

## *Monthly update*

# *The Uniting Church in Australia*

## **St Luke's Congregation, Highton**

April 2026

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*The encounter between the risen Christ and Mary Magdalene*

In a world that can feel loud, anxious, and divided, Easter arrives with a quiet but powerful word: *peace*.

This Easter, Rev Charissa Suli, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, offers a message drawn from the heart of the resurrection story — the moment the risen Jesus stood among his frightened disciples, showed them his wounds, and breathed new life into their fear.

It is a message for anyone carrying more than they show. For communities facing real pressures. For a world still searching for hope that doesn't flinch from the hard things.

Resurrection is not denial. It is love moving through scars. And that peace — the peace of the risen Christ — does not stay behind locked doors. It moves outward. It sends us.

### **Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.**

**President's Easter Message 2026** -  
*Rev Charissa Suli (President, Uniting Church in Australia)*

Peace! If life feels loud right now... If the world feels more anxious than peaceful... The first Easter happened behind locked doors.

Not in a cathedral. Not in celebration. But in fear. And into that fear, the risen Jesus stood among his disciples and said: "Peace be with you." He says it twice — because sometimes once isn't enough.

As President of the Uniting Church in Australia, I want to speak into this moment we are living through — because the world does not need more noise. It needs peace.



Many of us are carrying more than we show. We feel it when making ends meet feels harder than it used to. In private grief. In young people wrestling with anxiety. In conversations that divide more than they heal.

Across the world, families live behind locked doors of their own. Across the Pacific, rising seas remind us how fragile home can feel. Here in Australia, the wounds of this land are still carried by First Peoples. Easter does not look away from any of this.

When Jesus appeared, he showed his hands and his side. He did not hide his wounds. Resurrection is not denial. It is love moving through scars. He stood among his disciples — not performing, not demanding — simply present. And he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit." This is how his peace comes alive in them.

Not by pretending everything is fine, but in the middle of real life. It brings them back to God — and back to one another. As Christians, this matters for us. Because if Christ is risen — and he is — then fear does not have the final word.

The Church does not live by anxiety. We live by resurrection. Not anxious about survival, but faithful in witness. We are here to represent Jesus Christ.

And that peace does not stay behind locked doors. It moves outward. It sends us.

So, this Easter — Receive his peace. Stand firm in resurrection hope. And live as people of resurrection —because death and fear do not have the final word. Because the tomb is empty.

Love has not ended. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Happy Easter.

Peace be with you.

**Rev Ikani Vaitohi**

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## COUNCIL REPORT

Easter Sunday is when "the Easter story continues to unfold. God's living Word is revealed to a woman, who cannot be a witness – and yet is indeed. Grief turns to astonishment and then to joy. The movement involves letting go. This one who was handed over by disciples, leaders, God, cannot be held in the emptiness of the tomb. This one must be allowed to rise. The rising does not negate the dying. Rather it emphasises its poignancy. The one handed over and lifted up in the hideous glory of death/birth on the cross returns to their origins as word-act of God. God's word has issued forth. God's action has been accomplished. The Word remains in God: and God's work continues." *With Love to the World.*

We move into the future sure that we are in God's hands.

At the recent congregational meeting we welcomed our new Council member, Dr Roger McLennan, who, with Catherine Mullen (Chair), Megan Knott (Secretary), Des Youngusband (Treasurer) and Geoff Boehm (resources), were re-elected onto the Council. Shaghek Qassabyan, in her role as non-Placement Pastor (Community Worker) and Rev Ikani Vaitohi are automatically on the Council.

During this last month we were challenged to consider changes to how we move forward as a congregation on this site, as we consider the ramifications for us of a safety report on the Kindergarten. The kindergarten is unsafe and structurally unsound. The building needs to be rebuilt. The Council had several conversations with Presbytery and Synod Property Services, the bodies of the UCA which own and also

have oversight of the land. A decision was made to bring a proposal to the congregation to have further conversations with Uniting regarding them having a \$10,000/year ground lease for 10 years. This will mean that, as the kindergarten is rebuilt and possibly after, they will have use of the hall. We all had the opportunity to hear from Heather Loader, Presbytery Secretary and Rina Neustroski, Property Services explain the need for this decision. The congregation decided by consensus to continue the conversations with Uniting.

