAN - congratulations to all who were able to spare time and effort 'sprucing up' the Church both inside and out. What an effort!

Sue Anderson
Secretary

Congregation News

St Luke's Chapel Collectibles

Our next opening in **DECEMBER.... Beware!** These dates are changed to cover the 2nd Friday and Sat in December – earlier to avoid the Christmas rush! **Friday 8th Dec**, between 12 noon and 4.30pm; **Sat 9th Dec**, between 9am and lunch time.

Readers, at the close of an amazing year – I need to keep in mind that this is not our Annual Report, although I feel like I am writing just that! During the year, and in fact after every month of opening, our Collectibles retail outlet continues to blossom. To November end this year, \$65,000 has been raised which is such a valuable contribution – enabling St Luke's to live out it's mission within our community.



To you, our supporters, we are grateful for all that you have helped us achieve. Your words of encouragement are so important, telling friends and families about our work, responding when we ask for items to restock the Chapel Room for refugee families, your willingness to take home small tasks (laundry items) – silverware, and repairs. And thank you to those who kindly drop off items, either to go directly to refugee families or items that go into the Chapel. In fact we have many teams, all prepared to help when required. You would be most welcome to offer a couple of your spare hours to help next year.

December in the Chapel promises to be geared up for your viewing pleasure. Beside your last minute Christmas shopping, we will show off collections of beautiful Australian pottery, Lidded SoupTureens/serving platters, dinner sets, glassware of every colour and description, wall clocks, a fantastic salt and pepper collection, an owl collection, and historical books. Our Copper collection includes kettles, jugs, plates, a coffee set and more. There is Carlton Ware, Royal Winton Ware, Royal Albert and Wedgwood – to name a few..

The Lane Memorial Meeting Room (adjacent to the Chapel) We continue to use the Lane Memorial to feature and display our collections of vintage and retro hard to find treasures.

Potted Garden Sales: Plants including: tomatoes, parsley, rhubarb, bedding begonias, plus many flowering pots are all waiting for the happy gardener.

Do you know: Every Wednesday morning, the Chapel is open to receive donations that go directly to needy families, or donations for our Chapel Collectibles.

Come and Visit: This is your last chance this year, to visit our Collectibles, just knowing about and seeing our Collectibles will help you to encourage others to visit and to enjoy all that we have to offer.

In closing I wish to thank every person who has helped us '**make a difference**' for families who have fled their country – they bring very few items with them, and have settled with little English – but who wake daily feeling welcome and safe.

Three cheers for Shaghek Qassabyan, St Luke's Community Ministry Worker. Shaghek is our pivotable person on whom we depend upon each week when upto 4 refugee families visit the Chapel Room for their supplies, a job, which is only a small part of her responsibilities.

Mission Outreach Ministry Team. St Luke's Collectibles initiative fits nicely under the umbrella of Mission Outreach. Thank you Sue and the Team for your never ending interest and support during this year.

On behalf of Linda, our amazing Collectibles Team, and myself, I extend to you all our very best wishes for a Blessed, Joyous and Peaceful Christmas.

Linda Salamy and Rae Anderson (Collectibles Co-Ordinators)

Mobile: 0413 888 884

In 1980 a new pastor and his wife were assigned to their first ministry in Brooklyn. It was to reopen an abandoned church. They arrive in early October excited about their opportunities. When they saw their church, their hearts sank, but with a positive attitude they set to with a goal to have everything restored and set up in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve.

They worked hard, repairing pews, plastering walls, painting, etc. and on December 18th they were ahead of schedule, then on December 19th a terrible storm swept through the region and lasted for two days, during which time it meant that the young couple could not access the church.

Finally, on the 21st, the pastor went over to his church and was devastated, the roof had leaked, and a large area of plaster about 9 metres by 2 ½ metres had fallen from the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit at head high. The pastor cleaned up the mess and not knowing what else to do but to postpone the Christmas Eve service, headed home with a heavy heart.

On his way home he noticed a community market and stopped by. One of the items for sale was a beautiful handmade, ivory coloured, crocheted tablecloth with exquisite work, fine colours, and a cross embroidered right in the centre. It was just the right size to cover the damage. He bought it and headed back to the church.

By this time it had begun to snow and he noticed an older lady running to catch a bus which she missed. The pastor invited her to wait in the church for the next bus in 45 minutes time. She sat in a pew and paid no attention to the pastor as he got a ladder and hangers etc. to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. Once done he could hardly believe how beautiful it looked.

Then he noticed the woman walking down the centre aisle. "Pastor" she asked, "where did you get that tablecloth?" Then the lady asked him to check the lower righthand corner to see if the initials 'EBG' were crocheted there. They were, and these were the initials of the lady, as she had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria. She could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had purchased the cloth. She went on to explain that before the war she and her husband were well-to-do people in Austria.

