

# The River of Life



The Uniting Church in Australia  
LODDON MALLEE PRESBYTERY

May 2025 Edition

## Worshipping Under the Trees

The shady trees of Castlemaine's Victory Park created a fine setting for the World Day of Prayer last Friday.

People from several churches gathered for an outdoor service to mark this special day in the



Christian year joining Christians around the world in lifting their concerns for the international community.

The Cook Islands were the focus community for this year.

Several hymns were sung including one that embraced the theme of the day:

*We thank you that your church unsleeping,  
while earth rolls onward into light,  
through all the world her watch is keeping  
and never rests by day or night.*

*PHOTO CAPTION: The Rev Sarah Tomilson of Castlemaine Uniting Church opens the World Day of Prayer service in Victory Park*

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## Synod 2025

The 2025 Meeting of the Synod of Victoria will commence with Opening Worship at 10:00am on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August at Kingswood College, this will include the installation of the new Moderator, Rev Salesi Fauqula. The Synod Meeting will commence at 1.30pm at Box Hill Town Hall and will conclude by 4:00pm on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2025.

### SPECIAL GUESTS INCLUDE:

**Rev Tara Tautari** – General Secretary of Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa (the Methodist Church of New Zealand) – will provide the daily theological reflections.

**Rev Professor John Flett** – Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Theology, Pilgrim Theological College – will lead the Bible Studies.

Please note, since 2021, Synod meetings, including Opening Worship, have also been livestreamed. For more information on this check out the Synod website closer to the date. <https://victas.uca.org.au/synod-meeting/>



**PILGRIMS of the  
SPIRIT**

**Synod  
2025**

## Connecting With First Peoples Is About Listening

Seeking links with First Nations people should not be based on the premise “What we can do to help?”.

It’s all about listening.

That’s the advice of Ray Stevenson based on his involvement with people of the Dja Dja Wurrung whose land is occupied by the presbytery of Loddon-Mallee.

Links with the people of Aboriginal communities go a long way back for Newstead resident Ray part the Castlemaine Uniting church.

His maternal grandparents were associated with Sir Douglas Nicholls, a prominent Aboriginal Australian from the Yorta Yorta people, a footballer, Churches of Christ minister and social worker among his people and a governor of South Australia.

“My grandparents helped me become aware of the sense of the necessity for justice that was fostered by my Christian upbringing. They gave me an awareness of the ‘battlers’ in the community and the need for people to be given a ‘fair go’ ”, Ray said.

“They were not firebrand radicals. They quietly got on with it.

“That is what is needed after the hurt inflicted by “The Voice” referendum”

After completing a behavioural science degree at Latrobe University, Ray obtained a post-graduate qualification in pupil welfare and educational discrimination from the University of Melbourne.

This led to him tutoring young indigenous people in Bendigo with the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Group including helping trainee teachers understand the significance of indigenous people.

“I found I was finding I had a foot in both camps and developing an understanding of the issues facing First Nations people”, he said.



“My awareness grew of a large part of our community experiencing the advantage of the dispossession of Aboriginal lands and the trauma and loss this had caused for First Peoples.

“If we do not acknowledge these things we do not get traction on reconciliation”.

“This is an issue of faith”.

Ray believes that many people are unable or afraid to acknowledge the injustice that has been done and offers advice how processes of reconciliation can be approached.

“For a start, you have to work out a plan and this can be done by organisations, communities and particularly schools and churches in encouraging indigenous communities to feel that they belong.”

Ray stresses the importance of listening and understanding, truth telling and communicating.

“For some time I have been involved with the Nalderum mob in the Newstead area and this has been a considerable honour.”

Ray said that where congregations could draw on connections with local indigenous people good progress could be made.

Indigenous groups ran courses that could help with understanding’

“Recently we had 30 students from the University of Melbourne ‘on country’ in the Newstead area with elder Rick Nelson and a young emerging elder learning to understand a First Nation perspective.

“The communication was excellent and people were lapping it up. Their questions showed that they were listening to the indigenous people’s world view.

“When that sort of thing is happening we are making progress,” he said.

Ray said churches could invite indigenous leaders and emerging elders to discussions without feeling threatened.

“One of the nuts to crack is that unacknowledged structured racism exists, unrecognised, in our thought processes.

“You don’t go in there asking, ‘what can I do to help?’. “You go in there to listen and connect.”

