

# NewView

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This issue considers the theme of 'Beginnings' and as we approach the climax of the Advent season we are reminded of the significance of the birth of Jesus, and how his life was to herald the beginning of what we often refer to as 'The Way'. 'Free Spirit' learned a new carol for the season, which expands on our theme of Beginnings. It is titled 'Born on a New Day'.

*You are the new day...When our life is darkest night, hope has burned away, Love, your ray of guiding light, show us the new day. Love of all things great and small, leaving none, embracing all, fold around me where I fall — bring in the new day! This new day will be a turning point for every one, if we let the Christ-child in, and reach for the new day. Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life, healing sadness, ending strife... You are the new day.*

In this issue of *NewView* we record some of the ways in which our congregation works towards bringing about that new day. As followers of The Way we have set some lofty ideals ('love of all things great and small, leaving none, embracing all') but we know that achieving these depends on every one's commitment to the daily life of love, and pressing on even though we are conscious of our daily failings and shortcomings ('fold around me where I fall'). But we are heartened to read of the many wonderful efforts that have happened in the last few months at GWUC towards achieving 'a new day'. There are plans for another beginning at GWUC: a new sacred space, set aside for us as a place for silence, quiet reflection or prayer.

On the international front Lyn McDonald talks about possible beginnings in the support given to our friends at Kivuli, Kenya; and an Outreach BBQ forum report informs us of the work of the Girl Guide organisation in bringing about gender equality world-wide. Our COP funds at work in East Timor and at Strathdon and the beginnings and possibilities they generate are reported. By contrast, we read about the disturbing beginnings brought about by new legislation affecting asylum seekers in Australia.

Our church reaches out to our community in many ways. Cynthia Chin provides some details in her article and Sue Morgan writes about our wonderfully successful fete. Additionally, on the local scene, Judith Greenwood provides some glimpses into how little people respond to being a part of a nativity scene. We learn about the myriad of ways in which our indefatigable Cliff Baker has spent his life helping others, and of another small avenue of help open to us through Sammy Stamp. Aaron Blakemore tells of his impressions of Synod which he attended as one of our representatives. We also remember significant milestones in our members' lives — wedding anniversaries, birthdays, marriages, baptisms and especially loss, which all bring about beginnings of a different kind for us all.

As we each meet up with friends and family to celebrate Christmas, let us remember that the birth of the Christ-child was the beginning of a new day, and of his vision for us all, living with love in peace and harmony. Let us carry that thought through into the new year as we begin 2015.

*Robin Pope*

## Some Reflections on Beginnings

When I saw that the theme for this edition of *NewView* was 'beginnings', I immediately thought of the beginning of my ministry at Glen Waverley Uniting Church. It is now 11 months since I took up this placement. Time has gone so quickly. I want to thank the joint nominating committee, the church council, the ministry team and the whole congregation for making the beginning of my new ministry here as smooth as it has been. I am enjoying the opportunities for ministry in this congregation and community. I am feeling well supported by everyone. I am learning new things and I am being challenged theologically, pastorally and in the practice of ministry. This is how I will grow and learn and further develop my skills. I also feel well supported on the occasions that challenges surface. I will always seek to be in close fellowship with God, rely on the Spirit's leading and enabling, and pray as I continue to serve God and serve the church congregation, the local community and the wider church.

I have also been thinking about 'beginnings' in relation to the key special times in our faith.

One of those times is Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus – Immanuel, God with us. This is a beginning in the sense that God came among us in a wonderful and new way. God became one with us and shared our human struggles and challenges. Jesus, through his life and ministry, showed us more clearly the very character and nature of God.

Another beginning is associated with Easter where we reflect on Jesus' death on a cross and his resurrection on the third day. The resurrection is a new beginning in terms of the promise of new life. Easter reminds us of God's promise of forgiveness and a new beginning that is possible for each of us. It is also true that sometimes things or programs will die before the new initiative is begun.

Pentecost is another beginning time where we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit in a fresh and new way. The Spirit came to enliven, equip and empower the people of God to serve others and to allow them to share in ministry and mission. The coming of the Spirit gave birth to the church that carries forward Christ's ministry.

