

*Monthly update*

*The Uniting Church in Australia*



**St Luke's Congregation, Highton**

March 2026

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## **WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH**

Have you ever felt scared or threatened? If so, you will recognise the sensation of butterflies in your stomach, difficulty breathing, a pounding heart, and so on. The escalating conflict between the United States of America and Iran, and more broadly between Ukraine and Russia, has intensified, and threats of nuclear conflict are quite frightening. If we believe what is being said about its destructive power, we naturally fear that our world as we know it



is in serious trouble. As human beings, when we perceive that our lives are in danger, we often respond by fighting or fleeing. So, if we are in danger and believe we have no chance of survival, we run. While fleeing is often not an option for the people of Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, who face imminent and destructive force of war, I wonder if you have ever been tempted to run away from something? Most of us have. Sometimes it is the wiser choice than trying to face a danger you can't beat.

One of the scripture readings for the second week of Lent is Matthew's account of the Transfiguration. Jesus, James, John, and Peter ascended the mountain where the disciples saw a bright cloud overshadowing Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. When they heard a voice from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Peter, James, and John were gripped with fear; they started looking for ways to escape, desperate to run from the inevitable end to their friend's life that they had heard about back in Caesarea Philippi. They wanted to build a safe place away from the world, to simply enjoy the moment, shielding Jesus and themselves from the heartache to come.

Jesus resolutely continues on his course, being aware of God's greater plan of glory that no one can prevent. He will not be swayed by fear. His priority, his core value, is to carry out his Father's purpose. He has an appointment with his destiny in Jerusalem, and he will go there, no matter what. He longs to protect his people like a mother hen protects her chicks by gathering them under her wings.

When times get tough, and we often find they do, knowing our purpose in life shapes how we respond. The story of a man trying to save a snake, and when asked why he

was risking his life, he said, 'It is in the nature of the snake to bite, but it is in my nature to save.'

In this second week of Lent, we can easily be distracted by many things in life that compete for our attention. Jesus, in the Gospel this week, however, invites us to stay firm in our commitment to the journey of the cross. With our eyes fixed on Jesus and the cross ahead, God's purpose for our lives should always remain clear, even amid life's troubles. We are called to venture into the unknown and the uncertainty, to confront the valleys of injustice, sadness, and greed. We are called to be a sign and a preview of God's kingdom by embodying hope, justice, and mercy within our circle of influence. This path is not easy. But it is a path of walking with Jesus in ministry in the world.

May God's boundless love and grace continue to surround you with His peace that surpasses human understanding as we journey towards the cross and the glory of the risen Easter Christ in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and peace, (Kelesi mo e melino)

***Rev Ikani Vaitohi***

Image: Hochhalter, Cara B.. As a Hen Gathers, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imageink.pl?RC=59275>

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## **CHURCH COUNCIL**

### **Worship**

We continue to be blessed with Ikani and his family being with us each Sunday. We are appreciative of his ministry, guidance, and pastoral care, especially in these changing times. We look forward to and pray for Ikani's ministry to us in this Lenten and Easter part of the Christian year. We also pray for his family and Siale's return to good health.

### **Council Meetings with congregational teams**

The Council has had very fruitful conversations with the following teams in the last month to discuss where the groups are, how they are going, what they need assistance with and how they see their future: Pastoral Connections, Non-Placement Pastor for the Refugee Ministry, Refugee Ministry and Material Aid, Men's Shed, Repair Café and the Environment Group.

The teams are an integral part of St Luke's congregation and, as such, continue to value the congregations support and encouragement of their activities, both actively and prayerfully. An occasional kind word or a visit really is encouraging of their excellent work on the congregation's behalf.

### **Kindergarten/Uniting status: A report to Worship Service on 22 February 2026**

"A 'Proposal' was provided by Uniting last year and was presented to the congregation at the congregational meeting on November 16th, 2025. After Church Council discussion with the Synod, Presbytery and the congregation, the congregation decided that the 'Proposal' would not be accepted, because it would mean that the Congregation would pass the Responsible Body status from St Luke's Congregation to Uniting. This could significantly affect the future of the congregation and it would not be approved by Synod nor Presbytery.

