

Monthly update

The Uniting Church in Australia

St Luke's Congregation, Highton



August 2024



Most of you would be aware that Rev Paul Stephens will be retiring in the new year. Council has now entered into a period of discernment of our congregational mission and ministry needs towards selecting a new minister. However this process is occurring in a time of unprecedented challenge for the Church in Geelong and across the country.

We are all in this together: As a UCA in Geelong we have emerged from COVID and we feel older from the experience of enduring the global pandemic. The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) reported that during the last 4 years the UCA experienced a 23% decline in membership. For some congregations this looked like the number of persons who did not return to worship after COVID: turning to online worship, illness, moving to nursing homes and deaths of members. Post-COVID and lots of our volunteers retired en-masse, making the filling of rosters a burden for the church. Leadership across Geelong have also reported that they are tired, overworked and have no one to succeed them. This is our common story, we are not alone, it is good to know that we are all in this together!

In this context, the *Greater Geelong Steering Group*, which includes 3 members of each congregation in the region with the support of Presbytery, has been considering options to enable the Church to flourish into the future. Over the last two years, it has reviewed the current situation and developed proposals to inform and support congregations.

Duplication in the region: When the GGSG started talking we had 13 church buildings across Greater Geelong. There are 10 ministry agents in Geelong, costing over \$1 million dollars. Every minister spends two days a week preparing 10 services, all held at 9:30/10am on Sunday morning, all use the TiS hymn book, all are traditional worship services. We are keeping God very busy between 9:30 – 11 am on a Sunday morning. The total number of people attending worship across Greater Geelong on any Sunday morning is 500 people (historically St. Davids had 600 in their congregation alone). Many people attending worship pass two other Uniting Churches on their way to worship. Is this good stewardship of our resources?

It is in this context that St Luke's Council is entering this process of congregational discernment. It is highly unlikely that Synod could provide us with a full time minister at any time in the foreseeable future. There are currently thirty one congregations without full time ministers and nine vacancies that cannot be filled. So we will need to look more deeply and holistically at how we can continue to worship and operate as a congregational community. We are as a community reflecting the love of God in our pastoral care and support for the needy of Geelong. We need to pray for the guidance of the Spirit, to be open to where the Spirit is leading us and supporting us to reflect and project Christ's presence throughout our region.

Michael Currie

Chair, St Luke's Church Council

Image ref: The Holy Spirit in His natural habitat (Grant Myles-Efra)

<https://newsongsd.org/message/3-spirit-lead-us/>

Coming Up

Services:

Thurs	8/8	1:30pm	Mid-week service.
Sunday	11/8	9:30am	Sunday Service with Rev Paul Stephens
Sunday	18/8	9:30am	Sunday Service with Rev Paul Stephens
Sunday	25/8	9:30am	Sunday Service with Rev Paul Stephens

Activities:

Wed	7/8	2.00pm	Coffee 'n' Chat
Wed	14/8	7:30pm	Seekers
Friday	16/8	12.00pm - 2pm	Sewing group
Friday	16/8	12.00pm - 4pm	Collectibles
Sat	17/8	9.00am - lunch	Collectibles

Congregation News

Environment Group

Do you know?

I do hope you have looked at the plastics display we mounted in the hall. There are some very serious issues there and some easy solutions. Basically we need to stop buying plastics so the manufacturing of plastics stops, as it is destroying the environment, our wildlife and us. Below is another article you should read.

Ocean pollution threatens the health of more than three billion people

By *Chrissy Sexton* Earth.com staff writer

In the first comprehensive report of its kind, experts describe how the impacts of ocean pollution are directly harmful to human health, and plastic is only part of the problem. The researchers found that toxic ocean pollution endangers the health and well-being of more than three billion people.

Dr. Philip Landrigan is the director of Boston College's Global Observatory on Pollution on Health. "Simply put, ocean pollution is a major global problem, it is growing, and it directly affects human health," said Dr. Landrigan.



"People have heard about plastic pollution in the oceans, but that is only part of it. Research shows the oceans are being fouled by a complex stew of toxins including mercury, pesticides,

industrial chemicals, petroleum wastes, agricultural runoff, and manufactured chemicals embedded in plastic. These toxic materials in the ocean get into people, mainly by eating contaminated seafood.”

“We are all at risk, but the people most seriously affected are people in coastal fishing communities, people on small island nations, indigenous populations and people in the high Arctic. The very survival of these vulnerable populations depends on the health of the seas.”

