

# NewView

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This issue of *NewView* provides ample evidence of the many ways in which the community of Glen Waverley Uniting Church **makes room for others** in the wider community through the work of The Hub (p.8), Leisure Time, play groups, keep fit classes, Cooee, badminton, the book group and many other activities. As Neil reminds us (p. 2) his ministry is about *people*.

As we reflect on the importance of Jesus' birth, I have become aware that this Advent season has an intense focus on the individual - perhaps to our cost. Like many other Australians I have become increasingly disillusioned about the political scene and I have been tempted to pull up the drawbridge and confine my focus to the local community. But common sense warns me that ignoring the bigger picture of Australian life is a serious mistake. Our democracy is worth a great deal (ask anyone from a country without it!) and we should remind ourselves of the responsibilities that come with it. We get the government we voted for, so our individual votes count. Democracy requires a parliament with robust debates from *all* sides about policies which affect us all. As citizens we should be demanding accountability; legislation affects each of us individually, and we need to ensure it looks after us all.

With the tools of communication available to us now we don't even have to write a letter. Emails, tweets etc are powerful ways of letting our representatives know what we think, and it is obvious that public opinion counts, especially at election time.

Our parliament reached a particularly low point on December 7 when our government employed parliamentary procedure to avoid passing a bill that would compel them to transfer children, their families and anyone else in need of medical assessment and treatment from Manus and Nauru to care in Australia. By filibustering in the Senate and closing the lower house before the legislation could be passed, it meant the individuals in detention - many of whom have been there in limbo for 5 years or more (p. 9) - had their hopes for a resolution dashed, a cruel example of how legislation affects individuals.

This week we learned of more sordid misdemeanours and hypocrisy from our elected representatives. It is a salutary reminder that if we do not keep our parliamentarians and their policies accountable we will only see a growth in self-serving ambition and secrecy. Our GWUC community has a fine history of members who have worked in public spaces to improve our wider community. The likes of Irene Marriott, Cliff Baker, Iris Pederick, Barbara Thompson, Graeme Frecker (pp.12-14) and others have been models we should emulate. It is inspiring to see our young people become involved in policy; we have recently witnessed rallies of students demanding action on climate change. Jesse Lang's contribution (p. 16) is similarly encouraging.

In addition to the reports of activities in our community, this issue provides a collection of positions about how our church can acknowledge First Peoples (pp. 16-19). They are presented to stimulate a discussion about our church. I urge you to chat with your friends, to participate. And remember to take an interest in what is happening beyond our community. Make room in your hearts for the big picture!

Robin Pope

## NEIL'S MUSINGS



My first thought about my heart, which is not a thought I would have had twelve months ago, is that I am so thankful that my heart once again has a strong blood flow and is pounding away in my chest. So, I am really thankful to my surgeon and the rest of the team who cared for me back in June.

As I sat with this *NewView* topic, I thought about the feelings I have deep within me – feelings like offering love, receiving love, acceptance, being noticed and valued, feeling wanted, feeling listened to, feeling cared for, and respect. I find it most fulfilling in life when I have the opportunity to be with others and hear their story, their joys, their struggles, and to share something of myself and my journey. I like doing that over coffee, over a meal or in some quiet space.

I want to continue to make room in my heart for others. I am genuinely interested in the other person. I recently met someone in the fellowship area of our church who comes from Afghanistan. The conversation was only slightly tentative at first. But, hey, how often do you get to speak to someone from Afghanistan?

So I asked her whether she had hope for the future of her country. This opened up a lovely conversation about her people, their history, their faith and the huge challenges facing her country. We finished our conversation both feeling heard and affirmed and enriched from our encounter. I feel I made room for her in my heart. I may never see her again. But we have a connection if I do.

Making room in my heart is an expression of the ministry that I offer. I have made room in my heart for Jesus Christ. Ministry is about people. It is encountering and engaging with people in church, in their homes, in hospital, in activities. If encountering and engaging with people is part of who I am then it goes beyond formal ministry. Over the years Lynn and I have got to know some of our neighbours in the street which has led to interesting conversations. Lynn and I walk most mornings around the same time so we have got to meet other walkers who walk regularly in the same areas and at the same time as us. We now know a few of these walkers by name which began as a 'hello', a smile or a wave as we passed.

I strongly believe that human beings were created for connection and to live in community. That connection can be expressed through a spouse/partner, families, work colleagues, a congregation, a club, sport, shopping, and in a neighbourhood. It is through making these broader connections that suspicions, misunderstandings and prejudices can be broken down and a stronger sense of community can be built.

I will strive to make room in my heart for Jesus and for people, for a diverse group of people. In some cases, this will mean a brief, but significant encounter. Sometimes a relationship will be built that lasts for years. Through these encounters I expect to be enriched and changed for the better.

*Rev Neil Peters*

## No Room?

'No room'. How odd.

Morning stars in chorus sang  
and angels shouted praise,  
as you called forth the universe:  
flung stars far out in space,  
then called each one by name.

What strange design.

The one who,  
laid the earth's foundations,  
ordered dawn and night;  
who walks the ocean deep,  
sees the shadow of death's gate.

Enters stockpiles for the snow,  
and hail, reserved for times of war.

