



THE MESSENGER

Newsletter of
St Luke's Uniting Church

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Minister's Message

Touring possibilities

On Tuesday the 15th of March I joined a mini-bus tour of the South-East organised for the Presbytery Standing Committee by Craig Mitchell, the Presbytery Minister Congregation Development. The South-East of the Presbytery includes the municipal area of Casey as well as some of Cardinia shire. These are among the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria, full of estates developed from farmland like Mount Waverley in the 1960s, though with more amenities, facilities and infrastructure from the outset and a more culturally diverse demographic.

There are six Uniting Churches in the area; Berwick, Narre Warren North, Endeavour Hills, Hampton Park, Cranbourne, and Pakenham. There is also a school, which was established by a joint effort by local Uniting and Anglican Churches, and these formed stopping points for our tour.

The school is Beaconhills College, which opened in Pakenham in 1982, and now has a second campus in Berwick. Each campus hosts students from preschool to year 12, with approximately 1300 students at each. The Rev Steve Terrell is currently one of the Chaplains at the Berwick campus, which we toured. It was an impressive first stop, with expansive grounds, modern buildings (the campus was opened by the Moderator, Rev Sue Gormann, in 2004) and a clear commitment to integrating the values of Christian community life into the curriculum. Campus Principal Sam Watson describes it as a multi-faith Christian community.

Students of any or no religious background are welcome and celebrated within the context of a school which teaches and offers immersion in the Christian faith. The Presbytery is looking to create closer ties between the school and nearby Churches.

The tour of the area showed that there is, in each community area around the Churches, a variety of established and new neighbourhoods, with differences in income clear in the style, size and density of houses, as well as the shops that service them (which you can see in Mt Waverley, too). In Pakenham and Hampton Park, the Church is close to the commercial district of the town, while the others are more like St Luke's – you have to live or be visiting nearby to travel past the Church.

Hampton Park is co-located with a Uniting agency, and there are numerous programs that use the Church buildings in the provision of services to the community. The weekly 'Carer's lunch' is one such initiative, which offers a free, home-style meal for carers, a counsellor from Uniting who facilitates a support group as part of the gathering, and the company of other people facing the same challenges. It is funded through an external grant, but supported by volunteers from the congregation and community. The Rev Ric Holland provides full time ministry there.

In Pakenham, St Luke's recent donation is supporting the work of Riak Kiir, who liaises with the local Sudanese community and with the Cardinia Council to support Sudanese Australians in navigating available government and non-government services, receiving important information (most recently about Covid and vaccinations), and finding ways to connect with the broader community. The Pakenham congregation is seeking ongoing grant funding for Riak's position, following the ending of a previous grant, and is using its own funds in the meantime. I'll invite Riak to share an update with us soon about how things have changed as restrictions have eased.

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Cranbourne congregation runs its 'Food Truck' three nights a week, providing hot meals to community members in need. While the work is supported by grants, the labour is all voluntary, and a cooking team prepares the meals in their homes to be served from the Truck. Hampton Park is looking to collaborate with Cranbourne to offer the Food Truck in Hampton Park and offer the use of their commercial kitchen for preparation.

Berwick has two worshipping communities – an inter-generational 9 am service and a more traditional service at 10.30 am (for which Matthew Clark often plays the organ). They also offer two weekly playgroups and a Messy Church called 'Kidzone'. These have been supported by the Rev Wendy Snook, and Mat Pendle, who have both recently finished their ministry in the congregation.

Endeavour Hills Uniting Church is nestled in a residential street, and in addition to weekly worship offers a playgroup, run once a week by congregation members. The Rev Mike You provides half-time ministry, with a focus on music.

Narre Warren North congregation sits on top of a hill in a semi-rural area just a few kilometres north of Westfield Fountain Gate shopping centre. An op-shop which runs out of the church hall provided significant funds until the pandemic shutdowns, and the volunteers running it are now focussed on recovery. There is also a community garden on the lower slope of the steep church block, a craft group, book club and photography group. The Rev Bruce Crowle provides part time ministry there.

The six congregations whose buildings and neighbourhoods we saw all face similar challenges to our own – an increasing average age of congregation members, a shrinking pool of people with both time and capacity to take on responsibilities, and a reliance on sources of funding beyond congregational offerings. Each one has been operating with its own ministry agent, but almost all of them are planning for part-time ministry in the future. Three of the congregations have no ministry agent in place at present.

In responding to the challenges facing the Casey and Cardinia congregations, and with an eye to the gifts of God's grace which the Uniting Church has to offer to the growth corridor, the Presbytery is exploring new models of providing ministry in the area; looking to strengthen and encourage the existing congregations, and identify opportunities for new ministries in the region. Craig Mitchell is leading this work, in conjunction with the Mission and Leadership Development Committee, the Pastoral Relations Committee and the Standing Committee of the Presbytery.

