



Baptist Union  
of Victoria

# TOGETHER

Our stories together ♦ Quarterly magazine

Issue 6 December 2023

*Featuring*

# HOPE

Connecting Community

## LEADERSHIP

RESOURCES events PRAYER

# WELCOME

Welcome to our December issue of TOGETHER – stories from around our Victorian Baptist Union.

As this year draws to a close, I have been reflecting on many highlights from within the BUV family. This year, we welcomed new faith communities into our union, cheered on churches expanding with new congregations and campuses, rejoiced with numbers who have been baptised and celebrated with 11 new ordinands. We celebrated with many of our churches who marked significant anniversary milestones and recognised the centenaries of our Baptist schools, and the witness they have provided to so many families across our city.

This issue of TOGETHER, however, celebrates the lesser-known stories of hope that occur across our union every day - in our churches, communities of faith and agencies. It's the initiatives taken by pastors, church leaders, congregation members and agencies to introduce the hope of Jesus to their local communities.

As I familiarise myself afresh with these stories from around our BUV family, I can't help but be filled with hope myself as I see so many examples of our churches and communities of faith joining in with God's redemptive work in society. And this seems appropriate as we lead into the Advent season, the season of Hope when Jesus was born.

My prayer is that as you read these stories, you will also be inspired and filled with hope of what could be – and what God can do through you and your church. We serve a God who knows no bounds and is able to do more than we can think or imagine; a God whose love for us is so great that He sent His son Jesus into the world at Christmas to show us the way.

May you experience the hope of Jesus this Christmas and be filled with His love, joy and peace.

God bless,

Daniel



Rev Daniel Bullock

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## Got a story to share?

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We would like to thank our BUV Editorial Consultant, Naomi Kollmorgen, for assisting with collating, interviewing and writing stories.





## Face to Face After Thirteen Years

A Tamil refugee father was reunited with his son after 13 years thanks to assistance from Now and Not Yet café - a BUV social enterprise community - and a Carey Baptist Grammar School scholarship.

Nigethan (Nige) was forced to escape civil war in Sri Lanka in the middle of the night in 2010 leaving behind his wife and 3-year-old son. He fled to Malaysia where his money and documents were stolen, before managing to get to Indonesia and then Christmas Island in Australia.

He spent more than six years in detention before the High Court ruled in favour of his release, along with several other Tamil refugees.

Once in Melbourne, a partnership unfolded between Now and Not Yet and Bapcare's House of Hope programme, (a programme that provides housing and assistance for asylum seekers and refugees) which enabled Nige to move into a house leased by Now and Not Yet in Warrandyte. For the past six years, Nige, supported by the community of Now and Not Yet, has worked tirelessly towards reuniting with his family. Happily, we can report that after 13 years of being apart, Nige has finally been reunited with his son. Now and Not Yet's founder, Derek Bradshaw, said the happy reunion occurred in August after Carey Baptist

Grammar School offered Nige's son a scholarship paving the way for the student visa and long awaited reunion. "The reunion was incredibly special with many from the Tamil community joining us at the airport. The sense of joy and justice being served was so palpable and the smiles have not disappeared."

Now and Not Yet will continue to support Nige's son's education and integration into the Australian environment and culture.



*As with all of the beautiful refugees we have supported, whatever is needed to help we will do*

"As with all of the beautiful refugees we have supported, whatever is needed to help we will do... Our motivation is to stand up and fight for the rights of all humanity, not just those who were fortunate enough to be born in a particular place and time. We believe as a faith community the imperative of the gospel requires us to do all we can with all we have to support the 'least of these'. Our aim is to just give people the start they

badly need in their journey of seeking asylum.

“How do you get a job if you don’t have a fixed address and how do you get a rental if you don’t have a job? So we provide free housing, training and employment opportunities for around six months and then ongoing assistance to help achieve long term employment, stable housing and legal assistance to secure appropriate visas.”

Nige, his son and Derek are all hoping that Nige’s wife might soon be able to move to Australia too. Nige will speak about his culture, hope against adversity, and his journey to be reunited with his family, at the café’s Tamil Feasts, which begin again next year. Proceeds go towards the café’s ongoing work with asylum seekers. To find out more about Now and Not Yet’s 2024 Tamil Feasts, follow their social media

To find out about Baptcare Houses of Hope programme –

[Click here for more information](https://www.baptcare.org.au)

<https://www.baptcare.org.au>



*Our motivation is to stand up  
and fight for the rights of all humanity,  
not just those who were fortunate  
enough to be born in a particular place  
and time.*







# Digging Deep or Reaching More?

*A decision that has opened the way for new expressions of church in Far East Victoria*

“Is it more important to really drill deep in relationships with folks or to try and spread ourselves thin to visit as many people as we possibly could?”

This was the question that Michael Carlisle, Bart Stingwell and the Lakes Entrance Church asked themselves after their initial bushfire response. The path they chose is opening some wonderful opportunities to share the love of Jesus throughout the far east region of Victoria and is opening the doors for a new network of micro churches being established through region.

During the bushfire response, Michael reflects, “We noticed a lot of generosity, a lot of people doing what they could. But the thing I noticed most was people needed people – and they needed people who would offer time and who would just be there to listen... and so that just enabled us as a church to respond.”

Bart and Michael believed the most important thing was to keep building the



*...he’s got this idea of this priestly person that will look quite different, and so I think we’re kind of modelling something that’s more Jesus-like than people’s picture of what church is...*

relationships and to keep responding to the needs that presented, helping to rebuild not only livelihoods but actual lives. Something that has set the Lakes Entrance crew apart is that they didn’t just blow in while the bushfires were big news or during COVID – “we are here doing this work, week after week, turning up again and again and just building these long-term relationships. With people making comments such as “Oh, you are the guy that keeps coming back.” And so that’s one of the things we’re really proud of, is that we are building those deeper relationships.

