



THE RIVER OF LIFE

Loddon Mallee Presbytery JULY 2020

COVID 19— The Good, the Bad and the Ugly!

How many times have I heard the words “unprecedented” and “once in a lifetime event” to describe the present pandemic? Many thousands of times! But what are the positive and negative spins of this pandemic.

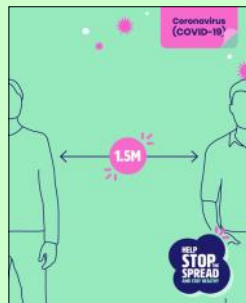
I have been going on regular walks around my neighbourhood and to my surprise I have been finding the bird life to be so prolific and interesting. There are birds of every description and colour with amazing calls, warbles and whistles. And near sunset there is a noticeable cacophony of these wonderful sounds. The intensity of the birds’ presence is so very much more alive to me than before the pandemic. I am also finding fascinating little walkways and laneways I haven’t noticed before when I have been rushing along in my car. The pace of life has become so much gentler.

I have been meeting people in my neighbourhood. Whereas I might have driven past them and given a friendly wave of my hand, now in my walks we gain eye contact and greet each other. Next time we meet we may exchange a few words, then exchange names and eventually have a fascinating conversation about all manner of unexpected things.

The pandemic has meant that we have changed the way we do things in this Presbytery, probably forever. Zoom meetings have meant that the long and tiresome drive to meetings is obviated. But meetings held by Zoom have created a new type of tiredness in some people and we will need to address this problem.

Another issue that will have to be addressed is the consensus model of voting. I suspect that meetings held by Zoom do not allow the same level of discernment that face-to-face meetings allow. For many of us the passion and body language of being face-to-face in a meeting is missing.

Meeting by Zoom has opened up an entire new world. We can have morning teas with our friends and colleagues while still wearing our slippers and pj bottoms! We can have meetings with multiple colleagues, whether social café



gatherings or more formal gatherings in the comfort of our own homes and without travelling vast distances. We can meet more frequently and many people are feeling more connected than ever before, both within the Presbytery and Synod.

I was surprised to see a sign at a café (other than the instructions about leaving your name and contact details and social distancing instructions) that read “Abuse of our Staff will not be Tolerated”. When ensconced in my seat and armed with my lunch I enquired of the proprietor of the café what prompted the unusual sign. She responded that there had been a spike in abusive behaviours towards her staff from customers who would not follow the regulations or were particularly aggressive towards her staff. These café workers (like many other workers) are providing a valuable service to their customers, particularly those customers who live alone. Yet, there is a proportion of the population who are so frustrated by the pandemic that they vent their frustrations on unsuspecting café staff and proprietors. Domestic violence has also risen since the beginning of the pandemic. Perhaps this is the underbelly of the Covid-19 virus.



*Rob Dalgleish
Presbytery Minister—Administration*



Harcourt UC

In an online Church Service I watched recently, several members spoke of how COVID 19 lockdown has affected our lives. One began by saying "I'm a plumber" and held up a toilet seat complete with a lid! He went on to say that when he finishes connecting pipes he has to do a pressure test to make sure there aren't any leaks. If there are, he has to fix them! Lockdown has been like a pressure test for us all – the pressure on relationships, families staying at home, parents trying to work online, supervising children with online school work, not being able to socialise with friends, trying to navigate the supermarkets whilst social distancing, missing visits to our grandchildren and for those who regularly attend Church, missing the fellowship between the minister and members of the congregation.

So like a plumber, we have to try to fix those 'leaks' as best we can. The easing of some restrictions has helped reduce the pressure a little, but I'm sure we've all experienced some "leaks" in our lives when the pressure was applied to "stay at home."

One of my lockdown projects has been to sort out family photos and I've even managed to put many into albums. Of course these days we tend to have them stored on our phone, computer or on a "stick." I came across a photo of a Sunday School Anniversary. These were such special occasions in the life of the Church "back in the olden days" as our kids used to say. The children would practice singing for weeks prior to the big day. Everyone would have new clothes for the occasion and all the parents came along. We held them in the Hall as the Church wasn't large enough for the crowd. The best part was being able to sit on tiered seating on the stage. Being able to sit right up to the top was a privilege for the older children. Each child was presented with a book with a certificate inside the front cover – you might have some of these books on your bookshelf. In typical country style the afternoon would finish with a delicious afternoon tea as only country cooks can provide. In later years we combined with the Church of Christ for Sunday School, Anniversaries, Picnics and quarterly Church Services.

