



Shepparton Uniting Church
Pastoral Letter #2
27 March 2020

Greetings once again,

May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

I'm beginning to feel a bit like Paul writing to the various churches at a distance. Church is always the people, not the building. We don't stop being the church because we can't gather. During this time of disruption and "physical distancing" we are finding new ways of being Church and continuing to live into the call of being the "sign, foretaste and instrument" of God's kingdom in our world.

To help us stay connected to God and each other there will be various resources made available both on line (check out the Shepparton Uniting Church Web site and Face book page) and in print format. The latter will be emailed to those for whom we have email addresses, or dropped into letter boxes and available for pick up at the following addresses: 5 Loddon Court (Rosalie), 34 Dunlop St (Loni) or 1/38 Maude st. (Joan Fisher – enter from Rea Street)

There are a variety of services available on line. We recommend that you might like to access a service from Glen Waverly Uniting Church (<https://gwuc.org.au>) at 10:00am each Sunday. Loni and I will also be preparing weekly Worship outlines with readings reflections and prayers. You may choose to set aside time at 9:30am to worship, pray and reflect or choose an alternative time that works for you. Afterwards consider ringing another member of the congregation and discussing the service you have tuned into or something that was meaningful for you in the service outline. Feel free to disagree with what was presented and share from your own experiences. Talk about the readings, pray for each other and others in need.

Now on another matter - most of you are aware that this is my 13th and final year of ministry with you.

This week I accepted a call issued by the Synod Placements committee for a priority placement with the congregation at Bairnsdale. I have reflected prayerfully on this call, and believe it to be God's leading. I will begin that placement on 1st September 2020 but will take 4 weeks Annual leave and 8 weeks Long Service leave prior to that. This means my effective finishing date for Shepparton U.C. will be Sunday 7th June. With no likelihood of gathering for Services of Worship for some time it seems a strange way to finish up my time among you. I feel as though we have journeyed through a lot together and I give thanks and praise to God for your willingness to step out in faith in new ways and for all the different folk that I have had opportunity to share life and faith with. In the remaining couple of months I have with you I will seek to continue to serve as best I can under the restrictions and limitations placed on us all by the presence of COVID 19.

In the words of one of our retired ministers Rev. Gereldine Leonard.

"Each of you has within you the capacity to be the people of God in this circumstance. I trust you to be generous in scarcity and careful and caring for one another and I trust that you have capacity to work out how to do that. I trust that you are capable because you have been doing this for one another, most of you, for a long lifetime. I

am trusting that you have learned how to pray, no matter how haltingly you may do that in public, to read the Bible, or to remember its stories or its poetry. To call to mind the way in which you have, in faith, strengthened one another along life's journey... As leaders we too have to trust what we have taught, the values we have tried to instil, the love we have poured out - and to let go –ourselves trusting in the One who called us to this ministry. So good friends, I am not afraid for you, I am confident that whatever befalls us, whether that be continued health, whether that be succumbing to infection, or even death – I am confident that we are safe in our inmost selves because we are ever held in divine love. I trust that you will be a calming influence in the community of which you are a part, encouraging and upholding not only those who share your faith, but everyone around you. Jesus has taught us how to live, trusting in God, and I am trusting you to live as you have been taught. Share your concerns, read the scripture, pray for one another and for those around you and look to where you are needed as the calming, caring presence of Jesus.”

Let me finish with the words of Rev. Dr. Mark Lawrence, General Secretary Synod of VicTas “In this challenging time for us all, I am reminded of Jesus’ commitment to his followers in the storm on the Sea of Galilee: “Why are you afraid... I am in this boat with you”, Jesus says (Mark 4:35-41). May we all continue to support and care for one another, in the faith that Christ journeys in this stormy time with us, as we navigate these ‘rough seas’ together.”

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Rosalie Rayment-Hewitt