Lynn and I want to wish you a very blessed and meaningful Christmas as you celebrate and reflect on the birth of Jesus. We hope to see many of you at Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services. We trust that God will walk closely with you in 2015.

*Rev Neil Peters*

# Beginnings...

**Beginnings:** What an interesting and logical topic for the December *NewView*.

We immediately think of the beginning of the life of Christ – Christmas – and the beginning of the new ‘deal’ between God and his people.

There are so many beginnings that come to mind: the beginning of our married life together; the beginning of the life of our children ... and just recently the beginning of the life of our fifth grandchild, our third granddaughter.



Blessing and Grace, the first calf

We have witnessed the beginning of projects in the Outreach in Kenya. Our family and friends, including many from GWUC, gave money in 2013 to assist various projects including Kivuli.

Some of this money went towards buying a cow, Blessing, whose first calf in 2013 did not live, but this year she successfully gave birth to a calf called Grace.

But prior to the arrival of Grace, the first kid was born at Kivuli whilst we were there in July.



Kivuli's first kid

Now, 26/11/14, Isaac of Kivuli (some of you met him whilst he was here in Melbourne) has emailed with photos of another beginning which occurred at Kivuli. Their first lamb was born, due to the money you gave to us.

We don't always realise the extent of our giving, often bound in love, and the words of Jesus, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you’.

The beginnings that follow sometimes amaze us.



...and now the first lamb

*Lyn McDonald*

## Beginnings...

### Christmas: When did the celebrations begin?

We celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25, but the Gospels of Matthew and Luke do not provide us with an actual date, so it is debatable whether Jesus was actually born then. The Roman Empire persecuted Christians until the conversion of Emperor Constantine, who not only ceased the persecution but recognised Christianity officially as the state church of the empire, establishing it as an orthodoxy.

The Romans were skilled in adapting practices and rituals from the existing religions of their conquered peoples, helping to ensure a smooth transition to their rule. An influential Roman cult at the time of Jesus' birth was that of Sol Invictus, the sun-god. Another cult worshipped Saturn, and he was honoured at the Saturnalia, a week-long festival that occurred December 17-24, around the winter solstice. It is thought that when in 350 AD Pope Julius I declared December 25 as the official date of Jesus' birth, that this was another example of incorporating customary practices and dates. In 529 AD Emperor Justinian declared December 25 a public holiday. In 567 AD the Council of Tours declared Advent as a period of fasting and preparation and the 'twelve days of Christmas' from December 25 to January 5 were recognised, with January 6 (Epiphany) being accepted as the date on which the magi, or wise men, brought their gifts to the baby Jesus. The Western Church has continued to recognise these dates, but the Eastern Orthodox traditions use a different religious calendar, and celebrate Christmas on January 7th and observe Epiphany on January 19th.

Similarly, in northern Europe there was a pre-Christian festival called Yule, held at the winter solstice, when huge logs were decorated with greenery and colourful ribbons were burnt to encourage the gods to ensure the sun would return in spring. The Western Christian church has adopted some of these traditions to honour Jesus' birth, and greenery, candles, singing, tree decorating, Yule logs (now often edible!), and feasting form part of celebrations in many Australian churches and homes.

Because of its known pagan associations, Christmas was banned by the Puritans and its observance was actually illegal in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681. It fell out of favour for some centuries as a celebration, but was revived during the reign of Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century. Today, Christmas is celebrated by most Christians.

*Robin Pope*

### Some Christmas Riddles

**Q:** What did Santa say to Mrs Claus on Christmas Eve?

**A:** It looks like rain, dear.

**Q:** What do elves learn in school?

**A:** The elf-abet.

**Q:** What did Adam say on Christmas night?

**A:** It's Christmas, Eve.

**Q:** What never eats at Christmas?

**A:** The turkey - it's usually stuffed.

**Q:** What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck?

**A:** A Christmas quacker.

**Q:** How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas?

**A:** Deep, and crisp, and even.

**Q:** How did Mary and Joseph know Jesus weighed 7 lb 6 oz?

**A:** Because they had a weigh in a manger.

**Q:** Why did no one bid for Rudolph and Blitzen on eBay?

**A:** Because they were two deer.

**Q:** What did the stamp say to the Christmas card?

**A:** Stick with me and we'll go places.

**Q:** What carol is heard in the desert?

**A:** O camel, ye faithful.

**Q:** Where did Rudolph go to school?

**A:** He didn't go to school. He was elf-taught.

## Soul Space

For several years now the subject has come up of a need for a space where people may spend some uninterrupted quiet time, a place to be still, and be aware of divine presence.

