

Anglican Diocese of  
**BENDIGO**

# The Spirit

171 DECEMBER 2025



## A Country Christmas

# The Bishop writes...

Dear Friends,

Christmas time can often feel like one long logistical test. Or a game of Tetris played out as we balance work, family, community engagements, time, bank balances, gifts, travel, exhaustion, vague weather, house cleaning, cooking, eating, expectation...and the list goes on. If ordinary life is difficult enough to organise, Christmas time just increases the difficulty.

I often watch on in awe as different people swing into Christmas-action. By and large I am a fairly good planner. However, the number of unrelated balls that some folk can keep in the air as the final weeks of the year rush by is amazing. I am exhausted just watching on.

We can sometimes have the temptation to roll into the Jesus story which Christmas tells as God's plan that worked following the plan that failed. However, there is another way of seeing this: that all that happened beforehand is part of God's painstaking preparation for the very first Christmas. The Advent and Christmas readings help us to see this as they show all sorts of planning.

The Old Testament themes we encounter point towards God's intention to wrap up the unfinished business of history. Have you heard the call for justice to flow to all, not simply the powerful? Or how about mercy to those who so often find themselves on the butt-end of every decision? Or the comfort for a hard-pressed and dispossessed people, or the hope of a free-flowing intimacy with the source of all life?

The characters we meet and who get a renewed run in the Christmas story tell the same thing. The long genealogies for Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist are a roll call of rogues, saints, and outsiders. They are like looking at a

*However, there is another way of seeing this: that all that happened beforehand is part of God's painstaking preparation for the very first Christmas.*

photo wall of people who God involved in God's own mission. It is worth going back and refreshing the memory of the stories of each one from the Old Testament and the curious and often difficult path they trod, and what that tells of God's determination to have Christmas go as planned.

Then the Old Testament hopes achieve their pinnacle on Christmas morn. We are introduced to a humble King, a good shepherd, a peaceful saviour. One upon whom all the hopes of old rest and for whom all the preparations were building.

Our own planning can be exhausting but we persevere because we know that the fruit of all that work is worthwhile. Certainly, we hope it will be. The opportunity to share with those we rub shoulders with and care for in a relaxed way is well worth the effort. Maybe this was part of God's own determination in approaching Christmas?



## Bishop Matt Brain

The fruit of the preparation God has made in the 'good news of great joy for all the people' (Luke 2:10b) that I have seen again this year is captured in the two songs from the chapter before the passage you will probably read on Christmas morning. In Luke I Mary (Jesus' mother) and Zechariah (John the Baptist's father and Jesus' great uncle) both sing out their hopes which they see being achieved through them and their children. The fruit of God's painstaking work to prepare the ground within which Jesus would be planted and grow up like a fruitful tree is given voice. Mary describes this as being filled with delicacies when hungry, and Zechariah as having the dawn's new light break through the darkness of night.

I wonder what other great consequences God was intending to flow from Jesus. I wonder where we see this in the plans God laid and the work God did to prepare.

Maybe you could make a list?

Your servant in Christ,

*Matt*



# ABM Celebrates 175th Anniversary

*Ian Howarth*

**M**y wife Allison and I were in Sydney for a couple of packed days of celebration for the 175th anniversary of the Anglican Board of Mission (ABM). A Supporters Day was held on Tuesday the 28th of October at Christ Church St Laurence, with 60 people in attendance. It gave an opportunity for the telling of the ABM story in twenty-five-year segments, ably handled by Revd Dr John Deane (Executive Director of ABM) and other ABM staff.

Then there was opportunity for us to share our own experiences of ABM as far back as we could remember. For us it was as children, who with our parents and other family were involved in the ABM fellowship in Armidale. Over the years there were many mission dinners, social outings, get-togethers and fundraising opportunities. It was insightful to hear of many other people's experiences too.

