LINK



The next LINK deadline is Sunday 17 January 2027. Please send contributions to gkp@netspace.net.au

Connecting the people of St John's Elsternwick December 2026–January 2027

Minister's word

The Light still shines

Many people will be familiar with a night light. These are often in bedrooms placed there for little children or sometimes adults so they can see in the night-time, and it is not pitch black. A night light acts as a source of comfort in the dark night, and children can look to see that there is still a light that shines in dark places. For adults, these night lights might help them not to trip over when getting up for a nightly bathroom visit.

The trick in buying a night light to fulfil their purpose, whether it is one that is in the form of a plug in light, or a lamp, is that they are not too bright, so that the child's or adult's eyes can adjust to see things more clearly in the darkness.

By way of contrast, is the extravagance of the Advent/Christmas custom of lighting homes with exterior lights and decorations. Here the lights are dazzlingly bright and sometimes on timers to appear and sparkle and disappear in sequence.

In both cases we see lights that shine in the darkness.

The prologue of John's gospel often read on Christmas Day speaks of the Word made flesh in Jesus who shines as a light. Chapter one, verses 3b to five and verse nine reads:

> What has come into being was life,
> and the life was the light of all people.
> The light shines in the darkness
> and the darkness did not overcome it . . .
> The true light which enlightens everyone.

As we come into Christmas and in January the Season of Epiphany, let us contemplate the Light we see in Jesus as like a light in the darkness, granting us comfort and peace, yet sometimes dazzling and so bright and radiating out to everyone that we feel drawn into awe and wonder.

Margaret Silf in her reflection on Light in her Advent book *Lighted window: An advent calendar for a world in waiting* (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002) speaks of how light can affect us. It can be like the gentle light of Spring that enables joyful blossoming of plants and bulbs or the harsher light that can bring a piercing heat that can expose or damage plants. Silf extends this illustration to our own hearts and lives where we can desire the light that helps us grow and be fearful and want to hide from the light that confronts the darkness in our hearts and lives. Here she says that "God's light is gentle . . . coaxing us out of our darkness" (Silf, p. 109). It is like a candle lit in the dark (like a night light) which has a powerful effect.

Let us as we celebrate Jesus Christ's coming and birth into the world and the light that appears and radiates to the entire world and ponder anew the light that still shines in our hearts. May this light continue to shine as a beacon of hope, love, and peace for everyone and as light for all the world to see.

A Happy and Blessed Christmas.

Rev Dr Lynette Dungan



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Church Council Report

Church Council has met twice since the last edition of *Link*. Here's a précis of the major decisions and news from the meetings held on 7 October and 11th November.

- The kitchen renovation has been completed (except for the painting of cupboard doors). See report on page 13 for further details and photos.
- The Mini Fete on 31 October, held in collaboration with Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association (BRASA), Lions Australia and the Asylum Art Market, was a successful event, despite the weather. $600 was raised for Uniting by the church's Devonshire Teas and Book Stall.
- Church Council agreed that the congregation will be encouraged to donate to Uniting Food for Families and UnitingWorld in its Christmas giving. The Christmas Day offering will be donated to UnitingWorld.
- Improvements to the carpark and its use by the wider community continues to be an item of discussion at Church Council. There are no easy answers to how we graciously share our car park with the community and still are able to access it for our own programs.
- Council agreed to increase the congregation's Mission and Service giving to the Synod by 3% in 2027.
- It was noted that from 19 October, anyone applying for or renewing a Working With Children Check must complete an online child safety training course before the application is finalised. It takes about 45 minutes. It covers recognising concerning behaviour and grooming risks, and responding when something is wrong. Computer Support will be offered to those members who are unable to do the training online at home.
- Christmas Events
  The Angel Project – A Christmas Event for Toddlers will be held again this year in the hall on Friday 4 December from 4 to 5.30pm. This is aimed particularly at Elsternwick Toddlers Playgroup families, as well as the wider community. The format will be the same as in 2025, with craft activities in the hall, and finishing with a sausage sizzle and ice cream. Cathryn will appreciate the support of the congregation again.

  Carols in the Park on Sunday 20 December at 7pm. Approval to hold this event in Hopetoun Garden has been received from Glen Eira Council. We will work with the Caulfield Indonesian Congregation to offer carols and a telling of the Christmas Story in the park. BYO chairs or picnic blanket.

  Christmas Day worship at 9.30am.
- Lynette and Cathryn both enjoyed leave in October – 2 weeks of long service leave for Lynette and 4 weeks of annual leave for Cathryn. Church Council has approved both Lynette and Cathryn continuing in their existing roles in 2027.

Cathryn

Presbytery Report

The fourth and final meeting for 2026 of Presbytery-in-Council was held at Noble Park on Saturday 14 November.

The meeting started with the reading from Luke 1: 46–55 with worship, music and reflection led by members of Fijian congregations.

The first agenda item was the book launch of Rev Dr Denham Grierson's latest book entitled *Honey from the Rock* volume 1 published by Coventry Press.

This was followed by the Release of Pastoral Ties for Presbytery Minister Rev Robin Yang who is moving to St Luke's Mount Waverley.

Discussion items that followed included the Faithful Futures Project (https://victas.uca.org.au/faithful-futures/), Finance Report and approval of the 2027 Budget, and Presbytery Staffing update.

Geoff

EnviroTip

For Christmas 2026

- Use washable plates rather than plastic disposable cutlery and napkins
- When it comes to food and decorations – less is more! Don't get anything you think will be left hanging round after Christmas and end up in the bin
- Buy seasonal, local and organic where possible.

