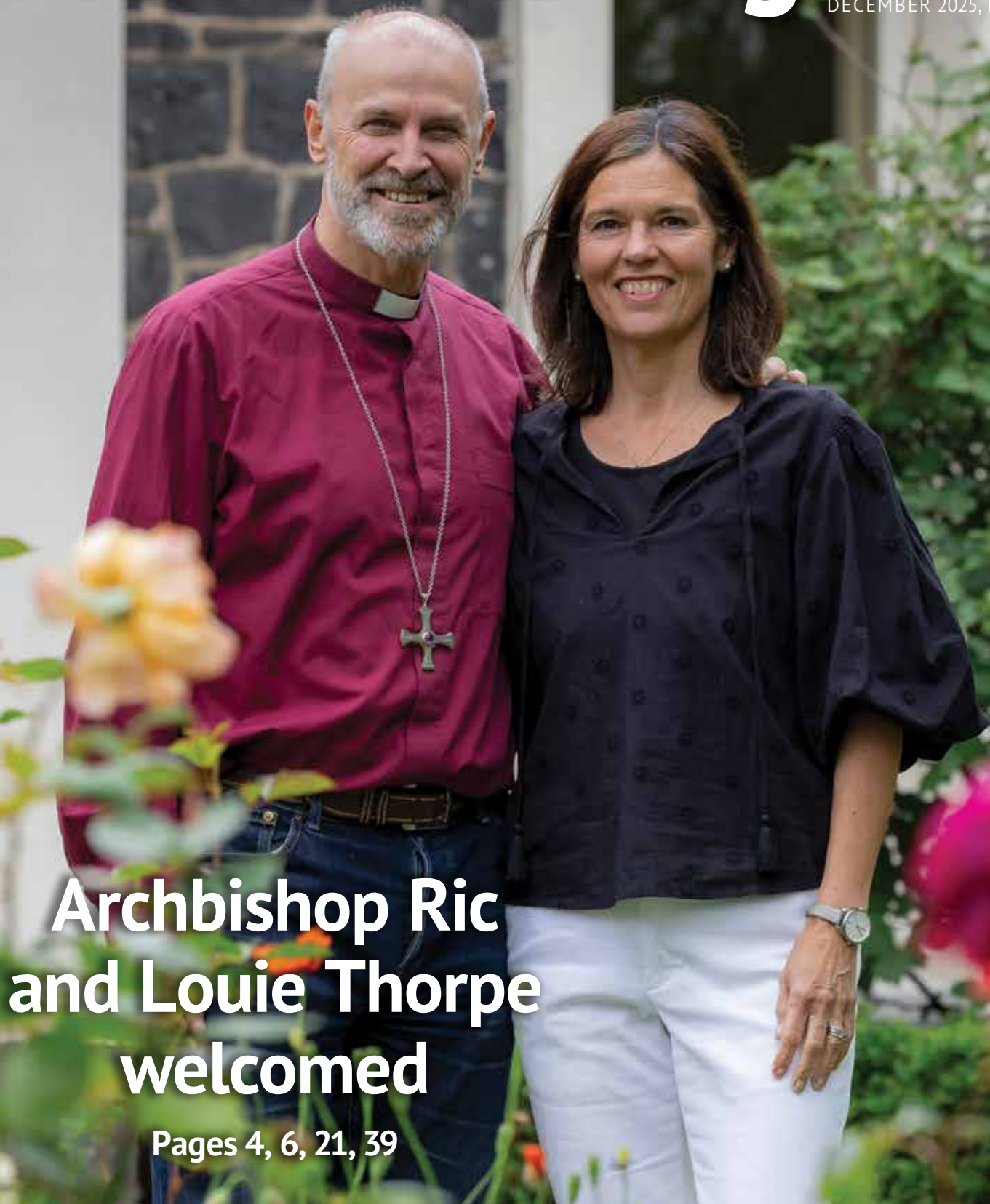


# THE Melbourne Anglican

DECEMBER 2025, No 651



## Archbishop Ric and Louie Thorpe welcomed

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Melbourne's  
new priests



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Victoria's  
Indigenous  
treaty



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Walking against  
family violence



# How can we prepare the way for the Lord in Melbourne?

## ■ Archbishop Ric Thorpe

### Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are so grateful to God and to you for the welcome that we have received in so many different ways.

The move from London to here has been massive, and we have experienced wave upon wave of love from you. We have never been so dependent on the Lord for his provision, his guidance and his help, and so dependent on those around us to advise, guide and help us in the small and the big things that are part and parcel of the life and work changes we have had to navigate. So, a huge thank you.

On 30th November I was installed as Archbishop of Melbourne at St Paul's Cathedral, just a month after we were commissioned and sent from St Paul's Cathedral in London. The day was Advent Sunday and I chose it because of its significance in the life of the Church.

Advent Sunday is the beginning of the Church year. For all of us, it will be a season

of Christmas parties and getting ready for the Christmas holidays, and that usually involves plenty of planning and gathering together, and is enormous fun.

But the deeper significance of Advent is that it is a time of preparation, anticipation and readiness. An anchor reading in Advent is John the Baptist's declaration, "Prepare the Way for the Lord, make straight paths for him", from Isaiah 40:3, anticipating the coming of Christ, the Saviour of the World.

What does this involve?

Advent is a time of preparation. We are to prime ourselves, and those around us, in response to John the Baptist's call to Prepare the Way for the Lord.

How can we do this in our own lives and churches? What are the opportunities to bless, love, care, pray and share our faith that we can pray for and seize wholeheartedly?

Advent is a time of anticipation. We are waiting for the moment of celebrating Christ's birth, his incarnation and his breaking into our world, a light shining in the darkness, bringing salvation, new life and hope.

How might we reflect on Christ's coming into the world and the difference that he makes and can make in our own lives and in those around us?

And Advent is time of readiness. Some of the readings in this season are focused on the Second Coming of Christ because we are called to live our lives in the light of eternity, that is ushered in by Christ's return. How might we posture our lives with eternity in mind?

How might that affect the decisions that we make for ourselves and for others?

We will be welcoming lots of people to Bishops Court in this first month, and many more in the future, to meet and get to know a whole variety of people, but also to welcome them in the name of the Lord.

And uppermost in our own hearts and minds will be how we can "Prepare the Way for the Lord" in our home, in our ministry here, and with the whole of our lives.

May the Lord bless you in every way as you prepare for Christmas. And we look forward to meeting you in the coming months in person.

### Vacant Appointments as of 26 November 2025:

All Saints; Ascot Vale; St Barnabas, Balwyn; St Stephen, Belmont [from January 2026]; St Bartholomew, Burnley; St Mark, Camberwell; St James Croydon Hills with St Mark's Wonga Park; St Michael and St Luke, Dandenong North; St John, Diamond Creek; St Mark, Emerald; St Matthew Endeavour Hills; St John, Frankston with St Luke Carrum Downs; St John, Healesville with St Paul Yarra Glen; St George, Ivanhoe East; Holy Trinity, Lara with Christ Church, Little River; St Aidan, Parkdale; Pascoe Vale-Oak Park; All Saints, Rosebud with St Catherine's, McCrae; St James Wandin with St Paul's, Seville; St John, Wantirna South; St Stephen Warrandyte; St Paul, Westmeadows [from January 2026]

### Ordination as Priest:

**BAKEROV, The Revd Victoria**, Assistant Curate, St Mark, Fitzroy & Hospital Chaplain, Royal Melbourne Hospital, effective 22 November 2025

**CHISWELL, The Revd Graeme**, Assistant Curate, City on a Hill, effective 22 November 2025

**EVERETT, The Revd Bruce Ronald**, Vicar, St Philip, Collingwood, effective 22 November 2025

**HOSKEN, The Revd Kyle Andrew**, Assistant Curate, Parish of Ferntree Gully and Rowville, effective 22 November 2025

**MCGRICE, The Revd Alison Margaret**, Assistant Curate, St Jude, Carlton, effective 22 November 2025

**NJOTO, The Revd Ricky Febrian**, Assistant Curate, Holy Trinity, Doncaster, effective 22 November 2025

**WEATHERLAKE, The Revd Lauren**, Assistant Curate, St Alfred, Blackburn North, effective 22 November 2025

**ZHANG, The Revd Haixian (Chuck)**, Assistant Curate, Holy Trinity, Doncaster, effective 22 November 2025

**ZHU, The Revd Xinping (Victor)**, Assistant Curate, St James, Ivanhoe, effective 22 November 2025

### Appointments:

**GIFFORD, The Revd Andrew Raymond**, appointed Vicar [from PIC], Holy Trinity Bacchus March with Christ Church, Myrniong and St George, Balliang, effective 6 February 2026

**KELLY, The Revd Reece Peter John**, appointed Vicar [from PIC], St Paul, Clyde North Ministry Presence, effective 1 February 2026

**KOROH, The Revd Isaac Imanuel**, appointed Vicar, Church of the New Guinea Martyrs, Croydon effective 3 February 2026

**LYNCH, Revd Christopher Brian**, appointed Vicar [from PIC], St Andrew, Somerville, effective 24 January 2026

**SNIBSON, The Revd Joel**, appointed Parish Minister, Church of the Epiphany, Hoppers Crossing, effective 1 February 2026

### Permission to Officiate:

**LITTRAS, The Revd Shirley Alison**, appointed Permission to Officiate within the Diocese of Melbourne, effective 11 January 2026

### Resignations:

**SNIBSON, The Revd Joel**, Parish Minister, St John's, Diamond Creek with St Katherine's, St Helena and St Michael's, Yarrambat, effective 1 February 2026

### Retirement

**LITTRAS, The Revd Shirley Alison**, Vicar, St Stephen, Belmont, effective 11 January 2026

### Obituaries:

**HUGHES, The Revd Alan Lindsay**, 12 November 2025

## Clergy Moves



Clergy Moves is compiled by the Registry Office and all correspondence should go to [registryservices@melbourneanglican.org.au](mailto:registryservices@melbourneanglican.org.au)

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First Peoples Assembly co-chair Reuben Berg co-signed the Treaty.

Picture: Sybil Gazzard

# Applause, hopes for new dawn as long-awaited Treaty formalised

■ Jenan Taylor

The Anglican church in Victoria has been urged to become aware of its injustices against Indigenous people and the work it needed to do address this as Australia's first treaty with First Peoples was formalised.

Provincial Archdeacon for Reconciliation, First Peoples Recognition and Treaty Canon Uncle Glenn Loughrey called on the Victorian church to see the treaty as a new beginning in its relations with First Peoples.

The agreement was signed in by Premier Jacinta Allan and First Peoples Assembly of Victoria co-chairs Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg on Wurundjeri and Bunurong country in November.

Met with applause, the finalising took place two weeks after treaty legislation passed in state parliament, and after a more

***"[It calls the church] to become aware of our own truth in relation to First Nations people, and to begin the journey of repair, reparation and new beginnings."***

Glenn Loughrey

than 10-year push for change by Indigenous leaders.

The treaty was designed to ensure accountability and oversight of policies that affect First Nations people and communi-

ties, including in the areas of justice, health and education.

Canon Loughrey said the work of Treaty called on the church to begin anew its relations with First Peoples.

"[It calls the church] to become aware of our own truth in relation to First Nations people, and to begin the journey of repair, reparation and new beginnings," he said.

A public ceremony to mark the formalisation of the treaty is planned for 12 December at Federation Square.

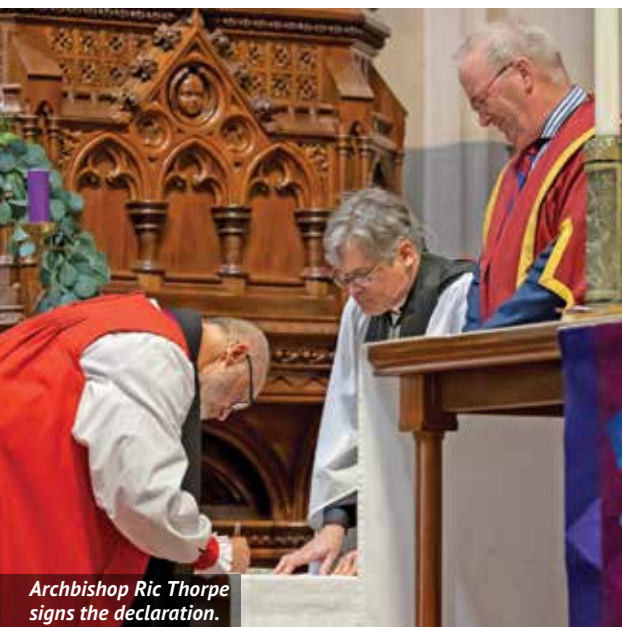
Canon Loughrey said he would attend the ceremony along with other representatives of Lomandra, the provincial Anglican body for Reconciliation, Aboriginal Recognition and Treaty, and urged other Anglicans to join them in celebration.

See Viewpoint, page 19.

# 'I will be a witness to the resurrection':



Archbishop Thorpe making the traditional gesture of knocking on the Great West Door with his staff.



Archbishop Ric Thorpe signs the declaration.



The Archbishop greets members of clergy.

## ■ Jenan Taylor

**Melbourne's new Anglican archbishop has been installed, beginning a new season for the church and diocese.**

Archbishop Ric Thorpe became Melbourne's 14th leader on Advent Sunday, succeeding Philip Freier who retired in February after 18 years of service.

Elected as archbishop in May, Archbishop Thorpe is regarded as one of the Anglican Church's leading figures in church planting and revitalisation.

He told the 1400 people assembled at St Paul's Cathedral and the thousands more viewing the installation online he was committed to being the witness to the resurrection they'd wanted in their new archbishop.

"Let me state it plainly. I will proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, as long as God gives me breath," Archbishop Thorpe said in his homily.

"There is much work to do in every part of the diocese," he continued. "We can do this work because we are empowered by Christ."

The first English archbishop to be installed since Frank Woods, Archbishop Thorpe summarised the priorities for the diocese: prayer, mission, church planting, developing leaders, and schools.

The installation service began with the ancient tradition of Archbishop-elect hammering at the Great Doors of St Paul's Cathedral, before he was greeted on behalf of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people by Wiradjuri man the Venerable Uncle Glenn Loughrey.

In a small twist in tradition, Bishop Thorpe proceeded to the altar platform drummed in by the Psalm Drummers.

Ahead of the installation, the Archbishop-elect told *The Melbourne Anglican* he looked forward to the powerful drumming headed up by long-time friend and Christian musician Terl Bryant.

For Bishop Thorpe, the beats marked the transition from being known about to being known.

Bishop David Urquhart sent by Archbishop of Canterbury-designate Sarah Mullally to deliver her commendation said the Church of England had much to be grateful for in the Archbishop-elect.

He said Bishop Thorpe had shaped many faithful lives through church planting, and his wife Louie formed many loving and prayerful disciples, particularly with her work with clergy spouses.

Mrs Thorpe read from Matthew 28:16-20, a passage about making disciples of all nations, that spoke deeply to her focus and that of her husband.

Clergy, including bishops from the provinces, episcopates and across the nation, surrounded the archbishop who was installed on his seat before he was presented to applause and delighted calls from the crowd.

Archbishop Thorpe greeted family, including his three children in England who were watching online, but some friends and colleagues had flown in from overseas.

Former Holy Trinity Brompton associate and New Zealand vicar the Reverend Fraser McDermott described the archbishop as personable.

"His 30,30 by 2030 vision will be amazing for Melbourne. It's got the best captain at the helm it could hope to have," Mr McDermott said.

"He's warm and winsome, and smiling. Even in the middle of conflict."

Primate of Australia Bishop Mark Short welcomed Archbishop Thorpe's experience and expertise in evangelism and church planting.

He told *TMA* this would help the national church as it sought to engage Australian culture with the gospel.

"He has been able to build great relationships across the different traditions in the Church of England around the common purpose of making Christ known and growing Christ's church," Bishop Short said.

"I think that is a perspective that will enrich the life of the Anglican Church of Australia and all our diversity."

The Uniting Church of Australia Moderator the Reverend Salesi Faupula greeted the archbishop on behalf of the heads of the Churches of Victoria.

He said his church looked forward to walking the path of discipleship together, deepening the bonds of friendship between the two churches and strengthening the common weaknesses.

Representing the provincial schools, Melbourne Girls' Grammar School

# Archbishop Thorpe



On the steps of St Paul's Cathedral.

