



InSpire



NEWSLETTER OF THE STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH

Vol. 12, no 2

March 2026



LOVE IN THE WALLS

InSpiring

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Enchantment, Evolution, and the Lenten Journey

It is hard not to notice how deeply fantasy has captured the modern imagination. Stories of hidden worlds, ancient powers, unlikely heroes, and cosmic struggle fill our bookshelves and screens. From wizarding schools to epic quests, we seem drawn — almost instinctively — toward stories where the world is alive with meaning.

Why now?

Part of the answer lies in the story of our culture. Since the Enlightenment, we have learned to see the universe primarily through the lens of reason and scientific explanation. This has been an extraordinary gift. We understand evolution, the age of the cosmos, and the processes that shape life. Yet alongside these gains, many people quietly sense a loss — that while we can explain more, we sometimes experience less wonder. And yet, the human spirit refuses to live in a flattened world.

It is no accident that some of the great architects of modern fantasy were Christians. J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis wrote in a time when modernity — especially after the devastation of the world wars — felt both powerful and spiritually thin. Their stories were not escapism so much as recovery. Through myth and imagination, they reawakened a sense that creation is meaningful, that courage and sacrifice matter, and that grace can break into history.

Today we stand in a different but related moment. We know the universe through the lens of evolution — that stars forged the elements of our bodies, that life has unfolded over billions of years, that consciousness has emerged through a long process of becoming. For some, this has felt like further disenchantment. But from an evolutionary spiritual perspective, it can be experienced as a deepening of awe.

What if evolution is not merely a mechanism, but a sacred unfolding? What if the universe is not simply a system, but a living story in which love and awareness are gradually coming to expression?

The popularity of fantasy may be a sign that people are longing to feel again that they live within a meaningful cosmos. A generation raised on stories of hidden powers and transformative journeys may be intuitively grasping something true: that life is not merely accidental, but open to transformation.

Christian faith speaks directly into this longing. Scripture tells of a creation declared “very good,” of a God who meets people in deserts and kitchens, storms and quiet whispers, of a Spirit continually renewing the face of the earth. In an evolutionary key, we might say that God is the depth of the unfolding universe — drawing creation toward greater compassion, communion, and consciousness — revealed most clearly in the life of Jesus.

And yet, many of us keep spirituality in the shadows. We are comfortable enjoying enchantment in stories, but less certain about naming the sacred in our daily lives — in our work, our relationships, our doubts, or even our struggles.

This is where Lent offers us a gentle but honest challenge.

Lent is not only a season of giving things up; it is a season of learning to see. It invites us to rediscover the sacredness hidden in the ordinary — in simple acts of kindness, in moments of silence, in the rhythms of daily life. It also calls us to turn toward the shadow parts of ourselves and our world — the fears, wounds, and habits we would rather avoid — trusting that God is present there too, not to condemn but to heal and transform.

If fantasy stories teach us to recognise quests, perhaps Lent reminds us that our own lives are a kind of journey — not through distant lands, but through the landscapes of the heart.

As a church, we can help by creating spaces where people are encouraged to explore this deeper awareness — where questions are welcomed, where science and faith sit together, where practices of prayer, reflection, and service help us notice the sacred woven through everyday life. We can affirm the longing for enchantment that fantasy reveals, while inviting

one another to discover that the real world is already charged with God's presence.

The journey from fantasy to faith is not about leaving imagination behind, but allowing it to open our eyes — to see that the same creative Spirit at work in the evolution of the cosmos is at work in our own transformation.

This Lent, perhaps the invitation is simple: to step more fully into the story — to look for the holy not only in moments of light, but also in the shadows, trusting that even there, grace is quietly at work.

John Power

ASK THE MINISTER!

We continue the series in which John will answer questions about his life, his ideas, and his theological formation and development. It will be a theological reflection on his life, using an overall evolutionary framework. (Remember, he invites us to similarly reflect on our own faith journeys.)

Question: This month John addresses the question *What prompted your calling to ordained ministry?*

John's Answer:

When people ask where I studied to be a minister, the simple answer is a list of institutions. But the truer answer is that ministry, like faith itself, has been an unfolding — a long conversation between curiosity, experience, and the quiet persistence of God.

As a teenager I was already drawn to the Christian story. When the time came to think about a career, I found myself pulled in two directions: toward engineering, with its love of structure and design, and toward ministry, with its invitation into meaning and transformation. I spoke with the Director of Ordinands, who offered wise counsel: "Go and study. Pay attention to life. Then come back." That advice set me on a path of exploration that still continues.