Clean Up Australia

Following Jesus: A Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Rev Charissa Suli

As we begin a new lectionary year, the Gospel of Mark invites us to encounter Jesus Christ afresh and to consider a question that runs throughout its pages: Who is Jesus, and what does it mean to follow him?

Mark opens with a bold declaration: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). There is an urgency to this Gospel. Jesus announces that God's kingdom has come near, calling people to repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15). Through his teaching, healing, and encounters with those pushed to the margins, we see God's love breaking into the world, challenging established boundaries, and transforming lives.

At the heart of Mark's Gospel is a question Jesus puts to his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). Peter recognises Jesus as the Messiah, yet struggles to understand that his mission involves suffering, rejection, and death. Jesus then calls those who would follow him to take up their cross. Mark reminds us that recognising who Jesus is cannot be separated from understanding the way he calls us to live.

This becomes particularly confronting in Jesus' teaching about power. Greatness is not measured by status or authority, but through service and responsibility for one another (Mark 10:42–45). The way of the cross challenges not only our personal assumptions but also the relationships, communities, and structures we create. In Jesus' death and resurrection, we encounter God's self-giving love and the promise that death does not have the final word.

For us in the Uniting Church in Australia, these readings come at a significant moment. As we approach fifty years of Union, Mark invites us to consider not only where we have come from, but who Christ is calling us to become. We are a pilgrim people, still being formed by God's Word and called to remain open to the renewing work of the Spirit.

As we journey through Mark together, may we listen with humility, allow Christ to challenge what we have grown comfortable with, and find the courage to follow him in ways that reflect God's justice, compassion, and reconciling love.

The question remains: Who do we say Jesus is, and what will our lives and our communities reveal about our answer?

Rev Charissa Suli is President, Uniting Church in Australia

Church Calendar

December 2026

1	World AIDS Day
2	International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
3	International Day of Persons with Disability
5	International Volunteer Day
9	International Anti-Corruption Day
10	International Human Rights Day
25	Christmas Day

January 2027

1	Naming of Jesus
6	Epiphany
10	Baptism of Jesus
24	Day of Mourning Uniting Church
26	Survival Day (Australia Day)
27	International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust

JustACT Social Justice Calendar
UCA Assembly Calendar

Christmas Night

The soft eyed sleepy kine looked out
To see what they could see!
They saw a mother in a stall,
A babe upon her knee.
The soft eyed, sleepy kine looked out,
But think! They could not know
Who that tiny infant was
There in the long ago!
But we light the lights of all the Earth . . .
Because we know! We know!

Anonymous

My walking holiday



In September, I enjoyed a walking trip with a couple of girlfriends. Firstly, we visited Carnarvon Gorge, eight hours west of Brisbane. It was stunning scenery. The ancient landscape of towering white walls, unique flora, fascinating bird and animal life, and rock art galleries.



Our second series of walks was in the Warrumbungles near the Siding Springs observatory, Coonabarabran. The eroded volcanic hills of domes and spires were spectacular scenery.

Both landscapes made me think what an ancient land we live on. Years of erosion creating unique environments. It made me think of the power of God and the insignificance of humanity as well as fearful about how quickly the land and its inhabitants are being threatened by the actions of people.



At our final lunch stop in Euroa we were delighted to meet Sister Bernadine sitting outside the tourist information shop offering peace to those walking along the main street. It was great to hear that the Catholic and Uniting Churches were working together on Peace events, sing peace songs on International Peace Day and showing the film, "Can art stop the bullets" by William Kelly on Harmony Day.

Cathy

Recipe



Serves 8

Ingredients

6 egg whites at room temperature
Pinch of cream of tartar
2 cups caster sugar
2 tsp white vinegar
1 tsp vanilla essence
1 tbsp cornflour
Whipped cream, strawberries and passionfruit to serve.

Method

Preheat oven 150°C or 130° fan forced.

Draw out 23cm circle onto baking paper and place onto tray drawn side down.

Dust with corn flour.

Whisk egg whites and cream of tartar in bowl using electric mixer for 3 to 4 minutes or until soft peaks form.

Add caster sugar one spoon at a time whisking all the time (10 minutes).

Add vinegar, vanilla and sifted cornflour.

Gently fold in with spatula. Spoon meringue onto prepared tray using circle as guide.

Bake one hour in oven and cool in oven with door slightly open 2 hours or best over night.

Slide Pavlova onto serving plate and decorate.

Patricia

Sign of the Times



Glen Huntly Road
South Caulfield

Bible Word

The Promises of God in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God's promises are fundamentally anchored in covenants – binding agreements where God binds Himself to His people with absolute fidelity. While some promises were conditional on obedience, the core of His Old Testament promises points to His unchanging character, redemption, and ultimate plan for humanity.

Major Covenantal Promises

The Abrahamic Covenant: God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, bless all peoples through his lineage, and give his descendants the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1–3, 15:18).

The Mosaic (Sinai) Covenant: God promised to make Israel His "treasured possession", a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, guaranteeing protection and blessing if they obeyed His law (Exodus 19:5–6).

The Davidic Covenant: God promised that King David's lineage and throne would be established forever, a promise ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

The New Covenant: Anticipated by the prophets, God promised to forgive sins completely, write His law directly onto people's hearts, and give them a new spirit (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Personal and Foundational Promises

Presence: God continuously promised His leaders and people that he would be with them, go before them, and never fail them (Joshua 1:5, 9; Deuteronomy 31:6).

Protection and Deliverance: God promised to be a shield, refuge, and deliverer for those who trust Him, especially during times of exile and trouble (Psalm 46:1; Isaiah 41:10).

Restoration: Even when Israel faced judgement and exile for disobedience, God repeatedly promised to gather them, heal, and restore them to their land (Jeremiah 29:11–14).