As we emerge from the disruptions of the pandemic, I'm inspired by the work I've seen on the tour. Our Church Council has a retreat scheduled for Saturday 2nd April, and Craig Mitchell will help us consider how we address the challenges we face, and discern the opportunities we can take up. I invite you to pray for our Church Council in its work, and to pray for the work of the Presbytery and the congregations in the Casey and Cardinia areas.

James

Making Post-Covid Connections in the Community

In 2022 the St Luke's Kids Hope program is resuming at Essex Heights Primary School and there are opportunities for St Luke's members to participate.

For those who don't know what Kids Hope is – it's a mentoring program which matches one adult with one child for one hour each week, through connecting one church with one school. The school selects students for mentoring who require additional support socially or academically. Each week during term at a mutually agreed time the child and mentor meet at the child's classroom for the 'mentor hour', as it's called. During this time the mentor and child ('mentee') work together on any class work set by the teacher, engage in an art or craft activity, and a fun activity in or outside the classroom. As they work together week by week, a relationship builds which gives the mentee a relationship with a trusted adult and a sense that they matter (mentors only mentor one child). Children look forward to the mentor hour and mentors do, too. It's a small and simple program which can provide a large benefit to the child who is mentored, the school, and the mentor themselves. As the Kids Hope admin team puts it:

Kids Hope is Australia's largest early intervention, school-based mentoring program. The powerful one-to-one model positively impacts children as emotional and social development needs are met and learning capacity enhanced. High-quality training, structures and child-safe processes have flow-on benefits to mentors, classrooms, schools, families and communities.

Currently there are three mentors – me, Rena Douglas and Rennus Crossley. I'm interested in hearing from congregation members who would be willing to be mentors or prayer supporters, as each mentor has a prayer supporter who prays regularly for the mentor and meets occasionally to discuss any areas of particular need. For mentors, there is a selection process, which involves filling out a form and doing a brief interview, followed by mentor training and finally matching with a mentee in consultation with the school. Before beginning, potential mentors need to have a current working with children check, commit to a code of conduct, and be willing to undergo the training (about four hours, which is done at St Luke's).

One hour a week is the minimum commitment, though preparation for sessions is always helpful. You will need to be able to get to and from the school, and get around the school, so some mobility is essential, but not athleticism. While the program relies on regular and consistent contact between mentors and mentees, there is sufficient flexibility to accommodate holidays or special events. You don't need to be a counsellor or therapist, just a reliable, understanding and caring adult, who is ready to listen and to share. If you have a hobby, this can be a connection point with your mentee. With my last mentee, Lucas, as well as working on maths and English, I brought simple science experiments that we demonstrated to the class, and we played with basic electronic circuits. Mum and Rennus shared different activities with their mentees, and I encourage you to ask them about their experiences.

Mentors are supported in several ways. Teachers work with the mentors to shape the 'work' of the mentor hour, the Kids Hope Coordinator provides support with training and liaising with the school, and then there are Prayer partners, who provide important support to the mentor through regular prayer, and through 'meeting' with the mentor (in person or by phone or zoom) to provide encouragement.

If you would like to know more, or want to volunteer as a mentor or prayer partner, please talk to me or to one of the other mentors.

James

From the Church Council

Writing a report for the Autumn edition of the Messenger seems a trite exercise compared with the situations occurring in many locations around the world at the moment.

However, here goes!

The Church Council at St Luke's has continued to maintain the rhythm of activities at St Luke's. We are gradually returning to a more 'normal' existence as the COVID situation and constrictions are gradually eased. We have continued with our Zoom worship services, our Zoom meetings and discussion groups. On March 6th, we returned to in-person worship services; also offering Zoom for those who would prefer this. Our small group activities have resumed meeting together at the church.

Continually, we are appreciating the technological expertise of James and the AV crew – thank you all!

We have welcomed Jan Heeley, Ros Grant and Margaret Carroll to our community, due to the closure of St Mark's after almost seventy years. This was a sad occasion for all who were part of this congregation. Change is in the area – as High Street Road UC and St John's have recently finalised their future amalgamation. The High Street Road property will be sold, and further development will occur at St John's, as members of both communities will worship together in that place.

Our Adult Growth and Development Ministry Group has planned a series of forums surrounding the topic 'Understanding Disability' during March. The first of these was on 19th March and more information is available from John McKie.

The Property Ministry Group has been busy with plans for upgrading the AV desk, the cabling and the purchase of additional camera equipment.

The Pastoral Care Ministry Group has continued to provide support to many of our St Luke's folk, who have not been well. Thank you to all in the Pastoral Care Ministry Group, and the Link people.

