The Westerly

PRESBYTERY OF PORT PHILLIP WEST

PPW & PWV Newsletter No.77 February 2026

Presbytery of Western Victoria

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust

Rev. Linley Liersch [PPW Presbytery eLM Minister]

Ashes to Ashes: We acknowledge that large areas of our presbyteries have been affected by grass and bushfires.

I spent my summer holidays at Halls Gap, where we have our home, and where they are recovering after two past years of bushfires. We were listening to the very mixed messages about how they are recovering. Some say business this year has been good. Others did not even bother opening on the 'catastrophic' days. Some accommodation will earn no money this summer because they are honour last years bookings. Market stall owners are saying it attendance is mixed and unpredictable; great one week not a person in sight the next.

Soon we were covered in smoke again as the westerly breezes told of fires at Grass Flat, Natimuk, Quantong and Haven. My husband and I travelled into Horsham for worship to hear some first hand stories of evacuation, Evacuation Centres and crisis accommodation. Stories of CFA surrounding the Natimuk Nursing Homes, protecting residents, as their own homes were threatened. It was a time of confusion as the electricity was out, the mobiles went flat, and people were unable to speak to their family members.

Returning to Hall's Gap we knew that we were cut off from home in Geelong, by the Skipton, Carranballac and Streatham fire and the Meredith fires and Lorne fires.

Two weeks later we are back in Geelong, the westerly blew and we were covered by smoke again, as Lorne fires continue and the Colac fires begin.

Dust to Flood: We acknowledge the extreme heat wave across our State and the flooding Lorne.
A heat wave has hit the state with many days above 40 degrees. Everyone sought refuge inside seeking respite from the blasted sun. But somehow there were rain deluges so heavy it caused flash flooding and the closure of the Great Ocean Road. The low lands were flooded, hundreds were evacuated, several rescued from roof tops or washed out to sea. The Lorne township was divided by floodwaters.

As an Australian, **Ash Wednesday** and bushfires have always gone together. Why do we bother to rub ashes on our forehead, when bushfire soot covers our hands and faces and houses. Why bother repenting when we are already lamenting. Yes we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return!

"Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust..." are words in the UCA funeral liturgy often quoted by TV funeral scenes. But it is the next few words that are some of the most powerful words to recall to those experiencing loss and are grieving ***"... In sure and certain hope in the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ who died, was buried, and rose again for us."*** To those who are grieving, hope is sure and certain for by Jesus' grace, we are saved in faith!

Ash Wednesday

SHROVE TUESDAY: Pancake Day

Uniting Resources

How to hold the perfect Pancake Day event.

Choose your date and location

Pancake Day is on Shrove Tuesday, but you can hold your event any time until the end of April. Great places to host your Pancake Day event include parks, schools, churches, workplaces, cafes and shopping centres, sporting clubs or even at home.

Get creative and have fun

- Hold a pancake tossing competition
- Hold a pancake decorating competition
- Have a pancake flipping race
- Invite a local celebrity
- Partner with a local business and ask them to match the money you raise dollar for dollar.

Recruit volunteers

Many hands make light work! Get your co-workers, church members, friends, family and your local community to help out at your event!

Get noticed

Promote your event in your local community; resources are available including a media release and posters to help promote your event.

Social media is also a great way to promote your event. We have a range of social media tiles available to download.

Look the part

- Deck out your venue with Pancake Day posters, use black and yellow streamers, black or yellow tablecloths etc
- Wear your brightest yellow outfit, pop on your name badge and get flipping
- Be sure the chef wears the Pancake Day apron supplied with your kit.

Hold your event

- Prepare your pancake mix 30 minutes before you start cooking – this makes yummier pancakes
- We recommend selling pancakes for $5 each, it is up to you if you would like to charge more for toppings
- You could even do a deal of $8 for two pancakes.

* Everyone holding a registered Pancake Day event to raise funds for Uniting is exempt from charging GST on the sale of pancakes.

Submit the funds you've raised

Complete your Funds Submission Form and send it back to us in the pre-paid envelope provided, or donate the funds raised online. Each event coordinator received a unique Pancake Day Fundraiser ID number on their Authority to Fundraise letter. We ask that you use this as your reference when depositing funds so we know who the deposit has come from and we can receipt you accordingly.