Andrea

Alex in China



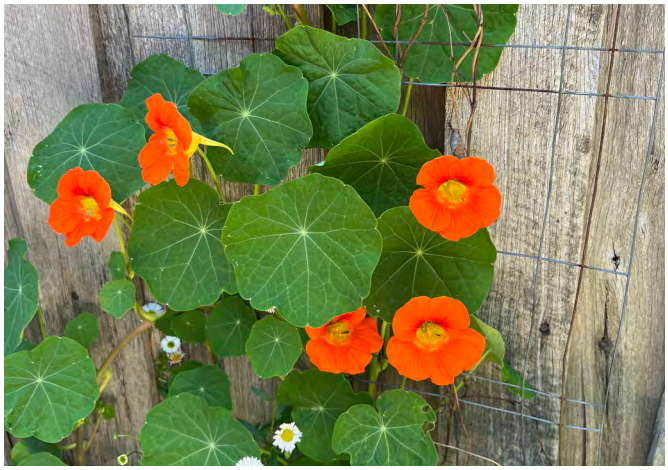
The editors, Andrea, Patricia and Geoff, thank all *Link* contributors. Thanks to Colin for his proofreading.

An explanation of cricket

You have two sides – one out on the field and the other in. Each man in the side that's in goes out, and when he is out, he comes in, and the next man goes out till he's out. When the side that's in is all out, the side that's been in goes out and tries to get the one that's coming in out. Sometimes you get men still in and not out when the side that is in is finally out. When both sides have been in and out, including those out, that's the end of the game.

Supplied by Patricia

Ministry of Flowers



A man scatters seed on the ground . . .

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (Mark 4:26-27)

In the last issue of *Link*, Greg wrote about Rod Dungan's 45 years of service as a youth minister and chaplain. One of the paragraph's read:

> We wonder about how many conversations, acts of support, recognition, understanding, and care have contributed to the lives of countless young people and their families over this time.

This article is to tell you about the impact of Rod's ministry on my life.

In 1986, Rod Dungan (Rod D) came to Hobart with his young family to work as a Youth Minister with the Hobart City Parish. I was 18 years old, had been engaged to Rod Peppiatt (Rod P) for several months and was in my second year at University, which was a tough year for me. Rod P (or "my" Rod) was experiencing an early sense of call to ministry at this time, and Rod D walked this journey with us for the next couple of years. I remember a conversation in which Rod D suggested to Rod P that perhaps the reason he was unsettled and unfilled in his work as an optical mechanic was actually the Spirit prompting him to listen more deeply to what God was calling him to.

By the time we were married in January 1988, Rod P's sense of call to the ordained Ministry of the Word was much more fully formed and we were having frequent thoughts of "Where to from here? What's the process? Where will Rod P undertake his study?" Rod D was a really important part of helping us work out the answers to these questions. As an aside, Rod D proposed the Toast to the Bride and Groom at our wedding reception, during which he made a comment along the lines of "The only things these two can agree on is that they want to get married!"

Having experience within the Synods of both Victoria and South Australia, and some knowledge of the Ministerial training in both, Rod D gently guided us in the direction of moving to South Australia for Rod P to attend Theological College in Adelaide, recognising that the systems there would better suit Rod P

While we did not exclude moving to Melbourne – the usual pathway to candidate for Ministry for people living in Tasmania – everything seemed to line up for Adelaide. We investigated the possibilities of studying in Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, trying to truly listen for where God was leading us.

In late November 1988, Rod P travelled to Adelaide for a few days to follow-up on several leads for work within the optical industry in which he was trained. He went to Adelaide with three job possibilities and came home several days later with 4 firm offers of employment. Now if that isn't confirmation of where God was leading us, I don't know what is!

Six weeks later, on 16 January 1989, we had packed up our small home and were on the move to Adelaide. In those 6 weeks, Rod D contacted a man by the name of Stan Parr in Adelaide. Stan was a legend! He found us rental accommodation owned by a member of his congregation and hosted us for a week while we waited for our goods and chattels to be delivered to our new little one-bedroom flat. Stan took the liberty of registering us for the church camp in February. It was at that camp that we met 6 other young people for the first time. These 6 people have become our closest friends and our relationship with each of them has grown and deepened in the ensuing decades. Those relationships are probably the most important in our lives, outside those with our family. Rod and I are deeply grateful to Rod D for his ministry that was a major factor in leading us to where we are today and in forming deep, meaningful and lasting relationships with our friends in Adelaide.

The time Rod D gave to Rod P and I was never rushed, always kind, thoughtful and thought-provoking/challenging. And we aren't the only people in Hobart that Rod D gave his time to. I know that his ministry in Hobart has had a lasting impact on many others – because we still talk about it when we get together.

Over the years, our paths have crossed in both Tasmania and Victoria and our relationship has developed into one of good friends, who have known each other a long time. Rod D continues to support and take interest in our life and ministry. It is a delight to now be working

alongside Lynette with the congregation here at Elsternwick Caulfield South. This would almost certainly not have happened were it not for Rod D's ministry in Hobart in the 1980s.

Thank you to Lynette for having patience with the young people of Hobart in the mid 1980s, with whom Rod D connected so meaningfully, who took him away from family time when the girls were so young. I didn't value the cost to you at the time, but I sure do now.

Thank you, Rod Dungan, for your ministry. It has blessed my life in countless ways.

Cathryn



Two Rods in their younger years – singing silly songs at a youth camp.



Rod D proposing the toast to the Bride and Groom, 9 January 1988.

