



Baptist Union
of Victoria

TOGETHER

Our stories together ♦ Quarterly magazine

Issue 5 August 2023



Featuring

**INSPIRING
YOUNG LEADERS**

Connecting Community

LEADERSHIP

RESOURCES events PRAYER

WELCOME

As always, this magazine brings together some exciting stories that represent just a very small insight into the wider Baptist family.

- Our feature on Inspiring Young Leaders gives us great hope for the future
- Our three stories of unique mission activities – a gospel singing festival, a free coffee cart ministry and sports chaplaincy – prove that mission is possible in any environment!
- Our research has shown the mood among our churches this year is more positive and there is anticipation for what the future holds.
- We report back and say thankyou for your contribution to the Stand with Myanmar campaign.
- And of course, we celebrate our very own Meewon Yang, who received an OAM in June of this year and will be awarded with her medal on 15th September.

There is so much more to unpack in this edition and I encourage you to pass this on to someone else who might like to read about what's going on in the life of the BUV.

God Bless,

Daniel



Rev Daniel Bulllock

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We would like to thank our BUV Editorial Consultant, Naomi Kollmorgen, for assisting with collating, interviewing and writing stories.

FEATURE - YOUNG LEADERS





Baptist Generations Network

The Baptist Generations Network is a group formed specifically for pastors and leaders who minister across the Generations space in one or more of the Children's, Youth, Young Adults areas.

The role of the BUV in this group is to equip, empower and encourage Generations leaders and as part of this, several events and catch-ups are held through the year. BUV Generations Pastor, Kimberly Smith, heads up the group who have a deep connection and desire to learn together.

The second Baptist Generations Network Day for 2023 was held in August with 30 leaders attending from across the state. It was a great day of connection, fellowship and learning from speakers and from each other.



Inspiring Younger Generations

Across our union of churches, we have some wonderful emerging leaders who are inspiring younger generations throughout Victoria to follow Jesus. Here, we speak to just a few, as they share how God has been shaping their work and drawing people to Himself in many ways recently.

The overwhelming theme amongst their stories has been the importance of seeking the heart of God as they step into activities, face challenges and build ministries that seek to glorify Him.

BUV's Generations Pastor, Kimberly Smith has the joy of leading and mentoring the Baptist Generations Network – a network of pastoral leaders working with children, youth and young adults, and says, "I am constantly inspired by the passion, creativity, persistence and commitment of our emerging leaders. They have led through tougher years than most have had to face early in their ministry lives and have grown immensely in character and capacity. This generation of leaders has a real heart and intent to encourage and develop younger leaders. They purposefully create opportunities for leadership experience and scaffold this with training, equipping and mentoring. This can make us very excited for our Baptist family both now and into the future."

Working alongside Kimberly at the BUV Support Hub, is Charlene Delos Santos, whose role as Second Generation Multicultural Coordinator, is specific to working with culturally and linguistically diverse youth leaders. Charlene says, "When I think of these emerging leaders, the things that come to mind are that they are thoughtful, considerate, and always seeking to follow Jesus. They have open hearts and minds, seeking to serve their communities whole-heartedly."

Way Lim



Way Lim, Youth Pastor at Syndal Baptist, sought God's direction after the youth group grew from 45 to around 75 this year. Way's team had made a smoother transition for youths moving from Grade 6 to Year 7, and young people were also inviting friends to youth group, which paved the way for the blessing and challenge of larger numbers.

"We had a sense that we needed to change what we do, otherwise we won't cope with what's coming. I spent time asking God and seeking Him, and He said firmly to do what you're doing now and focus on doing it with 30 more kids than you had, without changing our overall program.

"When I started the role, we focused on two main things – creating space for the kids to build relationships with others, and also with God. We do a lot of fun stuff,

but we also do a lot of intentional time in small groups to talk about God and I think the growth comes from those two pillars.

"One thing we could have done, with so many people coming, we could have focused on getting even more people. But God was very clear that we needed to focus on welcoming who's coming now, and caring for the kids we have. That was what He wanted us to do.

"God is at the core of everything we do. Whenever we have big challenges, turning to God helps give perspective. It focuses on asking God, 'what do You want to come out of this conflict or this challenging circumstance?'"

Way has seen God's blessings in the young people's

growth, the provision of leaders at just the right time, and the collaboration with parents as they hold their bible study groups at the same time as youth group.

“Having a lot of youth involved encourages the older generations, including the parents. It allows the older youth to really step up as potential leaders. This year, whenever any leader is up the front in some way, such as doing a prayer or serving food or in the band, they have one of the youth doing it with them.”



Last year, Way attended the Pacific Emerging Leaders Summit where he advocated on behalf of Pacific Island nations on issues important to them. The summit was organised by Micah and Baptist World Aid.

“The aim was to empower young Christian leaders in advocating and communicating with the political leaders in our country. I found it met those aims very well.”

Adam Deveson

At Mill Park Baptist, Youth Pastor Adam Deveson has been surprised by the direction his ministry has taken as he sought out God’s leading and followed with an obedient heart. Adam has built a network of churches from different denominations across Melbourne’s northern suburbs, where remoteness can take its toll.

“The BUV has always been big on getting together, and out in the north it’s really isolating because there are only two Baptist churches near me. I felt I didn’t really have the same style of support as those in the inner city, so I had to find it myself.”

Three years ago, Adam was asked to direct Youth Unite, a gathering of youth ministries in the northern suburbs once a term. Since then, the network has grown from four youth groups serving 40 kids, to 12 pastors serving 180 kids. As director, Adam oversees three youth events, one leadership training event and four Youth Unite catchups per year.

“This has been a really good space to grow relationships,” he said. “Once we started doing those catch-ups, we felt unity in our region tripled. Now

when we get together, it feels like catching up with friends not strangers. We believe this and the grace of God have enabled these youth events to grow. It has been fun and exciting, and I couldn’t imagine what God was going to do when I was given this opportunity to lead the churches.

“Among the pastors there is a lot of WhatsApp chat about what people have been studying or about ideas. We have one topic we reflect on, for example, how you do training or how you manage rest for your leaders, so we come with that topic in mind to share different perspectives. It helps us to sharpen our processes and ideas.”

The network recently hosted Whitley lecturer Reverend Andy Mitchell to discuss applications of the Barna Research, which investigated how faith impacts worldview, cultural transformation, ministry and spiritual development.

In September, youth groups from the network will hold a youth service at Diamond Valley Baptist focusing on “unity, purpose, and Jesus”.

Sarah Do

At Whitley College, Sarah Do builds networks of a different kind. As the Assistant Coordinator of the TransFormation program, Sarah engages with pastors, leaders and emerging leaders of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and facilitates their theological training and leadership formation.

She said it had been a “very humbling experience” to carry the program forward since her appointment in 2021, in light of its 20 years of theological training for CALD and LOTE students at a Diploma level.

“In my time, 11 students have successfully graduated with a Diploma of Theology, in suit of many students in the years before, and I hope to see more students graduate as well-equipped leaders for their various ministry contexts.

“The TransFormation program is something I am particularly invested in because it is a unique program that accommodates training and leadership formation for our growing migrant and non-English speaking communities. Having had theological



training previously, being able to offer it to others is a great privilege, as well as a unique opportunity to encourage thinking through truly contextualised theology.

“I have benefitted a lot in being part of this program because of the diversity of stories and experiences that I get to hear and be engaged in conversation about. In particular, learning about the Burmese refugee experience and journeying with their experience of church in Australia, has helped me to appreciate the context within which I have grown up, as an Australian-born Vietnamese with refugee parents. Not all our experiences are the same, but I believe that the stories I hear, and the stories I share are mutually beneficial as we continue to partner together in God’s work in our local contexts.”



Shepherding people from diverse contexts is something Freddy Biak knows well. As Assistant Pastor at Melbourne Chin Church, he cares for 120 youth, including 20 bible-study groups and a Saturday night service, while also helping care for other needs in the church of around 900 members.

Recently, Freddy’s ministry has focused on forming

Freddy Biak

the bible study groups with the main goal of helping the young people to grow in both their faith and a sense of belonging to God’s family.

