

The Westerly



PPW & PVW Newsletter No.72 August 2025



New Purpose for Old Buildings

Rev. Linley Liersch (PPW Mission Development Strategist & Education)

We discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic that congregations can make major adjustments to do ministry without a building. We also found out that returning to the sanctuary became a priority once the novelty of worshipping online wore off.

We cannot deny that church buildings are sacred spaces. We officiate weddings and perform baptisms in our sanctuaries. We comfort grieving families through shared meals after funerals in our fellowship spaces. We gather for prayer and teach classes that sustain the current generation's hope and cultivate faith in the next. In rural communities and urban centers, religious buildings are often well-known landmarks. The steeples and spires serve as stable reference points even as the neighboring landscape changes.

But one of the challenges we face today is that many religious buildings are falling into disrepair. As the facilities age and maintenance costs increase, congregations must discern how to move forward: relocate the congregation or repurpose the building?

Relocating the congregation be challenging, given the attachment to the building. But what does it look like to repurpose our buildings? Some congregations have discovered that their mission is energized when they use the building more instead of less. What if the church doors stayed open six or seven days a week to offer resources and renewal to the community through programs and partnerships? Is it possible to use church-owned property to address pressing needs in the local area?

Torquay Uniting Church repurposed their old manse into a renovated community centre much needed in their seaside community. They called the centre 'Oak Tree Place' as the back balcony is shaded by a large old oak tree. One member said: ***"'Oak Tree Place' offers us an opportunity to reach out to the local community in a variety of ways."*** Today it houses Lions Club, the local Bridge Club, Hospitality Evenings, fundraisers like Biggest Morning Tea, trading tables, markets. In August the congregation will be a part of the local 'Arts Trail' as members turn their building into an art gallery.



New Purpose for Old Buildings

New Purpose for Old Buildings by Rev. Linley Liersch (cont.).

We love our old buildings. But sometimes we are overcome with nostalgia, and we fail to see how deferred maintenance erodes the church's future vision. How might your congregation be more intentional about imagining a new purpose within its existing property?

A property consultant once said to me that he refers to church buildings as "facilities." A building is a static structure that exists to be maintained. Facilities, he said, facilitate.

Once again, words matter. To facilitate is to assist, enable or help. Church facilities should do more than just occupy space on the ground. Sanctuaries assist congregations in carrying out a thriving mission to the glory of God. Classrooms enable churches to gather people around the Scriptures to learn and grow as students of the word. Offices help dedicated staff plan life-transforming programs and provide space to do the work of discerning God's vision for the congregation. Every generation has upsized our churches, but it may be possible to downsize too. When we think of buildings as facilities, perhaps we will begin to reflect more deeply on how we can repurpose our sacred spaces.

I'm reminded of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, that reminds us to be good stewards of our resources. Often the things that limit us as congregations is our missional imagination.

In what ways are we good stewards of our resources?

What sorts of spaces are younger generations inhabiting? Eg. Modern, cosy and warm, freshly renovated cafes...

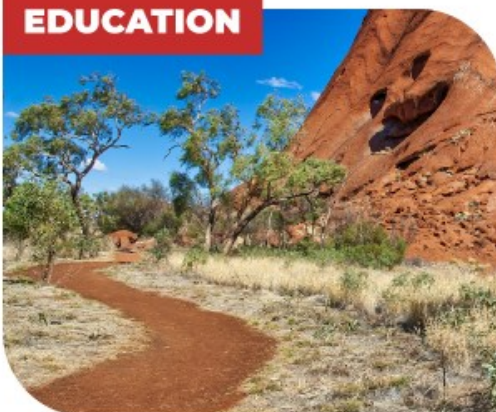
In what ways can we reimagine how we use the facilities that have been entrusted to our care?

Video series

A new video series produced by Dr Craig Mitchell for the Port Phillip East Presbytery has been released featuring indigenous theologian Rev Dr Garry Deverell exploring 'Aboriginal Spirituality and Culture'.

[DOWNLOAD THE RESOURCE](#)

EDUCATION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge all First Peoples of the beautiful lands on which we live and celebrate their enduring knowledge and connections to Country. We honour the wisdom of and pay respect to Elders past and present.

From the Editor: Has any one noticed that I swap the logos on the front of The westerly regularly? If you missed an edition of The Westerly see [Newsletters – Presbytery of Port Phillip West \(ucappw.org.au\)](#). Rev Linley Liersch Linley.Liersch@ppw.victas.uca.org.au.

Please click links or pictures for hyperlinks.

Next edition submissions 23rd August 2024

Hospital Chaplaincy Matters

Andrew Shearer-Cox (Ballarat Hospital Chaplain)

Last month in the aged care church services that I lead around Ballarat, we've been reading the OT story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from Daniel chapter 3.

