The Westerly

PWV & PPW Newsletter No.78 March 2026

A Lenten Invitation

Rev. Charissa Suli [UCA President]

Beloved Church,

The Lenten season is not about giving up chocolate. It is not about surviving forty days without coffee. If that is all we do, we have missed the invitation.

We begin this season in a world that feels tense and fragile. There is violence across nations. There is division in public life. We have seen peaceful voices met with tension. We have witnessed how quickly trust can fracture, and how deeply communities can feel wounded. Many are carrying grief, anger and uncertainty – here in Australia and beyond. Lent asks more of us than surface sacrifice. It asks us to go deeper.

"Return to me (God) with all your heart" – Joel 2:12

This is the invitation of Lent:

To examine our hearts.
To confront what shapes our reactions.
To sit longer in prayer than in commentary.
To fast not only from food, but from whatever in us hardens the heart – pride that places us above others, anger that overshadows mercy, and anything that diminishes our witness to Christ's love. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1). There, in hunger and testing, he entrusts himself to God.

What if this Lent we did the same?

Let us make space each day to be with God, even in the midst of busy lives.
Let us fast from noise so that we can hear the Spirit more clearly.
Let us practise generosity that stretches us.
Let us listen more carefully to those who feel wounded or unseen.
And let our turning back to God reshape how we pray, what we fast from, and how we live out Christ's love in our congregations and the world.

Lent is not simply about what we relinquish. It is about surrendering ourselves to Christ – and becoming people who love as he loves.

Return to God

A Lenten Invitation

Rev. Charissa Suli [UCA President]

You might "lend" differently this year. Lent is not withdrawal from the world. It is deeper engagement – with Christ at the centre.

- You might join UnitingWorld's Lenten invitation to stand with communities across our region who face poverty and climate injustice.
- You might support Frontier Services and our bush chaplains, who quietly walk alongside isolated Australians carrying hardships many never see.
- You might offer time, advocacy, hospitality or reconciliation in your own community.

The Church does not exist to mirror the noise of the culture.

We exist to witness to another way – the way of Christ, marked by truth, humility, and courageous love. As I reflect on this moment for our Church, I hold this hope:

In unsettled times, we are called to remain anchored in Christ.
When voices divide, we become a praying people.
When hearts grow weary or hardened, we keep mercy alive among us.
We do not turn away from injustice.
But neither do we surrender to fear.
We follow Jesus.

This season is not about spiritual performance. It is about transformation.

May this Lent shape us into a Church that looks more like Christ – courageous, humble and radiant with resurrection hope! We do so in confidence, trusting that Christ rules and renews his Church by his Word and Spirit, and that the Spirit of Christ will lead us into all truth and forward in hope.

A Prayer for the Beginning of Lent

Holy God,
As we enter this Lenten season,
lead us with your Son into the wilderness –
the place of quiet, the place of testing,
the place where we learn again to trust you.
When the path feels uncertain, steady our steps.
When distractions crowd our hearts, call us back to yourself.
When we feel our weakness, remind us that we are your beloved.
Form in us a deeper hunger for your presence.
Teach us to depend on your Word.
Shape us through these forty days
so that our lives may reflect the grace of Christ.
Walk with us, Lord Jesus.
And bring us, in your time, to the joy of resurrection hope and peace. **Amen.**

From the Editor:

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

Please click links or pictures for hyperlinks.

Next edition submissions 31st March 2026

Faithful Futures Project Lead: Dr. Karen Roberts

What will your role involve?

The Project Lead is a new role and is focussed on supporting Synod and Presbyteries to implement the strategic plan known as Faithful Futures. It will involve collaboration with key people and committees across Victoria and Tasmania to determine how we are going to achieve the five goals contained within Faithful Futures. As part of this role, I expect to be having lots of conversations, working with others to develop achievable plans, and learning more about the great work that is underway across our Synod.

What is your professional background?
How will your experience support your new role?

I am an occupational therapist by profession and have over three decades of experience working in healthcare and higher education. Most recently I have been the Occupational Therapy Manager at Alfred Health in Melbourne. I have completed post-graduate studies, including a Doctorate of Clinical Science (Occupational Therapy) and studies in leadership and management, and have led major projects within healthcare settings.