It would be:

1. A *safe* place, where one may cry (grieve) or laugh or pray.
2. A *silent* place: a place to breathe and to listen, where the need to be silent is respected by others.
3. A *sacred* place to nurture the soul; to relax; to feel God's love surrounding you; to be happy and thankful.

Decor would include the Cross, perhaps a bowl of sand and other appropriate symbols. Thus it may be seen as a demonstration of our vision statement i.e. of being a Christ-centred church.

Recently a letter was sent to Church Council requesting such a space. We are pleased to say that Council voted in favour of this proposal. And, thanks to the property committee, the outer vestry will be released for this purpose.

Initially we see a trial period beginning next year. Before that, do look in on the room as you go past, and do let us have your thoughts and ideas on the concept.

Would you use it?

Please feel free to speak to Heather Wilkins, Pamela Longmuir, Council members and Evan's Friday group.

As Psalm 46:10 says, '*Be still, and know that I am God*'.

*Pamela Longmuir*

## Urgent Call for Stamps

The following is an extract from *Network Magazine*, October 2014

This year we have noticed a measurable drop off in the number of stamps we are receiving, so much so that our trimmers have on more than one occasion almost run out of work.

Recently, in the news, Australia Post indicated that mail volumes had declined to around a third over the past six or so years. On top of this our two bags (once it was around nine) we receive from the CBD each week may cease about the middle of next year.

It is therefore even more imperative that our UCAF and church supporters round up as many stamps, albums etc as they can. We find doctor's clinics are a good source of stamps.

...Up to and including Sept 4 sales had reached about \$17,603. We have just approved \$5000 to SHARE to assist asylum seekers. So, grants so far this year have totalled \$32,248.

*Allan J. Clarke*

*And a recent footnote comes from Joy Wahner and Dorothy Graham:*

At Sammy Stamp today Leon Pederick, Allan and the team were more idle than they wanted to be. The buyers keep coming though!

**Remember to save your stamps from all those Christmas cards you receive, and deliver them to the church office for Sammy Stamp.**

*Joy Wahner and Dorothy Graham*

## Organ Fund Update

Due to further generous donations, the Fund now stands at \$16,500. These donations help replenish parish funds originally used to buy the instrument.

*Geoff Willis*

## Getting to Know You: Cliff Baker

When approached for this interview, Cliff Baker claimed his life was boring. It was a typical response from a quiet but incredibly energetic man. No grass grows under Cliff's feet!

Cliff was the product in 1928 of a 'mixed marriage' (Cliff's phrase) of a Presbyterian and Methodist. There was music in the home and Cliff's father was a choirmaster, although according to Cliff only his younger brother received the musical genes. His father was also a secondary school teacher, so his parents appreciated the value of a good education. Cliff recalls the support and encouragement he received from both parents, and his later life illustrates the significance of having grasped these opportunities in his own career and family life.



Cliff began his education at Elsternwick Central — the walk there from Brighton was quite a hike for a small boy — but when Cliff was in Grade 4 in 1936 his father was transferred to St. Arnaud. In 1942 another transfer took them to Warragul, where his father ultimately became headmaster of Warragul High. Cliff's academic abilities were evident there: he was twice dux at the high school. Since Warragul High did not then continue through to matriculation level Cliff came to Scotch College in 1945 to complete that year, and here he was equal dux again.