Charts the course of desert rain,  
carpets sand with grass and flower.

Who fathers drops of dew,  
gives birth to frost from heaven.

The one to whom the lightning bolts report.

Creator,  
who provides for young magpies  
and joeys in the pouch,  
when they cry to you for food;  
hides the hippopotamus  
beneath the lotus flower,  
that floats in reedy swamps.

The God adorned with splendour;  
clothed in majesty and honour,  
who brings low proud and wicked,  
unleashes fury in his wrath.

You – who hold it all together,  
know beginning from the end.

What strange intent,  
that there should be no room.

In my cluttered, daily life,  
there is a tiny crevice  
Christmas cares have not filled.  
Is that sufficient room for you  
to come into my heart?

Anne Cook©2018

## OUR FETE: MAKING ROOM IN OUR

We were well prepared! A team of dedicated workers with trailers had been collecting goods for weeks before the event, everyone had set aside goods for sale, flyers had been distributed in letterboxes by a team of walkers, and local traders had been approached for donations for the silent auction. On the Thursday and Friday of fete week the tables were set up, the worship centre was re-arranged, the outside stalls were erected, the signage was hung, the goods were sorted and displayed; even the crab apple trees remembered what we expected of them and generously burst into marvellous blossom.

And then: the rain fell...and fell...and fell; but while the crowd was smaller than hoped for, the enthusiasm was undiminished and we still raised \$22,921. This was an outstanding effort for a day of such miserable weather.



# HEART FOR OTHERS

And after the event there was all the sorting of left-over goods, separating what was re-usable or recyclable from what could not be saved.



There was the dismantling of the tables, the tents, the fencing; materials hired or borrowed were returned; the entire building was cleaned; and the furniture was restored to its customary location ready for the usual activities of the following week.



Apart from a few unusual items in the carpark, anyone visiting us for worship the following day would probably have seen little evidence of the mammoth effort that had taken place. To everyone who contributed, especially to our fete committee (Murray Lowe, Sue Morgan and Peter Anderson) and stall holders and workers:

**WELL DONE, AND HEARTFELT THANKS FROM THE NINE ORGANISATIONS WHO RECEIVED THE PROFITS FROM OUR 2018 FETE**



## INDONESIAN CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION



On Sunday December 2, the Indonesian Fellowship invited members of Glen Waverley Uniting Church to join them in their Christmas Service. It was indeed a wonderful musical celebration in words, song and dance. Apart from the Bible readings, prayers, hymns (in both English and Indonesian) and sermon which we regularly encounter in our English services, those of us from GWUC particularly enjoyed the cultural expressions of the Indonesian celebration. The Indonesian Fellowship Choir sang *O Holy Night*, and an Angklung Orchestra (Angklung DWP KJRI Melbourne) played two songs. The angklung is an instrument made of bamboo tubes, each person in the

orchestra having an angklung tuned to a specific note in octaves - much like the handbells which were once a tradition in Western worship. It requires an impressive amount of concentration and accuracy to know when to play your note! A highlight of the service for me was a tableau depicting



the story of the birth of Jesus, performed by the Ganda Marpaung Group, whose professionalism was evident in the quality of the dancing and the beauty of the elaborate costumes. These were based on traditional costumes of specific



areas in Indonesia, as the overhead screen informed us, revealing the diversity of Indonesian traditions. I was particularly touched by the protective arm of Joseph supporting Mary as they approached the inn, and then the joyfulness of the angels as they celebrated the birth of the child. Following the service we were warmly welcomed to a tasty dinner provided in the hall. Thank you Indonesian Fellowship for inviting us to share your special Christmas celebration!

*Robin Pope*



# GIVING THANKS FOR OUR CANINE COMPANIONS

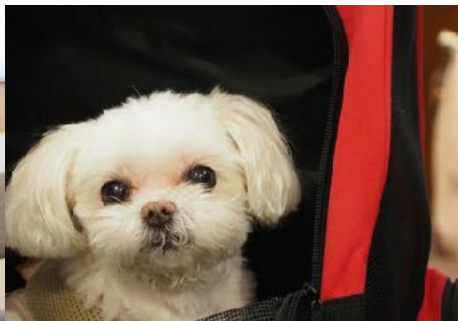


There are many people who have 'made room in their hearts' for a canine companion. On November 18 Free Spirit choir travelled to Heatherton-Dingley UC church to provide musical support for their annual thanksgiving for the



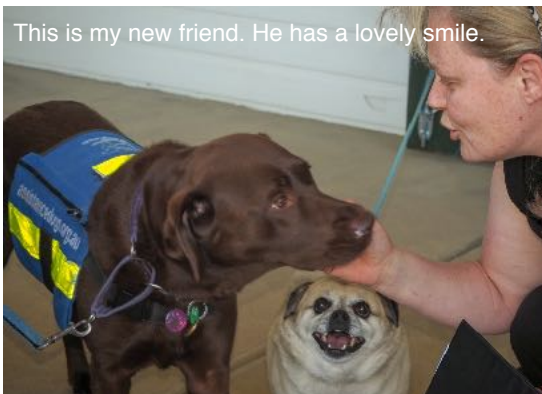
support and companionship provided by dogs. For some people at the service, accompanied by seeing-eye dogs or trained support dogs, their dogs enable them to live independently. For others, their canine companions provide companionship and are sometimes a means of making friendships with others who also have dogs in their home. The church at Heatherton-Dingley has an active dog group which meets on a regular basis to share knowledge and friendship.

