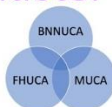




The Uniting Church in Australia
Congregations of: Blackburn
North / Nunawading; Forest Hill;
and Mountview (Mitcham);
in a shared ministry together



Cluster News

December 2021

Welcome to the December Cluster News

Our ministers have continued to work very hard to nourish our spirit and keep us connected through the past month. We sincerely thank Rev Tina Lyndon Ng, Rev Peter Cannon and Rev Pete Rivett for their guidance, adaptability and dedication and their input as members of Regional Council.

As a new Regional Council this year, we have attempted to balance the needs of three congregations, three campuses and three councils. Everything we attempted was new but as we reach the end of the year, we realise that we have established procedures which will help us as we move into 2022. We have worked well together with warmth, enthusiasm, understanding and humour so we are looking forward to the year ahead.

As the Regional Council we have made great progress this month, working with Phil McCredden, our consultant who is helping us through the process of forming our cluster. Each church council, and a nominated member from each congregation, met with Phil over a period of weeks to answer questions and provide their views on our shared future as a Cluster. On Monday 20th December the Regional Council met with Phil to hear his feedback from all three congregations. Are we all on the same page in our journey, do we have similar hopes and concerns, were just some of the questions we discussed. While we have quite a range of views among our congregations, we have a great deal in common. Phil's workshops and interviews have revealed that we need to improve communication between everyone; the Regional Council, church councils and congregation members, so we intend to improve in that area as soon as we can. Now that we are all seeing each other at worship, that presents an ideal way to improve communication; talk to your representative on the Regional Council or your church councillors. Ask a question or share a concern, it will help us all to be more informed.

Early in 2022 you will be asked to complete a Survey to gather your thoughts, your hopes, or your concerns about the future. The link to the Survey will be emailed

to everyone at the end of January and it is our hope that Surveys will be completed online within 2 weeks, i.e. by approximately 15 February. A small team of people will help members who do not receive email communication; a paper Survey will be provided. More information about the Survey will be provided in January. Your answers will help to guide us as we prepare for the workshops with each congregation which will follow the Survey.

The positions of Chairman and Secretary of the Regional Council are one year appointments to be shared between the three congregations. This year, those positions were held by members of the Mountview congregation, Rob Jackson and Lynne Rosenthal. We are very pleased to advise that Daryl Hawkey from Forest Hill will be Chairman and Joy Williams, also from Forest Hill, will be Secretary for 2022. We thank them for volunteering for these roles. The Regional Council has a responsibility to report its progress to the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra on a regular basis so a report outlining our activities will be sent to Presbytery this month to fulfil that obligation.

The Regional Council will not meet in January so there may not be a January Cluster bulletin. We wish our ministers a well-deserved break during January, a time to refresh and rejuvenate. We commend the Christmas Bowl Appeal to you all as we think of others less fortunate at this time of year. We also think of those for whom the Season may be difficult this year due to changed circumstances and hold them in our prayers. We hope the Christmas Season will be a joyous time for many of you.

Report for 2021 from the Whitehorse Cluster Ministry Team

The ministry team commenced together during April this year, Rev's Tina Lindon Ng and Peter Cannon starting 1st April and Rev Pete Rivett commencing his long-term supply placement mid-April. Since then the team has worked on building its ministry relationship, identifying strengths, weaknesses and opportunities

together. We meet weekly to explore the needs and issues facing the Cluster.

While there is much more work to be done on building our rapport and teamwork, much has been done already. We each have personal ministry supervisors, together we receive team supervision and we adventured on a team retreat prior to the last two lockdowns. The weekly team meeting is supplemented with regular contact and communication through the Microsoft Teams platform.

With so many disruptions through COVID restrictions and lockdowns, it has been difficult to establish connections and rapport with the members of the congregations across the Cluster. Pastoral Care has been limited for much of this time to electronic communication such as phone calls, emails and video conversations.

Worship has been predominantly through digital methods such as pre-recorded YouTube videos, live Zoom services and the use of SWAY. Likewise the continuation of printed worship materials that are distributed through the Pastoral Care networks have provided connection and support to those unable to access the digital media. Each of these media has provided a crossover mutual support, with many choosing to access multiple streams and using this to delve deeper into the issues and their faith.

Paradoxically, the lockdowns have allowed many to get to know and see their ministers more often. Our differences and similarities, personalities and ministry approaches were on display each week as we worked as a team to lead worship for the cluster. The joint worship gave us an insight as to ways in which the Cluster could be a blessing to our local context and needs.