From the Editor:

Linley.Liersch@ppw.victas.uca.org.au.

Please click links or pictures for hyperlinks. **Next edition submissions 24th February 2026**

Victorian Council of Churches: Emergency Ministries

Michael Downing

During the recent bushfires in Victoria, VCC EM has had teams in the following locations:

- Kyneton Relief Centre
- Wodonga Relief Centre
- Lilydale Relief Centre
- Seymour Relief Centre (now helping with Secondary Impact assessments)
- Whittlesea Relief Centre
- Colac Relief Centre
- Cobram Recovery Hub
- Castlemaine Recovery hub
- Meredith - community drop in 15th January
- Skipton Recovery hub
- Community Gatherings in Murrundindi

Michael Downing (VCC EM Operations Manager) writes: "*Thank you to each and every volunteer who has been deployed, provided availability, worked in the Operations Centre, looked after teams or just thought about or prayed for our teams on the ground. The summer season is far from over and there is also still plenty of work to do in these communities with Secondary Impact Assessments, Outreach, and Recovery Hubs".*

Sikh volunteers were on hand to offer food to people in various Emergency Relief Centres during the recent bushfires.

Transfiguration Sunday

Source: Roots UK "Thrive with Roots" designed for families worshipping on-line and at home

How to take a family activity sheets and turn it into an inspiring creative worship. Create worship station around your worship space.

Write

Make an acrostic. Write the word 'AWESOME' vertically down a piece of paper. Set a 60-second timer and see how many adjectives you can think of to describe something 'awesome' starting with those letters. Place this near your front door to remind you of God's awesome presence in the world.

Put a whiteboard & pens against the wall in the church and write the word "AWESOME" across the top. Congregational members are asked to contribute their own acrostic words that best fit the bible reading.

Living Scripture

'We had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.' 2 Peter 1:16

What events have you personally witnessed? Perhaps an epic sporting victory, a wedding, a birth, a crime, a miracle? Seeing these things can change our expectations of the future (it could happen again).

Peter tells us he was an eyewitness to seeing Jesus in his glory on the mountain of transfiguration. That encounter changed how he saw Jesus, and how he understood the future.

What encounters have you had with God? Has God met with you, encouraged you, called you or nudged you somehow? How did those moments change you? Who do you wish could experience more of Jesus? (It might be you.) Pray for that person today.

If I lead a creative worship I have one stationary idea for people who do not like to move during worship. Put these words (Commentary Notes) and questions on the over-head screen as a think piece. And they are invited to re-flect on the questions. They may even talk to the person next to them and share ideas and stories.

Pray

God of good news,
for eyewitnesses who share,
for all who were there:
we praise you.
for your living word your loving heart,
that calls us all to play our part:
we praise you.
We thank you that you are here now,
our awesome God... take a bow
as we praise you.
Amen.

Put this prayer next to a sand tray and tapers and invite people to light a candle for a miraculous events in your life!

First impressions

- How important is it to see things with your own eyes?
- In what ways have you experienced God's presence?
- How might you describe these experiences to someone who is sceptical about faith?

Put these question on some butchers paper on the communion table with some post it notes... People add their answers to these questions that they are happy to share. These can be read out to the congregation at later and serve as a witness of worshippers.

Decorate an old cardboard box and turn it into a memory box. You could write words to describe your family on the outside or even print off photos to stick onto it. Fill it with photos, stories and objects that remind you of important memories and people. Thank God for them and pray for them as you fill the box. Alternatively, you could decorate a notebook instead to fill with memories.

Decorate a box and take it home fill. Every time you feel God has answered your prayers write a note to remind yourself perhaps with a photos of who the prayer involved. You could include your friends stories too.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: FOR UNITING CHURCH CLIMATE ACTIVISTS

Climate Action Task Group

Convened by Uniting NSW/ACT

For people across the whole nation

One of the ways that we put our **faith in action** and plan our climate advocacy is our monthly **online community of practice** (OCoP). These are normally held on the third Thursday of the month.