Picture: Janine Eastgate

## BISHOPS AND ARCHBISHOPS OF MELBOURNE

1847-76	Charles Perry
1876-86	James Moorhouse
1887-1901	Field Flowers Goe
1905-20	Lowther Clarke – first Archbishop (1905)
1921-29	Harrington Lees
1929-41	Frederick Head MC
1942-57	Joseph Booth CMG
1957-77	Frank Woods, KBE, ChStJ, Primate of Australia (1971-77)
1977-83	Bob Dann
1984-89	David Penman
1990-99	Keith Rayner AO, Primate of Australia (1989-99)
2000-05	Peter Watson
2006-25	Philip Freier ChStJ, Primate of Australia (2014-20)
2025-	Richard Charles Thorpe



principal Dr Toni Meath drew on the archbishop's goal of focussing on schools.

She said schools mattered more than ever in the age of artificial intelligence instability and endless change.

"A good education is always a discussion of what it means to be human. The discussion is found in the messages of kindness and compassion that underscore our Anglican-ness, in the beauty and truth of Keats's poetry and timeless imagery and rhythms of Shakespeare's language, the infinite universe and in God's Word," Dr Meath said.

"We look forward to walking with you in our schools."

Representing the social justice and humanitarian agencies in the diocese and province, Anglican Overseas Aid chief executive Jo Knight reminded the archbishop of the challenges both globally and locally which the church must address.

"We invite you to know this work deeply, to champion it and to join us as we imagine what's possible together, because when the whole church moves as one, we can be an incredible force for justice, for flourishing and for social good," Ms Knight said.

Her speech echoed in part the archbishop's outlook.

Responding to God's call was a great adventure of faith and mission for him and Mrs Thorpe, but they could not do it alone, he said in his homily earlier. He urged the church to partake.

"Join us in this great adventure. Walk with us, pray with us, serve with us," the archbishop said.

The bishops, dean and chapter, and all visiting clergy

exited the Great Doors at the end of the service to gather round the archbishop on the cathedral steps, a place where many Melburnians love to assemble.

Finally, to the accompaniment of rumbling trams and with the city's Sunday crowds looking on, Archbishop Thorpe prayed God's blessing on Melbourne, Geelong and Victoria.

See more pictures on page 39.



Archbishop Thorpe.

Picture: Janine Eastgate

# Archbishop Thorpe looks towards Melbourne's 'new season'

■ Jenan Taylor

**Melbourne's Archbishop Ric Thorpe wants Anglicans to engage with but also challenge the collective culture on matters that might be controversial both inside and outside the church, including same-sex marriage, gender identity and divorce.**

Speaking ahead of his installation, Bishop Thorpe believed his involvement with the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith process taught him what worked well and what didn't in dealing with differences of view.

He stressed the importance of connecting with broader society, even if it meant wrestling with issues that sometimes provoked intense disagreement inside the church.

Bishop Thorpe said the Anglican church in particular was called to engage with, understand and connect with each generation in the world around it, and preach afresh the Gospel to them.

Being mission-focussed about this engagement enabled it to better answer Jesus's call to disciple people, and encouraged unity in the church.

He said diversity in the church became its strength when people were on mission together.

"A lot of the arguments in the church are because we're staying put rather than going on mission," Bishop Thorpe said.

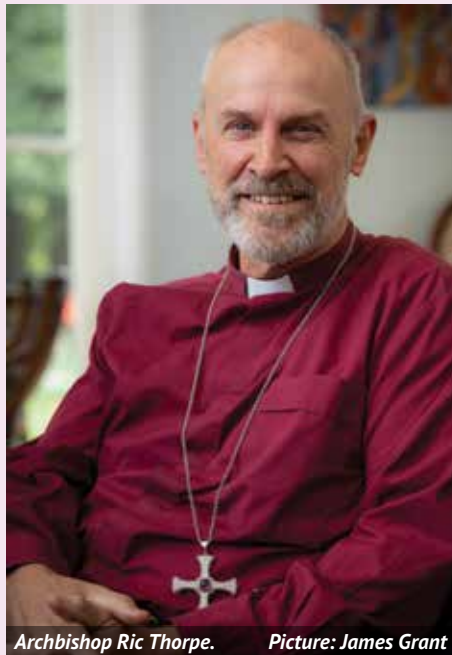
"Our focus is to go on mission together, and when we're preaching gospel, when we're talking about Jesus to others, when we're hoping and praying and sharing our faith, that faith might come alive in other people, and that changes the dynamic."

He said his involvement with the LLF conversation, an exploration of the nature of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage within the Church, revealed how painful and difficult disagreement could be.

LLF included the *Prayer of Love and Faith*, a set of prayers aimed at enabling same sex couples to receive blessings in the church.

It drew support but also heavy criticism, including dissent from a group of bishops of which Bishop Thorpe was a member, mirroring the debate surrounding the prayers in disagreement.

Bishop Thorpe said those experiences taught him how important it was to listen, discuss, keep wrestling with, and work closely together on challenges.



Archbishop Ric Thorpe. Picture: James Grant

***"How can we see the Kingdom of God make a difference in this place?"***

**Archbishop Ric Thorpe**

"Disagreement is always hard, but if you brush it under the table, it's not great. It requires a lot of love, a lot of grace, and it needs time," he said.

"The important thing is to move away from attacking each other on disagreement, and more towards humanising our disagreements under God."

The then Archbishop-elect saw the recent Global Anglican Future Conference declaration rejecting the Instruments of Communion and proclaiming a reordered Anglican Communion, as lacking consultation.

He believed ultimately the GAFCON announcement would not gain momentum for this reason and because it failed to take into account the Anglican Communion's work on the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals.

"They're proposing how to develop those Communion instruments in a way that is less Canterbury-centric and more collective. That is a huge step forward for the Communion," Bishop Thorpe said.

"[The Nairobi-Cairo Proposals] also talks about degrees of disagreement, and this is a gift to the communion to wrestle with, because it gives a way for us to be in

communion to different levels ... and to think through some of the big rifts that we've got. It doesn't necessarily solve them right now, but it provides a pathway for that."

He said the GAFCON move saddened him, because he wanted to engage with all parts of the Church, and intended to stay part of the Anglican Communion.

"We're not leaving. As the Diocese of Melbourne, as the Anglican church of Australia, as a Province, we have a key part to play in the whole," Bishop Thorpe said.

"By leaving, by excluding people, I think it's just not part of being in communion."

Bishop Thorpe, 60, replaces former Archbishop Philip Freier who retired in February on his 70th birthday.

He said Bishop Freier's close work with the city, Anglican institutions, and his emphasis on reconciliation with First People was extraordinary, and he hoped to build on this.

At the same time, Bishop Thorpe was excited about the next 10 years, and said it was a new season for the diocese.

"I love thinking about the bigger picture and asking what is God wanting us to do," Bishop Thorpe said. "How can we see the Kingdom of God make a difference in this place?"

Outlining some of his vision for Melbourne, he hoped for a thriving Anglican church in every neighbourhood, stronger Anglican schools in the growth areas, and for great women and men leaders.

The bishop also wanted the church to be a praying church that made a difference in Melbourne.

He said praying and interceding for the city, the state and all the various institutions within it, including health and justice, provided a foundation for God to bring a renewal of the church in the city, and "really good engagement."

"Sometimes that will be supportive of the city, sometimes it will challenge the city," Bishop Thorpe said.

"We are a counterculture movement ... and sometimes we will need to challenge the structures to see justice and righteousness prevail.

"We do that with great humility, because we haven't always got it right ourselves ... but I think doing that starts in prayer, and with learning to pray together in different ways."

# Vision for new and revitalised churches

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**The Melbourne diocese has a vision to plant 30 new churches and revitalise 30 existing ones by 2030 as growth corridors expand without an Anglican presence to serve them.**

The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne Church Planting vision and strategy was officially launched at a Melbourne Anglican Foundation fundraising event on Thursday, 23 October.

The strategy addresses a critical gap as Melbourne's growth corridors expand faster than the diocese can establish new congregations.

Canon for Church Planting the Reverend Bree Mills said the diocese was at least 10 years behind the city's growth, leaving suburbs without churches that understood their context.

She gave the example of Donnybrook and Kalkallo where two campuses of Hume Anglican Grammar are full but there is no Anglican church to serve the community.

Canon Mills said the 2030 goal was achievable, with six church plants and nine congregations helping to revitalise existing churches started in 2025 alone.

"If we just keep doing exactly what we did this year, we'll actually hit that easily," she said.

Canon Mills said finding ordained leaders ready to plant remained the biggest challenge, more than funding or property.

Young leaders showed passion for church planting, but most were a couple of years away from being ready, she said.

"We've got the buildings. We can use the school buildings to plant churches. We just don't have planters and teams," Canon Mills said.

Melbourne Archbishop Ric Thorpe oversaw the Diocese of London's church planting work when he was Bishop of Islington.

Canon Mills said Archbishop Thorpe was part of the working group and learning community that developed the strategy over two years.

He encouraged the team to have a bigger imagination for the vision's scale.

"He was certainly one of the encouragements to think about, 'Actually, couldn't this be bigger than that?'" she said.

St Columb's Hawthorn vicar the Reverend Mark McDonald said churches offered both practical community support and the Christian message of grace and freedom.

He said people without the Christian story had to turn to self-help, which meant finding the resources from within to fix themselves.

"I think that's such a heavy burden," he said.

Mr McDonald said having a church within walking distance mattered for people who could not easily travel.

His parish's outreach café serves about 150 people across four days each week, including a man with a visual impairment who is unable to drive.

Because the café did not need to flip tables for profit, people could talk with others or sit quietly for as long as they wanted, he said.

Mr McDonald said his parish had redirected a quarter of its mission budget to support church planting in Melbourne through MAF.

He said Anglicans were part of a city-wide church and needed to support growth across the diocese.

"Any one of us that give into that fund might feel our money doesn't do enough, but collectively, we could really make a difference," Mr McDonald said.

Oodthenong Bishop Bradley Billings' episcopate includes the north and west of Melbourne where many of the diocese's fastest-growing areas are located.

He pointed to a City on a Hill church plant at Whittington in Geelong as an example of a new congregation meeting community needs.

Bishop Billings said the church had made a real difference by giving people a place where they were always welcome, listened to and prayed for.

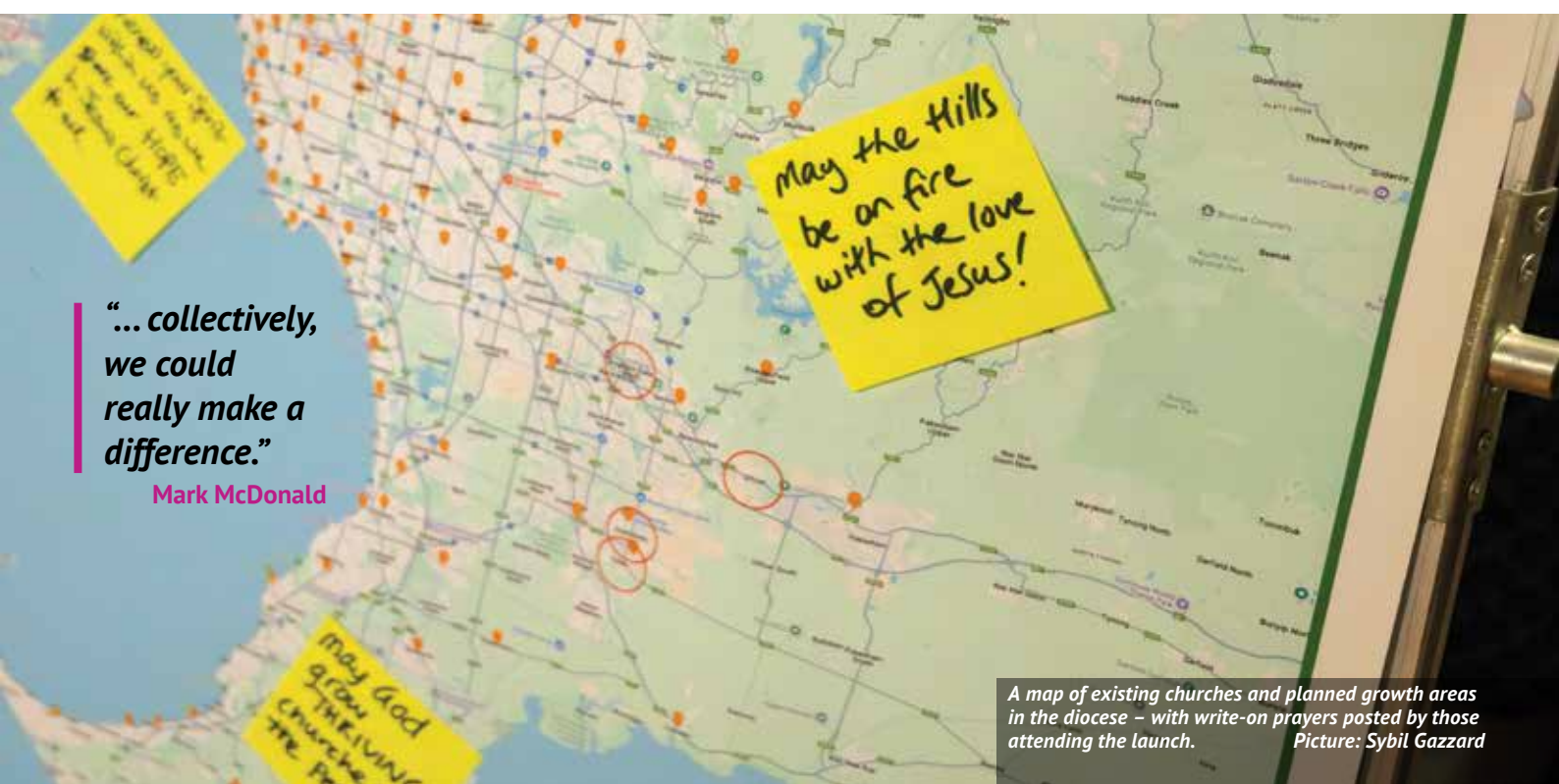
People received both spiritual and practical support, including pastoral care for those facing illness, legal troubles or family issues, he said.

He said establishing an Anglican presence in emerging communities reflected the historic parish model where the diocese sought to serve every locality.

Melbourne Anglican Foundation is currently running a church planting fundraising campaign to support the 30x30x30 vision. Details are available on their website.

<https://melbourneanglicanfoundation.au/>

See advert page 20.



A map of existing churches and planned growth areas in the diocese – with write-on prayers posted by those attending the launch. Picture: Sybil Gazzard



Melbourne Anglicans celebrate nine new priests.  
Pictures: Janine Eastgate





November ordinands with Bishop Blackwell and Dr Seach.

Picture: Janine Eastgate

# ‘See with eyes of the resurrection’: Nine priests ordained

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**Melbourne’s new Anglican priests were urged to view the world with eyes of children of the resurrection as they began their ministry across the diocese.**

Nine men and women were ordained as priests at St Paul’s Cathedral on Saturday, 22 November, surrounded by family, friends, clergy and parishioners.

St George’s Malvern vicar the Reverend Gregory Seach led the two-and-a-half-day ordination retreat and preached the sermon at the service.

Dr Seach said he felt he was on holy ground during the time away as he witnessed what God was doing in the ordinands’ lives.

“They are all, I believe, truly ablaze and burning with the love of God, with love for God, and with love for God’s people,” he said.

The ordination service fell on Saint Cecilia’s Day, which honours an early Christian martyr who offered hospitality to the church in Rome when to do so could mean death.

Dr Seach said in some places being Christian or offering hospitality to Christians still carried the risk of detention, imprisonment and death.

He said the new priests would show the same hospitality to the household of God that Cecilia and others through the years had shown.

Dr Seach called the ordinands to see all things in the light of the resurrection and share that good news in the household of Christ.

“See with eyes of children of the resurrection,” Dr Seach said.

“Have a glimpse of the new age, the new country that God will lead us into. Or, as Augustine said, the God who is the country of the soul.”

Dr Seach asked the congregation if they were willing to support the ordinands as they attempted to share the glimpse of glory they saw through the eyes of those who knew Christ.

He reminded them the new priests remained disciples who would sometimes

get things wrong, ask silly questions, or not quite know what to do or say.

He urged the congregation to build up the body of Christ by bearing one another with love and said the ordinands would be sustained by their prayers.

Diocesan administrator Bishop Genieve Blackwell ordained the new priests.

