

Anglican Diocese of
BENDIGO

The **Spirit**

166 MARCH 2025



Celebrating Christmas

Children in the nativity play at Holy Trinity, Maldon

The Bishop writes...

Dear Friends,

I have three people I want to meet when I get to heaven: Johnny Cash, St Paul, and Lesslie Newbigin. I do not mind which order I meet them in as long as they are the first three. Many of you will recognise who Johnny Cash and St Paul are – one wrote 25% of the best music going round and the other wrote a quarter of the New Testament. But I wonder whether Lesslie Newbigin rings a bell.

Newbigin was a pastor, bishop, theologian and leader who had the rare quality of being able to write in a way that was both deep and readily understood. I have loved his books and articles, and they have helped to form my approach to faith and the practice of ministry. One particularly helpful insight he had was that the local congregation is the very thing which helps those who are not Christian understand the great News about Jesus.

This is a very important thing for us to be considering as we prepare for Hope25. You will remember that following Easter and throughout Australia Anglican congregations will be sharing hope in Jesus to their local community – Hope25.

If you are wondering where we may start in trying to articulate how Jesus brings us hope the Gospel readings for Lent (drawn from Luke 13 -15) contain parable after parable describing God's Kingdom. These 'word pictures' tease out God's intention for all that God made and how it works. In these parables we see God's plans and purposes contrasting with the usual run of this world. Surprising people find a comfortable home, while the seemingly powerful and self-sufficient are left on the outer, our priorities are challenged and a different way of satisfying our needs and desires is offered.

*It is as if those
around us can declare,
'Ah, I see what
you are saying!'*

If you are looking for something to kick start your own thinking about how to talk about hope in Jesus, the parables in these Lenten Gospel readings are a great place to start. Ask yourself what are the people around me basing their image of a good life on...and is it delivering the goods? Then contrast it to the world where God reigns and to which Jesus brings hope. We can clearly see the goodness of what God is offering to those who realise that our present way of living does not deliver what it promises.

If you read through all the three chapters in Luke's Gospel the Sunday readings are taken from you will see that while the parables take up most of the space there are a series of interactions between Jesus and people who respond to him in different ways. Again, we see that a surprising thing occurs. The people who seem to have all the spiritual cards reject Jesus and the ones who are looked down upon receive him with joy.

The interactions the different people had with Jesus, or his disciples, were usually prompted by what Jesus was doing. In other words, Jesus lived according to the pattern of life set out by God as fitting for God's Kingdom and this



Bishop Matt Brain

naturally sparked conversation or even contention. Jesus' actions were made plain by his words and his words given substance, depth and meaning by his actions.

This is what Newbigin picked up as he thought about the usually small congregations he pastored or assisted. It is when people see people honestly and enthusiastically living out the pattern God desires in prayer, worship, personal relationship, business dealings, the time they spend and so on that they have a picture illustrating the words we say when there is a chance to tell them about Jesus. It is as if those around us can declare, 'Ah, I see what you are saying!'

As you ponder your plans for Hope25, or maybe even make some, this journey through Luke can give us clues. Where is Jesus offering access to God's way of life and future...and where can people see this pattern lived out in my life and the life of the congregation I worship with.

Your servant in Christ,

Matt

Giving Thanks for 48 Years of Faithful Service in Swan Hill

Words offered by Ian Newland at Christ Church, Swan Hill on the 29th of December 2024.

For the past 48 years this Parish has been blessed with the presence of a quiet achiever; our very own Denis Gell. Denis came to Swan Hill and to this church as a young man in 1976. He wooed and won a lovely young schoolteacher, Helen, who has been beside him throughout his life journey. They married and raised a family.

Over the years Denis involved himself in many aspects of church and diocesan life; Parish Councillor; Warden, Treasurer, Cursillo team member and Lay Co-ordinator. And then Denis changed ranks and joined the Clergy! Denis fulfilled a dream when he was ordained Deacon in 2011 and Priest in 2014.

This enabled Denis to use his considerable people skills more effectively in counselling, comforting, consoling, mediating, and generally seeing to the spiritual needs of this parish. He became our 'go to' man whenever we needed advice or a shoulder to lean on. He has also taken his faith out into the world as Chaplain of the local RSL, participating in ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day services.

Denis has stepped up the last three times we have been without an incumbent rector, taking on the burden of responsibility for the wellbeing of the parish, even when he was suffering from major back problems. During the Covid years Denis worked hard to keep our parish together and functioning. I am sure our past Rectors have appreciated Denis' quiet strength and great faith, as we all do, but it is time now to allow him to take a step back and take things a little easier.

Denis is retiring from his official role as Assistant Priest, although I am sure he will be happy to help out if needed. So, this is by no means goodbye Denis, but an opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for your years of faithful service, and true witness to Christ, and to wish you well for your future.



Denis officiating his first wedding on the riverbank at Nyah in 2021

Celebrating Christmas Together

Christmas is such a wonderful opportunity to get together with other congregations, to involve our children, and to invite our community to join with us as we celebrate the good news that Christ was born. Here are just some of these moments of Christmas celebration from around the diocese.