Michael says, “It’s been quite funny because one man who we visit, has been trying to work out who the minister is, and I’ve just got work clothes like the rest of the guys, and he can’t work it out. But he’s got this idea of this priestly person that will look quite different, and so I think we’re kind of modelling something that’s more Jesus-like than people’s picture of what church is, and I think that speaks volumes. An old



farmer told me years ago, ‘Michael, shine your light before you honk your horn.’ And that’s just what we’re doing. We’re just out there engaging and praying and trusting God will give us opportunity to speak into these situations because the actions have already been credible.”

As relationships have grown, faith has naturally come into Michael and Bart’s conversation and many people have wanted to talk about their own faith. Some asked to meet regularly to read the bible and pray together.

“One day when I (Michael) was introducing Bart to someone, explaining a shift in personnel and asking if it would be ok for him to have their number she said, ‘Oh, I wonder, would they be able to have a time with me where they could maybe share a verse from the Bible and pray?’ We think there are many like this who would like the opportunity, in the right context, to rekindle their faith.”

Bart also reflects, “In general, people are receptive... Because we’ve been prepared to roll up our sleeves and help them in a time of need, they then become more receptive to anything that we are prepared to offer, for example, to talk about our faith. We don’t go out there to just intentionally drill into somebody what we believe in, but it’s a natural part of the way we live to talk about the faith that we have and about who Jesus is. And because all that hard work has been done, which has included many cups of tea and times of listening to stories, it’s like a door opener and it builds that respect. People are then prepared to be open and hear what we might have to say in those times, if it is appropriate. There have been numbers of times where people have indicated to one or other of us that we have saved their lives, and literally meant that.”



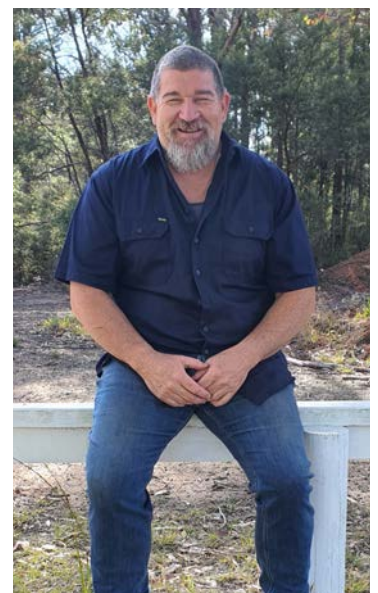
*“There have been numbers of times where people have indicated to one or other of us that we have saved their lives, and literally meant that.”*

“We don’t have to have this great strategy. We are just ordinary blokes surrounded by other ordinary people who are reaching out to people in their very ordinary situations. And we’ve got phenomenal good news – and I’ve followed Jesus for most of my life and I’m still astounded by all that God has got in the salvation that he provides for us in Jesus, and life, and life for eternity. And man, that’s great news. And it’s just sharing that in ordinary ways with people and seeing what God does.”

Prior to the Bushfires (and of course Covid-19) LEBC had been considering a church plant in nearby Orbost. “We believe that it is up to us to ‘go’ more than expect people to come 50 kms or 250 kms.

Many people living in the area have no ready access to a church fellowship due to remoteness, so Michael was considering setting up small gatherings with a simple format, such as a barbecue with conversation on spiritual matters and scripture readings.

Having attended a BUV Reimagine Mission training workshop on Micro churches, Michael realised that what he was doing had a name! ‘To be able to link in with the BUV and others to explore and expand this further is exciting.”







*We don't have to have this great strategy. We are just ordinary blokes surrounded by other ordinary people who are reaching out to people in their very ordinary situations. And we've got phenomenal good news*

Over the past two years LEBC has also been sharing the good news through a young mums' Bible study, a boat-lovers' group, Messy Church both inside and at the Lakes Entrance foreshore, and through Tiny Turtles community playgroup, where a young mum has just made a decision to follow Jesus.

It is experiencing these moments that assure Michael and Bart that there is so much potential to expand these micro church gatherings through the region over time. "I think it's up to God to take care of the numbers, how many folks are able to respond and how quickly that happens. And sometimes in our mind we might like to think, well, wouldn't it be great if there was more? But I guess we can just be faithful in responding to the people that he puts in front of us and the opportunities that he gives us"



## How can you be involved?

This ongoing work is possible through Lakes Entrance partnership with the BUV Support Hub who have provided Grants to facilitate these endeavours. In 2024 we're looking for 1000 partners to see this work continue as we partner with LEBC and others who are exploring similar expressions of Communities of Faith across Victoria. We encourage each of you to think about what it means to partner with us as new opportunities continue to emerge. For as little as \$2-5 per week we can work together. A lot of people giving a little makes a remarkable difference.

Donate online [buv.com.au/give](http://buv.com.au/give)

**1000 partners in 2024**



### 2024 and beyond

We need 1000 partners to help us reach every corner of Victoria.

Our state is growing rapidly - estimated population will be 8 million by 2033.

We want to see more churches planted, and more of God's kingdom at work in Victoria, particularly in growth areas.

