

NEWSBEAT

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PORT
PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY



June 2025

Art and Harmony

*Celebrating the rich talents
of the Port Phillip East!*

MISSION MATTERS WITH
KARINA KREMINSKI

CLOSING SERVICE AT
ARMADALE

FAITH INTERVIEWS
WITH ROBERT JOHNSON

EASTER SUNDAY AT
THE KOREAN CHURCH
OF MELBOURNE

SMALL ISLANDS,
BIG HOPE

ART EXHIBITIONS
GALORE!



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Hansel and Gretel

6th, 7th, 8th June 2025

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Pantomime

By Andrew O'Leary



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FROM YOUR COMMS OFFICER

What a brilliant Presbytery we are.

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend not one - but two! exhibitions of local art held by Uniting Churches. It just so happened that I had the opportunity to catch the final days of the NGV exhibition of Yayoi Kusama's brilliant works, too.

Kusama's eminently Instagrammable work revels in her trademark polkadots in vivid, disorienting colours and recurring patterns. We'd be forgiven for assuming she's a product of this generation's hyper-saturated, social-media driven art scene, but Yayoi actually belongs to the Pop Art movement of the 1960's.

Now in her nineties, she continues to produce art prolifically, commuting daily to her studio from the psychiatric hospital in Tokyo where she lives full-time. She has struggled all her life with debilitating depression, and uses art to confront the darkness.

The polkadots strewn throughout her work stem from a childhood hallucination, and have been with her for all eight decades of her working life as an artist. The overwhelming, drenching repetition has come to represent her own sense of smallness against the massiveness of the universe: a concept she calls "self-obliteration".

I think we each handle that existential shudder in our own way. As I walked through our Presbytery's exhibitions, I saw remarkable expressions by our own local artists that contemplated the ideas that moved them most deeply. From Nell Potter's moving meditations on fusion, sameness, and inequality to Lyn McBain's heartfelt tribute to Uniting Place at Hampton Park, and Jasmine Pole's butterfly mural at Chelsea - we are awash with artists of deep talent who generously share their extraordinary gifts with their communities.

It strikes me that church is *just* the place for art. Art doesn't shy away from the big questions, and it isn't pacified by easy answers. Art provokes, struggles, yearns and searches unceasingly. Art is *outré* - it's counter-cultural, unapologetically counter-conventional, strange, deep, and often inconvenient. It's a lot like faith, when we're honest. And like faith, it takes real guts and bravery to persevere with art.

Long may our artists keep delighting us, moving us and unsettling us. And long may their work bless the spaces we go to to be challenged!

Naomi Cardwell

COMMUNICATIONS, PORT PHILLIP EAST PRESBYTERY.

HYMNS ON CREATION & THE ENVIRONMENT

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Bruce Macrae, organist Colin Prohasky and
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AT 2.30PM**

Stonnington Community Church
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Or for a Zoom link, email:

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VICTAS UNITING CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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The Anxious Generation

The sent ones

Rev Dr Karina Kreminski's "Mission Matters" workshop issued a surprising challenge to the congregations of Port Phillip East.

By Naomi Cardwell | Photography Supplied

Rev Dr Karina Kreminski's highly-anticipated visit to Port Phillip East gave the congregations of the Presbytery the chance to get down to the nuts and bolts of modern mission.

With 25 congregations represented at the event at Glen Waverly Uniting Church, the morning offered the opportunity to exchange stories, lessons, and reflections ready to set our intentions for mission moving forward. The session was a welcome chance to calibrate our approach, and to celebrate the incredible diversity of our vibrant region of Melbourne.

When many of us think about "mission" our minds jump straight to programs: to busy rosters, bustling kitchens, outreach nights and sausage sizzles, all bolted on to already-packed church calendars. Mission, in this mode, becomes a daunting series of tasks to organise, schedule and announce.

Karina embarked upon her own ministry with this idea of mission, moving to Surry Hills in NSW with plans to plant a church and do the usual things.

She discovered that another church was the last thing this community wanted: what it desperately needed was connection. "We're discovering more and more that people don't get it (Christianity) at all" Karina explained, observing that Christianity is becoming an idea that sits at the margins of the Australian cultural milieu. "We live in a post-Christendom era," she said, a truth which lies at the heart of the question of mission in a 2025 context.

The painful gap left in our society, though, isn't the absence of the surface symptoms of Christianity – churches, programs and the like, which are all still around – it's us, the Christians ourselves, out there in the real world. "We are redeemed, called, and forgiven so that we can go out and be a blessing to our world," Karina said. "The world is supposed to look at us and understand the Good News".

Perhaps the biggest modern impediment to mission, then, is how invisible Christians become when we're tucked away in our churches.

Rev Dr Karina Kreminski speaking at the workshop

"We are redeemed, called, and forgiven so that we can go out and be a blessing to the world"

“Some people have issues even walking into the church,” Karina observed, and so she decided to go outside. She began by re-tooling her approach to embrace the “pre-evangelical” – seeking out spaces that belonged first to the neighbourhood, not to its Christians. Getting outside the church and discussing spiritual matters with people on their own turf – in neighbourhood centres, spirituality groups, and finally, in her own home – Karina began to realise that secular Australia is in fact a deeply spiritual place.