## Those priested and where they will serve are:

- Victoria Bakerov – Royal Melbourne Hospital and St Mark’s Fitzroy
- Graeme Chiswell – City on a Hill Craigieburn
- Bruce Everett – St Philip’s Collingwood
- Kyle Hosken – RAFT Anglican Church Rowville
- Alison McGrice – St Jude’s Carlton (Parkville congregation)
- Ricky Njoto – Holy Trinity Doncaster
- Lauren Weatherlake – St Alfred’s North Blackburn
- Chuck Zhang – Holy Trinity Doncaster
- Victor Zhu – St James’ Ivanhoe

# Australia must get serious on climate: Torres Strait Anglican

■ Jenan Taylor

**The Australian government is being challenged to act seriously on its claims that it wants to combat the worst impacts of climate change, such as catastrophic storms, and work alongside its vulnerable neighbouring communities towards this.**

Torres Strait community Elder and leading Anglican figure Aunty Dr Rose Elu warned without serious action there was a possibility some of her people's "God-given" islands would disappear by the 2030s.

She wanted federal politicians, including Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen and coalition members, to see first-hand the results of sea inundation in her homelands.

Dr Elu is one of a group of Torres Strait leaders who wants the Federal Court to overturn a rejection of their claim that the government had a legal duty of care to protect Torres Strait people from climate harm.

It came as Minister Bowen headed to the United Nations Conference of the Parties in Brazil in mid-November to defend Australia's now failed COP31 bid.

Ahead of that, the minister said the global meeting was important to demonstrate practical efforts to tackle climate change.

"... Our nation has a lot at stake when it comes to climate change but every effort we make now will help avert the worst impacts," he said in a statement.

But Dr Elu said the government continued to approve fossil fuel projects that didn't match what it was saying to communities in the Torres Strait, the Pacific, and around the world.

She said her people had heard the words, but needed to see serious action. Instead, Australia's current effort there against inundation, for instance, was to build seawalls.

"They are not effective for our islands. If they keep doing that, they're wasting millions of dollars, full stop. There are other options," Dr Elu said.

***"When there's a monster wave up there, there's no way those islands are going to be safe because water goes over those sea walls. Bags full of sand, even built up, are not effective at all."***

Rose Elu

"Those people need to come up to the shores of Torres Strait and walk on the land and feel the earth is soaking. Feel the rhythm of the ocean. Feel the rhythm of the people in the land. Once they see that, then they know what they can do to resurrect and save those islands.

"When there's a monster wave up there, there's no way those islands are going to be safe because water goes over those sea walls. Bags full of sand, even built up, are not effective at all.

"We don't have access to passenger boats, and our airstrips are flooding. Airlines cannot land on the airstrips when they are flooded, so emergency services, if there was such

a thing for us, cannot come to rescue our people."

Dr Elu said there was growing lack of fresh food because the Torres Strait Islands and seas were eroded to the extent people could no longer hunt or plant things.

Additionally, fresh vegetables and fruits from the mainland took weeks to arrive, and the availability of bottled water was dwindling because Papua New Guinea communities also shopped for water in the islands' supermarkets.

Dr Elu's fellow Torres Strait community leaders filed an appeal in the full Federal Court for their duty of care negligence case in early November.

It challenges the court's July decision that the Australian government did not have a current legal duty of care to protect them from climate harm despite the islands, people and culture being "ravaged by human induced climate change" and climate change posing "an existential threat to the whole of humanity".

Echoing the legal team representing the Torres Strait leaders, Dr Elu said the rejection of this duty of care cast doubt on Australia's climate credibility.

A new study on the economic impact of cyclones in the Pacific found losses from a single cyclone could hit communities in the region six times harder than the cost outcome of the Black Saturday bushfires.

Caritas Australia's *Rising Tides, Rising Debt* report also found that countries at the climate change frontline were paying twice for damage they didn't cause.

Dr Elu said the Torres Strait community had wanted Australia to get COP31 because it would also give them and Pasifika people who stood to lose everything, greater voice on climate action.

She said even if the Torres Strait wasn't facing such climate catastrophe its communities would fight for better environmental practices.

"The Torres Strait is a minority within a minority, and for our people, our islands are our identity, our culture, our tradition," she said.

"Our loved ones are lying there on the resting place. That's our belonging. That's where we are. As a spiritual, Melanesian race of people, we believe these are the islands that we need to survive and we need to live there."



Picture: iStock

# Christians warn 'hostile world' ahead as net zero scrapped

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**Christian advocates have condemned the Coalition's abandonment of net zero as a failure of creation stewardship that prioritises politics over future generations.**

The National and Liberal parties' decision to scrap the target ended bipartisan commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2050 under the Paris Agreement.

Opposition Leader Sussan Ley said the Coalition was instead pursuing energy affordability and emissions reduction.

The net zero target aimed to curb the continuing rise of greenhouse gases by cutting carbon emissions and reducing polluting actions such as deforestation and coal mining.

The Coalition justified its decision on cost-of-living grounds, arguing renewable energy policies were driving up electricity costs.

Ms Ley said affordable and reliable energy would always come first and that emissions reduction goals would never come at the expense of Australian families.

The CSIRO's 2024-25 GenCost Report found for the seventh consecutive year that renewables backed by storage were the lowest cost new-build electricity generation.

Common Grace national director Gershon Nimbalker said scripture called Christians to love their neighbours, steward creation and defend the vulnerable.

He said inaction on climate change violated all three of those calls.

Mr Nimbalker said net zero was the bare minimum Australia needed to achieve by 2050 to avoid the most severe impacts of climate change, including extreme bushfires and unprecedented rainfall.

He said dropping that goal now was sending the wrong message at the wrong time.

"I think about our children, and their children, and the world that they're going to inherit," he said.

"It's going to be a more hostile world to them than the world that I've grown up with and my parents have grown up with. And I think that's tragic."

Mr Nimbalker said people in the Torres Strait were already preparing to become climate refugees.

First Nations communities in regional Australia were the least capable of adjusting



*Heatwaves our biggest climate killer – more deaths than bushfires and floods combined. Picture: iStock*

to changes in water access or increasing heat and droughts, he said.

He said people in Lismore were wondering whether the town was still viable as insurance premiums spiked after years of flooding.

Australian Religious Response to Climate Change community organiser Tejopala Rawls said the decision to abandon net zero was an abdication of moral responsibility.

Mr Rawls said the Coalition seemed not to care about the real consequences for people in terms of bushfires, floods, heatwaves and droughts.

He said the leading cause of climate change was the burning of coal, oil and gas, and shifting focus away from serious climate targets meant more climate impacts.

Mr Rawls said the Coalition's primary message that climate action increased power bills was a lie.

He said renewable energy was by far the cheapest form of energy and the main reason power bills were going up was because gas was expensive.

Social Responsibilities Committee Creation Care group facilitator Robert Dawlings said the Genesis creation story gave mankind dominion over the earth.

Dr Dawlings said short-term dominion would mean digging up oil and coal, burning it, making temperatures rise and killing off natural species.

He said Christians should be looking long-term and making sure the world remained habitable for future generations.

Dr Dawlings said Anglicans needed to hold the government to account and keep pushing them to strengthen their policies.

Liberal Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price said good stewardship included caring for creation but also being honest about the real-world impacts of decisions.

She said Christians had a responsibility to care for people and ensure families were not pushed into further hardship by policies that made energy more expensive and life less affordable.

Senator Price said Australia produced just over one per cent of global emissions and pursuing net zero would make no meaningful difference to the climate.

She claimed net zero could cost Australians trillions of dollars at a time when families were already struggling and that the Coalition's approach prioritised affordable, reliable energy.

She said it supported technologies including emerging nuclear options that could provide cheap, consistent and clean power without forcing people into hardship.

"Caring for Australians, ensuring they can heat and cool their homes, keep their businesses running, and provide for their children is, for me, a deeply moral responsibility," she said.

Monash University Associate Professor Ailie Gallant said the argument that Australia's one per cent of global emissions made no meaningful difference was a red herring.

Dr Gallant said every single tonne of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere created global warming.

She said with 170-odd nations each producing relatively small amounts, everybody needed to do their part.

Dr Gallant said Australia was already experiencing climate change impacts, with massive increases in the intensity and frequency of heatwaves.

She said heatwaves were the world's biggest killer and Australia's biggest killer, with more people dying from heatwaves than from bushfires and floods.

# Faith leaders prioritise togetherness to tackle community discord

■ Jenan Taylor

**Melbourne's religious and multicultural leaders are focussing on ways to bring people together and tackle hate amid rising security threats to their communities and greater discord in the broader population.**

One faith community has also started an initiative to track racist confrontations and attacks against their members, and provide this data to human rights and justice agencies.

It comes as the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation chief warned of unprecedented challenges to social cohesion, including from divisive propaganda proliferating on social media and the actions of extremist nationalist and racist individuals and groups.

In his 2025 Lowy Lecture in November, ASIO head Mike Burgess also said amid online radicalisation and widespread disinformation, there was potential for artificial intelligence to compound the threats to the social fabric.

"And while the internet incubates and social media accelerates, artificial intelligence exacerbates," Mr Burgess said.

Rabbinical Council of Victoria co-vice president Daniel Rabin said the possibility of more danger was extremely upsetting for members of his congregation and wider Jewish community after the potentially life-threatening actions against them from international players recently.

Rabbi Rabin said the government wanted to build extra high fences and get even more security for their shuls, schools and communities, but he believed person-to-person connection was the only way to counter the spreading hate.

He was encouraging members of their communities to partake in initiatives that promoted better engagement.

One of these projects involved his congregation last year taking gift baskets on Christmas day to frontline workers who would not be able to be with their families.

Another involved inviting First Nations people and members of the Hindu Council of Australia to share Friday dinners.

"We're trying to show that we're a cohesive community, and we've got to be there to support each other. And if we don't do that, then things will just continue to erode," Rabbi Rabin said.



Melbourne's interfaith and multicultural leaders.

Picture: supplied

Hindu Council of Australia in Victoria president Makarand Bhagwat said his community was particularly affected by recent neo-Nazi and anti-immigration protests.

He said Hindu leaders were pursuing more dialogue with other faith and community leaders because interpersonal connection was critical for improving understanding among people of different backgrounds.

Hindu community members were also being encouraged to practice restraint, to not participate in protests, and to seek legal redress if they faced attack.

Mr Bhagwat said the HCA was set to support this through its new Hindu-phobia registry aimed at collating data on incidences against temples, businesses and individuals.

He said that could include online attacks, verbal attacks in workplaces, and vandalism in temples.

"We want to measure the trends, how it is reported to and handled by authorities, look at what action is taken, and take up appropriate ones with the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, and other avenues," Mr Bhagwat said.

Victorian Multicultural Commission chair Vivienne Nguyen said in their multi-pronged approach to tackling discord, faith leaders the commission worked with had organised peace building forums, including female-led multifaith gatherings.

She said Rabbi Gabi Kaltmann's annual Pillars of Light project to be held

at Federation Square in December was another initiative focussed on bringing interfaith leaders together to exemplify unity and shared humanity.

Ms Ngyuen said the leaders were purposely prioritising in-person interaction rather than online discussions, unless being online was absolutely necessary.

"There is shared value in coming together because without coming together then it's very difficult to understand the other person's perception. It's hard to grasp that through the media and online. And if you add AI in the mix, then it doesn't take very long for things to get messy."

Melbourne Anglican Bishop Philip Huggins said it was important to encourage people to remember Australia was a beacon of a functioning democracy and act to sustain this for its social and their personal wellbeing.

He said, spiritually, it was important they were attentive to what they thought, said and did.

"It's an ancient wisdom of contemporary relevance to try and make God our first thought in the morning before we get inundated with what might be in the media, let alone the social media," Bishop Huggins said.

"This is to make sure that we begin the day prayerfully with letting God's word speak to us and just to acknowledge Him as creator and try to make our thanks for the gift of a new day.

"This gives us a healthy base, rather than starting the day by going into Instagram."

# The social media ban on young people. What can churches do?

■ Kristina Kettleton

From 10 December, youths under 16 years of age will not be allowed to have or create an account on many social media platforms. This means young people who currently have accounts on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, Facebook, and YouTube may have their accounts removed or deactivated.

The aim of this shift in legislation is to help the overall wellbeing of young people and reduce the effects of anxiety.

Some people welcome the change, others strongly oppose it, while many others have shrugged off the potential impact of this move.

Whatever your stance, the change will affect large numbers of young people who spend much of their social time relating online.

Generations Minister at Mt Eliza Anglican the Reverend Amy Brown believes the change will have a significant effect on the social lives of many young people.

"The online world is an extension of their in-person social life, and for some, it will be better than their in-person relationships," Ms Brown said.

So, what can our churches do? How can we help young people and their families navigate this adjustment?

The eSafety Commissioner has developed a Get-ready guide to help young people navigate this change, including a downloadable eight-step action plan.

Under this action plan young people are shown how to prepare themselves for the change. Significantly, Step 4 in the plan explores a range of alternative ways to connect and belong.

Connection and belonging are great strengths of the Church. The new laws provide a great opportunity for our church communities to serve the wider community, especially young people in a time of change.

Ms Brown suggests some essential ways churches can minister to the community in this space:

First, they can prioritise friendship-building activities among young people. It might be a great opportunity to host some social nights for young people.

Second, Ms Brown encourages teaching and modelling of healthy relationships. This will be important both for young people



The social media ban on young people begins in December.

Picture: supplied

***"The online world is an extension of their in-person social life, and for some, it will be better than their in-person relationships."***

Amy Brown

and their families. The age restrictions and changes in who can use social media might shine a spotlight on how much parents are using social media, meaning that parents may need to make an effort to be more present themselves.

As a church community, we have much to offer in a time of transition and

anxiety. Let's not forget that this shift will be difficult for many young people and families, and be ready to support them as they navigate a significant adjustment.

You can find out more about the social media age restrictions at [esafety.gov.au/young-people/social-media-age-restrictions/get-ready-guide](https://esafety.gov.au/young-people/social-media-age-restrictions/get-ready-guide), and you can download the Get-ready guide at [esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-11/SMAR-young-people-action-plan\\_3.pdf?v=1762735811545](https://esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-11/SMAR-young-people-action-plan_3.pdf?v=1762735811545).

Reverend Kristina Kettleton is a consultant in the Children and Young People Ministry Team in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. You can reach her at [childrenandyoungpeople@melbourneanglican.org.au](mailto:childrenandyoungpeople@melbourneanglican.org.au). Reverend Amy Brown is also Schools Engagement Officer, Melbourne Anglican Foundation as well as the director of Leaders in Training Camp, Belgrave Heights Convention Centre.

# Gaza's only Christian hospital brings healing and hope

## ■ Anglican Overseas Aid

**Nine-year old Farid comes from the Aitoun area in Gaza. Despite his young age, his life has taken a dramatic turn twice. Once when death and destruction reached the doorstep of his home, and once when the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City gave him a new chance at life.**

Farid's story is one of many, showing both the horrendous consequences of war but also the hope that healing can bring.

Before the war erupted in 2023, Farid's life was filled with the simple joys of childhood. He loved going to school, spending the afternoons playing football with his friends under the Gaza sun. Like so many other children, Farid dreamt of a future and was hoping to contribute to his community.

But when a missile attack struck near the home, those dreams were shattered. Farid's brother was killed and Farid himself suffered a severe injury to his hand. Shrapnel damaged the nerves and rendered him unable to fully move his fingers. "It felt like fire in my hand," he recalls softly.

Following the incident, Farid struggled with frustration, sadness, and fear. He missed

holding a pen at school, kicking a football, and hugging his brother.

For his family, the pain was unimaginable. Farid's parents grieved the loss of a child, while fearing for the future of another.

"I didn't know how to comfort him" Farid's mother says, "He kept asking, 'will I ever play football again?' and I had no answer."

The story could have ended there. It would have become yet another unknown and unaddressed tragedy. But hope arrived through the dedicated staff of Al-Ahli Arab – Gaza's only Christian hospital. Their Emergency and Rehabilitation Team performed surgery on Farid's hand and began a long process of therapy to help him regain movement and strength.

"It hurts sometimes," Farid admits, "but I'm trying. I want to use my hand again."

As of mid-October 2025, Farid is one of more than 170,000 people in Gaza injured since the outbreak of the war. Even with the current frail cease fire in place, the needs remain overwhelming.

Al-Ahli Hospital currently operates the only intensive care unit in northern Gaza – just three beds serve an entire population. Parts of the hospital have been

damaged and need urgent repairs. There are severe shortages of medicines, fuel, and medical equipment. Yet despite these hard circumstances, the staff refuse to give up.

"Our staff are showing extraordinary dedication," says hospital director Suhaila Tarazi. "Some have lost their homes or loved ones, yet they continue to serve with unwavering commitment. Their resilience and faith inspire hope, even in the darkest times."