Overland to Adelaide



Southern Cross Station

Last month, I travelled with Elizabeth, my Hobart cousin, on *The Overland* train to Adelaide. These two cities have been connected by rail since 1887 with the current name adopted in 1936. Until recently, the train was government-owned (V&SAR); now it is a privately-run train. Fifteen stops have been reduced to 8 and onboard catering has replaced the Refreshment Rooms.

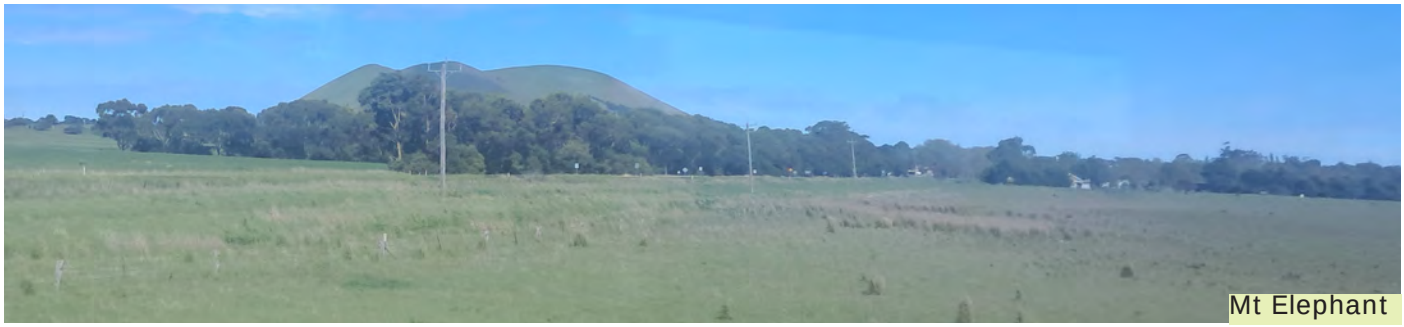
The eight-carriage train left Southern Cross Platform 2 at 8am and travelled close to the docks to Newport, North Geelong, climbing to Moorabool, crossing the Moorabool River by the high-level Batesford Viaduct, and on to Western Victoria's undulating volcanic plains.

This has been familiar territory for both travel and my teaching. Hamlets, villages, and abandoned stations flashed by and we crossed streams headed for the ocean. Volcanic cones (peaks), such as Mounts Hesse and Gellibrand, were glimpsed in the distance. The highlight was reaching Derrinallum and *My Favourite Mountain*. Mount Elephant at 380 metres has been a landmark in my travels and teaching.

Soon after, we left the plains and crossed the Divide passing to the north of the Grampians to Horsham then on the undulating sandy terrain of Victoria's Wimmera and the Murray Mallee in South Australia. At Murray Bridge, we crossed the Mighty Murray – again familiar territory. The last part of the journey was the winding path through the Mount Lofty Ranges and into Adelaide arriving around 7.

So ended a most enjoyable journey. The ride and seats were comfortable, the catering tasty, and the wide windows afforded an uninterrupted view of the changing landscape. If you have the chance, I recommend *The Overland* to view our country without distractions of car driving.

Geoff



Mt Elephant

Doris Bush, loving dogs, and friendship

Doris Nungarayi Bush was born around 1942 at Haast's Bluff, 23 kilometres west of Alice Springs. Doris is a senior woman in the Luritja communities. Doris is also a very successful artist, with big stories and visions, adapting creatively and successfully to a gradual loss of sight.

I met Doris in 2012, when working for three months in Papunya. We struck up a close friendship. Doris, and another close friend, gave me my skin name (Tjangala). That was the "right skin" to marry Doris. I was told to be wary of dreams, as bringing community members together is one of Doris's roles. I don't think Doris "dreamed me", but I figure she reckoned the skin name gave her the right to order me around, which she does in good spirit: "Old man – cup of tea!"

I've spent a lot of time with Doris over the years. My favourite memories are driving the many hundreds of kilometres, sometimes into Western Australia, with my work. Doris, in the passenger seat, would be constantly pointing to landmarks of significant dreaming, and singing the relevant songs. Talking to me in Luritja about them. Doris does not speak much English, is pretty deaf, and I have no conversational Luritja. Our friendship has somehow transcended these earthly limitations.

Doris, daughter Stephany, nephew Jarquin and great niece Nolita spent last week with me in Melbourne. With further declining hearing and no working hearing aid, Doris spent long times, unengaged. A high point was the last evening, as we sat close to my open fire, fending off a cold Melbourne chill. I had found a video I recorded in Papunya in 2013, with Doris, her adoring Border Collie "Blacky" and a little white puppy. The video records Doris telling the little puppy that he was going to Melbourne to live with me. That puppy is now Jack the Dog (or "Whitey" to Doris), now himself an aging but very loving dog, sitting with us at the fire in Elwood. Seeing the video, Doris came to life. We watched it about 8 times on repeat, as Doris laughed, pointed and chortled, telling the story once again. I was pleased that young Nolita was taken by all this, recording the goings-on, on her phone, and replaying it to Doris the next day.

With increasing frailty, I think it will be Doris's last visit to Melbourne. I was a little teary at the airport. A friendship, transcending so much, enriching so much.

Greg



Doris Bush, Blacky and Whitey, Papunya, 2013



Doris Bush painting ('Haast's Bluff') Whitey and Greg, Elwood.



Holiday in three parts – and part of my life-story!

Stage One

The first part of my holiday started way back in 1966, before I was born, when my father was a member of a 3-month Rotary Group Study Exchange Team to the United States. During this time, he made friends, particularly in and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the steel industry was a major employer. Dad maintained some of those friendships over many years. I remember our family receiving Christmas Cards with photos of children I had never met, sporting crew-cuts and turtle-neck sweaters!

