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# WITNESS



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Salutations and greetings to you all. As we begin our season of Lent this year, we once again look at our year B gospel of Mark. As a gospel writer, Mark was a man with a mission. No time for the story of the nativity, of angels or a childhood, Mark seems to jump right in to Christ's ministry. There is an urgency in Mark's gospel that we don't experience in other gospels. I am reminded of those early years of school, when the teachers always introduced the first concert of the school year with these words "Don't blink, or you'll miss a whole song".

Our lectionary, in some respects tries to slow Mark down, by spreading the events of a single day over several weeks gives us the opportunity to study each event closely, but we still get the impression that the people who were following Jesus at the time, had a hard time keeping up.

We even become aware of one of Mark's favourite words, from the first chapter. "Immediately." The disciples leave their boats and follow Jesus "immediately" the unclean spirit leave "immediately" Simon's Peter's mother is healed "Immediately" Mark uses it twelve times in the first chapter alone. Mark's narrative is direct and very intentional. It gives us a very clear picture of the "busyness" of our Lord. That's something that we can all relate too. We live in a world, in a time, when "busyness" is not only the norm, but the expectation. We seem to have created a culture where stillness, solitude, quietness or contemplation are no longer seen as acceptable or necessary.

And yet, even within the urgency and busyness of Mark's gospel, Christ takes time for solitude and prayer. He seeks out the

darkness, and takes time to connect with the Father.

We all need to be mindful of our "Busyness" and ensure that it is not distracting us from our own connection to the Divine. Taking time for prayer, for bible reading and reflection, walking in nature, giving thanks and listening to the voice of God from within, is essential in our Lenten experience.

Invite you in these coming weeks to examine your "busyness" and determine if there are perhaps some unexpected places where you can let God re-new, re-create, and re-focus your faith.

Blessings **Mandy Stark**  
**THE PRESIDENT WRITES**

The first issue of *Witness* for 2018 is here! I know that as we get older, time does not go faster, but right now it sure seems that way. Time, indeed, is important to us, and certainly was to the writer of Mark's gospel, which we are considering in this lectionary Year of Mark. The word 'immediately' is used many times to point out to the reader that there is no time to be lost when accepting the call to follow Christ, leaving behind the past, moving into unknown places, meeting difficulties but ultimately moving to a place of joy and fulfilment of God's promise.

I am a classic procrastinator. I can think of a dozen reasons at least why I don't really need to face a tricky task, be it to solve a difficult sewing problem, write a sermon, or even put together a report like this. To jump right in with a new idea or commitment is rather foreign to many of us. However, our faith demands that when we know that we are called to action that we must just 'do it' and not let other things get in the way.

As we come into the season of Lent we may be tempted to rely on how we observed it in the past, even consider using worship ideas

from the tried and true. But, this year is different. We as individual worship leaders are each in a different place from past seasons. Just as important is that the worshipping communities in which we lead are different too. We need to be sensitive to these on-going changes and our preaching must reflect this. We too, are encountering innovative approaches to worship leadership and it is important that we explore these options to discover how they may enhance our worship leadership.

That brings me to the 2018 Lay Preachers' Conference and AGM. A program has been put together that includes worship, practical approaches to worship planning as well as updates on lay preaching and how it fits in our changing church. There also will be ample opportunity for chatting with each other and catching up. I hope to see many of you there.

In our changing Synod structure we can't wait for it all to settle down. We have to continue with our work in an environment in which we're not secure or comfortable. That's what I see Mark saying to us right now. Keep going, meet the new, challenge our thinking while all the time following Christ in our role as Lay Preachers and supporters of others in our church.

God's peace to you all.

**Lou Anne Stabb**

## **PRESBYTERY REPORTS**

**Gippsland**

**Peter Morris**

We are fortunate to have dedicated clergy, lay preachers, worship leaders and congregation members leading worship and preaching in churches across Gippsland. Our lay preachers happily do as much as they can, and members of congregations are willing to lead worship when required.

Our challenge as a lay preachers' network is to find the best ways to provide encouragement and continuing education opportunities for busy people, often living in distant places. It is important to be praying

for each other, and to look for opportunities to encourage to our sisters and brothers in this ministry, whenever we are in contact. As we think of the people who took an interest in us and encouraged us to take our first steps in preaching, let's be doing the same...

John Allcorn was leading part of the worship in Traralgon a couple of months ago when he shared that he started as a lay preacher in 1947.

As part of an accountable ministry, I would encourage all lay preachers to write an annual report for their Church Council, on their ministry, sense of call, and continuing education.

For those who haven't been applying for the Continuing Education Certificate, I would encourage them to look at the application form. It is not as daunting as it seems... What have you been reading..? Have you been listening to some CDs on preaching..? Have you been going to a Bible study..? Have you come to an LPA Conference or a training day over two years ... you should have enough to apply for your certificate.

The more I see of the work of lay preachers and worship leaders, the more I appreciate their ministry.