“We are growing our identity together, and growing spiritually as well,” Freddy said. “Each group reads certain scriptures within a week and meet outside of church – it could be at a restaurant or a home – to discuss the scriptures and pray for each other. Then at our church service we discuss the main themes.

“We only started our program one month ago, so not everyone is doing it yet so I have been very busy visiting them at home and calling them to talk about how it works.

“The reason we started this program is that I could see for us, as Chin, our parents were Christians and then we automatically assumed we are Christians as well, but I can see that not everyone feels like they belong to the church. Some may come out of duty and they don’t see a sense of belonging here, so I wanted to focus on the relationship between each other and as a child of God. I find that very important.”

Freddy is grateful for God’s provision of several leaders this year who are a wonderful support to him. “This makes my job a lot easier because they know what they are supposed to do, and they also bring up a lot of good ideas about how to lead the youth and what changes we can make in order for the youth to grow.”

Another church project Freddy has been working on is a music album, which he hopes to release at the end

of next month on all major music platforms. Freddy and two friends wrote the songs, and the church’s worship team recorded the music.

“One of the visions of our church is to preach the gospel all over the world, and one of the main ways we do that is through the album. God has blessed our church so much that one of the songs we released from our church is now sung everywhere, overseas as well!”

Freddy is studying for his Masters in Theology at Whitley College, and his family owns a Chin restaurant in Hoppers Crossing.

But his main focus in this busy season?

“That’s an easy one! Once I became a pastor, the most valuable piece of advice I got is to focus on my relationship with God. If my relationship with God is good, then the rest will work out. That’s my priority.”

Abbie Pilat

The youth group at Lifeway Christian Church in Lara is also enjoying a new program this year, under the prayerful guidance of Abbie Pilat who started as the Associate Pastor there around six months ago.

Lifeway had not run a youth ministry for several years, but with recent growth in the congregation and growth in young people’s faith through an Alpha course in April and May, the church felt the need to introduce Lifeway Youth, which began in Term 3.

“It is still very new, but we have been enjoying our first term together exploring ‘Questions for God’ and creating a ‘group covenant’ of what we hope our culture will be,” Abbie said. “We are seeing consistent engagement from our church families with teenagers as well as being able to invite teenagers from some of our local community families. In a small group of teens, we have a diverse age range from Year 7 to 12, and all of them at different stages of their faith.

“I have personally really enjoyed being able to start a ministry from scratch. Having come from a larger church with an established youth ministry, being able to undertake this project has been faith building and has encouraged me to continually seek and rely on God for his guiding and not rest on what I think I already know. As a youth leader for 10 years now, my short time away from leading a youth ministry reminded me of how much I love this demographic and what a privilege it is to partner with our church families on leading and discipling the next generation of Jesus followers. It’s just the beginning, but I am looking forward to what God has for Lifeway Youth and the impact we can have in our local community of Lara.”



Moonee Ponds' Holiday Hikers

Seven Moonee Ponds Baptist Church adventurers spent a couple of days hiking in Lederberg National Park recently as part of the church's commitment to coordinating all-age activities in the school holidays.

The 20km hike along Ruth's Gully Circuit near Blackwood was held on June 29-30 and was open to anyone aged 13 years and above.

Youth and Young Adults Pastor Nathan Soo said the hike provided much-needed time and space for encouraging relationships to develop between different generations in the church community.

"One thing we recognised is that we have limited time with our youth and young adults every week. This hike and camp was a means to be intentional with our relationships and create an opportunity to be active listeners to where our next generation is at. We want to foster a deeper level of connection, and our hope is that opportunities such as this will go a long way in doing so."

The camp's organisers aimed to make the hike tough but achievable, in order to open up discussions about facing adversity with faith in Christ.

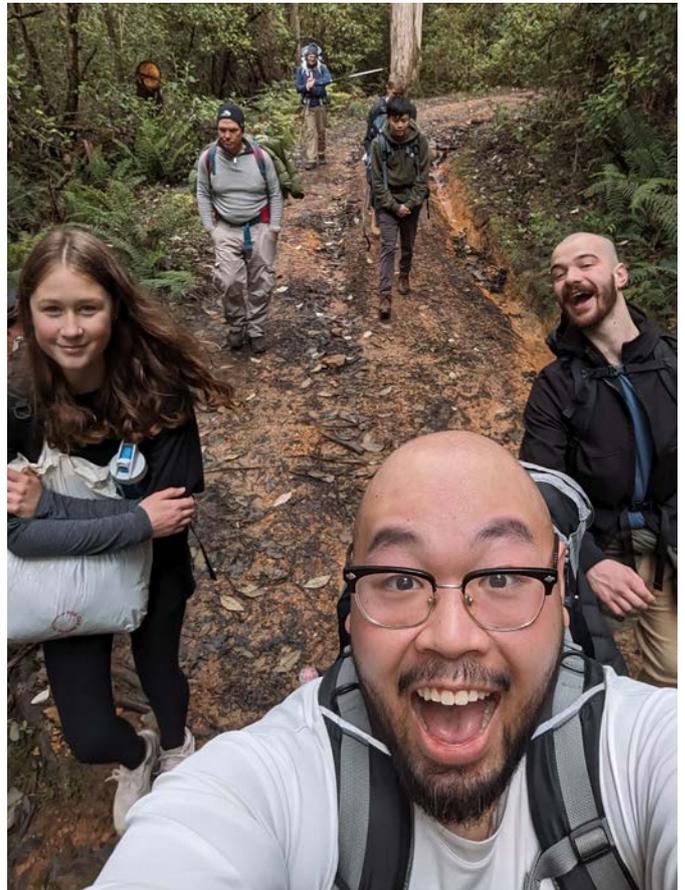
"We wanted to create an environment where those who came along could experience a safe level of challenge and adversity. This idea of challenge shaped our campfire discussions with the group where our leaders spoke about their own challenges that they have gone through in life and how Jesus walked alongside them in those moments," Nathan said.

"During the hike, I was impressed with how few complaints there were and there was a very supportive and encouraging atmosphere displayed by everyone who came along. Besides a few tired legs at the end of the hike, we had positive feedback from attendees."

Some of the challenges participants conquered included carrying all equipment, tents, food and clothes, night temperatures near zero degrees, and one hiker losing a shoe in a river crossing.

"We ensured that everyone had appropriate clothing and sleeping arrangements for the hike. Fortunately our seasoned hikers were able to get a roaring campfire going using damp wood which kept everyone warm.

"I think the best part was the sense of achievement that was felt by everyone at the end of the hike. It was



a good level of challenge and definitely brought the group together having completed it."

Based on this year's success, Moonee Ponds Baptist aims to hold more hikes in the future.

In the past, the church has hosted a holiday club for primary-aged children and an all-ages fishing day in Port Melbourne. In the holidays after Term 3 the church will hold a "rough-it camp" at a farm.



ignite Multicultural Youth Conference

Over 370 youth, young adults and pastors/leaders, representing nearly 40 BUV churches gathered for our 9th Ignite Multicultural Youth & Young Adults Conference at Syndal Baptist Church last Saturday 1st July. Ignite provides an opportunity for young people, many of whom are 2nd generation Australian, to gather together, hear inspiring stories and teaching on life and faith, celebrate through song and dance and worship God. The theme this year of 'Come Follow Me: Embrace the Way of Jesus' encouraged and challenged young people to prioritise Jesus in their lives and take the next step in their discipleship.

We opened the conference with Welcome to Country by Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Norm Terrick, who is a member of Melbourne Indigenous Christian Fellowship. Keynote speakers included Rev Marbuen Diaz (Baptist Association NSW & ACT) and Bianca Manning (Common Grace), who shared their stories of following Jesus.

For many, the Ignite Conference is a highlight of their year. One young person commented, "Ignite has been very encouraging for my faith and it is one of the things I look forward to every year!"

New Vision Baptist Church, and City Baptist Church led us in heart-felt worship and praise. Various cultural performances from Victory Baptist Church, Pwo Karen Baptist Church, and guest African drummers, were enjoyed by all. A participant shared that the "cultural performances and diversity amongst the people made me feel connected on a spiritual level." Other favourite moments mentioned were seeing everyone dancing and being prayed for.

Workshops also provided opportunities to dive deeper into topics on life and faith, as well as training for pastors and leaders in building resiliency in young people.