Contacts are The Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative [www.bdac.com](http://www.bdac.com) or Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation [djadjawurrung.com.au](http://djadjawurrung.com.au)

Rev Jim Foley

*PHOTO CAPTION: Ray on the Pelodyll (Loddon River) bridge with a piece of glass that has been worked into a sharp edge for cutting, believed to have travelled by nineteen Aboriginal trade routes from NSW to north central Victoria that was found in the area and is to be returned, as an artifact to the Victorian Archaeological Survey.*

[This is the first of a series of occasional pieces highlighting how Uniting Church members and congregations from across our presbytery are 'Walking together as First and Second peoples']

## "Palm" Forest and Flowering the Cross at Castlemaine Uniting Church



Palm and other branches flourished at the front of Castlemaine Uniting church on Palm Sunday as Rev Sarah Tomilson had encouraged people to bring branches to church to mark the day. Players from the church music team led worshippers into the building for the service.

Many hands made joyful work of converting a confronting cross into something of beauty at Castlemaine Uniting church on Easter day.



On Easter Sunday, people gathered in the sunshine outside the church as Rev Sarah

Tomilson led them in shouts of joy at Christ defeating death and appearing to his followers on that first Easter.

The service embraced the impact of Christ's



peace, love and hope embodied by his followers down through the centuries and it being particularly important in times of uncertainty. Led by the children, people were invited to attach flowers

to netting covering the cross that had stood in the church for the Good Friday service.

The bloom bedecked cross was raised again to the traditional shouts of "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

The service ended with an Easter egg hunt organised by the children.

*PHOTO CAPTIONS:*

*Rev Sarah Tomilson with worshippers midst the "forest"*

*People interlace followers on the cross.*

*The flower bedecked cross is raised.*

## 'UCCOS - in Tune'

Sunday March 30th, the congregations of UCCOS ~ (Irymple, Merbein, Mildura, RedCliffs and Wentworth/Dareton) joined to worship together



at Irymple, where we were hosted 'At Home' by the Tongan congregation.

Our worship service alternated throughout between Tongan and English - including the singing and a lovely liturgical movement was brought to us by the children and young members accompanied by song.

We enjoyed a generous morning tea which followed and admired the upgrade of recently installed new carpet in the church and new curtaining in the hall. Thank you to Irymple for their wonderful hospitality.

As we departed, the children's choir were busy practising for 'White Sunday' on May 4<sup>th</sup>, when



the children and young people are responsible for the worship service.

*Lyn Adams, UCCOS Secretary.*

*Photos taken by Michael McBain on 30.03.2025*

## Hospital Chaplain's Report - May 15, 2025

Greetings to everyone, I would like to thank you for your kind support of messages, calls and cards asking how I was after being on leave after injuring my back while on holidays. My back is much better I still have some limitations but want you to know that I am now back to my usual hours. Which is Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 9:30am – 3:30pm. I am also on call for End-of-Life Calls.

I am based at Bendigo Health but also have visiting rights at St Joh of God and have visited people there. My role involves visiting both Uniting Church Patients and any person referred to Spiritual Care who needs to speak to someone concerning their needs.

I feel privileged to serve as the Uniting Church Chaplain and thank you all for your continued support of me and my role.

Thanks, Tanya Dunbar

### Loddon Mallee Chaplaincy Fund

If congregations or individuals would like to donate to the Loddon Mallee Chaplaincy Fund, please find the account information below.

**Account Name: Uniting Church in Australia Presbytery of Loddon Mallee**

**BSB: 633000**

**Account number: 132832148**

If donating by direct debit, please give your Church Name. If donating by cheque, please make it out to Uniting Church in Australia Presbytery of Loddon Mallee.