On February 6th, 2026, a Building Report was emailed to the Council by Uniting, identifying significant structural and safety issues, which, by law, have to be addressed. The repairs would incur considerable cost, for which the congregation does not have the finances. After a meeting with Presbytery, and Synod Property Services, it

was decided that Presbytery and Synod would contact Uniting to offer Uniting a partial ground lease for the Kindergarten part of the site, on which they could renovate the kindergarten, at no expense to us.

On February 20th Uniting presented to the Congregation (and Presbytery and Synod) a letter stating that they were unable to support rent of more than \$10,000 and that, if a rebuild, as described in the Proposal, was not an option, that they be advised by Saturday 14th March, as enrolments for the following year commence from that date. Should a rebuild not proceed, Uniting will need to begin planning for the orderly closure of the kindergarten service. Closing the kindergarten or not, is of course a decision that UNITING will make. We are only able to continue having discussions with them and try to work out a scenario that works for both parties.

We were going to discuss the letter in the AGM on March 15th but a further conversation was had on 21st February between Megan and Heather Loader, Presbytery Secretary.

We have been advised by Presbytery that no negotiations, offers or decisions should be included in a regular congregational meeting on 15th March at this point, until advised by the Presbytery. It is important to ensure that we follow this advice, hence this statement to explain where we are at this moment.

It is not our decision to close or keep the Kinder open; that decision lies with Uniting.

We can only focus on the decision we've already made, which is Uniting's offer to take over the Responsible Body Status. The advice from Presbytery and Synod is clear on that.

Therefore, the question before the Church Council and Congregation is whether we want to make any changes to the decision of 16 November 2025, bearing in mind that the only other option for us in this discussion is to accept Uniting's proposal from last year, or find other options based on that proposal which may not include but we know that both Presbytery and Synod are of such an option.

We are awaiting a response from Presbytery and Synod Property Services regarding the next steps which can move us forward, and we acknowledged to Uniting that we have received the letter and will advise them in due course.

Obviously the Council will keep the congregation updated, but bear in mind that things will start to change more quickly now.

This is a lot to take in and it requires a lot of prayerful consideration, so please keep the Council, the Presbytery, Synod and Uniting in your prayers as we endeavour to come to a resolution."

## **Safety**

A near miss with a Kindergarten toddler and a car at the rear of the hall necessitated the implementation of a few safety features- signs, clearing the pathway directly behind the hall and a chain barrier to clearly identify the driveway from the pathway.

Although the kinder now has access back through their regular front entrance please drive slowly and carefully in all areas around the site and ensure that you follow the signs, being aware that there are children around.

## **Congregational Meeting: AGM**

We have the AGM coming up. Please take the time to read documentation and attend so that we can all be informed of all matters relating to the congregation. Documents will be available from March 8th.

**Catherine Mullen**

**Megan Knott**

*Chairperson*

*Secretary*

## PANCAKE CELEBRATION

*To remember the arrival of Lent, Pancakes were enjoyed after the Feb 22 Sunday service as well as for the Pre-school children and the Mid-week service. Over \$200 was made to support Uniting outreach.*



## MARCH CALENDAR

### Meetings

- *Thurs Mar 12* **Midweek Service** with pancakes
- *Wed March 4* **Coffee'n'Chat** Brioche 1:30pm
- *Friday March 13 & 27* **Sewing Group**
- *Sat March 14* **Repair Cafe** 1pm
- *Mon March 23* **Pastoral Connections** meeting
- *Fri Mar 20 & Sat Mar 21* **Collectibles**

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## PASTORAL CONNECTIONS

**Psalm 46:1** 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.'

A church minister was being interviewed on television. His wife had been a Deacon in the Anglican Church. She had died, just two weeks earlier. The day she was ordained she had been told that she had leukaemia. "After the initial shock," he said, "she made it clear that she didn't agree with God about it."