The afternoon was then spent looking at what shape the future of mission might take, given how much has evolved

and changed over the past 175 years. There is a much stronger understanding today of needing to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters and our overseas mission partners as equals in living and sharing the gospel. This is an important motivation for continuing to reshape how we go about mission. There were First Nations and overseas mission partners present who also shared not only how ABM has served their church and communities, but how over time their work and example has been of help to others.

The second day was equally packed. There were options of a tour of Scarred Tree Ministries at St John's, Glebe or of Gawura School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Unfortunately, we couldn't attend everything as there was a Diocesan Representatives meeting at the same time. In the afternoon Choral Evensong was held at St James', King Street, where ABM was formed on that very day in the church's school room in 1850. The first appeal was immediately met with enough donations to buy a boat to help Bishop Patteson

with other missionaries and supplies get to the islands of Melanesia. Thus a missionary enterprise was born that continues to this day.

A magnificent dinner followed the service at the NSW Parliament House with over 300 people in attendance, including many bishops. During the dinner at Parliament House ten people received a Coaldrake Award in recognition of their service to God's mission through ABM. The stories told, friendships rekindled and ongoing networking make clear that the future of ABM is bright. The challenges always remain, but it is up to all of us as Anglican Christians to continue to support the cause of mission; God's hope, love and justice in action.

*ABM image used with permission:* Guests at the dinner included L-R Br Zebedee Tausabe MBH from the Melanesian Brotherhood, Bishop Keith Joseph from Diocese of North Queensland, Acting Archbishop Nathan Ingen and Mother Jesicah Ingen from the Anglican Church of PNG and Mercy Hauriasi from the Anglican Church of Melanesia.

# Oh Christmas Tree!

Neil Fitzgerald

Continuing a 'tradition' introduced by Fr Neil last year members of St Mary's, Woodend brought in their own decorations for the parish Christmas tree. During the service the decorations were placed upon the tree, each representing a prayer for someone or something. When the tree was complete Revd Zan led the congregation in a blessing and a countdown to the lights being turned on and the parish welcoming in the season of Advent. Gifts, toys and seasonal food items will be placed around the tree for local charities such as Woodend Neighbourhood House to distribute to the community this Christmas.



## Axedale 'What If' Becomes Reality

Richard Bath

Two years ago as the newly ordained parish minister I would drop by St Paul's Axedale in my travels; sometimes to pray, sometimes to fix broken things, and sometimes to just sit and dream; "what if?"

St Paul's Axedale was built in 1913 and since 1937 it has been part of the Parish of Heathcote. Regular Sunday evening services were held up until 2011, with the last service held there on the 17th of June 2012. Apart from the occasional wedding, the church has been home to the Axedale Quilters who continue to meet every Friday afternoon in the main church building.

After being approached out-of-the-blue by friendly neighbours of the church earlier this year, the first Axedale Board Games Night was held on the 31st of July. There was a great turnout of young and not-so-young people from the local community. These games nights have become monthly, and the parish has provided a free BBQ each time.

After a Facebook survey indicated that Sunday afternoon was the preferred time for this get together, I felt led to begin monthly church services after the board games and BBQ. The first service at St Paul's, Axedale in over ten years was held on the 23rd of November for the Feast of Christ the King. Nearly twenty people across a wide demographic attended the service and enjoyed the warm fellowship.

Going forward at St Paul's, Axedale we plan to have a Christmas Eve 'Almost Midnight Mass' service and then monthly services in 2026.

St Paul's is becoming a place for local individuals and families, many of whom experience loneliness and isolation, to have fun together and engage with others. My prayer is that with the doors of this small bluestone church open again, many Axedale locals will hear and experience the love of God through Jesus Christ and grow in faith in the years ahead. In a time of so many churches closing doors and small towns declining, may I encourage us all to dare to dream and pray "what if?"