You know the story, perhaps from your Sunday School days, about the 3 young Hebrew men who refuse to follow the king's orders and bow down in worship of the big, shiny statue he'd built. They get dobbed in by an official and brought before the king. They're given another chance to comply but refuse and face the wrath of the king. The three of them are thrown into a furnace where the king expected them to meet their demise. I don't think it is a spoiler to tell you the Hebrew men survive the blazing furnace.

I like using Bible stories that 'tell themselves' for aged care church services. The messages are clear, and residents of varying capabilities can engage with the story. This passage from Daniel 3 is a good one to use during a chilly Ballarat winter because you can talk about heat (I've noticed people get a bit edgy if you tell the story of Noah's Ark while it's raining.)

One of the questions I ask after we've read about Rack, Shack and Benny is 'why do you think this story is in the Bible?' We get responses – and rightly so – about the faith and principles of the three Hebrews and how they stick to their faith in trying circumstances. However, it occurred to me in preparing these services, that what if part of the lesson was the change of heart of the king? In Daniel 3, the king changes from being zealous about himself to zealous about God, all because he witnessed first-hand the power of faith shown by Rack, Shack and Benny.

*Have people come to faith
because they've witnessed your
faith?*



Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry – Leader 7, 14, 21 August 2025

Hosted by Rev Dr Niall McKay, this course is a 3-day program designed to give participants an introduction to the key concepts and practices of ministering with congregations and agencies in times of transition.

This program also qualifies participants to be Intentional Interim Ministers. It is a helpful course for ordained ministers and others in significant pastoring and leadership roles in the church.

For more information or to register your interest, scan the QR code, or email umeinfo@nswact.uca.org.au



This initial three-day course is especially helpful for:

- * People in Presbytery leadership roles
- * Ministers moving from chaplaincy/agency roles into congregational ministry
- * Ministers in placements going through significant transitions, such as looking for new mission directions, contemplating combining/closing, moving to resource ministry across multiple contexts.

Vital Leadership

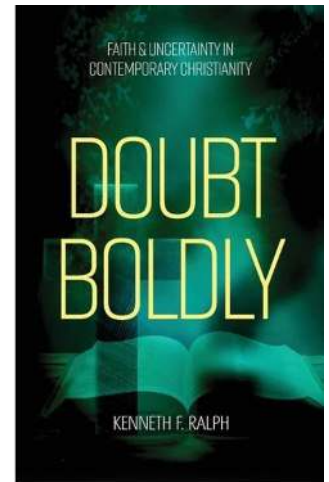


Doubt Boldly: Faith in Contemporary Christianity By Kenneth F. Ralph

Martin Luther, the robust founder of reformed Christianity, encouraged believers to sin boldly but also to believe more boldly in Christ. Boldness would seem to be an essential condition of religious traditions.

In our own times, the growing decline of church membership as well as the increasing number of Christians who express reservations about church structures, creeds, devotions and formal worship call for serious - and bold - reflection.

Doubt Boldly takes seriously these concerns and realities. *It records the stories of many who have abandoned traditional ways of being and believing, and encourages an active and thoughtful approach to the reality of doubt.* It acknowledges that many 'doubters' continue to belong to church communities - often working in ministries - yet aware of their growing misgivings about how to reconcile their doubts with a genuine commitment to church membership. For others, the processing of their doubt has resulted in abandoning both Christianity and church affiliation.



The book invites readers to consider the origins of their doubt and the circumstances and history that led them to this situation. It records the stories of many who have been on this journey in the church's history and discovered a healthy-minded, life-enriching Christianity. How they liberated Jesus of Palestine from dubious identities and activities and why that was important for them is a central theme of this book.

Kenneth F. Ralph was born in New Zealand. He studied there (University of Otago), in the USA (Princeton Theological Seminary USA) and psychotherapy at The Cairnmillar Institute, Melbourne. From 1965-1989, he worked as an ordained minister in Presbyterian and Uniting Churches; as well as a Consultant (Cairnmillar), Staff Counsellor (Preston and Northcote Community Hospital), Therapist (Geelong St John of God Hospital Peri-Natal Depression Unit) and founder of Kenneth Ralph Counselling, specialising in anxiety, depression and relationships. His previous books *Yes I get Depressed* and *Your Final Choice* were well received. **COVENTRY PRESS—**

Purchase the book directly from Kenneth in Belmont (\$30) or I will mail you a copy at \$38. Contact: 0404461935 or kralph@bigpond.com

Retired Minister's Gatherings—Pascoe Vale RSL

Venue: Pascoe Vale RSL, 40 Cumberland Rd Pascoe Vale 3044

Time: 12:00 – till 13:30 Friday 22nd August 2025

This is for those of us who are retired or in the process of retiring to have lunch together and share a little of the journey. We gather in an informal way to catch up on how everyone's going and what we're up to. New members welcome.