Winning a general exhibition in the matriculation exams provided entry to Ormond College at Melbourne University in 1946. While Cliff completed a double degree in arts and science (B.A., B.Sc) over the next four years, his brother also completed a degree (in engineering) at Mildura,

continuing the family recognition of the importance of education. With a good qualification and the post-war construction period gaining momentum, Cliff obtained a position in the Department of Works Laboratories, monitoring and testing the quality of materials for construction projects, especially concrete. Here he worked on pioneer work in cathodic protection, preventing corrosion, and he instituted these processes for the first time in the installation of Stokes Wharf in Darwin.

While working in Port Melbourne, Cliff boarded in a house in Ivanhoe where he met Maisie, a Tasmanian girl boarding in the same place while she worked in Melbourne. The attraction led to an engagement in 1954, and marriage in 1956. Children soon followed, with Maree born in 1957, Cheryl in 1960 and Helen in 1963. Education has been significant in this next generation of the family too.

During World War Two the government had established the National Association of Testing Authorities in order to ascertain standards and to ensure that the quality and procedures of production could be trusted. Cliff's professional work led to his involvement in the organisation in about 1953-4. The CEO was a man whom Cliff admired, and before long Cliff was on the organising committee and eventually he became chairman of the group. In 1999 he was awarded an AM for his work as chairperson of this body, and for recognition of his long-time contribution to setting standards in Australia. Cliff is still an honorary member and says it has been his hobby for 60 years. He also had professional involvement with another related but different body, the Standards Association, clarifying the differences between certification and accreditation.

From 1957 Cliff worked for Humes Research and Development Engineers, a concrete product manufacturer who sent him overseas to investigate procedures there. He stayed at Humes until 1986 when it was taken over, and then worked part time and as a consultant before his notional retirement.

## Getting to Know You cont.

Cliff and Maisie's first home together was in Surrey Hills, but when enough money was saved they bought a place in Clayton, the deposit being helped along by the sale of Cliff's personal stamp collection. Again, his mind was at work, and Cliff designed another home for their expanded family and this was built in Glen Waverley. It was here that Cliff's involvement with the church started to occupy more space in his life. He had earlier been involved in the Presbyterian Church in Warragul, where Rev Fraser Sutherland was something of an adviser. While at Scotch College church attendance had been compulsory and at Ormond College contact was even more distant. But now, with children attending Sunday School at the old Bogong Avenue Presbyterian Church, contact became more frequent. A common thread in Cliff's life story has been the way in which he has been confronted by various needs, and has seen these as challenges to engage his skills and experience. Max Senior recruited Cliff to the Monitoring Committee of the church, to assist with the oversight of planned giving and church finances. He eventually took on the convenorship of the committee and guided it through the time of union. He has continued his role on the Planned Giving Recording Committee for over 30 years.

In other fields Cliff has seen a need and stepped in to fill the gap. When his daughter Helen was attending the Vermont South Special School, Cliff mobilised other parents to approach local politicians to bring about change to regulations which cast students adrift at age 16. Similarly, he involved himself with the fete at Syndal High School which his daughters attended.

Cliff has always been keen on sport (there is a poster of the Sydney Swans on his wall). He started golf as a young man in Warragul and achieved a handicap of 12. However, tennis eventually took over, especially after marriage when the arrival of the children meant regular golf time became problematic. He has returned to golf in later years but bemoans the body's inability to do what the mind envisages!

In 1996, Cliff's wife Maisie passed away, leaving a vast gap in his life. However, although retired, and theoretically with time on his hands, Cliff has found other needs to fulfil. In about 2000 he began assisting the Red Cross with their annual door-knock appeal, and soon saw the need for organisation of the door-knock in the Monash municipality. When he took on the task he had 150 volunteers. By 2014 his logistical skills had mustered 1100 volunteers who collected over \$44,000, the third highest amount of any Victorian municipality. The organisation of this occupies him from December, when first contacts are made, through to May, when final details are completed.