The Church Council is planning a retreat on 2nd April, when we will discuss the future plans for St Luke's. The Annual General Meeting for St Luke's will be held on 24th April, so please note this in your diaries.

The Church Council members have continued diligently with their allotted tasks, and this has enabled St Luke's to continue as a supportive community during COVID times.

Of course, we are indebted to James for his care and spiritual leadership for us all. We pray for James and his family, and ask for God's blessings on them in every aspect of their lives.

I would like to share with you this quote from Jimi Hendrix.

'When the power of love, overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.'

Eunice Magee

Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics

Some good news on international cooperation

Tom Spurling

Readers to 'The Messenger' will probably recall that in 2014 the Adult Growth and Development Ministry Group organised a well-attended meeting at High Street Road Uniting Church on the impacts of plastics on marine life. The speaker was a research worker from CSIRO who showed some alarming images of the effect of plastic debris on fish species.

There had already been international concern about the issue. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 had said:

"We note with concern that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen based compounds, from a number of marine and land-based sources, including shipping and land run-off. ... We further commit to take action, by 2025, based on collected scientific data, achieve significant reductions in marine debris to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment."

They gave themselves plenty of time! This time is needed. International agreements are difficult to negotiate. Discussions about banning chemical weapons started in 1925 and weren't completed until 1997!

In the following I outline to process that has resulted in an agreement to have an international legally binding instrument by 2025.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is responsible for coordinating responses to environmental issues within the United Nations system. It was established in 1972 and has its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA) is UNEP's governing body. Created in 2012 to replace the Governing Council, it currently has 193 members and meets every two years. It had its first meeting (UNEP/EA.1) in Nairobi in June 2014.

At that meeting the national representatives requested:

The Executive Director (ED) (of UNEP), in consultation with other relevant institutions and stakeholders, to undertake a study on marine plastic debris and marine microplastics, building on existing work and taking into account the most up-to-date studies and data.

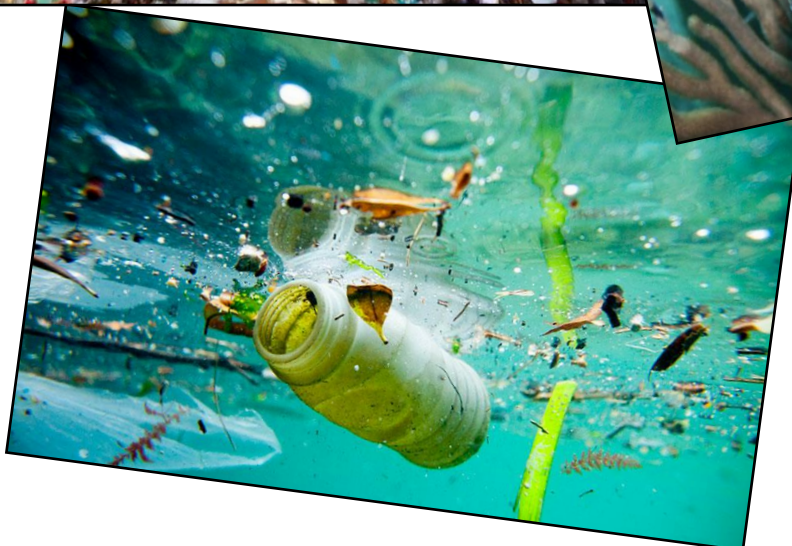
The second UNEP/EA was held in Nairobi in May 2016. The meeting noted that the UN General Assembly in 2015 had adopted the Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to "prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution." It considered the report commissioned in 2014 "Marine plastic debris and microplastics: global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change" and decided to request the ED to "undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional strategies and approaches to combat marine plastic litter and microplastics, taking into consideration the relevant international, regional and sub-regional cooperation and coordination, and to present the assessment to the EA at its next session."

The next session (UNEP/EA.3) was again in Nairobi in December 2017. This meeting noted all of the reports and information available to it and requested that the ED convene meetings of an open-ended ad hoc expert group to further examine the barriers to and options for combating marine plastic litter and microplastics from all sources, especially land-based sources.

This work was reported to UNEP/EA.4 in Nairobi in March 2019. The assembled delegates requested the ED to "develop guidelines for the use and production of plastics in order to inform consumers, including about standards and labels; to incentivise businesses and retailers to commit themselves to using sustainable practises and products; and to support governments in promoting the use of information tools and incentives to foster sustainable consumption and production."

All of this work led to the fifth meeting (UNEP/EA.5) in Nairobi in February of 2022 to take the very important step to request that the ED “*develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, which could include both binding and voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full lifecycle of plastic.*” This is to be completed by the end of 2024.

This is an ambitious plan. We all hope that it will be achieved.



