

Please be assured of my prayers as you continue to live with change and uncertainty. Whether that is planning for services and other ministries or what it means for you being able to take some leave. The following stories show how in amongst it all you are taking many opportunities to share Christ's love with each other and with others. As the sentence set for last Sunday reminds us:

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness – Lamentations 3 : 22 : 23*

MARMINGATHA

Stories to Inspire

FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2021



### *St Alfred's Blackburn North & St Luke's Vermont*

#### **WHITEHORSE CHURCHES CARE**

Over many years pastors and ministers in the City of Whitehorse have met to pray and do ministry together. For example St Alfred's has had close and productive relationships with New Hope Baptist Church and One Community Church of Christ for many years. For over twenty years we have produced a Christmas Carols event in collaboration with the City of Whitehorse; our staff teams have shared lunches together to build relationships and our senior pastors have preached in each other's churches annually. In more recent years and especially during the period of COVID these positive inter-church relationships have extended to include over thirty churches from across the denominational spectrum: Catholic, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Uniting, Independent, Anglican, Baptist, Church of Christ, Salvation Army. Out of these relationships a new entity has been birthed called Whitehorse Churches Care. This entity has been set up and financed by local Whitehorse churches to provide care to some of our most vulnerable. At the moment the focus is on two areas: food relief (especially during COVID) and temporary accommodation in churches for people struggling with homelessness, called Winter Shelter. At the moment we have about 250 volunteers from many churches ready to serve in the Winter Shelter. We are as excited by the idea of helping those in need as in the amazing cooperation that has occurred among such a diverse range of churches.



In the week leading to Pentecost we met to pray together for five nights in five different churches: Red Church (on Zoom), Box Hill Salvation Army, Full Gospel Assembly, St Alfred's and St Benedict's Catholic Community. Each church led the prayer time in a way that was true to their traditions. This meant that over the week we experienced brass band hymns, multi-lingual prayers from different country representatives, quiet contemplation, prayer on screen, sung chants and noisy exuberant prayer. The focus of our prayers was largely around themes to do with our city (both Whitehorse and Melbourne), our nation, the world, the church, and those in need. Along the way God was building and deepening relationships across the churches. This seemed to be very much in the spirit of Pentecost.



Through Whitehorse Churches Care we have also built positive relationships with Eastern Health, Box Hill Police and the Whitehorse Council. The united witness and work of many churches is having a positive impact and so we thank God for the birth of this new work. It is still early days but we are hopeful that we have found a new vehicle to serve our community and to commend the gospel.

*- Rev Peter MacPherson*

*Praying for our country on 21 May at St Alfred's Blackburn North as part of Whitehorse Churches Care 'One Heart: Week of Prayer'.*

## THE GOSPEL GOES TO CHINA

ANZ has a presence in over 30 countries and major service centres in Bengaluru, Manila and Chengdu. Recently I chanced (by a clear double-intervention by the Spirit) to discover a chinese national in our Chengdu office who had some years ago been given a Bible, but has since had no connection with any christians, let alone a local church. In reading the Bible, he'd started at page 1 – so, he's now up to Psalms, but had yet to reach the Gospels! So, I've had the privilege of explaining the Gospel to him, include him in our ANZ in-house worship, and personally disciple him.

## INDIA & THE PHILIPPINES

We recently conducted an ANZ in-house time of prayer for our colleagues in the virus-ravaged countries of India and the Philippines, and this attracted thirty staff, which is almost the most we've had for an in-house event. Of these, four are non-believers (one in Melbourne and three in India), and fed back that they found it deeply moving.  
– *Rev Angus Monro*

### *St Matthew's Prahran*

#### SMALL GROUP LIFE ONLINE

*“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” – Isaiah 43:19*

When we joined our new church in April 2020, we were in the middle of lockdown. The usual ways of meeting people, getting to know them and taking part in the community were completely upended. Like most churches, we started having Sunday gatherings online. As online church became routine, I realised that for mums in our community, this format actually allowed us to stay in church and participate in worship and listen to the sermon. Instead of having to leave the room to settle children, we could put ourselves on mute and still participate. It was also true of those who were too ill to attend face to face or had other physical barriers to attending church.

The same realisation came about for our mums bible study group that used to meet for an hour after playgroup. This group had met face to face for some years and some of the mums could no longer attend as they returned to the workforce or the kids outgrew playgroup. During lockdown, we started an online bible study group once a week in the evening, also using a Whatsapp group to communicate. There was an enthusiastic response to this new way of conducting small group. Suddenly all the barriers for attending were eliminated - there was no travel required in the evening, the group could now include mums with children older than pre-school age, working mums could now attend. When lockdown ended, we had a serious discussion about whether to return to bible study after playgroup and surprisingly, most wanted to continue online. We adjusted our group to meet for just over an hour once a week online for bible study or prayer, we took a break over school holidays and we have a purely social face to face gathering every 6 weeks where we can invite new people to join us. Our Whatsapp group has also become a way in which to keep in touch during the week, to connect, celebrate and pray for each other in close to real time without having to wait until we see each other or meet online.

As a consequence of COVID and lockdown, our church has now put a priority on exploring new ways of connecting to community. From the dryness of being physically separated came the unexpected blessing of becoming more inclusive by using technology to remove barriers.

– *Esme Hitchcock (wife of Rev Jordan Hitchcock)*



#### ONLINE WORKSHOP

*Covenanting together  
in a Covid world*

**6 July 9.30am-4pm**

Facilitated by Victorian Council of Churches. This is an opportunity for listening, learning & sharing. A one day workshop for people who are interested in exploring new ways of working collaboratively together as churches.

**Click here** to register

#### ZOOM READING GROUP

*Congregational Leadership  
in Anxious Times*

**Monday afternoons:**

**19 July, 16 August**

**& 20 September**

**from 3-4.30pm**

This short reading group will use *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* by Peter Steinke.

Contact **Ken Morgan** to register

#### SPIRITUAL DIRECTION & QUIET DAYS

*Forest Retreat*

**Rev'd Susanne Chambers**

**0405 758 766**

Rev'd Susanne Chambers is running 'Forest Retreat' which offers individual Spiritual Direction or quiet mornings or days in small groups.

Fee is by negotiation

**Click here** for more information