There is a lot more to consider and a lot more discussion that needs to occur between Uniting, Presbytery, Synod and the congregation. In all discussions, it should be noted that Presbytery and Synod have endeavoured to explain that this is not an easy decision and they have the congregation's best interest in mind to ensure that we retain as much of our site for future use and financial security- it is a joint decision by the three levels of the UCA.

We have started the process to reimagine how we use our spaces around the site. The first change to be made is rearranging the worship space. We are hoping to do this on May 1st and 2nd, ready for worship on Sunday 3rd May. We're sure you will be very excited to attend and see what we have done. If you think you have muscles to help move furniture and are available on the 1st or 2nd May, please see a council member and let them know.

In the coming months there will be a lot of meetings, discussion, information and some level of uncertainty as we move forward, but we were, and are a pilgrim people, moving forward in faith that this is where God is leading us.

**Catherine Mullen**  
Chairperson

**Megan Knott**  
Secretary

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## Congregational directory

I will be approaching people to see if they would like to have their personal information (ANY or all of: name, address, phone number and email) presented in a directory that would only be available to other people within the directory. There will be no online access for anyone.

If yes, I will be asking you to sign saying you agree and once I have collated the information you will receive a copy. If no, then I will remove your name from the list - but you won't get a copy of the directory.

Please see me if you have any questions,

Catherine Mullen (occasional office administrator)

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## APRIL CALENDAR

### Services

- Sunday April 5 9:30 Easter Sunday service, Rev **Ikani Vaitohi**
- Sunday April 12 9:30 Service, Rev **Ikani Vaitohi**
- Sunday April 12 7pm House Church Kevin & Joy McAvaney
- Thurs April 16 1:30 Midweek Service & Communion
- Sunday April 19 9:30 Service & Holy Communion **Ikani Vaitohi**
- Sunday April 26 9:30 Sunday Service Rev **Ikani Vaitohi**

### Meetings

- Friday April 10 & 24 Sewing Group
- Fri April 17 & Sat April 18 Collectibles
- Wed May 6 Coffee'n'Chat Brioche 1:30pm

## PASTORAL CONNECTIONS

*Reflection on the past, enjoying the present and looking with hope and faith to the future.*

### THE LEGACY OF ST. LUKE'S

According to the thesaurus a 'legacy' is "an inheritance, a gift and/or a tradition."

Having attended the Belmont Uniting 100th anniversary celebrations in early March, I was prompted to investigate what lasting legacies have been left by our predecessors at St. Luke's. What follows is a brief outline of the hard working 'farming to suburban' history through the ages, which has left a valued Legacy, for our faith community.

In 1853 the first Wesleyan church services were held in homes in small farming communities in and around the 'Highett' the area, later known as Highton.

October 1854 saw the foundation stone laid for the first brick church on our present site. This is also the year that Highton Primary School was opened.

The present chapel was built in 1868 from Ceres sandstone, carted free by farmers from McCann's quarry. The area developed rapidly and in 1873 a stone Sunday School room was built and was part funded by potato crops grown on the grounds.

The Highett Wesleyan's joined with other churches in Victoria in 1902 and became known as the Methodist Church of Australasia.

In 1926, with the village of Highton growing, the Lane Memorial (Kindergarten) hall was constructed and was completed just days before a tornado swept through the Highton area destroying the Chapel bell tower and inflicting severe damage at St. Johns and several houses in the area.

As Highton continued to grow throughout the 1950's, and as more younger families moved into the area, the first resident minister was called, then fourteen years later the pre-school centre was built, followed by the church hall in 1966.

As from 1972 the Highton Methodist and Presbyterian churches began sharing worship between their two properties, eventually becoming the Highton/Barrabool Hills parish, During 1977 the Highton/Barrabool Hills parish became part of the Uniting Church of Australia.

In 1974 the name St. Luke's had been adopted, signifying the philosophy of hope and healing as reflected in the Gospel of St. Luke, and thus St. Luke's Uniting Church came into being.

Eventually in 1983 the two congregations combined on the one property when the present worship space was completed.