Ketsu Tuitama, one of the youth leaders from Victory Samoan Baptist Church, shared a word of encouragement to the participants. He started his Ignite journey back in 2019, with only 4 of their young people, and now brings over 30 of his youth along to Ignite. It's been a space of encouragement for him and his church.

We are looking forward to celebrating our 10th Ignite Conference in 2024! Save the date – Saturday July 6th 2024!







Community-Building Fun at the State Youth Games

Baptist youth groups were the largest represented denomination at the State Youth Games this year as Warragul's Lardner Park came alive for the enthusiastic but light-hearted competition on June 9-12.

The much-anticipated event is run by Churches of Christ each year with competitions in a substantial number of sports such as AFL, basketball, soccer, netball, table tennis, European handball, bocce and ultimate frisbee.

New Community Ringwood's Youth Coordinator, Alex Capp, said the Games provided an opportunity for young people to get together and enjoy interacting with like-minded youths from around the state.

"For New Community it's always a highlight. It's something the youth and leaders are always keen and pumped for during the year. Some things they enjoyed most were creating tighter relationships, closer connections, and a sense that they're part of something bigger than themselves. Our hope and prayer was that eyes would be opened to faith and to Jesus if it's their first time experiencing that, or otherwise continuing to have something stirred up in them, which might result from chats with leaders or listening to speakers over the weekend or interactions that they had.

"Coming back after the second year after lockdowns and Covid, it was an event that really solidified community amongst our youth. It's a great spot for providing memories and stories for each individual

camper to look back on. I hope that helps them to stay connected and be involved in youth."

New Community Youth brought a group of 80 teens, young adults and leaders along this year. They celebrated winning the Netball A Grade Mixed event for the second time in a row, while a Year 7 boy won the Table Tennis Under-18s event. The group also came runners up in ultimate frisbee and indoor soccer.

Alex and his fellow leaders had fun planning group initiatives this year with their "Pegs of Encouragement", and intentionally sharing refreshments with other teams.

"We tried to think of different things we could get up to, which could increase involvement from everyone and inspire encouragement with other youth and interacting with one another. So we tried to bring a bunch of oranges and take them out to sports, just like half time at the footy. We also brought a whole heap of pegs and wrote words or bible verses on them as an encouragement, and the youth and leaders were able to secretly peg them onto people as they went out to their different sports, to discover later. It was a bit of a game, and the youth had a lot of fun with it!"

The weather treated the campers kindly with far less rain than in years past.

CONNECTING COMMUNITY



 Baptist Union
of Victoria

Country Connections in the Spotlight

From carpark baptisms and a trivia fundraiser, to a weekly community meal – here is an update on happenings at Wodonga and District Baptist Church (WDBC) this year as the church endeavours to resource and serve surrounding communities.

An encouraging relationship has been growing between Wodonga and Corowa Baptist Churches lately, with shared pastoral assistance and social events.

WDBC Senior Pastor David Hodgens said the connection had developed over the past two years while Corowa has been searching for its own pastor.

“The Corowa youth have been joining with our youth group on an irregular basis, so there’s an overlap with the young people. We’re also participating in their wider church activities at times. In addition, we have an ongoing supportive relationship between pastors in the local area including Corowa’s youth leader, Emma, and Nick who is both an elder at Corowa and the pastor at The Vine Rutherglen.”

David said the aim was to encourage the Corowa church because they have not had a pastor to provide vision and leadership recently.

“It’s lovely to have an opportunity to come together and it’s good for us all to be part of something bigger, to realise that it’s not just the few of you but there’s a wider group of people who love God. Kendal, the Youth and Young Adults worker at Wodonga, and Emma get together and throw around ideas for the youth groups. Kendal has been able to help Emma strategise with issues that have come up along the way.

“Working together has been a wonderful blessing for everyone. Wodonga is well resourced in terms of people, so it’s a great opportunity to use that to build God’s kingdom, not just our own small corner of it. I’d like to think that we’d continue to be able to work together and build that relationship long into the future.”

Wodonga and Corowa are involved in a far-north-east support network of Baptist churches along with Albury, Corryong, Wangaratta and Rutherglen.

“This has given our congregations a lot of encouragement recently,” David said. “We’re looking at bringing another pastor into our team in Wodonga to continue the work God is doing in this area. God has moved wonderfully and we’re just trying to keep up!”

Both WDBC and Albury Baptist Church were excited to host several baptisms recently, and those in Albury were held in the unusual venue of the church car park because the people being baptised were physically unable to enter the baptistry.

An enthusiastic congregation of around 50 people attended the occasion.

“Since they couldn’t get into the baptistry, we decided that the water volume didn’t matter – what matters is the people behind it and their love for God – so we used a bucket of water and a shower chair!” David said.

“I took the time to explain the theology behind baptism so that everyone knew it was being done properly. It was a very encouraging occasion for the church. Fortunately, the weather was pleasant and not a cold day!”



Another exciting event, a church trivia night run by the young adults at WDBC, has raised \$8866 towards International Justice Mission (IJM) projects in the Philippines.

Around 220 people of all ages were treated to chilli con carne and quizzed on topics such as sport, music, literature, history and for-the-family.

Church member Sue Rosevear, a partner with IJM, suggested the event and Youth and Young Adults

Pastor Kendal Seaton said the young people were “thrilled” with the result.

“Our team had been talking about ways we could reach and extend outside of our group, so it presented a great opportunity to come alongside one of our church members and a great cause.

“It was an encouragement to our team and it reminded me how generous God’s people are. Sue was such an encouragement and lifted everything up firmly in prayer – which was absolutely key!”

IJM partners with local justice systems around the world to help build safe communities where people are protected from violence and slavery. On the night, Sue shared about IJM and her heart for helping those affected by exploitation and abuse.

An IJM spokesperson said the money donated at the event was “amazing” because it would be used to cover the cost of a prosecution development team in the Philippines for around two months.

“IJM’s Christian prosecuting lawyers ... are working hard to support OSEC (online sexual exploitation of children) survivors during the legal battle of bringing their perpetrators to account in court. That is the impact, on the ground, of what your church trivia night has enabled.”

Kendal said the young adults were excited to contribute in this way.

“We essentially wanted to create a night that allowed us to give back to our community and allow the wider church to gather for a night of trivia, dinner, games and laughs with friends.”

Another way WDBC serves the local community is through its free Thursday night meal, which David described as “like church, but not as you know it”.

Each week, hundreds of dollars in unwanted food gets collected, cooked and distributed at the meal which has grown a following of around 60 people whom the church refers to as a new congregation – people who may not attend Sunday morning services but who enjoy the meal each week while sharing in a sense of community and a gospel message.

Kerry and Lyn Bell started the meal with a team of helpers who all have a passion for loving their neighbours as Jesus does, and for serving people in a low socio-economic situation. The group had been collecting carloads of meat, fruit and vegetables from Foodshare and giving it away, but then Kerry decided to make better use of the food by cooking weekly meals, which enabled the team to build lasting relationships.

David said the Thursday meal began a year and two months ago.

“It’s usually a two-course meal – sometimes it’s hamburgers or sea perch, sometimes it can be something fancy like roast duck or a leg of lamb! Kerry’s very creative and he prepares whatever is available at the time.



“Sometimes we get special things to give away, like crates of Coke, boxes of bread or boxes of donuts through Foodshare. Kerry helps Foodshare by taking items that can be a bit hard for them to distribute and in return they have been very generous.

“In recent times, some of the people have lamented the cost of living, but as they come and enjoy a meal it is cutting back and cost-saving for domestic budgets each week. A lot of people who come here are feeling the pinch and some are living day-to-day, so being able to provide a bit of food and company is good.”

After the main course is served the team presents a welcome and devotion.

“We’ve thrown caution to the wind – it’s a clear gospel message which relates to the demographic because some guests have some significant struggles in life and we try to address their context. It’s a happy, comfortable environment and our guests are very respectful.

They’re engaging in a way a congregation on a Sunday normally wouldn’t, which is wonderfully refreshing

They’ll ask a question or call out what’s on their minds. We have people asking for prayer, and people asking for help at different times. And the night, it’s always good fun. We sometimes get people who are a bit lonely or a bit out on the edge, so it’s a place we can invite them to come to.”