I hope that my experience in supporting individuals to adjust to a new way of being (following injury, illness or disability), leading teams through change and uncertainty, designing and delivering education, and approaching new opportunities with a curious and collaborative mindset will enable me to serve the Uniting Church through this role.

Do you have a connection to the Uniting Church?

As the child of a Uniting Church minister, I grew up in the Church and, as an adult, I have chosen to actively continue my connection with the Church. My family and I currently worship at Ormond Uniting Church (Port Phillip East Presbytery), where I am involved in supporting mission and pastoral care, as well as playing the piano for worship.

I have lived in rural presbyteries (North-West Victoria and Gippsland) as well as the Tasmanian presbytery (King Island and Kingston congregations) and am looking forward to reconnecting and learning more about what is happening around our Synod. In my 20s and 30s I was an active member of the Wild Duck Christian community (a new and emerging worshipping community within the Uniting Church) and, more recently, my family have been involved in the Uniting Faith and Families program.

Why is the Faithful Futures strategy so important for the Church?

I truly do believe that the Uniting Church is called to be "a pilgrim people, always on the way", as noted in the Basis of Union (1971, 1992). This requires us to look forward towards the future while simultaneously stepping with compassion, justice and connection. Whilst I am only just starting this role and appreciate that I have much to learn, I am excited about this strategy. It is crucial in helping us to continue shaping the future of the Uniting Church in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, so that we can continue to be relevant, inclusive and grounded in the good news of the gospel.

How can Uniting Church members get involved in the Faithful Futures project?

This work is just starting, but the strategy is a shared collaboration between the Synod and Presbyteries and, therefore, congregations. I would encourage you to talk with your congregational presbytery representatives and your ministers about how Faithful Futures is unfolding in your own local regions. Keep your eye on Crosslight and our internet sites/social media, and feel free to reach out to the Faithful Futures team as another point of connection.
More information can be found here

Email the team at: FaithfulFutures@victas.uca.org.au

FAITHFUL FUTURES

Duration:
13 April, Monday evening - 20 April, Monday afternoon

Venue:
Various mission sites in Seoul, Busan, Masan and Chang Won in South Korea.

Requirements:
Participants must have a valid passport, be aware of their own medical and dietary needs and be able to walk approximately 6–8 km including subway staircases each day.

Who can join:
Friends and colleagues in the VICTAS Synod

Where to apply:
events.humanitix. com/2026- contextual-learning-group -to-south-korea

In 2016, a group of six people from the VICTAS Synod visited Korean partner churches. After a decade I'm privileged and moved to organise another group of young people to South Korea. They'll learn about Australian mission work and its missional ties between the two countries.

This 7-day intensive group tour visits 3 Korean partner churches of UCA and various mission sites established by Australian missionaries since 1889. The group aims to strengthen historical and missional ties with Korean partner churches and mission organisations.

The group will learn and appreciate the UCA's rich history, leadership and involvement in ministry and mission works in overseas. The group will receive valuable insights, particularly highlighting the significant contributions of Victorian missionaries during the early stages of Australian mission works in Korea. There will be a series of group and individual activities with local hosting churches and organisations, debriefing and sharing sessions among participants and several group tours learning more about local culture and food.

Please submit your expression of interest by the end of 9 March 202. Once accepted, you need to arrange your own round-trip ticket between Melbourne and Seoul, South Korea. (after registration, a copy of '2026 CLG guideline booklet' will be emailed)

For more information, contact **Rev David Dong Won Kim**, VICTAS Synod Multicultural Ministries Coordinator

Palm 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 Church building.

FIND

Gather up as many leaves as you can find. In a large, outside space, arrange them to spell the word 'HOSANNA'. Photograph your work and make it into your screen saver or background for Holy Week. You could also share it and send it to a friend to remind them to rejoice!

Why not decorate the front lawn in front of the church with gum leaves spelling "Hosanna!" as a part of worship and put it on FaceBook.

Bring your grandkids to church. Decorate Easter oval biscuits in Church Kitchen ... who in your community most needs to hear the Easter message of hope? Deliver the biscuits.