We look forward to being able to hold Church Services at Harcourt again as soon as the restrictions on the number who can attend increases beyond the present 10 and the proposed 20 (from 15th June) to perhaps 40 or more.

A young minister was to hold a graveside service for a pauper who had no family or friends. Not knowing where the cemetery was he got lost. When he eventually arrived there was no sign of the hearse, the backhoe was beside the hole and the workmen were having lunch under a tree. The minister rushed over to the hole and began a lengthy, passionate service honouring the deceased man. As he returned to his car he overheard one of the workers say: "I've been a plumber for 20 years and in all my time putting in septic tanks I've never seen anything like that before!"

Jan Jenkin, Harcourt UC.



Still Catching Up

Swan Hill Uniting Church Afternoon tea group gathered by the Murray River during the lockdown of cafes. BYO everything, thermos, chair and warm clothes. It was so good to meet up and chat about our experiences in lockdown as well as catching up on everyone's news.



Now that cafes are able to admit guests we have switched to the at Riverside Park where we sat in the sunshine and out of the wind. Word of mouth should gather the whole crowd together again, and we are looking forward to our favourite venue reopening on Tuesdays.



L-R Jill Pattenden, Joy Jones, Marg Clark, Brenda Bishop and Lorraine Bray.

Joy Jones, Swan Hill UC.

The Cover Header Photo: A new way of meeting

Do you recognise the Zoom captions? Presbytery and many congregations are using Zoom for worship, Church Council meetings and group meetings.

Whilst it will never take the place of meeting face to face, Zoom and other online platforms have allowed us to continue. In fact, in all facets of our life, we are learning new ways of doing things. Throughout this edition of The River, many people will share their 'isolation' stories. Enjoy.

PS: *Monthly Zoom subscriptions are available to congregations free of charge for the duration of the isolation regulations. Please contact one of the Presbytery Ministers for details.*

Dunolly church turns to tech to keep connected

[Christie Harrison](#), Friday, June 5th, 2020.



Dunolly Uniting Church's Reverend Gordon Wild has been staying connected with community members like James Spencer through video chat while coronavirus restrictions have temporarily put a stop to church gatherings.

Members of Dunolly's Uniting Church have kept their community connection alive and well through technology, despite the current pandemic temporarily putting a halt to in-person services.

While restrictions have started easing, allowing a small number to congregate for services, church members have been uniting online via video chat for the past few weeks.

The church has just over 30 members and is attended by residents from as far as Carisbrook and Bealiba, and Reverend Gordon Wild said while the past months have been challenging, the community has stayed connected.

"When we first heard about the pandemic our first thought was for the safety of our community — the average age for people in Dunolly is mid 50s and this congregation's average age is a little older than that," he said.

For the past few weeks the church has also started holding Sunday services via video chat service Zoom which Rev. Wild said has been a new experience.

"The Uniting Church's region has funded the local churches that wanted to get on Zoom including Dunolly, Maryborough and Eaglehawk," he said.

*Reproduced with permission
The Maryborough District Advertiser*

Disability Royal Commission

It is devastating for a person with a disability to be abused, or suffer violence, neglect, or poor treatment. It is appalling to see it, and heartbreaking to know it's happening.

This is why a Disability Royal Commission is happening now, aiming to spotlight this and prevent it. To do that, the Commissioners need to hear stories of people's experience.

You can share your experiences of violence, neglect, or abuse. The Commission also wants to hear from families, support people, organisations and the broader community. You can share your story in person, or through the website below. All the information is there.

There is support and interpreters available to help you do this. The Presbytery Ministers are also available to support you if needed.

Phone **1800 517 199**

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story>



ALL GO AT CASTLEMAINE

The doors of the Castlemaine district Uniting churches might be shut but there has been plenty going on during the corona virus closure.