People also bring bags to fill with leftover fruit and vegetables or cooked items produced by Kerry’s team, to take away.



Spotlight on Faith and Community at Gospelfest Armadale

Gospel music carrying the message that God hears our prayers rang out from Armadale Baptist's Community Arts Hub in June as the church held its first community Gospelfest concert in three years.

Four secular choirs, including two from Armadale's Community Arts Hub, performed for a packed house of around 200 people with well-known titles such as Freedom is Coming, Wade in the Water, O-o-h Child, and Standing in the Need of Prayer.

Leading one choir was Armadale's Pastor Jude Waldron who said the songs "spoke of being deeply human and yet also deeply spiritual".

"All of our choir's items were about prayer, from calling for God's help, to a sense of hope and that you're not alone, to reassurance that it's going to get better, and that God is there and hearing you – He hears every word. It was just an amazing experience to sing these lyrics together."

She said people were encouraged in many ways by the event.

"If you wanted a secular event, it was that – like a concert. Yet if you were open to having an encounter with God in some way, you had that too. If you wanted to have your spirit lifted and join in with your own voice in singing and praise, you could. If you wanted some

encouragement and challenge, that was there too."

It has taken a long time for Jude's singers to regroup after Covid lockdowns, as some members left, new ones joined, and some were unable to attend regularly. Gospelfest was the first time the choir performed a full 15–20-minute set of songs together since the restrictions eased.

"This was the moment we were a team again, a connected group of people. The difference in the community feel was huge. There was a sense that we're strong together, and a sense of unity."

The audience clapped, stomped, danced and sang along to almost two hours of gospel music at the event. At the end, the four choirs combined to sing I'm Glad To Be In The Choir, along with the audience who had learned the lyrics during the concert's stage changeovers.

Jude endeavours to make the choir a "safe and gracious space" for people who are interested in gospel music to sing together, grow in their musical ability, and experience the love of God.

Over the past few years Armadale Baptist Church has renovated its 120-year-old building to create performance and training spaces that promote community through the arts.

Two Sparrows Serving Coffee With Care



A coffee van organised by Kilsyth South Baptist Church is serving a free heartwarming brew and slices of pizza to locals in Boronia and the local community.

Named Two Sparrows, in reference to Matthew 10:29-31, the van makes its rounds every Wednesday from 6.30-9pm, aiming to put a smile on the faces of people around the area, from curious passers-by to those doing it tough and needing a little pick-me-up.

It was purchased and fitted out earlier this year using grants from Baptcare and the Boronia branch of the Bendigo Bank.

Two Sparrows volunteer Keith Richardson, a deacon at KSBC, said some of the locals had become regulars and the van's group of volunteers had been able to spend time talking, praying and sharing with them the gospel of John with its message of hope.

"A lot of the people we serve coffee to are homeless or just lonely. They're able to come and sit around our fire and have a seat and have a talk.

"We are now seeing the same people coming along each week and staying. It's amazing how many people ask us if we would pray for them, and we do.

"The Two Sparrows is going into the community and meeting people in need and showing that there are people who care. I've always believed Jesus said, 'do my work', and he didn't only do it in a church building on a Sunday morning, he went to where people were, and that's been the prompter for us.

"I think we've got to realise we have to move to a different type of church – it doesn't replace a traditional church, but it complements it."

Keith said KSBC would host an Alpha program in July and August, and the van's volunteers had been able to invite people to attend the course.

Two Sparrows also regularly visits two local primary schools and has "become a big hit" offering free coffee to parents and staff before school, and helping people to build friendships as they enjoy a hot drink.





Accredited 'Chappies' in High Demand

Every weekend, dozens of Baptist church members can be found barracking, setting up equipment, checking in with players or praying for their needs, as they chaplain teams from a wide range of sports across Victoria.

People like Pastor Mark Purser from Crossway Baptist Church and Pastor Adam Hince from Essendon Baptist Church help behind the scenes to keep teams and sports figures running by supporting their personal growth as they deal with stresses on and off the field.

As demand for chaplains is high, on September 10 (or an alternate date of their choice), churches across Victoria will host Sports Sunday, an event organised by Sports Chaplaincy Australia (SCA) to encourage more Christians to consider becoming accredited chaplains equipped with SCA's training, ongoing support and insurance cover.

After retiring from his hockey and cricket career, Mark Purser was keen to remain involved in high level sport and invest in people's lives pastorally. He has been a volunteer chaplain for Essendon Football Club for the

past 6 years, and also at Adelaide Crows and Eastern Ranges Football Club for 5 years each.

He aims to allow his personal faith to inform the way he carries himself in the sports organisation as he relationally supports players and staff.

"Whether it is grief counselling, running a parent workshop, leading a wedding/funeral, kicking balls at training and helping on game day – it is a huge privilege to be invited into the club's workspace and contribute. Breaking down those barriers that players/staff previously had of Christians and supporting them holistically is so encouraging."

Mark said there were opportunities right across the community for sports chaplains.

"We regularly pray for opportunities and open doors to share our faith in our community. God is answering our prayers, the sporting doors are opening in our clubs right across the nation. Our churches need to wake up to the need and invitation that is before us.

The conversations are profound and those pivotal moments to care for someone in a time of need is powerful and often life changing.

"I am a more well-rounded Christian and a more effective pastor as a result of my chaplaincy experience. The conversations are profound and those pivotal moments to care for someone in a time of need is powerful and often life changing."

Becoming a chaplain had always appealed to Adam Hince because he knew other people in the role and, when he became a pastor, he wanted to also serve in avenues outside the church.

He has been chaplain to Cricket Victoria since 2001, easing into the role over several seasons working with predecessor, "legend" Barrie Sutton.

Adam attends training and matches, meets players one-on-one for a walk around Albert Part Lake or Junction Oval, and occasionally participates in group training sessions – "where I usually don't say much!"

... a powerful reminder that sporting teams and church communities have a lot in common (the good bits and the bad bits)

"When I meet players, we discuss life outside of cricket – which for elite athletes is a strange mix of complex, boring and balanced. There have been three significant deaths in my time as a chaplain, which represent both the 'best' and most difficult times in my role. Each has been a powerful reminder that sporting teams and church communities have a lot in common (the good bits and the bad bits). It's why I think sports chaplaincy is a good space for followers of Jesus to be in. We actually understand a lot of the politics, culture and expectations better than most. At times of deep sadness, it seems chaplains offer something unique and helpful."

SCA Victoria and Tasmania coordinator, Luke Connaughton, said the need for sports chaplains was greater than the supply.

"Each week around 14 million Australians meet to play sport. Fields and courts across our country are packed with players and those cheering them on. Today, the sports club is one of the heartbeats of our community and we – the Church – are being invited to be there, to be present in all seasons. Our hope is that we would see a multitude of new chaplains identified, trained and sent into communities to represent the heart of Jesus."

The best chaplains are people that "love Jesus and care about people", Luke said. "You don't have to love sport

or be a 'professional' chaplain. Those that are already connected to a sports community, through their kids' participation, or their own, are well placed."

For Jess Suraci, the best thing about being a chaplain is building meaningful connections with people while sharing the faith and strength that only come from the Lord.

Jess became the chaplain at Taylors Lakes Football Club after receiving her SCA accreditation in 2014. She applied after watching her brother play rugby at representative level and witnessing the effects of two suicides that shook the community.

"I wanted to make sure that there was a formal option – people advocating for our young players who didn't have support, advocating for parents that were not coping at home. I felt God was leading me to be that person.

"There is no way a person can do the work of a chaplain without their faith, and the strength, patience, wisdom and guidance that can only possibly come from the Lord. I know that for me, personally, planting myself firmly on the foundation of my faith is the only way I can continue to be effective."

On Sports Sunday, churches can use SCA information resources to include a brief segment about chaplaincy in their services. Register interest at sportschaplaincy.com.au/Home/SportsSunday



WHAT IS SPORTS SUNDAY?

Sports Sunday is one day when the church thinks about, prays for, and commits to being a presence in the local sports community.