So if you're interested, can you please let me know your RSVP by email before 5pm Tuesday 18th February mark@dunn.id.au This is essential for a lunch booking.

Lay Preacher Studies in 2025

Semester 2 - **Exploring Christology** -7 July to 22 September <https://victas.uca.org.au/exploring-christology/>

Semester 2—**Understanding the UCA** 15th July—14th October <https://events.humanitix.com/understanding-the-uca-pmsxd2p4>

Semester 3 - **Exploring Preaching in the UCA** - 13 October to 24 November - \$30 <https://victas.uca.org.au/exploring-preaching-in-the-uca/>



Study Spiritual Care

Graduate Certificate in Spirituality

This course is designed for Spiritual/Pastoral Carers and Chaplains and is taught by Spiritual Care practitioners.

- Accessible timetable to fit in with work commitments.
- Online synchronous and in-person attendance options.
- Practical assessment tasks to deepen your understanding and discover new resources.
- Learning outcomes align with [Spiritual Care Australia credentialing framework](#)

While Pilgrim is a Uniting Church college, courses are inclusive and practitioners of all spiritualities are welcome. BYO spirituality and speak from your own perspective and experience in class discussions and assessment tasks.

For current course requirements, see the [Graduate Certificate in Spirituality](#) page on the University of Divinity website.



Find out more

Please contact Erlinda Lovegood, Registrar, Pilgrim Theological College at study@pilgrim.edu.au or call (03) 9340 8892

Core Subjects include:

Choose one of these (depending on experience):

- Spiritual Care: The Independent Practitioner (DP8011P) **or**
- Spiritual Care: Senior Practitioner (DP9031P)

Plus:

- Spiritual Care: Ritual, Meaning and Reflective Practice (DS8021P)

Optional elective subjects include:

- Spiritual Care: Trauma and Moral Injury (DP9041P)
- Spiritual Care: Grief and Conflict (DP9051P)
- A wide variety of units in Spirituality or Spiritual Care or Spiritual Direction

MARTIN LUTHER



NORTHEY LECTURE TUESDAY, JULY 29



Dei Ex Machina: The Images of God in our Conceptions of AI

AI has emerged as a tool for productivity, a threat to jobs, and even a stand-in for God. Much of the language used to discuss AI draws on apocalyptic and prophetic discourse, as well as on images of God rooted in divine omniscience. Rev. Dr Kristel Clayville, a lecturer in ethics in the computer science department at University of Illinois Chicago, suggests an alternative theological framework.

Rather than emphasising AI's godlike powers of omniscience and control—traditionally masculine divine attributes—Clayville examines how feminine divine imagery might reshape our understanding of artificial intelligence. Could we envision AI through metaphors of nurturing, relationship, and collaborative wisdom instead of domination and all-knowing power? Does embracing feminine images of God offer new ways to conceptualize AI's role and possibilities in human society? Her talk will explore this alternative and attempt to offer a different conceptual vocabulary for AI.

Northey Lecturer: Rev. Dr Kristel Clayville PhD



Rev. Dr Kristel Clayville holds a PhD in Religious Ethics from the University of Chicago's Divinity School and completed Fellowship training in clinical medical ethics at the MacLean Center. She has served as the Acting Director of the Zygon Center for Religion and Science, and was a Fellow in the Sinai and Synapses program. She has a clinical background as a chaplain and ethicist at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

Currently, she teaches ethics in the Computer Science Department at UIC, where she also serves on the hospital ethics committee, and the medical school ethics education committee. Her research interests encompass the ethics of emerging (bio)technologies, organ transplant ethics, the role of religion in medical education, AI and religion, and the function of ethics committees in hospitals and tech companies.

Tuesday, July 29

Pilgrim Theological College,
29 College Cres, Parkville, 3025

Refreshments available from 5pm
Lecture commences at 5:30pm

To register visit:
events.humanitix.com/northey-lecture-dei-ex-machina-the-images-of-god-in-our-conceptions-of-ai



Celebrating 10 years of being Pilgrim Theological College

JOHN WESLEY'S CLOCK a Methodist mystery tour!

Talk by Prof Graeme Davison AO.

FREE EVENT

Sunday 24 August 2025, at 2.30pm.