In 1979, when he took long service leave, Dad took Mum to the US to meet many of the families he had stayed with 13 years earlier. The relationship with the Howell family was especially rekindled during this visit and resulted in an annual Christmas phone call during which the weather and "what time is it there?" was always discussed.

The conversation in the 1981 Christmas phone call included Marge Howell asking my mother, "When are you sending Cathryn over for a holiday?" to which my mother replied, "If Cathryn comes to visit, it won't be for a holiday, but to go to school for a year." And that's what ended up happening.

After completing year 10 in 1982, at the tender age of 15 years and 4 months, I jetted off on 7 January 1983 ready to attend Elizabeth Forward High School (EFHS) for the whole of that year. And what a year it was!



Cathryn and Nancy-Joy

Marge and Lon Howell were my hosts for the year and they ensured that there were young people around for me to connect and make friends with. The very first of those was Nancy-Joy, a member of the youth group at the Bethesda United Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania. That church community was hugely supportive of me. People welcomed me, nurtured my faith, cared for me when my grandmother died suddenly in March 1983, and provided plenty of opportunity for fun with the youth group. Nancy-Joy remains one of my dearest friends. She was able to attend my wedding, as a surprise guest. Seeing her arrive at the airport with one of my other dear friends in the days leading up to our wedding is a moment I will never forget. We are both hopeless at writing letters, emailing or calling, but when we do manage to connect, it is always for a VERY long chat, and the years just fall away!

Once I started at the high school, I made many more friends. Most were in the school marching band, which became an important part of my school life. Being part of the marching band included giving up three weeks of the summer holidays to attend band camp to learn the new music and marching routines for the coming year. Working as a team to perfect the routines really brought the group of students together – and the students were from across the entire school community, not just the one year-group. Consequently, I have friends from the Classes of 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986.

I am officially a member of the EFHS Class of 1984, even though my age meant I should be in the Class of 1985, and I attended the school for all of 1983 and wasn't actually able to graduate with the Class of 1984. I begged my parents to be able to stay for another 6 months to graduate in June 1984, but my visa and, no doubt, the conditions and cost of the airfare, made that impossible.

Despite not graduating, I have remained friends with many of the people I knew in 1983. The introduction of social media in the early 2000s meant that I was able to reconnect in new ways with some of the people that I had lost touch with. That was an absolute joy!

It was through Facebook that I learned of the 20-year reunion for the EFHS Class of 1984.

I was very fortunate to be able to attend that event in August 2004. My husband, Rod, was extremely supportive of me going, although he chose to stay home with the children. I would have loved him to come with me and meet the people I had been talking about for the entire time we had known each other, but our children were only 10 and 12 at the time.

The 2004 trip was my first time back in the USA since I had left in January 1984 and was a wonderful time of reconnection with so many friends. Because of that trip, I rekindled friendships and, through Facebook, have been able to maintain friendships more easily than previously.

That visit also gave me the opportunity to thank "Aunty" Marge and "Uncle" Lon for welcoming me to their family and supporting me throughout 1983. Taking on the responsibility of caring for a 15 year old from across the globe must have come with some trepidation.

In 2017, Rod and I took long service leave, which included a trip to the USA, when I was finally able to introduce him to many more of my high school and church friends. Unfortunately, both Marge and Lon Howell had passed away by this time.

And, finally, we're at the point in the story where we get to this year's trip to the USA!

The EFHS Class of 1984 did not have a 40-year reunion in 2024; however every member of the class (except for me and one other guy) turns 60 in 2026, so it was decided to hold one big 60th birthday party in lieu of the reunion that didn't happen. As soon as I saw the event advertised on Facebook, I started arranging things so I could be at the event. About 40 class members were able to travel to be at the party. I reconnected with some very dear friends, and made new friends following conversations with people I didn't know so well in 1983.

Being able to spend the entire 10 days staying with Nancy-Joy was a highlight of the trip. Needless to say, we never ran out of things to talk and laugh about together. Other friends generously went out of their way to pick me up and take me home from the myriad events that took place over the weekend of 10/11 October and the ensuing week. There were more late nights than I am used to, but I was on holiday, so could sleep in.

Saying goodbye to dear friends again was hard, but I am so blessed to have them in my life and fortunate that I was able to see them in person again.

Stage Two

After a bit of a debacle with my suitcase not making it from Sydney to Melbourne with me, I made it from the airport to my granddaughter's kindergarten for their "Special Persons Day". Other than being back with Rod, the big hug Olive gave me when I walked into the kindergarten was the best thing that happened the day I returned.



Cathryn and Rod in budga budga/Halls Gap

An unplanned night back at home (due to the missing suitcase), meant an opportunity to sleep well in my own bed before driving to budga budga/Halls Gap for a 9 day camping holiday with Rod. To be able to spend all day together in beautiful surroundings after 12 days apart was another blessing of my annual leave. The weather was generally kind to us, the wildflowers were beautiful, we managed a couple of more challenging walks to places with great views over the Grampians, and enjoyed all that the area has to offer. We stayed at the same caravan park in October last year, and I remember writing an article for the *Link* about that time away, in which I said:

> I had the space and freedom to stop, to take time to breathe the air deeply, to breathe in the Spirit of the Divine and to breathe everything that would separate me from that.
>
> I was reminded of the un-nameable awesomeness of GOD in the sweeping views and the amazing geological forces that created this beautiful part of the world. And I was aware of the intimacy of GOD in the tiny flowers that were pops of colour in the bush.
>
> GOD – indescribably enormous, life-force of all that is, and yet as close to me as breathing. A blessing.

I experienced the same feelings this year. Indeed, the feeling of connectedness to God

that I experience in Nature is the main reason we returned to budga budga/Halls Gap.

