The Westerly

PRESBYTERY OF PORT PHILLIP WEST

PPW & PWV Newsletter No.34 – 23rd June 2022

Presbytery of Western Victoria

My Bonnevaux experience …

Rev. Geoff Barker (Warrambool UCA)

For study leave this year I recently spent two weeks at the World Community for Christian Meditation's Bonnevaux Abbey in France, with my wife, Colleen. It was different to any Minister's Retreat, Course or Church Camp I've ever been on. We were there for two programs- one on Labyrinths and one asking the question 'Are We Making Progress?' ethically and spiritually as a human race. During our two weeks there were people from 16 different countries, but the sessions were in English.

Christian meditation has been part of my spiritual practice for nearly 30 years, but this stretched me- with prayer times which included 30 minutes of silent meditation three times a day; and then keeping silence, (apart from session times) for all but the evening mealtime. The program was very spacious with lots of time of reading, reflecting or walking the gorgeous grounds or French countryside.

It was different to the Iona experience which many UCA people have been part of- it was with a much smaller group and (perhaps being French) less wild, more comfortable, less busy.

While traditional in many ways it was also progressive- including readings from other faith traditions, and concern for peace, justice and the environment. I gained a greater appreciation of the Catholic tradition, and the writings of the Church and Desert Fathers and Mothers- beyond the arguments over the creeds or homoiousios that my theological training consisted of.

SEEKING REFUGE

My Bonnevaux experience … (Continued)

Rev. Geoff Barker (Warrambool UCA)

Fr Laurence Freeman is the Director. There were other permanent members of the community, and others who are staying for extended periods, some people who are employees and visitors. Having a second week there enabled us to get a greater feel for living in a Christian community and feel embraced by them.
I didn't really feel I learned anything new about labyrinths, but there was great joy in building one there with the other participants. The seminar on 'Are We Making Progress?' was led by Charles Taylor, an eminent Canadian philosopher. Such a great question. It would take another article to answer. It turned out I am more positive about the question than he is. While we were there, Fr Laurence broke out the bottle of champagne he was storing to celebrate the change of government in Australia with us.
I'm not sure what difference this time is making to my faith-life but the overall experience was unforgettable. You can explore the in-person and on-line programs and learn more of Christian Meditation on the WCCM website- wccm.org.

Share Sunday

Rev. John Clarke (Director of Mission)

This year the focus of the Share Sunday resources is hospitality around the theme of

'God's kind of hospitality'

The 2022 resources include:
A sample service outline
liturgy
reflection
hymns
PowerPoint presentation

Plan a Share Sunday appeal in your congregation, faith community or school and raise money for UNITING.

Stories of people supported by the Church's commitment to serve those on the margins.
The resources are available to download from the Uniting Vic.Tas.
Website at: https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/congregations/download-share-sunday-resources-form/

From the Editor: This edition we explore the theme of 'Seeking Refugee' with Rev. Geoff Barker's story of retreat time in a French abbey, JIM Article Refugee week, Rev. Fi Bottcher (Deacon) encourages us to all practice self-love. Rev. Mat Harry (Deacon) speaks about the statistics around young adults who are taking refuge in their faith. If you missed your June 5th Edition of the westerly back editions are available at Newsletters – Presbytery of Port Phillip West (ucappw.org.au) . I am on leave in early July so note that the next edition is July 20th. Any submission are due the Monday before publication. Always happy to receive your stories, poems, book reviews, photos, and theological reflections from across both our presbyteries.

Refugee Week

Justice and International Mission

JUSTUPDATE
ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

The Australia we know today would look very different without the 880,000 refugees we've taken in since the end of World War II. Global stability and economic insecurity are not new concepts. Over the last decade, there have been drastic policy and moral changes to the way Australia has responded to refugees and people seeking Asylum Seekers. The following two pages help to cut through the complexity by covering the basics.

Photo Courtesy of the ARAN—Australian Refugee Action Network

2019 Refugee and Humanitarian Program:

Australia distinguishes between onshore (applied for within Australia) and offshore visas (applied for while outside Australia). For 2018-19, the allocation of places available under Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program is 18,750. There are the available visas: Temporary Protection Visa, Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, Permanent Protection Visa. Refugee Category Visa – this type of visa has several offshore subclasses, including; (Emergency Rescue/ Woman at Risk). The final refugee category visa is new Global Special Humanitarian Visa. Through this visa, a refugee can access the **Community Support Program (CSP).** This is where an individual, business or community organisation can sponsor a refugee for a Global Special Humanitarian Visa to be settled in Australia. Refugees are helped by the proposer to become financially self-sufficient within the first year of being in Australia.