Beyond church buildings, life is filled with “secular liturgies”, she observed – rituals and routines around which communities are already gathering, and practicing faith. She described a memorial which sprang up following the death of a local resident, and of the catharsis and meaning that nurturing and gathering in that place has brought to the residents.

Listening humbly and learning from the locals opened up space for authentic conversation about spiritual matters to flourish. Karina discovered the Winter Solstice held particular significance in her area, and so she leaned into it. “Now, we hold a gathering in our home around June,” she said, and over mulled wine and soup, she and her husband offer a cosy safe space for conversation about the seasons of life and the rhythms of creation.

Karina’s provocation comes straight from the Bible itself: recalling the Great Commission, she encourages a “go” approach. “Our community isn’t as interested any more in coming to us,” she said. And while some might hear in this the death knell for church as we know it, Karina is energised. “We are a people of death and resurrection,” she said. “I love the way the Basis of Union (calls us) a “Pilgrim People”. This period in the church’s history “gives us an exciting opportunity to re-orient ourselves outward toward the community.”

She encouraged us to ask first, ‘what is God’s mission?’ – and to find creative ways to scope the answer to this question out in our own neighbourhoods. “Prayerscaping” was one “micro-practice” Karina recommended – bringing your faith along with you on walks, “praying with your eyes open, and discerning the neighbourhood. Asking God where there’s hope? Emptiness? Growth?”. These intentional forays led to organic conversations with locals who may never have come along to Church on a Sunday.

From local elders to neighbourhood larrakins, from sports clubs and shopfronts to heated council meetings, Karina has discovered opportunity everywhere to live out the identity laid out for us by Christ in John 20:21, which reminds us: ‘As my Father has sent me, so I

send you.’

“We are the ‘sent’ ones,” Karina said. “I try to see myself as someone sent into my community.... to participate in how God is already loving the people there, and to really respect the ground that we’re walking on.”

While mission, for many congregations, will always represent busy and important activities and bursting calendars, Karina’s workshop gave us the space to set aside for a moment the machinery of day-to-day church life. She wasn’t proposing that we add another initiative. She suggested, instead, that we go outside for a walk.



Follow the QR code to get your copy of Karina's book "Urban Spirituality: Embodying God's Mission in the neighbourhood".



Food and Harmony at Mount Eliza!

This term at the Village Church, Mt Eliza, our Village Youth have been exploring different cultural traditions and holidays in connection with Harmony Day.

Young people can often struggle to feel at ease entering a space that feels much older than themselves, and whilst we can boast about inter-generational time, if young people aren't in attendance, it becomes a moot point for them.

This is why for our dinner, we had the families, congregation and surrounding communities enter our space and meet the young people where they were at and join in with their festivities.

The support from the Village Church exceeded our expectations. Originally, we were planning to host the dinner in our youth room, however, with ever increasing attendance numbers, it was obvious prior to the night that we needed a larger space. Our community also brought generous contributions, which required an additional table to accommodate the abundant provisions, which was a heart-warming gesture of support for our youth and our celebratory dinner.

Our Potluck dinner activities included community artwork, thumbprints in the shape of a dove, to represent harmony being a collective process, and the reading of "I'm Australian Too" by Mem Fox. There were enough young people to have everyone read a page and pass it along to include everyone from our Youth program on a Friday night.

***We hope to encourage
and foster community
amongst everyone!***

- Find out more at <https://www.harmony.gov.au/about>





Endings and beginnings at Armadale

On Sunday, 4th May, the congregation of Armadale Uniting Church and its friends gathered for a final service to farewell the 144-year-old Kooyong Road building.

Armadale Uniting Church is a place built for Autumn, with its smart red brick and hedges outside, and the lovely stained-glass windows warming the light inside. I've had the pleasure of getting to know this lively congregation over the last six months, and while their numbers are few, the people here are the best sort — kind, curious, clever, and always concerned with their community. The conversation at Armadale is always top-tier, and the atmosphere is lively, warm, and welcoming.

For thirteen months, Rev. Barbara Allen has served as supply minister for this special group, supporting the

congregation as they tackled difficult decisions.

No better heart could have journeyed with the close-knit community than hers. "What a gorgeous, vibrant, witty group of pilgrims this is," Barbara said in her sermon on the special 4th May service.. "I've been so

blessed to have been with you for the last twelve to thirteen months." Change is hard, she said, but faith never promised to stay still: it's an "incredible journey" — one we take with Jesus at our side.

During her sermon, Barbara packed a suitcase for the congregation's journey ahead. Into it went a lamp, to remind them to be light in the world; a cross, as a call to carry one another's burdens; a heart, to spread love wherever they go; a compass, to be guided by faith; and a butterfly, "because



The church from Kooyong Road. Source: OHTA

now is the time to come out of our cocoon."