We sang some well-known hymn tunes with specifically written words which acknowledged what a blessing dogs have been to many in the congregation and in the wider world.

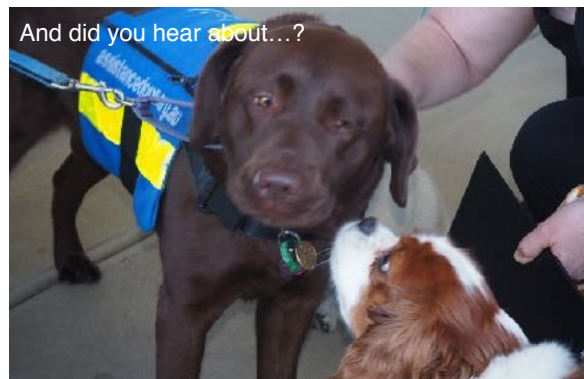


While most dogs sat quietly enjoying the company, some were moved to join in the singing. Although it must be admitted they need to work on their pitch, the emotion evoked was heartfelt! Following the service, humans and canines were provided with some yummy treats, and new friendships were forged.

This is my new friend. He has a lovely smile.



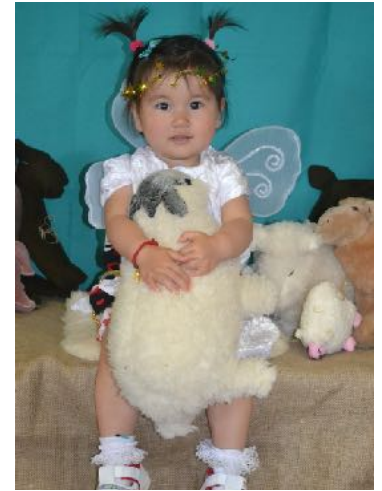
And did you hear about...?



(Heatherton-Dingley UC member)

Words: Robin Pope Photos: Frank Cutuli

# Making Room: Christmas at The Hub



The HUB has been a very busy place over the last few weeks. Children from Playgroup, Mini Maestros and the wider community came to have their photos taken dressed in nativity costumes. There were some gorgeous angels, beautiful little Marys looking after baby Jesus, regal looking wise men, young shepherds with their sheep, and even some very woolly sheep and a cow. Our thanks to Geraldine for being our wonderful photographer.



The Christmas Morning Tea at The HUB brought in many people from the community and from our church on a very hot day. People enjoyed chatting away and munching on some lovely home made shortbread, Christmas cake and delicious fruit. Our thanks to The HUB volunteers who brought food, and all those who worked so hard on the day. We were able to give the \$580 of donations to GWUC Welfare for needy families in the community.

*Judith Greenwood*



## Cup of Tea at The Hub

I met Lauris's friend called Sheryl.  
Di was there as was Neil,  
The fruit platter had great appeal.  
The cherries were delicious.  
Decorations graced the tables  
The kitchen crew were very able.  
What a good way to increase our store  
Of welfare food -  
We always need more!  
Also new friends with whom to chat,  
I hope they return to The Hub - en  
masse!

*Gael O'Brien*



## Making Room this Christmas

### Make Room This Christmas

Make room this Christmas, there's too much to do!  
There's shopping and cooking and cleaning it's true,  
Time seems to be racing as we strive to get ready  
So much to do, so we need to be steady?

Shopping for family, shopping for friends,  
Sometimes the shopping seems never to end!  
I'm hosting the dinner, should we do hot or cold?  
It's part of tradition, or so I've been told.

But is all this pressure what Advent's about?  
There surely is more, of that there's no doubt.  
I've heard there were angels, a stable, a star,  
A journey of wise men who came from afar.

Christmas is the story of Jesus's birth,  
God sent Him to show us that we have great worth.  
Two ordin'ry folk, whom God saw as able  
Were parents to Jesus, born in a stable

We all feel surprised that there was no space  
For God's only Son who came for our race.  
A precious gift, this should be a sign  
For us to make room this Christmas time.

*Di Paterson*

### Making Room for Asylum Seekers?

*Extracts from the latest Medecins sans Frontieres newsletter*

It's been 5 long years for most of the asylum seekers and refugees held on Nauru under the Australian government's offshore processing policy.

[The Médecins Sans Frontières] team has spoken out about what they saw there: 135 asylum seeker and refugee patients, including children as young as nine, who have considered or attempted suicide or self-harm; children suffering from traumatic withdrawal syndrome, unable to eat, talk or take themselves to the toilet; concerning levels of severe depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Among the Nauruan patients, there were people with chronic psychotic illness who had not received treatment in the nine months prior to the opening of our services.

MSF had been providing psychological and psychiatric services on Nauru since November 2017. [They] delivered this care under a One Door for All policy in full agreement with the Nauruan Ministry of Health...On

5 October, the team was told by the Nauruan government that our services 'were no longer required' and that we must cease activities within 24 hours...