There have been many others past and present, as mentioned in 'Steadfast Through Change', who have contributed to our fellowship and leadership through worship and mission.

The history of Highton Methodist aka St. Luke's has been transitional. A faith journey that has experienced many changes and adaptations, and so it continues as we journey through 2026 and beyond.

The Pastoral Connections team strives to encourage friendship and support through fellowship, love and support through prayer, and a sense of belonging through the visiting and contacting of our members who have all contributed, in their own way, to the heritage, traditions and gifts shared within our fellowship.

The legacy of St. Luke's will live on in the hearts of those touched by our presence, no matter where our worship space may be in the future.

*Pam Seller (Pastoral Connections team co-ordinator)*

## PRAYER DOT POINTS FOR APRIL



### Praise and thanksgiving

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 your name. Praise God for the life and witness of all those who have gone before us.
- Loving God bless this day and all that it holds for each of us. May all our actions and thoughts reflect your grace and love, to all who you place in our hearts.
- We pray for and give thanks for our Church Council who are working hard to encompass the thoughts and concerns of the congregation. May they know your wisdom, and grace as they move us onto the next stage of our journey.

### General Prayers

- 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 that they may work to bring justice and unity to the people they govern and serve.
- Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine, Gaza, South Sudan, the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Cuba, and many other countries too numerous to list. We pray that there will be people to support and help them until peace returns.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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

## St LUKE'S COLLECTIBLES

**Welcome** to our latest Collectibles news. We hope that you enjoy reading, and sharing the story, knowing that with your prayerful support we can make a difference to all needy people: refugees, asylum seekers, homelessness, family violence victims, and detainees.

### **Questions are often asked 'what else happens – apart from Collectibles sales and household items in the refugee room'.**

- **During** January/February: 20 Refugee families were assisted with material aid: 8 Afghan, 3 Karen, 1 Karenni, 1 Iranian, 3 Iraqi, 4 Syrian.
- Jan/Feb/Mar: 17 families / people were provided with material aid in conjunction with Agencies finding accommodation for homeless and family violence victims.
- Lazarus House – we provided 4 sleeping bags & 4 back packs for the homeless.
- Testing and Tagging: Raad Bahnam tested and tagged 80 items Jan/Feb. (charge \$4.00 per item) for Refugee Ministry & Men's Shed.
- A van load of tools & equipment was transported to Skipton for distribution by Blaze Aid to property owners who had lost their equipment in the February bushfires.

Wednesday Drive through donations: Weekly average = 8 cars. February/Mar 52 cars. Letters of thanks to donors: 39 in Jan/Feb.

New Volunteers in February - 2 community people joined the Wednesday sorting team, and 1 community person joined the Wednesday Drivers team. One community lady joined the refugee sewing days providing conversational English to newcomers. Financial Result from February Sales weekend \$12,781.00, and \$7,333.00 in March. Monies raised from the Collectibles Sales are directed to support Refugees and others in need.

**Synod of Victoria and Tasmania: Working with Children Check/Working with Vulnerable People Policy:** . To comply with UCA requirements, every endeavour is being made to have all our volunteers complete their WWC check.

**Donated 'potless' succulents.** A special working bee was held to pot-up a large range of donated succulents. Sales of potted plants always draws many customers.

**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. We will welcome a group from Barwarre Gardens this month.

### **April at St Luke's: SALES WEEKEND**

**Opening:** **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> Apr from 12 noon** until 4pm; **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> Apr from 9am** till lunchtime.

**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*



## APPEAL FOR SEWING MATERIALS

*Email to St Luke's from Alison Parker*

*I hope you don't mind me taking the liberty of contacting you but I'll explain the connection. I'm the daughter of Mary and Alwyn Jones, who were parishioners at St Lukes until my mother died twenty five years ago and their ashes are in the Memorial Garden.*

*In their younger years (late 1960's) they were Presbyterian missionaries for three years on the tiny island of Paama in Vanuatu (or New Hebrides as it was then).*

*My sister Helen and I are planning a trip back to visit Paama later this year, 57 years after we left. Paama is very remote from the main islands and has no tourism facilities at all so travel logistics there are not straightforward! However we are being assisted by a lady called Sue, who runs a NZ non-profit organisation called Pacific Partnerships. Sue has done some aid work on Paama so is putting us in touch with the local NiVan Pastor and Elders there.*