The decision to close was one the congregation reached together, after much soul-searching. "We're ageing, our numbers are slowly declining and our finances are such that we can't guarantee adequate financial support (for a minister)", they wrote in a heartfelt reflection last November. Rather than struggling on, the Church Council turned their minds to

Council turned their minds to how they could use the long legacy of Armadale Uniting Church to extend even longer-lasting blessings to their community and the causes weighing on their consciences.

They made the remarkably brave decision to close the bricks-and-mortar church and offer it up for sale, in order to spread their support and blessings as widely as possible.

“We do not know how many seeds have been planted from this place,” Presbytery Chair David Higham said, explaining that the sale of the building would allow the former congregation of Armadale to work with Synod and Presbytery to direct funding into new ministries and faith communities. Like dandelion seeds, these blessings from Armadale are being sent out by its people, to take root elsewhere and grow strong.

Throughout the service, members of the congregation took turns offering readings, prayers, and words of worship. Janet Atkinson, Bill Rush, Keith Ferguson, David Fallick, April Blackwell, Ian Thomas, Hugh Luxford, Ann Chin, Karen Brown, Cheryl Mason, and Chris Kunaratnam each stepped forward.

David Higham and Rev. Jay Robinson, our Presbytery Team Leader, chimed in with their own reflections too and took a final communion with this special congregation. “I wish I could attach a tag to every single one of you,” Barbara said, holding up her Paddington Bear teddy, “that said Please Take Care of This Bear.”

Music filled the building, as it always has. Dapper in his waistcoat and sporting an excellent moustache, Rowan Kidd has been a much-loved staple on the

Armadale organ since 2013. With its enormous pipes and lush orchestral sound, this famous organ deserves to be played by someone as talented and



Rev Barbara Allen and Presbytery Chair David Higham, as the congregation light their candles

serious about his craft. Rowan gave it everything on Sunday, opening and closing the service with a prelude and postlude that induced goosebumps. We sang All People that on Earth Do Dwell and God Gives us a Future - and with so many friends and guests present, the organ and the congregation's voices together were incredible.

One of the most moving parts of the service came at the end, when each person lit a small candle from the Christ Candle at the front of the church. Although the main flame was extinguished, more than fifty little flames still brightened the Church in the hands of friends, locals, well-wishers, and the



Presbytery Team Leader Rev Jay Robinson

Continued overleaf

core group of people who have called Armadale home for so long. Each person who had been touched by this place was symbolically sent out into the world with a share of its light to pass along to others.

Afterward, we enjoyed a magnificent afternoon tea and spent some final time with the building. I chatted with one friend of the church who'd met his wife here — she a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding, he a groomsman — and later married her here too. Another couple came to honour their parents, long-time members of the congregation. There were so many stories with this place at their centre, and so many deep laughs to be had, too.

This was a closing service. But to me, by the end, it felt far more like

an opening — an opening-wide of the church doors, and a sending-out of its people to do God's work. Because the truth is, Armadale Uniting Church is an extraordinary concentration of wonderful personalities and brilliant examples of Christian faith. Wherever each of them goes next, they will bless the communities they join. The world is better when people like these are set loose in it.

And we in the Uniting Church — who have worshipped in tents and fields, in borrowed halls, in cafes and in living rooms — we know this: that churches were never really buildings. Churches are congregations, called to be brave and go out into the world, arms wide open.



The congregation, with candles lit

Inspiring, Renewing... Connecting!

**Ennis Macleod reflects on the
Uniting Theological College's
("Inspiring" workshop**

I love hearing stories of other congregations trying new ways of being church, reaching new people, and being Jesus. That's what was happening on Saturday 5th April, at the "Inspiring" workshop at UTC (Uniting Theological College). "Celebrating stories of New and Renewing," celebrating the "something profound and very special" the Christian community has to offer.

So, we got to hear about connections made with the community around Brown Hill Renewal, and the Café of Dangerous Ideas. About ways of refreshing our worship with 2nd generation Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) members, with dog lovers, with multi-generational worship and with those seeking a more holistic experience of worship. About online discipleship, discipleship within Common Ground and other Fresh Expressions communities, and using BLLESM to establish spiritual rhythms in communities.

But I went primarily to hear how the Connecting Leaders project begun in 2022 by MLDC (the Mission Leadership and Discipleship Committee) has morphed as Synod has taken up



the challenge and opportunities it presented. Hans Tilstra shared a on with MLDC for building communities from the Church using technology, seeing it as a new way to fast track connections between leaders in the Presbytery. Some of us will remember filling in a spreadsheet at Noble Park about our interests, passions and skills. This was the beta version of Connecting Leaders. The Inspiring workshop saw Hans, and Dianne Hewatt introduce Mark 2.

It was called "An Experiment in Engineering Serendipity," and 35 responded to the call to complete a much simpler questionnaire about interests and passions. The data was analysed and attendees were grouped to have lunch with the people who had indicated similarities. So we already knew something of what we had in common with those we sat down to lunch with. Hans and Diane were gratified by the response: participants used their phones to

return the questionnaires, the app analysed the information, and voila: six points of similarity for six lunch tables! I look forward to being able to use the process when different congregations come together to investigate options for shared ministry and mission.