**Will YOU partner with us?  
All it takes is \$2-\$5 per week**

*A lot of people giving a little makes a remarkable difference*

SCAN QR CODE TO PARTNER



*We'll keep you updated on the impact your giving is having around Victoria*

For more information, please contact  
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# Hopes and Dreams Inspired Through UK Exposure Trip

Hope was renewed and passions reignited for a group of seven Victorian Baptist pastoral leaders who accompanied the BUV's Director of Mission and Ministries, Rev Daniel Bullock, on an exposure trip to the UK in July. The purpose of the trip was to:

- take a diverse group of Pastors from Victoria out of their own context and expose them to a variety of expressions of mission, ministry, charities, and churches, with a specific emphasis on pioneering and innovation;
- stimulate conversation and innovative thinking that will serve the BUV over the next 5-10 years;

- see and experience more widespread forward thinking and experimentation around mission, given both countries are experiencing decline in mainstream church.

Diversity of age, theology and expression of church and culture was represented across the Pastors who were invited to attend the trip. All Pastors were also required to be in a current leadership position, have the capacity to contribute and influence the wider BUV over the next 10 years, able to engage in conversation respectfully when exposed to theology and missional practice that they may not agree with, have the capacity





to reflect, and have the capacity to get along with other pastors who may be very different to themselves.

The team visited twenty different expressions of church as part of the trip, from a more formal style of church at St Paul's Cathedral, right through a mixed ecology, to small community missional initiatives, each with its own individuality. Each experience provided its own opportunity to reflect on its relevance and potential for the Australian context.

Different experiences inspired each of the team members in unique ways, but the overarching theme was a reignited passion for connecting with church congregations and local communities, with a more authentic and tailored approach.

Pastor Jenn Garavito Alarcon and Pastor Mark Payne from Brunswick Baptist Church said "Each community we visited was unique and faithful to its own context. It would be unfair to say that one was better than the other. Each team leadership was faithful to its conviction to carry on what they believed God was inviting them to respond and to become."

Rev Nathan Steer from Camberwell Baptist Church reflected "We need to move beyond the church, to engage deeply, to be a people who live with compassion and kindness, as a way of rewriting ourselves into the story of our community."



*The sense of hospitality and warmth from the staff, the inclusivity of the moment, and the joy of the children reminded me that the gospel is so much about sharing space, inviting people in, and displaying love through hospitality. I realised that it's time to fling open the doors of our churches and homes and take some risks again.*

Rev Sally Agostino reflected on their time in Birmingham with Anj and Ash Barker. "The sense of hospitality and warmth from the staff, the inclusivity of the moment, and the joy of the children reminded me that the gospel is so much about sharing space, inviting people in, and displaying love through hospitality. I realised that it's time to fling open the doors of our churches and homes and take some risks again."

Rev Brad Hayman shares that as a result of the trip, he has a "a renewed passion for helping people find their God-given passions and gifts and working ways to release them into whatever it might look like and understand that what helps one person is not a one-size fits-all."

Key takeaways from Daniel Bullock's experience were that hospitality is vital, there is much to gain from investing (non-monetary) in your local community, that community wellbeing needs to be a focus, that





we must try new things and have a go - small or large, it doesn't matter, and that we need to establish leadership pipelines for church planting and existing churches. Incarnation and relationships need to be prioritised and evangelism needs explanation / definition - how are we, the church, good news in the neighborhoods? As a disciple of Jesus, how am I good news to the people in my life?

Pastoral exposure trips are a worthwhile investment in our current and future BUV church leaders. The hopes and dreams that have been reignited from getting out of the comfort zone of our own towns, state and country are priceless. Please join us in praying for great fruit to come from the trip.



*Each team leadership was faithful to its conviction to carry on what they believed God was inviting them to respond and to become.*





# Prayer, Pancakes and Packs for VCE Students

Amid that stressful time of year when students are crazily cramming and exam-ing in an effort to earn their VCE/VCAL, many Baptist churches around Victoria have put in a special effort to offer their support.

Pastors shared a wide range of ideas on how to encourage students as each church works in its own context.

Prayer was naturally the top priority, as youth leaders across the state uplifted the needs of their young people before our Almighty God during this stressful time.

At Hope Revolution Church in Officer, leader Sam Crotty organised a Pancake Parlour visit for each student along with two leaders. This gave the young people an opportunity to share about exam preparation and to receive prayer and encouragement.

Essendon Baptist Church put together a survival study pack in the September school holidays, containing a Bible verse, handwritten cards, blank study cards, giant stress ball, stationery items and a pack of the students' favourite snacks. Youth Pastor Laura Riessen said, "Students LOVE getting the survival packs and are really touched that we went to the trouble of organising them."

New Peninsula Baptist Church's similar study/survival packs included lollies, snacks, highlighters, sticky notes and boredom busters such as fidget spinners and games. They also contained a handwritten card on behalf of the church family, promising to pray for students over the exam season.

NPBC Youth and Young Adults Pastor Andrew Simpson said, "Even though the gift itself wasn't very significant or expensive, the thought that the church was thinking of them during a pretty stressful time in their life meant a great deal. I'm aware of the significance of this transition time in terms of life stage, but it's also a season where young people can disconnect from church community - this gesture is also part of a wider strategy to help young people make the transition into the next season of their life in church community too - whether it's part of the young adults community or serving on a ministry team. Knowing that they're seen, heard and understood helps us keep them connected because it's a place that cares about them."

Youth Coordinator Alex Capp, of New Community Ringwood, said students received a pack including a book to encourage each of them in their faith.

"We had a time at the end of church praying for our Year 12s, and then a time afterward where we invited parents, friends and anyone else from the wider church family to join us praying individually for the Year 12s, which the parents especially seemed to appreciate."

At Syndal Baptist Church, Youth Pastor Way Lim put together a schedule of exams so that leaders and others could pray for the young people on their specific exam days.







# The Gift of Hope through Companionship

A new ministry at Lilydale Baptist Church aims to ease the burden of loneliness for the socially isolated living in aged care.