On this page; top left is a photo of Roslyn lighting an Advent candle with Val Barker-Pigott at the Pop Up Church Christmas Eve Service in Robinvale. Bottom left the children of Maldon Kids Club take their places inside Holy Trinity for their Christmas show; 'A Very Robotic Christmas'. Bottom right Tracey Wolsley lights the Christmas candle with Scarlet and Logan.

Top of the opposite page; children at St Mark's, Golden Square performing their fabulous Nativity Play for the Christmas Eve Crib Service. And below, the Solomlon Islander Choir of the Anglican Parish of Castlemaine with others from the St John's Anglican Church, Footscray.







Churches Offering Support

Darcy Vaughan

Many of us are feeling the pressure of the ongoing cost of living crisis. We notice it whenever we shop for groceries, pay the energy bill or make a mortgage repayment. We may also have noticed the impact this crisis is having on those around us. When the cost of necessities is so high, it is the most vulnerable who are hit the worst. While our governments provide assistance and local organisations do what they can, churches around the diocese have begun to question what role they might play in assisting and supporting those in need.

The crisis is perhaps most visible in Bendigo city where many people are sleeping rough. Anglican street chaplains Fiona Preston and Tracey Wolsley continue to make themselves available to those on the streets of Bendigo through the MinisTree initiative. On their regular walks through the streets they are able to really listen to the people they meet, develop relationships and offer prayer and support. Fiona and Tracey are also able to provide some essential items to those they meet such as bottled water, warm clothes and nutritious snacks. “The special thing about being out on the street” Fiona said, “is that we are able to respond to peoples individual needs.”

Also at the centre of Bendigo, St Paul’s Cathedral have established a ‘We Care’ basket at the back of the church, so that parishioners can donate grocery items each week which are then taken to Foodbank for distribution. The Cathedral Mother’s Union are also collecting essential toiletry items for students in need at the university.

At Christmas, the Parish of Christ Church Daylesford commenced an outreach for those in need. Named the ‘Just One’ initiative, parishioners bring ‘just one item’ from their weekly shop and place it in a giving basket. Once a month the items



are packaged up and made available from the church’s open but covered porch. The availability of the packages is advertised on Facebook as a gift available to those in need in the local community. The positive response has been immediate and this simple judgment-free outreach will continue for 2025.

A member of Holy Trinity, Maldon wondered if people in the area were feeling the pinch. Knowing that the task of running a community pantry was beyond the small congregation, the church approached the Maldon Neighbourhood Centre with the proposal that they run the initiative out of the church’s hall. The response has been overwhelming from the young and the elderly, families and those living alone, those with their own house and those sleeping locally in tents or vans. Since November 2023 well over 1500 people have benefited from the Maldon Community Panty’s provision of

essential items, with a weekly attendance of around thirty people coming for a cuppa, conversation and material assistance.

These are all real and tangible expressions of compassion to those in need across the diocese. As the financial and social pressures on our communities grow it may be increasingly important for churches to consider their role in loving their neighbour and caring for those doing it tough.

Images from opposite page, clockwise: Fiona Preston receives a donation to MinisTree from Holy Trinity, South East Bendigo. Fresh fruit and vegetables on offer at Maldon Community Pantry. Mad Cow offering breakfast from the Curnow Centre, Bendigo. Christmas ‘pop up pantry’ at St Paul’s Cathedral, Bendigo.

Above: food packages left in the porch at Christ Church, Daylesford.



Meditation and Connection at Black Horse Therapies in Walmer

Reflections from Ian Howarth, Elizabeth Hannah and Carol McDonough

Ian: On a beautiful spring Sunday afternoon a group of parishioners and community members gathered at Walmer for meditation, relaxation and equine assisted therapy. First the group journeyed to an ancient eucalypt tree at least 300 years old, perhaps even older. From there we shared some time in mindfulness-based meditation.

Mindful meditation is a way of directing attention to the present moment. It may include focusing on an image, object or thought. What better place to do this than beneath an ancient tree, with its thick trunk, gnarled branches and exposed root system; a tree that has witnessed generations come and go, right

back to when only the local Indigenous people (the Dja Dja Wurrung) cared for and tended their sacred land.

Mindfulness can be interchangeable with meditation. Meditation techniques can assist with focus and with managing anxiety, stress, worries and concerns. It is about finding balance and stability, terms with strong connections to the Benedictine Christian tradition. We also shared in elements of 'Dadirri', a form of Indigenous meditation shared by Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr. This helped us to look, ponder and be at one with the land.

Elizabeth: Participants then split into small groups. We took turns in the yard with one of the horses while others acted as observers. At the end of this time the observers shared what they had

noticed and the participant shared their experience. Even though the sessions were short it seemed that everyone benefited from their time with the horse.

Carol: Back at Elizabeth's mud brick home people reflected on their growing sense of comfort as they grew in communion with the horse, and noted a greater sense of self-knowledge.

All who gathered were able to relax and be real with each other. Thank you to Elizabeth, the horses and the tree for a memorable day. Hopefully we were all slower in our day to day lives after an afternoon at Walmer.

