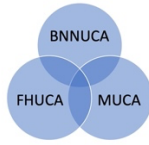




Whitehorse Uniting Cluster

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



Cluster News September 2021

Welcome to our first Cluster Newsletter!

We look forward to sharing news and ideas with you on a monthly basis to communicate with all congregations, especially since our chances to meet in person are so limited. Weekly notice sheets for each congregation certainly keep us in touch with our own members but across the Cluster we share common interests and values and it seems appropriate for us to draw these threads together with this Newsletter.

In this and future issues, Regional Council members will introduce themselves to help us all to get to know each other a little better.

Whitehorse Regional Council members are:

Blackburn North/Nunawading Uniting

Elaine Hewson

Anne Smith

George Manuofetoa

Forest Hill Uniting

Daryl Hawkey

Julie Hawkey

Joy Williams

Mountview Uniting Mitcham

Rob Jackson (Chairman)

Lynne Rosenthal (Secretary)

David Rowe

Ministry Team

Rev Peter Cannon

Rev Tina Lyndon Ng

Rev Pete Rivett

We hope you find the Newsletter helpful and of interest and we invite you to contribute items if you wish by sending them to your Church Council member or the Regional Council Secretary,
lynne.rosenthal@wuc.victas.uca.org.au

The Regional Council members meet on the second Thursday of every month.



Regional Council member Joy Williams

I have been part of the Forest Hill congregation for over 45+ years; then of course part of the Methodist circuit. It has certainly been an interesting journey. I am now retired, but my profession was that of Kindergarten Teacher. I had numerous positions including working for governments ...local, state and federal. I also worked for the Uniting Church for 25 years working to establish, manage and support the early childhood centres operated by the congregations and agencies. Thoroughly enjoyed working in the rural communities setting up mobile services.

I have 3 adult children, all married and settled in their own communities. I am the proud grandma of 7 grandchildren ranging from 18 to 10. Also Paull, my partner is a big part of my life as well. These days I spend many hours in my garden, enjoying the roses, orchids, veggies and my chooks. I regularly say 'my garden is my sanity'.

*A kind word is never lost
It keeps going on,
From one person to another,
Until it comes back to you again.*

Change

Change is a fact of life whether we like it or not.

We don't realise how much change governs our life from the day we are born to the day we die. For instance, the weather changes all the time.

Recently, I saw a young woman walking her dog. The weather forecast predicted a warm day although the morning was very chilly. The young woman's outfit showed she was betting that change in the weather would come. To be prepared she wore shorts, but her torso was clad in a thick jacket. As well, she wore a sunhat. In that chilly morning the sight of her bare legs sent a shiver up my spine. She was obviously dressing to accommodate any possible weather change.

Recently too I heard an old recording of the then Welsh boy soprano Aled Jones.

Apparently one of the men who was recording the young boy's sublime voice had tears coursing down his face when he heard it. But as we all know the soprano voice of that young boy changed when he reached adolescence. How did he cope with the radical change in his voice?

We know from seeing our grandsons grow that change is a factor of life.

I know from firsthand experience too; how radical change can be. It impacted me when we came to Australia to live after spending over 12 years in the remote Western Highlands of PNG.

Although supplies were adequate in the Highlands, there was little choice. In contrast, in Australia the choices on display in the cavernous supermarkets were overwhelming. I can laugh now, but at the time, and in the supermarkets, I became incapable of making decisions about anything. Even the breakfast cereal section, not to mention the choice in the toilet roll aisle, was confronting.

And age doesn't halt change. As a senior I can vouch that the amount of change we can experience in a year can be as radical as a baby experiences in their first year of life. We don't expect that.

Kathleen Norris an American poet and author who re-discovered her faith in mid-life has summed up what she discovered. In her book *The Cloister Walk* she wrote,

'A secular world view, terribly sophisticated but of little use to me in the long run, had taken hold of me in my teens'.

Her words remind me of the importance of holding onto the golden thread of faith in God. Of necessity this too must change and be refined as we travel through life, but change doesn't stop there. For us all there is further change - life after death.

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Pastoral Letter from Rev Tina

It's been a challenging month for all of us, with a small gap in between lockdowns. I've heard Lifeline has had more calls in its history this month, than any other time. During times like this it's important to lean into God and stick together. Perhaps not concentrate on what we don't have but rather choose to concentrate on what we do have. These times have helped us realise how important relationships are to us, with God and our loved ones.