The workshop was an exciting opportunity to encourage each other in the Gospel, grow connections, refresh and renew, share lessons, and to hear about what grants the Synod has available to expand their mission. Following on from Karina Kreminski's insights from the weekend before.

Port Phillip East Presbytery has opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in new and renewing ways with our communities. Let's celebrate. If you're interested in being part of the continuing development of the framework, Hans would love to hear from you. jjd.tilstra@gmail.com



The art of Welcome at Murrumbeena

By Naomi Cardwell

On 11th April, the Meeting Place at Murrumbeena Uniting Church debuted its newly-renovated McDonald Hall with the launch of its inaugural Community Art Exhibition.

Even the church's delightful olive trees were dressed up for the occasion, sporting colourful crochet jumpers around their trunks. It was exciting to follow the light and buzzing conversation into the jewel-toned building, where we were treated to a fabulous array of food and tasteful live music to enjoy with the fantastic conversation as we checked out the art.

The McDonald Hall has been sympathetically updated to become a vibrant space for showcasing art at exhibitions like this while retaining its flexibility. The team have painted the brick walls in warm, inviting cream, with perfectly-matched acoustic panels softening our footfalls on the gorgeous polished original floorboards. It's a

pleasure to be in this space, which manages to be airy and intimate all at once.

There was plenty of room to meander and take in the artwork, which was produced in a variety of media which included paintings, sculptures and installations. The art is the work of members, friends, and friends of friends of The Meeting Place, and serves to pull the diverse threads of this thriving community together in a safe, cosy evening.

Nell Potter, Community Engagement Offer at the Meeting Place, has long been a practicing artist and I am immediately drawn to her painting *Life Divides - two realities* (2008), a reflection on global gender disparity and under-5 mortality rates. A woven, almost pixelated checkerboard effect simultaneously unites and divides two babies who lie facing one another in repose. I love art that leaves you wondering, and all night long I can't make up my mind whether the little ones are being woven together

or torn apart by the insistent, overwhelming order of the marching squares.

Further along, Kristen Tinkler's Salon (2025) is an explosion of "yarn-bombing", which turns a relatable still life of domestic objects - side table, the bones of a lamp, and her own grandmother's Brentwood chair - into an explosion of cosy, slightly crazy colour. It's so fun to see an ordinary scene lit up with Kristen's fabulous humour and warmth, and I wish I could live a day inside her world.

We were treated to an installation by multidisciplinary artist Rachel Mackay, too, who salvaged stacks of discarded Uniting in Worship books and gave them a new lease on life by arranging them spines-inward to form the shape of a cross. Rachel's restoration of the discarded books into a place of honour and value reminds me that art sees old things in new ways, meaning our precious artists possess the magic to *transform* things.

"I'm a little voice, but I have a lot to say," Rachel told us in her speech, and enthused about the welcome she has received over time to exhibit her own works and those of her students at The Meeting Place. "What we do here connects us all together," she said, "and the congregation's willingness to share (this space) is the key to ignition" – not only for meaningful connections between The Meeting Place and its community, but for the artists who need that community to help them thrive.

"This is exactly the reason why I decided to run for

council," Counsellor Kimberly Young declared in her talk. "There's so much community and love in Glen Eira, and it's so important that our artists have somewhere they feel safe and at home.

Rev Andreana Reale spoke too, welcoming all comers to the Meeting Place to check out what's going on there on Sundays, too. "We are a spiritual community," she reminded guests at the exhibition, "and we gather on Sundays in the sanctuary around the most profound stories of love". A special exhibition in the sanctuary titled Across the Globe offered the opportunity to explore the church, discovering global representations of the Cross that lead safely through the space. This offers a special, very gentle welcome for curious people who don't often interact with the church to be in the space, to walk around it freely, and to come and go as they please.

"Welcome" is an art of its own, and it's one The Meeting Place excels at. Visitors were drawn from thoughtful corner to comfy spot all night long, compelled to keep exploring the welcoming building and chat with fascinating artists and art fans. I know that this special evening is the first of many art exhibitions, and a continuation of the creativity and welcome at The Meeting Place.

Featured artwork, L-R: Kristen Tinkler, 'Mosaic Trio' and 'Salon'; Paul Fergadiotis, 'The Twelve Flowers in the Circle of Life'.

First page: Rachel Mackay, 'Re-faced Books'.





Sharing the journey

By Rev Dr Robert Johnson

Photos supplied

Sitting in the pews, Sunday by Sunday, are people with amazing stories about their faith journeys.

They probably think their journeys are quite ordinary, but when we listen to them, we find they are quite extraordinary. The trouble is, we rarely hear these faith journeys in our services.

About six months ago, I began to wonder what it might be like to hear one person's faith journey each Sunday. Since then, at every service I lead, I share an interview with a member of that congregation about their walk of faith.

I use six questions to draw out their stories, which have been included overleaf.

The stories have been diverse and encouraging, and the response has

been overwhelming. People have loved to hear these interviews, and in turn, have been inspired to think about their own journeys, and perhaps to try new ventures in faith. Let me tell you about just a few of those stories (with permission from those interviewed).