Our first OCoP for 2026 will be held on **Thursday 19 February** from **7-8:30pm AEDT via Zoom**. At our February meeting we'll be reconnecting after the summer break and **planning our advocacy for the year ahead**. We'll be reflecting on two key questions:

1. What does it mean for us that **Australia is no longer hosting** COP31?
2. How can we **plan our advocacy around the liturgical calendar** - the natural rhythm of the church.
3. If you were part of our OCoPs in 2025, k**eep an eye on your inbox** soon for an invitation with the **Zoom link**.
4. If you **haven't joined us before** but would like to be part of our gatherings in 2026, **send us an email** so we can send you the link! advocacy@uniting.org

Reduce Emissions as a Lenten Calling

Dr. James Thom [Chair of PPW Mission and Education Committee]

Do you want to reduce the carbon emissions at a church property but your Congregation does not have the funds?

Then read on.... **SERF 2026 Open for Applications**

FUNDS TO ASSIST YOUR CONGREGATION OR FAITH COMMUNITY REDUCE EMISSIONS - In 2024 a Synod **Emissions Reduction Fund (SERF)** was made available by the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and many congregations applied and were granted funding to assist with their work in reducing their emissions.

There is now a further opportunity for congregations and faith communities to apply for another round of funding.

Your congregation or faith community is invited to make an application to this fund in order to assist your congregation's work towards reaching zero emissions.

Applications close 5 pm on February 28th 2026.

-- DOWNLOAD THE SERF 2026 APPLICAITON BY CLICKING HERE --

No application will be funded more than $10,000. We aim to inform congregations and faith communities on the outcome of their applications by the end of March 2026.

Questions about the application can be asked of the SERF Administration Team members:

Jamie Thom 0427 210 787 Heather Baxter 0487 429 748 Tom Spurling 0409 461390

Once you application is completed, it can be submitted to: jim@victas.uca.org.au

Justice and International Mission Unit

EVENT

Building community

New and innovative ways to build Christian community will be explored at ‘Inspiring 2026’, to be held at the Centre for Theology and Ministry on Saturday, February 21.

REGISTER HERE

Northey Lecture

Associate Professor Laura Rademaker from the Australian National University will present the first Northey Lecture for 2026 on February 26, speaking on the theme of Respecting Country.

LECTURE DETAILS HERE

EVENT

EVENT

Surrender Festival

Christian social justice collective Surrender will explore the stories of those living on the margins during a three-day festival in March. The event takes place from March 20-22 at Belgrave Heights Convention Centre.

FESTIVAL DETAILS HERE

WELCOME TO PILGRIM THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

2026 COURSE GUIDE

Pilgrim Theological College has a purpose statement: To educate, form, and equip people to foster a just and compassionate world through creative and critical theological inquiry, practice and research.

The 2025-2030 strategic plan has four focus points that informs the ongoing work of the College.

1. **Learning and teaching for intercultural church –** excelling in learning and teaching in line with our commitments to intercultural, inclusive and accessible education.

All of our subjects are designed to engage in learning from a wide range of cultural perspectives. Subjects addressing this directly include "Intercultural Leadership and Multicultural Ministry", and "Practicing a Missionary Church: Forming a Community of Christian Witness". **See page 18**.

2. **Liberative and contextual theologies –** providing leadership in prioritising and learning from liberative and contextual theologies, as we acknowledge our location on stolen land. Creating space for generous dialogue and amplifying diverse perspectives, taking seriously the breadth of human experience and the need to pursue justice.

In 2026 we are offering a new subject: "Respecting Country: Deep history, the colonies, and the church", a unit that equips you to tell histories of the land on which your congregation lives and worships. **See page 15**.

3. **Equipping the whole people of God –** expanding the scope of the College's work to equip the whole people of God for changing contexts for ministry, mission and discipleship.

This Course guide reflects the growing scope of educational and formation opportunities being offered or promoted by Pilgrim. See the online Uniting Learning courses (**see pages 29** and **30**) that are designed for lay leaders and ministry staff. Once again we're introducing new professional development options for people serving in ministry, lay or ordained. We've included here the opportunities for clinical pastoral education, training in professional supervision, and leadership development, many offered in collaboration with other colleges and training groups.