There is some wonderful news for our cluster. Our three pastoral care co-ordinators Julie, Cherril and Heather are working together with their pastoral teams and Jill from Centre 81, to send small pamper packs to members of the three cluster congregations who are doing it tough. If you know of anyone who is having a difficult time, please contact your pastoral care coordinator.

We can find comfort from God and one another. Last year I introduced Lacuna, which means a gap or a space. In 2000 the Victorian Synod called the church to make space for God, attend more carefully to God's still small voice and make ourselves more vulnerable to the mysterious presence of God. The symbol for Lacuna became an empty bowl representing our need for God and space to receive God's grace.

Little did we all know that we would have an abundance of time to make space for God and this time has changed us, for the better.



This is part of that call that was endorsed by the meeting of the Victorian Synod, 2000 - "Faithful is God who has called us and who will not fail us." Faithful is God to us and faithful are we to God and this is something to celebrate. Despite the struggles we face, we can rise up with courage and faith and make a difference. We can do our best to reach out to others and make someone's day a better day. We also need to be kind to ourselves. To do something nice for ourselves each day. To exercise in some way, read, sing, play music, get outdoors, walk the dog, do gentle stretches, eat well, etc., to do something that brings joy or satisfaction.

Part of that self-care concerns what we do with our time. During last year's long lockdown a study linked adolescents' excessive use of social media and screen time with depression. I'm talking about all day. The concern is when people are using social media with friends, and everyone is feeling negative about life and sharing this angst, it may increase people's negative feelings. This made me wonder whether all ages would be affected by excessive screen time. I often hear my adult children telling their children: *That's enough screen time*. As we know, many families are helping their children with online home schooling at the moment and children also watch TV. Perhaps all of us need to have a healthy approach to social media and screen time, where we also spend time cooking, reading, walking, talking to people on the phone, sleeping. It's worth exploring ways to become resourceful and creative during this time.

Worship at the end of August celebrates and gives thanks for pets and the unconditional love they offer and the comfort they bring to their owners, especially during these difficult times. After an encounter with some plovers during August I was reminded of our natural affinity with animals. Plovers can be aggressive when protecting their chicks. I was walking to a coffee shop and park along a busy road and there was a tiny chick on the footpath and its parents were making a lot of noise and swooping on me, so I went around them.

But for some reason I stopped and observed them, and it was clear the mother was trying to lead her chick across the busy road but somehow knew it would be killed if she tried to do so. I walked over and picked up the chick and carried it across the road and put it down on the ground in the car park of a golf course. The parents stopped swooping when I did this, and the mother came over and was reunited with her chick and off they went.



*Misty who loved people and lived until 23
(108 human years)*

My background is law and Justice is a passion. I'm aware of suffering going on in communities who live in third world conditions. My recent visit to Alice Springs led to a greater understanding of some of the challenges our Aboriginal communities face. My visits to Nepal and relationships with members of the communities here have helped me understand the lack of services and poverty in Nepal. I admire those who seek to make a difference in a country where there is a lack of medical services, and an ambulance is often a basket on a family member's back, with more than a week's walk to the nearest hospital. The average wage is very low, children die due to a lack of hygiene and there are three communities of people with leprosy, most of whom are Christians. A friend found seven disabled women living in a tin shed about fifteen years ago and she founded a charity where the women are leaders and thousands of women are assisted.



Meanwhile I watched a TV show about discrimination or ageism in our community.

As we age, we become wise and concerned with offering a legacy to those who follow us. This wisdom needs to be valued.

Perhaps we could find a way to share our stories and wisdom with those who will come after us and speak out more. We have much to offer. Perhaps we can use this time to reach out to people who have nothing due to the tragedy COVID 19 is creating for those living in third world conditions.

During all these challenges and need to contribute to others' wellbeing, is the invitation for us to stick together, hold things lightly and hand over our worries to God, to love and laugh a lot and celebrate our relationships, and the beauty we find in one another and God's beautiful creation.

Rev Tina Lyndon Ng



Regional Council member Lynne Rosenthal

I was born in Mitcham and instantly became part of the Mitcham Methodist church then situated in Mitcham Road. It was a vibrant, busy congregation and my parents and grandparents were very involved in the church community. I guess you could say I've never left. We had a huge Sunday School and youth group back then as well as several netball teams and a roster of parents to transport us to play other church teams in the area on Saturdays. It was a lot of fun and lifelong friendships were made.