Karen described growing up in a family that didn't go to church. A friend invited her to an adventure camp run by the Uniting Church, and it was there she found her Christian faith. She told of feeling a call to be a medical missionary, so she trained both as a doctor and as a missionary, and headed to Bangladesh.

As her faith matured, and she moved away the somewhat fundamentalist Christianity she'd initially embraced. She realised that her call was not so much to convert people, but simply to serve those



Robert Johnson interviews Karen at Mt Martha Uniting Church

most in need through her medical skills. She served in a desert area in Afghanistan under the Taliban, and in Africa, in Kenya and South Sudan. In Kenya she realised how vital it is to have a loving and supportive faith community, as hers supported her through a personal tragedy

Today, she lives out her faith in her family, teaching at university, chairing the Mount

Martha congregation and in music and worship leadership. It is the Christian community and worship that feed her faith and keep it growing.

At High Street Frankston Uniting Church, Matthew shared about growing up in Korea in a strongly Christian family. His decision to migrate to Australia brought many challenges in learning English, understanding a new culture, and sometimes experiencing racial discrimination along the way.

It also brought a strong and growing faith of his own. One of the things which helped that was his determination to join an English-speaking church, rather than a Korean church, in Australia. He came to High Street Frankston, felt welcomed and valued, and began to develop a faith of his own. His faith matured as he experienced the death of a loved uncle for whom he had

prayed hard. That led him to a lot of thinking about prayer and faith, and he says, I still don't have all the answers.

Matthew has worked and studied hard in the field of IT, earned a Ph.D. in that field and worked in USA for three years, where he was part of a Korean church with a strong emphasis on Bible Study and that grew his knowledge of the faith. He uses those IT skills to support the technical areas of ministry at High Street Frankston.

One of the most moving interviews was when we listened to Janet at Mt Martha. Janet grew up with a mother of strong faith and in a lively and active congregation. She has been a very active person in her family, her church life and in the community and loved bushwalking. About three years ago that was challenged with a diagnosis of motor neurone disease. (MND is a condition that causes weakness in the muscles, leading eventually to paralysis).

Janet shared how her faith has helped her cope with both the diagnosis and the consequent weakening of her muscles, limiting what she can do. She has stayed committed to keep

Six Faith Interview Questions:

- 1. What started you in your journey in faith?**
- 2. What is the biggest help to keep you growing in faith?**
- 3. Can you tell us about a time your faith has been really tested?**
- 4. Is your faith different today than when you were young?**
- 5. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your journey?**
- 6. What can we pray for you in your journey in faith?**

making a difference, working within the limitations that MND puts on her. Later I preached about being "blessed to be a blessing", Janet and her husband Peter talked about it and told me that they had decided that although MND could hardly be called a blessing, the experiences and interactions and intentional relationships as a result of the new challenges has been a blessing to them, deepening their faith and continuing to enable them to be a blessing to others, now in new ways.

We are not people of perfect faith, but people on a journey. Sharing our stories helps to encourage us all to keep following Jesus, each in our own way, and through good times and tough.



Robert interviews Matthew at High Street Uniting Church



Murals and *Renewals*: Easter at Uniting by the Bay

By Rev Sung Hyun Joo Photos supplied

This Easter, Uniting by the Bay in Chelsea unveiled a vibrant new mural, a collaborative creation which brought together faith, art, and community.

Led by 19-year-old mural artist Jasmine Pole, known on social media as @j_lynnette_art, the mural was painted with the help of the congregation's Sunday school kids during a joyful creative afternoon — featuring pizza!

The mural, now brightening the church's walls, depicts the lifecycle of a butterfly beautifully: from caterpillar, to cocoon, to two stunning monarch butterflies, one

in full flight. Set against a background of soft grasses inspired by the local wetlands, the artwork reflects both the natural beauty of the area, and the deeper message of Easter. "The butterfly's transformation reflects the new beginnings of Easter," Jasmine said. "It represents new life, change, and hope."

This mural is the latest in an ongoing series of artworks commissioned by Uniting by the Bay. The tradition began three years ago with the church's first Easter mural—a project that saw a young Jasmine collaborate with local artist and Sunday school teacher Elizabeth Alexandrou.



Uniting By the Bay's own artist in residence, Jasmine Pole. Source: Facebook.

That early project marked Jasmine's first foray into public art at just 16 years old. Since then, the church has continued to celebrate key moments of the liturgical calendar and community significance with murals, including a striking Pentecost piece designed by Elizabeth Alexandrou with the Sunday School, as well as a heartfelt

appreciation mural honouring the church's beloved Op Shop painted by Jasmine.

These murals are part of a broader community engagement initiative, through which Uniting by the Bay uses the universal language of art to connect with the wider community.

Before the mural series began, the church participated in the local Yarn Art Trail, and it is now expanding its creative efforts even further—actively working on plans to host local art shows and offer more opportunities for residents and artists to come together in shared expression and connection.

The influence of this congregation is shown as clear as day through Jasmine's story. Having grown up in the church, Jasmine has launched her own mural business, building on the foundation of encouragement, creativity, and community she experienced at Uniting by the Bay. It's a beautiful testament to the lasting, positive impact a church can have on young lives.