Early in our ministry with you, we embarked on familiarizing ourselves with the various systems, programs and passions of each campus of the Cluster. We began with connecting with the Pastoral Coordinators and teams. We have also spent time listening with the Mission and Outreach Committee who are bringing the campuses together in their shared passion of mission, outreach and justice. With the approach of Advent, we are now exploring the connections and needs of the worship leadership within and between the campuses.

Each of the ministers has developed specific aspects of their ministry in the Cluster. Rev's Tina and Peter have worked on the Pastoral needs. Rev Tina has developed new approaches and opportunities with worship,

meditation and further personal connections (e.g. through the walking activity).

Rev Pete has worked on SWAY and helping people to go deeper in their faith journey. He has encouraged us each to think more broadly in our visions and ideas, sharing ideas for missional development. He too has introduced new approaches and opportunities with worship.

Rev Peter has worked on a range of digital media both developing its use in meditation, online worship and in person services but also in supporting the Cluster to share and learn from each other. He too has contributed to the exploration of missional development in the Cluster as well as various approaches and opportunities in worship.

One of the essential components of our ministry with you has been the steps we have taken to listen and understand each campus, their unique qualities and needs and their shared faith and experiences. Our engagement with the Council meetings, time listening in general conversations and the use of a range of survey and feedback has informed our thinking and approaches. With the easing of COVID restrictions we look forward to getting to you know you much better.

There are exciting things ahead of us. We have begun working with you, laying together positive foundations of trust and gracious openness. We are excited by your faith and passion for the mission of God in the community and love for each other. As we all move into the future together, we seek God's grace and the leadership of God's Spirit.

Christmas Message

Rev Tina



This is an icon of Mary. I purchased it from the Anglican Benedictine Abby of St Mark at Camperdown many years ago. What I find reassuring is Mary has her hands open, as if to receive. I believe this symbolises her

desire to receive whatever God brings into her life. Perhaps her openness helped her live through the changes that came into her life, where she was able to receive the greatest gift of all, and give birth to him, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, where her life was never the same again.

I wonder what it could be like if we held our hands out like Mary, with trust and openness and willingness, to receive whatever God brings into our lives. Perhaps it would make our journey over the next year easier. This Christmas I've been wondering what it means for God to be born into a human body and come and live amongst us. Did it change God's identity?

Women get married and are no longer a Miss. They can choose the title Mrs or Ms. Does this change women's identity? When I was ordained, my title changed to Rev. Did this change my identity? I wonder whether Mary's identity changed after she gave birth to Jesus. Her purpose in life certainly changed.

In ancient times a person's name defined their essence. Christian is a name from the early church and has been changed to Christopher or Christine. Does a name define someone's identity today? Teenagers and young adults are thought to be focused on developing their identity. Yet the formation of identity is a lifelong process that begins from the moment we are born.

The other day my granddaughter asked me: *Why do they pour a bucket of water over someone's head?* She was asking about Baptism. How do I explain baptism to a seven-year-old child? I said a lot of things to her, but she understood Baptism is a change in our identity, where we come to belong to Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit. We no longer are the same person.

What is identity? Is it the core of who we are or our essence, or do we inherit our identity and personality, where it's shaped by our environment and our response to life? How does God change our identity? Does a group of people have an identity? Perhaps.

Over the next year our identity as the people of God will change. Three churches of the people of God will come together and will unite as one people of God. The richness of our identity will grow and blossom and God will bless us with a wonderful future. Believe this is God's will for us.