This opportunity exists because of the 14 million Australians who meet each week to play sport. Because there is such a great demand for sport chaplains - we the church are being invited to be there and this represents a great opportunity to engage with the broader community by being a presence in the local sport community.



“I greatly appreciated the seminar. The speakers were all superb and imparted a great deal of valuable information. My sincere thanks to all involved”.

Finishing Well Seminar

In June, around 50 people from congregations around Victoria attended our Finishing Well Seminar, to hear from experts in the fields of Continuum of Care (retirement living, residential/in-home/palliative care), Estate Planning, Grief, and Funeral Planning. At some stage in our lives, we will all contemplate what it means to have ‘fought the good fight, keep the faith and finish the course’ in such a way as to do so with dignity whilst also caring for those around us. This seminar provides a wonderful opportunity to consider some of these topics in a safe environment with like-minded people.

The BUV Support Hub partnered with Baptcare and other like-minded people to present this half-day seminar. Presenters shared their expertise in a caring and engaging way, and each attender left with both information and some practical next steps.

Further Finishing Well seminars will be presented during 2023 and beyond. If you have an interest in

attending a Finishing Well Seminar in the future, please contact Andrew Naylor on (03) 9880 6129 or email andrew.naylor@buv.com.au.

Future events (see page 31):

- 13 October - Wangaratta
- 1 November - North West Metro



“I found the seminar very informative, thank you to those involved.”

“I thought I had covered off on all those things but realised there were some gaps.”

LEADERSHIP



Honours Well Deserved for Rev Meewon Yang

A huge congratulations to the BUV's own Multicultural Consultant, Rev Meewon Yang, who was awarded a Medal in the Order of Australia (OAM) in the King's Birthday Honours in June.

The distinction was awarded for her passionate service to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and to Baptist churches in Victoria.

For the past 25 years, Meewon has worked for the BUV to help give a sense of support and hope to refugee and asylum seeker communities across Australia. Her passion to advocate for these communities began during her study at Whitley College and while pastoring at Brunswick Baptist Church, where she became keenly aware of "God's compassion and justice for the most vulnerable in our society".

"Australia has huge resources, and we can give refugees a new chance at life by involving them and by voicing their concerns, and this gives hope for us all," Meewon said. "I also believe that as we give voice to our Indigenous peoples we will grow as a nation welcoming refugees and migrants, and we will become stronger together."

In 1989, Korean born Meewon came to Australia as a student. Coming from a Korean culture and church, Meewon believed that "multiculturalism is a vision of God's Kingdom" and so she was keen to experience other cultures. But until she engaged in her ministry it was a dream. Joining the pastoral team and sharing at Brunswick opened her mind to other cultures and it was where Meewon learnt many of life's invaluable lessons.

In 1995, an opportunity arose for Meewon to help Somali women she had got to know through ministering at the church. Many Somali women were isolated in their homes all day, looking after their children and maintaining their households. After getting the women together from all over Melbourne, Meewon realised the women were adamant about one thing - they wanted to sew! With the assistance of both Brunswick Baptist Church and the local Council, Meewon was able to set up some sewing machines, find teachers who volunteered their time every Wednesday and Saturday for sewing class. And so began the Somali Women's Sewing Group. When refugees from East Timor and

Kosova came the sewing class extended to them. This group has been a long term ministry of the Brunswick Baptist Church and has been a true blessing to so many refugee women across Melbourne.

Whilst at Brunswick Baptist Church, Meewon also initiated an accommodation program for asylum seekers in the house next door to the church and in conjunction with Baptcare's Sanctuary project, she acted as the chaplain to the program.

After completing her studies and ordination formation, Meewon was ordained by the Baptist Union of Victoria in 1997.

When Meewon applied for Permanent Residency in Australia, unfortunately, due to the wrong legal advice, her 'distinguished talent' visa was rejected and that she had 28 days to leave the country. Brunswick Baptist Church wasn't going to let that happen. Members of the church assisted Meewon with an appeal. Even members of the Somali sewing group took a petition to their Mosque and received an overwhelming number of signatures, which assisted in the approval of her visa in 1998. Meewon was so blessed by this and realised that "Christians and Muslims can work together".





Leaders at the Baptist Union of Victoria had seen Meewon's work and engagement with multicultural groups and realised the potential she had to connect multicultural groups to the BUV. It was then she was appointed, along with her role as a pastor of Brunswick Baptist Church, as the Multicultural Minister of the Baptist Union of Victoria. Once Meewon had full time work in Australia, her permanent residency was approved and since then she has been an active advocate for asylum seekers and refugees.

This month, Meewon celebrates 25 years of service to the BUV, where largely as a result of her dedication and faithful work, the number of multicultural churches in the BUV family has grown to be well over 100 congregations and comprises over 1/3 of the total number of congregations in the Union. She also set up the BUV RAALS scheme – a refugee airfare and car loans scheme. It financially assists in two areas. Firstly, to assist those who have been granted a humanitarian visa to come to Australia, but without an airfare they would not be able to travel before their visa expired. Secondly, for interest free loans for refugees to buy cars to assist with employment. Many refugees are also benefitting from the interest free loans to help bring family members to Australia.

As a practitioner, pastor, and consultant for many years, she has also taught at Whitley College on the Multicultural church, asylum seekers and refugees, and after her additional research study, on the different ways of being a multicultural church.

Recently, Meewon was part of coordinating an ecumenical Australia-wide prayer service at Collins St Baptist Church for the people of Myanmar, where civil war has caused a human rights crisis and the displacement of 1.3 million people.

Meewon said the OAM was a "humbling experience",

in fact, when she received the email regarding it, she thought it was spam! Meewon expressed her gratitude to Brunswick Baptist Church and the Victorian Baptist Churches, including the many languages other than English speaking churches, and some other significant people. Her gratitude is not only for believing in her and supporting her journey, but also for the opportunity to work with people from a variety of cultures to promote multicultural Australia. She particularly would like to share the award with the team members who work alongside her at the BUV.

"I am an ordinary migrant and a relatively new citizen of Australia and am very honoured. I want to acknowledge and appreciate the many people who have supported and journey with me. I would like to take this opportunity to stand up for the marginalised in our society embracing the hospitality of God."

Meewon is the BUV's Multicultural Consultant. She also serves as a member of the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce and was an adjunct lecturer at Whitley College.



Innovation to Lower Language Barriers

With the many multicultural communities in Victoria, it is such a privilege to have different cultures represented at churches as we worship God together, although one big challenge this presents is the language barrier.

Churches in the Baptist Union of Victoria have been creatively adapting their services to meet this challenge so that everyone is included.

At Tottenham Baptist Church, Pastor Adam Bamforth and the leadership team are transitioning towards a stronger use of English over Spanish as the main language of their services in order to remain connected to emerging generations. Some songs are sung in Spanish, while others are sung in English, and sermons are translated via a headphone system by a translator sitting in an office next to the stage.

BUV Generations and Emerging Leaders Pastor Kimberly Smith found this encouraging when she preached at Tottenham earlier this year.

“Because of the live translation, people listening to the sermon were able to respond in real time to the preaching,” she said. “It will be interesting to track this transition as other churches could learn a lot from this journey.”

Similarly, at Sion Church in June, BUV Multicultural Church Consultant Jessen Yeoh preached in English while Pastor John Truong translated his message for the Vietnamese community attending the service.

Jessen said sermon translating played a crucial role in helping BUV LOTE congregations overcome language barriers.

“It allows members who are not fluent in English to engage in the sermon. By providing translations, sermons become accessible to LOTE audiences, fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging within the BUV community.

“Sermon translating promotes cultural exchange and understanding, as it allows preachers from different backgrounds to share their faith and teaching. It can strengthen the relationship between BUV constituent churches and enrich the spiritual journey of LOTE churches’ members.”



CHURCHES MORE POSITIVE IN 2023, WELL PLACED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY WELLBEING IN 2024

The major takeaways from a variety of information that the BUV collected through 2023 indicate an improved state for our churches compared to the past couple of years, with an alignment on our core priority, being mission.

Pleasingly, our 2023 Flourishing Church Survey results indicated that **over 80% of churches are flourishing** in the areas of **Spirituality, Congregational Engagement and Structure and Processes**. Areas that had the lowest percentage of churches reporting flourishing results were Evangelism (38%), Justice (54%) and Leadership (59%), but interestingly all reported increases of over 50% in 2023.