My Venice

I recently was reminiscing with my sister Sandy and brother-in-law Graeme about the magical times we had on our four trips to Venice. During the conversation I showed them some photos of a batch of paintings I had completed about ten years ago based on those wonderful experiences. Sandy and Graeme hadn't previously seen some of them so I decided to put together a compilation of them. And here it is!

Tony Lenten

MY VENICE

TONY LENTEN



St Luke's Lunch Group

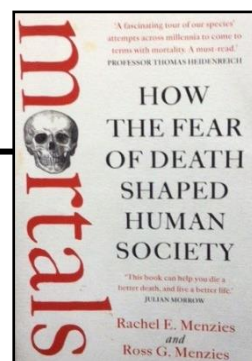
Members of St Luke's recently enjoyed lunch together at the Burvale Hotel in Nunawading.



Book Recommendation:

MORTALS

Written by Rachel Menzies and Ross Menzies.
Published by Allen & Unwin.



This book was recommended to me and I have passed on that recommendation to many people.

As an 83-year-old my body and brain remind me regularly that I am ageing. I have found *Mortals* very helpful in thinking about the subject of dying. On the front cover is the statement – ‘How the fear of death shaped human society’.

Other comments include:

“This book can help you die a better death, and live a better life.”

– comedian Julian Morrow

“A fascinating tour of our species’ attempts across millennia to come to terms with mortality. Mortals offers a stunning glimpse into what our fear of death means for our future. A must-read.”

– Professor Thomas Heidenreich, Esslingen University

“A death-defying book from two leaders in their field.”

– Professor David Veale, King’s College London.

I found *Mortals*, priced at \$34.99, very good value, and I believe it is about half the price if purchased online. It is also available from some public libraries. Please Google authors, Rachel Menzies and Ross Menzies, both psychologists, for further information.

David Langley

A Covid Christmas

*'Twas the night before Christmas, but Covid was here,
So we all had to stay extra cautious this year.
Our masks were all hung by the chimney with care
In case Santa forgot his and needed a spare.
With Covid, we couldn't leave cookies or cake
So we left Santa hand sanitizer to take.*

*The children were sleeping, the brave little tots
The ones over five had just had their first shots,
And mum in her kerchief and me in my cap
Had just settled in for a long winter's nap.
But we tossed and we turned all night in our beds
As visions of variants danced in our heads.*

*Gamma and Delta and now Omicron
These Covid mutations that go on and on
I thought to myself, "If this doesn't get better,
I'll soon be familiar with every Greek letter."*

*Then just as I started to drift off and doze
A clatter of noise from the front lawn arose.
I leapt from my bed and ran straight down the stair
I opened the door, and an old gent stood there.
His N95 made him look pretty weird
But I knew who he was by his red suit and beard.
I kept six feet away but blurted out quick
"What are you doing here, jolly Saint Nick?"*

*Then I said, "Where's your presents, your reindeer and
sleigh?
Don't you know that tomorrow will be Christmas Day?"
And Santa stood there looking sad in the snow
As he started to tell me a long tale of woe.*

*He said he'd been stuck at the North Pole alone
All his white collar elves had been working from home,
And most of the others said "Santa, don't hire us!
We can live off the dole now, thanks to the virus".*

*Those left in the toyshop had little to do.
With supply chain disruptions, they could make
nothing new.
And as for the reindeer, they'd all gone away.
None of them left to pull on his sleigh.*

*He said Dasher and Dancer were in quarantine,
Prancer and Vixen refused the vaccine,
Comet and Cupid were in ICU,
So were Donner and Blitzen, they may not pull
through.*

*And Rudolph's career can't be resurrected.
With his shiny red nose, they all think he's
infected.
Even with his old sleigh, Santa couldn't go far.
Every border to cross needs a new PCR,*

*Santa sighed as he told me how nice it would be
If children could once again sit on his knee.
He couldn't care less if they're naughty or nice
But they'd have to show proof that they'd had their
shot twice.*

*But then the old twinkle returned to his eyes.
And he said that he'd brought me a Christmas
surprise.
When I unwrapped the box and opened it wide,
Starlight and rainbows streamed out from inside.*

*Some letters whirled round and flew up to the sky
And they spelled out a word that was 40 feet high.
There first was an H, then an O, then a P,
Then I saw it spelled HOPE when it added the E.*

*"Christmas magic" said Santa as he smiled through
his beard.
Then suddenly all of the reindeer appeared.
He jumped into his sleigh and he waved me
good-bye,
Then he soared o'er the rooftops and into the sky.*

*I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight
"Get your vaccines my friends, Merry Christmas,
good-night".
Then I went back to bed and a sweet Christmas
dream
Of a world when we'd finished with Covid 19.*

With thanks to Rosemary McQuiggin