Jasmine Poolie, who goes by @j_lynnette_art on social media, working on the mural

The congregation of Uniting by the Bay and their beautiful new Easter mural by Jasmine Pole



All together at KCM!

Easter Sunday at the Korean Church of Melbourne was filled with music, fun and family

By Naomi Cardwell



Arriving at the Korean Church of Melbourne on Easter Sunday, I found myself swept up immediately into a hive of activity buzzing within the lovely old red brick building.

Taken by the hand by a new friend, I was led through halls heaving with happy church members calling out greetings, Sunday School rooms readied for many classes of little ones, a commercial kitchen in full swing, and, in the main hall, a full house taking their seats ready for the service to begin. Swept up into a whole room full of hugs and laughter, I managed to find a seat in the hall just in time. As this wonderful congregation patiently navigate the complexities of

council permits and planning, the main sanctuary is temporarily closed, with services held instead in the church hall. The space is only just big enough for this thriving congregation, but it's airy, light and welcoming, and very cleverly put together to get the very most out of the period in the church's history.

Later, I'd learn the congregation have also cleverly added an overflow area upstairs, which was packed this Sunday too. I was here for the later service - an entire other service had run earlier, with as many people again! These thriving numbers are not a special Easter Sunday situation - it's every Sunday at KCM, where

generations have grown up running through these halls, safe and nurtured in their community.

The service began with hymns, sung in both English and Korean. We all know the words. With the English lyrics projected alongside the Korean, I couldn't decide whether it was more fun to sing along with the excellent music or to pause and just listen to the lyrics of old favourites like How Great is our God and Because he Lives rendered in syllables that were new to me.

As a special Easter treat, we were treated to an incredible performance by the church's robed choir and its musicians who played stringed instruments and piano.

From modern favourites like *Because He Lives*, to beautiful classical pieces like Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*, the arrangements were clever and creative, and the music absolutely soared. There is so much talent at KCM, so generously poured into making this community a special, beautiful place to be.

Our Presbytery Team Leader, Rev Jay Robinson, led a stirring sermon titled "Believing the Unbelievable". In it, she reflected on the corrupted Roman state that greenlit the crucifixion of Christ, and the ultimate failure of Empire to impose its will on the radical Son of God. Then context of the crucifixion was "not a system of justice," Jay said, "but a broken system of power that trod on the weak and powerless": a callous state that routinely executed those who got in its way. The

shocking paradigm shift Christ's resurrection brought about was a permanent breaking of the power of a vicious state over the lives and deaths of its people. The courage it takes, then, to be Easter People, is the courage to stand up for the right thing, and to believe when hope seems impossibly out of reach.

"Such belief does not dwell in the space between our ears," Jay said. "Belief in the resurrection changes our very existence: right here and right now". As Easter People, she said, we don't have to settle for the world the way it is: we are uniquely endowed with the hope to dream, to challenge, to tell the incredible story of Easter, and to step into the possibilities God opens up to us.

Rev Han Song, KCM's lead pastor, led the baptism of two precious babies into the congregation, and the

confirmation of six youth as well. As the church members stood to pledge leadership and teaching in Christ to the two little ones and the six youth, it felt like a special privilege to be among this large extended family for such an occasion. All the more so later, when I learned that many of this congregation had, themselves, grown up in this very Sunday school and were now raising the next generation of little ones in the very same rooms.

KCM is exactly the kind of church one can grow up in - no matter how young or old you happen to be. With choirs, bible studies, music groups, volunteering, cooking, a great youth and children's program, and so much more going on, this thriving and tight-knit community is one that nurtures its people.

As I left at the end of the service, a gentleman stopped me to ask whether I'd enjoyed my morning here. I answered enthusiastically - "I loved every minute! And I feel like I belong here now." He gave me a huge smile: "In that case, we'll be seeing you next week!". And I truly can't wait to return!



The KCM Youth Group singing

Boundless creativity at Hampton Park!

There's always something wonderful going on at Hampton Park Uniting Church, and its Art, Culture and Diversity Exhibition was another triumph. Featuring works by local artists, congregation members, and the friends they've made along the way, the event was a beautifully curated celebration of the concentration of talent, passion and personality at the aptly named Uniting Place.

Pianist Justin Davison kept the atmosphere lively, playing a mix of

classics and covers with zest! It was a joy to wander and take in the works – and even better, to meet the artists themselves as we mingled over a cuppa and yummy snacks.

Many of these creatives had stories to express through their art. Organiser Lyn McBain's beautiful series on the Cross inflected the symbol through shifting colours and contexts, culminating in a piece that greeted visitors from its place opposite the doorway to the sanctuary

expressing her love for Uniting Place and the deep meaning it's come to have in her life. Fellow organiser Heather Sheppard's delightful paintings were sold out almost immediately. Her focus this year was on the small friends we sometimes overlook in our gardens, like bees, ladybugs, and birds, which were such an absolute delight.

Emerging artist and friend of Uniting Place, Mark Lucas, contributed a striking piece titled Welcome, in which a pale hand opens toward the

viewer from an obscured background, seeming to beckon or to reach.