At the University of Melbourne, I immersed myself in philosophy and psychology — two streams that asked, in different ways, what it means to be human. An interdisciplinary subject

called *The Human Condition* opened windows onto Freud, Jung, Hermann Hesse, and the searching literature of the twentieth century. At the same time, my philosophy studies — shaped through the Department of Middle Eastern Studies — became, in effect, a journey through the world's religious traditions. I began to see faith not as a fixed system but as a living stream, flowing through cultures and centuries.

These years planted a deep intuition in me: that God is larger than any single formulation, and that the spiritual life is an evolving relationship rather than a settled possession.

I went on to study theology at Ridley College within the Australian College of Theology. At that stage I was wrestling with existential questions — less interested in inherited answers than in authentic encounter. Ridley's evangelical clarity sharpened my thinking, even as I sensed that my own questions stretched beyond its boundaries; meanwhile, the broader theological world sometimes felt too abstracted from lived experience. Living between these currents helped me learn to listen deeply and to hold tensions creatively.

Philosophy — especially the work of Paul Tillich — profoundly shaped my imagination. The idea of God not as a distant being but as the *ground of being itself* resonated with my experience: God as the depth within life, the presence in which all things arise and toward which all things grow. I found myself moving away from images of a distant, mythic deity toward a sense of the sacred woven through existence.

Alongside this, I was drawn to movements that emphasised lived experience of the Spirit. While I never felt at home in a strongly legalistic expression of faith, I was deeply nourished by the charismatic emphasis on encounter — the conviction that the gospel is not merely a set of propositions but an invitation into transformation.

Looking back, I see my formation as evolutionary in the fullest sense. Each stage — study, questioning, prayer, community, doubt, discovery — has been part of a slow shaping. The thread running through it all has been a desire to help people encounter the living God not as an idea to be defended, but as a reality to be experienced

— the presence that calls us forward into greater depth, compassion, and freedom.

That is why I teach and preach as I do: with a hope that together we might continue to grow, to question honestly, and to discover that faith is not about arriving once and for all, but about participating in the ongoing unfolding of life in God.

(John contributed this article in response to a request from a member of the congregation)

LITURGICAL COLOURS

The Four Church Colour Seasons: A Guide to the Rhythm of Christian Time

Across the Christian year, the Church tells the story of Christ not only through readings and prayers, but also through colour. These colours are not decorative extras. They shape the emotional and spiritual atmosphere of worship. They train us, quietly, to feel the movement of the gospel — longing, celebration, repentance, growth, glory.

While the full liturgical calendar contains more nuances, most churches follow four primary colour seasons: Purple, White, Green, and Red. Together they form a spiritual rhythm that carries us through the life of Christ and into our own transformation.



Purple – Seasons of Preparation (Advent & Lent)

When used:

- Advent (the four weeks before Christmas)
- Lent (the forty days before Easter)

Purple signals preparation, reflection, and holy longing.

In Advent, it carries a tone of watchfulness — we wait for Christ's coming, both in Bethlehem and in the deeper unfolding of God's kingdom. It is not yet celebration; it is expectancy.

In Lent, purple deepens into self-examination and repentance. It invites us to face what must die in us so that resurrection may come.

Purple slows us down. It asks us to be honest. It reminds us that growth requires gestation and pruning.



White (or Gold) – Seasons of Celebration (Christmas & Easter)

When used:

- Christmas Season
- Easter Season
- Other major celebrations (such as baptisms, weddings, Trinity Sunday)

White (sometimes replaced with gold) represents light, joy, resurrection, and divine glory.

At Christmas, it proclaims that light has entered the world. At Easter, it announces that death does not have the final word.

White is expansive. It is the colour of breakthrough — when what has been hidden becomes radiant.

If purple is the womb, white is birth.



Green – The Season of Growth (Ordinary Time)

When used:

- The long stretches of the year outside major seasons (often called “Ordinary Time”)

Green symbolises life, growth, and steady discipleship.

It may not feel dramatic, but it is essential. This is the season where teachings of Jesus are explored week by week. Roots deepen. Habits form. Character matures.

Green reminds us that most transformation is gradual. Resurrection joy must become daily practice. Faith must put down roots in ordinary soil.



Red – The Fire of the Spirit and the Cost of Witness

When used:

- Pentecost
- Days remembering martyrs
- Ordinations in some traditions

Red stands for fire, passion, courage, and the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, it symbolises tongues of flame — the Spirit empowering the Church. On martyr commemorations, it recalls the cost of faithful witness.