Humanitarian Visa Allocations

Between 1984 and 2011 the average yearly intake of people under Australia's Humanitarian program was 12,986. Over 2017-2018, 74,080 people lodged applications for the 16,250 humanitarian visas granted during that period. Of this number, 7,909 were Offshore Refugee visas, 6,916 were Special Humanitarian Program Visas and 1,425 were permanent Protection Visas.

The Difference between a Person Seeking Asylum and a Refugee?

A person seeking asylum is someone looking for protection because they fear persecution, or they have experienced violence or human rights violations. A refugee is a person who asked for protection and was given refugee status under the United Nations 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. They may have been resettled in another country or be waiting for resettlement. *Not every asylum seeker becomes a refugee, but every refugee starts out as an asylum seeker.* A refugee is defined by Australia's *Migration Act 1958* as someone who "is outside their country of his or her nationality and, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country".

Offshore Detention (Pacific Solution)

Australia first introduced offshore processing in 2001 to process people seeking asylum seekers in the Republic of Nauru (Nauru) and Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Manus Island (Manus). It was first normalised as contemporary policy in 2012. Offshore detention applies to people arriving in Australia by boat without a valid visa. PNG and Nauru are responsible for processing the refugee claims of people seeking asylum.

Refugee Week

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Medevac Act 2019

The *Home Affairs Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Act* 2018 is commonly referred to as the Medevac Act, Medivac Act or the Urgent Medical Treatment (UMT) Act. This act was repealed at the end of 2019.

2019 Detention and Community Statistics

As of March 2019, there are 1,312 people held in onshore detention within Australia. There is a total of 915 refugees and people seeking asylum held in offshore detention, 359 of whom are on Nauru, and 547 in PNG. A further 953 are in Australia with regard to receiving medical treatment who would otherwise be on Manus of Nauru.

Cost for Detention

It costs $573,000 a year to hold an asylum seeker in offshore detention; more than $346,000 to hold them in detention in Australia; $103,343 for an asylum seeker to live in community detention in Australia; and $10,221 for an asylum seeker to live in the community on a bridging visa while their claim is processed.

Children in Detention

In early 2019 the Australian Government declared no children were detained in Nauru, with the final four children sent to the United States. There have been over 200 held at Nauru. As of March 2019, less than five children remain in onshore community detention.

Legacy Caseload

This specifically refers to a group of 30,000 asylum seekers who travelled to Australia by sea between 2012 and 2014. Due to the politics at the time, this group of people has punitive measures placed on them restricting or removing their access to services, rights and legal assistance. As of May 2019 there were still 8,985 people waiting for the Department of Home Affairs to determine their visa eligibility, 4,682 of whom are waiting in Victoria.

Operation Sovereign Borders

This is a military-led border security operation established in 2013 to forcefully stop migrants and people seeking asylum from arriving in Australia by boat. The three key policies of this operation are

To turn back boats;

Prevent anyone travelling to Australia without a visa from remaining in Australia; and

Deter and stop the activities of people smugglers.

Asylum Seekers and Coronavirus

In May 2020 186 organisations across Australia wrote and open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison asking that people seeking asylum not be left out of crucial coronavirus related legislation. Here is an excerpt of that letter:

We need to ensure that all people in Australia are considered in COVID-19 policies and stimulus packages, especially the most vulnerable who currently are not able to access basic levels of support. Currently, there are highly vulnerable groups who have been left behind, including: • People seeking asylum on bridging visas • Temporary visa holders including refugees, temporary migrant workers and international students ...

COVID-19 does not discriminate, and neither should access to a safety net or improved assistance during this time. We are in this together and there must be support for all who need it, regardless of visa status.