Our patients left behind are critically ill and exist in a cycle of despair. They have no freedom, little control over their lives, no information and no plan. Many have been forcibly separated from their family members, and many have experienced violence, including sexual abuse, while on Nauru: traumas that compound the trauma they have survived in their countries of origin and on their migration journey, and shatter their resilience. They have been repeatedly and deliberately misinformed about the timeline of their processing. **These are innocent civilians**, the majority found to be refugees, and yet they have less clarity over their future, and less access to legal processes than someone who has committed a crime. Further, there is continuing criminalisation of mental illness, with people who have attempted suicide taken to jail, and parents with mentally sick children being themselves accused of child abuse. ...It is our medical opinion that this deterioration is a direct result of the indefinite offshore processing policy.

...This model of deterrence - using a group of people to set an example for another group, while causing them permanently damaging physical and mental harm - is morally abhorrent. The Australian government says it wants to save lives at sea, and that in fact offshore processing as a measure to stop people getting on boats is a 'humanitarian act'. Let us be categorically clear. Indefinite deterrence causes mental and physical harm and leads to self-harm and ultimately death. There is nothing humanitarian about this policy, and no evidence to show it achieves anything but immense suffering.

...With more than 68 million people forcibly displaced around the world - the highest number on record - Western governments continue to erect barriers to keep people out of sight and out of mind. But through creating policies that generate suffering, endanger lives and criminalise people on the move, they forsake their responsibility to afford protection and assistance to those in need...

The Australian government's policy of indefinite offshore processing must end. Further, it should never be looked upon as a model for any government to replicate. Paul McPhun, Exec. Director

## COMBINED SERVICE DECEMBER 2

The combined service of worship held on December 2 at 10am was a special occasion aside from the coming together of our various worship groups. It also marked the anniversary of the ordination of two of our Glen Waverley Uniting Church members: Rev Evan Laidlaw, celebrating 50 years since ordination, and Rev Neil Peters, celebrating 25 years of service since ordination.

Neil noted that 20 of his 25 years of ministerial work had been working with ministry teams, and he explained how enriching this had been. He thanked us for the trust that people placed in the team.

Evan was presented by Bill Norquay with a large stick to help in 'sticky situations'. Evan declared that God must have a sense of humour, as he had been ordained on Friday 13th, 1968! He then reflected on his journey over those years, from his dramatic movement into a Christian life, to recognising the change and growth he had experienced on his faith journey. Those who had supported him along the way were acknowledged; many were present at the service to share in the occasion.



Following the service, 102 of us adjourned to the church hall to share in a delicious Christmas lunch of roast chicken and dessert, prepared by FISH groups. \$580, including donations from the nativity photos at The Hub, were collected in support of GWUC Welfare.



## DREAMS

Some years back my good and long time friend Geoffrey died from liver cancer. He told me he suffered from nightmares while he was taking drugs to alleviate his pain. The dreams were very distressing. He believed the drugs scrambled his brain. Sometimes as he slept his mind seemed to focus on things and ideas that were not just weird but nasty. Why did this happen?

At present I am using drugs to control my myeloma and I seem to have experiences similar to Geoffrey's. My side effects include interrupted sleep accompanied by strange dreaming. Strange wonderings prompted by what?

Last night I had been watching a TV program which may have caused my inner self to think about standards of behaviour and integrity and uprightness. In the middle of the night I endured a succession of vague experiences – about engaging in a political debate graciously, about a lawyer defending an obnoxious criminal, about a romantic reconciliation of two lovers. I don't know why. My dreams were weird but not awful; thankfully they reflected goodness in people of integrity.

Perhaps my wondering about things of value brought me to a good place. It reminded me that Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8 –

*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think on these things.** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

It has taken a long time, but I am learning to focus on the good as I snuggle under the blanket. May your dreams be 'sweet dreams'.

Graeme Frecker July 2018

## *What kind of church are we called to be?*

1. The Church is called to be a fellowship of reconciliation between the First and Second peoples. The Church is being shaped and reshaped in the covenant between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the UCA.
2. Secondly, the Church is called to be culturally and linguistically diverse at its core.
3. Thirdly, the Church is called to be oriented towards growing and suffering.
4. Fourthly, the Church is called to be a church which receives its diversity as the precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

May we be encouraged by the realisation that the Holy Spirit is already making us into the church we are called to be.

From:  
Andrew Dutney, the former  
President of UCA National  
Assembly.

## Getting to Know You: Graeme Frecker

Stan and Elsie Frecker had their first child, Graeme, in 1935, but Graeme's earliest memory is not until the age of 5 when his father died, age 33, as a result of incompetent medical care following a tonsillectomy. Graeme still has images of his mother crying and running to the bedroom, and then the next day, as he sat alone in the hall, of his bewilderment at the presence of many big people dressed in black. Children were, in 1940, considered 'too young to understand' and were not offered explanations. So, although it was not discussed with them, life changed for Graeme and his younger sister Coralie, with Nana and Grandpa coming to live with them for the next eight years, and acting *in loco parentis* while their mother went to work. Graeme remembers the constancy of their presence through those school years, and realises now how much his grandfather gave to them, given that he had been just about to retire. His grandfather was an elder, choir member and conductor at their local Church of Christ and set a powerful example by living out his faith. Graeme had also been told that now his father had died, he was the 'man of the house' and had a particular responsibility to look after his little sister.