# Let's All Gather by the River

*Beverley Brown*

Sunday the 2nd of November brought us together for an Ecumenical church service at Cohuna Beach, overlooking our local creek. Representatives from our three churches participated in the service, which was led by Carol Boyce (Uniting) and assisted by Revd Sue Allen (Anglican) and Peter Doyle (Catholic).

The opening hymn 'Let's All Gather by the River' was a fitting choice before Carol welcomed everyone and gave an Acknowledgement of Country. The theme for the service was 'Unity' and this was beautifully illustrated through Sue's 'story of the sticks': a reminder that while one stick can be easily broken, together they are strong.

Prayers for the people and a blessing of the water were offered by representatives from each church. Messages and prayers of hope, written on rice paper, were then scattered into the water.

The service concluded with everyone joining together in reading the Benediction, followed by tea, coffee, and biscuits shared in fellowship. It was a blessed, happy, and friendly morning of unity and faith.





# Christmas at the Cathedral

*Angela Lorrigan*

Every year the birth of Jesus Christ is remembered and celebrated at St Paul's Cathedral with solemnity, awe, joy... and no small measure of chaos!

As many events and services are prepared and practised, the unexpected always makes an appearance. This is often the result of volatile weather. One year I remember some children being beyond excitement when they found a paddling pool placed in the church for their Christmas enjoyment. They raced to take the plunge, only to be told that the pool was only for the capture of 'inside rain', a consequence of summer storms and an ageing roof. The pink paddling pool is still in the Cathedral and can be seen on display whenever heavy rain comes our way.

Once again, Christmas preparations are under way at St Paul's. A highlight this year will be 'The Really Good Christmas Pantomime' to be performed at our crib service on Christmas Eve, and we are also preparing for a carol service, midnight mass and two services on Christmas morning, as well as Christmas services at several aged care residences. All of these will feature the well-known Christmas hymns and carols.

We are immensely grateful to all those who put in such an effort to mark and celebrate this miraculous occasion of the incarnation. The Karen community hold distinctly Karen events, as well as organising the decorating of the Christmas tree, the crib and contributing to all our celebrations. The choir sing overtime, the musicians show great patience and talent, and every volunteer contributes selflessly. And as you enter the Cathedral at Christmas, please take time to look for the flowers. A huge effort goes into the beautiful arrangements that will greet the Lord among us on Christmas Day; the gold, frankincense and myrrh of our modern times!

# A Living Hope

*Fiona Preston*

From the 2nd to the 7th of October Revd Canon Tracey Wolsley along with Revd Fiona Preston travelled to Bangkok, Thailand to represent Australia at the 2025 International Prison Chaplaincy Association (IPCA) Conference. Four other Australian Anglican chaplains attended all financially supported to attend by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

130 prison chaplains from over thirty countries gathered for the eighth IPCA Conference, also marking the 40th anniversary of this ecumenical network. The theme 'A Living Hope' taken from 1 Peter 1:3 guided the week of worship, learning, and international collaboration.

Around the world today more than 11.5 million people live behind bars; a population that would make up the world's 86th largest country! Each of these lives represents not only an individual story but a network of families, victims, staff, and communities profoundly affected by incarceration. To overlook or forget prisoners is to overlook the lived experience of millions of global citizens. Yet behind the walls, around the clock, acts of care and compassion continue; small, quiet moments of grace in hidden places.

Delegates included Orthodox priests from Belarus, Evangelical pastors from Ghana, Lutheran chaplains from Europe and Muslim imams from Scandinavia — all united by a single calling: to bring the light of Christ's compassion into the world's prisons.

The Venerable James Ridge, Chaplain General for England and Wales, opened the conference with a keynote address on the chaplain's call to bring "living hope" to those who may feel abandoned. "Our task," he said, "is simple but profound: to care. To remind each person that they are made in the image of God and that they are not forgotten."

Across national and denominational differences the chaplains in attendance recognised a striking similarity in their work; to bear witness to God's presence, even in the darkest places.