We ask you to lead the Australian Government to ensure that all people in Australia are protected from the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 by:

1. Ensuring all people have access to medical treatment and Medicare for people seeking asylum

2. Ensuring all people have a financial safety net so they are not forced into destitution:

a. Extend JobSeeker to people on bridging visas currently ineligible for income support

b. Extend JobKeeper to temporary visa holders so that businesses employing them can continue to operate

c. Remove penalties for Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders accessing Special Benefit in light of the pandemic and remove restrictions on accessing Special Benefit for Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or SHEV holders who are studying

3. Preventing people from losing legal status and access to support

Mental Health Matters

REV. FI BOTTCHER (DEACON AT SUNSHINE MENTAL HEALTH)

Do as I say, not as I do!" This became a joke between mum and I when I was studying Year 12. She was also studying computing, and when she was frantically submitting an assessment at the very last minute, I'd put on a cheeky grin and say: "what's that you keep telling me about study plans?" And she'd say…

These words came back to me during a Tai Chi class I held in the psychiatric ward recently. I was encouraging people to do one exercise every day. As I enthused "just a couple of minutes a day!" a voice whispered in my ear "do as I say, not as I do, right?"
Of course, the biblical origin of this saying is a warning against hypocrisy. We just conveniently forget the second part: "do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, *for they do not practice what they teach*" Mathew 23:3.

It's easier to implore others to prioritise self-care, and to create healthy boundaries and balance in their lives than it is to do it ourselves. But this is our calling, the great command: **to love others as we love ourselves.**

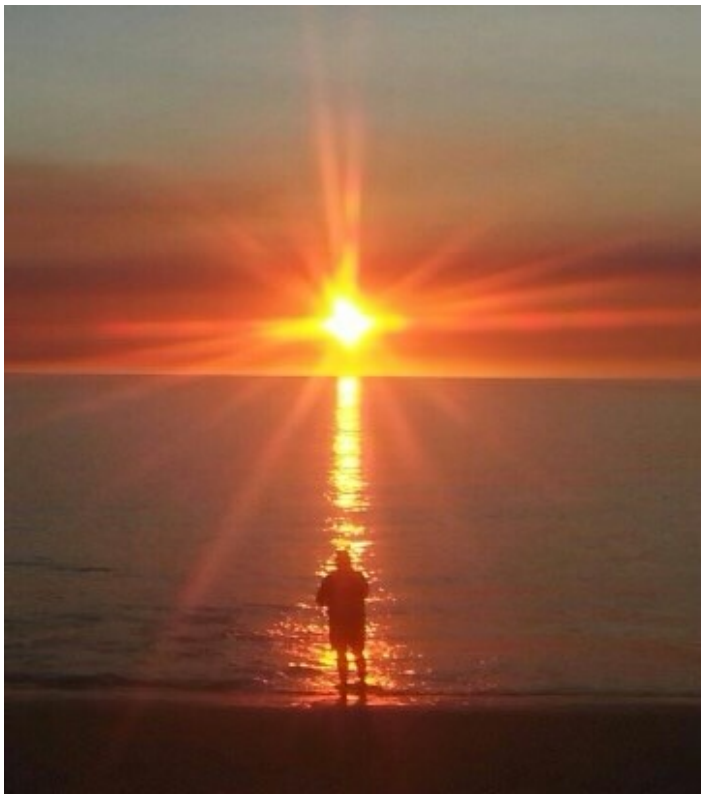


Photo credit: Margaret Quinn via Rev Karen Eller

We give thanks to God for the courage, energy and insight of those who formed the Uniting Church, for the faithfulness of Uniting Church communities all over the country, and for the Spirit in our midst, leading us into the future.

UCA President Rev Sharon Hollis shared this video message for the anniversary, featuring members of the 16th Assembly sharing what they love about the Uniting Church.

Speak Up!

Christine Morris (PPW Climate Action Group)

Jesus was vocal against all injustices and frequently spoke out against the authorities. As his followers, we too are called to speak up against injustice. One of the greatest injustices on the planet is climate change. The people impacted the most are the poorest people – those who have lived very simple lives and have contributed to it the least. Let's love our neighbours by speaking up to authorities about stronger climate action.

Love them or loathe them, politicians make the decisions about how fast (or not) we are moving on climate. Democracy was not around in biblical times and people just had to live with whatever the government did. Despite this Jesus and the prophets courageously spoke up against systemic injustices. If we want change, we need to tell our politicians. Democracy is about speaking up. And if enough people speak up often enough, change is possible.