Red is energy. It is ignition. It reminds us that faith is not merely contemplative — it is participatory and sometimes costly.

A Living Pattern

Taken together, these colours form more than a calendar. They shape a spiritual journey:

- Purple – prepare and turn

- White – celebrate and awaken
- Green – grow and mature
- Red – be sent and empowered

The Church year is not circular in a static way. Each time we move through it, we are different. We spiral deeper. The colours train our imagination to recognise the rhythms of death and rebirth, waiting and fulfilment, contemplation and action.

In this way, the liturgical colours become more than fabric on an altar. They are a language — one that teaches us how to live the story of Christ not just once, but continually.

“INSPIRING 2026”

Alison Tokita

On Saturday 21 February, John and I attended an event at the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Parkville. It was part of the Uniting Church “Faithful Futures Project”, a collaborative effort between Presbyteries and the Synod to discern priorities, direct resources, and ensure we are equipped for the challenges and opportunities ahead. The project was initiated out of conversation at the Presbytery Synod Forum and approved at the Synod Meeting 2025. The theme of the day was “Celebrating stories of New & Renewing”. We heard presentations by leaders in parishes who have spearheaded exciting and dynamic initiatives to connect churches with communities in new ways, and the planting of completely new churches from scratch. Renewing projects included: Banyule’s “Common Ground” that links four congregations and three worshipping communities in a mix of conventional and unusual activities; Cranbourne’s Food Truck; a Messy Church Camp in WA. One of the most interesting cases was Kyneton Uniting Church’s “Simba Sessions”, monthly community dinners featuring open mic poetry, music and art with a spiritual basis.

An interesting concept of church leadership was introduced: Core and Edge leaders. Core leaders are people at the “centre”, they keep things running, maintain stability and hold institutional memory. Edge leaders are at the “frontier”, operating at the boundaries between the organization and the outside world. They are more likely to experiment, innovate and reach new audiences. It was stressed that “healthy churches need both types of leader”!

The opening worship centred around Matthew 9:16-17.

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.¹⁷ Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

We were invited to consider the following discussion questions.

What are the old wineskins that Jesus is asking us to think about in our own traditions/faith communities?

What is the new wine we need to be open to in our own faith traditions/faith communities?

What is the old wine we must savour and appreciate and honour?

What do the new wineskins look like and how can we create those spaces where the new wine can flow?

The day was curated and led by Rev Mat Harry, who will be our guest at Café Church on Sunday 29 March – something to look forward to!

MEMORIES TRIGGER MEMORIES

Historical Retrospective and Back to Church

The plan to have an exhibition of historical memorabilia together with a Back to Church event has been postponed until 2027. However, the preparation is well in hand. We hope that regular InSpire articles which feature the recollections of long standing congregation members will trigger others’ memories and unearth all sorts of “treasures”!



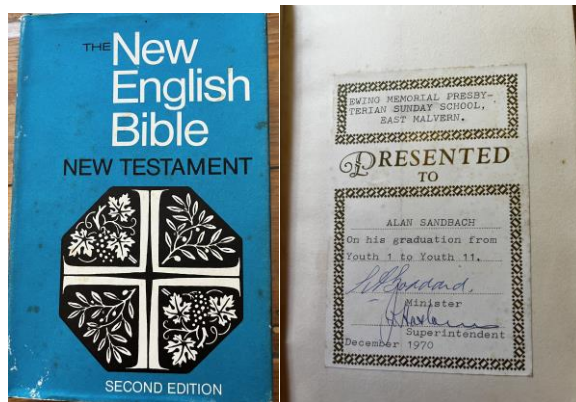
Your memories are precious: they may be captured in your recollection of a special moment, a photograph or a portable object. All your contributions will be handled with respect, care, and returned. Please consider sharing your memories, either by contacting the editor who will arrange a chat; or by writing your own reflections for InSpire. Our focus is particularly on the last 30 years and is intended to complement Ian Jenkin’s comprehensive history “In Search of His Kingdom”, published in 1991.

Alan Sandbach has agreed to “kickstart” this project by sharing some of his early recollections of Ewing’s (as it was then) church life in the 1960s and 70s. While this is immediately before the focus period, post 1990, it provides a context for how Stonnington Community Uniting Church (SCUC) has evolved.