Memories of attending Brighton State School include playing marbles in the boys' playground, engaging in the occasional fight and enjoying the distinction of owning a pair of football boots with 'real leather stops' which Grandpa had made him. Moving on to Gardenvale Central School, Graeme again came into contact with another caring person who influenced his future. Betty Stainsforth, his teacher at Gardenvale, recognised his academic promise and set in train a successful application for a Dafydd Lewis Scholarship. This scholarship trust - which is still in operation - had been established by a wealthy philanthropic Melbourne businessman to assist promising boys to acquire an education, and it provided him with a generous weekly income which carried through his university years.

Graeme moved on to Melbourne High School, enjoying participating in a range of sports and representing his school in the athletics, football and cricket teams. He was simultaneously active in the Brighton Church of Christ, becoming secretary of the Sunday School and playing in one of the church cricket teams. Here, again, he came under the influence of another man who was an excellent sportsman and who set a high standard of behaviour ('we'll have no sledging here'), establishing by example that the ends did *not* justify the means. In looking back over his life and recalling these significant mentors and benefactors, Graeme acknowledges that, beginning with his grandfather, he has probably felt an unconscious sense of obligation to justify the faith placed in him by so many, and it partially explains to me why he has achieved so much in a wide field of activities. He has, in a sense, been driven by gratitude and a responsibility to follow through, to make the investment in him worthwhile.

Following on from his matriculation, his results gained him further financial support, and he graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor in Civil Engineering (Hons) in 1955. In 1957 he married Margaret\*, and then the first three of their children (David, Catherine and Kerryn) joined the family. For 9 years Graeme worked in both public and private employment, gaining

\* Margaret's story was written by Cynthia Chin and published in *NewView* some years ago, so has not been included here.

## Getting to Know You: Graeme Frecker

valuable experiences which included observing how a profit motive affected quality of production, and an embryonic awareness of the tensions between public good and private greed.

With encouragement from Margaret (then pregnant with Rosalyn, their fourth child) Graeme successfully applied for a scholarship to do his doctorate with the University of Newcastle, through the Hunter Valley Research Foundation (HVRF). The Hunter Valley, which comprises a distinct geographical region, had been devastated by floods in 1956 and was undergoing a massive reconstruction. The HVRF had brought together a large group of young people from a wide variety of disciplines and walks of life, all doing postgraduate studies which fed into the reconstruction effort. Graeme acknowledges the profound effect it had on his own working outlook, learning how to gain co-operation from people with different sets of expertise, and how to draw on a wide range of evidence to support both social and economic outcomes. In 1969 he graduated with his Ph. D in the economics of water resource development and from 1970 worked for the MMBW (Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works), co-ordinating their environmental activities.

Another landmark experience occurred in 1974 when he was one of 14 Australians selected to attend the Duke of Edinburgh Commonwealth Study Conference at Oxford. These were held every 4–5 years to provide leadership development opportunities for participants from member countries of the British Commonwealth. He testifies that this opened his eyes to the wide world out there, with all its diversity and its need for co-operative and supportive systems to achieve progress. It reinforced the importance of his learning about regionalism and community from the years spent in Newcastle.

The years that followed can be divided into his professional and public achievements. In 1975-6 he became Chairman and Chief Executive of the Port Phillip Authority, developing methods of management for the Port Phillip coastline. He later acted as a consultant within the Victorian public sector on land use planning and groundwater management, and was active in The Institution of Engineers and its Executive Committee. He rounded off his professional engineering life by taking up an academic post at Swinburne University of Technology in 1988, lecturing in water and municipal engineering, investigation, design and professional practice. He continued in this work until retiring in 2000.

Graeme's Newcastle experiences had made him recognise the important function of local government, and he subsequently stood for election as a councillor of the City of Waverley in 1973, a role he held until 1994, during which time he served two terms as mayor. He also held positions as President of the Municipal Association of Victoria 1985-6 and its Treasurer 1988-94. On the national front, from 1989 he became President for three terms of the Australian Local Government Association. In 1991 he was appointed to the Commonwealth Economic Planning Advisory Council, and in 1994 his service to local government was recognised with his appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia. On reflecting on the lessons gained he particularly pinpoints the necessity for consultation and co-operation as essentials for change to be long-lasting: 'Unless the troops support an idea 80-90%, a decision will come back to bite you', he maintains.

In all of this achievement and drive, Graeme acknowledges how fortunate he has been to be guided and supported by so many over the years: those who helped him define his ethical standards and his desire to serve 'the public good' over private profit. He pays particular tribute to Margaret, who has unstintingly given him encouragement and support in all these ventures, has been his constant mainstay at home and who faced with him the loss of their daughter Kerryn.