Most of us are aware of Cliff's contribution to the Glen Waverley Uniting Church fete, especially with the organisation of the silent auction, which occurs by dint of donations Cliff solicits from local businesses and church members. Work for this begins in July, and runs through until the fete details are settled in November. In case you thought Cliff had time on his hands, he still maintains his veggie garden and assists with the Leisure Time program, filling the roles of treasurer and outings co-ordinator, and writing the submission for a Monash Council grant. It is this work, with Leisure Time, the Red Cross and the fete, that inspires him to continue. At Leisure Time especially he sees the smiles and enjoyment of the immediate beneficiaries, and this provides him with his reward and satisfaction. There are many people who have cause to be thankful for Cliff's generous contribution of his time and organisational skills which make such a difference to their lives.



*Robin Pope*

## Community Hub Missional Group

### Nativity Comes To Life at The Hub

As a Community Hub Missional Group we are continually getting to know better the people from the local community as they join in our Community Hub activities of Leisure Time, Playgroup, Cooee, The Hub, or come in for welfare assistance.

One of the activities that The Hub provides each Christmas is to take photos of children dressed up in nativity costumes. Doing this gives us the opportunity to talk with the children and their parents about the real Christmas story.

Over 60 families came to The Hub to have photos of their children dressed up as Mary, Joseph, an angel, a wise man, a shepherd, a sheep or a cow! Even King Neil came!

Some parents didn't know who the characters of the Christmas story were, so we were able to explain the story very simply to them.

Some of the Monday Playgroup children delighted the Leisure Time guests by dressing up and parading in to visit them. These children were certainly spreading some Christmas joy that could be seen on the faces of the Leisure Time guests and volunteers.

Some children liked to look at themselves dressed up in the mirror.

One parent of a child who attends Mini Maestros said that this was a great idea! She would rather have a photo like this than one with Santa. She wants her children to know the real story of what Christmas is about, not just Santa and presents.

One grandmother saw the notice about the photos in the local paper and phoned to ask more about it. She brought her grandchild to dress up and have a photo taken. She said what a lovely set up we had, and what a really good idea. She thanked us very much.

It was lovely to hear so many children and parents saying 'Thank you' to our photographers and helpers.

Thanks to Jenny Vass and Geraldine Fleming for being our wonderful photographers. Thanks also to Sarah and Steph, our special helpers, who did a great job dressing the children and helping parents to fill out the forms.

There were many special moments as photos were taken. Here are a few to share with you.

Judith Greenwood





# Nativity Comes to The Hub



Timmy & Faith



Thomas & Benjamin



Joel & Rachel



Oliver and Charlotte

# Missional Group Activities: Outreach BBQ Forum

The Community Outreach Missional group hosted another in its series of BBQ Fora at lunch time after the 11am service on September 28.



Our speaker was Erin Wicking, a young woman working with the Girl Guide Association to make changes in the status of girls and women around the world. Erin provided us with some facts about the guiding movement. It is the largest organisation in the world which works for girls. Surprisingly (to us) Rwanda now has some of the best gender equality in the world, following its careful social restructuring after the genocide of 1994, when 800,000 men, women and children perished in one hundred terrifying days.

Erin went to Rwanda in 2013 to attend a bilingual conference and to help set up the program 'Voices Against Violence'. The program drew on the Rwandan situation, where women had been encouraged to voice their personal experiences. Girl Guides is very strong in Rwanda and provides strong leadership for community values, and has been active in working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women. A notable feature of their program has been to involve men in their programs to ensure they have an equal part in bringing about change. A crucial part of the education provided at the conference focused on how to facilitate strong values through 'Voices Against Violence', developing particular aspects of inequality which required addressing: domestic violence; sexual violence; bullying; violence at school; female genital mutilation.

The World Association of Guiding (WAGS) was subsequently sponsored by UNICEF to bring young women from many different countries to consult with the UN Commission on the Status of Women and then to produce a position paper as a follow-on to the Millennium Goals. Erin was part of the presentation of the paper to the United Nations in 2014.

It was enlightening to learn of the significant influence that non-government organisations (NGOs) such as Girl Guides can have, especially in countries where the movement is strong and can introduce practical strategies in changing entrenched negative cultural attitudes concerning gender.

Fairlie McKinnon thanked Erin for her informative talk, and Rohan and Sharmini Wickramaratne were thanked for generously cooking our lunch with assistance from members of COG.