Stage Three

To finish off the four weeks of annual leave, Rod and I travelled to Tasmania to spend time with my family, beginning with a night spent with my two brothers and sister-in-law. We don't get to do this very often, and it is always a fun time. Then on to spend a couple of nights with my parents, who remain in relatively good health.

I grew up in a very beautiful part of Tasmania: George Town on the banks of the Tamar River. Every time I return, I enjoy walking to the river, looking for crabs under the rocks and enjoying the beauty of the place. Nowadays, I walk there with my great-niece and nephew – and we still look for crabs under the rocks!

People have said I must be exhausted after all that I did during my annual leave; but honestly, it was all invigorating and refreshing. My bucket has been filled up, as they say, with the joy of deep friendships, loving family and being immersed in the magnificence of our Creator God in Nature. What more could I ask for?

Cathryn



Native pea



Holly Grevillea –
one of my favourite wildflowers

St John's Uniting Church Elsternwick
Christmas 2026

The Angel Project
Friday 4 December 4pm–5.30pm in the Church Hall

Annual Carols Service followed by supper
Sunday 20 December at 7.30pm in Hopetoun Gardens

Christmas Day Service at 9.30am

Craft and Chat
Mondays at 1pm–3pm

Chatty Cafe
Wednesdays 10am–12pm

All welcome



Unbearable Sorrow

April 6 2026 7am.

Who wants us, who will have us
As a guest in your house.
Who wants us, who will
Have Us A Guest . . .
A guest in Your home.

I don't have a home.
Who will want me in
A Home, Who wants Me;
Who will love Me when the
Light is Out.
Who will Tend Me, Who
Will quench My Thirst . . .
When the Lights Go Out.

I have no Family . . . to
Love me.
You annihilated that.
Who will Love Me . . . Who
Will need Me.
Has Your Empty, Your Empty

Heart Have Space.
Who will Love Me . . .
Who will need Me.
I am not of colour of
A space . . . Neither will
It matter.
I may be black or white
Or colour.
What is a skin . . . of what
Colour.

Who will love Me . . . Who will
Need Me.
I am The Human Race

Pack Me Up . . .
Distinguish My Spirit.
Give Me The Grace.
They bomb and annihilated
Us the Human.
We hear Gods call.

Deaf.
Silence.
No Earth . . . below;
Flesh Burning.
The Stench unbearable.

Who will want Me,
Who Will need Me.
The Universe . . . The Stars will Mine
Milk . . . the richness and Rape the
Minerals . . . Who will Want Me.
The Planet No Longer.

Who will want us . . .
Who will Need Us.
What a Wonderful Place
The Earth Is.

Who will Want Me . . . Who
Will Need Me . . . Who Will
Let Me Dwell in Your Heart.
Forever and Love Me For
Eternity . . . And Forever Beyond.

I am of Flesh.
Flesh of and Beyond.
Who Will Love Me, More
And Beyond.
May I be Your Guest. May I
Dwell in Your Empty Space . . .
Your Empty Space; Dwells in
It Dwells In Your Heart.

Who will want us . . .
Who Will Need Us.
Who will Want Us . . .
Who Will Want Us . . .
Who Will Need Us.
Mourn and Grief . . .
Intolerable Grief.
Who will start to open

A Heart . . . And cast that
Unbearable . . . unbearable
And distinguee a Flame
Who Will want us . . . who
Will Need Us.

Gwen

Kitchen Renovations

After many years of wishing and dreaming, the main kitchen at St John's has been partially renovated by Craig Thiele Kitchens. Gary Elliott project managed the work and Church Council is deeply grateful for his experience, expertise, eye for detail, and time.

In 2025, the old gas cooktop and large food warmer were removed for safety reasons. Since then, the Church Council approved the replacement of cupboards on the southern and eastern walls, removal of the servery opening to the rear foyer, replacement of the other two serveries, and removal/replacement of the island bench, as well as the purchase of new appliances: two ovens, a dishwasher, rangehood and cooktop. These appliances, together with the kitchen sink (literally, not figuratively!!), were purchased in June and have been stored in the vestry since then. The decision was made to keep the existing cupboards on the northern and western walls, but add new benchtops. The flat pack cabinetry and benchtops were delivered to the hall on 9 September, with building works commencing on Monday 14 September.

Demolition of the old cabinetry and island bench took only a matter of hours. Craig's colleague, Darren, built the cabinets in the hall. A plumber and electrician undertook the necessary work to install the new sinks, dishwasher and appliances, all of which were installed in the fourth week of the renovation works. Before the appliances were installed, new wall tiling and grouting was completed above the new benchtops, and painting of the walls and ceilings was done by "our" painter, Kristian.

Of course, as with all building works, what was to have been a 2–3 week job extended well beyond the initial suggested date of completion, with the final piece in the puzzle, the installation of the floor tiles, being completed on Thursday 5 November. However, the wait has been worth it. The kitchen is now fully functional, with safe, up-to-date ovens, a rangehood to remove steam and odour, a dishwasher for hygienic washing of plates and cutlery, safer, lighter roller blinds into the West Room and Hall, and much improved bench space.

The old cupboards, which were not replaced due to budget constraints, will be painted to give them a fresh look.

There are plans to invite our groups, hirers, and members of Caulfield South Community House to a celebration event, which will include a blessing of the new kitchen. The date for this is yet to be determined.

We look forward to enjoying the use of the new facilities at future church and community events.

Cathryn







Spring Concert for Peace

Our second Concert for Peace for 2026 was held on Sunday 20 September. Originally planned to be outdoors, the wind forced us into the East Room, where we were treated to an afternoon of Jazz and Blues music. Almost 50 people came along to enjoy the performances and afternoon tea which followed.