**North East Victoria**

**Joan McRae**

The first date for Lay Preachers, worship leaders and friends for 2018 is the Lay Preachers' Day to be held on February 24 at Euroa. The day will be led by Lay Preachers. Kevin Chapman will lead worship. Wendie Wilkie's session is on *A New Look at Easter*. LouAnne Stabb will lead a discussion on the Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers and Joan McRae a session on *The Practice of Public Prayer*. And we will welcome the President, LouAnne, in her home presbytery!

Our Presbytery Minister Mission and Education has accompanied Rohan Pryor to the national conference for lay educators, so we look forward at last to something definite about working with the competencies for Lay Preachers, now four years after the Review of Lay Preacher! In light of the Assembly's decision to discontinue the Working Groups -

on Doctrine, Worship, Christian Unity, Relations with Other Faiths and Education for Ministry - we are keen to know how their work will be done after the Assembly meeting in July 2018.

Meanwhile, Lay Preachers and worship leaders in this presbytery have a choice of three ReGen days with Chris Barnett (February 8, 9, 10) and numerous opportunities to attend Safe Church days.

**Port Phillip East                      Di Paterson**

We have many of our Lay Preachers regularly involved in leading worship at a number of Churches in the Presbytery. I have had an enquiry regarding becoming a Lay Preacher from a person with a Masters of Theological Studies who does do some local preaching. Will need to follow up as to what needs to happen to get that person sorted through the system. One of our Lay Preachers has just begun a contract for 12 months with a Bayside Church, this is a good outcome for the Church as they work through their future direction.

Lay Preacher Graeme Marshall passed away just before Christmas after a short but severe brain cancer.

**Port Philip West                      Rob Coulson**

Malcolm McEgan has retired after many years of faithful service. We thank him and wish him God's blessings in his retirement

Training day scheduled for 24 February with guest speaker Rev Dr Sean Winter who will speak on preparing for Easter

**Tasmania - vacant**

**Yarra Yarra                              Haley Rose**

We have already held our first meeting of the year. Yarra Yarra currently has 7 candidates at various stages of progression in their studies and having services assessed. We have given out a number of service certificates in the last half of last year, another five still to be presented and have another six identified for presentation this year. As a result of the concerted effort being made to update our role five people have

advised of their decision to retire with retirement certificates being presented. We have our first continuing education afternoon on Sunday 18 February 2018 being held at Rosanna Uniting Church, Arden Street where we will have a presentation by Rev Dr Barry Brown on preaching the lectionary through Lent.

We thanked Tony and Jan Lemmon for their work and commitment to Yarra Yarra Lay preachers as both retire from the Lay preachers committee.

**Lenten Reflection    Mandy Stark**

We often speak of Lent in terms of what we "Give up" during this time. As a child I was always expected to "Give up" something that I loved or valued for Lent. This was usually sweets, or a particular favourite toy or activity. We can consider this sacrifice as a removing the luxuries or distractions that take us away from Christ in the ordinary, everyday activities of life, but we can also look at this activity as stripping away the "excesses" that weigh us down in our faithful life, and hold us back from being the people that God calls us to be.

We get used to the little things that make life easier. Whether that be coffee, chocolate, devices, personal items, it doesn't take much to become a little reliant upon them. Lent is an opportunity to remove the extraneous wants and distractions from our lives, and refocus on our relationship with the Divine. Jesus was a not one to get caught up with life's luxuries. He travelled light throughout his ministry, advising his disciples to do the same "Go take nothing with you, except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in their belts" (Mark 6:8) Advise that few of us follow. If you disagree with this statement, open your wardrobe and look at the clothing you haven't worn in over a year.

One congregation I regularly preach at, hand out large garbage bags at the start of Lent. Congregation members are encouraged to add an item of clothing, or a household item to the bag each day. On Easter Sunday, each member brings their full bag of 40 items to donate of various church agencies. This activity allows the individual to de-clutter a

small part of their life, and also to offer God's abundance to those who may not have been blessed in recent times.

Perhaps this Lenten season we could focus, on "Giving to God" rather than "Giving up for God." We can give to God our time. Our time in prayer, our time in worship, our time in service. We can reframe our thoughts to offer to the Divine, those parts of ourselves that we would choose to hide away, or would rather have to ourselves.

May this Lent be a time of blessing and faithful reflection for us all.

**Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Lay Preachers' Conference 2018. Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> & Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> of March.**

Once again, our annual Lay Preachers' Conference promises to be informative, reflective, inspiring and community building. We will be joined by the lay preacher candidates, as we gather to share our experiences, our challenges, and our fellowship as Lay Preachers from across the Synod. This is a unique opportunity to gather, listen to speakers and share worship. Please be aware that unlike other years, accommodation will not be available at MacLean House. Nearby accommodation includes the Vibe Hotel, at 441 Royal Parade, Melbourne. This hotel is 15 minutes' walk from the venue.

Attendance at the Conference can be contributed to the achievement of your continuing education certification.

More details contained in the attached flyer.

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