*Robin Pope*



Fairlie thanking Erin



Kaye thanking Rohan

# Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ

*Let us talents\* and tongues\*\* employ  
Reaching out with a shout of joy  
Bread is broken, the wine is poured  
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.*

Although this is basically a communion hymn I feel that the words in the first line, taken literally, apply to our congregation!

Have you ever stopped to think about the wealth of talent and resources we have in our congregation?

Yes, it really is amazing! This wealth coupled with a very participative enthusiasm on the part of the congregation has been instrumental in the organisation of many events in the life of the church.

An outstanding example is the Grand Fete held in October each year. Starting with a capable and hardworking organising committee, the network extends downwards to include a plethora of stalls which include food, craft, recycled goods, plants, cards etc. Each year this enables the COP committee to channel fete funds towards nominated organisations which are in need.

The FISH Xmas dinner is held because of the hard work of Aqua FISH group and friends. The Book Fair is initiated by the Gold Fish Group and friends and supported by Uniting Voices with their Devonshire tea.

On the music (tongues) side, both Free Spirit and Uniting Voices have raised funds while they provide entertainment to GWUC and the community.

Apart from the innovative ideas and hard work involved there is also one other factor which should not be ignored, and that is: generosity. Without this generous spirit we would not be able to run most of the fete stalls. Look at a few examples. The cake and preserves stall runs on cash donations and home-made cakes and preserves. The Asian food stall is generously donated to each year by Asian church members. The Devonshire tea kiosk receives much-needed supplies of freshly-baked scones by regular contributors. None of the recycled goods stalls would survive if GWUC and the local community members did not go through their homes to clear out unwanted items. The silent auction takes place only because of the goodwill of local businessmen and GWUC donors. Fundraising dinners take place because members contribute their time as well as in kind.

One other factor which is becoming increasingly important is manpower. With an ageing population, the volunteers who have helped in the past are often no longer able to assist and will have to rely on the younger set. Take for example the fundraising dinners when it is necessary to set up tables and chairs out of storage. It is so heartening to note that the Youth Group have been quietly assisting with this for the last number of years. A vote of thanks go to them. It should also be acknowledged that each year at the fete, the Asian food stall has had several helpers from outside the church community. Each year they look forward to coming back to be part of this event.

So it is hoped that we will continue in this way and, hopefully, fulfil the vision of 'Emerging Future Directions'.

**\*talent:** a large amount of silver or gold worth a huge amount of money. One talent was considered to be what a working man would earn in about ten years.

**\*\* tongues:** The New Testament records miraculous speaking in tongues, indicating the Holy Spirit enabling believers to speak in languages they had never learned.

*Cynthia Chin*



## *Many hands make Fete work!*

On October 18 and the days leading up to it, we were again reminded of what a great church community we have. So many church members, many bringing their friends, were there to do what they could for our annual fete. Many were just 'doing what we always do' (and others have come to rely on them doing...), others were filling in wherever they were needed. Whatever your strengths and abilities, you put them to good use, and for that the Fete Committee, and the recipients of the funds raised, are very grateful. As a result of your efforts, this year's Fete profits have just passed the amazing figure of \$30,000. All of our COP projects were able to be funded in excess of the target amount.



As always, the Trash and Treasure, Cakes, Books, Plants, Collectibles and Used Clothes were good money-raisers. Food is always popular, and the Asian Food, Devonshire Tea, the BBQ, pizza, waffles (a new feature this year) and fairy floss between them raised around \$5000. A very big money earner was the result of the huge effort of one man — thank you, Cliff, for soliciting donations and organising the very successful Silent Auction. Children enjoyed the \$2 boxes, the Animal Farm, Face Painting, and climbing aboard the motorcycles. Special thanks to Jenny Vass and David and Shirley Williams for contributing their creative talents and selling their work. Our friends at Beac crawled under their shearing sheds in order to collect and bag two utes full of sheep poo, as a result of which our city gardens are now much richer. For the first time, the SES were there to show us their trucks and explain their work. We were entertained by the Chinese orchestra, Chinese dancers, and the Mini-maestros. The preliminary breakdown of amounts raised can be found on the wiki, with a link found at the bottom of the page <http://wiki.gwuc.org.au/ChurchFete2014>



To even begin to thank individuals would be a dangerous task, with so many helping in so many ways. Instead, please just know we mean YOU when we say 'Thank you'.