Pastor Peter Los has a big heart for the elderly, and this has prompted him to develop the **Seniors' Hope Companionship Ministry** at Lilydale Aged Care (LAC) along with care provider Allity, and St John the Baptist Anglican Church.

The initiative follows a similar model to Kids' Hope because each trained volunteer is partnered with one resident for a one-hour visit per week, with Allity staff identifying those who could benefit most from the program.

"This idea started for me when I was regularly visiting my own parents in nursing homes, and seeing so many people who didn't have any visitors, who were feeling lonely," Peter said. "I talked to the staff, and one lady said it's a very lonely place for many people. While the staff are very aware of this, they are unable to sit and spend time with these people because they need to be working and keeping everyone fed and showered and so forth.

"So the thought grew that the church should be doing something to ease that sense of aloneness. The heart needs companionship, and that need is not being met. I believe God calls us to the marginalised – as the Bible says, "blessed are the poor in spirit". I feel some of the most marginalised in our community are in nursing homes. Except for the nurse who cares for their physical needs and who is on a time limit, they're



*We are sitting with someone, listening to them, building a friendship and allowing that friendship to become stronger and richer over time.*

not able to interact much at all socially."

So far, around 20 people from the two churches have finished the application, training and vaccination requirements and are being introduced to a custom-matched resident at LAC.

Peter said the initiative was warmly welcomed by Allity directors and staff who "cared deeply" about the residents and were "very excited and open to the idea". A team of volunteers used to visit LAC but this ended during Covid lockdowns.

While Senior's Hope is a church-run initiative, Peter warned that volunteers needed to be careful not to overstep boundaries regarding evangelism.

"Your aim can't be to come in and get notches on your belt. There's a big power imbalance and you're there to meet a need and as a friend. We are sitting with someone, listening to them, building a friendship and allowing that friendship to become stronger and richer over time. We don't want them to think they have to make some sort of commitment or I'll lose my friend. My experience from working in nursing homes is that you show love and care, and over time you allow God to do what He does."

Peter told the story of an elderly man at a Yarra Glen nursing home whom he visited for a year before asking if he would like prayer. Eventually, prayer became a natural and automatic part of their time together.

"If I forgot to pray during our visit, he would remind



me! After a while the man moved to another place and I was unable to visit him, and I apologised that I would no longer be able to pray with him. He said, 'You don't need to, Peter. I can do it myself now!'"



*If I forgot to pray during our visit, he would remind me! After a while the man moved to another place and I was unable to visit him, and I apologised that I would no longer be able to pray with him. He said, 'You don't need to, Peter. I can do it myself now!'"*

Peter and the team are developing a manual on Senior's Hope with the aim of sharing their training and knowledge with other interested churches, including

the need for ongoing volunteer support and for a respectful, gentle approach.

"It's only a model, it's nothing really new, but I'm already getting feedback which is positive, and we're on a learning curve. Talks with people in aged care have been eye opening! One thing I've learned is that our volunteers need ongoing support, so I often call them after their visits to see how things are going.

"I really believe this ministry is on God's heart. I look at the early church and one of the first things that happened was taking care of the widows at church – that's something God has really impressed on me. He really wants to reach into this need in the community – that's important to God and I want to do what is on God's heart. I have seen Him reach out to people who are drug-affected and seriously mentally ill, seen Him raise up an incredible work, and this is another area where the marginalised need the church to be there, not making a big deal, just quietly walking alongside people."



*I really believe this ministry is on God's heart.*





# Welcoming Community

A warm and open space to connect with other people in a caring environment has opened at Brunswick Baptist Church (BBC), based on the concept of the Renew Wellbeing program seen in churches across the UK.

The new Renew space aims to support wellbeing and reduce isolation by providing several communal areas where people can come to relax, share hobbies, pray or spend time in quiet reflection. BBC Associate Pastor Jenn Garavito Alarcon said the spaces provided a place where it's "ok not to be ok".

"The aim is to foster acceptance, belonging and community. What we learned in the UK is that people are sometimes suspicious and uneasy which makes it difficult for them to connect with the community, and Covid didn't help, so these spaces help people to build trust again, to engage in relationship with the community in ways that they enjoy. We are building supportive relationships and trying to improve social solidarity and connection."



*We are building supportive relationships and trying to improve social solidarity and connection."*

In the UK, Renew Wellbeing operates as a national charity that any church can work alongside. Being present, being prayerful and being in partnership are the key principles behind each Renew space. Churches are encouraged to create partnerships with council or mental health services in the nearby area to enable access to additional support if needed. The charity recommends keeping the space simple and therefore less stressful for the hosts, such as offering tea and coffee for people to help themselves, or partnering with a nearby bakery or café where people can go to get food if needed.



While the Renew space at BBC has only just started, Jenn said people had responded very positively, appreciating the opportunity to share some of the things they enjoy with others.

“One person who has come along likes art, and we asked him if he would like to bring his painting in, or perhaps to show us how to paint. Another girl loves sewing and one morning she brought in something that she had made, which was fantastic. We are still learning the dynamics in our context but we are creating those spaces and opportunities for people to share with each other their hobbies and interests.”

Jenn said some people simply appreciated a place of solitude for prayer and expressing their emotion to God, and it was important not to invade people’s space.

“We Christians want to help people, want to fix people – not with a bad intention, because we want them to feel the love and healing power of God – however it’s important to walk with people in their moment of struggle and for their struggles to be ok, not fixing them but being with them. What we observe, that is very healing and powerful, is an opportunity for people to feel safe even if they are ugly and messy. Really, all of us are ugly and messy, and we are learning to be ok with that.”