The collection of goods for St Vincent's de Paul has continued with people continuing weekly donations to a Community Pantry run by several organisations and churches that provides goods to people who are having difficulty putting food on the table.

Although congregations have been unable to meet physically for worship, the services provided by the Loddon-Mallee worship group have been emailed out each week together with a congregational newsletter. The parish office becomes a print shop where hard copies are run off for delivery to people who do not have computers. The feedback has been that these weekly resources are greatly appreciated.

ZOOM has been put to good use by the Sipwell faith community, while small congregational "cluster groups" have been keeping in contact with each other.

All in all, people are cooperating well in keeping alive the call of our Basis of Union to build each other up in faith hope and love. (See photos on Page 10.)

Jim Foley, Castlemaine UC.

A day in the life of a candidate for ministry

In February this year I began the next part of my journey as a candidate for ministry; three years of academic study and formation. Each Thursday (until lockdown) I would catch the train into Melbourne from Castlemaine and ride my bike up to the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Parkville. My first class was NT Greek and we had a short test each week of the vocab and grammar. It was a bit of a shock to have to do rote learning again after such a long time, but I enjoyed it and now at the end of first semester I can read and analyse very basic sentences.



In the afternoon, I had a tutorial for my other class Earliest Christianity. This subject looked at each of the books in the New Testament, when they might have been written, by whom and why. We also learnt how the New Testament came to be and how to better understand the worldview of each of the writers of these books. It's easy to forget that the Bible is a collection of different types of books that speak of our Christian tradition. It's a bit like putting a sci-fi book, an essay, poetry, a novel and a letter together. By seeing the individual gifts of these as well as how they interact, we get a more accurate picture of the whole.

With COVID-19 everything moved online. For the last two months I have had quite a regular rhythm of reading, watching lectures and participating in zoom conversations. I have really enjoyed this time at home with my family with all of us studying or teaching, with time for a regular walk with my husband Joel and coffee breaks and lunches together.

This year I have also been studying Spiritual Direction. Normally we would meet for two day intensives five times a year. Instead we have met weekly by zoom. In Spiritual Direction I am learning how to listen deeply to another and for the movements of the Holy Spirit in their life – what gives the person energy and makes them come alive. This has not been easy via zoom but we have managed!

In addition to academic study all candidates participate in 'formation'. This is a time for all the candidates in first second and third year to come together to learn about the various aspects of ministry. There are 17 candidates at the moment from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, age, from Victoria as well as Tasmania and WA. So we are a diverse group, but richer because of it .

Normally we would have gone on excursions to various places of worship or a funeral parlour or to see ministry in action, but with COVID-19 this has been restricted and we have met via zoom for a reading and discussion. I have

Scam Alert

On June 20th, the Prime Minister addressed the nation regarding sustained, targeted, and widespread cyber-attacks across the country by a sophisticated "state-based" actor. It is a timely reminder to us all to beware of scammers.

It is important to note that whilst the largest percentage of scammers will make contact via email, phone messages and calls are high on the list as well.

Protect yourself from phishing scams

- Do not click on links or attachments from senders that you do not recognize. Be especially wary of .zip or other compressed or executable file types
- Do not provide sensitive personal information (like usernames and passwords) over email
- Watch for email senders that use suspicious or misleading domain names
- Beware of requests for details or money
- Be wary of unusual payment requests
- Choose passwords carefully

Spotting a scam

- Typos and grammatical errors
- Poor image quality
- Sense of urgency
- Suspicious links

Stay secure and safe online. The current time of isolation when you may be spending more time on-line, has highlighted that you must be wary at all times of scams.