My working life, as a stenographer, began in a shipping company in Melbourne, then 2 years living in London, working and travelling, and in more recent years, working in 2 different schools. I am retired now but by still using those skills in a voluntary capacity, I'm hoping to keep the brain cells alive for a little longer.

My husband, Bob, and I have 2 adult children who also live in Melbourne, one married, the other single, and we're blessed to be part of their lives. My hobbies are playing netball, cycling, gardening and riding my motorcycle with my husband and many of our friends.

It's exhilarating and a wonderful escape from time at the desk.

The Whitehorse Cluster a shared vision

The 3 church councils of Blackburn North/ Nunawading, Forest Hill and Mountview, the churches of the Whitehorse Cluster of Uniting Churches, have a committed desire to become one church community, one congregation, and to establish a joint church council to provide oversight for that church community.

It is envisaged that each of the 3 churches in the Cluster would initially have equal representation on the joint church council which would oversee the mission, outreach, spiritual wellbeing and financial responsibilities of the Cluster.

We envisage that, as we undertake the journey of becoming one congregation, the members of the Regional Council and the ministry team, will work in unison to strengthen and uphold the congregations in faith and love as we find ways to listen to each other's stories and appreciate the history we hold dear. We trust that, together, we will explore and identify the type of church community we wish to become and progress those goals to become one body, fulfilling God's mission in the community.

We acknowledge the diversity of our 3 congregations and the importance of accepting that the process of combining our congregations may create a feeling of loss or uncertainty for some members while for others it will be uplifting and a sign of hope and renewal. We will seek to listen and support members at every stage of the journey.

It is our goal to combine our congregations and establish a joint church council as soon as practical to do so, preferably within 2 years, with the assistance and endorsement of the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra.

Members of the Whitehorse Regional Council

***You have been my help, therefore in
The shadow of your wings I will rejoice.
Psalm 63:7***

The Journey

We remember how it began – a group of ministers, different in personality, presentation, and areas of theology, wishing to work at times in community, and have the people of their congregations enjoy the new perspectives brought through the challenges of meeting a wider worshipping group, being outward-looking from the previous routine, and meeting neighbours.

Then – the ministers moved on.

And we were in the vacuum of 6 possible ministers for appointment Synod-wide, and 23 vacancies in our Presbytery.

So – meeting at a Presbytery gathering to explain this dire situation, three of the congregations decided to work together to find a ministry team. Three people, at least one ordained, would jointly undertake the workload of the equivalent of 2.5 full time leaders, and so bring relief to deficit budgets.

The vision was for movement of ministers and significant co-ordination between the three congregations using the three buildings.

Underpinning this, a **Proposal** document was agreed by the three Church Councils, and affirmed at congregational meetings. To further satisfy Presbytery requirements a **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) detailing agreements on some details, especially sharing stipends, was signed by Church Council, but lockdowns began, and wider discussion was limited. We were in the new era of Zoom meetings.

Nevertheless – a **Joint Nominating Committee** (JNC) was formed. Each congregation provided 2 members, led by Presbytery representatives Rev Ross Pearce and Rev Sylvia Akauola-Tongotongo, wise leaders generous with their time and experience. Work to put the information from three individual congregational profiles (developed by each Church Council) looked simple because of the very real similarities shown. However it needed several returns to Councils before a document was signed by all Chairs, accepted by PRC, taken to a Presbytery meeting, and forwarded to the Placements Committee of Synod on behalf of the Whitehorse Cluster of the Uniting Church.

During these negotiations, it was ruled that a single Council was needed in order to issue a call or calls. After considerable discussion, it was recommended that this new body be formed by members of the JNC, because of their involvement with the steps needed and

obstacles overcome, with one other from each congregation to make a Regional Council with a membership of 9, with annual office bearers of chairperson and secretary.

Surprisingly, within a short time, four names were forwarded from Placements Committee, but one subsequently withdrew their name, having accepted a call elsewhere. And, after several interviews, by Zoom and in person, the JNC had the names of two ministers, bringing gifts and matching our profile, especially in relating to people, and in one case with significant experience with Cluster development. Each congregation affirmed the Regional Council's resolution to accept the recommendation of the JNC to issue Calls to these ministers, Rev Tina Lyndon Ng and Rev Peter Cannon. With their acceptance, the team was starting to take shape.