Alan has a lifelong association with SCUC being the third generation of his family to take an active part in the congregation. He recalls that his parents (Ed and Margaret) actually met through the Ewing PFA. Similarly, his aunts and uncles (Colin Ramsay, Marilyn Muir, Alison Sandbach and Robin Macfarlane) found their life partners through this youth group. The Church provided a rich active social life, and a warm embracing fellowship ranging from a tennis club to Scottish country dancing and a scout troop.

Alan remembers the after-school treat of Ewing PWMU's generous homemade afternoon teas: passionfruit sponge, lamingtons and yo-yos! He particularly recalls coming to Church as a 4 or 5 year old in a kilt, a nod to his family's Scottish heritage.

Sunday School took place in the Ewing Hall diagonally opposite the Church on the other side of Burke Road. Alan fondly recalls his first Sunday School teacher, the kindly Mrs Cleverley, who was a former Church missionary to China. Generally, the children left the Service after the Minister's Children's address and walked in a carefully supervised "crocodile" across the road. Under Reverend Chris Goy a big feature of Sunday School life was the annual tableau, which Chris wrote, and which of course had a biblical theme.



Children were a part of Church life from birth, as indicated by the photo of James Sandbach's enrollment on the Cradle Roll. Graduation from Sunday School was around Year 8 (second form), and this rite of passage was marked with a ceremony in the Church where each child graduating was given a New Testament with a

book plate marking the occasion. From then on, the child attended the full Sunday service.

Like many of us, Alan has witnessed great changes at SCUC over the last 60 years. However, he reflects that what is important – the commitment, support and love of a faithful caring congregation – remains a constant.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

A reflection on the screening of "Love in the Walls"

As part of our community engagement mission, the widely publicised Servants Community Housing's documentary "Love in the Walls" screened at SCUC on Sunday 22 February 2026.

Servants is a not-for-profit private initiative which provides social housing in Boroondara for approximately 96 residents across 4 properties. This film explores the unique housing model developed over 40 years through a series of personal resident stories: from Paul, a former drug addict; to Richard, a victim of a king hit, suffering brain damage, and Mahdi, an Iranian refugee with significant back injuries. Interspersed are reflections and cameos from people closely involved with the organisation; including a neighbour, art therapist and housing managers. To quote a young Strathcona student who is interviewed during the documentary, "everyone has a back story".

The consistent message from all is that this is a community in which dignity, hope, connection, respect and love flourish because individuals are valued and encouraged. The young housing manager, Jaiden, subsequently commented that this form of social capital is an investment from which we all benefit, both morally and economically. Not only does this housing model affirm an individual's right to safe secure stable housing, but it provides for people who may otherwise fall through the cracks, possibly ending up in hospital or jail, at a far greater expense to the community.

The afternoon was particularly memorable because there were a number of the Servants team present, who introduced the film, responded to a memorable Q and A session and sold their organic sparkling apple juice and honey.

On a number of levels, the event highlighted community building: SCUC has developed a positive connection with the dynamic distinctive Servants community and its housing model. By screening the film we have positively promoted both Servants, and our own church's engagement; and behind the scenes a busy group of SCUC congregation members worked as a team building personal connections, to ensure the day was seamless and a success.

For those who are interested but were unable to attend, there should be an opportunity to view this documentary on SBS in March 2026.

NEW SCUC INITIATIVES IN 2026

Spirituality Workshops

The first workshop on the overall theme "Awakening to the Living Universe" was held on 10 February. The theme of this first session was the Fruitful Elder: it opened up the participants to the concept of flowering and fruiting in old age. Commencing with the image of the bamboo, we were encouraged to contemplate this idea through sound, visual images, writing and sharing. It was gentle and non-threatening! The focus was on recognising the patterns in nature and their application to our lives; these monthly gatherings weave science, contemplation and faith, to deepen awareness and reconnect us with the living whole of which we are a part.

The next session will be on Tuesday 3 March at 10.00 am in the church.

Music Mission

Music is not simply something we do in worship, it is as a way of building community, deepening spiritual life, expressing joy and opening new doors to those who may not yet feel at home in church. This conviction is being embodied in the formation of **two new choirs** in 2026: the adult

community choir called Spiritsong, and a youth / young adult choir. The Spiritsong choir, directed by Houston Dunlevy, had its inaugural gathering on Monday 23 February.

Both non-auditioned choirs are being shaped around a simple but powerful rhythm: **Belong · Behold · Believe · Become**, as eloquently outlined by John in last month's *InSpire*.

In addition, Houston expects to organize a couple of "Pleasant Sunday Afternoon" concerts during the year.

Community Engagement

The year commenced in a burst of energy with the screening of *Love in the Walls* on 22 February (see Maria's reflection in this issue).