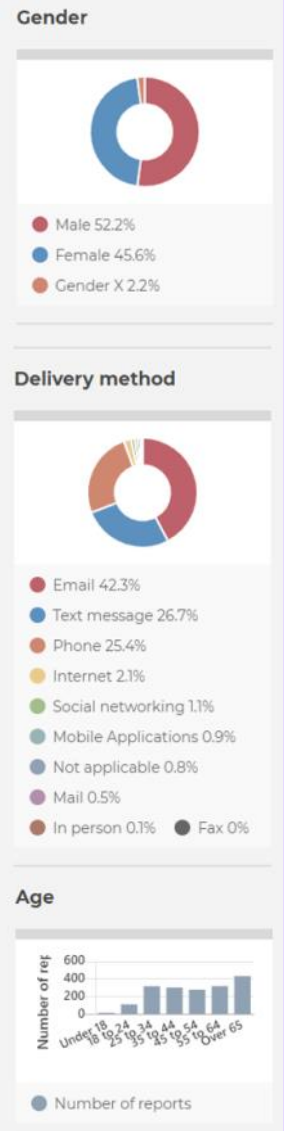
For more information about phishing attacks and online security, check out this website: <https://www.scamwatch.gov.au/types-of-scams/attempt-to-gain-your-personal-information/phishing>.

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found this to be quite a rich time and I've been challenged to consider new images of God and how I understand the world and my role in it. All the change is a bit unsettling, but I have learnt this is also a sign of spiritual growth.

I am very grateful for the presbytery's ongoing support and prayers and also for the book allowance , which has been particularly fabulous when I haven't been able to access the library. Deep felt thanks from me to you all!

Cath James



Counting Sheep



On Wednesday 24 June the Presbytery hosted a Q and A about Covid and Congregations.

It was wonderful that so many joined in with our Q and A Zoom – approximately 19 congregations and 37 people. Whilst we sometimes see Zoom as a mixed blessing, in this case it has helped us increase our sense of community in our Presbytery. It has also helped us learn more about how to help each other and how to get together and talk through complicated issues without distances getting in our way.

General points made:

- **Info updates:** The Synod website has the latest Covid information with weekly updates and communion advice. <https://victas.uca.org.au/all-you-need-to-know-answers-to-your-frequently-asked-questions/>
- **Adhering to the rules** at this time matters, not so much because of fines, but because it would be devastating if a dear member of your congregation became seriously ill or died as a result of not taking these seriously.
- **Encourage people to join the Loddon Mallee Presbytery Facebook** where there are regular updates for our Presbytery.

Points about returning to worship face to face, allowed now under certain conditions:

- When inviting people to worship or events, remind people not to come if they feel unwell at all.
- Max numbers are 20 in addition to those required to run the service. Display a sign that says so.
- Note that a church building can accommodate two groups of 20 IF the building is set up with permanent divisions. There must be an assurance that there will be no contact at all between the two groups.
- Remember that attendees names, dates and contact needs to be recorded.
- Some congregations are inviting people individually to worship, or asking people to phone and register to attend, rather than having to turn people away. (Note that Police in every locality are checking numbers at public events, including funerals etc)
- Suggestion that those without internet who can't access online worship should be invited first to face to face worship.
- Some congregations are having small face to face worship with others participating by Zoom on the big screen. Contact Gordon Wild for help with this.
- Allow 4 sq metres between people in worship and retain 1.5 metres space generally. To calculate what your space can hold, this is the space where the congregation sits. You can include the front area of the church if some people are happy to sit on the Elders

chairs at the front.

- Family units or those from the same household can sit together but are counted individually (e.g. a couple is counted as two people not one)
- Provide sanitiser, hands free stations if possible.
- Attenders are to sign in and record to be kept for 28 days, in case an infection is identified.)

Vulnerability awareness and over 70's

A lot of conversation has been about vulnerability as people over 70. However the definition also includes those who are unwell, people recovering from surgery etc. Congregations who send a message need to be aware that to send an invitation to return to worship except for people over 70 is discriminatory, hurtful and can increase the sense for some of aloneness and isolation. Some feel its better then, to wait till it's safe for everyone to return.

Meetings and Church Groups are recommencing in some places, but strict adherence to numbers and hygiene must continue.

Cleaning

- Note the cleaning requirements on the Synod website including the checklist to keep records. Note these records could need to be produced as evidence of cleaning.
- If to host higher numbers for worship there are two services planned, there needs to be an hour between to allow for cleaning and to avoid contact between the services.
- This may include carpet cleaning – to check.

Tenants and casual users of Church buildings

- Can begin to use the property from Monday 29 June, maintaining regulations of numbers etc.
- The congregation is still responsible for the cleaning (either to do it or check it has been done).
- Rent relief is available. Apply to Synod via Rob.