At Brunswick Renew, a light meal is provided courtesy of volunteers as “a simple way of sharing community”. The church will monitor and adapt the Renew space as the need arises.

Another Renew venture that enables people to connect and belong is BBC’s Latin Renew group, which meets twice a month at the

church and is led by Jenn. The group started in September because some friends wanted to spend time together discussing ideas around spirituality. Jenn said the group was diverse with people of many different beliefs, but everyone joined in with an attitude of “acceptance and empathy”, and people are encouraged to share thoughts and raise questions without judgement.

“Our aim is to create healthy and open interpersonal relationships. When we create this mindset from compassion, empathy and solidarity, we are able to create a more inclusive society. Everyone is responsible for that to happen. I’m creating this common place for common values, not putting too much weight on our differences, but pretty much what Paul writes about in Galatians – my prayer is that people will see the fruit of the Spirit in us as we lead this group.”



*... it’s important to walk with people in their moment of struggle and for their struggles to be ok, not fixing them but being with them.*





Service







# BUV Ordination Service – An Ordinand’s Perspective

By Mandy Stark

It was a day of being lavished upon with generous gifts of every kind...

Beautifully worded cards and floral bouquets, leadership books and Koorong gift-cards, long distances travelled bringing the gift of presence, even “ministry” earrings (the kind that don’t get you into trouble as a woman with those over-the-ears microphone headsets!!)

Gifts that are a tangible reminder of the gift of God’s people to us...

Our individual and collective communities, always supporting and affirming, as they’ve walked the years of the ordination journey with us, cheering us on, holding us up, calling us higher.

Gifts of the Ordination service itself...

The encouragement and exhortation of God’s Word, to be shepherds of God’s flock, having the same mindset as Christ Jesus, taking the very nature of a servant, and being presented with our individually chosen “Ordination Bibles”.

The affirmation and commendation of hearty handshakes and embraces, as we shared our unique stories, the telling of how our calling, character and ministry gifts have been discerned, tested and developed.

The sacredness of taking solemn vows of commitment

to the ministry of the gospel, overawed by the responsibility as well as the privilege.

The laying on of hands in prayer, feeling filled up and fueled, blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, for a lifetime of called ministry.

Gifts that also reminded me of God’s calling...

The verse that God ultimately used to confirm his invitation to pursue ordained pastoral leadership...“I am giving you the service of the priesthood (or ordained ministry) as a gift” (Numbers 18:7).

It’s truly a gift of God’s grace...

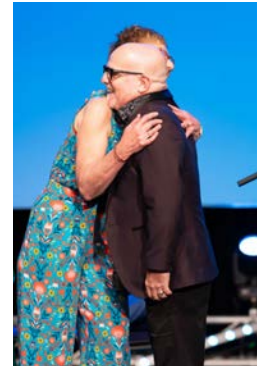
The gift of being allowed to serve God, his people, and the world, as ordained pastoral leaders in the way we do, and to do this as part of a multi-generational, multi-cultural, pastoral leadership community, friends and peers for a life-time of ministry.

And so now, having received our Ordination as a gift from God...

We pray that we might somehow be God’s gift to others, as we seek to be the pastoral leaders he has called us to be, in whatever context he might call us to in the future, always trusting that...

*“Faithful is he who calls [us],  
and he also will do it”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:24).*









# Bringing Hope to Seniors

Pastor Aaron Wardle of Wangaratta Baptist Church reflects on a recent information seminar that the church hosted for seniors.

How can we bring hope to more people? That's a question that is always front of mind for us at Wangaratta Baptist Church. So, when we heard about the Finishing Well Seminar that was run earlier in the year by the BUV, and then also got an email around the same time from our local council about a Seniors Fest running in October, it seemed like a no-brainer – let's combine the two, and bring hope to Seniors by meeting some real needs that they have for information and support.

The morning began with a presentation by Gary from Seniors Rights Victoria. Gary was an excellent presenter and was so knowledgeable about the laws surrounding changes in circumstances that occur later in life. He explained all the different aspects of medical treatment decision makers, advance care directives, enduring powers of attorney both financial and personal, the legal assistance available and so much more. Mark from Baptcare then presented a session on in-home care options and how to register. He encouraged those present to get assessed, or get their loved ones assessed and begin the process, so that people can remain in their own home for longer by accessing the help that is available.

The 15 or so in attendance then enjoyed a wonderful morning tea where many conversations and connections in community occurred, before a Q&A Session, followed by an opportunity for me to present on grief and loss. This was followed by Kat, a local funeral director, sharing about the final stages of life and the best ways to care for those you leave behind by being prepared and sharing your wishes for your funeral with those you love. She explained how funeral directors can assist in this process as well. Kat

has come from a palliative care background before joining her family's funeral home, so was a wonderfully knowledgeable presenter once again.

Everyone who attended were so thankful for the very informative and practical advice they each received, and it showed how important it is to have these difficult but essential conversations with those whom we love as our number of birthdays we have left to celebrate get fewer and fewer. There was a real sense of hope and optimism in the room, learning that there is support and care available. It was a privilege as host to share about the support network and family that a church provides, and then invite those present, that if they are looking for connection and support, to consider engaging with a local church which would certainly welcome them, connect them in relationship, and love and support them.

As far as events go, this was a simple, almost no cost gathering that met real needs, provided hope and connection, and I would certainly recommend hosting one at your church if you have the opportunity to!

*If you are interested in attending or hosting a Finishing Well Seminar, please contact our Partnership Development Pastor, [Andrew.Naylor@buv.com.au](mailto:Andrew.Naylor@buv.com.au)*





# Fuelling for Fruitful Ministry



Nourish, a day of encouragement, fellowship and connection was held on Friday 20th October, with 160 pastors gathering together at Essendon Baptist Community Church.