When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave with her husband planning to follow her the next week. He was captured, sent to prison and she never saw her husband or her home again. The pastor wanted to give her the cloth, but she asked him to keep it for the church. He then insisted on driving her home to Staten Island, she was only in Brooklyn for the day doing a cleaning job.

What a wonderful service was had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full, the music and spirit were great, and at the end of the service the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door and many said that they would return, they were elated and praised God.

One older man, whom the pastor recognised as being local, continued to sit in one of the pews. Finally, he asked where the wall hanging had come from because it was identical to one that his wife had made many years earlier when they lived in Austria before the war.

He told the pastor how the Nazis had come, and how he had forced his wife to flee for her safety with him planning to follow, but he was arrested, imprisoned and he never saw his wife or his home again.

After sharing a coffee together, the pastor asked the man if he could show him something. He drove to Staten Island, to the same house he had taken the lady three days earlier. He helped him climb the three flights of stairs to her apartment, knocked on the door and witnessed the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever have imagined.

This is a true story showing that the miracle of love and compassion live on regardless through time eternal.

Carols by Candlelight

Hello friends at Uniting Churches around the Geelong area. Wesley is holding a Carols by Candlelight service on **Sunday 17th December at 7.30pm.**

We warmly invite you all to join us to make this a memorable evening. In particular we are looking for singers of all abilities to form a combined choir to lead the carol singing, and sing one or two items on our own.

Rehearsals will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday nights Nov 22nd & 29th and Dec 6th & 13th. Please contact Heather Cooney on 0477 805 234 or handpcooney@gmail.com and indicate your voice part.



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Prayer Points



Peace be with you
this Christmas.
PRAYER REFLECTION.



Reflection on Lord's Prayer

Our father, who art in heaven,

Father you are not distant above the earth but ever present here on earth.

Hallowed be Thy name.

May we never lose the reverence your authority deserves as we bask in the tenderness of your love.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, we long to be part of your kingdom with you ruling our hearts by your love.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Father, your manifold blessings poured out upon us, constantly reminding us that you are sufficient for all our needs.

And forgive us our trespasses.

Lord, how we need the reassurance that your forgiveness overwhelms us, even as we so often choose to do what suits us, rather than what we hear your Spirit telling us is best.

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

This means totally and unconditionally for by this we will reflect your love for us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Father, you know our weaknesses. Help us to be strong and do what is right.

For thine is the kingdom the power and the glory,

Lord, by your grace may your power and glory shine through us.

Forever and ever. Amen

Our material possessions are only temporarily owned by us, our relationships only last in this mortal life, our hopes and dreams are limited by circumstances, financial restraints and our surroundings. but Lord your love lasts forever. So be it.

Continue to praise God
for nature, families,
friends and Advent season.



Continue to pray for
peace, healing, hope
in the world and those
struggling with ill
health.



Thank you for joining once again with churches across Australia as we share God's love through the **Christmas Bowl**. Today, more people than ever before have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and disaster. People like you and me who, through no fault of their own, have had to leave behind everything they know and love.

Along the Thai-Burma border, refugees from Myanmar have endured decades of exile, living in camps that have become home to generations who have never experienced any other way of life. With hope of returning home extinguished, many fear they will be forgotten.

As more and more human tragedies like this fade from newspaper headlines, lifesaving aid is being stretched too thin, leaving many refugees without hope for the future. In the face of such suffering, the legacy of Rev. Frank Byatt, the founder of the Christmas Bowl, has never been more important.

Frank believed we have a responsibility to share what we have with others who need it. He saw it as a fundamental part of living out Jesus' call to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:31). This year, just

as we did in 1949 when the Christmas Bowl began, we can come together to express our unity in Christ and take practical Christian action to share God's love so refugees know they are not forgotten. In the words of Rev. Byatt, we can "get a bowl to put on [our] Christmas dinner table as a Bowl of Remembrance" so that "the love of Christ can be made more vivid through Australian Christian concern, on Christmas Day, the one great day of sharing". Thank you for being part of this important tradition and helping to create, together, a world where uprooted people have a safe place to belong.

From Christmas Bowls Resource Kit 2023

Readings for the Month

	<i>1st Reading</i>	<i>Psalms</i>	<i>2nd Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
December 10 Advent 2	Is 40:1-11	Ps 85:1-2,8-13	2 Pt 3:8-15a	Mk 1:1-8
December 17 Advent 3	Is 61:1-4,8-11	Ps 126	1 Thes 5:16-24	Jn 1:6-8,19-28
December 24 Advent 4	2 Sam 7:1-11,16	Lk 1:46b-55	Rm 16:25-27	Lk 1:26-38
December 25 Christmas	Is 52:7-10	Ps 98	Hb 1:1-4	Jn 1:1-14
December 31 Christmas 1	Is 61:10 - 62:3	Ps 148	Gal 4:4-7	Lk 2:22-40