A highlight of the trip was a visit to a men and women's Thai prison and an invitation to speak with some of the men from the Christian group. The men spoke highly of their chaplain and the profound affect Christ has had on their lives. It was important to communicate to them that they are seen and cared for.



Australia Pacific Delegates

# 16 Days of Activism Against Domestic and Family Violence: Service at St Paul's Cathedral

Revd Lauren Lockwood-Porter

Tuesday the 25th of November marked the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gendered and Domestic and Family Violence. The 16 days of Activism sees actions, discussions, commemorations and demonstrations happen globally, as people from many different backgrounds say no to violence against women, children and within families. St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo held their annual 16 Days of Activism service on the 25th of November. Revd Hannah Gregory, Rector of the Parish of Bendigo North and Bendigo Mother's Union chaplain and Revd Emily Payne, diocesan healthcare chaplain, sensitively led the service, with Revd Roger Rich offering intercessions. The Cathedral healing service team led the music.

Those present heard from a local, faithful, female Anglican about her long-lived experience as a victim-survivor of domestic and family violence. She explained the mechanisms of control and coercion, and how the fear and daily threat of abuse chips away at your confidence and sense of self-worth. She shared the complex challenges of safely leaving an abuser and how her own faith has sustained her through her journey to freedom and healing.

*It helped those of us present to start to understand some of the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and financial challenges victim-survivors face.*

Revd Hannah read out the names of the 44 women to date who had been killed as a result of domestic and family violence. As she read each name those present lay a flower at the foot of the cross in front of the altar. According to the organisation *Our Watch*; in Australia on average one woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner (calculated from the 2020-21 Statistical Report 42 from the Australian Institute of Criminology). It was a powerfully sad and moving time to reflect on who each of these women were, many of whom for legal reason remain anonymous, but are "known to God", as Revd Hannah noted.

After the service, over morning tea generously provided by Bendigo Mother's Union (who continue to be very supportive of the work of DFV education in the diocese), there was much discussion about the role that the church and we as Christians can play in preventing and addressing domestic and family violence in our homes and communities. We noted the need to educate ourselves, to listen to the experiences of those in our congregations who have experienced or are currently experiencing abuse, to call out unhealthy expressions of gender inequality and un-Godly behaviour. Many also highlighted the importance of prayer, both in public worship and in private, which is a powerful action we can all be taking regularly.

(If this has raised concerns for you please reach out to 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or visit [orangedoor.vic.gov.au](http://orangedoor.vic.gov.au)).



Revd Hannah Gregory and Revd Emily Payne

# Hancrafted Gifts of Scripture

Chris Whiting

What happens when a passion for re-use and recycling meets with the joy of sharing Scripture? Well, in the Parish of Kyneton, Malmsbury and Trentham at least, it results in pencil-holders which bear a scripture plaque on their base.

It occurred to Warren Miles of St John's that the bench element from some pews that had been removed from the 150-year-old Malmsbury building could be cut and polished to serve as the base of a pencil-holder. Add to this a short length of clay pipe retrieved from amongst the many which had been used to reticulate water to gold mining works in Drummond, and you have a device, both handsome and practical, for the adornment of desk or shelf.

Always keen to share the Scriptures, Warren asked fellow parishioner, Chris Whiting, in his capacity as manager of the Kyneton Farmers Market which takes place at St Paul's Park each month, whether the pencil-holders could be given a scripture and offered as gifts to each stallholder. So, the next task became assigning suitable Bible verses for each gift recipient.

Some of the verses were easy to choose: for the vegetable growers, "It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops" (2 Tim 2:6), the olive oil producer, "He has given me the wine to make my heart rejoice and oil to make my face to shine" (Ps 104:15), the gin producer, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts" (Prov 31:6). Others were not so obvious. For the kombucha vendor it was decided, "He who believes in me, from within him - as the Scripture has said - from his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

But what does one offer to a donut vendor? After considering a limited number of very obscure possibilities Isaiah 6:3 seemed the most suitable, "And one cried unto another, and said, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory'".