To learn more about Black Horse Therapies see blackhorsetherapies.ntpages.com.au



The prayer chapel is officially opened

What Does a Christian Look Like?

Edward Barkla

How would they be clothed? In the uniform of a doctor, or one of those salt of the earth nurses? Perhaps they look like an emergency services officer? Then again, they might wear the colours of their local sports club. All these wonderful people wear clothes that identify their connection and affiliation.

But without a uniform, how else might Christians in community stand out in the crowd? Could it be their jewelry, their tattoos or their hair style? Is it the family that does everything together? Or could it be the family that seems to be coping when the rest of the world is in chaos?

Maybe it is not just about how we appear but who we really are and what we do. A Christian is one who is in God, a wholehearted believer obedient to his Word. Those who follow Christ can be in the community knowing that in every moment and in all circumstances they are completely in his hands. It is God's desire to shine his light and truth through our very being and into the community around us.

The Engine Room at St Peter's, Eaglehawk

Dale Barclay

The phrase 'engine room' can be used to describe the central hub or core of an organization. It refers to the place where all the hard work and effort happens, often hidden from view but essential for success. In a Christian context, perhaps the engine room is the place of prayer. In a ship, if the engine room breaks down it puts the whole ship in jeopardy. Similarly, for our churches our prayer life is a sign of the trust we place in our heavenly Father.

Recently St. Peters, Eaglehawk created its very own engine room! With the approval of the bishop, part of the sanctuary area (where the organ used to be) has been transformed into a prayer chapel.

We want our buildings to reflect what is important for us, and this space will reflect the importance of prayer in the parish. We want to encourage its use before and after church, during the week, for both individuals and small groups. May it be the place where all the hard work and effort is done, often hidden from view but essential for success.

A huge thank you to Peter Toyne who has driven the project on behalf of Parish Council. It was officially opened on Feb 2nd with our oldest and youngest members cutting the ribbon along with Peter.



Canon Shannon

Darcy recently caught up with Shannon to film one of the videos for Hope25. (Keep an eye out for those after Easter!) During their conversation Shannon shared a little about what is giving her hope in her ministry at Golden Square:

“It is an enlightening and exciting time in my ministry. We are starting to make progress and develop relationships with our local Aboriginal communities. When I came to Bendigo in 2020 there wasn’t a single Aboriginal person at our church, unless it was a family member. But this year we have had someone coming to St Marks, Golden Square which is a hub for Aboriginal ministry here in Bendigo.

We also now have an Aboriginal art group that runs every Tuesday. A few of the people who attend are part of the Stolen Generation and psychologically it is a challenge. The people who come all come with their own story, and they’re often not good stories about the church. We have to take responsibility for the role the church played in it. Even though I’m here as an Aboriginal Priest, how do I help our people to reengage with a system that so badly damaged them? How do we create a safe place for our people? That’s what we’re working towards here at Golden Square.”



A Stanhope Christmas

Angela Lorrigan

St Matthew’s, Stanhope might be small but the congregation tripled for its carol service, a well-known annual function. This is not surprising because the standard of singing is exceptional, due largely to the talent and dedication of Donald Campbell.

It’s a long way in time and space from the Goulburn Valley in 2024 to Bethlehem at the beginning of the 1st century, but as we gathered in the warm evening our hearts and minds were transported back to Bethlehem and the truly miraculous appearance of God in human form. We shared the hopes and fears of all that it means to be Christian in today’s world as we reflected on God’s Word, assisted by beautiful singing and music.

We were treated to a better than ever Stanhope feast (which must be seen to be believed) and we were able to admire the generous assembly of gifts for the Anglicare Appeal under the Church Christmas tree.

Gulliver the Gutter Vacuum

After a long dry summer the CFA are on high alert for fire risks and our farmers are talking about a big downpour coming sometime soon. In order to be good stewards of our church properties it is important that we are prepared for extreme weather and the ways it may affect our buildings.

Are the gutters at your church clear of all debris, leaves, branches, twigs, dirt and mud? Ensuring gutters are cleared of

debris and functioning correctly is essential for protecting our buildings from fire and water damage.

Luckily Gulliver the Bendigo Diocese's gutter vacuum is here to help! St Mark's, Golden Square recently put Gulliver to work with some surprising results. "Ever wondered what happened to that lost shoe?" said Shannon. "Well we found it in the gutters at St Mark's, Golden Square, along with a toy rake, thanks to Gulliver the gutter vacuum!"





Editor's Notes

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Photo of Bishop Matt on page 2 credit of Bendigo Advertiser.

Blessing of the Backpacks

Julie Worrall

This year the kids of Christ Church, Swan Hill returned to school with something special on their backpacks; a tag reminding them that they have been blessed by God and are loved by their church.

As many prepared for the start of term we offered special prayers for parents, teachers, support staff

and everyone connected with daycare centres, schools, universities, TAFE and even U3A.

And of course the blessing of our students also came with the gift of a packet of Smarties; because if you go to school you're a smarty!

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