Uniting Place in Hampton Park has a way of lodging in your heart. With something new to discover around every corner, you'll find it filled every day with friendly faces and creative souls, all committed to uniting its people's natural spring of artistic talent with their deep hearts for their community. I can't wait to see what's on next!



Heather Sheppard's bee



Lyn McBain's Cross



Mark Lucas' hand of welcome



Patricia Johnson's Birdbath



Jacqui Gurr



Oliver Freeman

Casey-Cardinia: Packed to the Rafters!

By Naomi Cardwell

What do you get when six congregations come together under one roof? An enormous party that feels like a family reunion!

On Sunday March 30th, the churches of the Casey-Cardinia region gathered to celebrate the signing of the Casey-Cardinia Covenant and to rejoice. As Presbytery Chair David Higham held up the newly minted document, it felt to this outsider like a whole new beginning.

But really, that's only half the story. The members of Hampton Park, Endeavour Hills, Narre Warren North, St Andrew's Berwick, Pakenham, and Cranbourne are clearly already family to one another. There were shouts of laughter, greetings fired across the room from all sides, and delighted hugs erupting everywhere I looked in the packed space.

Hampton Park Uniting Church's flexible space easily absorbed the extra numbers, with partition walls between the church and multipurpose area flung wide open, and rows upon rows of extra seating brought out as people kept arriving. It's always a sign of a great service when extra chairs are continually called for!

Every single one of these congregations has a unique and cracking personality, and this great extended family is clearly very dear to one another. As their collaboration advances into this new covenant, it feels as though this united body is Port Phillip East's gift to the growing region of Casey-Cardinia. Guest speaker Karina Kreminski delivered a message reiterating her paradigm-shifting perspective on mission, which was so apt for this region, whose missional spirit is unmistakable.

They are setting out collectively to do what they already do so well individually: to live out their missional spirit in harmony.

Small islands, Big Hope!

Cornish College's forum for Sustainable Change

By Dennis Freeman Photo Supplied

More than 150 educators, business owners and sustainability advocates gathered last month for **Small Islands, Big Hope**, a forum proudly supported by **Design Futures at Cornish College**.

The event featured hands-on workshops and discussions about emerging green technologies, future-focused solutions, and the power of collective action with participants exploring sustainability from different perspectives – natural, urban, personal, and cultural.

Cornish College Principal Nicola Forrest opened the forum with a powerful message: “There is energy in collective hope; there is energy in collective wisdom – but hope alone isn’t enough – you’ve got to act.” Her words reflected the forum’s key message that small, intentional actions can inspire significant change.

Keynote speaker Brendan Condon, founder of Australian Ecosystems, echoed that urgency. Driven by a teenage realisation about global deforestation, Brendan has spent over two decades leading ecological restoration projects. “We need to lean into the regenerative capacity of the natural world,” he said, advocating for simple, nature-led solutions.

The forum’s hands-on workshops offered real-world applications, from drones in conservation and recycled art to wicking beds and a discovery walk around Cornish College’s 100 acres of natural parkland.

One thing clear was clear from the success of the Sustainability Forum – there’s a growing number of committed and passionate people wanting to make a difference today, for a more sustainable tomorrow.



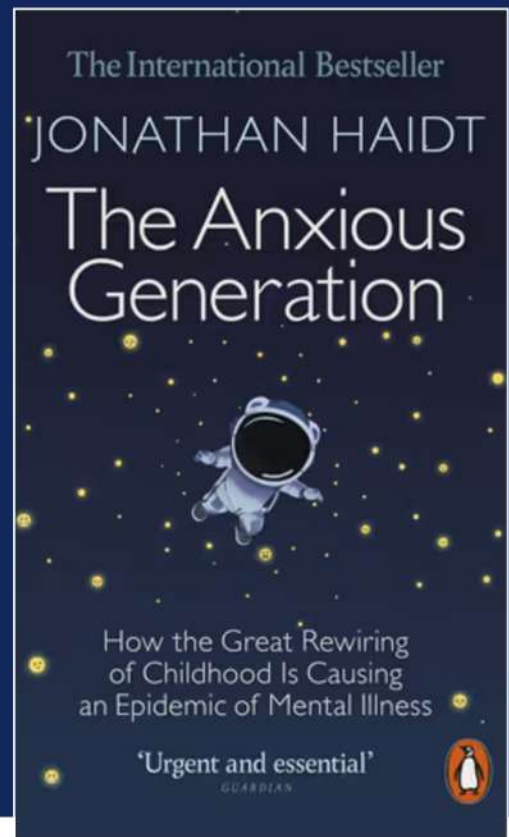
L-R: The forum breaks for morning tea, and Principal Nicola Forrest delivers the opening message.

Book review:

The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness **by Jonathan Haidt.**

Penguin, 2024.

Review by Dr Vivienne Mountain



New York University's Jonathan Haidt presents contemporary research and discussion relating to the adolescent mental health crisis.

Haidt observes that something alarming is happening. After more than a decade of stable or improving levels of mental health, he recognises a sharp increase of anxiety and depression across the anglophone world between 2010-2020, including alarming increases in reported depression, emergency room visits for self-harm, and accelerating suicide rates.