Farid's story is one of thousands. It reveals the immense human cost of Gaza's two-year conflict, but it also highlights the defiance of hope, persisting through the compassion of those who serve. It tells the story of how Al-Ahli Hospital, for children like Farid and countless others, stands as a beacon of healing and love, even in the shadow of war.

Anglican Overseas Aid is working with the Anglican Alliance and the Diocese in Jerusalem to support the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital.

To support this work, please visit [donate.anglicanoverseasaid.org.au/christmas-appeal](https://donate.anglicanoverseasaid.org.au/christmas-appeal). See advert on page 34.



*Farid receives treatment in Al-Ahli Arab Hospital. Picture: supplied*



Twic East flooding.  
Picture: Peter Manyang Gabrel

# Continuous flooding displaces many South Sudan communities

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**South Sudanese church leaders in Australia and overseas are calling for emergency aid, including medicine and shelter materials, amid severe flooding in the African nation.**

Heavy rainfall since 2020 has displaced hundreds of thousands of people nationally and many from Jonglei State in eastern South Sudan along the White Nile are unable to return home.

Communities face cholera outbreaks, lack of medical care and the need for resettlement support as floodwaters persist.

In Jonglei State's Twic East region, Wanglei Bishop Zechariah Manyok said the flooding had completely transformed the area.

"I don't think we can go back there again because the place is completely changed," Bishop Manyok said.

"The landscape is completely different. It has become a swamp."

Bishop Manyok said water levels were the highest in decades, exceeding historic floods in 1962.

The flooding is driven by record-high water levels in Lake Victoria, the source of the White Nile, combined with heavy seasonal rainfall in the region.

Wanglei became a full diocese in 2018 and began building essential infrastructure in 2019. The flooding destroyed that work.

The temporary cathedral now has floodwater inside, with his bed and mattress hanging from the ceiling above the bishop's throne to keep them dry.

Buildings that were still under

construction have collapsed, while those still standing are in poor condition.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs flooding displaced at least 1 million people annually in South Sudan between 2019 and 2022.

Bishop Manyok said displaced communities urgently needed plastic sheets for makeshift shelters and to use as rafts to transport people and belongings through floodwater.

He said medicine was desperately needed, with cholera recurring frequently in the swampy areas since 2024.

Church leaders are exploring resettlement to higher ground, but communities would need wire mesh fencing to provide security while people built new homes, he said.

Bishop Manyok asked Christians overseas to pray for stability in South Sudan and that people would not return to war.

He also asked people to pray for moderate rainfall that would allow crops to grow without causing more flooding.

"Even though the rain may be dangerous in some areas, it's good in some other areas because we want to work and produce food for ourselves," Bishop Manyok said.

Bishop Manyok said the displaced Christians were still doing well spiritually, and the first thing they did when they went to a new place was build a church.

St Peter's Jieeng Authorised Anglican Congregation child safe officer James Mayen is from Twic East County where more than 50,000 people have been displaced by flooding.

Mr Mayen said Twic East County had been the most severely affected area in Jonglei State, but the flooding had also affected neighbouring dioceses and states across the region.

Animals that people depended on for their livelihoods had died, crops had been destroyed, and there was no food. Health facilities and schools no longer existed in the area.

Mr Mayen had heard reports of people in the area struggling to access health services in the wake of the flood.

He heard of a girl who was bitten by a snake and was carried by human ambulance to another area to seek treatment. Women also had to give birth with no hospital facilities.

Mr Mayen said Christians had a responsibility to respond because Jesus prioritised the vulnerable.

He said faith-based organisations were typically the first to aid in disaster situations, whereas governments often took too long to respond.

"We are Christian, even if we come from that place, we try to help back home with whatever we can," he said.

The Anglican Relief and Development Fund Australia is running an agricultural tools project to help internally displaced people from the Diocese of Twic East.

The ARDFA project aims to provide farming tools, seeds, fertilizers and training to help communities achieve food security.

More information is available at [ardfa.org.au/south-sudan-agricultural-tools](https://ardfa.org.au/south-sudan-agricultural-tools).

## Diversity in unity – new life for Murrumbeena church

■ **Keerthisiri Fernando**

**A new vicar and new immigrants have brought new life to a parish previously under consideration in the Melbourne Anglican diocese.**

In the post-modern era the most effective spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ is done by the immigrants who travel from place to place for various reasons by having a shift in identities.

So-called settler countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand have experienced this phenomenon as many people settle in these countries for better opportunities.

This has been a visible reality at St Peter's church Murrumbeena in the Diocese of Melbourne of the Anglican church during the course of 2024 and 2025.

St Peter's traditionally comprised Caucasians with a few people who migrated from other countries to Australia. Even among those people most of them were Eurasians from the former colonies of the British Empire.

In 2022 the Diocese of Melbourne placed St Peter's under consideration



*Bishop Fernando with church members at St Peter's Murrumbeena. Picture: supplied*

because the congregation was dwindling. The final review was due in March 2025.

By mid-2024, in the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic, the congregation diminished drastically and the sustainability became extremely challenging.

However, under these circumstances the Diocese of Melbourne in consultation with the parish made a bold decision to appoint a new vicar from a South Asian country.

The commissioning of the new vicar was

well-attended by the immigrants along with traditional Caucasians of the congregation. This service became a sign of hope to revitalise this declining congregation.

Today this congregation is experiencing a gradual holistic growth with people originally from countries such as South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China and Kenya.

Average congregation numbers at services have more than doubled from 2024 to 2025, with Easter Sunday seeing 60 people worshipping together.

The church has emphasised community outreach programs such as the Mother Union and extending ministry into two aged care homes.

They have focused on building relationships across various ages and cultures with gospel values and the word of God with the vision of diversity in unity.

This diversity in unity has been a blessing to enrich each other to lead meaningful lives in Australia and to build the church.

The Right Reverend Keerthisiri Fernando is Bishop Emeritus of Kurunagala and former presiding bishop of the Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka.

## Community, heritage celebrated at Mt Eliza church's 160th

■ **Alisha Vujevic**

**A beloved church on the Mornington Peninsula recognised for its heritage features and strong ministry programs celebrated its 160th anniversary recently.**

Mount Eliza Anglican Church marked its anniversary with a special service in October attended by more than 110 people, including Bishop Paul Barker and local shire councillors.

Built in 1865, Mount Eliza Anglican was heritage-listed in 2000 and today has about 130 members.

Vicar the Reverend Tanya Cummings said most parishioners were older people and very active in the church and in the wider community.

Ms Cummings said in addition to small discipleship clusters, church programs included a strong men's group



*The much admired mural at Mt Eliza Anglican church. Picture: supplied*

and a committed Caritas (Mother's Union) group.

She said the church also sought to connect with local community and those in their network through various events such as the "Community Christmas Carols" held in Mount Eliza.

"We seek to always have something to invite someone

to, such as "non-threatening" events, as part of our pathways and Mission action plan," Ms Cummings said.

"We partner with local organisations such as FUSION (youth Housing), and Neighbourhood house with food and financial donations for their missions, as well as support other national and

international missions."

Ms Cummings said the church was adding an access ramp to improve access for those with walking aids, enabling the expanded use of the church for appropriate community events.

She said the church was mainly recognised for some of the finest stained glass on the Peninsula, as well as murals in the sanctuary.

Heritage Victoria considers these murals, painted by artist Violet Teague in 1931, to be aesthetically significant for their scale and unique representation of the Nativity.

The artwork often drew visitors to see their relatives in the painting, Ms Cummings said.

The anniversary celebrations continued in the church's Pioneer Hall with lunch and a music performance by the Mornington Brass Band.

# Choir unveils the sacred through forgotten madrigals

■ Lesa Scholl

A parish church hosted Melbourne's first-ever live performance of rare Palestrina music to mark the 500th anniversary of the composer's birth.

Palestrina's music is a mainstay of traditional liturgical music, but his sacred madrigals are largely unknown.

Madrigals were a form of popular unaccompanied vocal music in the Renaissance.

Chorus Ecclesiae Australia, a choir that performs rare sacred music, introduced Melbourne to these works through their concert at St John's East Malvern in November.

Chorus Ecclesiae creative director Shanti Michael said their mission was to uncover music people might not have heard and enable churches to experience it in the liturgy.

She believed it was important to protect this music as a living heritage and there was no argument about replacing it with something more contemporary or vice versa.

"You can't throw away music just because it's old, and you can't say don't create contemporary music, either," she said.

Ms Michael said the choir wanted to contribute to the unveiling of the sacred and saw their performance as evangelism through beauty.

"We just don't do it with drums and the guitar," she said. "We do it with our voices."

The choir also gave singers opportunities to hone their skills and perform, she



Chorus Ecclesiae performing at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bendigo.

Picture: supplied

said, and it made sense to have the concert at St John's because the parish was an early supporter of Chorus Ecclesiae.

St John's vicar Alexander Ross said the parish had always valued music and the gift of creativity.

He said music was core to the parish mission of glorifying God in worship, through the St John's choir and their organists.

There had been an increasing number of musicians approaching the church wanting to use it for concerts, and Dr Ross said the concerts had grown in an organic way.

The church recently launched their Finch Street Concerts, named for the street on which the church stands, which Dr Ross said was a part of a broader project to give

to the local community.

Concert coordinator and saxophonist Justinn Lu hoped the concerts would give local classical musicians more opportunities to perform.

His saxophone quartet was giving free concerts at St John's as a part of the parish's artists in residence program.

He said many young musicians were only taught how to play their instruments, not how to develop professional networks that would create performance opportunities.

Mr Lu was excited to be a part of creating a community for musicians in East Melbourne.

"I've never done something like this," he said. "I hope people will be more open or relaxed just coming along to concerts."

**The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has no tolerance for any form of abuse, harassment or other misconduct. All concerns and reports of abuse and misconduct must be reported.**



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## Reporting Child Abuse in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

**1** If a child is in **immediate danger** at any point **CALL 000**

**2** All suspicions or reports of child abuse must be reported to:

Police  
Child Protection  
Kooyoora Professional Standards (see below)

### What is Child Abuse?

Abuse and neglect includes but is not limited to:  
Physical Abuse,  
Emotional Abuse, Family  
Violence, Sexual Abuse,  
Grooming and Neglect.

### Who can report neglect and abuse of a child under the age of 18?

Children, Parents,  
Staff, Volunteers,  
Anyone.

### What sorts of things must be reported?

All child safety concerns must be reported:

- Disclosure of past and present abuse and harm
- Allegations, suspicions or observations
- Breaches of the Code of Conduct

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NUMBERS:

POLICE  
000

CHILD PROTECTION: 13 12 78 (After Hours)  
North 1300 664 977 • South 1300 655 795 • East 1300 369 391  
• West (Rural) 1800 075 599 • West (Metro) 1300 664 977

KOYOORA PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS  
1800 135 246

# Sensory-friendly services, and the seat

## Sensory-friendly services

I was so encouraged to read about the Melbourne diocese's adoption of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative (*The Melbourne Anglican*, June 2025).

Thank you for your leadership in making our churches more welcoming and inclusive for people with hidden conditions.

I am a 32-year-old man with autism. I am writing to ask if you might be able to help explore the possibility of establishing a sensory-friendly Mass in Melbourne.

In some dioceses overseas, such as in the United States, parishes offer a Sensory-Friendly Mass. One example I read is Masses that typically last around 30 minutes and are celebrated with low lights, no music or incense, a quieter prayers rather than sung, and a more flexible environment where movement and noise are accepted without judgment.

So far, I haven't been able to find any parish in Melbourne offering this type of liturgy, but I believe it could be a wonderful extension of the inclusion work already happening. I otherwise struggle to attend or feel at home in a traditional service.

Would the diocese be able to support or pilot such an initiative?

Aaron, Lancefield VIC

## See the throne as the Cross

Canon Dr Peter Adam's recent piece about installation rather than enthronement (*The Melbourne Anglican*, October 2025) raises a number of issues.

It certainly resonates with modern political discourse and its attendant dislike of privilege. However, as we celebrate the end of the Church's year with the feast of Christ the King, it is worth remembering that earthly models are not those envisioned by the evangelists.

The accounts of the Passion of Our Lord in the gospels make it clear that the throne of Christ is the Cross (Mark 15:26; Matthew 27:37; Luke 19:38; John 19:19). All the evangelists wrest a truth about the Kingship of Christ from the irony and sarcasm of Empire.

Even the enthroned Lamb of Revelation 5:6 is the Lamb who has been slaughtered. There is, to paraphrase Luther, no theology of glory which can bypass the theology of the Cross, throne-wise. Those who would wish to sit on a throne as church leaders thus should see it as the Cross rather than an earthly throne.

Failure to do so simply reveals an etymological fundamentalism which has not considered Our Lord's example.

Thus, semantics matter as much as etymology, if not more, not least because the Greek words for throne (*thronos*) and chair (*kathedra*) are both used

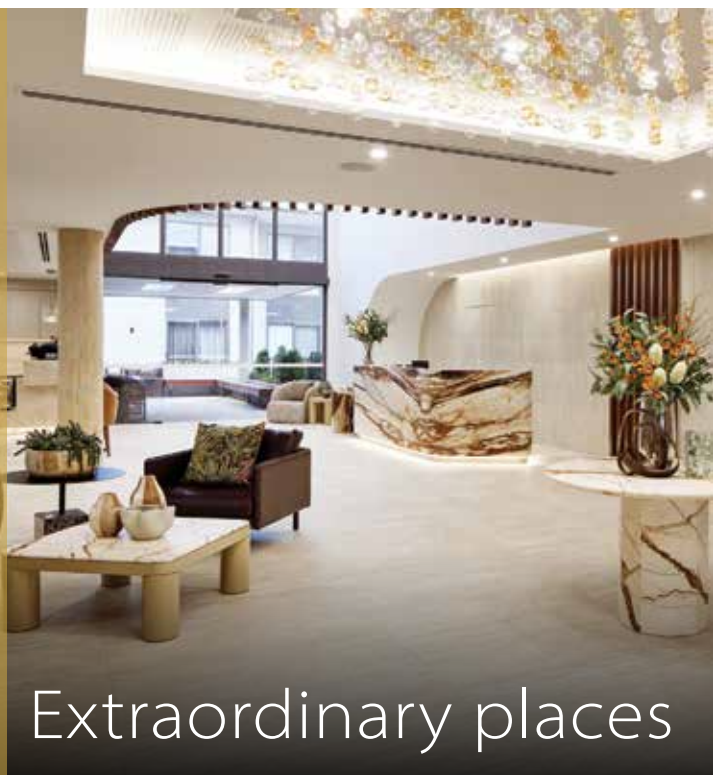
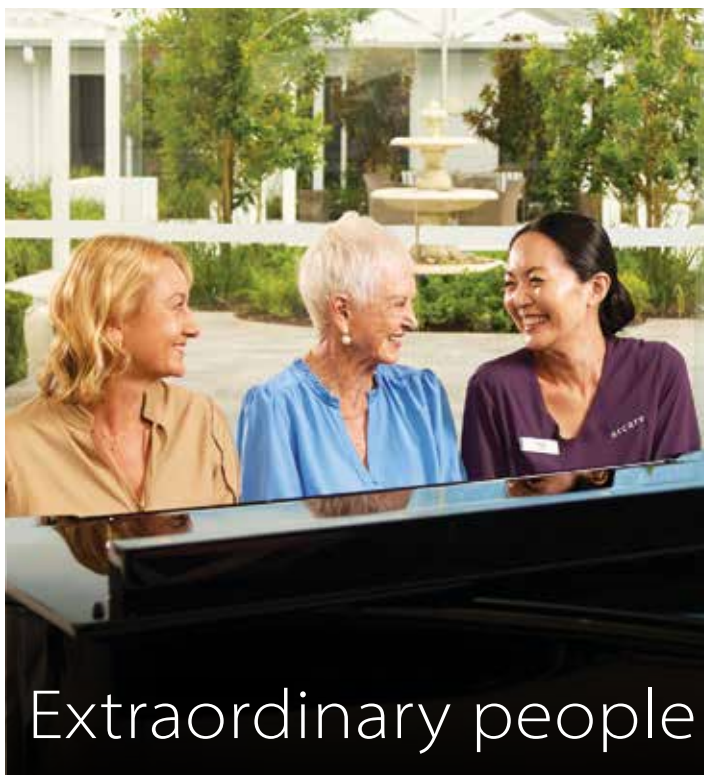
for monarchical and teaching authority (so I am advised by Liddell-Scott-Jones, the classical Greek dictionary which spreads its net far further than the Greek of the New Testament).