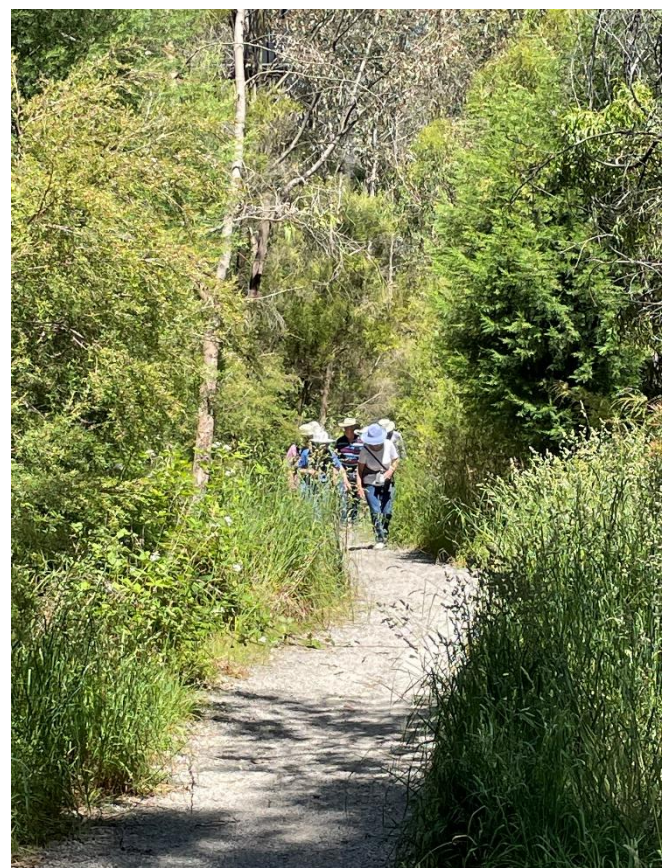
As you gather for the Christmas Services and feasts, when you are surrounded by loved ones, celebrate the

birth of Jesus amongst us. Celebrate how God was willing to be born, both divine and human, and live amongst us. Ponder on how God sent the Spirit upon us to birth us as a church and how we have been the people of God on the way through the centuries, adapting to changes in demographics, history, and culture. Where today, we are always open to the love of God and invited into the transformation God offers us, to grow more Christlike every day.

As you have a January Sabbath, I invite you to ponder on some of the questions I've asked and add your own questions. Ponder about who you are and how your identity has changed over the years and whether your purpose in life has changed too.

Cluster Walk

On Sunday, 28 November, a group of walkers from all three congregations gathered at Schwerkolt Cottage carpark in Deep Creek Road, Mitcham, at 2.00 p.m. to undertake a 4 kilometre circuit walk, led by Margaret Cosstick and Rev Tina. It was a beautiful day and everyone seemed to enjoy the exercise and the chance to get to know a few more people from other congregations. Thank you, Tina and Margaret.





Photos by Parijha Selvan from Forest Hill

Centre 81

Our thanks go to all Mountview folk, who again this year, have so very generously donated food and Christmas fare, to be included in our Christmas hampers. Forty hampers were delivered/collected on Friday 17th December 2021. This year, we found that there was a greater need, not only from our own clients, but of those within the wider community.

Your ongoing support, year after year, is always very generous, and our clients, who receive our brimming hampers, are always delighted, and very appreciative. The Spirit of Christmas is truly at work.

This year, we have also been supported by the Blackburn North/Nunawading congregation. We thank them for donations, and involvement in this important outreach. Special thanks to Jeff Randles who delivered some of the hampers for us. Jill Kidd for Centre 81



Worship in January

2 January

Blackburn Nth/Nun 9.45 a.m. Rev Pete
Forest Hill 9.30 a.m. Rev Tina
Mountview 9.30 a.m. Rev Peter

9 January

Blackburn Nth/Nun 9.45 a.m. Bruce Hill
Forest Hill 9.30 a.m. Rev Pete
Mountview 9.30 a.m. Rev Tina

16 January

Blackburn Nth/Nun Combined 10.00 a.m. Rev Tina
Forest Hill 9.30 a.m. Corinna Fong
Mountview Closed

23 January

Blackburn Nth/Nun Closed
Forest Hill 9.30 a.m. Bob Laslett
Mountview Combined 10.00 a.m. Rev Peter

30 January

Blackburn Nth/Nun Closed
Forest Hill Combined 10.00 a.m. (Meal)
Mountview Closed

Whitehorse Regional Council membership

Blackburn North/Nunawading Uniting

Elaine Hewson 0425 709 089
 Anne Smith 9899 1932
 George Manuofetoa 0404 884 140

Forest Hill Uniting

Daryl Hawkey 0419 607 085
 Julie Hawkey 0488 460 875
 Joy Williams 0402 491 013

Mountview Uniting Mitcham

Rob Jackson (Chairman) 0413 599 047
 Lynne Rosenthal (Secretary) 0415 286 855
 David Rowe 0411 268 680

Ministry Team

Rev Peter Cannon
 Rev Tina Lyndon Ng
 Rev Pete Rivett

The Regional Council members meet on the second Thursday of every month (no meeting in January 2022).