From the introduction of the telephone in 1925, to TV, computers, and finally the internet, there has been a sharp rise in the adoption of communication technology. However, the rise in mental illness for young people is interaction to prepare for adult responsibility. Early puberty is a

only evident in the period following 2010. Haidt identifies this as the new era where the social lives of adolescents moved to the smart phone with internet connection, social media, and online video games.

It is the contention of this book that adolescents have exchanged a 'play-based childhood' for a 'screen-based childhood'.

Play has historically been a dominant need for growing adolescents. Children's basic needs are the expected sort: food, protection, safety. However, play is a special additional need to develop problem solving and the formation of children's social identities. The brain of the young child is malleable and creative, needing stimulus and social time of rapid brain development, second only to the first two years

of life. Traditionally, play is central for this stage of growth: the child's learning and engagement is cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual as they take tentative steps into wider society. Their world is expanding, their skills are developing, and various life paths are being explored.

Neuroscience, psychology, biology and the social science all recognise play as a primal activity common to all mammals. For humans, it starts as pre-conscious and pre-verbal. Play is seemingly purposeless, voluntary, all-consuming and fun. Through play the child explores, experiments, overcomes fear and establishes harmony with people and their world. They develop a growing awareness of the self as a relational creature.

Haidt contrasts the ‘real world’ of play as we know it, to the ‘virtual world’ of screens that are influencing Gen Z. The “real world” is embodied: the body is part of the communication, which occurs in “real time”, with one on one, or one on several interactions at once. Interaction takes place in a context of a moral community with encouragement for relationship repair to rifts as they happen.

In contrast, the ‘Virtual world’ disembodies connections, relying largely on language. Contact is asynchronous, using text-based posts. Many communications are impersonal, often one-way, and frequently many complex interactions are happening at once. Virtual communities tend to be short-lived, with the ability to join – and just as easily, abandon – relationships with a click.

So, in contrast to the rough-and-tumble experience of real-life play, Haidt sees an avalanche of ideas and images from the internet assaulting the screen-based adolescent. The child passively accepts rapidly changing, often disturbing information, far beyond the comprehension of the maturing brain. For girls online, Haidt observes identity in body image and social acceptance becoming distorted and inflated. For boys, as well as anxiety over body image, the escapism of internet gaming and pornography can become dominant. Haidt suggests that our progress from simple flip phones to

smartphones with high-speed internet access and social media apps has produced four measurable outcomes. Social deprivation results from time spent using electronic devices overtaking real connection with others. Sleep deprivation is the outcome of children being drawn into constant world-wide internet activity. Attention fragmentation compromises formal education, teaching and learning. And finally, addiction is a recognised mental health outcome for some, stemming from constant social media posting and internet gaming.

The final section of the book is entitled ‘Collective Action for a Healthier Childhood’. Acknowledging a problem is one thing. But the battle for change is another. However, we have positive examples of regulations that ensure safety for children and adults alike: wearing a helmet when riding a bike, automotive safety regulations, and the legal age restriction for drinking alcohol.

Governments have begun formulating laws for protection of children online. In June 2020 the UK enacted the ‘Age Appropriate Design Code’ for Technology companies. The US has deemed the age of ‘internet adulthood’ has to be 13, The educational system has recourse to exclude smartphones from school, and to

consider devoting more time to play, free time, and nature exposure to re-assert play-based childhoods.

The solution also lies with family and community, in games, camping, arts and crafts, music, sport and activities that can be enjoyed together, as well as spiritual practices of prayer, ritual, quiet and meditation. All these facilitate a sense connection to a wider world and self-transcendence.

In my opinion, this is a book for our times. Educational and government institutions are beginning to grapple with these issues. However, it is a battle. Research is calling for restriction, BUT the financially and politically powerful E Tech companies are business-driven with a profit imperative. They have power to exploit psychological vulnerabilities in adolescents, with the use of well-researched algorithms.

I recommend this book as part of the response to the current rising incidence of mental health issues in young people.



Notices

Are you subscribed to 'Newsbeat'?

Want to keep up with "The Beat" of what's going on around your Presbytery?

Email "Subscribe Me!" Today using this QR Code to receive your next issue hot off the press and straight into your inbox!



Correction

Coatesville Uniting Church have had to change the date for their highly-anticipated High Tea to 29th June. Please update your calendar accordingly.

With proceeds supporting the Coatesville Community Food Pantry, your donation (suggested \$10) will help local families struggling with the cost of living by supporting them with food and household essentials, as well as showing them that Coatesville Uniting Church truly is "a great place to belong".

RSVP now and look forward to an afternoon filled with delicious treats, fantastic band music, and Coatesville's famous warmth and humour.

See you there!.



**Coatesville Uniting Church Girls Night Out
and Music Team invite you to an afternoon of
epicurean and musical delights**

**In aid of the Coatesville Community Food Pantry
Suggested \$10 donation**

RSVP 0422 528 5384 by 23 June

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*Yummy food at the Korean Church
of Melbourne - including the best
Hot Cross buns ever!*