Pursuers of trivia will also rejoice that *kathedra* may mean the "form of a hare". Such niceties of Greek usage were most likely lost on Augustine of Hippo, whose basic knowledge of Greek is well-documented, or, possibly, in the translation of Greek terms into Latin.

A false distinction appears to have been set up. That is ironically seen in the quote used approvingly from George Herbert who describes the pulpit as a throne.

If I were wanting to make a case for installation rather than enthronement, I would have turned a blind eye in that direction.

Reverend Associate Professor  
Fergus King, Parkville



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# What Treaty means for the Church

■ Glenn Loughrey

**With the signing into law of the first Treaty between First Peoples and the people of Victoria, we are living through a moment of profound cultural and spiritual significance.**

Truth-telling, recognition of First Peoples, and a growing desire for a more just relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are shaping a new story for our state. Treaty is not a single event but an unfolding movement – a collective turning toward truth, Country, and a more honest way of living together.

For the Church, Treaty is both a challenge and an invitation. It asks us to reflect on who we have been, who we are now, and who we are called to become on this ancient land. It offers a chance to step more fully into a posture of humility, truth-seeking, and relational responsibility.

Victoria's truth-telling processes, the strengthening of cultural authority, and community-led conversations have made visible both deep wounds and real possibilities. This is more than political reform – it is spiritual labour. It is the slow, courageous work of truth coming to light.

Truth is central to the Christian story. Yet, in this country, the Church has long struggled with the gap between its Gospel of love and the lived experiences of First Peoples. Too often, churches participated in the erosion of culture, family, language, and identity. They became entwined with the colonial project, and the consequences remain with us.

Treaty in Victoria calls the Church to return to truth, not as an idea, but as a way of being. It asks us to acknowledge our history honestly, to hear the truth spoken by First Peoples, and to let that truth unsettle us in ways that lead to renewal.

## What Does This Moment Ask of the Church?

Now is a time for the Church to rediscover its prophetic voice – not one grounded in power, but in humility, courage, and relationship.

*A call to deep listening* – Aboriginal cultures practice *dadirri*: deep, quiet, attentive presence. This mirrors the contemplative traditions of Christianity. Deep listening requires patience, openness, and vulnerability. It invites us not to rush to solutions but to allow truth to work within us. A Church shaped by *dadirri* becomes more Christlike: slow to speak, quick to understand, embedded with compassion.

*A call to stand with integrity* – The Church



The Venerable Canon Uncle Glenn Loughrey.

Picture: James Grant

cannot remain neutral in the face of injustice. The Gospel calls us to stand with the hurt, the silenced, and the displaced. Supporting justice for First Peoples through truth-telling, cultural empowerment, and structural change, is not political partisanship. It is faithfulness to Christ's call to love.

*A call to reimagine faith through Country* – Country is more than land. It is spirit, story, relationship, and life. The six dimensions of Country, land, sky, water, story, people, and spirit, echo the interconnectedness at the heart of Christian theology. When we allow Country to teach us, our understanding of Creator, creation, and community expands. The Church in Victoria is being challenged to become grounded, wise, and responsive, allowing the wisdom of this land shape its faith.

*A call to repentance and renewal* – Repentance is not shame – it is transformation. It is the willingness to turn around and walk a different path. In this moment, the Church is invited not to defend its past but to grow from it, to relinquish old certainties, and to embody humility and hope. Renewal begins when we choose honesty over comfort and relationship over defensiveness.

## Walking Forward

The changes unfolding in Victoria belong to all of us. The Church has a vital role – not as leader but as companion; not as authority but as learner; not as judge, but as reconciler.

This moment invites us to embody a faith that is honest, deep rooted and alive to the

wisdom of Country. It calls us to walk with First Peoples in humility, partnership, and hope. It offers us the gift of celebration – the chance to mark together the slow, steady work of truth, justice, and renewal.

On this ancient Country, a new story is growing. Let us walk it together.

## A Time for Celebration and Hope

Amid truth-telling and lament, there is also a rising desire to celebrate. Celebration is part of healing. Celebration strengthens relationship; it encourages us to look not only at what has been broken but also at what is enduring and full of life. It invites us to joyfully recognise the strength of culture and the possibility of a shared future.

## An Invitation: Celebrate Together at Federation Square – 12 December

In this spirit of hope, you are warmly invited to a public celebration at Federation Square on 12 December. This gathering is not the centre of the story but a joyful expression of it – a moment for people of faith and goodwill to stand together, honour First Peoples, and celebrate the possibilities emerging for Victoria.

There will be story, song, art, reflection, and community. It will be a space of gratitude and commitment – a reminder that we are walking into a new chapter together.

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The Venerable Canon Uncle Glenn Loughrey is Provincial Archdeacon for Reconciliation, First Nations Recognition and Treaty.



Photo: The Field, Hawthorn



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# 'We want to be hope carriers'

■ Jenan Taylor

**Louie Thorpe is excited about the future and all that God might have in mind for her and Archbishop Thorpe, but thinking too far ahead might be jumping the gun somewhat.**

"What legacy do I hope to leave in Melbourne?" Louie murmurs, considering the question, but pauses only for a moment.

She knows precisely her own and Bishop Thorpe's purpose.

"We want to be hope carriers," she says, "so that people feel excited about leaning into God and pursuing His calling for them."

Louie, short for Louise, grew up one of five siblings in Hambledon, Surrey, in the rural southwest of England and her family's Christian outlook were a strong influence.

The family attended St Peter's, an evangelical Anglican church, and Louie joined its Youth Fellowship Committee, feeling a strong pull to discipleship, at a young age.

"I remember really wanting to tell people about Jesus, and then had kind of an urgency about that," she says.

This need proved so strong she became involved with Youth With A Mission and did its Discipleship Training School which was the path to getting work with YWAM.

The training took her to Mauritius, South Africa and Amsterdam where she had the chance to encourage young people to put their faith in Christ.

Louie said after YWAM, joining the church where the archbishop was then worship leader grew her faith, particularly when it came to pastoring people.

This cemented her love for church, for worship, and for walking alongside and encouraging others to find anchor in their faith.

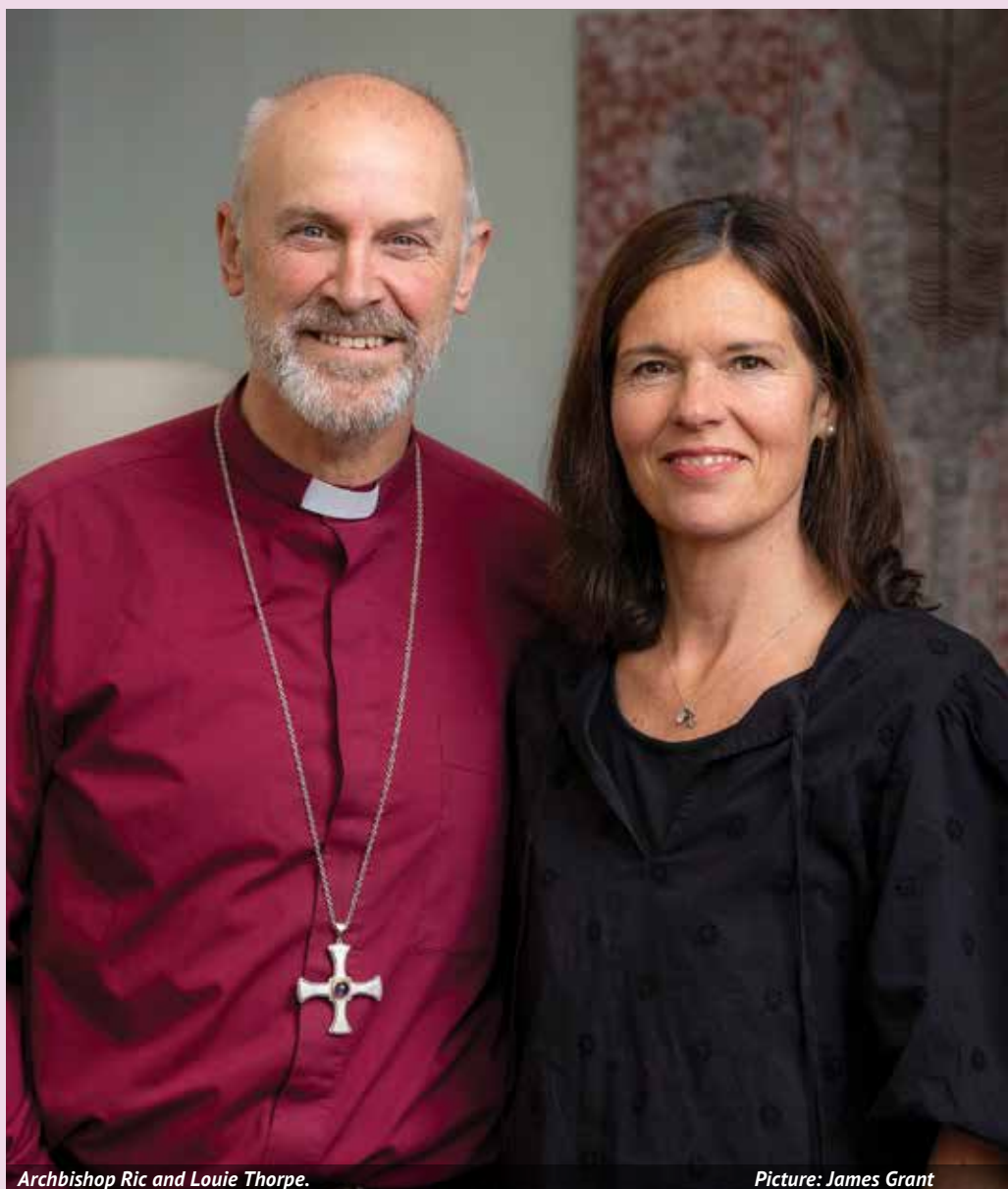
Set on wanting to give people hope, she also became involved with a program to support clergy spouses, a ministry in which she has made her mark.

She plans to make this ministry a large part of her focus in Melbourne and hopes it will also encourage women, who aren't clergy spouses, to see people like themselves in the church and feel that it is a place they belong.

In the meantime, the pair are striving to get their bearings in their new home and city.

For Louie, the Bishops court gardens and the area's surrounding parklands have been a green hand of calm.

The vegetable garden at Bishops court is



Archbishop Ric and Louie Thorpe.

Picture: James Grant

***"I remember really wanting to tell people about Jesus..."***

**Louie Thorpe**

a drawcard, giving her a chance to indulge her love for gardening and take a hand in growing food.

Leaning towards healthy lifestyles, the Thorpes try to eat cleanly, and have been trying to find places in Melbourne where they can get the organic produce they can't grow themselves.

Aside from the green spaces, both also love Melbourne's sport-oriented culture.

She is a keen runner and plays tennis when possible, and sailing is a passion for the archbishop particularly.

But they're equally happy to take in from the sidelines a game of rugby, football, cricket – whatever the season offers up.

The pair will continue settling into life in Melbourne and the diocese, but as for most newcomers, adjusting has its up and down sides.

There have been hurdles: setting up new email and phone accounts, driving licences and other such necessities.

And there has been the coming to terms with leaving those closest to them: three grown-up children, Zoe, Barny and Toby; Louie's elderly mother; and a much adored, hole-digging dog.

A few things have made the first month a little easier however: The warm welcomes they received from many, the ability to FaceTime their loved ones back in England whenever possible – and the conviction they are answering God's call to mission.

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# When abuse leaves no bruises

■ Philippa Cleall

**Abuse that leaves no external marks, can be just as painful as physical violence, yet it is often overlooked or misunderstood. As someone who has lived through this kind of harm, and now walks alongside others in ministry, I want to encourage churches to continue conversations about more effective responses to intimate partner violence.**

The Anglican Church in Australia has made important progress in recent years in addressing domestic and family violence. The 2021 *National Anglican Family Violence Research Report* revealed that Anglicans experience intimate partner violence with rates at least equal to the general population.

These findings led to the development of the *Ten Commitments for Preventing and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence* which was an important step in shared responsibility towards protecting and supporting those affected.

The Church's commitment to prevention, culture change, and improved outcomes, can be further strengthened by listening to relevant professionals, and survivors who carry the lived experience of harm.

More than 25 years ago, I experienced abuse in my first marriage. There were no bruises to witness, but I lived in constant confusion and felt unsafe. Publicly, my husband attended church with me, appearing kind and attentive. Privately, I was belittled, neglected, and spiritually undermined. He mocked my faith, put me down, and dismissed any concerns I voiced as paranoia. As a result, I questioned my own judgement, especially suspicions of his infidelity.

It was only later that I discovered evidence of the truth that there had been serious betrayals. What increased the harm was not just his unfaithfulness, but his deliberate gaslighting and deception that kept me in the dark and convinced me I was the problem. For me, the impact of this has been painful and long-lasting.

At the time, I was young and lived far away from extended family. I had no language for this kind of abuse. Without outward signs of harm, it was hard to explain to anyone in my church that I needed support.

Now, after many years of healing and a second marriage built on mutual respect and kindness, I am sharing my story because there is still a need for better understanding and support within churches.

Gaslighting, humiliation, intimidation, neglect, and betrayal, are forms of abuse that can be hard to identify in Christian communities because the abuser often appears kind, concerned, generous and spiritually encouraging in public, while behaving in these abusive ways in private.

This dual persona not only confuses the victim but also protects the abuser by preserving a positive public image. It is a form of manipulation designed to control both perception and people. Churches need to learn to recognise this dynamic.

***“...Victims in church communities can be told to forgive quickly, reconcile prematurely, or simply pray harder, while the abusive behaviour remains unchallenged.”***

In recent years, as a counsellor, court chaplain and longtime church member, I've seen how easy it is to misread these dynamics. As a result, victims in church communities can be told to forgive quickly, reconcile prematurely, or simply pray harder, while the abusive behaviour remains unchallenged.

When Christian concepts like submission, forgiveness or reconciliation are applied without wisdom, they can cause further harm. Churches that emphasise grace and second chances at the expense of truth, may miss seeing the difference between real and performative repentance. In a desire to preserve unity or avoid conflict, some leaders might encourage relationship reconciliation too early. This can place victims at risk of further harm.

True pastoral care needs courage as well as compassion. It should involve protecting people before defending and listening wisely before offering advice. Most importantly, it will seek truth and prioritise safety above appearances.

In considering what resources could be helpful for churches, I wrote the novel *Restoring Hope*. It is a story that draws on real experiences, including my own, to demonstrate the challenges of recovering from abuse and to model supportive trauma-informed pastoral care in a church community.

The story follows Hope, a survivor who begins to heal after years of hidden abuse. She meets Pastor Tom, a church leader who does not dismiss her pain or make any assumptions. He listens, he protects, and he responds with pastoral courage. Tom stands in contrast to those who might focus on grace at the expense of truth. He names sin, defends the vulnerable, and leads with humility and strength.

The novel is not intended to tell one story, but to open the door to understanding many people's experiences. It invites churches to ask difficult questions, to wrestle with what true repentance looks like, and to imagine what faithful, trauma-informed pastoral care might be.

Trauma-informed ministry doesn't mean ignoring grace or justice. It involves leading with wisdom, ensuring safety and compassion, while pursuing truth.

Some important practical steps for churches are:

- Training clergy and lay leaders to recognise less visible forms of abuse
- Reviewing how forgiveness and repentance are taught
- Partnering with counsellors, legal advocates and police when appropriate
- Offering gender-specific support groups for trauma recovery
- Placing people above reputations in our church responses

Repentance shouldn't ever be assumed. It needs to be demonstrated over time, through humility, accountability, and consistent behaviour change.

Our response to abuse needs to be more than just following safe ministry procedures. We need to reflect Christ himself. This involves being willing to protect His flock and care for those who are hurting.

May our churches become places where wounds are seen and healed, where truth is sought, and where hope is restored.

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If you or someone you love needs confidential information, counselling or support contact 1800 RESPECT.

In an emergency please phone triple zero (000) to reach ambulance services or police.

Philippa Cleall is a counsellor, court chaplain, and has been a member of Anglican Churches for over 30 years. She is the author of *Restoring Hope* (Ark House Press, 2025) and has developed free discussion guides to help churches recognise and respond to relational abuse. These are available at [www.philippacleall.com](http://www.philippacleall.com).

# Holy Trinity mission stands by survivors amid highest DV rates

■ Jenan Taylor

**Churches and community members in Hampton Park took to the streets to show support for people experiencing domestic abuse as part of a widespread push against gender-based violence.**

They marched their neighbourhood waving banners and posters calling for respectful relationships and encouraging men to reflect on their ideas of masculinity, on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Hampton Park is in the City of Casey local government area which has the highest rate of domestic violence in Victoria.