Exercise classes

- Can recommence but are limited to 20 indoors (regardless of age) but at least one person must be over 19.
- There must be capacity to maintain the 4sq mtr space between individuals for classes, and maintain 1.5m space at all times. Also hygiene regulations.

Safe offerings

- Options – place bowls on tables, ask people to save up their envelopes, encourage and publicise how to make offerings by direct debit (or can be paid in at bank or Post Office, and can be organised locally). Contact Rob Dalgleish if help is needed to set up direct debit.
- Count cash wearing gloves
- Tapping debit cards: some congregations are using a tithe app. (e.g) <<https://get.tithe.ly/>>, <<https://www.easytithe.com/>> or <<https://www.givelify.com/>>

Rob Dalgleish - to advise on online options and charges and ask Synod if they would help with charges to help congregations avoid cash contact (as they have with Zoom).

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Thank you Bill

On Sunday the 21st of June, the Barham, Wakool and Moulamein congregations came together for the final service of Pastor Bill Pohahau and his wife Lisi. This day saw the conclusion of a three-year appointment with the Barham Wakool Parish. The Service was held at the Moulamein Church where Siotame Paletu'a, Presbytery Representative (accompanied by his wife Elizabeth), officiated over the "Release" part of the service.

A fitting and moving tribute was given by Ian Polkinghorne, the Parish Chairperson, speaking of Bill's strong and enduring faith, a faith that he exhibited throughout all his time in the Parish, despite at times his own personal circumstances.

Father Neale, the Anglican Priest and Tracey Timms were also part of the service, very capably providing the morning's music. A highlight of this was their rendition of the Blessing, which they sang, bringing a tear to our eyes. It was a heartfelt tribute to such a loyal and faithful servant of our Lord.

A luncheon concluded the day.

Blessings Pastor Bill and Lisi for whatever plans the Lord may have for your future and thank- you.

Lynne McKindlay, Secretary Barham Congregation



Photos: Top: Bill and Lisi.

Bottom: L to R: Ian Polkinghorne, Jamie McKindlay and Rev Siotame Paletu'a enjoy the fellowship following the service.

THE MALLEE RIVERS MINISTRY CLUSTER

The congregations of Swan Hill, Kerang/Murrabit, Cohuna, Pyramid Hill and Moulamein form the new Mallee Rivers Cluster which will be served by three ministry positions. These will be full-time Pastoral Ministry and Mission Development roles and a part-time (0.4) Intergenerational Ministry.

This exciting and innovative concept was developed over a period of several months of extensive consultation with the congregations, which have embraced the possibilities of having a team of ministers who will work across the region, supporting and encouraging them pastorally and in their missional and inter-generational activities. Each of the full-time ministers will also be the person that particular congregations relate to. A Cluster Council, which will include the Presbytery Ministers, will have oversight of the finances and preaching plan.

The challenge for us now is to identify the people who have the gifts and passion to serve in these three placements. We ask you to pray for discernment and direction for the Placements Committee and the local Joint Nominating Committee at this very important time.

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Morning teas

- The go-ahead not yet received for face to face morning teas after worship or food generally.
- Some congregations are hosting a morning tea or coffee time via Zoom on Sunday morning or other times. This can be a gathering or a pastoral time.
- Some congregations are dividing into small Sunday gatherings either for worship or morning tea. (5 visitors max).

**Contact Rose Broadstock or Gordon Wild if congregations need help to teach as many members as possible to use Zoom. Note that Zoom will be used for some education courses this year.*

Singing

Whilst there are no rules against this, advice is that we shouldn't sing yet because droplets spread 6 times as far as conversation. This is difficult, particularly in some cultures, but recorded music and hymns can be wonderful to listen to.

Op shops

Uniting Op Shops have guidelines that could be helpful. People with vulnerabilities including those 70+ are not to participate. Be mindful of the risks of receiving from donations, handling cash and the complexities of thorough cleaning. It's also difficult to control how people from the community might behave, e.g. not

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Welcome Jeremy and Claire

In late 2019, my wife Claire and I embarked on an adventure, moving to the Mallee to take up ministry roles in the Central Mallee Cooperative Parish and the Uniting Church Parish of Tyrrell, a ministry comprised of two parishes with eight centres, across a distance of 170 kilometres.