The Kyneton Market boasts a mixed array for product offerings, amongst which is the sale of a hemp-seed extract which renders a mild sedative or analgesic effect. The product's painkilling attribute allowed use of, "They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it" (Matt 27:34). It was an interesting moment to be able to tell a very 'New-Age' vendor that the gall and wine mixture was the Roman way of

deadening the pain of crucifixion, but that Jesus would not take of it because he was resolved to pay the full price for our sins.

"The pencil-holder gifts have allowed me to introduce myself to the stallholders" said Revd Lauren Lockwood-Porter. "There have been mixed reactions to the gifts. Some stallholders have been bemused, others have been delighted to think that our interest in them is more than that of commercial transaction."





# Art Show Springs to Life

Jesse Sherwood

St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo was recently transformed into an art gallery as it hosted the annual Spring Art Show.

Nearly 200 original art works from more than 60 local and regional artists were showcased in the historic Cathedral. A wide range of mediums were featured including oil, water colour and acrylic painting, drawing, textile, photography and sculpture.

For more than two decades the Bendigo Spring Art Show at St Paul's Cathedral has showcased the diversity and depth of creative visual talent in Greater Bendigo and raised funds for social welfare support services.

This year's exhibition was held on the 24th to the 26th of October and was officially opened by the Very Reverend Elizabeth Dyke in one of her final roles as Cathedral Dean.

The exhibition was curated by Rohan Phillips, and entries judged by Ms Lauren Ellis, curator of Bendigo Art Gallery.

Monetary prizes were offered for first and second prize winners, highly commended and a youth prize for artists 25 years and under.

Prize winners included:

*First Prize* - Dawn Duncan-Smith: 'Maggie', Textile. Above, top left.

*Second Prize* - Robyn Davis: 'Sitting in the Garden', Acrylic. Top of next page.

*Highly Commended* - Paul Harrington: 'Rejoice', Pastel on paper

*Highly Commended* - Sarah Hemmings: 'Bendigo Collage 2/20', Linoprint and watercolour

*Youth Prize* - Dexter Kimberly and Kayden Callanan: 'Bunjil (Wedge-tailed Eagle)- Totem for Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples of the Kulin Nation', Acrylic. Bottom of next page.

The exhibition concluded with a specially themed Choral Evensong with readings and music celebrating creativity and artistic endeavour.

In the spirit of HOPE 2025 the event organisers aim to further expand the Art Show and connect Bendigo's increasingly diverse communities to the Cathedral through their arts and culture.





# Outstanding: A Tribute to Keith Cole

*An address given by Charles Sherlock at the launch of this new book..*

**K**eith Cole served Christ in at least six distinct contexts, from city to rural, Kenyan to Aboriginal, academic to parish level education. The common thread was helping others learn from history. Keith delighted in details and eschewed simplistic generalisations. His aim was to help us follow Christ and gain wisdom to discern God's leading.

Christian formation began at St Phillip's Eastwood, and then at Moore College in the Diocese of Sydney. These contexts are known for engagement with the Scriptures and the importance of personal faith in Christ: they were then suffused by ethos and use of the Book of Common Prayer. Such a setting could produce a blinkered, defensive outlook. Not so in Keith: the foundations laid there, along with his love of music and delight in sport, sustained a breadth of outlook that enabled him to

adapt to new contexts with principled, Christ-centred wisdom.

Following a decade of bank work, study and student ministry, Keith, with Merle, moved to Kenya, then preparing to stand on its own post-colonial feet. Keith's prayers for skill in Swahili were answered in full measure; in his oral exam he managed to engage for an hour about Aboriginal Australians!

The original plan was for Keith to be a theological college principal, but he had to wait four years. He found himself training Kenyan school teachers, then being a School Inspector – what a call to adapt! His bank work stood him in good stead institutionally, and he came to know local congregations.