## Getting to Know You: Graeme Frecker

Graeme also recognises the bedrock that his church background and upbringing has been for his moral grounding, and his commitment to community. From his earliest years with the example of his grandfather's unobtrusive guidance, to the captain of the church cricket team, and caring youth leaders and school teachers, he feels blessed to have been mentored and assisted by those who 'coached and encouraged' him. He is able to look back and see his own Christian journey passing through various phases, beginning with his initial acceptance as a young man of Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. He remembers that for many years he equated a Christian life with participating in many church activities, and accepting responsibilities of leadership. However, over time he realised that at the heart of Christianity is the example of Jesus in showing us *how to live*, how to treat one another with love. He sees this as the lifelong challenge with which we are all engaged.

Similarly, his perception of the nature of the church has changed. In looking at our rapidly-changing world today, Graeme sees the church as of much less importance today than in earlier years; its standing in the Australian community is not now so widely acknowledged. He observes that it is probably not the official pronouncements made by the leaders of today's church which have the most effect on community attitudes, but rather, the actions of individual church members in their daily social and professional encounters with others in their community which carry the most weight *ie the ordinary people of the church*, not the hierarchy. 'Organisation should be built *around* the congregation, not *over* it,' he once wrote.

He also notes that with the increasing statutory obligations which our church must now observe, there is a real danger the focus of our church could become one of merely fulfilling the law by obeying the rules. Graeme calls it 'running wild in the commercial woods'. Without diligence and alertness, this could stealthily replace the simple dictum of loving one's neighbour as oneself; the change in emphasis is a dangerous shift in purpose from caring for the individual to using rules (not love) as the guidelines for living. He has a pithy summary of his assessment of the importance of the example of Jesus' life: 'Jesus was a pragmatist, not a dogmatist'. In other words, Jesus was not motivated by rigid prescribed rules, or specific creeds of faith, but was driven by compassion for others. Similarly we need to be motivated by love for humanity, not by those older fears of hell-fire or ex-communication with which the church traded in the past. And so Graeme speculates that the future of a relevant church may lie in cohesive clusters of people working and walking alongside each other on a broad path, not divided by articles of faith but accepting of our individual differences in a unity of love and respect for each other.



Graeme gives thanks for the blessing of the guidance and care of wise mentors, of landmark experiences which shaped his development, and the unerring support of a loving partner. We give thanks for a life dedicated to the betterment of community.

Robin Pope

## Background Briefing on Dispossession of First Peoples

*The following is a contribution written by Jesse Lang, who researched the topic and wrote the essay. It provides some useful historical reminders about why the Uniting Church feels compelled to acknowledge what has occurred in the dispossession of First Peoples and their land, and why that disadvantage has continued down through the years.*

### Australian Heritage – Colonisation

Before the British settled in Australia, there were over 500 Indigenous nations in the Australian continent, numbering roughly 750,000 people in total and having a history going back more than 60,000 years.

Many European trade and merchant ships came across Australia and its inhabitants and named the continent New Holland. In 1770, Captain James Cook mapped the eastern coast of Australia and named it New South Wales, coming into contact with the Aborigines multiple times. Despite them knowing the existence of these peoples, the British considered Australia to be a land belonging to no one and eight years later, claiming it under English law, began their plans to establish a convict colony.

The First Fleet led by Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in 1788 at Sydney Cove, bringing with them lots of white settlers. The Colonial governments began granting, leasing and selling land to white settlers, and as they used up the land near them, they went further abroad to search for more land. Governor Darling did try to suppress the spread of settlement, but this was done more to ensure that the settlers could still be controlled by the law than out of concern for the Indigenous inhabitants of the land. As land was gradually claimed beyond the boundaries set by Darling, they began to intrude on more and more of the Aborigines' food supplies, hunting grounds and sacred sites. As they did not believe in the Aboriginal peoples' spirituality, they thought that they would simply move to new land due to their semi-nomadic lifestyle.

The Indigenous peoples did not follow these actions, however, and always returned to the land that they were from. This led to them performing many skirmishes and violent raids in order to claim back the land that was taken, but this resulted in many of their deaths due to the British settlers' superior weapons. The 1834 Battle of Pinjarra, the 1838 Myall Creek Massacre and the 1843 Warrigal Creek Massacre were three of such events that occurred in all parts of the country. They were between both the Aboriginal

people and the white settlers who were supported by the white authorities, including soldiers and the police. On top of their superior weapons, they also had greater numbers as more and more Aborigines died from disease. Occasionally, the Indigenous resistance did succeed and the white settlers left their farms, but most of the time, the settlers simply found new ways of eliminating the threat that the Aboriginal people posed. For example, instead of fighting them, they poisoned their water and food. Another method the colonials used to break up the natives was by setting up the Native Police Forces. These consisted of Indigenous men who were trained by the colonists' troops. The colonists used tribal rivalries to encourage violence between different Indigenous clans.

A large number also died from malnourishment due to the removal of their major food source, the native animals of the bush. Also, many died from diseases both due to lack of clean water or nutritious food supply and diseases introduced from Europe such as chickenpox, smallpox, typhoid, measles and influenza. As the Aborigines had no immunity from these due to their inexperience with them, they began to have a rapid decline in numbers.