While we had discerned over the period of a few years that God was calling us to a country move, this move to the Mallee has meant a significant change for our lives and ministry, as both Claire and I were born and raised in Melbourne and have always lived around Victoria's metropolis.

Before coming to the Mallee, my previous appointments were as priest in charge of St Philip's Anglican Parish, Mount Waverley and as the Anglican Chaplain at Monash University's Clayton Campus. For a number of years, Claire managed St Vincent de Paul op shops as well as assisting me in parish ministry.

I am an Anglican priest and Claire is an Anglican deacon, so coming to a joint Anglican and Uniting Church ministry brought with it a range of changes for both us and the parishes. The northern section of the two parishes, the Central Mallee Cooperative parish, has a well established joint ministry which reaches back to the early 1990s, and the southern section, the Parish of Tyrrell, is a Uniting Church parish which has welcomed Anglicans and other Christians into the fold in recent decades as churches were closed, so each congregation has its own history and character.

The joint arrangements between the Anglican and Uniting Churches in the Mallee makes us mindful of the links across denominational lines in both our formation and our ministry in the parishes. Claire and I both studied theology alongside Uniting Church and Jesuit (Catholic) students at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, and the Uniting Church has played a significant part in our faith and ministry formation at several points in our lives.

During the early 1980s, my dad was a youth minister with the Uniting Church, and I remember attending several youth camps that he led which were always exciting for me as a small child. It was on one of these camps that I sensed the first glimmers of a call to ministry. While I grew up in a Christian home immersed in church life, Claire came to faith as a teenager, and during a several month stay with her mother in Queensland in 2004, Claire joined the Uniting Church congregation in Mundubbera and has kept in touch through their newsletter since then.

Although there are many areas of common ground, the



Uniting Church does have a different culture and set of practices compared to the Anglican Church including in both liturgy and governance, and with these come some challenges that need to be navigated. However, I would encourage both denominations to not be afraid of disagreement, and to also be mindful of their foundations in apostolic and historical Christianity.

Like many Christians, Claire and I are passionate about Christian unity, and feel the pain of our divided church and the scandal of its disunity. We share the desire expressed in the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*, "Seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will for the Church."

Finally, people often ask how we have found our move away from the city, particularly with the recent disruptions and shut-down due to COVID-19. While at

times we miss our friends and family, who we now keep in touch with over the phone and social media, we can honestly say we do not miss living in Melbourne. We are thankful for the warm welcome we received from our parishes, and we have enjoyed making our home in our Mallee communities.

Rev Jeremy Morgan

From page 6

maintaining distances which will create risks for others.

Communion

- Kerrie Needham (Robinvale) has info about safe communion receptacles.
- In some congregations, bread is served by one person with gloves to each person with tongs.
- Some congregations are inviting people to bring their own bread and wine, which will be blessed as part of the liturgy.

Funerals

- Build in cost for deep cleaning. Older members shouldn't be doing it.
- There are ways to represent those who can't be present because of numbers, e.g. Helium Balloons with names, photos etc
- There is text available for memorial services (See Gordon Wild) which will be important to hold when possible as an opportunity for accrued grief to be able to be released.

The Zoom finished with a prayer led by our Chairperson Judy Causon 'Prayer in a time of Coronavirus.'

Thank you to all who attended. Please know that the Presbytery Ministers are keen to support you in this time. Any questions you have we will be glad to respond to.

Live Streaming at Heathcote UC

I have been following the series Bronwyn and John have been presenting on YouTube through the site Heathcote Community Church. I read about this site in the last River of Life magazine. I have been thoroughly enjoying the messages and the sing-a-long, as words are presented on screen. Sometimes I sit and watch a couple of sessions at a time. I told my sister Heather to join the site too, as travelling for services is not easy for her. I think this is a great way to reach out to people who for one reason or another cannot attend church and so I would like to see this format continue past Coronavirus as a form of outreach into the community.

June Gleeson

I am loving the on line service on Sundays. It is great seeing so many church family members join in. The only thing I am concerned about, is there are members that are unable to join us and are missing out.