I warmed to that. Our discipleship shouldn't make us unthinking zombies, accepting everything that happens without question. We have a right, even a duty, to use the minds God gave us. Not simply to repeat the well-worn platitudes.

"Did prayer help?" he was asked. A thoughtful pause. "Yes.... But don't ask me how. Prayer is learning to rest in God".

I get less and less satisfied with the sort of prayer that's constant petition. Of course, asking is part of prayer, but it tends to take over. I suspect it's the activist in us – we want things done, decisions made, goals accomplished now.

But in the end, the relationship between God and us has to go beyond that – to resting. Learning simply to sit with him quietly and leaving the final decisions to him. They are his anyway, and if he's not competent to deal with them, nobody is.

*Extract from Facing the Storm, published 1989.*

And so I ask, Lord, not necessarily to understand the way things are but just to find the grace to rest in you.

To still my mind and in the blessed peace and quiet that comes when I relax, and lift my arms, surrender to your presence.

And in your nearness find that's all I need.

Over many years St. Luke's has been blessed with an active link to God through Prayer.

Our requests come from varied sources such our web page, our email system and from far away places, such as Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland, when past members of St. Luke's find themselves in difficult situations and would like the reassurance of prayer from friends.

Some of our requests are from families who have lost loved ones, and are struggling to find peace. These requests can come from other churches, some from Nursing homes, where families are seeking comfort while experiencing a difficult time.

Of course, most of our prayer requests are from family and friends who live close to us and value the knowledge knowing that the power of prayer grows when we pray together.

We are so blessed to have this privilege and freedom to offer grace and peace of mind, for all families who ask us to pray.

For anyone who finds themselves requiring prayer contact St. Luke's office on 5244 2997, or

Pam Seller on 0407 557 933 – Prayer Link convenor.

Peace and grace *Pam Seller, Pastoral Connections Team Leader.*

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## PRAYER POINTS FOR MARCH



### PRAISE POINTS :

- Almighty God, we give thanks for people and organisations that give time and money to help restore and protect the amazing diversity and beauty of our world.
- We praise you God for the joy of sharing with family and friends. Our thoughts are with those families who are separated by distance or illness.
- We give thanks for the gifts that you have blessed each of us with. The gifts of fellowship, service, pastoral care and prayer. These are given to all members of your 'body' the church, to bring comfort and blessing to those placed in our care.
- We give thanks for those within our fellowship, who give so much of their time and skills to enabling the smooth operation of our church services, refugee outreach and the love and care of our community.

### PRAYER POINTS :

- Almighty God we give thanks for our Church Council, and pray that they may know your blessing as they work with various church authorities, to understand the future way ahead for our community at St. Luke's
- Lord God, our hearts go out to all refugees. Like us they know fear, hope, love, and a longing to return to their homes. Show us ways to reach out and offer understanding, compassion and support.
- We pray for our farmers throughout our country, who have lost so much, through drought, fire and flood. May they know our compassion as we support them through prayer and with practical household and farm implement items to help their recovery and wellbeing.
- Our prayers are for all ministers of the word who share the gospel every week. May they be inspired and led by the Holy Spirit as they prepare for worship.
- God of grace, we bring before you our concerns for the world and our society. We pray for justice, peace and for wise leaders, to discern the best interests of the people they serve.
- Our thoughts and prayers are for peace of mind, for those friends and family who we know are unwell, in hospital, recovering from surgery, receiving or waiting for treatment or the result of tests.
- Our thoughts go out to those we know who are facing changing circumstances, such as losing a loved one, the loss of a driving licence or having to move into care. Give them patience, strength and support to cope.