*We are looking for donations which we can take to Paama and given baggage limitations, we are hoping to collect dressmaking materials for the Paamese mothers to make dresses for themselves and the children. Fabrics need to be lightweight cotton only due to the heat. We'd also welcome any donations of sewing threads, elastic and trims such as bias binding, lace, ric-rac and similar decorative articles. I'm also thinking about simple school supplies such as writing and drawing paper, coloured pencils and sharpeners for the children if we have room in our bags (unfortunately children's books would be too heavy).*

*Would you consider publishing this request in the next St Luke's newsletter and/or on your noticeboard? I'd be happy to design, print and send you a flyer to put on the noticeboard if that would help.*

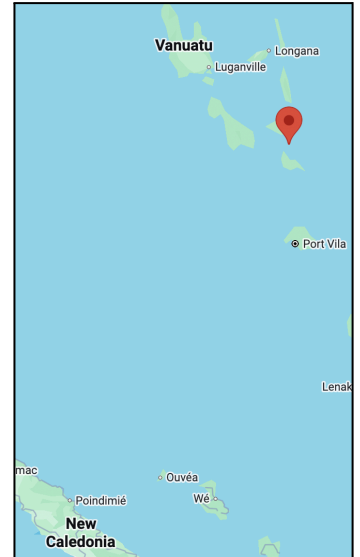
*I thought perhaps that people might like to take the opportunity to clear out their sewing & school supplies and support our small but very worthwhile project. Local NiVan people on Paama lead an essentially subsistence life so we thought this would be a useful project for the two of us to undertake.*

*Would you have space somewhere in the church buildings for a donation box? I will be away for most of April but very happy to come to Geelong from Melbourne and collect donations from the beginning of May onwards (so long as there's petrol!).*

*We would so appreciate your consideration of our request.*

*Alison*

*If you would like to support this request, please contact Shaghek.*



## NATIONAL NEWS

### Encountering the Living God as we journey toward Easter

Assembly General Secretary Andrew Johnson reflects on encountering the Living God – and invites the Church to seek and trust that presence anew this Easter



On Monday evening in Holy Week, I sat in a Eucharistic service followed by the proclamation of the Word. The pews were uncomfortable. There was no printed Order of Service – you were expected to know the responses. I tried to follow the patterns of worship, though high Anglican tradition is not my most familiar. I stood, sat, and knelt as best I could, until my knees would take no more.

And yet, despite all of this, I found myself in the presence of the living God. I was fed – by both Word and Sacrament.

Recently, I have also had the privilege of spending time with two saints of our Uniting Church.

The first was Rev Duncan Harrison – my grandfather – who served as both Moderator and General Secretary of the Synod of Queensland. Now 97, approaching 98, his speech is slowed by age and his hearing diminished. The President, Rev Charissa Suli, and I sat with him and listened carefully. Communication was not easy. And yet, in the midst of those limitations, we encountered the presence of God. We were fed – through prayer and the Scriptures.

The second was Rev David Gill, former General Secretary of the National Assembly. In many ways, we were strangers. Yet as we sat together, we spoke honestly about the life of the Church. We wondered aloud whether those who gather for worship come expecting an encounter with the living God – or simply to catch up with friends.

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Uniting Church, how do we see this moment?

Is it a time for nostalgia, looking back to the saints of the past?

Is it a time to lament decline?

Or is it a moment to look forward with hope?

In many ways, we are like that Holy Week service. Our conversations can be uncomfortable. We do not always have a clear blueprint for the future. Even the patterns and practices we try to follow can leave us weary.

And yet – again and again – we encounter the presence of the living God. In Word. In action. In one another.

So the question presses in on us:

Do we expect to encounter the living God?

Are we actually looking for it?

And how might that encounter come to us this Easter?

I left that Monday evening service with a sense of longing. I wished I could continue the journey through Holy Week with that community. I wanted to see where the preacher would go – how the threads he had begun to unravel would be woven back together.

Read [the rest of this article](#) in National Update, 1 Apr 2026.