After being welcomed by Rev Jonathan Stark and a rousing worship segment led by an updated 'BUV' band, Rev Daniel Bullock introduced the theme of 'Fuelling for Fruitful Ministry'.

In the first session of the day, three of our BUV Pastors speakers, Mandy Stark, Fred Mugambi and Heather Dunning, delivered "TED" talks on the topic of Me and Ministry – how we can be fueled for ministry in our own lives.

After morning tea, special guests Nicky and Sila Lee, creators of The Marriage Course from Holy Trinity Brompton, addressed the topic We and Ministry - how we can be fueled for ministry in our marriages and how we can support those who are married in our congregations.

A long lunch break always provides a most appreciated time for pastors to catch up with each other.

After lunch, a panel of pastors discussed Us and Ministry - how we can help the people we work alongside so that we can together be fueled for the ministry of our church or community.

Before communion, led by Maranda Ng, attendees were encouraged to spend some time in prayer together for our union, our state, plus our brothers and sisters in war-torn countries.



Nicky and Sila Lee

The day concluded in worship to our God, as we sang together, 'King of Kings'.

Approximately 80 pastors participated in a Professional Standards Workshop following Nourish on the topic of 'Our Code for Healthy Pastoral Practice.'



Jonathan Stark, Luke Williams, Mark Edwards, Phil Weeks





# members DINNER

Members' Dinner was held on the evening of Friday 20th October at the Reggio Calabria in Parkville, with over 250 people present. After beautiful worship led by Zomi Baptist Church Victoria, our BUV Union Council Chair, Mick Turnbull opened the evening with prayer, an Acknowledgement of Country and a Bible reading from Philippians before we celebrated the new faith communities and micro churches that have been welcomed into the Baptist Union since we gathered last in May.

A highlight of the evening was a video of our eleven wonderful ordinands who were ordained on Saturday 28th October. The video was a short glimpse into each of their journeys to ordination. [The full videos can be found here.](#)

Our assembly meeting detailed the appointments and voting process for the evening after which Debbie Uy, Director of Finance and Administration, provided an overview of the 2023 Financials Forecast and detailed the recommended Stipend, Superannuation and Membership fee for 2024. Mick Turnbull facilitated the show of hands voting for finances and all resolutions were approved.

Three pastors were invited to talk with Rev Bullock about their experiences and key takeaways from the UK Study Tour in July. Daniel then presented the vision and strategic priorities for the BUV Support Hub in 2023.

Table discussion focussed around the issue of community wellbeing and time was provided for feedback from the attendees.



A time of celebration focussed on two different membership expressions within the BUV. Firstly, the centenaries of our three Baptist schools in 2023 and 2024 with a video showcasing past and present images of Carey Baptist Grammar School, Kilvington Grammar School and Strathcona Girls Grammar School. And secondly, we celebrated by way of an interview, the 50th anniversary of the Community of the Transfiguration – a protestant monastery within the BUV.

A time was provided for delegates to share stories of things happening in their churches and communities - this is always a time of great encouragement to others.

The evening closed with all ballots declared as passed and congratulations provided to the nominated appointees.

All in all, it was another wonderful day of connection and encouragement – we look forward to being together again in May 2024.







# Pioneering Christian Micro Communities

*At least 70 operate across Australia – most fairly new – and many did not know other micro churches existed when they started.*

A reimagining of ways to disciple people in small communities and individual contexts is rippling across Australia: the micro church.

This concept has gathered momentum over the past 10-20 years as a number of Christians have felt God prompting them to invite neighbours and friends to meet together in worship (up), spiritual growth (in) and reaching people who don't know Jesus (out).

Micro churches, another tool in the gamut of ways to share Christ, are typically informal, volunteer led, involve around 5-40 people, and aim to multiply into more micro churches. At least 70 operate across Australia – most fairly new – and many did not know other micro churches existed when they started.

The BUV meets regularly with a network of Victorian micro church leaders to enable them to build connections and share resources and inspiration. Recently, BUV Micro Church Consultant Andrew Hill talked to several leaders on how they're embarking on mission, as part of the Reimagine Mission podcast series.

As micro church leader Megan Stock shared, a group can centre around something as simple as hot chocolates in winter and playground gatherings in summer.

"I felt really convicted that I'd lived in the same area for 20-odd years and no longer knew my neighbors... I found myself sitting in the sunshine outside my house

looking at the park going, 'Hmm, I think I'm supposed to do something with this.'"

This prompted Megan to knock on doors along her street with a plate of cookies and an invitation to a barbecue in the park. Now she hosts monthly outreach gatherings (out), and hosts a group of 10-12 people in her home to worship (up), read scripture, take communion and grow together in how to disciple others (in).

"When you have a smaller number of people, it's much easier to connect with one another than what some of our predominant model churches look like. But that's not to say that predominant models don't have their place and aren't part of the Christian spectrum of worship, but what I felt to do was to start a micro faith community with a view to training and equipping people within that community to then start their own.



*How do we better minister to people who will never walk in the door of a predominant model church or a traditional church because they have absolutely no experience*



“How do we better minister to people who will never walk in the door of a predominant model church or a traditional church because they have absolutely no experience? And in a way, the catalyst to that thinking was actually my daughter getting married to a young man who had no church background, no understanding of what church was about, didn’t really even understand who Jesus was... And so what we’re working on is, how do we have a language and how do we talk about our faith and our experiences of Christ with somebody else?”