A major challenge was the Mau Mau rebellion erupting all around Kenya. Christians were put under extreme pressure; some were martyred. The Coles declined to evacuate, believing that to do

so would be to fail local Christians. In later life, Keith warned against Tertullian's notion that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church". No, he insisted: it sees Christians killed, and churches destroyed.

Meanwhile a new diocese was forming, and the bishop asked Keith to be its archdeacon, to support emerging local leaders. Another call to adapt – and one that saw him begin his work on the history of the Kenyan church. Then, finally, in 1954 he became the Principal of St Paul's United Theological College at Limuru, near Nairobi. It prepared men for ordination across Kenya: Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian. The position called for wisdom in dealing with different church structures, and a range of theological traditions. Keith continued to centre his life on prayer and Scripture, Evangelical emphases which sustained him in this new context.

In 1962 Kenya became independent. It was a good time for the Cole family to return to Australia. They ended in Melbourne rather than Sydney, with Keith learning to be Vice-Principal of Ridley College, newly led by Leon Morris. It was not an easy adjustment: Ridley is not a diocesan college, as Keith was used to in Sydney and Kenya, and it had just become a university college. Completing his doctorate was an initial task. Then, alongside teaching, he arranged conferences, was Assistant Minister at St Hilary's Kew and took weekly Bible studies at St Paul's Cathedral!

Further, Melbourne is the Australian centre for ecumenical theological education. Keith's experience in Limuru meant that he saw its importance, though ecumenical work was not a high priority for Evangelicals then. Alongside Ridley, he became the founding secretary of ANZATS: the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools. This fosters cooperation across theological colleges, and international links: Keith travelled across Asia, engaging with theological educators in varied contexts.

During his decade in Melbourne Keith contributed much to Evangelical activities, especially CMS: St Andrew's Hall, its training college, was established next door to Ridley just after he arrived. Through CMS he was invited to visit the Northern Territory to research mission history: so began his long interest in Aboriginal people – adapting to yet another context.

In 1973 he became the founding Principal of Nungalinya College in Darwin. A new Commonwealth Government was “implementing its revolutionary policy of Aboriginal self-determination” (Keith’s words). So he and Merle headed north. This new ministry saw good relations develop with Aboriginal people and leaders of the missions involved, lots of fund-raising, supervising building, and then doing it all again after Cyclone Tracy later that year!

Keith’s earlier teaching assumed ‘Western’ learning styles. But Nungalinya students came from remote communities, where English was often a third or even fourth language. Keith introduced Theological Education by Extension, enabling students to learn in their home communities, alongside intensive weeks in Darwin. To foster research in Aboriginal life and Christian ministry, he set up Nungalinya Publications. And – crucially - he laid the foundations for Aboriginal Christians to emerge as teaching staff.

But five years of flat-out pioneer work in the Territory climate took its toll. A letter

was a challenge, so Keith initiated local training and ongoing learning for clergy. Lay leaders then had little opportunity for adult Christian education, so Keith began a Diocesan Resource Centre (now the Keith and Merle Cole Library), and a certificate course that could be done by distance education. He sparked up the diocese’s bodies on doctrine (then considering the ordination of women), education, liturgy, evangelism and Aboriginal ministry. And he kept writing: the monthly Theological News, short booklets, and further research in the Northern Territory when on leave.

When Keith retired in 1984 he thanked God for his “godly upbringing ... experience of forgiveness through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... [and] of sharing with God’s people of different races.” He “testified that the Bible had been ‘the Book’ for me ... in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Swahili, Kikuyu, and in a small way in Aboriginal languages”. (No doubt English also!). These words put into a short space both his foundational Evangelical perspective, and the varied contexts in which he ministered, constantly adapting his approach - for the sake of the Gospel.