The daily reflections that John and Bron put together are so inspiring. I love the fact they focus on a particular subject and then provide a reflection and song in relation to what the subject is. Each day the reflection is only a few minutes but food for thought to think about afterwards and think about how I as a Christian can grow in my faith to be the best person and Christian our father wants me to be.

Wendy

The services on line have been great. Bron and John, and David, make you feel like you're in the Church at the time. However, it will be nice to get back to normal so we can all mix again. But as I've said, the services on line have been great.

Fiona

We at Heathcote Uniting Church have had the privilege of having weekly worship services online through Facebook. One of our Ministers the Rev. Bronwyn Jones and her husband John Robertson have used their technology skills to provide a worship service including singing every week since we have been in lockdown due to the Corona virus. We can see and hear them and can send through messages and prayer requests to each other.

Our normal Church membership is up to about 15 members but our online worship services have attracted over 30 people from other churches and members of our local community. It has been great to see us reaching out to a wider audience who may not have walked through the doors of the church but feel comfortable watching a service online either live or later, as each are recorded then put on our Facebook page for people to watch. While I miss seeing and being with my church family, it has been great to have the opportunity to have worship provided every week and be fed with God's word and sing some great songs.

I thank all involved in this for their effort to ensure we have been able to continue with weekly worship.

Tanya Dunbar

It has been said many times over the last few months that one vital cluster that is not allowed, is any Church gatherings.

We have been very fortunate to have an IT person like



John who has been able to set up our Sunday Worship and Daily Reflections. I feel blessed being able to connect every day with Bronwyn and Sunday Worship with Bronwyn and David, also Communion.

I do however miss the personal contact with everyone and the "chatter".

God will always find a way.

Blessings - Laraine

We are very thankful, at Heathcote District, for the commitment and dedication of Bron and John through their offering of Online Worship Services and Daily Reflections. We know how valuable it has been to many, including ourselves. We have greatly appreciated their ministry which keeps us connected with one another as a Christian Fellowship throughout this COVID-19 period. Although we have been unable to physically meet together, we have felt connected in a different way. What a blessing!

Jean and David

How fortunate, blessed and encouraged we have been as a church to have had weekly services and daily reflections and teaching during this very new and challenging time. Whilst we have been physically separated, it has allowed us to remain connected, to be fed spiritually and it has been an amazing outreach to so many. On a personal level, as a shift worker and a member of an outlying church, it has also given me a new flexibility and I get to "go" to church each week, even though it might not be Sunday morning!

Sue Hayes

Presbytery Contacts

Presbytery Office

90 Mollison Street, Bendigo.

P: 5442 1341; E: lmucapresbytery@gmail.com

The Office is closed indefinitely, but emails and phone messages are checked regularly

Presbytery Minister Administration

Rob Dalgleish

M: 0429 449 347; E: r.dalgleish@bigpond.com

Presbytery Minister Southern Region .5

Rev. Rose Broadstock

(NB: Rose is working part time till December)

M: 0416 805 022; E: Rose.Broadstock@lm.victas.uca.org.au

Presbytery Minister Southern Region .5 Supply

Rev. Gordon Wild

M: 0413 455 856; E: gordon.wild@lm.victas.uca.org.au

Presbytery Minister Northern Region

Rev. Siotame Paletu'a

M: 0408 996 255; E: spaletua@westnet.com.au

The Worship Collective

It was late March 2020 in the Loddon Mallee. A flurry of change swept over us all, stiffer than any autumn rainstorm. Worship services were shutting down; churches were locking up.

Yet midst these winds of change, new ideas and fresh ways were being uncovered in our Presbytery.

What if people had all they needed to worship in their own homes? A church in every household? What if we found life and faith in the voices and prayers of our own people; God's word and work alive among us now in Loddon Mallee?

Our Presbytery Ministers Rose Broadstock and Siotame Paletu'a gathered local leaders from across our presbytery to make this happen. So began the **Worship Collective**.

The Worship Collective is an open set of lay and ordained leaders from across our presbytery. So far it has included Tanya Dunbar, Libby Gregory, Anne Honey, Kerrie Needham, Cynthia Page, Siotame Paletu'a, and Gordon Wild.