**ALL PRAYER REQUESTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL AND PERMISSION MUST BE RECEIVED BEFORE NAMES ARE SHARED DURING WORSHIP.**

# *St. Luke's Collectibles*

*Raising funds for Refugee Ministry*



1. Following a massive 'Chapel' stocktake during January, a very successful clearance sale was held. Bargain hunters snapped up many treasures which helped clear the way for new stock to commence the new year.
2. Our February Chapel Collectibles sale proved to be outstanding as a fund raiser to support Refugees and others in need. New customers from all over Victoria, familiar faces, young couples looking for furniture, two enquiries seeking info on becoming a volunteer, one retired lady offered to support a newcomer family with 'conversation English'.
3. During February, the Refugee room has supported 5 families with kitchen items; dinner sets, bowls, crockery, cups, mugs, cutlery, saucepans, baking pans, and chopping boards. Linen items included doonas, single and double sheets, towels, hand towels, tea towels, placemats, and white goods.
4. The Wednesday Drivers Team's Roster commenced in February. This is a very welcome addition to our set of Teams. One volunteer each Wednesday gives one hour at lunch time to deliver important Op Shop items to 26 Rose Ave, Norlane.
5. Shaghek Qassabyan: We continued to be blessed to employ Shaghek Qassabyan, our Non-Placement Pastor Community Ministry Worker, with her many languages – supporting people in need with material aid, banking arrangements, Centrelink queries, or connections to power, while extending the hands of friendship.
6. Barwon Trefoil Girl Guides: We continue to give thanks to the Barwon Trefoil Girls who regularly send a team to clean and polish the donated, but tarnished, silverware prior to sale.
7. Monies raised from the Collectibles Sales are directed to support Refugees and others in need.
8. Thank you to Alison and Nola who kindly spent 4 hours dusting the chapel after bush-fire ash settled amongst the Chapel Collectibles. The chapel was renewed, refreshed and sparkling in time for the sale weekend.
9. Group Tours in Collectibles Chapel and morning tea: If the Group in which you belong is seeking to have a delightful morning out, why not book a tour and hear our story about our Ministry to Refugees and Asylum Seeker families. Phone Rae to have a chat.

## **SALES WEEKEND . . . . St Luke's Chapel Collectibles,**

**Cnr Barrabool & Scenic Rds, Highton. 3216**

**March Collectibles Sales Opening:** Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March from 12 noon until 4pm.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>. Mar from 9am till lunchtime.

You are invited. Bring friends. Help share our story.

**Will you remember:** Every Wednesday, between 9.30 am 11.30am, the Wednesday Team are available to receive material aid donations. Simply drive between the Chapel and Men's Shed to off load. The Collectibles Chapel story continues.

We give thanks for those who connect with us, donating material aid to support people in need. St Luke's Uniting Church, 174 Barrabool Road, Highton 3216.

Rae Anderson 0413 888

884 Collectibles Co-ordinator



## ENVIRONMENT GROUP

### Clean Up Australia Day

On the 28<sup>th</sup> February, we organized "Clean Up Australia Day" along with Western Heights, Wesley and Belmont UC Environment Groups. Combining our groups for events such as this means we can pick up so much more rubbish.

This effort in turn not only makes the place where we live look nicer, but also saves any of our birds and other creatures mistakenly eating something that may be harmful for them.

Anything we find that can be recycled, we save and place that item at the appropriate place. It may not be a nice job, but it is certainly satisfying.



### Repair Cafe

The first Repair Cafe for the year was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> February. We are certainly blessed with the number of volunteers who come in and spend their time repairing for those in need.

The cafe is also a good outreach, as older people on their own, come in for a cuppa and some company.

Over the 9 years that we have been operating, we have saved over 9,000 kilograms from landfill by repairing those items. This is very important as landfill sites reach their capacity.

*St Luke's Environment Group*  
*Claire Ziegler*



## NATIONAL NEWS

*World Day of Prayer is on Friday 6 March and will be celebrated by more than 170 countries. Links to commemorative services and resources are available [here](#).*

*The season of Lent may be entering its second week, but it's not too late to join UnitingWorld's Lent Event! Individuals, congregations and community groups can journey through [40 for the Future](#), use the [Lent resources to inspire](#), and [give generously](#) to stand with families facing poverty and climate change.*