Sydney and Moore, Kenyan schools and the United College at Limuru, Ridley and Melbourne, Nungalinya and Aboriginal people, Bendigo diocese and writing; few have ministered in such varied contexts, and done so with graced wisdom and personal kindness (as he was to me as a new student at Ridley).

Keith Cole was a Christian ‘man of all contexts’. His example encourages us all – not least Anglican Evangelicals – to build on firm foundations, resist the temptation to ‘one size fits all’ approaches, and foster structures that foster God’s work in and for each context.

I congratulate all who have been involved in this book, especially the irrepressible Mike Butcher and the persistent Bob Anderson. I am delighted to be associated with the launch of *Outstanding: a tribute to Keith Cole*.

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*Outstanding: a tribute to Keith Cole*, ed. Mike Butcher, is available through Broughton Publishing.

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from the Bishop of Bendigo invited him to be that diocese’s Theological Educator. This confirmed his and Merle’s growing belief that their time up north was ending. So, another new context, new place and new ministry. And just after the move, Keith had a heart attack, showing the stress he had been under in the Territory. He recovered, but only after six weeks off.

But what was he to actually do in Bendigo diocese? Most of its 36 parishes comprised small centres, 131 in all, spread out over some distance. And a regional diocese having a Theological Educator was a new thing! Finding clergy



Bp Matt Brain and Wendy nee Cole

# Walkabout Brings Reconciliation Through Welcome and Truth

*Lesa Scholl*

Early on a chilly Melbourne spring morning, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians departed on a walkabout of truth and healing from St Paul's Cathedral. Victoria's Provincial Walkabout would see the group enter each Anglican diocese of the state to listen to the stories of local elders and First Nations leaders.

Bendigo Anglican diocese's the Reverend Canon Shannon Smith said it was as important for the church's First Nations leaders as well as non-Indigenous people to hear these stories. "The clergy working in Victoria, they're not Victorians," she said. "We're going to be coming and working on this country; we've got to learn." She said if the church wanted the First Peoples to walk with them, the church needed to learn to walk with First People before it extended the hand.

While some of the truths told were harrowing, Canon Smith believed God's presence protected the group. "I don't think we would be going to these places if it wasn't God's will for us to be there," she said. "Between God and our old people, they come along with us." She said it was as if Bunjil (Kulin language for Creator God) was there saying they would hear things but he was there to hold them. "He just popped up everywhere," she said.

Past and present bled together on the journey. On the first day the walkabouts were invited to join in Sorry Business for a slain young Indigenous man in Gippsland. Canon Smith said the group was confronted by the visit to Portland and the Convincing Grounds, where the first recorded genocide of Indigenous peoples occurred. "We were able to walk down to the waters, just walking out there thinking, this water was just once soaked in blood," she said.

Yet while confronting harrowing pasts, many of the walkabouts found healing. Gippsland's Canon Auntie Phyllis Andy said the most significant part of the journey for her was being on country in Hall's Gap, her mother's country. "That's

where I was able to connect because my mum, being removed as a young girl and not being able to return there... That was her country, which meant that through her, it was mine," she said. "Within that connectiveness I was able to walk on country," she said. "I paid my respects to them [the ancestors] and, in turn, they received me with gracefulness." "You live here and you're accepted. But it's so different from being home, on your own country."

Kyneton-Malmsbury-Trentham priest-in-charge the Reverend Lauren Lockwood-Porter said she wanted to be on country rather than just read books and see television shows about it. For her it was meeting different people and experiencing the relationships on walkabout that helped her understand the history of the land. She said she was blown away by the generosity of the people in sharing their stories and the detail and care with which they spoke about their culture.

Ms Lockwood-Porter learned about the trade of smoke eels and was amazed by the way in which the eel traps worked with the natural waterways and paths of the eels. "It was such a smart system that it freed up a lot of time for culture and for storytelling," she said. Ms Lockwood-Porter said her parish held a lot of interest in Aboriginal culture and the reckoning with the history. She said there were sites where terrible things happened, so she wanted to listen and understand, and find meaningful ways to acknowledge Victoria's past.