Despite Evangelism being the only area that reported less than 50% flourishing, it had increased substantially from 11% in 2022.

Mission, outreach and evangelism clearly provide challenges for our churches and congregation members, and resources and training in this area were the most frequently requested response for BUV equipping and focus in the years ahead.

The major sentiments across congregations were **positivity, hope, enthusiasm and cautious optimism / anticipation**. There was a definite improvement in the general sentiment for pastors and leaders, who reported more positivity and excitement about the future - although this can be balanced by a feeling of exhaustion at times.

Churches have seen a **slight increase in attendance** but most have not yet reached the consistency of their pre-Covid level and are seeing some **decrease in the frequency of attendance**.

Churches are making changes to stay relevant to the time, such as a renewed focus on prayer, preaching appropriate for newcomers, hospitality for newcomers, online programs and more of an outward focus.

Overall, the research results suggest that despite signs of a general lack of hope within the wider community, with specific fears such as cost of living and mental health anxiety, the **church is well placed to provide support to community wellbeing into the future**.

BUV ANNUAL RESEARCH METHODS

The BUV initiates research each year using surveys throughout the year in order to assist in understanding the state of our union, the areas of strength and weaknesses, and the opportunities to focus on for the future. In addition, this year, we also specifically collected some information from the non-church going members of the community (external to the BUV), in order to understand the community landscape, areas of strength and weakness and the challenges community members are facing.

Although these insights are not included below, we also take into account the feedback we receive from our field staff who are talking with pastors and leaders of churches each day and our annual statistical surveys, that provide insight into attendance, membership and

baptisms trends, numbers participating in community outreach, and giving trends.

This article contains insights from the research listed below:

1. Pastors Survey – Nourish (May)
2. Flourishing Church Survey (June – July)
3. Church Pulse – (July)
4. Discernment Process – Consultation forum (March), Members Dinner (May)
5. Pain Points – external (June)

This research forms the basis for the BUV Support Hub strategic planning and priority setting for 2024.

1. Pastors Survey – Nourish

At Nourish in May, 91 Pastors took part in our 2023 **Pastors Survey** which centred mainly on the values and distinctive aspects of the wider BUV and the significance of mission to our Union. The questions asked and the most frequent answers are listed below, additionally with some key quotes from responders:

What sets Victorian Baptists apart?

Diversity, sense of community/ community focused, togetherness/ united, mission focused, autonomy and freedom of conscience, multicultural

“Our commitment to each other in forming disciples, exercising governance, discerning direction, building the church (body of Jesus)”

How would you rate mission as a priority in your church?

Highest	19.4%	Average	16%
High	61.3%	Low	3%

“There is a uniqueness in our voluntary fellowship and the spirit of cooperation that is fostered when vision and faith is the main thing that draws us together, rather than hierarchies of power and governance structures. There is a freedom which comes from being invited in to the cooperative mission of the Baptist family rather than a coercive leadership authority”

Thinking of the wider BUV, what would you say are the actual values of the Baptist Union of Victoria – or what describing words would you use

Care and Support, Christ-Centred, Community, Mission / Outreach

Actual values of the BUV - “Mission and community oriented churches with a diverse range of ethnicities.”

Do you agree that mission should be centre of the BUV strategy?

96% Yes 4% No

“We just don’t talk about loving our community, we actually do many practical things to make a real difference”

One area for BUV to focus on in 2024

Mission / Evangelism / Outreach, Discipleship, Generations and raising up and training leaders

Does being a Baptist church make a difference?

Yes 54% No 46%

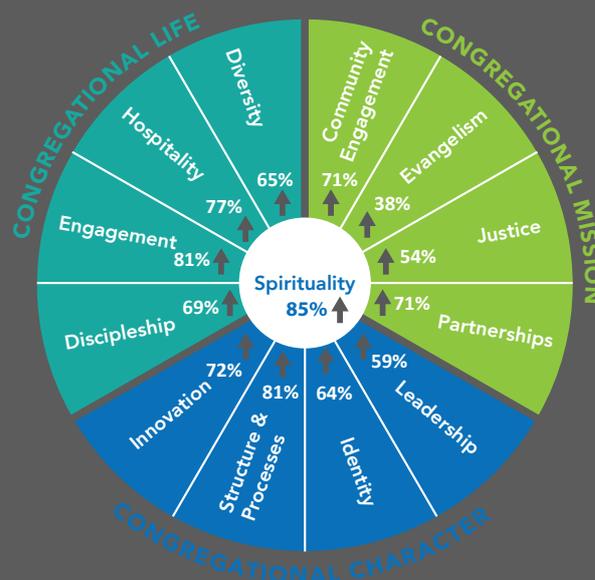
2. The Flourishing Church Survey

The **Flourishing Church Survey** received an improved response with a significant increase in the number of churches submitting surveys.

Results improved in all areas of the survey, which indicated a more positive year, but also showed that improvements made to the format of the survey in 2023 had made it easier for leaders to respond to each aspect.

Pleasingly, spirituality and evangelism had the highest increases of all aspects, with spirituality moving from 40% of churches flourishing in 2022 (those reporting a rating of 7+) to 85% in 2023, and evangelism moving from 11% in 2022 to 38% in 2023. Despite the large increase in evangelism results, this aspect remains the lowest of all in the survey and is the only aspect with under 50% of churches reporting flourishing results.

Also noteworthy, congregational engagement improved by 69% from the previous year, with 81% of churches flourishing in this aspect; and community engagement improved by 61%, with 71% of churches flourishing.



Areas that had the lowest percentage of churches reporting flourishing results were Evangelism (38%), Justice (54%) and Leadership (59%), but interestingly all reported increases of over 50% in 2023.

3. Church Pulse

Our **Church Pulse** is another qualitative tool from a small representative sample of churches across Metro / Regional / Rural, LOTE / Anglo, Church Size and helps to triangulate information received from other sources. We specifically asked some similar questions from across other surveys to check consistency of results.

The major sentiment across congregations was considered to be **positive, hopeful, enthused and cautious optimism / anticipation**. Most have experienced an increase in in-person attendance post-Covid with steady growth but not a return to pre-Covid levels as yet. **Frequency of attendance** was the detail most noted, with those who come less than every week coming less regularly - perhaps monthly instead of fortnightly - and so on. Some noted a seasonal decline.

In 2023 **churches are doing some things differently** to cater for changes in attendance or their congregations - of note were a renewed focus on prayer, preaching appropriate for newcomers, hospitality for newcomers, online programs and more of an outward focus.

The vast majority of churches have an **online presence**, some being new post-Covid. A minority are investing

in this and developing it into a dedicated community, while others are wrestling with how to better engage in this space.

All churches rated themselves 7 or more out of 10 for how much of a **priority mission** is in their church, some rating it as the highest priority.

All churches are undertaking **missional / community initiatives to connect and engage** their communities - some are more focused than others.

The **biggest challenges or pain points facing the local neighbourhood** or local communities were a lack of hope, anxiety, cost of living, homelessness, suicide, drug and domestic violence.

Most churches are engaging in initiatives that could **help to alleviate a challenge or pain point(s)** and support the community to experience joy and a sense of connection. Some examples are community meals, toy runs, Empowered Faith Communities, emergency housing, schools/ education, men's group, suicide prevention organisation, cooking clubs, assisting immigrants.

And finally, the main sentiments among pastors / leaders about how they are feeling this year are **excitement and positivity**, but at the same time, weariness - depending on the day!

4. Discernment Process – Consultation forum

During 2023, one of the BUV's priorities was to define and demystify evangelism and this topic was a focus of our 6 **Consultation Forums and discernment around the state and May Members' Dinner**. Feedback from the table discussion at both events is summarised below.

The main challenges for evangelism expressed were around the:

- Fear of evangelising and the lack of priority / interest / equipping
- Negative reputation of the church and the hostility toward Christianity in community
- Lack of relationships with neighbours and non-Christians
- Consumer culture

The main opportunities for evangelism expressed were:

- Friendship evangelism - outside church – sharing authentic daily life with people and being there when need arises, listening
- Online/ New Tech – embracing online platforms for some who may not or cannot come to a church and new technology to connect with younger generations

Resources the BUV Support Hub could equip you with in this area?