The music was provided by young musicians, Ace on saxophone and Mark on drums, together with more mature musicians in Greg, Phil, Steve and Marnie. The talent and skill of Ace and Mark were truly amazing for young men only in year 11 at high school. Ace is aiming to study music when he has completed his secondary education – from what we heard at the concert, he has a promising future ahead. Both students generously gave up their usual Sunday afternoon busking to support our peace cause. It was a joy to watch musicians, who had never played together before, bounce off each other and support one another in their performances. Their enjoyment was obvious and added to the delight of the audience.

The audience also became part of the performance, joining Greg, Phil and Steve for several songs. The simple, familiar chorus of *Stand By Me* was sung enthusiastically by everyone in attendance.

One particular delight of the afternoon was a sketch of the performers, which was drawn by one of the audience – a woman called Elena, who happens to be the mother of Sharon Liebowitz, the cello teacher who hires the East Room most Sunday afternoons. The sketch was given to Cathryn at the end of the afternoon and copy is included here.

The event was emceed by Cathryn, who shared with the wider community the congregation's deep commitment to working for peace in all its forms – community peace, world peace, the peace that comes from economic security (social justice and climate justice). She shared information from the Synod's JustAct resources for the International Day of Peace 2026

The theme for 2026 is *Invest in Peace – For Everyone, Everywhere, Every Day*. The theme honours the everyday architects of peace – people driving local action, laying the groundwork for stability and building a lasting peace from the ground up.

Remember, peace isn't just built in conference rooms or by politicians and nations – it is shaped by everyone, everywhere, every day.



By Elena

Everyone, everywhere, can do their part of peace. Take one small step for peace every day:

- Give your time to help someone else.
- Lend your voice to drive positive change.

As with all the Concerts for Peace held in the past two years, the congregation was a huge part of its success. Support, both prayerful and practical, comes from every direction: putting promotional material up in local venues, personal invitations to people to attend, coming along yourself, putting out chairs and tables (and then more chairs as more people turned up!), providing and preparing the afternoon tea, welcoming our guests, washing up, putting away furniture, vacuuming the floors . . . none of it goes unnoticed. Rather than risk leaving anyone out by naming individuals, heartfelt thanks are offered to everyone who contributed.

The Church Council decided to donate the proceeds from the this year's two Concerts for Peace to the UNHCR Australia. Over $250 was received in cash donations at the Spring concert. When put together with the donations received at the Winter Concert for Peace, over $1000 has been raised for UNHCR Australia.

I'll finish with one of the other highlights of the afternoon, the performance of a new song, *The Most Beautiful Word*, written by Greg. The lyrics of the song remind us that peace is only achievable if people work together. The audience were once again invited to join in the chorus:

If we want Peace – the most challenging word the most powerful word, the most beautiful word is "we".

Cathryn

Recently Seen

These photographs reflect recent people activities at St Johns's.
1a–**1f** November Mini-Fete activities.
2 Chatty Cafe farewells Jo.
3 Chatty Church: *Come to the Banquet*.
4 Sunday Night at St John's.
5 Friday Friends at Mandoline.
6 *Faithful Futures Project* discussion.

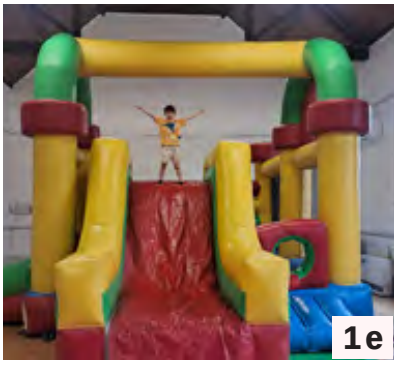


1a


1b


1c


1f


1e


1d


3


2


4


5


6

Peace Concert Review





What a Blast!

What a cry for Peace. It spoke loud. It spoke resonate, loud strong . . .

A small community . . . we all crying out as one for Peace.

It followed on from Rod's sermon in the morning worship . . . and the gusto of hymns the message . . .love one another. Makes it sound easy. And it isn't that easy.

It has to start somewhere.

Greg sang and we cried out for peace. Also he was on double bass and keyboard. Along with Steve and Phil on guitar and sax. And a couple of youngsters: Ace on sax and Mark on drums.

Imagine what the world would be like at Peace.

The ladies also worked very hard to make the day a success. Audrey, Patricia, Pauline, Devonshire tea, and Cathryn MC battling a very croaky voice.

Gwen

The Gift

Thank you God for the gift of me
Whatever I am, however I may be
I look different to others,
but I'm meant to be

So thank you God for the gift of me.
If the passage of life is a race to be run
There are those who will scramble to claim
that they've won.
But I run my race with a spirit that's free
So thank you God for the gift of me.

I might not look much, not have many skills
But I try in my way to help others with ills.
And when my race is run and a new world I see
I shall thank you God for the gift of me.

Supplied by Andrea

There once was a garden

There once was a garden
of imperfect things,
with crooked old petals
& the troubles life brings.
some grew sideways,

some reached for the sky,
some bloomed in the sunshine,
some struggled to try.
some leaned to the left.

some never grew tall,
some barely
grew at all.

the sun never searched
for the perfect few,
it just poured out the gold
on the crooked ones too.

Supplied by Andrea

The New Year

Resolutions? Just a few
See if they appeal to you!
I'll be brave, my chin held high
Life shall never make me cry.
I'll be gentle, for I know
Words can hurt you like a blow.
Every day, I'll try to find
Little ways of being kind
I shall smile at life, and see
If it won't smile back at me.

Anonymous



Christmas Fundraising

Food For Families, Uniting VicTas



Please bring donations by Sunday 12 December.