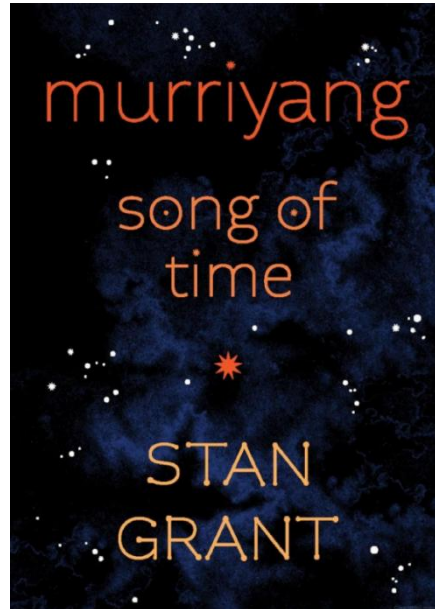
## Notes from Murriyang – song of time by Stan Grant

This is an unusual book. Stan Grant describes it as a Wiradjuri Book of Prayer. Each chapter is a Murriyang – a meditation followed by Babiim- a memory of his father. Totally jaded of modernity, the pace of life, politics and the media, Stan Grant encourages us to read it slowly, take in nature and shut out the media and politics.

Following his introduction of what sort of book it is he begins with a deep lament like some of the Hebrew scripture's psalms or Jeremiah's Lamentations: "I say: Why Lord? Remember Lord, what has happened to us. Look and see our disgrace. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers; our homes to foreigners. Lord, I wait."

In his first Babiim he tells some of his father's story. His father has been a holder of Wiradjuri tradition and law, while making his way in the racism and oppression of rural Australia. He is now elderly and frail. Stan's relationship with him has been difficult, but there is love. "When he is gone, I will have to take his place- I will have to place my feet in our soil and pull all our strength from the earth – I will have to stand under the stars and speak to God . . ."

Stan grew up in a Blak Christian church- that was able to hold together Christian faith and traditional aboriginal spirituality, with the Creator Spirit that commands the heavens, who gave the Wiradjuri their place and law, named Baiyaame. From a young age Stan Grant had an alive spirituality. He also has a PhD in theology. But with his years as journalist, seeing the worst of human horrors around the world, it dimmed. "I was blinded by the world." "God was waiting." Back in Australia the lack of progress and then the rejection of The Voice referendum did battle



with his soul. More recently "God has crept up on me . . . in quiet places where His gentle presence could settle my mind." "God has returned me to my ancestors and filled me with grace. That's what being Wiradjuri is, it is a place of grace, not anger. Justice matters, yes, but not resentment." In the book he is prepared to take the risk in this cynical and hostile culture of writing about God and his faith. While acknowledging the terrible things that the church has done, he is now an open-minded Catholic

with a humble, contemplative- even mystical-faith.

In each Murriyang he tells stories of his experiences, often referencing music, scientists, authors, philosophers, scripture, spiritual leaders. He writes as best he can about transcendence, and the sacred has been lost since the Enlightenment. He reflects on time. Brought up in a Western linear concept of time, this is the part of the book I found hardest to get my head around. He is haunted by the words of Bungal David Mowaljarlai- "Once I was past and future, Now I am only the present, Today, the moment, And that is hard to bear, With no past, no future." "It is a truth known to the peoples of the continent we now call Australia, who for countless generations lived in a relationship with place that preceded birth and continued beyond death."

It is a book to linger over. Each chapter is bursting with wise content, relevant to the situation of our lives, our world and our nation, as he speaks of trauma, lament, grace, forgiveness, hope, love, the sacred and the closeness of God.

*Book Review by Rev Geoff Barker*

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## We are a Multicultural Church: 40 years on

In 1985, during its fourth national Assembly meeting, the Uniting Church proudly declared: 'The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church'. As the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary approaches, the Uniting Church Assembly is inviting Uniting Church communities to mark **15<sup>th</sup> June 2025** as the date to commemorate, celebrate and reflect on this commitment to diversity, which is God's gracious gift.

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To mark this significant occasion, a three-day National Theological Consultation will be held from 10-12 June, co-hosted by the Assembly and United Theological College, with local hubs streaming in around the country. Find the information on this here: <https://uniting.church/hubs-we-are-a-multicultural-church-anniversary/>

The Assembly will soon release a resource for local communities to mark the anniversary in worship, along with an anniversary edition poster of the 'We Are A Multicultural Church' statement. You'll be able to find them both on this page in early June <https://uniting.church/multicultural-church-40-years/>.

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## Mission Grants 2025 – Open for Application

Recently the Loddon Mallee Presbytery office sent out an email to all congregation Chair's and Secretaries advising them that the Synod Mission Grants are open for 2025. These grants assist congregations and UCA entities to fund mission and ministry programs, and capital works projects. They come from a combination of bequests, specific purpose funds and general Synod funds (Mission and Service Giving and interest on investments).