The researchers analyzed data from more than 584 scientific studies. Beyond food contamination, oil spills and chemical waste threaten the marine microorganisms that provide much of the world’s oxygen supply. According to Prince Albert of Monaco, the analysis can be used to mobilize global resolve to curb ocean pollution.

“The link between ocean pollution and human health has, for a long time, given rise to very few studies. Taking into account the effects of ocean pollution – due to plastic, water and industrial waste, chemicals, hydrocarbons, to name a few – on human health should mean that this threat must be permanently included in the international scientific activity,” wrote Prince Albert.

“This document on Human Health and the Ocean, prepared with the contributions of the Monaco Science Centre and Boston College, substantiates that the pollution of the ocean is not inevitable.”

The researchers found that mercury pollution has become widespread in the oceans, and accumulates to high levels in predator fish. Once mercury enters the food chain, it poses documented risks to humans. The study showed that burning coal is the biggest source of mercury pollution.

The analysis confirmed that human sources of pollution such as industrial waste, agricultural runoff, pesticides, and sewage have increased the frequency of harmful algal blooms (HABs). These blooms produce toxins associated with dementia, amnesia, neurological damage, and rapid death.

Plastic waste is now entering the oceans at a rate of more than 10 million tons each year, according to the researchers. This waste is consumed by people in the form of toxic microscopic particles, which are now found in all humans.

The study also revealed that the Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, and Asian rivers are the water bodies that are most severely impacted by ocean pollution.

“The key thing to realize about ocean pollution is that, like all forms of pollution, it can be prevented using laws, policies, technology, and enforcement actions that target the most important pollution sources,” said Dr. Landrigan.

“Many countries have used these tools and have successfully cleaned fouled harbors, rejuvenated estuaries, and restored coral reefs. The results have been increased tourism, restored fisheries, improved human health, and economic growth. These benefits will last for centuries.”

“Our Global Observatory on Pollution and Health at Boston College is extremely proud to have been able to partner with the Centre Scientifique de Monaco and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation to produce this report and develop the Declaration of Monaco.”

“This work advances the mission of the Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society at Boston College to use scientific research to benefit society, and it fulfills Pope Francis’ call in *Laudato Si’* to care for our Common Home and to protect the poor and the vulnerable among us.”

Claire Zeigler (*St Lukes Environment Group*)

St. Luke's Collectibles

Raising funds for Refugee Ministry



July Opening: Extremely wintry, chilly, windy and cold weather lasted for the entire 7 hours of our last sale days. But our team of volunteers bravely outlasted the weather as they welcomed, chatted with, and listened to customer's stories as people enjoyed our collections as they shopped. Thank you, team. Shoppers bought items in readiness for Christmas, birthdays and/or anniversaries.... and to add to their own collection, knowing that all money raised, supports our Ministry to Refugees. We banked \$5,000 for July.

Thank you to the Wednesday team who refreshed the Chapel with new treasures (including soup tureen collection, figurines and wall plates plus books on equestrian events, a new book display, and new items in Grannies Cupboard.) Thank you to the Thursday 'girls' who displayed a range of Nautical scapes, furniture, ash tray collection, Christmas in July, Pavlova plate collection, Tea Pot collection, Olympic Games Memorabilia, writing tablet collection, framed jigsaw puzzles, and original art works – all freshly set up in the Men's Shed meeting room. Well done Thursday Team.



We welcomed 28 people from the Belmont South Probus Club for morning tea and a Collectibles tour. It was a happy occasion, giving the Collectibles Team the opportunity to share the story of our Ministry to Refugees.

August Opening: Friday 16:12 noon until 4pm; Saturday 17: 9am till lunchtime.

You are invited. Bring friends. Tell us where you are from. Help share our story.

Do you know: That the Refugee Chapel Room stocks: blankets, doonas, bed linen, towels, tea towels, hand towels, mugs, cutlery, glasses, baking trays, saucepans, dinner sets, crockery, tablecloths, and vases. Refugee families are welcomed each week, for material aid.

Do you know: Every Wednesday, between 9.30 am and lunch time, the Wednesday Team are available to receive donations. Simply drive between the Chapel and Men's Shed to off load. We would proudly walk you through the Chapel when you arrive, so we can share the story.

We can help you: It does become a worry if you are downsizing. Not wanting to 'land fill' And not knowing what to do with your treasures is a real concern. Please note, that we will accept all household items (incl white goods, furniture, garden tools, pot plants etc.) The only things we cannot take are electric blankets and bed pillows.