The vision was shifting a little – the ministers brought their visions for the congregation's mission in their neighbourhoods being enhanced by regular worship together underpinning our activities.

Being available, the ministers began their placements promptly, joyously celebrated in an inspiring combined service for Easter Day early in April, followed by Inductions in May. The vacancy remaining was filled by a Supply minister, Rev Pete Rivett. However, as with all new situations, adjustment was needed, too. Change is never easy. Now we had a preaching roster, and three ministers and three congregations began the process of getting used to each other. Each had different backgrounds, different ways, and different expectations. And this is still being worked through.

A constant throughout all this has been the shadow of COVID-19 – lockdowns, social distancing, hand sanitizing and checking in are the new normal when we can meet. No socializing over morning tea to bring enjoyment of life, no serving Communion for our deeper spiritual food. But we offer prayers of thankfulness that the infection has been kept at bay. We have become used to NOT being able to meet, and nervously attempting the steep learning curve in accessing on-line worship. But within this, too, we have found real gems – services with unexpected messages, new hymns, different music, all with cheerful sharing.

With our new ministry team, we have such significant skills in technology, so that now we can share Cluster-wide rather than looking elsewhere for worship. Member churches have shared their resources, and the members of the technology teams have used their expertise for all. We are truly grateful.

Our vision is again shifting, adjusting –

- *We can look at wider sharing in music, in studies, in special services.*
- *We value the Mission and Outreach / Justice ministries meeting together, prepared to help each other with actions and shared experience.*
- *We will continue to learn new ways of using technology providing such things as a data base of members, for ministers to use.*
- *We look forward to learning from each other, in combining groups, in hearing and supporting each other in activities, and wherever possible, doing things together.*

And so with working together, we will grow together – neighbors will become friends as our worship together becomes witnessing to God's love together.

What of the future?

This we cannot really foretell. Who would have foreseen the terrible disruption of the pandemic? It will leave its distressing mark in our memories for many years. And we notice the numbers who can no longer attend worship, either because of changed circumstances or being no longer with us.

- But we can hope and plan for continuing worship by prayerful people, good fellowship with those following the same path, and continued service throughout our neighbourhoods as we play our part in supporting the varied activities of the Uniting Church.
- Our vision will need to continue to adjust, specially influenced by numbers. The number of services may need to reduce, the level of combining may need to increase. However, we can be assured of continued Pastoral Care, members being aware of the needs of each other, and lending prayer support and a helping hand wherever possible.
- Administratively, we know that Presbytery expects our vision to include moving to one church Council within quite a short time frame (COVID permitting) which will lead to combined Congregational Meetings. This will require more adjustment and change as we learn to work with others, in some cases adopting their methods, in others sharing our own.

We go forward resolutely, remembering, in the words of the hymn (TIS 112)

'Through all the changing scenes of life, ...

...(v6) and you will then
have nothing else to fear;
if in his service you delight
your wants shall be his care.'

From the memories and notes of Anne Smith, Whitehorse Cluster.

We look forward to others across the cluster sharing their memories of the journey likewise.

Our Vision for a Just Australia

The recently released up-date of the UCA's "Vision for a Just Australia" articulates our hopes for Australia to be a nation that is just, compassionate, inclusive and courageous.

This document expresses the Uniting Church vision for a just Australia and why our Christian faith calls us to work towards its fulfilment.

The Reverend Sharon Hollis, President of UCA, says in the introduction, "The pandemic has shown us what can be achieved when we have the courage to take measures that are designed to protect all people. It has demonstrated that we are stronger as a nation and a community when we care for those most vulnerable and at the margins of society. In the Uniting Church, and as followers of Jesus, we believe we are called to participate in God's life-giving mission the world."

The hopes and visions for a just Australia are expressed in seven different foundations:

- A First People's heart
- Renewal of the whole of creation
- A welcoming, compassionate and diverse nation
- An economy for life
- An inclusive and equal society
- Flourishing communities, regional, remote, and urban
- Contributing to a just and peaceful world

This resource can be used to start a conversation, forum topic, for reflection and prayer.