Megan uses the Discovery Bible Study method to help her group to encounter God through reading the Bible together because it “helps people take scripture and apply it to their lives”. The plan over the next six months is to equip some group members who might be confident to start micro churches in their own settings. Megan said this multiplying model is the key difference between a bible study and a micro church.

“(Bible studies are) quite scripture focussed, or relationship focussed which is fantastic. I think that’s a great space for people. But the micro church space having an intentional rhythm of, we meet together, we meet in our community, and we read the Bible with people, those three things being part of our DNA actually pushes us ... to being more outward focused and more purposeful in what we’re doing.



“It really is listening to the Holy Spirit, following the steps of Jesus, using some tools that are out there. It’s starting at that discipleship, that relational space, and all of us have relationships, and all of us can do that.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Matt Moran of Croydon Hills Baptist Church (CHBC) has gradually been stepping away from his youth pastor role in order to plant a micro church that’s linked to CHBC. The micro church was born out of a desire to share his love for Jesus with people who don’t know Him, who have been hurt by the church or were afraid of the church. With confirmation from CHBC, Matt sought what God wanted him to do and felt led to pray for every house in the suburb for a year.



*We walked every street and every house just really saying, “God, how do we reach this community? How can we be present?” And that was powerful...*

“We walked every street and every house just really saying, “God, how do we reach this community? How can we be present?” And that was powerful... And then patience – waiting for God to do his work, really setting a posture of readiness.”

Matt started a “blokes’ barbecue” alongside a printing business where he worked two days a week.

“There were lots of men living in their factories [or who had] broken up their family relationships and didn’t have anywhere to go. There were lots of guys that just rock up to work early, leave late and don’t have any relational space. So primarily, good news in that community was a group of blokes around a barbecue, turning a sausage, talking about life.

“We started with just three of us, and at one point we’ve had 15 or 16 guys on a Thursday lunch. It actually gets more difficult as more and more people come because it’s hard to be so relational and so intentional. But what we found over nearly two years is the depth of relationship has gotten to a point where a day doesn’t go by when I don’t speak to one of those guys. They’re setting the agenda. So the conversations about faith are prompted by what they see in my life, what they see in the life of some of the other guys that have joined me on this journey.”



The barbecues led to doing an Alpha course with some of the men and, through God’s calling and the relationships and testimonies shared, several people have come to faith.

Matt said starting a micro church involved listening for where Jesus is calling us to go and considering “what do we need to give up, to get there”.



*Plant where you are.  
Right here. You’re here. You  
know these people. Love them  
with my love.*

“My mission field was the people I see right in front of me, these people with their heads down and they’re kind of living life, but just surviving. And it was just the push of the Holy Spirit to say, ‘Plant where you are. Right here. You’re here. You know these people. Love them with my love.’

One member of the micro church who responded to God’s call has naturally started sharing the Bible and his faith with others. Another prayed for a friend four times and God healed her from a painful sickness.

Matt is excited about encouraging and equipping others at CHBC to become a “centrifugal force” – building disciples who make disciples, rather than being internally focused.



For more details on micro churches visit [microchurch.com.au](http://microchurch.com.au).

# Reimagine MISSION PODCAST



Click here to listen to  
Season 4



# Experienced in Ministry Luncheon

The annual Experience in Ministry Luncheon was held on the 23 November. About 60 retired Pastors and spouses, ex missionaries and widows gathered and were offered a wonderful lunch, good fellowship and community. Andrew Naylor began by leading the group through some favourite tunes before this year's guest speaker, Marita Munro (BUV Archivist) took the stage. Marita took us on a fun journey and showcased some treasures and mysteries from within the BUV Archives.





# Converge 2023 – Join Us As We Take Action For Myanmar



Click to watch the video or visit [vimeo.com/884237128/](https://vimeo.com/884237128/)

What an incredible privilege it was for a delegation of 40 Baptists from around Australia to meet with MPs and Senators at Parliament House in October to advocate for the people and country of Myanmar. CONVERGE is an annual event facilitated by Australian Baptist Ministries with the purpose of using our strength as a group representing 1000 churches and 350,000 Baptists around Australia, to advocate together on issues that are close to the heart of Baptists. This year, Myanmar was the focus of the campaign.

Since the military coup in 2021, the number of displaced people in Myanmar has risen from 380,000 to 1.9 million – a five-fold increase in just 3 years – and that doesn't include the thousands who have fled the country to seek refuge elsewhere. The escalating conflict and violence coupled with disaster caused by natural hazards has left families living in makeshift homes, schools and camps scattered through the jungle where they hide from daily airstrikes. (272 airstrikes from May to August 2023 - Source: Progressive Voice Myanmar [Report](#))

Within the Baptist Union of Victoria, 56 (16%) of our church congregations originate from different ethnic groups within Myanmar. These churches are both supporting their local congregation members, and their

families and communities back in Myanmar, and this year in particular the BUV has had a focus on standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters facing this ongoing hardship, through our [Stand with Myanmar](#) initiatives.

Our Victorian CONVERGE delegation comprised representatives from Myanmar from our Chin, Karen, Kachin and Zomi churches, as well as members from the BUV Support Hub, Baptist World Aid Australia and Baptist Mission Australia.