Food: Pasta, rice, noodles; flour, polenta, couscous; tinned tomatoes, pasta sauces; dried or canned beans, chickpeas and lentils; tinned tuna, salmon and ham; soups, curries and vegetables; baby food, nappies and formula; spreads, jam, Vegemite; long-life milk; tea, coffee, Milo and sugar; stir fry sauces and soy sauce; long-life coconut milk and coconut cream; breakfast cereal.

Household cleaning: Laundry powder or liquid; multipurpose cleaning products – sprays, toilet cleaner; dishwashing liquid, scrubs/steel wool; environment bags; bin liners.

Personal hygiene: deodorant; shaving cream; razors; sanitary items; shampoo, conditioner, soap; toothpaste & toothbrushes.

Uniting World – Gifts that fight poverty

See Cathy for packs of Christmas Cards or a card to represent a donation.

Packs of 8 Christmas Cards $15



Catalogues are available for you to choose an item of livestock or training in overseas countries as a donation and receive a gift card that can be given to friends or family.



Collection on Christmas Day

will go towards Uniting World Projects not the usual Act for Peace's Christmas Bowl.

The Five-Finger Prayer



The five-finger prayer is attributed to the late Pope Francis when he was Archbishop of Argentina. It is a lovely tool for teaching prayer to younger disciples and a reminder of the different focuses of prayer for older disciples.

Thumb

It is closest finger to you. Start by praying for those who are closest to you. They are the persons easiest to remember: your family.

Index finger

Pray for those who point the way – those who teach, instruct and heal you.

Tallest finger

This finger reminds us of our politicians and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.

Ring finger

This is our weakest finger. Pray for those who are in trouble or in pain.

Pinkie

Our smallest finger reminds us to pray for ourselves and our own needs.

Supplied by Alex

Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves.
Proverbs 11:17

Sermon themes

- The Law and Following Order
- Come to the Banquet!
- Conquering Difficulty
- Love your Neighbour
- Servanthood and Trust in God
- Faith Alight Lamps burning
- Where do you find love?
- Christ the Good Shepherd King

St John's Uniting Church, Elsternwick

Roster & diary dates for December 2026 and January 2027

December 2026	6 Advent 2	13 Advent 3	20 Advent 4	25 Christmas Day @ 9.30	27 Christmas 1	Diary Dates
Leader	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan***	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan**	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan**	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan**	**Patricia McKay**	**December Birthdays** **22** Rod **Events** 4 The Angel Project 4–5.30pm **13** Sunday Night at St John's @ 5.30pm **20** Carols Service in Hopetoun Gardens @ 7pm **25** Christmas Day @ 9.30am **Weekly** Craft & Chat Monday @1–3 Chatty Café Wednesday @10–12 * Holy Communion
Lectionary Readings	Is 40:1–11; Ps 85:1–2, 8–13; 2 Pt 3:8–15a; Mk 1:1–8	Is 61:1–4, 8–11; Ps 126 or Luke 1:46b–55; 1 Thes 5:16–24; Jn 1:6-8, 19–28	2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; L 1:46b-55 or Ps 89:1–4, 1926; Rom 16:25–27; Lk 1:26–38	Is 9:2–7; Ps 96; Ti 2:11–14; Lk 2:1–14, (15–20)	Is 61:10–62:3; Ps 148; Gal 4:4–7; Luke 2:22–40	
Prayer	Patricia	Cathy	Greg	Lynette	Patricia	
Greeters	Colin	Raj	Colin	Raj	Raj	
Readers	Geoff	Don	Audrey	Greg	Alex	
Screen Operator	Cathy	Greg	Cathy	Cathy	Geoff	
Steward/Offering	Andrea/Colin	Andrea/Raj	Cathy/Colin	Cathy/Raj	Andrea/Raj	
Morning Tea	Luchee/Patricia	Alex/Rhonda	Audrey/Wendy	—	Denise/Jean	
Flowers	Alex	Wendy	Audrey	Patricia	Patricia	

January 2027	3 Christmas 2	10 Epiphany 1	17 Epiphany 2	24 Epiphany 3	31 Epiphany 4	Diary Dates
Leader	**Patricia McKay**	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan***	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan**	**Patricia McKay**	**Rev Dr Lynette Dungan**	**January Birthdays** **29** Audrey **Events** **29** Friday Friends BBQ Harleston Park @ 12,15pm **Weekly** Craft & Chat Monday @1–3 Chatty Café Wednesday @10–12 * Holy Communion
Lectionary Readings	Jer 31:7–14; Ps 147: 12–20; Eph 1:3–14; John 1:(1–9), 10–18	Gn 1:1–5; Ps 29; Acts 19:1–7; Mk 1:4–11	1 Sam 3:1–10, (11–20); Ps 139:1–6, 13–18; 1 Cor 6:12–20; Jn 1:43–51	Jon 3:1–5, 10; Ps 62:5–12; 1 Cor 7:29–31; Mk 1:14–20	Deut 18:15–20; Ps 111; 1 Cor 8:1–13; Mk 1:21–28	
Prayer	Audrey	Patricia	Lynette	Audrey	Lynette	
Greeters	Raj	Raj	Colin	Raj	Colin	
Readers	Don	Audrey	Don	Alex	Patricia	
Screen Operator	Geoff	Geoff	Geoff	Geoff	Cathy	
Steward/Offering	Andrea/Raj	Andrea/Raj	Patricia/Colin	Andrea/Raj	Andrea/Colin	
Morning Tea	Jean/Alex	Luchee/Rhonda	Wendy/Audrey	Rhonda/Colin	Denise/Patricia	
Flowers	Alex	Wendy	Rhonda	Audrey	Patricia	