4. **Life-giving community –** fostering an exemplary, flourishing, collaborative college community in which students and staff feel valued and empowered, supported by a healthy governance and management environment.

The quality of education is shaped by our experience in the classroom, in online tutorials, in the library, in the café, and in the one-on-one conversations with lecturers, facilitators and supervisors.

I encourage you to look through the 2026 Course Guide and contact Pilgrim Theological College by phone or email to explore your next step in your lifelong learning path.

While Pilgrim Theological College is a Uniting Church college that provides formation for ordained and lay ministries of the church, anyone from any background is welcome to study here. Who do you know that would value the opportunities provided here?

You can connect with us through the **Pilgrim Theological College website**, where you can sign up to our monthly **Pilgrim enews**, and find the links to the **Pilgrim Facebook page**, and **Pilgrim Instagram page**.

Duncan

Duncan Macleod
Executive Officer,
Equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM)
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Uniting Church in Australia

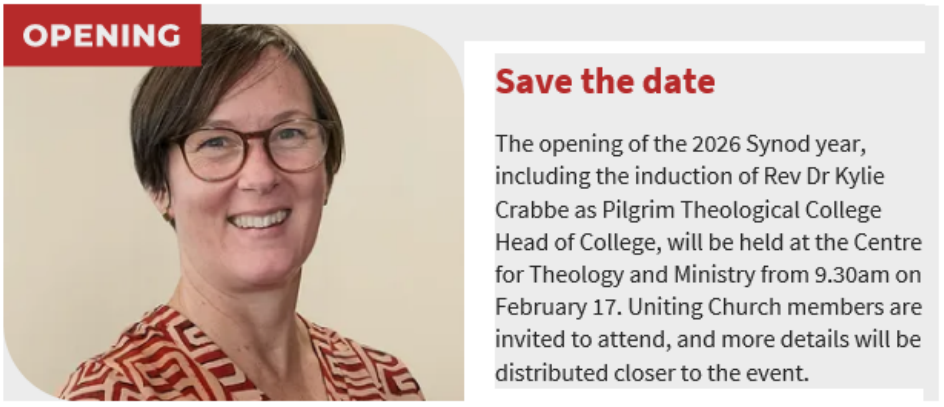
In 2022, the 16th Assembly (Reconvened) requested the ASC to set up a task group to aid the national Church in bringing together the work happening in many parts of the Church and achieving our goal of net zero emissions by 2040. The Net Zero Steering Committee has since that time been drawing together experts and those working in this field from across the life of the Church, to share stories, compare and align approaches, develop tools and attempt to learn from the wisdom of First Peoples.

The Net Zero Steering Committee has hosted a number of roundtables (with another coming later this year - details to come!) and set up some specific sub-groups focusing on Measuring Emissions, Exploring Carbon Offsets, Learning from First People's Wisdom, Climate Champions and Practical Steps in Congregations.

Arising from the Climate Champions group, and driven by excellent work in the NSW-ACT Synod, there will be a training event held in Sydney in late February. Called **Vaka 2026**, this event will enable our Church leaders to be upskilled in community organising to enable advocacy and action related to Climate Change.
Download the flyer and register here.

If you're located outside NSW or the ACT and would like to attend but travel costs are an issue, the Assembly may be able to assist. Contact us at aru@nat.uca.org.au.

Training Opportunity on Climate Justice

Events

13th February	**Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generation**
15th February	**Transfiguration Sunday**
17th February	**Shrove Tuesday—Pancake Day**
17th February 9.30am	**Opening Worship of Synod Year 2026 - eLM / Pilgrim Theological College**
18th February	**Ash Wednesday**
21st February	**PWV Presbytery Meeting**
21st February	**Building Community** New and innovative ways to build Christian community 'Inspiring 2026', @ Centre for Theology and Ministry Register here.
22nd February	**Lent Begins**
26th February 7pm –8:30pm	**Northey Lecture— Respecting Country** **Assoc Prof Laura Rademaker** Rego
28th February	**PPW Presbytery Meeting—New**
20-22 March	**Surrender Festival** **@ Belgrave Heights Convention Centre**
29th August	**2026 On-line Synod Meeting—Synod members pls save the date!**