Their foundation and inspiration are in a handful of key ideas:

1. We are still one church with many congregations who can bring gifts of worship and care to one another.
2. We already have excellent local leaders with the theological and pastoral skills to carry us through these days.
3. We can learn to use technology to connect us to each other when physical distance is necessary. The struggles to learn are met with the joys of achievement.
4. We will strive to ensure that everyone can still access meaningful worship resources, regardless of their access to technology or location.
5. We wanted to further build up the presbytery's presence on the internet, and so we created loddonmallee.unitingnow.net.

Congregations across our presbytery have taken up the Worship Collective's work in many different ways. Dozens of copies of services are printed and distributed by hand to people who are offline. Services are read in homes and used in small gatherings for worship.

It has been deeply enlivening for the members of the collective. As Tanya Dunbar said,

For me personally, it has been great working with these members to provide a worship service each week. I have learnt new ideas and have been able to offer some ideas as well.

I can't wait for Wednesday morning to come around to meet with my fellow collective members to discuss

the week's worship resources, over coffee, fun, fellowship and usually a laugh or two. Each brings their unique gifting's to help assist one another in a most helpful and respectful way. What I have really appreciated is being encouraged, heard and made to feel at home amongst a group I would call friends.

Anne Honey calls this group a 'wonderful gift'

With coffee in hand, chocolate by my side, warm Ugg boots on my feet and dressed in a respectable t-shirt or jumper, I have gathered with up to six others

every Wednesday morning on Zoom. Surrounded by my Bible, hymn and song books, computer, iPad, and any other resources I might need we have, together, finalized a weekly worship service for our Presbytery web site.

Yes, we have been physically isolated, yet we have found joy and delight in taking turns to prepare a worship service before gathering together to

offer any insights or helpful suggestions we might have. It has been such a respectful space. It has been a space of generosity and encouragement. It has been a space in which all voices have had an opportunity to be heard and all contributions honoured.

The result has been a rich variety of worship services for people to engage in – for each of us has been able to bring our own style and focus to the "table".

Kerrie Needham names the gift of the Worship Collective in these terms:

Other presbyteries and congregations have come up with different solutions to the sudden brick wall which dropped onto the road in our faith journey. Our congregations have been able to choose what suits their journey best and we rejoice at the abundance which is available.

One of the greatest blessings (and yes, we can find them in times of crisis) is that people who even a short couple of months ago may have been called 'shut ins' have access to church; to worship again. We have been able to experience the grief of not being able to attend church and we now look in hope for a time when we can all return to church with plans in place to enable the service to reach the people who are totally able to join us – just not physically.

The Worship Collective's work continues as long as it is needed through this time. You can see what unfolds at loddonmallee.unitingnow.net

*Deep peace to you all in this time.
Gordon Wild, for the Worship Collective.*



Photo Album



Top Left: Rev Jim Foley makes a groceries delivery to Chris, a helper at Community Pantry based at the Castlemaine Church of Christ complex.

Top Right: Thirla Frankling in the Castlemaine parish office runs "hard copies" of the presbytery worship resources off for delivery .

Above Left: The Sipwell community gathers with the help of ZOOM.

Above Right: Margot Foley makes a Castlemaine letterbox delivery of the presbytery service.

Left: George Milford of Harcourt views the on-line version of the presbytery service.

*A website for the children
-loveoutloudoz.com -*

Copy the address, go to the home page, sign up for an account— it's free!
From there, look at the videos and activities. It's quick, easy and awesome.

Have fun!

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Please write to us by email or snail-mail and send us your contributions (lmucapresbytery@gmail.com).
This is a chance for you to share your news and happenings to unite our mission and connection.
Thank you to those who have taken up this offer. *Editorial Team—Rose and Joyce.*

For the Children ...

Colour in this Pentecost picture with felt pens or coloured pencils. When you've finished, ask Mum and Dad for some cooking oil. Carefully coat your picture with a little oil (don't use too much, or it won't dry). Once it has dried, it will be a beautiful stained glass window. (Send us a photo of your work for the next edition of 'The River'.)