This month: The Collectible's Team warmly invite you to visit the Chapel Collectibles on 16th or 17th August so you can stroll at your leisure, and enjoy the many happy memories that will come into your mind as you recognise treasures from bygone days.

This month we will welcome the Barwon Trefoil Guides Group for morning tea and a Collectibles tour.

The Collectibles team continues to give to thanks to those who donate items. Your generosity means that we can fulfill our Community Outreach by supporting our Ministry to Refugees and people in need.



Linda Salamy and Rae Anderson – Collectibles Co-Ordinator. Mobile: 0413 888 884

June Reflections from Pastoral Connections

CELEBRATING NEW

“What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)



St. Luke's prides itself on the Fellowship and Hospitality it offers to everyone who enters its space. Therefore, it was a special occasion on July 16th when Rev. Paul led a service where we received seven recently arrived, or recently transferred, members and welcomed them into our fellowship.

Those received into membership were Kathryn James, Karen Boer, Natalee Anderson,

Sue and Roger Beardwell who transferred from St. David's Uniting church Albury, along with Joan Daniel and Megan

Knott who have transferred from the Banyule cluster group of churches, in Rosanna. Each having chosen to make St. Luke's their spiritual home.

Each of those mentioned above have interesting stories to tell about their journey before arriving at St. Lukes and over morning tea each Sunday we have an opportunity to hear more of their lives prior to joining us. Following the service on the 16th an opportunity to meet and share with those involved was offered at morning tea, by the Pastoral Connections team.

There are many opportunities at St. Luke's to meet new people. The main one is by volunteering to join a roster, by taking up the collections, serving morning tea or helping with transport at the afternoon service. You can also help out at Repair Cafe, the Collectables, at Uniting, or by supporting the Refugee sewing and English lesson classes.

Coffee and Chat which meets once a month and is an opportunity for those present to support one other and catch up on news. Men's Shed is a great fellowship event where men can meet to work together or chat with people from the community who may choose to attend.

Other opportunities for fellowship are through the monthly, mid-week service which offers a worship service and afternoon tea. Messy Church is another service conducted every 2 months and includes activities for children and a gathering together with our refugee community. House Church meets monthly (except in winter) for devotions and a speaker. All of these services offer hospitality.



Coffee and Chat

During the colder months we are relocating to the cosy café BRIOCHE, 175 West Fyans St, Newtown. Time changed to 2pm. Next meeting Wednesday June 5th at 2pm. Then on July 3rd.

We hope to see our usual friendly crowd and maybe a few new faces. To assist Kylie arranging tables can you please RSVP to either: Barbara 0409 037 190 or Pam 0407 557 933

NOTE – change of venue and time and need to RSVP.

Prayer Points

The following Prayer dot points are offered as a foundation for your own prayers.

Praise and Thanksgiving

- 1) Lord, accept our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the wonders of the whole of creation and the mystery of love.
- 2) Almighty God, we thank you for the people who surround us, both family and friends who share kind words and support in our times of greatest need.
- 2) Forgive us Lord when we forget to give you, the praise and thanks for all the gifts you have granted us. Show us ways to use them to bring praise and glory to you Praise God for the life and witness of all those who have gone before us.
- 4) Thankyou Lord, for the opportunity to welcome new friends into our St. Luke's Fellowship on the 16th of July. We thank them for their gifts and their stories which were shared during the service.
- 5) Loving God bless this day and all that it holds for each of us. May all of our actions and thoughts reflect your grace and love, to all who you place hearts.

General Prayers

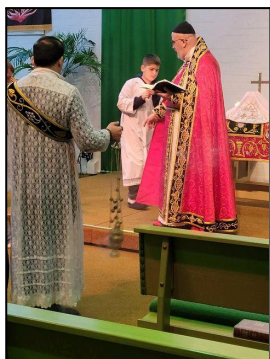
- 1) God, today and every day we pray for our world. We pray for peace and hope for those who live and work in areas of conflict. We pray for countries where political tensions force people to fear for their lives. Grant wisdom to the leaders and they may work to bring justice and unity to the people they govern and serve.
- 2) In particular our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the United States during this time of division. We continue to pray for Ukraine, Gaza and South Sudan, the Congo, Iran, Iraq, and many others too numerous to list, that there will be people to support and help them until peace returns.
- 3) Lord, empower us to work with you and may you use us to restore your kingdom in the world, in our country, in our community and within our households.
- 4) We hold in our hearts all young people who find themselves in crisis situations. Those who are caught up in crime and violence. We pray in particular for the police and law enforcement officers charged with bringing change, help, encouragement, and alternatives into their lives.
- 5) Gracious and loving God we uphold before you those we know who are struggling with ill health. Those close to end of life and those who are receiving extended treatment. We pray for the families of those who have lost loved ones. May they know in their hearts that we love and care for them and are supporting them and their extended families through prayer.