...and save the date: Saturday 17 October 2015, when it all happens again!



*Sue Morgan*



## 2013 COP Grant for Strathdon Community Garden



On Thursday 4 December I had the privilege of representing our congregation at the opening of the McGarvie & Faichney Activity Garden at the UnitingAgeWell residential home, Strathdon. Through a COP grant in 2013, our church contributed towards this garden, enabling the building of raised garden beds, seating, barbeque area and a covered outdoor gathering space. All elements of the garden have been carefully planned and designed to meet the residents' needs.

On a beautiful sunny afternoon, many residents and guests gathered to take part in the official opening. It is a beautiful space and will be enjoyed by many. If you are visiting Strathdon I encourage you to look around the garden.

*Judy Lowe*



*We rejoice with the following members of our church family:*

*Bill Morgan, who celebrated his 99th birthday*

*Warren and Judith Greenwood, who celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary*

*John and Barbara Hurst who celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary*

*John and Barbara Thompson who celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary*

## Synod Report from one of our Representatives

There are always those few things about a wider church event that stick with you, and this Synod meeting was no exception! It was full of life giving moments and renewed hope for the church with just a hint of exhaustion from those memorable 5 days.

Quite early in the Synod meeting we were blessed to have a time of listening to stories of the last 18 months within the church, specifically the Uniting Our Futures program. This time of listening allowed the Synod to heal, grieve and acknowledge its mistakes and shortcomings which opened the door to forgiveness and finding the best way forward as a church which journeys together. From there the Synod was able to venture together through discussions on all sorts of matters.

One of these was a discussion around the relationship between the UCA Vic/Tas Synod and Access Ministries. Over many days the Synod heard many different things from a number of groups and people about this relationship and organisation of which the Synod is a part. At the end of this, through the powers of the consensus model, the meeting was able to find common ground to stand on. (To read more about the Synod's decision click here: <http://crosslight.org.au/2014/11/02/access-denied/>).

The third key discussion at Synod was around the Major Strategic Review of the UCA Vic/Tas Synod and to me this was an exciting part of the time together as we were given an update on how the discussions around the wider church were going. Furthermore I was invited to speak with the MSR task group about life in the Synod as a young adult, which turned into brilliant conversation with other young adults and the task group!

Some of my favourite moments were hearing the many different stories about the life of the church across our Synod. We heard from many arms of UnitingCare as well as Uniting AgeWell, chaplains in all levels of schooling and the military. It was hearing these stories of the church living out its call to live and journey with the people that gave me the most hope for the church and its heart of mission and service.

Aaron Blakemore

## Thank you for the Musical Instruments – from the community of Baguia, Timor Leste

I would like to pass on grateful thanks to members of the congregation who responded several months ago to an unusual request from Baguia, Timor Leste, by donating musical instruments (or funds towards instruments). In September our instruments were carefully packed then loaded into a container that was shipped to Dili through the support of the Rotary Club of Hawthorn. On arrival in Dili, the instruments, along with donated household goods, were loaded onto trucks for the long and difficult eight hour trip up the mountains to Baguia. The President of Friends of Baguia, Derarca O'Mahony made the trip to Timor to supervise the unloading of the container and the transport to Baguia. Derarca ensured that all instruments were transported safely and we are pleased to note that there was no damage en route.

Altogether this congregation donated 3 electronic keyboards (including one brand new), keyboard stands, speakers, guitars, violins, clarinets, flute, music stands, microphones and mouth organs. We received the following SMS message recently from our friend Leopoldina in Baguia:

*All the things you organise and send over for us are very useful. Special thanks for the instruments support by your parish. They are the best and useful in Baguia community. It is not only for my school but it is for schools, church and community activities such as 12 of November, the Massacre Santa Cruz ceremony. Will use for every activities when community need. Love Leo*

Thanks to all for your wonderful generosity. You can tell that it is greatly appreciated!