The next community engagement event will be the *Feast for Freedom* on Sunday **31 May 2026**, a special lunch for approximately 60 people, after the Sunday service. All proceeds from this occasion will be donated to the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre. The menu for our Feast will be drawn from special recipes provided by the ASRC, fostering connection and cultural awareness through sharing food.

This will be followed by a special "Christmas in July" dinner on **25 July 2026**, a Saturday evening, again for approximately 60 people. All proceeds will go to the **Avalon Centre** which provides community support services and homes for the homeless.

A ticket booking system will apply for both the Feast for Freedom and the Christmas in July meals. Readers will be advised of the process in future editions of *InSpire*.

We are also collecting memories and memorabilia from present and former members of the congregation, culminating in an exhibition in 2027 of historical memorabilia at "Back to Church", when former members and their families will be encouraged to join us. This event will trace the evolution of **Stonnington Community Uniting Church** in our community. Meanwhile we welcome your reflections and contributions. Please see the article "Memories trigger memories" on page 7.

“THE ROMERO PRAYER”

A Reflective Prayer

(This so-called Romero prayer was composed in 1979 by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan.)

It helps now and then, to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.



This is what we are about: we plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capability. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the

Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the

worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

Amen

ASH WEDNESDAY SERMON

Preached at a brief Ash Wednesday service at Wesley Church Melbourne on 18 February, by Matt Julius, Church Engagement Worker, Uniting Church of Australia. Reprinted from Matt's blog, Liturgical Pantry, with permission.

“You are formed from the dust ... and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)

Today we are invited into a deep place. A place of ash and grief, darkness and daring. In a moment we will be invited to be marked by ashes — bearing on our bodies a sign that we are formed from dust, and to dust we shall return.

This ritual recalls one of the deep stories shared across the Jewish and Christian traditions: the first human was formed from the dust. In Hebrew *Adam* was formed from the *adamah*; the human from the *humus*; earthlings from the very earth.

When we remember that we are dust we are invited to remember that we are part of this world. Bound to the cycles of seasons, and the unfolding, evolving processes of the universe itself. As the scientists say, “we are made of star stuff.” Bound to the cosmos itself.

And yet, we are dust that is formed. As a shape is defined by its edges, our lives are defined by our finitude — by the limits which make us who we are. Revelling and wrestling with the gift of our own existence, and the jagged edges and limits of our lives.

We know this clearly when we love. When we profess our love for those most close to us it is the intimacy which defines our bond. We do not love in generalities, we love in the particular.

I do not love the general idea of a wife. I love my wife, in particular. The person I proposed to in our favourite spot in the park. For the way she thinks, the way she cares for others in the world. For the particular shape her life takes as it flows alongside mine.

The ash reminds us that just as life is fleeting and finite, and so it is that we are given this particular life to live; these particular people to love; this particular world within which to strive for justice

and peace. It is to these ends that our ritual points.

This is the gift and tragedy at the heart of human existence.

"You are formed from the dust ... and to dust you shall return."

Today, for some, death will be close. We may be carrying loss heavy in our hearts — or feeling in our throats the anxious wait for difficult news. Alongside this we are invited to know that our love for those we have lost made them who they are, as their love for us is making us who we are. We are defined by the hard edges of our love for fleeting lives.

This is the gift and dance at the heart of human existence.

"You are formed from the dust ... and to dust you shall return."

So it is with the ash, so it is with the dust, so it is with each of us.

We are all formed from the dust, and so we belong together. The deep yearning of loss is a reminder that we shall all, one day, return to the dust and be again together.

And so, today we are invited into a deep place. A place of ash and grief, darkness and daring. A place of remembering that we are dust — dust which has been formed and given shape, filled with life and breath most holy.

And so, today, we receive this as a gift from God:

"You are formed from the dust ... and to dust you shall return."

IN MEMORIAM: NOLA STEWART (1945-2026)

Kerrie Davies has sent us the obituary of Peter Grossman's cousin, an amazing woman who passed away recently. I think it will be of interest to many readers. She added that Nola also presented at Oxford University each year for about the last 3-5 years.

This article originally appeared in the Sustainable Population Australia Newsletter, Issue 162, February 2026.



Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) loses a stalwart. We say farewell to the highly talented but always quiet and self-effacing Nola Stewart, a former Minutes Secretary of SPA and a member of our Executive for more than a decade. Majoring in Chemistry, Nola graduated with a Bachelor of Science from Sydney University in 1963, almost immediately commencing theological studies to become a Deaconess in the Presbyterian Church, serving for three years in Sydney's Fairfield Parish. From 1970-1983 Nola lived in Papua New Guinea working as a high school teacher while pursuing her passion for the environment including helping establish 'Friends of the Earth PNG' for which she wrote its constitution. Her activities in agitating to preserve native forests and the species therein brought her up against the logging industry. Everything she wrote about the industry and everything they wrote to discredit her, including death threats, she sent back to her parents in Australia in case the foresters acted on those threats. It also resulted in an invitation to address a UNESCO conference in Japan about PNG's rainforest degradation. Returning to Australia in 1984 she continued secondary school teaching, specifically Earth and Environmental Sciences and Biology. Her retirement in 2003 allowed her to become more involved in groups such as ours, often combining it with her gentle Christianity. When Jenny Goldie went to the COP (Conferences of the Parties) preliminary meetings in Bonn in 2009, she took with her pamphlets for distribution which Nola had produced — 'Conservation Through Having Smaller Families'. In 2010, Nola was instrumental in building SPA's relationship with the Ecological Christian Organisation of Uganda, assisting in

raising money for the bringing together of representatives of eight African nations for a two-day conference organised by them. It examined the relationship between population growth and climate change and the role reproductive rights might play. Nola presented at that conference and later conducted a one-day workshop for Ugandan pastors. This productive relationship between ECO Uganda and SPA has continued to this day, with their representatives often staffing SPA's stall at the Climate Change COPs. Nola was a longstanding member of the NSW SPA branch committee, taking up a position on the Nature Conservation Council of NSW as Convenor of their Sustainable Population Advisory Committee, which she was instrumental in establishing. So much of this history would be all but unknown to SPA members, not even those at Executive level, because Nola was such a private person, never promoting herself. Last year we were delighted to give Nola our occasional 'Dr Mary E White Unsung Hero Award' which she was unable to accept in person, by then living in a nursing home, but her family told us about the pleasure this gave her, pleasure so richly deserved. Nola Stewart - a life well-lived 9 November 1945 – 9 January 2026

REPORTS

STONNINGTON COMMUNITY UNITING CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT *Joyce Jenkin*

The following topics were discussed at the February council meeting.

The congregational roll will be updated in the near future but we have a need to communicate with a wider group of interested parties so we discussed various options for reaching our extended community.

The new choir initiatives are well underway, mainly church members have joined so far.

The Awakening to the Living Universe Group sessions have moved to the first Tuesday of the month.

We will have new tenants in the Jazz Centre from March as Gaynor Maxwell has sold her business.

We are waiting on a quote for the installation of reverse cycle air-conditioners to replace the gas wall furnaces in the Ewing Memorial Centre. We will run a 'special effort' to fund this.

The dead plants in the garden under the noticeboard will be replaced in autumn with those of a more suitable native species.

A number of concerts have been proposed put by Houston Dunleavy and council has agreed in principle.



A Tenebrae meal and service will be held in the church on Thursday 2nd April, beginning at 6.30. Please notify Jane no later than Monday 30th March if you wish to attend.

SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT Lorna Henry

We had a range of topics to talk about in our first meeting for the year, and perhaps this will be the pattern now.

An absorbing recent news item was discussed. There had recently been a remarkable rescue of a mother and family who were swept out to sea on their paddle boards in WA. The 13 year old elder brother had swum four kilometres to shore and run a further two kilometres to seek help. It was an extraordinary achievement and saved the lives of all. Eureka Street magazine reported that 13 year old Austin Applebee had told a press interviewer that he had prayed to God all the way, and "I don't think it was me who did it. It was God the whole time." It seems that the ABC and BBC did make brief reference to this, but not a word of this faith statement was mentioned in the commercial press. This omission is possibly an

indicator of the lack of acknowledgement of religion and faith in our society.

We discovered a group interest in planning for our group to explore places of worship of other faiths, and hear from people of other faiths. Something to plan for.

The power of storytelling is richly available in the parables and stories of Jesus. We heard some very similar short stories from 'The Song of the Bird', by Anthony de Mello, an Indian Jesuit teacher and psychotherapist. Stories that require thought and a response.
More of these and other things in March.

We will certainly talk about the very moving film, 'Love in the Walls', shown on Sunday 22 February at SCUC. There is much in that film to learn about community, care and love. I am sure those who saw it will want to share impressions about it with others.

We will meet on Sunday March 15th, the third Sunday as usual, at 5.00 at 5 Vickery St, East Malvern. And all are very welcome!