BAKE

Bake a simnel cake or Easter biscuits to share with friends and family on Easter Sunday.

Walk your town or neighbourhood.
Think about Jesus journey to the cross.
Use your eyes as a source for prayer *eg. Passing the school you pray for students and teachers.* Who in your community needs forgiveness and healing?

Pray

Lord Jesus,
as we journey with you to the cross,
we offer you our praise and our pain.
Thank you that you entered into Jerusalem
and went to Calvary for our forgiveness and healing.
Help us to journey with you this week.
Amen.

DRAW

Read the whole of today's passages, Matthew 21:1-11 and Matthew 27:11-54. As you read, doodle the parts that stand out to you.

Give the congregation permission to doodle the bible readings highlighting key words and phrases that are important to them.

First impressions

- In what ways does this Palm Sunday painting by Mark Jennings capture the essence of Holy Week?
- What does Holy Week tell us about the nature of God (who Jesus is) and the nature of humanity?
- How can you keep Christ central to your journey through Holy Week?

Put these question on the PowerPoint and invite the congregation to talk in small groups.

Earth Hour: Create the Biggest Hour for earth

28th March, 8:30pm

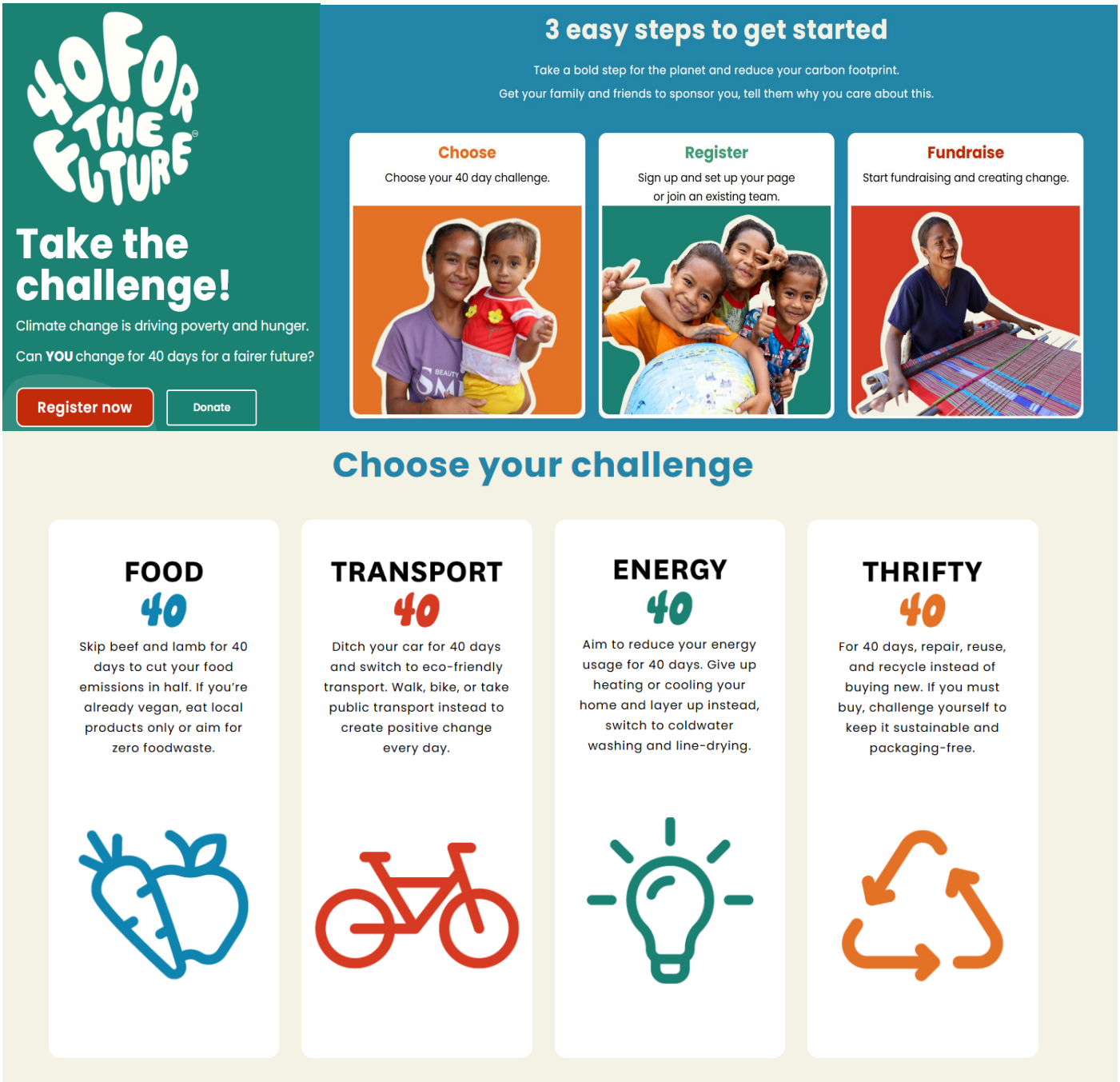
Earth Hour is **a worldwide movement** organized by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The event is held annually, encouraging the individuals, communities, and businesses to give an hour for Earth, and additionally marked by landmarks and businesses **switching off non-essential electric lights**, for one hour from 8:30 to 9:30pm. Observe how much light pollution occurs in your neighbourhood.