Judy Lowe



## Amendments to Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation

*Uniting Justice has issued an Advocacy Brief which sets out the concerns of the Uniting Church about the amendments to the Migration Act which passed the Senate on December 5. Here are extracts summarising some of their major concerns:*

- The legislation seeks to absolve Australia of our obligations under international law to protect refugees and is a serious threat to Australia's commitments to uphold human rights under international law.
- One of the most serious obligations is 'non-refoulement', however there are a number of provisions which would put people in danger of being refouled, such as the proposed new definition of 'refugee', which sets a much lower bar for protection and conditions for removal; the 'fast-track' assessment process for arrivals after 13 Aug 2012 and their denial of access to appeal; the 'fast-track' review process by the newly established Immigration Assessment Authority which will conduct only a limited merits review of decisions. The IAA will be under no duty to accept or request new information or even to interview an applicant.
- The legislation adds a clause to ensure that decisions made by the Minister cannot be challenged on the grounds that 'the rules of natural justice' were not upheld. ('Natural justice' is one of the foundational principles of law that refers to the right to have a fair trial or hearing and the right to free from bias or prejudice in decision-making). The legislation allows for the Minister to ignore findings by the courts that the Government has breached our international obligations.
- The legislation enables the Government to re-introduce Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). TPVs will be granted for three years and TPV holders will be given the right to work, and access to Medicare and social security. They will never be able to apply for permanent protection and will have to be re-assessed every three years. They are not allowed to re-enter the country if they leave, and they are denied the right to family reunion. People on TPVs in the past have been shown to experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and other psychiatric illnesses than the rest of the population (eg a study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*). A Senate inquiry in 2006 found that there was little real evidence of the deterrent value of TPVs and that they imposed a significant cost in terms of human suffering. There is also some evidence to suggest that TPVs may increase rather than decrease the likelihood of people arriving in Australia by boat (of the 353 people aboard the SIEV X when it sank in 2001, 142 were women and 146 were children hoping to reunite with their husbands and fathers already in Australia on TPVs).
- The Bill specifically addresses the situation of newborn children who would gain the same legal status as their parents, as an 'Unauthorised Maritime Arrival'. This exposes newborn babies to possible transfer to a regional processing country, long-term detention and the denial of protection in Australia — breaching their rights in relation to Australia's international obligations. The Human Rights Commission's Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention report concluded that children in immigration detention for long periods of time are at high risk of serious mental harm. UNHCR commented that 'overall, the harsh and unsuitable environment at the closed RPC [Nauru Immigration Detention Centre] is particularly inappropriate for the care and support of child asylum seekers'. In addition, newborn children have the right to acquire a nationality. There is a risk that the newborn child of non-citizen parents would be rendered stateless under this new legislation [although] *Australia's Citizenship Act 2007* states that any child who was born in Australia, and who is not and has never been a citizen of another country and is not entitled to apply for citizenship elsewhere, is eligible for Australian citizenship.

*The full document can be found at [unitingjustice.org.au](http://unitingjustice.org.au) under 'information and action resources', or email [unitingjustice@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:unitingjustice@nat.uca.org.au), or write to UnitingJustice Australia, PO Box A2266, Sydney South, NSW 1235*

You might also be interested to read an article by Alistair Nicholson, former Chief Justice of the Family Court, in *The Age Digital* edition, on December 14. Members of the Asylum Seeker Support Group have copies.

*Robin Pope*

for everything there is a season  
and a time for every matter under heaven

*We record with sadness the deaths in the past months of members of our church family and we extend our support and sympathy to their families*

*Peter Hastings Thorpe*

*Dora Isobel Nixon*

*John Theodore De Ravin*

*Phoebe Lillian Proctor*

*Ralph Henry Blair*

*Edith Olwin Brooks*

*Glenis Joan Dunn*

*Harry Benjamin Poutney*

*We celebrate the marriage of*

*Gary William Woodward and Karen Alayne Woodruff*

*We record with joy the baptism of*

*Noah Johnathon Andrews*

*Saige Bella Andrews*