Queen's College Chapel,
University of Melbourne
1-17 College Crescent, Parkville

Or for a Zoom link, email:

ken.barelli@bigpond.com

For enquiries call Ken on **0418 317 942**

VICTAS UNITING CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



For more information visit www.thewesleycentre.org

WESLEY CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

theology - ethics - public policy

THURSDAY EVERY MONTH

12:30 PM - 1:30PM, WESLEY CHURCH

First Nations

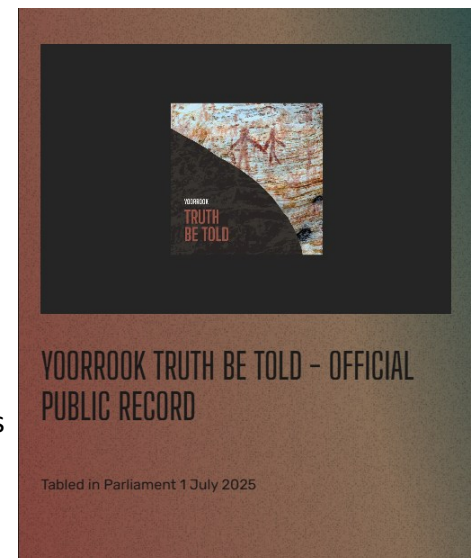
Rev. Sandy Boyce (UCA Minister—Victorian Council of Churches EO)



The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways. (Preamble to the Constitution, Uniting Church in Australia).

YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION

The Yoorrook Justice Commission, Victoria's first formal truth-telling inquiry into historical and ongoing injustices against First Peoples, has recently delivered its final reports, titled "Yoorrook for Transformation" and "Yoorrook Truth be Told", which were tabled in the Victorian Parliament on July 1, 2025. These reports detail systemic injustices, racism, and discriminatory policies and practices, making 100 recommendations for reform. The commission's work is seen as crucial to understanding Victoria's history and fostering a path towards truth and justice. Read the Yoorrook reports [here](#).



ASSISTANCE



Share Grants

This year's Share Grants program, administered by Uniting Vic.Tas, provides financial assistance to parish missions, congregations and others to enhance the quality of services to the community in Victoria and Tasmania.

[GRANTS DETAILS HERE](#)

General and Emergency Relief Grants

These grants are intended to support small general projects that directly address human need, are preventative in nature, tackle underlying structural causes of disadvantage, improve the quality of community services.

Projects may include: • Care and support of disadvantaged groups or groups with significant support needs e.g. asylum seekers • Education (including life skills) • Counselling and advocacy • Family strengthening and early intervention programs • Social outreach initiatives e.g. drop-in centres, men's sheds • Coordination of volunteers who deliver programs • Emergency relief services e.g. material and food aid.

YOU ARE INVITED TO

CLIMATE CHAMPIONS AFTERNOON TEA

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 20TH AT 2 PM

WESLEY UNITING CHURCH GEELONG
100 YARRA STREET GEELONG



We will enjoy being together and sharing.

Activities include writing letters about climate change concerns and you will be making beeswax wraps to take home and use. Bring any books on climate issues that you would like to recommend. And Bring along your friends

RSVP SUE STRONG 0437 741077

Assembly's digital home

The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly has announced the introduction of uHub, the refreshed and renamed digital home for the Assembly's national resources.

[CHECK OUT UHUB HERE](#)

RESOURCES



SEASON OF
CREATION

CELEBRATION GUIDE 2025
PEACE WITH CREATION



The Church as a
Prophetic Voice in
Australian Society

Past ,
Present &
Future

UNITING CHURCH NATIONAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 3-5 OCTOBER 2025

✉ ucnhs2025conference@gmail.com

🌐 uniting.church/uca-national-history-society/

July Events

29th July 5:00	The Northerly Lecture Rego Rev. Dr. Kristel Clayville PhD. Dei Ex Machina: The Images of God in our conceptions of AI
4th August	National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
4th—10th Aug	National Homelessness Week Liturgy
10th –16th	Interfaith Awareness Week
7th, 14th & 21st August	Fundamentals in Transitional Ministry Rego NOW An article in The Age by Rev Alex Sangster UCA Minister
15th August	Climate Change: Resilience & Hope [UCA Schools Event] Rego
22nd August	Retired Ministers Gathering
24th August 2:30pm	John Wesley's Clock: A Methodist Mystery Tour @ Queens College Chapel, 1-17 Collegeville Cres, Parkville
30th August— 2nd September	SYNOD 2025 MEETING "Pilgrims of The Spirit"
1 September—4th October	Seasons of Creation: "Peace with Creation" Resources
3-5th October	<i>Uniting Church National History Conference</i> "Prophetic Voice" Enquiries: Rev Ivan Roberts – mobile 0422 648 191 www.uniting.church/uca-national-history-society/

VACANCY -Macedon Ranges Partnership MISSIONAL WORKER

[Position Description](#) to Mr Peter Canning - wanderinaussie52@gmail.com Ph Num 0478 777 400

Kyneton & the Northern Congregations are looking for a Non-Placement Lay Pastor To explore missional opportunities in the congregations communities, contemporary worship leadership, work with community groups, assess welfare needs in the communities, event planning and publicity for 12 hr a week (0.3 FTE).