This year the following grants are available:

- Grants for Mission or Ministry Programs (funded from Mission Grant Fund)  
These grants are offered to support specific ministry or mission programs. They are available for a period of up to five years, as nominated, to be paid in monthly instalments. The program is applicable to congregations, parish missions, regional clusters and presbyteries.
- Grants for Mission or Ministry Programs (funded from Trusts, Bequests and Designated Funds)  
(As above)
- Grants for Capital Works Programs  
These grants are offered to assist mission-focused building projects and are available to be accessed for a period of up

to 2 years only, beginning the January after approval. Funds are drawn down as required to either pay the service provider directly or reimburse the UCA entity. The program is applicable to congregations, parish missions, regional clusters and presbyteries.

- Grant for Small Mission Projects.  
These grants of up to \$5,000 are available to UCA congregations, to assist small mission projects that will be an outreach to or build community, provide educational opportunities, or are an innovative expression of worship. Grants may be considered for start-up funding for short to medium term mission projects.

For more information about the mission grants, or to access and download the forms to begin the application process, go to <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/grants/mission-grants/>

Please note that all completed applications need to be submitted to Presbytery by the **2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2025** for review. Contact the Presbytery Office if you require more information or have any questions.

*Katherine Wall Dobson*



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## Music Didn't Lie

The concert held on 27 April at Harcourt Uniting Church was very well attended, a fundraiser for the Asylum Seekers Welcome Centre. As Jimi Hendrix intended in the rest of his quote about music, it created harmony and cooperation.

A blissful afternoon beginning with baroque music and a version of the Teddy Bears' Picnic ranged through stories, folk songs and Irish fiddle. The final item saw a return of Brasslemaine with some heart-warming numbers.

Thanks to the performers, many of whom are Harcourtians or with strong connections to Harcourt, the helpers with afternoon tea and the generous and appreciative audience

# Donald Uniting Church – 100<sup>th</sup> Celebration



Smiling people and overflowing dinner plates filled Donald Uniting Church Sunday March 23. The reason: the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their church building.

" The first St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church was built in 1872. The current church was opened in 1925. It seats 300. It was built by Messrs. B.M. Basset and Son, Donald for the sum of £4275."

A Foundation stone reads, " This stone was

laid by Senator J.F. Guthrie 23rd February 1924. Presented by Mr & Mrs W.H. Gray Donald".

Rev. Margaret & John Russell led the worship



celebration. Isabelle Flett and Harold Flett were part of the team gathering this celebration together.

*Words written and photos taken by Rev Gordon Wild.*

## HYMNS ON CREATION & THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduced by Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood with pianist  
Bruce Macrae, organist Colin Prohasky and  
guest choir

**SUNDAY 22 JUNE,  
AT 2.30PM**

Stonnington Community Church  
59 Burke Road, Malvern East

Or for a Zoom link, email:

[ken.barelli@bigpond.com](mailto:ken.barelli@bigpond.com)

VICTAS UNITING CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Presbytery of Loddon Mallee pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we gather and worship. They were the first inhabitants of these places from time beyond remembering. We pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging and to all descendants who have cared for these lands since creation. We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather and worship.

## Loddon Mallee Presbytery Website

Don't forget that the Loddon Mallee Presbytery has its own website. If you would like to check it out, go to <https://loddonmallee.ucavictas.org.au/>

## Social Media Corner



Find us on  
**Facebook**

We have our own private group on Facebook. This is a great place to catch up on Presbytery news, between editions of "The River of Life". Invite your friends to join (Please note this is a closed group).

Search for "Loddon Mallee Presbytery" or use the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2302440563408439/>

## Cover Photo

*The photo in the banner on the cover is from a series of photos taken of Mount Moliagul in different seasons and at different times of the day. These were taken by the Rev Gordon Wild in his travels throughout the Loddon Mallee Presbytery. These photos will now feature in each edition of The River of Life.*

## Presbytery Contact Information

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## NEXT EDITION—August 2025

Please write to the Presbytery Office by email or snail-mail and send us your contributions ([Impresbytery@lm.victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Impresbytery@lm.victas.uca.org.au)). This is a chance for you to share your news and happenings to unite our mission and connection and the River of Life is all the richer for it!

Please note that the cut-off date for article submissions is the **12<sup>th</sup> August 2025**.