*We bring Baptist leaders from across Australia to talk with our political leaders about how to become a more just nation and it's been terrific to do that this year in league with our brothers and sisters from Myanmar*

Scott Higgins, Australian Baptist Ministries





As the Junta continues a campaign of violence and oppression against their own people, Australian Baptists urged the Federal Government to take further action focussed on 3 “asks”, namely;

- To follow the example of USA, Singapore, Canada and the UK in sanctioning the Junta’s two primary financial institutions to limit their capacity to trade and divest from companies doing business with the military
- To follow the lead of the European Parliament by formally and publicly recognising the elected shadow government (or government in exile) as the legitimate government of Myanmar
- To increase diplomatic pressure on the Government of India to cease arms sales by private Indian firms, and grant exit visas to Burmese people who have been granted refugee visas for Australia and are currently being detained in camps in Mizoram



*... as a participant of Converge2023  
I learned that we are not alone -  
there are people that love us, there  
are people that are taking their time  
to be a voice for people who don’t  
have a voice”*

Biak Nei Zing



Lobby groups were well received by the Immigration Minister, the Speaker of the House, Ministers, Members of Parliament, and Senators, with interest shown from the majority in how they could assist.

Please consider joining other Australian Baptists in this campaign and sending a letter to the Foreign Minister, Penny Wong. [Click here to be directed to Baptist World Aid Australia’s website](#) for an easy email template, a prefilled email or to order prewritten postcards for yourself or your church that can be signed and sent direct to the Foreign Minister.

Please continue to pray that our meetings have an impact on Australian Government policy and our humanitarian programmes and that peace will prevail in Myanmar.

Thanks to Australian Baptist Ministries for coordinating and to our CONVERGE representatives for joining in this collaborative event.





# Welcome to the Baptist Union of Victoria

At the recent Members' Dinner we welcomed to the Baptist Union of Victoria



Good News Ministry Church  
(New Faith Community)



Philadelphia Karenni Baptist Church  
(New Faith Community)



Rev Fred Mugambi (Pastor Transfer Kenya Assemblies of God)



Growing Faith Church (Microchurch)



# AGENCY NEWS

## Centenary School Celebrations

2023 and 2024 mark the Centenaries of all three Baptist Schools in Victoria. Click on the image below to watch the highlights video of the journey of the schools over the past 100 years.



## Baptist World Aid Better World Gifts

  
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- Helps mothers survive childbirth
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From children going to school, to chicken farms and safe drinking water, there's not much a Better World Gift can't do. Buy online now - [bwaa.co/gifts](http://bwaa.co/gifts)



# WHAT'S ON 2024 EVENTS

17 FEB	24 FEB	06 MAR	Creating Safe Spaces	24 FEB	25 FEB
16 MAR	23 APR			Church Admin Day Bendigo	Prayer Week Commencing

29 FEB	02 MAR	07 MAR	13 MAR	14 MAR	21 MAR
Let's Pray Together	Creation Walk	27 MAR	Consultation Forums (Camberwell, Bendigo, Albury, Geelong, Online)		

07 MAR	14 MAR	19-21 MAR	16-18 APR
BGN Network Day	Marriage Celebrant Training	Rural Ministry Fellowship (South West, South East)	

24 APR	Prepare-Enrich Facilitator Training	29 APR	Edge 10:10
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6-8 MAY	Multicultural Pastors' Retreat	24 MAY	Nourish	24 MAY	Members' Dinner
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FOR MORE 2024 EVENTS AND INFORMATION  
VISIT [BUV.COM.AU](http://BUV.COM.AU)



# prayer

**WEEK** 25 Feb - 2 Mar 2024



In 2024, the BUV continues to focus on providing opportunities for corporate prayer. We have designated the week commencing Feb 25 - March 2 as the BUV's Prayer Week. We encourage you and your church to join us in prayer in a variety of ways.



- Join with us in prayer for 1 of our churches each day by using our [Prayer Calendar](#) or weekly prayer points shared on social media



- Community Prayer Walks - Walk and Pray around your neighbourhood  
25 February - 2 March



- Let's Pray Online Prayer Meeting - Join us on Zoom as we pray together as a wider BUV family on Thursday 29th Feb 7-8pm



- Creation Walks - At the culmination of the Prayer Week, join others in your region to celebrate what God has done by joining together in a guided Creation Walk. These will be facilitated by churches or BUV Support Hub staff at specific locations around the state on Saturday 2 March.

See [www.buv.com.au](http://www.buv.com.au) from late Jan 2024 for more info on dates, venues and resources.



# DECEMBER 2023 PRAYER CALENDAR

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thur

Fri

Sat

Sun



**Baptist Union**  
of Victoria

Here at the Baptist Union Support Hub we believe that together, in prayer and listening to His voice, we can be the voice others need to hear through this new season. We'd love you to join us in daily prayers for our churches, leaders, communities.

4

Malvern Slavic  
Evangelical Baptist  
Church

5

Manifold Heights  
Baptist Church

6

Mara Christian Church  
of Victoria

7

Matu Immanuel Church

8

Melbourne Agape  
Baptist Church

9

Melbourne Bangjoo  
Church Inc

10

Melbourne Chin Church

11

Melbourne Chinese  
Baptist Church

12

Melbourne Immanuel  
Baptist Church

13

Melbourne Karen  
Baptist Church

14

Melbourne Karenni  
Baptist Community  
Church Inc

15

Melbourne Matu  
Baptist Church Inc

16

Melbourne Mizo  
Church

17

Melbourne Senthang  
Church Inc

18

Melbourne Siyin  
Burmese Mission  
Church

19

Melbourne Thadou  
Baptist Church

20

Melton Baptist Church

21

Mentone Baptist  
Church

22

Mildura Baptist Church

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Mill Park Baptist  
Church

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Millgrove Baptist  
Church

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Mitcham Baptist  
Church

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Moe Baptist Church

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Moonee Ponds Baptist  
Church

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Mooolbark Baptist  
Church

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Murrumbeena Baptist  
Church

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Naringal Baptist  
Church

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Narre Warren Baptist  
Church