LIBRARY NEWS **Faye Pattinson**

Our first Book Chat for the year was held on Thursday, 19th February in the Margaret McKinnon Room at the church.

A fun, enthusiastic and ebullient group shared a diversity of genres. Among these were:

"A Doctor in Africa" by Andrew Browning

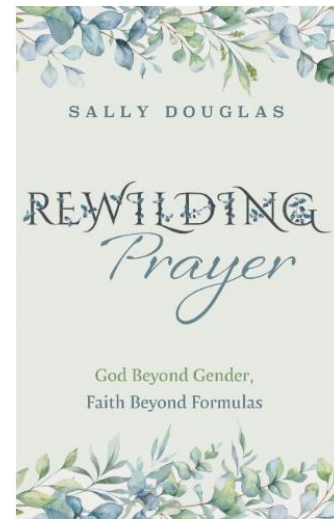
"Hamnet" by Maggie O'Farrell

"Demon Copperhead" by Barbara Kingsolver

Our next Book Chat will be on Thursday, 16th April at Nirvana, 78 Nirvana Avenue, East Malvern.

All welcome with or without a book to share.

New book for the church library



This new book by Sally Douglas has been ordered for the church library. It includes the knowledge and care for accurate language of a scripture scholar, the interest in people and colloquial language of her ministry in a Uniting Church Congregation, the natural gifts of a born writer, and the passionate interest in prayer of a gifted spiritual guide.

The passion that drives *Rewilding Prayer* is Douglas' conviction that Christians are taught badly how to pray, confine themselves to prayers in the language and culture of another century or of childhood, and give up on it because the staid, dry and limited forms of prayer they know are so distant from their lives. In her book she discusses the many shapes and connections of prayer, including its links with Scripture, with the people and situations we pray for, and with the silence when we have no words. In each section she offers beautifully written and direct prayers both for personal and for shared prayer.

As the title suggests, this book is an exercise in rewilding. The word suggests that prayer is too often imagined as entry into a disciplined garden of gravel paths, trimmed shrubs, flowers in precise lines, lawns to be kept off, and games not to be played. Prayer actually grows out of the messiness of our lives with their passions, boredom, talkativeness and silence, self-preoccupation and gregariousness, thorns and weeds, seasons of flowering and of fading.

This is a book to enjoy, to learn from, to use as tinder for prayer, and to treasure.

CASCADE BOOKS ISBN 9798385247226

Hint: You can find an extract printed in the latest issue of *Crosslight* to whet your appetite!

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY TABLE

Lencie Harding

It has been decided to postpone the first Fellowship Opportunity Table for the year until Sunday April 12th due to the long Labour Day weekend this month.

SAMMY STAMP

Lencie Harding

Since last year there have been numerous and fascinating donations of stamps including albums of first day covers, annual catalogues of Australian stamps and many stamp albums. A number of large donations have come from deceased estates. Of particular interest was a collection of U.K. stamps that belonged to Clare's partner Alan which featured characters from the novels of Charles Dickens including Mr Bumble, Mrs Gamp and Mr Micawber. Another series of stamps pictured scenes from the novels accompanied by a quote from Dickens:- "No one who can read ever looks at a book, even unopened on a shelf, like one who cannot."

Jane accepted a donation of stamps for Sammy from the Stonnington Council offices in Glenferrie Road which was promptly delivered. Margaret Beaumont of Sammy Stamp will have a number of thank you letters to write.

The Sammy Stamp volunteers have been excited by the donation of a wonderful coin collection which included eight 22ct gold coins (boxed). Seven have been sold to date for around \$2000 each. The coin collection has to date raised over \$16,000.

The following is Allan Clark's report for the March 2026 issue of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship magazine 'Net Work'.

A Generous Donation.

In December 2025 Sammy Stamp's fortunes bolted out of the starting gate and raced for the straight.

You may remember it being reported in the previous issue of 'NET WORK' that our total had reached about \$35,470 at 12/12/2025. Well, due mainly to a generous donation of coins, total sales to the end of 2025 reached \$46,648! (2024's total was \$35,583).

This has continued into 2026 with sales of \$7,291 for January (same period last year, \$1,338!) In addition, so far in February, to the 6/2, we have raised a further \$2,690.

We have not as yet received any grant applications this year.

Thank you all for your generous donations of Philatelic items, coins, medals, badges and so on, it is much appreciated; please keep it up.