Take a walk in the park or natural space: Immersing yourself in nature will bring you a sense of enjoyment and comfort. Leave your electronic devices at home. Look at the scenery, listen to the sounds of nature, engage in some nature arts, i.e. drawing the things you see.

Give something to the earth by doing something your love, gardening, bird watching, bush or beach walks, picnics.

Earth Hour is celebrating 20 years of this movement, across 180 countries.



Christian College Geelong

Sue Strong [Board Member]

For the past seven years I have been a member of the Board of Christian College, representing the Uniting Church. In its foundation, the Board comprised 4 member churches (Anglican, Uniting, Baptist and Salvation Army) and the connection of these 4 has remained. It is a joy to work alongside members from other churches and I have learnt how much we have in common.

The Board is made up of a range of people who respect one another and want the college to flourish, and we are prepared to work on issues that range from the troubling and difficult to the fulfilling and joyful.

We meet monthly as a whole Board, but we also have distinct roles to play on the various sub-committees, that then feed into the Board. Ours is a role of governance but we are vitally interested in how the college operates and we work alongside the Executive Principal. I really appreciate the fact that the college's strategic plan and actions are consistent with the Uniting Church's mission, values, and policies.

I feel that I am in a fortunate position, as I used to be an employee of the school (for 24 years) and this work enables me to keep connected to a place that I love and care about. I feel so privileged to have an opportunity to connect my Uniting Church roots with my past teaching practice and my love of this school. I am continuing to learn and grow in this role and believe that God has enabled me to be of service to the college over these years. I look forward to a little more time in this work in the future.

UC Historical Society – Speaker Rev Dr Paul Goh

Our VicTas Uniting Church Historical Society is pleased to announce our first event for 2026 on **Sunday 15 March**, by **Zoom** only.
2:30pm start. To register email ken.barelli@bigpond.com or mobile 0418 317 942.
Rev Dr Paul Goh will speak on 'Why the statement that "we are a multi-cultural church" matters more today'.
Any English as a second language congregations in your region are most welcome.

Worship Leader, Lay Pastor, Lay Preacher Studies on-line

Understanding the UCA:

Monthly on Tuesday Nights Feb 24th—Oct 20th, 7-9pm, Zoom. Cost $50-.

Introduction to the Basis of Union, key UCA resources, covenants and values.

Contact: Mel Perkins Mel.Perkins@victas.uca.org.au

Amanda Nicholas Amanda.Nicholas@victas.uca.org.au

Lay Preachers AGM & Conference

Venue: The Centre for Theology and Ministry and via Zoom

29 College Crescent, Parkville

Saturday 14 March,

Guest Speakers:

Rev. Duncan McLeod "Update on eLM & Lap Preachers"

Rev. Daniel Sihombing "Jesus, Discipleship and Justice"

Direct Debit/Internet Banking:

To Trust Account BSB: 063 880 Account No: 10139958

Register by Monday 9 March 2026

Email to Secretary of LPA robertlees181@gmail.com

OR post in time to reach LPA by above date. Address: LPA Secretary, 37 Mabilla Cres, Strathville 3550

Don't miss this opportunity to join with other Uniting Church Lay Preachers, Lay Leaders and Worship Leaders in exploring ways to enhance your work in the ministry of preaching.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2026

Nigeria

"I will give you rest, come!"