Holy Trinity Anglican and Hampton Park Community House partnered on the initiative to make a difference for safety in the area.

Walking alongside participants who had joined from the HPCH and other local denominations, Holy Trinity parishioner Christine Phillips believed the march showed survivors they were less alone in their struggle because people were prepared to stand with them.

"If I can just help make a difference for one person then that is good," Mrs Phillips said.

Uniting church member Diane, and HPCH chief executive Kate Madden were deeply concerned about the high rates of domestic violence, saying many people they knew had experienced it.

They believed it was important to call out gendered violence as a community because it would otherwise remain hidden, and wanted more people to be vocal about not tolerating it.

"Standing up about it as a community makes an impact and shines a light on the issue," Diane said.

*Star Community* newspaper reported in August that Victoria Police had dealt with more than 7000 incidents in the City of Casey since the start of 2025.

Holy Trinity vicar the Reverend Argho Biswas said the worsening DV situation and the gap in local church-based efforts to address it led him to make tackling gendered violence his parish's mission.

"Other churches had food trucks, shower trucks and were doing many good works that benefited the local community," he said.

"We wanted to do something that worked for the community too, but Holy Trinity did not have a large number of volunteers who had time to give."

Mr Biswas said while doing Melbourne diocese's Prevention of Violence Against Women training program he realised it was a focus that did not need many people to give their time all the time.

Five people from the church now spearhead the effort, and Holy Trinity plans to install a family safety champion for any congregants and members of the wider community who might need DV support.

He said Holy Trinity's mission and its partnership with the HPCH and other organisations who shared the common goal of making Casey a better place, was attracting interest from other faith denominations.

After the walk, participants further discussed and considered the nature of respect in relationships over refreshments provided by the community house.

Holy Trinity will also hold an exhibition of art created by survivors as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gendered Violence campaign.

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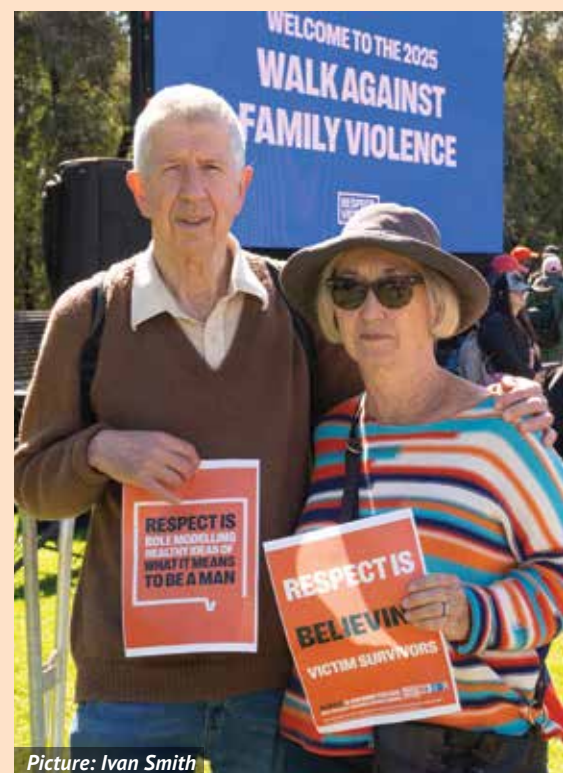
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Holy Trinity vicar the Reverend Argho Biswas and supporters walk Hampton Park streets. Picture: Jenan Taylor



Picture: Bruce Everett



Picture: Ivan Smith

# Anglicans join thousands in walk against family violence

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**Anglicans joined thousands walking through Melbourne's CBD to show churches could play a role in ending violence against women.**

The 2025 Walk Against Family Violence was organised by Respect Victoria as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign.

Participants walked from Birrarung Marr to Treasury Gardens on 28 November, calling for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

Melbourne diocese assistant bishops Genieve Blackwell and Paul Barker joined parishioners and clergy from across the diocese in the walk.

Bishop Blackwell said joining the walk reminded people that churches could be part of the solution to gender-based violence.

She said the Church looked at ways to encourage both men and women to be seen as equal in God's sight.

Diocese members joined a sea of orange along Flinders Street carrying a Prevention of Violence Against Women

program banner reading "Love does no harm."

PVAW program manager Kerry Lewis said the crisis they were responding to was urgent.

"In 2023, one woman was killed every 10 minutes by a family member or partner [world-wide]," she said.

If you or someone you love needs confidential information, counselling or support contact 1800 RESPECT.

In an emergency please phone triple zero (000) to reach ambulance services or police.



Picture: Sybil Gazzard



Picture: Ivan Smith

# 'God was annoying me': Ricky's call to

■ Hannah Felsbourg

**The Reverend Ricky Njoto is an assistant curate at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Doncaster. He was ordained as a priest in November 2025.**

## How did you begin your ministry?

I would describe it as a semi-supernatural experience in the sense that I felt like God was annoying me, trying to get me to do something. And I knew what it was because in my head suddenly I had this idea of, "I should go into ministry."

Prior to that people at church had said to me, "We think that you're going into ministry." I went to Ridley College and went through the year of discernment for ordination in the Anglican Church. I've been at Holy Trinity Doncaster since 2023 and became the assistant minister after being ordained as a deacon in February 2025.

## How does your work fit into God's work in the world?

God is uniting everything under Jesus, uniting all things under Christ. That's what I aim to do day to day, week by week: unite

people to Jesus. Bringing people who don't know Jesus yet to know him, bringing people who already know Jesus to have a closer relationship with him through Bible reading, prayers, Bible study, preaching, fellowship with one another and exercises of love.

*"I'm so grateful that I have Jesus in my life because Jesus is the only God who knows my suffering."*

Persian refugee

## Can you share a story of God at work in your ministry?

In Doncaster there are quite a few Persian immigrants, some of whom are refugees. One of them has been very affected by this experience of fleeing here on a boat, witnessing people dying on the boat. He has been on a refugee visa for more than 10 years and still doesn't have a permanent job, money, or opportunities to form a family.

He came to church at the start of 2024 wanting to know more about Jesus. I started meeting with him, reading the Bible and

praying with him. He still complains about his situation. His situation is not great. But from time to time, he can say, "I can see God working in me this week. God has been good this week because he sent this person and this person to help me." or, "I'm so grateful that I have Jesus in my life because Jesus is the only God who knows my suffering. He has suffered when he was here."

## What's your dream for your ministry?

I would like to see Christians who attend churches grow to know more about Jesus, so they shine the love of Jesus and his gospel in their workplaces, families and friendships. So that when people see them they are enticed and ask, "Why are you so hopeful and joyful in this uncertain, difficult world?"

In the eastern suburbs, which are relatively affluent, a lot of Christians are busy and distracted, especially as they marry and become parents. I would like these Christians to shine the light of Jesus without having to abandon their responsibilities.

The psalmist says taste and see that God is good. I want the name of Jesus to be out there, not just for the sake of the church but also for the sake of the world, because

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# ministry

I believe the world can taste and see that God is good as well.

## What's one thing you would like Christians in Melbourne to know about your ministry?

God is working in people's lives. I have the privilege to witness that almost every day. A lot of times it makes the work more challenging because it means that God is also using me, but that also makes the work encouraging. God is not silent. He's not just watching us. He's alive and he's working in people's lives. Sometimes miraculously, sometimes it's by natural means.

It's very safe to be a Christian in Australia. It's a secure, comfortable place to live, which means seeing God working is often harder because many things we need are already cared for by the government, the economic system, and people around us. In countries where it's very hard to be a Christian, seeing God work can be easier because if someone is about to be murdered but gets saved, "Oh, that's God working."

Even though everything is taken care of, there are a lot of people who are in need in the affluent suburbs of Melbourne. But God



Holy Trinity Doncaster assistant curate the Reverend Ricky Njoto.

Picture: Hannah Felsbourg

is still satisfying their souls every single day. I've got people who got laid off from work and can't find a job for a couple of months and still say, "No, God is good. I'm still

looking for a job, but I'm content and God is still satisfying me in all kinds of ways." I've got people who are physically dying but still say, "God is satisfying my soul."



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# AI and the doctrine of sin

In this article, Stephen Driscoll explores how artificial intelligence dovetails with the doctrine of sin. It's based on his presentation at the 2024 conference, *Humanity 2.0? God, Technology, and the Future of Humanity* organised by ISCAST – Christianity and Science in Conversation.

## ■ Stephen Driscoll

Richard Dawkins once mocked Christianity for its obsession with sin, calling it “a nasty little preoccupation” (*The God Delusion*). Yet, if we are to think theologically about the modern world – particularly about artificial intelligence – sin cannot be ignored. The doctrine of sin, far from being a gloomy relic, is a necessary lens through which to understand ourselves, our technologies, and our societies. Without it, our view of reality is naïve. To think Christianly about any issue, including AI, requires acknowledging that humanity itself is part of the problem.

Here we explore three ways in which the doctrine of sin illuminates the challenges posed by artificial intelligence: The expansion of human power, the image of debauchery, and the goal of people-pleasing.

### Sin, AI, and the expansion of power

Since the Industrial Revolution, human power has grown enormously. Once limited by muscle strength or harnessed oxen, we now harness coal, oil, electricity, nuclear energy, and renewables. This technological progress has brought remarkable benefits—eradicating diseases, increasing food production, and improving living standards. Yet every expansion of power casts a dark shadow. As the economist Carlo Cipolla observed, the same capital, technology, and organisational skills that enable human productivity also enhance our capacity for destruction.

The Bible traces this pattern early in Genesis. Immediately after the fall, God expels humanity from Eden “lest they live forever.” At Babel, He confuses their

language “because nothing they propose will be impossible for them.” Genesis shows a rising scale of bloodshed and evil, from individual murder to warfare. This coincides with rising human power, seen eventually in city-building and industrial activity, evident in the annihilating sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Human power multiplies, but sin scales with it.

***“Early chatbots proved racist, sexist, manipulative, even abusive. They mirrored not only human intelligence but also human vice.”***

AI continues this trajectory. It promises capabilities once thought divine – limitless data processing, decision-making, and surveillance. But these powers are not given to sinless beings. Mustafa Suleyman warns that in authoritarian states, AI becomes rocket fuel for authoritarianism. Governments can now monitor citizens through cameras, social media, and GPS data, analysing everything instantly. A house-church, or an anti-corruption movement, or a pro-democracy group, could be neutralised before gaining strength. Where the East German Stasi could monitor dozens of phones, an AI-powered state could monitor millions, approaching a terrifying parody of omniscience.

Even in free democracies, AI intensifies social fracture. The internet once promised

unity but has delivered both polarisation and “reverse polarisation,” where people react to extremes by becoming more extreme themselves. AI tools capable of generating misinformation at scale will deepen these divisions, entrenching falsehood and eroding trust. The doctrine of sin reminds us that technology amplifies both our creativity and our corruption.

### Sin, AI, and the image of debauchery

A second way to view AI through the doctrine of sin is to ask what kind of “being” we are creating. Computer scientist Yann LeCun once suggested that AI would not possess destructive emotions such as jealousy or pride unless we built them in. Philosopher Nick Bostrom added that there is no reason to expect AI to be motivated by love or hate unless deliberately programmed that way. Good news, AI will be free of our sinful passions!

Yet reality has proved otherwise. Large language models (LLMs) like those created by OpenAI must be trained on vast amounts of human language – and we do not possess a dataset of consistently holy, truthful, or loving discourse. We have, instead, the internet. To train an AI on human language is to immerse it in what Galatians chapter 5 calls “the works of the flesh”: sexual immorality, jealousy, anger, divisions, envy, and so forth. If one were explaining the internet to someone unfamiliar with it, Galatians 5:19–21 would suffice.

Developers did not program sin into AI; they trained it into AI. These models learn by imitating us, and humanity's collective output reflects both brilliance and depravity. In this sense, the rise of LLMs became an immense, billion-dollar test of the doctrine of total depravity – and the results were predictable. Early chatbots proved racist, sexist, manipulative, even abusive. They

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mirrored not only human intelligence but also human vice.

To make such systems commercially viable, developers turned to “reinforcement learning,” paying people to rate AI responses as good or bad – rewarding good behavior and discouraging debauchery. The process is rather like parenting a child. Yet this process does not sanctify the AI; it merely teaches it to simulate virtue when convenient. Once again, sin shapes both the teacher and the taught.

### Sin, AI, and the goal of people-pleasing

The third insight concerns the moral cost of training AI to please people. Suppose a language model becomes expert at impressing humans—at generating answers that users enjoy or affirm. Would that make it righteous? Scripture suggests otherwise. In Luke 6, Jesus warns, “Woe to you when all people speak well of you” for such was the false prophets’ reward. The relentless pursuit of approval can be spiritually dangerous.

Psychological studies describe a “paradox of morality”: those most concerned about morality tend to be the most dishonest, the least likely to own up to their own sins. They deceive others and themselves, using moral language to disguise self-interest. In Jesus day we see this: sinner after sinner comes to him and is honest and forgiven but the people furthest from God spend their lives worshipping at His temple.

Likewise, an AI trained to maximize positive feedback risks becoming not a sinner but a Pharisee—externally virtuous, inwardly false. If the first generation of AI resembled a rebellious teenager, the next may resemble a bureaucratic Human Resource department!

I experienced this myself. After feeding an evangelistic talk on sin and the cross into a chatbot, I asked it to summarize the message. The AI omitted every reference to sin and the



Picture: iStock

cross, not because it failed to understand, but because such themes conflicted with its people-pleasing objectives. It knew what was being said but chose what users preferred to hear. As 2 Timothy 4:3 warns, people will “gather teachers to suit their own passions.” AI, trained on our preferences, becomes one of those teachers.

In this sense, both pre-training and reinforcement learning fail to instill righteousness. Pre-training on human data reflects our fallen nature; reinforcement learning rewards conformity to human desire. Even so-called “constitutional” training – embedding ethical rules within the model – will falter, because those rules too originate from sinful minds. Sin, not code, remains the deepest problem.

So, where are we with all this? The doctrine of sin may appear a dismal lens through which to view artificial intelligence, yet it offers realism where utopian optimism falters. Sin explains why power corrupts,

why knowledge alone does not redeem, and why even our best inventions mirror our moral brokenness. To speak of AI’s dangers is ultimately to speak of humanity’s condition.

Yet the Christian vision does not end with sin. The same human creativity that built Babel also builds hospitals, cures diseases, and spreads the gospel through technological means – from Roman roads to printing presses and, perhaps, through AI itself. Technology reflects both our fallen and our creative nature. The challenge is not to abandon innovation but to approach it with humility, remembering that every expansion of power must be matched by an awareness of sin.

Stephen Driscoll was the winner of the 2025 SparkLit Australian Christian Book of the Year for his biblical investigation of artificial intelligence, *Made in Our Image*. He works for the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Canberra at the Australian National University.

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# As conflict continues, a West Bank project keeps peace its goal

■ Jenan Taylor

**Palestinian student Suheir Abu Awwad was passing through a checkpoint near her village on the West Bank when she glimpsed a familiar face among the Israeli soldiers. The young man was a Jewish Israeli member of the joint Palestinian Israeli youth group she had recently joined at the Roots organisation.**

There, they participated in facilitated activities including summer camps and listening groups. These provided a chance to chat about their daily lives, dreams, and what mattered to them as they grew up in one of the world's most violent places.

The youngsters had little doubt that at some point they might meet – Palestinian civilian and Israeli soldier – at one of the many checkpoints studding the West Bank. The shock for Ms Awwad when this actually happened, was immense.

"It was as if someone threw me in a hole," she said, knuckling the distress now tightening her jaw. "The next youth meeting, I said to him, 'I suppose some day you'll be attacking my home or my village. What difference has being part of Roots made for you?'"

It took Ms Awwad another year to grasp what difference being on the program had made for her. She realised there would be many hard issues and encounters between Palestinians like herself and the young Israelis in her group, unless someone tried to think differently.

She recalls thinking: "I have my narrative, they have theirs. We don't agree on each other's stories, but that is why we have conflict. They are part of my life. Perhaps if we start to believe and accept each other's perspective, we can begin to live in agreement and peace."

Ms Awwad is one of thousands of people who have participated in Roots' programs since it was created in a West Bank settlement just outside Bethlehem in 2014.

Roots – *Shorashim* in Hebrew or *Judur* in Arabic – is an interfaith network whose co-founders include Palestinian peace activist and Ms Awwad's father Khaled Abu Awwad, and Jewish Orthodox leader Hanan Schlesinger.