Finally, if there are any wonderful people reading this report who would like to spend a few hours each week in Brighton volunteering for Sammy Stamp, please contact Allan Clark on (03) 9557 1008. Our motto: Come when you can, go when you must.

Allan Clark
Convenor

COMMON THREADS Alison Tokita

On Thursday 26 February, we marked the season of Lent with a Pancake Day, usually done of 17 February, Shrove Tuesday. This issue will have gone to press by then so there may be more details in the April issue!



(This photo dates back to last year with many of the same faces!)

Meanwhile congratulations to Jo for joining up more rugs in the last month. One of the many rugs completed by Jo in recent weeks.



Next meeting on Thursday 26 March when we will be back to normal.

MONTHLY CAFÉ CATCH-UP

**Mr Sister Café, 81 Waverley Road
(Third Tuesday 2.00 pm)**

The monthly café catch-up is the place to be! In February we again had a full table with ten attendees who enjoyed a lively even vociferous meeting in the cooler room at the front of the café. The bonus was being served with complementary muffins at the end of the day!



(This photo dates back to last year with many of the same faces!)

Please feel free to drop in and join in the conversation at the next catch-up on Tuesday 17 March from 2 pm.

TAICHI AT ST ANDREWS



Taichi classes at St Andrew's Gardiner are held on the first and third Friday of each month at 2.00 pm. For March, this will be Friday 6th and 20th It is great for your mental and physical serenity, and for forging links with a vibrant neighbour congregation! Everyone welcome.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS!

3 March EXPERIENTIAL SPIRITUAL GROUP

Rev John Power will offer a workshop titled "Awakening to the Living Universe: A Path of Panpsychist, Evolutionary Spirituality". This experiential spiritual group will meet monthly. The initial get-together will be in the church on **Tuesday 3 March 10am** followed by morning tea.

You can read about the rationale in the leaflets in the Narthex explaining the nature of the approach. If you are interested in taking part in this group, please inform Jane in the office, or speak to John directly.

6 March WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

The World Day of Prayer is a global Christian movement led by women, uniting people in prayer and action for peace and justice across the world. Each year a different country prepares the service and shares its stories and culture with the global community.

The theme for 2026 is "I Will Give You Rest: Come" (Matthew 11:28–30), with Nigeria as the focus country.

This year, Temple Society Australia will host the local World Day of Prayer service, featuring a musical contribution from the McKinnon Secondary College Senior Singers. The event is open to the wider community and all are warmly welcome to attend.

The service will be held on Friday 6 March, 10:30am-12:30pm, at 152 Tucker Road Bentleigh.

For further information, visit: [World Day of Prayer - Bentleigh | Bayside City Council](#)

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Thanks to all for your contributions to the issue. We always welcome your letters, articles and photos. Special thanks to Maria and Alan Sandbach for their editorial assistance and diverse contributions.

The deadline for the **April 2026** edition of *InSpire* is **Monday, 30 March**. Articles should be emailed to the Editor, Alison Tokita, at [alison@inspire.org.au](#).

25 March MUSICAL SOIREE



Isabelle Roberts will host another musical soiree, "Listening to Music", at her home on Wednesday 25 March, 2.00 pm. The programme will include a taste of Baroque, Classical and Romantic music. If you are interested in coming, please speak to Isabelle to reserve a place!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Alison,

I recently received an email from a UCAF associate in W.A. who shared a video of appearing in a local TV segment speaking about the Living Legacy Forest in which her late mother will be 'planted'. Do you think the readers of InSpire could be interested to see the video? I had never heard of the Living Legacy Forest and discovered that there is a Living Legacy Garden in Somerville on the Mornington Peninsula.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxvSz2XfU8>

Kind regards, Lencie

CALENDAR MARCH 2026

SUNDAY 1ST	11 AM	EUCCHARIST & COMMUNITY LUNCH
MONDAY 2ND	7.30 PM	SPIRITSONG
TUESDAY 3RD	10.00 AM	SPIRITUALITY WORKSHOP “Awakening to the Living Universe”
SUNDAY 8TH	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE
SUNDAY 15TH	10.30 AM 5.00 PM	CHURCH SERVICE SOMETHING FOR THE SPIRIT
TUESDAY 17TH	2.00 PM	CAFÉ CATCH UP AT MR SISTER CAFÉ 81 WAVERLEY ROAD
SUNDAY 22ND	10.30 AM	CHURCH SERVICE
THURSDAY 26TH	10.00 AM	COMMON THREADS
SUNDAY 29TH	10.30 AM	CAFÉ CHURCH