Canon Smith said three Aboriginal clergy joined this year's walkabout, and as they shared stories of their own country, the atrocities were often the same. She said many of the places were recreating the spaces into healing spaces rather than trying to eradicate the history. "This is a part of our history," she said. "We need to accept it as well." "We need to walk it together."

*First published in The Melbourne Anglican. Used with permission.*



Hopkins Falls, on the lands of the Eastern Maar peoples



# Youth and Families Ministry



## Wrapped Up



Did you know that Australians use 150,000 km of wrapping paper every Christmas? That's enough to go around the world four times! The greatest gift of all wasn't wrapped in paper, but in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger not under a tree. If you're counting down to Christmas and still have gifts to wrap why not use fabric instead? Or go for simple, recyclable brown paper and decorate it for an extra personal touch. If it's after Christmas, instead of just throwing all that paper away, cut it into squares and practice your origami. Or use it to cover a notebook to use as a prayer diary or journal. Apparently crumpled up wrapping paper can also be used to clean windows – while doing this pray that God gives a clear vision for the year ahead.



## .....Cards, Cards, Cards



In our digital age Christmas cards are fast becoming a thing of the past. But a handwritten card is a gift in itself. They are also a reminder of the gift of God's Word. If you're counting down to Christmas, why not take the time to make your own Christmas cards. Instead of a single sentence sentiment, include a bible verse or passage, or write out a prayer for the person you're sending the card to. If you're counting up from Christmas and have a pile of cards lying about you could cut the front up into bookmarks with Bible verses on the back, or gift tags to use for next year. Keep the backs as a reminder to pray for that person – one idea is to put the cut-up cards in a jar and pull out one each week to pray for.



## Chomps .....

Many churches have special candles for Advent and Christmas. You might also have them at home during this season. Candles are also a great symbol for Epiphany, which is the remembrance of the coming of the light of Christ to the world. If you're counting down to Christmas, you can create your own Advent Candle Calendar by using a permanent marker to write the numbers 1 to 25 down the side of the candle and lighting it each night. You can also decorate the side of the candle with a nativity scene. If it's after Christmas, you can prepare for next year by making your own Advent candles. (This takes lots of care and adult supervision!). Collect up scraps of candles and carefully melt them down to make new ones – Pringle cans make very good moulds (and a good excuse for a snack!). You'll need new wicks and some candle dye, but these can easily be found online.



As this issue of the Spirit comes out, we are into the season of Advent and the countdown to Christmas has begun. Before we know it, the big day will have come and gone. But Christmas isn't over on the 25th of December! The church celebrates the season of Christmas for 12 days, ending with Epiphany. (This is where the song with all the partridges in pear trees comes from!). These days remind us that the gift of Jesus isn't just for one day, but for all time. Whether you're counting down to Christmas, or counting up after, here are some ideas for engaging with the season, with a creative and creation-care theme, as we look back to Jesus' first coming and look forward to his return.

Archdeacon George is the Ministry Development Officer for the Diocese.



## Editor's Notes

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*Photo of Bishop Matt on page 2 credit of Bendigo Advertiser.*

# Porch Pantry Adds Christmas Cheer

Josephine Snowdon

The Open Porch Pantry team at Christ Church, Daylesford are preparing some extra Christmas cheer for those homeless and financially struggling this Christmas.

With the assistance of Anglicare every Wednesday and Sunday we provide six parcels of non-perishable groceries so that people can call into the church porch and take one with them. To cater for those without easy access to a kitchen

the food can be cooked in a microwave, over a small hot plate or eaten without preparation.

As well as the parcels available each week, for Christmas we have some additional gifts available in the pantry. These include homemade small Christmas cakes and handcrafted care bags made up with personal toiletry items.

It has been good to meet several people who pop in to pick up parcels and slowly make personal and spiritual connections with them.

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