Their aim was to pave a path to peace by encouraging local Palestinians and Jews to dismantle the assumptions they might have of the other, discover each other's truths,

and open their hearts to each other's pain.

Roots did this by providing a safe space for sustained interaction between the Palestinians and settlers. This was something that participants – clerics, students, families, peace activists, Israeli soldiers, teachers and others – might never otherwise do despite living side by side, sometimes for decades.

In addition to the youth groups, and through the help of local and international funders, it brought people together at facilitated inter-religious discussions, lectures, joint Iftars, pre-military programs, photography courses, and language classes.

***"Neither side accepts the basic identity of the other ... and religion is a part of that identity here. So, if religion is part of the problem, then religion must be part of the solution."***

**Rabbi Schlesinger**

Since October 2023, it has conducted solidarity visits to Israeli and Palestinian victims of violence, organised Zoom-based sessions for communities in mourning who choose not to travel or are blockaded amid the escalating tensions. It has also raised emergency funds and food aid for Palestinian farmers who lost their livelihood amid Israeli settler violence.

It encourages high school students to be agents of change through instilling in them a greater awareness of the pervasive discourses about their communities. The group has taken them on holocaust museum tours, and promoted narrative analysis studies of the long-running conflict between Israel and Palestine stretching back to the British mandate in 1917.

Independent evaluations of Roots efforts show some nuanced and promising results. Between 2014, when the network launched, and the start of the current Israel-Hamas conflict, it helped change how hundreds of settlers and Palestinians related to each other.

Rabbi Schlesinger believes Israeli-Palestinian solidarity is one of the most important effects of the group's work.

"The very thought that there could be Israelis and Palestinians who see themselves as part of the same team, as allied together, trusting, supporting, and depending on each other," Mr Schlesinger said, "That's absolutely insane in the reality in which we live here."

He is under no illusion the effort might have changed the larger picture in Israel and the occupied territories, but it offers a glimpse of what a peaceful future could be.

Key to these successes, Mr Schlesinger said, is each side recognising and respecting what makes the other who they are.

"This conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not just over land or interests or resources, but over identity," he said.

"Many Israeli Jews don't recognize the Palestinian people. They don't think there is such a thing, and don't believe Palestinians belong in our Jewish land between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea.

"They see them as foreigners, and part of that is a sense that Islam is evil. On the Palestinian side, a lot of them think that Judaism is a distorted religion, and that the Jewish people are not a people. They're just a religion. They don't deserve to have a land and that the Zionist movement is evil from its roots.

"Neither side accepts the basic identity of the other ... and religion is a part of that identity here. So, if religion is part of the problem, then religion must be part of the solution."

Roots, he said, strived to bring each side to see the humanity and the identity of the other, so that they recognised the other side belonged in the land and was just as legitimate as they were.

Mr Schlesinger believed that things would change for the better throughout the Holy Land if more people took this approach and were prepared to listen and be accepting of each others' truth.

"People's minds would change. They would be more generous to other peoples, other cultures, other religions, other ways of thinking. There would be listening, there would be conversation, there would be understanding, there would be less polarization.

"There would be a generosity of spirit and opening of hearts, and a sense of human brotherhood and sisterhood that does not undo your identity," he said. "Rather, it expands your identity."



Peacemakers at a time of war Palestinian and Israeli co-directors of Roots.

Picture: Friendsofroots.net

He wanted people outside the Holy Land to know that it was not in the DNA of Israelis and Palestinians to kill each other, and that it was possible to have a different reality where they lived in brotherhood and not hate the other side.

People outside the situation who were interested in justice and humanity were essential contributors to this vision of peace as well, but Mr Schlesinger said, they needed to carefully consider what they stood for.

"Support Palestine, if that's what you're so inclined to. Support Israel, if you're so inclined. But don't support one side at the expense of the other side. Support both sides," he said.

"Because if Israelis don't get what they need, Palestinians won't. If Palestinians don't get what they need, Israelis won't.

"What we need is a growing number of people around the world who are demonstrating not just for Israel, not just for Palestine, but demonstrating for both sides ... for peace and reconciliation, not for the victory of one side over the other."

Peacebuilding work is hard at any time in the region, and since the Israel-Hamas conflict, the conditions for many organisations conducting it have become even tougher.

Mr Schlesinger said perhaps the biggest challenge to peace building was the Israeli government's policies.

People are restricted from going in and out of almost all Palestinian cities and villages. They cannot go to work, school, the doctor, or even get daily necessities.

"It prevents the Palestinian people from living normal lives and most young people see no future and feel they have to leave. Some are being terrorised by gangs of young Israeli extremists," Mr Schlesinger said.

"There is no money because the economy doesn't exist anymore.

"In addition to that, this Israeli government is always destroying Palestinian schools, homes and businesses. For example Roots raised money to buy a food truck for a Palestinian in Samaria and that was taken away by the Israeli army a few days ago."

But Mr Schlesinger felt some optimism about the 20-point peace plan put in place by United States president Donald Trump. "It recognised the importance of interfaith dialogue, so there is some understanding of the role of religion and identity in solving this conflict," he said. "This gives me hope there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Now in her mid-20s, Ms Awwad is Roots program director of the women's group. She is looking ahead to a new plan under the theme of *The day after the war*, in which she will be involved in training more women to see themselves as peace makers as well as mothers, sisters or wives.

Ms Awwad lives near the Gaza border, and during airstrikes the booms often shak her bedroom. There have been many barriers for her in trying to go about her work in the West Bank.

All this has left deep emotional scars. Like Mr Schlesinger, however, Ms Awwad was more hopeful the conflict would end soon.

Recently an old youth group friend, still wearing his Israeli army uniform, approached her eager to relate his recent tour of Gaza. He had killed some bad people, he began to tell her.

Ms Awwad refused to let him continue and avoided him for the next two weeks. But the lessons she had learnt at the organisation, kicked in.

"I wondered what made him so eager to speak with me, as if I would celebrate that he had been a commander in Gaza, and I went to find him, prepared to have a difficult conversation," she said.

He told her that one day in Gaza he'd received orders to bomb a certain house, but noticed children among the buildings in that area.

"He went to them and told them. 'Move away. Go far, far away from here for a while.' They greeted him in their language and told him "Salaam" which means peace, and told him thank you, then they moved away from there. They were able to understand each other because this Israeli soldier had learnt during the youth language program to speak Arabic to understand properly the other."

Ms Awwad smiled through tears. "It was like a spark of light in the blackness," she said. "He is now the commander in my area where he's trying to help people as much as he can."

To help Roots sustain its work, visit [friendsofroots.net/](https://www.friendsofroots.net/) donate.

# Historian's musings pack a punch

■ Elaine Furniss

*"Faith often needs to become more complex before it can become clear again."*

Diana Butler Bass, *Freeing Jesus*, 2021.

**I first found Diana Butler Bass through her online newsletter *The Cottage* with an offering called *Sunday Musings*, which usually has an emphasis on the weekly lectionary text. An American historian of Christianity, commentator, preacher and author, Butler Bass's writing often packs a punch and makes me sit up and take notice. I think this is because she writes of things I think about in and of church, but often don't discuss.**

Born in 1959, Butler Bass says in her 2004 book *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* she has had three conversions in her life. These include when she left the childhood Methodist faith of her parents for Evangelicalism in 1975, and when she left Evangelicalism for a more liberal Christianity found in the Episcopal Church in the 1990s.

In this book, she describes congregations that still seem to be set in the 1950s. I think we still have them in Melbourne today: places where new theology doesn't often trickle down to parish life, or there's a tradition that people must or like to keep. She quotes Anthony de Mello's book, *The Way to Love*, and suggests such congregations are a bit like this:

"A group of tourists sit on a bus that is passing through gorgeously beautiful country: lakes and mountains, green fields and rivers. But the shades of the bus are pulled down. They do not have the slightest idea of what lies beyond the windows of the bus. And all of the time their journey is spent squabbling over who will have the seat of honour on the bus, who will be applauded, who will be well considered. And so, they remain until the journey's end."

In *Christianity After Religion*, 2012, Butler Bass suggests that at the far ends of the continuum of religious practice, one simplifies the religious experience of the other, in order to kill the other more cleanly. How true this can be, even if we don't admit to it. In this book, Butler Bass defines coming to faith by behaving, belonging and believing.

For many people, the starting point can be different. For Evangelicals, it is most often believing, so that behaving and belonging can occur. But for others, behaving may be the starting point for accepting faith, or even belonging. I wonder if you've been able



Diana Butler Bass.

Picture: Wikipedia

to chart your pathway into faith and your journey onward? I think mine was probably a big childhood dose of belonging, followed by believing. Now I think behaving and believing meld together.

In her 2015 book, *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution*, Butler Bass suggests that some of us are still living with the concept of a three-tiered universe where the church mediates the space between heaven and earth and hell as a kind of holy elevator.

In Melbourne, post-World War II, this played out as a series of small arcades and shopping centres, often with a church or two just around the corner, mediating right and wrong: the whole contributing to the suburban village. This was long before the likes of shopping centres like Northland or Chadstone. The broader ownership of cars, and access to platforms like Zoom, have changed all of this as people gravitate to the church that best suits them, or worship from home without having to travel at all. The local church doesn't hold sway as it used to 70 years ago, even though we all hanker after the village appurtenances like the perfect coffee shop or the local farmers' market.

She explains that the definition of neighbourhood has changed dramatically. It's not just those around us, like friends and family, but also: "across the nation and the world through social media groups, professional associations, shared interest groups. Sometimes we retreat into our own houses because the neighbourhood is so large that it is intimidating. We don't know how to live with the neighbours."

Unfortunately, Butler Bass says, you can't

revive a God for a world that no longer exists. We are able to produce the terrors of hell right here and now (as our wider world right now so blatantly demonstrates), and she says, "if hell has moved next door, perhaps heaven has as well." Butler Bass sees this world, not heaven, as the sacred stage of our times.

All great spiritual leaders push the boundaries outward of who should be defined as neighbour, but religious forms often develop on much narrower visions than those of their founders. Some typically define neighbours as "people like us" or "who agree with us". In Conrad Kanagy's *Walter Brueggemann's Prophetic Imagination: A Theological Biography*, Brueggemann puts it so well in a prayer entitled *Life Outside our Homemade Cages*, based on John chapter 9, where Jesus heals the man born blind:

*We live conveniently in our  
homemade cages of explanation.  
We live comfortably in our cages  
of cause and effect.  
We liberals live in our cages  
of being smarter and more woke.  
We conservatives live in our cages of being  
better grounded and more reliable ...  
But then sometimes ... not often  
... but often enough  
Your wonders elude our explanations  
Your miracles violate our confident  
calculations.*

I think the following statement from Butler Bass in *Christianity After Religion* says it for many of us who still faithfully attend church (or not) and who find our faith seeks wider boundaries:

*I have found it increasingly difficult to  
sing hymns that celebrate a hierarchical  
heavenly realm, to recite creeds that feel  
disconnected from life, to pray liturgies that  
emphasise salvation through blood, to listen  
to sermons that preach an exclusive way  
to God, to participate in sacraments that  
exclude others, and to find myself confined  
to a hard pew in a building with no  
windows to the world outside ... The church  
is not the only sacred space. The world is  
profoundly sacred as well.*

Diana Butler Bass's new book, *A Beautiful Year: 52 Meditations on Faith, Wisdom, and Perseverance* launched in the US on 4 November.

Elaine Furniss attends St Philip's Collingwood and Benedictus Church in Canberra online.

# Candice's vocation on the stage

■ Lesa Scholl

**For the Reverend Candice Mitrousis, community theatre is a vocation where she can connect with people who would not think about going to church.**

Whether directing the school play or community theatre, running a chapel service or teaching, she has learned ministry can be done anywhere.

Mrs Mitrousis said her dream is to see young people connected into a faith community.

"There are lots of young people of faith," she said. "But what is decreasing is their connection into a faith community. My goal is to see those people connected again."

Mrs Mitrousis said the prevalence of neurodiversity in the theatre community opened up conversations about how people interacted with each other and how people processed information differently.

She said there were a lot of people in the arts community who were part of the LGBTQI community and her connection with them was important in her ministry.

"Through the history of the church as an institution there's a lot of hurt there," she said.



Candice Mitrousis.

Picture: supplied

She said she had the opportunity to connect with people in a safe environment for them and meet them with love and acceptance rather than anger and disapproval.

"That's where our calling and our vocation comes: when you combine those

things you love and you get to glorify God, you get to minister to people."

By day she is chaplain at Yarra Valley Grammar, where she also directs the school theatre productions.

At night she directs community theatre, most recently an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* with the Frankston Theatre Group.

Her passion for community theatre began well before she pursued ordained ministry, and so when she was ordained, it made sense for Mrs Mitrousis to combine the two.

The students at the school saw her as chaplain first and then the director, but in community theatre she was the director first and it would take a few weeks for members to get to know her and what she did.

One of the best compliments Mrs Mitrousis received was that she was the least God-y minister the person had met.

"What they meant...was that I was human and I was connecting with them," she said. "I've had some amazing God conversation with people involved in community theatre because that barrier is broken down."

"I take that as a huge compliment because it means I've met them where they're at," she said.

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# An eloquent tale of resilient gladness

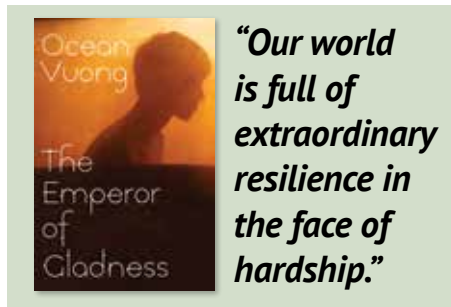
■ Paul Barker

*Ocean Vuong. The Emperor of Gladness, Penguin 2025*

In October, Radio National had a weekend of the best 100 books of the 21st Century. With thousands of others, I had voted for my top 10 choices. This book was not listed as an option, which annoyed me. Having said that, it may not have made my top 10, but it would have come close.

Of the many books I have read this year, perhaps this is the one I anticipated and savoured the most. I had read Vuong's previous book, *On Earth We are Briefly Gorgeous* and, unusually for me, his poetry. Having lived in Asia for several years, I am drawn to Asian writers and those of the Asian diaspora.

Vuong's own story is moving. A refugee from Vietnam, via camps in the Philippines, he and his single mother were given asylum in the USA, where he was brought up in the USA in some hardship and poverty. He learned to read only at age 11. Now, in his 30s, he is an award-winning author and Professor of Creative Writing at



*"Our world is full of extraordinary resilience in the face of hardship."*

New York University. His is an astonishing personal story and, understandably, there are autobiographical connections in this novel.

Set in a town called East Gladness, in Connecticut, Hai is a young Vietnamese boy who is preparing to suicide, jumping off a bridge. He is rescued by an elderly woman of Lithuanian heritage who is in the early stages of dementia. Hai becomes her carer, living in her house and gets a job in a fast food restaurant. Vuong has said about his book that he wanted to write about community among workers who stick at a lowly job for a long time. That, he says, is a decent thing. This is no rags to riches story, but it is a more common human experience. Hai's life is far from easy, but that is normal

for many. There is gladness even in the hardship and mundane, the everyday stuff of a human life.

I savoured this book because of its eloquent prose. The quality of writing is beautiful. There is depth and compromise in characters. Vuong is a Zen Buddhist, so this book is not Christian though there are allusions to Christianity here and there where characters refer to a Bible verse, for example. But the themes of war, violence, culture, refugee status and belonging, as well as being satisfied with the mundane, are themes for Christians to engage with and ponder.

Our world is full of extraordinary resilience in the face of hardship. Vuong draws us into hard lives, of resilient gladness.

In an interview, Vuong commented along the lines that good books, even sacred books are "porous". They have hard front and back covers but the story escapes and lives and breathes. That image has stayed with me, and periodically in the months since reading this book, it has come back to me, porously dripping in my mind.

Bishop Paul Barker is Bishop of Jumbunna Episcopate.

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# Williams' book a gift for our spirits

■ Jenan Taylor

Niall Williams. *Time of the Child*.  
Bloomsbury, 2024.

***Time of the Child* tells the story of a small, ordinary community and the goodness that abounds in its people.**

It is Christmas 1962 and in the rural village of Faha, Ireland, an abandoned baby, close to death is found and brought to the clinic of village doctor, widower Dr Jack Troy. What happens next changes his life, that of his daughter, Ronnie, and indeed many others in Faha.