Resources: Fact Sheet, service booklet, Images, Music Sheets, Videos, artwork, poster, advertising flyers and much more... Click on the Map of Australia with Victoria highlighted for a list of all the known service locations and times are listed.

Vale: Rev. Dr. Fiona Dawn Green Hill

By Rev. Jeanne Beale *with thanks to her husband Stephen*

Fiona died peacefully, surrounded by her husband Stephen and other family members, at Geelong Hospital on Tuesday, 02 December, 2025.

Fiona grew up in the Salvation Army and at the age of 19, as a Media Studies student, was already a published creative writer in Salvation Army publications. Her work experience with Lt-Col Rowland Hill, a senior Salvation Army editor and journalist also led to an introduction to their son Stephen Hill, leading to a whirlwind romance and a wedding in the August the following year (1985).

Following Stephen's career, they moved to Horsham and Fiona became a cadet journalist at the local paper, and was rapidly promoted to A-Grade journalist. After finishing her Media Studies degree, she transferred to the local ABC Radio station. Fiona was soon promoted to Current Affairs producer for Western Victoria.

During their eight years in Horsham, Fiona and Stephen were blessed with the arrival of their two sons: Justin and Liam, with the arrival of Christa after moving to Mount Waverley. Here they joined the Salvation Army at Ferntree Gully, where Fiona was employed as a Community Development Worker, running family fun days, and special services, all with spectacular results. This role rekindled a call that Fiona had experienced as a teenager and triggered a return to studies, culminating in a Bachelor's degree in Theology; a post graduate diploma in Pastoral Care; and a doctorate (PhD) in Biblical Studies.

Ministry pathways in the Salvation Army were not (yet) available for married women Fiona was ordained and called to a Ministry position with the Baptist Church. Unfortunately, during her third placement with the Baptist church, Fiona was sidelined with a cancer diagnosis. After surviving two bouts with cancer, Fiona waited for another placement busying herself as an Art Therapist, published a book and other consultancy projects. After a few years cancer free and without a placement, Fiona turned to the Uniting Church, and was accepted and ordained on the 10/10/2010 and called to the Diamond Valley Parish. During the 2020 pandemic lockdowns, Fiona, bringing together her creativity and media skills, created an online initiative "Church from the Manse Garden" involving her family as a remarkable production team.

In November 2023, Fiona accepted a call to the Grange Cluster, based in Hamilton, unfortunately, back pain revealed that cancer had returned. She wrestled with her illness while trying to continue in her role, but was forced by her diagnosis to retire early in June 2025.

Fiona and Stephen moved to St Albans Park to be closer to family and transferred their membership to our local congregation. Our brief encounters have revealed a woman who brought her 'whole self' to ministry, through the way she loved and encouraged all people she encountered. A colleague who very quickly became a friend. She will be sadly missed - see you on the other side.

Education Fund

Festival Fund

Simpson Fund

PRESBYTERY OF PORT PHILLIP WEST

<u>PPW Presbytery Simpson Grants 2026</u>—Out on **17th March 2026**

Simpson Fund

- **Eco-friendly / Net Zero**
- **Mission**
- **IT & Equipment**
- **Small property Under $16,000-**

Events

6th March	**World Day of Prayer** Resources
8th March	**International Women's Day**
16th—22nd March	**Harmony Week**
19th March	**National Close the Gap Day**
20-22 March	**Surrender Festival** Link @ Belgrave Heights Convention Centre
29th March 1pm	**Palm Sunday & Stronger Together March** Link @ Princess Street Bridge, Melbourne
9th—11th April	**TALANOA OCEANIA** Rego *(Rego opens after 8th March)*
13th—20th April	**2026 Contextual Learning Group to South Korea** (p.4)
7th November	**2026 On-line Synod Meeting – SAVE THE DATE**

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