Arabic Service at St. Luke's

Father Ezekiel – Arabic Community Service at St Luke's.

St Luke's hosted an Arabic Church Service for a gathering of people from Iraq and Syria on Sunday 17 July at 3.30 pm and it was my privilege to attend. Father Ezekiel and seven Deacons travelled from St Yacoub (St Jacob) Syrian Orthodox church in Melbourne to lead the service of Liturgy. Following the Liturgy, he led a prayer for a memorial for one of the family's members who passed away in Syria two weeks earlier. The family had dinner in the church hall. The other group of people attending the service, had evening tea in the Fellowship room.



This was the 2nd. Arabic service held at St Luke's over recent months. Prayerful thanks go to Shaghek, our Community Ministry Worker, for arranging such an important event in our worship space. Through Shaghek, we are able to live out

our commitment within our Ministry to Refugees here at St Luke's. I look forward to hearing that more services will become a part of our worship outreach.

Rae Anderson



Wider Church News

National Update (August 2024)

Give us this day our daily bread – Food and Social Justice Justice and International Mission Convention 2024

When: Saturday 5 October, 9 am – 4:15 pm

Where: Centre for Theology and Ministry, 29 College Crescent, Parkville

Cost: \$40 Metropolitan/ \$25 Concession and Rural and Regional/\$10 online (morning sessions only)

Food is an integral part of our life in our Christian Communities. There are many social justice dimensions to what we eat. These include:

- Making sure everyone has enough healthy food to eat;
- Impacts on climate change, with emissions related to food making up a third of global greenhouse gas emissions;
- Multinational food corporations that put their profits ahead of people's health;
- Fair employment conditions for those that produce our food; and,
- Not stigmatising people for their weight when ultra-processed foods are designed to be addictive.

Large food corporations are producing unhealthy and addictive food products that drive up unhealthy food consumption. The foods in question cause various health problems, including obesity, cancer, heart disease and depression. Ultra-processed foods have been progressively tailored by scientists and technicians through combinations of sugar, salt, fat and flavour enhancers to bypass our natural mechanisms of appetite control.

More than half the global population will be living with being overweight or obese within 12 years if prevention, treatment and support do not improve.

Clearing forests for farms and ranches comprised 29% of the food-related greenhouse gas

emissions. Thus, strategies by food corporations to drive up food consumption and obesity also impact global greenhouse gas emissions.

The Convention will explore the social justice dimensions of food production and how to incorporate them into the church's life.

[Nine ways to Connect with the 17th Assembly of UCA](#)

Members of the 17th Assembly will gather in Parramatta in just one week, and there are lots of opportunities for the wider Uniting Church to follow the work of the meeting as it happens. Whether it's opening worship, the meeting livestream, social media highlights or decisions and celebrations, here's your guide to connecting with the Assembly.



Uniting News

Share Sunday is a time for all parts of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania to celebrate the collective community work of our agencies, parish missions and congregations.

The Uniting Church has both a deep history and a contemporary commitment to responding compassionately to those who are experiencing pain, trauma, hopelessness, or despair.

Share Sunday is an opportunity to turn our attention to the ways in which we are seeking to build a more just and equitable society.

This year's theme is 'draw near', inspired by Psalm 34:18

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit

We invite you to think about the ways we draw near to human need because we recognise and celebrate the inherent dignity of every person.

Readings for the Month

	<i>1st Reading</i>	<i>Psalm</i>	<i>2nd Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
August 11 Pentecost 12	2 Sam 18:5-9,15,31-33	Ps 130	Eph 4:25-5:2	Jn 6:35,41-51
August 18 Pentecost 13	1 Kgs 2:10-12;3:3-14	Ps 111	Eph 5:15-20	Jn 6:51-58
August 25 Pentecost 14	! Kgs 8:22-30,41-43	Ps 84	Eph 6:10-20	Jn 6:56-69
Sept 1 Pentecost 15	Song 2:8-13	Ps 45:1-2,6-9	Jas 1:17-27	Mk 7:1-8,14-15,21-23