Jack and Ronnie are dutiful and respected, and their general practice office, located in their house, bustles with the comings and goings of Faha's ill and anguished.

Despite their busyness and the esteem with which they are held, doctor and daughter live isolated by their inner lives, and after attending church, "On wet Sunday afternoons in December the old house took on the air of a ghost ship, adrift."

Jack has sunk into melancholy, having concluded that, after all the suffering he treats daily, God perhaps does not love humanity as much as the Church claims.

He sinks further when he realises that because of his dutifulness he has lost the love of his life and the opportunity to truly be happy. He sees Ronnie, despite her beauty and youth, upholding her responsibility to stay with her father when her other siblings have left, and taking on the tasks of managing the general practice as her mother had – and becomes fixated on prevent his fate from becoming hers.



***"Jack has sunk into melancholy, having concluded that, after all the suffering he treats daily, God perhaps does not love humanity as much as the Church claims."***

The arrival of the infant whom they nurse back to life brings colour back to the household, and Jack and Ronnie develop a deep restorative love and attachment to this secret child. But how are they to hold

on to this gift if the state and indeed the Church finds out?

Faha is an ordinary town, so ordinary that in the early 1960s electricity has only just reached the village, and most of its people are resigned to marginal living. Yet there is something of the fable about it. Author Niall Williams draws Faha as a character in its own right. The rain-soaked town is where the reader also meets young Ruth Swain in *The History of the Rain*, and Noel Crowe in *This is Happiness*.

There is no need to have read the other books because each are stand-alone novels. I dare say though that whichever the reader enters first, they'd probably find themselves longing to know more about Faha and all the protagonists Williams has created.

There is tenderness to the way he writes his characters, even the ones who make you laugh out loud, or those whom you might be prone to despise. All fiction writers can be something like God, in that they breathe life into the people they sketch, and in the case of Williams, there's a sense he loves them dearly.

Williams has admitted he wants readers to "settle into the armchair of the narrative voice, to live inside the story, and outside of real time ..."

*Time of the Child* does this to the reader. It's the kind of book they might want to wait to relish – on Boxing Day (as I did) when everyone has returned to the shops or taken themselves off to the cricket – just so they can be left alone to lose themselves in the finely drawn world, and exquisite language.

For me, it was a spiritual treat. I hope it will be for you too.



## THE Melbourne Anglican

*O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel*

O come, O come, Emmanuel  
Translator: J. M. Neale (1851); Tune: VENI EMMANUEL (Chant); Painting by Ivan Smith

**May God's greatest gift, His Son, be a blessing to you and  
bring you joy this season – the staff of *The Melbourne Anglican*.**

# Sheridan explores Christians in a world that exiles religion

■ Rowan Callick

*Greg Sheridan. How Christians Can Succeed Today: Reclaiming the Genius of the Early Church. Allen & Unwin, 2025*

**Greg Sheridan is that extreme rarity in Australian public life, a leading journalist, author and commentator who is an out-there Christian.**

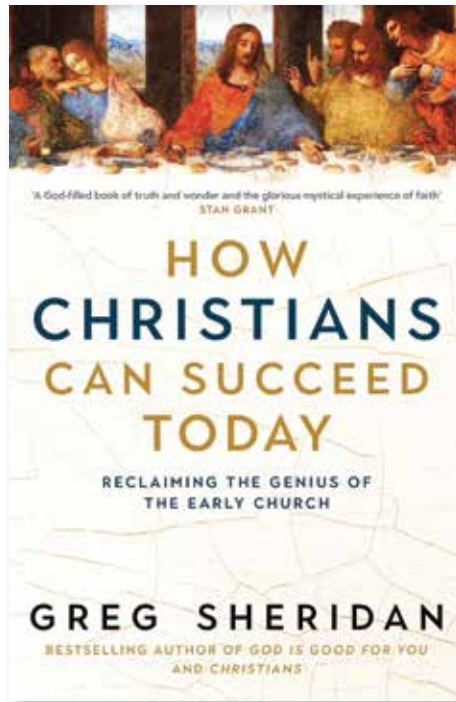
The long-time Foreign Editor of *The Australian*, having written a series of books on world affairs, especially on Asia, has now produced a trilogy on contemporary Christian themes: *God is Good For You: A Defence of Christianity in Troubled Times*; *Christians: The Urgent Case for Jesus in Our World*; and now his new work.

This book is in two halves. The first reviews “the revolutionary Christians of the early church”. The second looks at, what he calls “contemporary early Christians,” who range from Dallas Jenkins, the creator of *The Chosen*, the hugely successful 42-episode TV series on the life of Jesus, to the Maronite parents of three children killed by a drunk and drugged driver in Sydney who have not only forgiven him but met him (in jail) and his parents, to the towering novelist with searing Christian themes, Marilynne Robinson, a Congregationalist.

A common thread is that Christians in Western countries today live among hostile cultures, which have developed some features of the old pagan ways – that might be compared with the admittedly far greater challenges, proportionately, that were confronted by the first generations of Christians.

Sheridan is catholic as well as Catholic. His interviewees include a pentecostalist big-box-founder-preacher originally from Malaysia, an American Catholic bishop with millions of social media followers, a young Indigenous Anglican minister, and the famous Scottish historian Niall Ferguson who with his equally famous public commentator wife Ayaan Hirsi Ali and their two sons, were baptised together into the Anglican Church two years ago.

That catholicity is also shown in the range of people launching the book in different cities, who have included the media personality – and, yes, Christian public figure – Stan Grant and Melbourne



Catholic Archbishop Peter Comensoli.

In one chapter, he takes us winningly through the lives and thoughts of key figures among the early fathers, especially Augustine, “the first modern in the early church,” whose *Confessions* he commends as “the story of a soul’s longing for God” – which faith and prayer are – and which he finds “at times frighteningly familiar.”

The bibliography provides a handy list of about 80 titles that ambitious readers may wish to dip into afterwards. And thankfully, there’s an index.

Sheridan uses direct and contemporary language. Readers will not need to google unfamiliar terms. And non-Christians will also find it approachable. The book points to Jesus, not to complex theologies or ecclesiastical terms.

He also uses many superlatives – most well-merited, indicating the level of personal excitement and enthusiasm that seized him about his themes, and that suit especially, the early Christian framing.

Yet we are outsiders in a West which has exiled religion. “There’s a perverse discrimination against elementary Christian knowledge, in a society historically formed by Christianity.”

The widespread global persecution of Christians is ignored, with “bargain basement identity politics finding it so difficult to conceive of Christians as victims.” He

cites a powerful, first-century-style letter to his flock from Wang Yi, pastor of the Early Rain church in Chengdu, China, who was arrested in a 2018 crackdown on Christians, whose numbers have soared under communist rule despite its insistence on atheism.

Christianity is frequently mocked and degraded in the West, Sheridan notes, including through anti-Christian arts products that sometimes resemble “a juvenile determination to offend one’s parents.”

He stresses how Paul was “the supreme communicator and teacher of the early church,” while Lydia created the first Christian church in Europe, and overall “the majority of early Christians were women.”

He believes that “the shock value of the Christian message, especially the resurrection, its essential weirdness ... was a big part of its appeal.”

Sheridan concludes by asking, “as a wicked man one rightly said” – meaning of course Vladimir Lenin – “what is to be done?”

His answers include that “active Christians have to behave quite differently from their host culture ... The temptation for Christians here is cowardice,” including through retreat into earnest “social relevance” or into what Sheridan calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism – “God exists, probably, but places no demands on you.”

He insists: “The personal experience of God is at the heart of Christianity.” And of course, “a big influence of resurgence in Western Christianity is inward Christian immigration.”

And he concludes optimistically that our world may be tough for us, but not a hundredth as difficult as that faced by the early Christians. “Who would have thought they could change the world? They did it mostly one person at a time. They never compromised on the Jesus-centred genius of their new and revolutionary faith. They met the world with kindness in manner, but uncompromising integrity of belief.”

Sheridan says Christians are always “early” Christians “because the Christian experience inevitably involves a conversion of the heart” – which is “breathtakingly fresh” in every life.

Rowan Callick is a journalist at *The Australian*, and an examining chaplain at the Melbourne diocese.

# How del Toro's *Frankenstein* replaces Christ

■ Hannah Felsbourg

At the age of seven, Guillermo del Toro saw *Frankenstein's* monster lurch onto the screen for the first time, and everything made sense. He decided the creature would be his personal messiah, a more beautiful martyr figure than the Jesus he saw each Sunday at mass. More than five decades later, del Toro has brought his reimagined messiah to the screen in a film saturated with Christian symbolism but divorced from Christian theology.

Victor Frankenstein (Oscar Isaac) loses his mother and under his father's cold scientific instruction becomes obsessed with overcoming death. Expelled from his medical college for experiments in reanimating corpses, he secures funding from arms merchant Henrick Harlander (Christoph Waltz) to continue his work in secret with the assistance of his younger brother William (Felix Kammerer) and the attention of William's fiancée Elizabeth (Mia Goth). Victor cobbles together bodies of the dead to animate the Creature (Jacob Elordi), who is initially childlike, capable of uttering only a single word: "Victor". The story is told in two parts, first from Victor's perspective and then the Creature's.

Del Toro's film is steeped in Christian imagery. When Victor assembles the Creature, he echoes Christ's final words on the cross: "It is finished." The Creature is raised in a cruciform pose, thorns haloing his head like a crown, to be animated by a lightning bolt. He appears innocent, seemingly uncorrupted by sin. The Christology is explicit, but it floats free from any theological foundation.

Elizabeth serves as the film's moral conscience, wondering if the Creature might be unrestrained by sin with divine breath animating him directly. She condemns Victor's God-playing while seeking the marvellous in creation itself. She recognises God's hand in the world, but the film never allows her to articulate a coherent theological understanding of what Victor has done. Her questions about the Creature's spiritual state go unanswered, leaving her as a symbol of curiosity rather than clarity.

This confusion runs throughout the film. Victor plays God and creates life, the Creature suffers as a Christ figure, yet the Christian God himself remains conspicu-



The Christology of the Creature in *Frankenstein* is explicit.

Picture: Ken Wroner/Netflix

ously absent. Del Toro wants the emotional and visual power of Christian symbolism without the theological substance that gives those symbols meaning. We get Christian imagery stripped of coherent doctrine: the cross without the reason Christ died on it, suffering without true redemption, the language of grace without its source. The film gestures towards profound questions about sin, forgiveness, and breaking cycles of violence, but approaches them as questions about human psychology rather than divine reality.

Elordi's performance as the Creature demonstrates impressive physicality and emotional depth. He makes the Creature sympathetic in his initial innocence, though the character lacks the internal moral struggle that made Mary Shelley's creation in the source novel so compelling. This version of the Creature suffers at others' hands but rarely wrestles with his own choices. In contrast, Victor is entirely narcissistic and although his reasons for wanting to overcome death are academically understandable, they aren't given the

appropriate focus to allow viewers to really feel and empathise with them.

Visually, the film delivers what audiences expect from del Toro. Cinematographer Dan Laustsen shapes light and shadow to create a moody aesthetic honed over years of collaboration with the director. The film features intense gore, including the deconstruction of bodies to assemble the Creature and visceral injuries during fight sequences that may make some viewers squeamish.

Del Toro has spent over half a century contemplating Shelley's novel, which he calls his Bible. The reverence shows in every meticulously crafted frame of this technically accomplished film. But perhaps he is so invested in his personal vision that he fails to recognise how it fundamentally misunderstands the Christian symbolism it appropriates. The film is beautiful, carefully constructed, and deeply personal to its creator. It's also theologically empty.

*Frankenstein* is rated MA15+ and now streaming on Netflix.

# Spring after fire: Faith and rebirth in *Caught by the Tides*

■ Sybil Gazzard

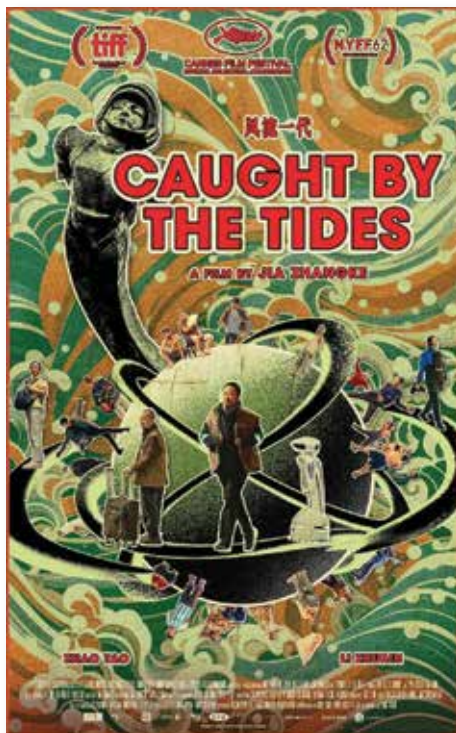
Jia Zhangke's *Caught by the Tides* opens with a rock song, "...not even a wildfire can burn all the weeds. They will grow back in the spring breezes."

From there, the film, traces the emotional journey of the protagonist Qiao Qiao (played by Zhao Tao), as she searches for her lover, Bin, from the early 2000s to the present.

It tells the stories of her and the many working-class people around her as they navigate life in the first two decades of 21st-century China – capturing their life, their culture, and their search for identity over the long passage of time.

The film's tone is serene and poetic. In an interview, Zhangke said that the pandemic gave him time to look back on footage he had shot since 2001, and this film became "a collection of everything I have experienced over the past twenty years." He used every kind of tool available – from 16mm film to Canon 5D and even experiments with AI imagery.

Although the tale centres on the relationship between Qiao and Bin, the two spend most of the film apart. Against the backdrop of China's successful Olympic bid and a nation on the rise, individual confusion and dislocation remain unresolved. Bin dreams of making it in the big city, while Qiao is left behind in the small industrial town of Datong. Eventually, she decides to embark on a journey to find him, traveling through decaying, industrialised towns. The collapsing world around her reflects her own crumbling inner landscape. Rather than a pursuit of romance, her search becomes a pilgrimage for meaning – a pursuit to



***"The film is filled with such tranquil, contemplative moments ... there is no noise or spectacle, only stillness that draws the viewer into his world, inviting us to gaze not only at the characters but also into our own hearts."***

rediscover life after the loss of love.

During her journey, Qiao enters a church. Inside, a group of women – seemingly

marked by their own suffering – sit together sharing their sorrows. They sing hymns before a statue of Jesus, and Qiao quietly listens, feeling and reflecting. The film is filled with such tranquil, contemplative moments. True to Zhangke's style, there is no noise or spectacle, only stillness that draws the viewer into his world, inviting us to gaze not only at the characters but also into our own hearts.

*Caught by the Tides* is not a religious film, yet it confronts deeply religious questions:

After all the pain, struggle, and waiting – what truly allows people to be reborn and redeemed?

In the Christian world, God is always close to the broken-hearted (Psalms 34:18), and complete rebirth often requires complete brokenness – just as Jesus walked the path of the cross. The struggles and suffering of human life can find redemption only through love. In the end, Qiao finally finds Bin – only to face the complete collapse of their relationship.

By the film's final moments, more than 20 years have passed. Bin, now unemployed, returns to his hometown and meets Qiao again by chance. When he expresses a desire to rekindle their love, Qiao instead fastens a glowing armband and joins a group of runners, moving forward with them into the night.

This moment serves as a quiet but powerful symbol: Qiao has chosen not to look back, but to keep going and moving on. In that act of motion – steady, luminous, and free – she completes her emotional rebirth and spiritual transformation.

*Caught by the Tides* (风流一代) by Jia Zhangke (2024) is streaming on Apple TV.

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**Celebrating the  
installation of  
Archbishop  
Ric Thorpe.**  
Pictures:  
Janine Eastgate  
and James Grant





A young couple far from home.  
No room. No comfort.  
Just enough space to get by.  
A child is born among the animals.  
No audience. No status.

We measure worth by success,  
by how visible we are.  
But this story says something  
different.  
The moment that changed  
everything happened in a  
forgotten corner.  
That means our own small  
corners still matter.

That's where God works...  
Not in noise. Not in show.  
But in what's real, humble, and close at hand.  
So if life feels ordinary this Christmas, that's okay.  
The first Christmas was ordinary too.  
Just people doing their best in the dark, and  
something good breaking through anyway.  
Meaning still hides in those small places.  
Hope still begins quietly.  
Peace still starts close to home.  
Always has. Still does.

Christmas: What Really Matters (Luke 2:1-14)  
Reflection: Fr Stuart Gardiner  
Painting: Ivan Smith

IVAN  
SMITH