- Evangelism training and equipping - how to share
- Provide relevant words – how to communicate
- Share stories and resources about ways we can be in community?
- Grants for projects
- Discounted training
- Package video resources eg. BLESS, etc

5. External Community Pain Points

“A sense of fear prevails in some places, as well as a sense of bunkering down and sticking too close family and friends. The world's a less friendly place, scammers, drugs, inflation are all having an impact in society, particularly after long periods of isolation and disconnection post-Covid lockdowns. I think people have become more insular, less trusting; compounded by the fear of inflation and what lies ahead financially.””

What could people of faith do to increase joy fun and connection for people in community?

Provide mental health services that are accessible and affordable without long waiting list times, free or low cost place for people to meet and engage with each other. Helping the vulnerable with food / medical deliveries, anonymously so they don't feel embarrassed. Help people to help other people.

PASTORAL NEWS



Baptist Union
of Victoria

BUV celebrates Milestone Ordination Anniversaries

Eleven Experienced in Ministry Pastors were invited to Nourish this year to be celebrated for reaching milestone ordination anniversaries.

Each May at Nourish, the BUV recognizes decade anniversaries of ordination for its Pastors from 10 years right through to, in this case, not only 50 years of ordination, but 55, 60 and one 65 years!

Rev Daniel Bullock prayed for each one of the Pastors represented on stage, congratulated them for their amazing years of service and ministry within the BUV (and in some cases beyond), and presented them with a Celebration of Ordination certificate.

Congratulations to the following Pastors for reaching these milestones:

65 Years

- Rev Len Lewis

60 Years

- Rev John Strugnell
- Rev Clarrie Edwards

55 years

- Rev Dr Stuart Robinson
- Rev Rod Bensley
- Rev Bob Payne
- Rev John Hicks
- Rev Dr Ian Hawley

50 years

- Rev Stewart Rae
- Rev Jim Walter
- Rev Alan Marr
- Rev Charles Olsen
- Rev Ray McDonald
- Rev Geoff Emonson
- Rev Charles Lazaro

40 years

- Rev Grant Stewart
- Rev Mark Bailey
- Rev Garry Lock



EVENTS

Visit buv.com.au for more information

Finishing Well - 13 October - Wangaratta 1 November - Essendon

The BUV, in partnership with Bapcare and other like-minded and caring organisations, are offering a half-day seminar to cover things to think about, such as **Continuum of Care** (Retirement Living, Residential Care, In-home Care, Palliative Care, Advanced Care Planning – decision makers etc), **Estate Planning** (Wills, Powers of Attorney), **Grief**, and **Funeral Planning**.

13 October - Wangaratta

[Click here to register](#)

1 November - Essendon

[Click here to register](#)

or email events@buv.com.au; or call 9880 6100

Let's Pray Together - 12 October

We would love any pastors, church leaders or congregation members to join us to pray together for our union, our state and our world. We will be praying specifically for the Korumburra Baptist Church and local community, for the referendum vote and for CONVERGE, our national Baptist delegation visiting politicians in Canberra to advocate for peace in Myanmar. You don't need to register – just join the zoom link to attend the prayer meeting:

[Click here for more information](#)

Members' Dinner - 20 October Reggio Calabria Club, Brunswick Rd, Parkville

Twice a year, we gather together to pray and discern, vote and decide on business, governance and other matters integral to the life of the union of Baptist Churches in Victoria. More information will be distributed shortly.

Nourish - 20 October Fuelling for Fruitful Ministry - Me, We and Us

Fruitful ministry is what we all desire as Pastors. But most of us know what it is like to minister when the fuel tank is low. Everything feels harder, small things quickly become so much bigger and one little setback can feel overwhelming. Paul urges us to, "always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58), but it is so hard when we are depleted.

But when our fuel tank is full, everything seems possible, obstacles don't seem to overwhelm us and major setbacks can be overcome with God's help. This Nourish we will have some great speakers sharing on how we can be fuelled up for ministry in our own settings.

- Me - How can I fuel myself for fruitful ministry?
- We - How can the significant people in my life help to fuel me for fruitful ministry or for ministry together?
- Us - How can the leaders of my church and I fuel ourselves to lead from a place of fruitfulness?

One of our sessions will be led by Nicky and Sila Lee, from Holy Trinity Brompton in the UK, who will join us while visiting Australia to share their wisdom and experience. This day is for everyone in Victorian Baptist Ministry and we would love for you to come and connect with other pastors. Spouses are welcome.

[Click here to register](#)

Creating Safe Spaces

- Phillip Island - 10 September - [click here to register](#)
- Online/Zoom - 6 October - [click here to register](#)
- Online/Zoom - 11 November - [click here to register](#)
- Balwyn (Mandarin language) - 18 November at 1pm [click here to register](#) For information about how to register for the CSS Chinese-language online module please email Vicky Dyer vicky.dyer@buv.com.au
- Derrimut (Vietnamese) 25 November - [click here to register](#)



Start planning for July 2025, when all Australian Baptists will have a one-of-a-kind opportunity to gather in Brisbane with Baptist sisters and brothers from around the world and learn how God is at work in and through our global family. It will be a powerful time of worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, and service.

The theme of the conference is Living the Good News and over the week, sessions will explore:

- How do we live the good news in today's world?
- How can we effectively proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind?
- How can we set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour?
- How can we work together to achieve this?
- What can we learn to take back to our own settings?

The theme will be unpacked by keynote speakers, in our worship, in Bible studies, focus groups, and seminars. The children's and teenage tracks will follow the same themes so that families can chat together about how they have been impacted by what they have seen and heard.

Registrations are open now -

To register, go to

<https://bwabrisbane.com/congress-registration/>

July 9-12, 2025: The main Congress program will start with the Opening Celebration on the evening of Wednesday, July 9, and will continue through each day and evening until the Closing Celebration on the evening of Saturday, July 12. Thursday through Saturday will include plenaries, Bible Studies, seminars and focus groups, and the International Festival as well as time for fellowship and networking together.

July 7-8, 2025: The Baptist Women's Summit and Emerging Leaders' Summit precedes the main congress and will be held on Monday, July 7, and Tuesday, July 8, 2025.

The conference logo was design was created by Australian Indigenous artist Mariah Sweetman and reflects a depth of meaning that is rich in symbolism and connection.

- Shape of Water: Symbolizes the Spirit of God in believers and the journey of believers to Christ.
- Journeys to Water Holes: Symbolizes God's provision along our journey – we are filled and sustained daily by the Living Water.
- Moving Water Lines: The river is flowing and not stagnant.
- Tracks Towards: Moving towards Jesus in our lives and meeting with Him.
- Tracks Outwards: This represents the overflow from relationship with Jesus.

BRISBANE • JULY 7-12, 2025



PARTNERSHIP NEWS

150,000 Thank you's

In April this year the Baptist Union of Victoria and Baptist Mission Australia partnered together in an appeal to raise funds for the ongoing crisis in

Myanmar. We are so thankful for the response from individuals and churches across our union. Baptist Mission Australia's broader reach enabled this appeal to engage individuals right across Australia and we are so thrilled to announce that together we have raised over **\$150,000!**

We want to say THANK YOU to all who have given so generously.

The situation in Myanmar is both complex and dire. It is highly political, both nationally and internationally, but also violent and frightening for those involved and so these funds will play a vital role in relieving the stress placed on the everyday lives of thousands of people, many of whom are Baptist.

The BUV is home to currently 56 communities of faith that represent the various ethnic groups of Myanmar - making the impact of the circumstances very close to us. The military junta of Myanmar are forcing many from each of these people groups to the various borders of India, Thailand and China. Hundreds of thousands of people have ended up in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps where basic human needs are scarce, children are not able to attend school and there are instances of further persecution at and across the

Stand with Myanmar appeal

borders as these vulnerable people try to negotiate this very dynamic situation.

Our partnership with Baptist Mission Australia has enabled us to be able to disburse funds in a legally responsible way based on Baptist Mission Australia's pre-existing and developing relationships with authorised organisations in the affected territories.