So how do you do it? Jump onto the JIM Unit webpage https://justact.org.au/climate-justice-creation/ and check out some actions you can take for climate justice. Read *Just Act* (https://justact.org.au/newsletter/). This Uniting Church Australia publication often gives information about current campaigns – although this year's newsletters present mostly good news about how advocates have wrought positive change! It's encouraging reading – even more so if you have joined in.

You don't need to wait for a campaign. You can write emails or handwritten letters to politicians at any time. You can write a letter for the paper about a topical issue. Published or not, your letter will help to get your views out there. And you can meet with politicians. Meeting with and listening to their constituents is their job. Your church may already have a social justice group. Join it. If not, Tearfund Australia has many groups of Christians ready to meet with their MPs to discuss taking stronger climate action. Take a look: https://www.tearfund.org.au/together-for-climate/join-a-local-electorate

Speaking up for the first time can be daunting. I was terrified. But I vote. My voice is powerful and so is yours. And when we speak up together in Jesus' name, anything is possible.

CLIMATE ACTION CONGRATULATIONS to …
Brunswick UCA for their sign during the Sydney Road Street Party.

Dear Practitioners

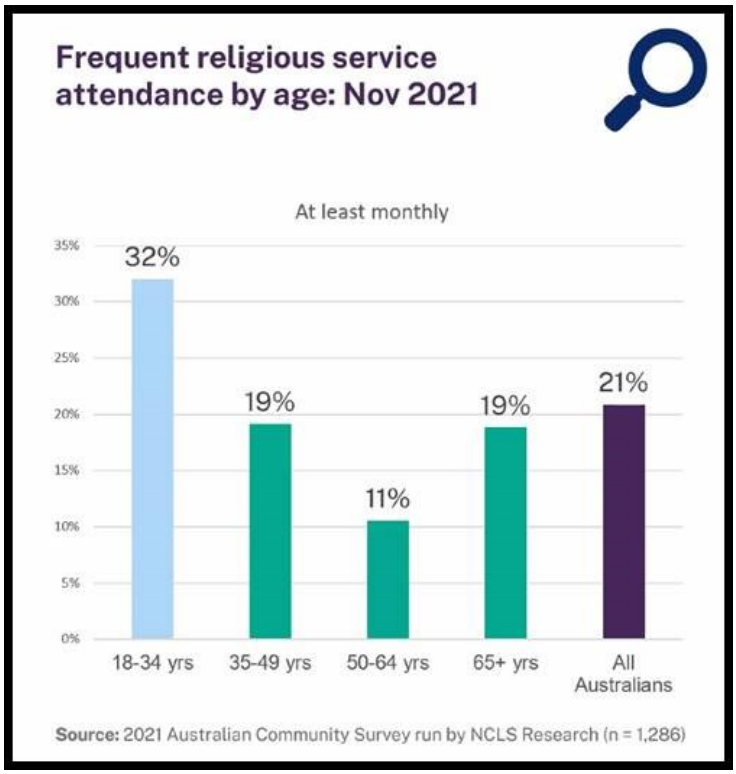
Rev. Mat Harry (Deacon)

I am in shock – and you may be too if you were a part of the National Church Life Survey NCLS Webinar yesterday.

Sometimes we tell ourselves stories from the evidence we have at hand. The issue is that the evidence we have at hand is not always the whole picture. When we remain within the groups and networks we move in, we can miss what else is happening. We can sometimes create stories that get repeated within our networks so that they remain unchallenged. We do not question whether they are truth.

One of these stories we tell ourselves within mainline denominations is, "young people are not interested in church."

Well the latest research from NCLS (National Christian Life Survey) launched yesterday in the Webinar: What Australians really think about Jesus and the Church Today, claimed that
32% of 18-34 year olds attended religious services (Nov 2021) at least monthly. The highest of any adult age bracket and almost 3 times that of 50-64 year olds (11%).
Say what? Seriously?



That does not align with the story we tell ourselves in the mainline denominations. We have kept up this narrative that young people are not interested in church. In fact we have a narrative that people in general, no matter their age are not interested in church!

Dr Ruth Powell director of NCLS Research – a research centre that focuses upon church vitality and community spirituality and wellbeing – has suggested that more research needs to be conducted upon this. However, this has been a trend that has shown up in studies within Australia over the past few years.