A number of Aboriginal people were originally offered help by government officials and Christian missionaries as the settlers believed that due to their supposed primitive and uncultured existence, they would die out. Eventually, due to this belief, they were forced into government reserves and church missions so that they could die in peace. Like many of the policies created by the colonists, rather than protecting the natives' freedoms, this only assisted in further destroying them. Soon these areas became overpopulated and the Indigenous Australians were sent back into the community, but no longer with any way of providing for themselves, they struggled for many years. Eventually, many had to resort to assimilation, merging with the British settlers and in doing so, sacrificing their own culture and ways of life.

*Jesse Lang*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLES

The meeting of the congregation on November 20th discussed how we might acknowledge the first peoples who occupied the land where our church now sits.

We were reminded that the preamble of the Uniting Church constitution was revised in 2009 to include reference to Australia's first peoples as follows: 'As the Church believes God guided it into union so it believes that God is calling it to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many lands'. We were encouraged to follow the lead of the Uniting Church Assembly and find a way to locally acknowledge Australia's first peoples.

The community in which we live is changing very rapidly and as we imagine and plan for the future, we should not forget what has gone before us; especially the people who lived in this land before us and what we might learn from them. Some members of the congregation are of the opinion that we should find a way to ensure that newcomers are made aware of our heritage leading back to Australia's first peoples.

Both Church Council and the November meeting of the congregation have expressed the view that we should not go down the path of making statements at the start of regular worship services or meetings.

Church Council feels comfortable with the following statement that might be included on a sign or plaque: 'In the spirit of reconciliation and solidarity the congregation of Glen Waverley Uniting Church acknowledges that the land on which we gather to praise God is part of the traditional lands of the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin nation. Across this wide land we recognise the First People's continuing connection to country, water and community, and recognise Elders past, present and emerging.'

St. Luke's Uniting Church has a plaque that states: 'In the spirit of reconciliation, we the congregation of St Luke's Uniting Church acknowledge that the land on which our church stands is part of the traditional lands of the Wurrundjeri people. We respect the close spiritual and cultural ties of the aboriginal people to their land and commit ourselves to work for justice for indigenous people'.

The meeting of the congregation was offered a third example of a statement that might be used: 'In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we are meeting on this land and have connection with this land, the land of the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulin nation. They were the custodians of this land for thousands of years. We pay our respect to their tribal elders, both past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions and the culture of aboriginal Australia. We give thanks for their descendants who went on to maintain their spiritual connections and traditions. Together we focus on a united and unified and cohesive nation. We walk together and hope for a better future.'

The November meeting of the congregation agreed by consensus that we, as a congregation, would like to progress acknowledgement of Australia's first peoples in some way.

As we imagine and plan for the future it is appropriate to consider how this acknowledgement might be done and to discuss and consider options widely throughout the congregation. I would like to invite you to volunteer to work with people throughout the congregation over coming months to identify options and what might be broadly acceptable. I encourage you to consider joining this group because this is not a job for just a few. If you are interested contact me ([john.snare@bigpond.com](mailto:john.snare@bigpond.com)), Glyn Howells ([councilchair@gwuc.org.au](mailto:councilchair@gwuc.org.au)) or Heather Hon ([office@gwuc.org.au](mailto:office@gwuc.org.au)).

*John Snare, chair of meetings of the congregation*



## Recognition of First Peoples: One Person's Thoughts and Feelings

The topic of the *Recognition of First Peoples* evokes a variety of emotions in people. Some are hurt, some feel threatened, some are angered, some are offended and others are even more supportive. I was asked to place my thoughts, my feelings, and my suggestions, in front of you, my friends, and encourage all of you to pray for guidance on what God wants us to do.

We, the Glen Waverley Uniting Church congregation, actually have a great deal in common with the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples who are identified by Monash Council as the First Peoples of the lands that include the land on which Glen Waverley Uniting Church sits.

Our congregation does not own the land and buildings on which the church complex and manses are located. We are just **custodians** of the facilities. From the current legal perspective, this property and its contents belong to the *Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust*. This is a body that also exists as **custodians** of the resources for the Uniting Church in Australia, and on behalf of the Assembly and the Synods. We (the congregation) cannot sell this property, we cannot buy more property and we cannot make significant changes to the property without the approval and support of the other custodial 'Owners'.

The Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples also do not believe they 'own' the land, but that they are **custodians** on behalf of their elders past, present and future. So just as they believe they must care for and use the land in a way that ensures it respects the past and is available for future generations, we also believe that we, as custodians, have a responsibility to use wisely the resources we have so that we respect our elders and members of the past, and provide resources for our elders and members of the future.

There is no conflict of interest, but a common aim.

We may debate endlessly how that is to be best recognised or achieved, but we both have the same aims. For us, the congregation, we have elders (small 'e') that have in the past given us this custodianship, and we recognise them by the foundation stones of the property, by our history and gift books and by the minutes and records of the meetings of our congregation, where the history, knowledge and wisdom of our community reside.

So in what way do I think we can better acknowledge and recognise the *First Peoples of Monash* as they relate to the land on which the Glen Waverley Uniting Church is located? I am aware of strong views in many directions, and so I ask that you accept the following as just another view to be considered.