Funds are being distributed into three ethnic areas of Myanmar - the Chin, Karen and Kachin peoples. Unfortunately, the issues in Myanmar will not be resolved quickly and so the Appeal remains open. If you would still like to contribute you can do so here: buv.com.au/standwithmyanmar.

Once again, thank you. Please continue to pray for the individuals and people groups who are suffering, but also for the overall situation to be resolved so that a just and democratic society can be reestablished for the various ethnic groups that make up the nation of Myanmar.



AGENCY NEWS

WHITLEY COLLEGE

The Baptist College of Victoria AD IUSTITIAM

Whitley welcomes former Dean of Research Rev Associate Professor Darrell Jackson, as Interim Principal.

Darrell has served in local pastorates, in denominational leadership, in a mission agency, and in two theological colleges prior to Whitley. In his words, he is “utterly captivated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and deeply committed to ways of engaging these realities with the world in which we live, serve, and work”. Of his appointment at Whitley, Darrell says: “I believe that we are at the point of opening a new chapter in the life of the College as we work to create the patterns and practices that will see Whitley flourish in its service of the churches of the BUW and the communities of which we are a part of.”

Darrell’s married to Beth, the Head of Ordination with the BUW Support Hub, and together they have two teenage children.



Plans for Whitley of the future

We’re expanding our capability to deliver courses to students Australia-wide and are currently developing a model to roll-out in Tasmania. Enrolments continue to rise, and this year we welcomed many new students to the college. Our commitment to improving learning pathways, connecting with the community, and supporting new and existing students is bearing fruitful outcomes.

Our church engagement focus is ongoing, with our faculty providing Bible classes at local Baptist Churches. This year, our church visits have inspired 15 young Christians to study at Whitley for the first time. Our academic team continues to develop course content that better responds to the needs of our community. With units on Gender and the Bible, Pastoral and Spiritual Care, we are empowering students to navigate big questions, to better serve their Churches, communities, and vocations. We continue to balance diversity and innovation with a respect for Baptist values and Biblical context.

Nationally, Whitley is a leading provider of theological PhD programs, with over 20 doctoral students. We have secured \$300,000 of research funding for projects in spiritual care and ageing, refugee ministry and identity, and are making a major contribution to developing a new theology of mission for the Baptist World Alliance.

We look forward to moving back to Parkville in early 2025 and for the moment continue to enjoy the generous hospitality at St Paschal in Box Hill.

RESOURCES



Justice and Advocacy Week

BUV Justice and Advocacy Week is an opportunity to focus and reflect on the heart of God for those who experience the challenges, inequalities, and often systemic barriers to fulfilling a flourishing life. God calls his people to care for the orphan, the poor, the stranger, and the dispossessed, and Jesus repeats this call when he prophetically fulfils the Isaiah 61 passage in Luke 4. Now, more than ever, is a time to join in with the Spirit as one body, to discern again the ways in which we all can participate in the healing of the world.

When is Justice and Advocacy Week?

The BUV has a focussed week from 4-10 September 2023 and we encourage your church to join in focussing on one or more of our justice issues. If you are not able to participate with us in the week of 4th September, feel free to choose another week that fits with your church calendar. All resources will remain available on the BUV website to access post our focus week.

How can churches get involved?

There are plenty of ways to get involved. Resources are available on each highlighted topic for pastors, small group leaders and individuals.

- **FOCUS WEEK** – You could choose to join with the BUV in a focus week – either in September, or at another time.
- **PLAN A JUSTICE SERIES** – Use the information and resources in the topic tiles to prepare your service each week.
- **DEVOTION AND SMALL GROUP GUIDES** – A devotion is available for each topic and a Justice Small Group Guide can be used for the week.
- **ENCOURAGE** your church congregation members to connect to the BUV social media (FB, Inst) to receive the devotions or connect with the J&A website pages.

[Click here for more information](#)



Reimagine Mission Podcast - Season 4

Season 4 has now been released and new episodes are being uploaded weekly.

The Reimagine Mission podcast is a conversation with pastors, practitioners, and missional thinkers about reimagining mission in our unique contexts. New conversations hosted by Andrew Hill are being uploaded to inspire, equip, and encourage you to reimagine mission in your church and neighbourhood.

- **Episode 1:** speaking with Megan Stock is a long time Baptist Pastor who has been stirred by God in the recent years to think and act in new and different ways in relation to the ways to relates to the people in her own neighbourhood.
- **Episode 2a:** speaking with Rev Meewon Yang and Charlene Delos Santos - The importance of Intercultural Engagement with Meewon and Charlene (Part 1 of a 2 part episode)
- **Episode 2b:** speaking with Rev Meewon Yang and Charlene Delos Santos - The importance of Intercultural Engagement with Meewon and Charlene (Part 2 of a 2 part episode)
- **Episode 3:** speaking with Rev Kathryn Jensen on a multi-layered approach to engaging with a community for mission
- **Episode 4:** speaking with Naomi Patterson and Rev Dr David Talathoti about mission on the margins
- **Episode 5:** speaking with Andy Mitchell and Naomi Wolf

More episodes uploading each week. Listen through spotify or direct from the BUV website

[Click here for more information](#)

SEPTEMBER 2023 PRAYER CALENDAR

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thur

Fri

Sat

Sun



Baptist Union
of Victoria

Here at the Baptist Union Support Hub we believe that together, in prayer and listening to His voice, we can be the voice others need to hear through this new season. We'd love you to join us in daily prayers for our churches, leaders, communities.

					1 Cohuna Baptist Church	2 Colac Baptist Church	3 Collins Street Baptist Church
4 Community Church of St Mark (Clifton Hill Baptist)	5 Community of the Transfiguration	6 Compassion Christian Church Inc	7 Connect Baptist Church Ballarat	8 Corryong Baptist Church	9 Crosspoint Baptist Church	10 Crossway Baptist Church - Brighton Campus	
11 Crossway Baptist Church - Burwood Campus	12 Crossway Baptist Church - Maroondah Campus	13 Crossway Baptist Church - South East Campus	14 Croydon Hills Baptist Church	15 Croydon Hills Micro Church	16 Dandenong Baptist Church	17 Darebin Samoan Baptist Fellowship	
18 Daylesford Community Church	19 Diamond Valley Baptist Church	20 Donnybrook Community Church	21 Doreen Baptist Church	22 Doveton Baptist Church	23 Drouin Baptist Church	24 Earthen Vessels Church	
25 East Camberwell Baptist Church	26 East Doncaster Baptist Church	27 Eastern Chinese Baptist Church	28 Eastern Hills Community Church	29 Ebenezer Karen Baptist Church	30 Emmanuel Baptist Church (Indonesian) - Melbourne Campus		

OCTOBER 2023 PRAYER CALENDAR

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thur

Fri

Sat

Sun



30 Hawthorn West Baptist Church	31 Heartland Fellowship Yarra Glen	<i>Here at the Baptist Union Support Hub we believe that together, in prayer and listening to His voice, we can be the voice others need to hear through this new season. We'd love you to join us in daily prayers for our churches, leaders, communities.</i>			1 Emmanuel Baptist Church (Indonesian) - Wheelers Hill Campus	1 Encounter Baptist Church Inc
2 Epsom Community Church	3 Essendon Baptist Community Church - Essendon Campus	4 Essendon Baptist Community Church - Newmarket Missional Community	5 Euroa Baptist Church	6 Faith Christian Community Church	7 Falam Baptist Church Melbourne Inc	8 Ferntree Gully Baptist Church
9 Follow Baptist Church	10 Footscray Baptist Church	11 Frankston Community Baptist Church - North Campus	12 Frankston Community Baptist Church - South Campus	13 Freeway Baptist Church	14 Friends First Church Inc	15 Geelong Korean Baptist Church
16 Glenroy Oak Park Baptist Church	17 Good News Ministry	18 Gospel Baptist Church Australia	19 Gospel Baptist Church Melbourne	20 Grace And Glory Church	21 Grace Baptist Church of Melbourne	22 Grace Baptist Community Church
23 Grace Romanian Baptist Church	24 GraceTree	25 Granite Community Church Inc	26 Grovedale Baptist Church	27 GT Church	28 Hamilton Baptist Community Church	29 Hampton Park Baptist Church