NCLS Replay Available Now **Right Here**

The research also revealed that of those surveyed (1,286 people as a representative group of Aussies) **31% responded "YES / Probably"** to the question, *"Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals, etc., would you go to a Christian church service if invited by family or close friends?"* A further **16%** responded that they were **"Not Sure"**. Together that means about half of family or close friends would possibly come along to church if they were invited. The willingness to come along is based upon relationship.

Maybe we just need to have congregants with enough confidence in the church community that they will invite their family and close friends?

Are people inviting others to explore Christian worship and discipleship within your context? Are you?

If not , what do you think this reluctance to invite people to worship is about?

Do we even believe in inviting people to worship or other church activities?

Think about this… you never know, maybe next week I will send out a survey asking your opinion about your churches openness to inviting others ☺ Keep serving others and inviting a response to the Kingdom.

Meeting Together

We believe that meetings can be rewarding, enjoyable and worthwhile, whether the issues that we face together are large or small. The Meeting Together workbook will assist councils, committees and groups in the Uniting Church to work more collaboratively, to understand the role of their group and leadership in the wider life of the church, and to deal with poor behaviour in meetings.

It can help to build the capacity in our members to meet and work together well, to respect and listen to one another, and to value each person's voice. It looks at the Scriptures and what we believe, the Basis of Union, the Manual for Meetings, and other resources. The booklet includes 14 short sections that can each be used to start discussion, plus resources for community building. These resources are an invitation to pause from what we do, and to have conversations about why and how we meet.

Meeting Together workbook Downloadable version & Imago Vita cards.
Launch Video available: Meeting Together Resources Launch on Vimeo

Imago Vita – Images of life

"Imago Vita" is a set of Australian photographs selected for personal and group reflection. The set is diverse and may be used for a range of purposes – community-building, story telling, identifying needs, dealing with change, discussing choices, exploring hopes, revealing strengths. There are 86 images and an activity guide providing some suggested activities for group conversation. The photo file is a 78mb PDF. We recommend getting them printed on a colour laser printer/copier (such as Officeworks), then laminating them and cutting them to size. Copyright information in the group activity guide.

July Education Events

June 30th **Synod Opening Service** @ Wesley Place

July 1st—3rd **Synod Meeting** @ Box Hill Town Hall

July 12th
10am
'A Gospel for all Ages' by David Csinos Book Launch

July 15th
9 - 12 nn
Ethical Ministry Refresher (Code of Ethics) Session 1 2022
Zoom https://www.trybooking.com/CAMNR

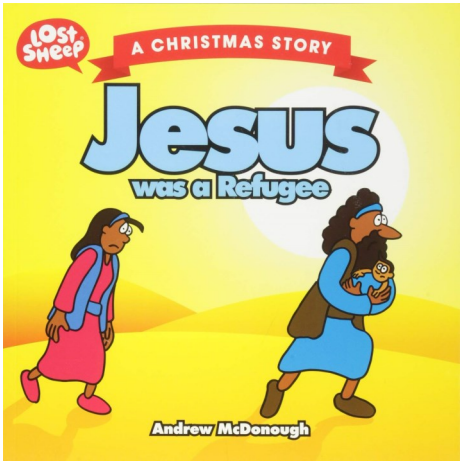
July 15th
1-4pm
Ethical Ministry Refresher (Code of Ethics) Session 1 2022
Port Arlington UC https://www.trybooking.com/CAMTR

July 20th
9 - 7:30pm
"Engage All Generations" Intergenerate AusNZ Conference—
Church of Christ, York St, Ballarat.

July 22nd
9 - 7:30pm
"Engage All Generations" Intergenerate AusNZ Conference—
Ascot Vale Church of Christ, 78 Leonards Rd, Ascot Vale.

July 26th
10—1
Ethical Ministry Refresher (Code of Ethics) Session 1 2022
Hopper's Crossing UC https://www.trybooking.com/CAMUF

July 28th
6.30—9.30pm
Ethical Ministry Refresher (Code of Ethics) Session 1 2022
Zoom https://www.trybooking.com/CAMTP

Sept 4th - 7th **PPW & PWV Minister's Retreat—Save the Date**
Norval, Halls Gap

Andrew McDonough on his Lost Sheep website during Refugee Week is offering free copies of his Book "Jesus was a Refugee."
Click here: Lost Sheep