I feel we can achieve this desirable outcome in a number of inclusive, truly meaningful and **respectful** ways:-

- We can place a plaque (another word for a foundation stone) on our property, acknowledging the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples past and present. My view is that this could be **beside our own 'items of recognition'**. That is, beside our foundation and dedication stones, showing that we are inclusive in our view of the ownership of our location. (Our dedication plaque is at the north entrance, prominently displayed for all the community to see.)
- We can include in our *History Book* (that resides in the glass cabinet on the southern wall of the foyer), an acknowledgement of the first people's custodianship of our area, an acknowledgement of their preexistence to the church complex, and our gratitude to their elders past, present and future that these lands are a shared resource for which we are both custodians.
- That at the meeting of our elders (small 'e') and our custodian leaders - **which in my view is the Congregational Meeting** - we acknowledge the first peoples of this land, and our gratitude for the custodial use of this land, every time we meet. And it could include a prayer of thanks to our leadership past and present.
- That at the meeting of our Elders - Church Council, with the usual opening prayers that they share, that they also acknowledge the first people elders past and present that have this shared custodianship of the land.

## More Thoughts on Recognition of First Peoples

- That our web site includes these words on the front screen beside our own mission and purpose, and
- That we initiate this acknowledgement by a special combined worship where local representatives of the first peoples are invited to participate in the worship.

I do not support the concept that at every worship service, gathering or meeting we should include this acknowledgement to the first peoples. For half of my 44 year working life, I watched this requirement forced on every meeting and gathering of the companies and staff, and what I saw was **disrespect** and **falsehood**, by people being required to say or support a statement they did not believe, accept or correctly read in a respectful and proper manner.

Just reading words does not show respect. It is no different to people who say the Lord's Prayer or sing the National Anthem when their minds and hearts are elsewhere!!! I believe this is disrespectful and meaningless. So for example, a sub-committee meeting of Church Council, the executive meeting of UCAF or at the Indonesian worship gathering is not the occasion for these words.

It also does not excite me that in other places of the UCA they are telling persons that they must do this, they must do that, that they must include these words in every worship (*first you must please define worship before you make these meaningless statements*). Wherever it is done, it must be respectful, NOT automatic and NOT prescribed behaviour, or we will have more people feeling hurt, feeling threatened, angered or offended as I said at the start.

May God give us an understanding of how we can live in an inclusive and sharing community.  
Amen

Warren Greenwood

## Another Point of View

We agree with the apparent consensus from the Congregational Meeting to have a plaque acknowledging the First Peoples. By doing so we support newcomers from all over the world to our country, city and church – we support, and acknowledge our history for future generations to be aware of their heritage.

We come to Church to renew our faith, hear from the Bible and celebrate the gifts of God with our church family but we don't support the concept that at every worship service, gathering, or Congregational/Property/Hub/Inclusive meetings etc, we should include an acknowledgement to the First Peoples. By all means acknowledge them with placement of a suitably worded plaque.

Is the verbal acknowledgement another instance of the majority pandering to the minority for the sake of political correctness? Is it really meaningful when you attend a venue where there is a verbal acknowledgement of the First Peoples? It is highly doubtful that any descendants from the First People attend or are even aware or care about our Church or the possible placement of a plaque in the future.

Eric and Lesley Armstrong

## Acknowledgement of First Peoples: Another View

I was excited when I heard that Glen Waverley Uniting Church was discussing how we might best formally acknowledge the First Peoples. For me this is something that we need to do, both for the First Peoples and for ourselves.

As members of the Uniting Church we are called to walk together as First and Second Peoples and it is not possible to do this if we do not acknowledge the First Peoples. The history of white arrival in this land is problematic as this arrival brought with it dispossession, violence and death for the First Peoples. As someone who was born in the 1960s I was not personally involved in these atrocities, but if I am not prepared to acknowledge that they happened then surely I am still complicit.

I believe that acknowledgment of First Peoples is the one way that can help us move forward as peoples together. But how might we do this?

Plaques are a common and good way to let everyone who uses our facilities know that we are aware of those who cared for the land before we were here. As custodians of the land the First Peoples cared for land in the same way that we might care for our worship space – working for something special that we can hand on to the next generation. A weekly acknowledgement in the bulletin or services shows that we are in solidarity with the First Peoples and that their concerns matter to us.

Some might feel this is overkill; yet it is something that appears in Uniting in Worship, I have participated in weekly acknowledgement at college and have witnessed acknowledgement in many worshipping communities. In some spaces this is done beautifully when coupled with the acknowledgement of those people of faith who have worshipped in the community in times past.

This is not an easy space to navigate and I pray that we might continue to have respectful conversations as we discern together how we might acknowledge the First Peoples of this land.

Heather Hon

### Sammy Stamp Update

Allan Clark reports in December:

Up to and including the 1/11/2018, sales have reached about \$41,342 (same week last year \$27,456).

The following grants have been approved since the last report:

UnitingWorld for Indonesian earthquake-tsunami appeal	\$5000
Yarram Uniting Church for the after-school club for primary school children	\$1200

\$46,700 in grants have been approved so far this year.

Keep those used stamps coming in! Remember to trim them and put them in an envelope for collection from the church office.

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*

*Darryn Geoffrey Wright  
Lorraine Florence Hooper*

*We celebrate the marriage of  
Guo Liang Qiu and Biyi He*

*We record with joy the baptism of  
Levi Jack Elkhuisen  
Xander Gerber*