



## **Victorian Council of Churches**

### **Annual General Meeting**

17<sup>th</sup> May 2025

In person and on Zoom

Reporting year: May 2024 to May 2025

“They all shall be one, just as you, my Father, are in me, and I am in you,  
so that they also shall be one in us”. (John 17.21)

## **Annual General Meeting (Conference) of the Victorian Council of Churches**

*The meeting will hybrid (in-person and online)*

### **In person**

**Venue** (in person) St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, 1 Epsom Rd, Kensington.

Public transport options include a bus along Macauley St, and a train – Kensington (short walk)  
There is a car park on site or street parking.

Registration will be from 8.30am, with morning worship starting at 9.15am, led by the Coptic Orthodox clergy at St Mary's.

The business meeting will start at 9.40am.

### **Online: Zoom**

#### **Register on Zoom in advance for this meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/joining/register/yXMcmdewSCiDioAUeDe9pQ>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Please check spam folder if you don't see the confirmation in your inbox.

When you enter the meeting via Zoom, please ensure you are on 'mute'.

The VCC AGM business meeting will commence at 9.40am. The Zoom link will open at 9.30am.

We will note those attending online so please ensure your correct name is registered on Zoom.  
*(To re-set your name, click on the '3 dots' on the right hand side of your image on screen and select the rename option)*

Questions can be asked in the chat or 'raise your hand' and questions will be relayed to the Chair.

Please feel free to use the responses button eg thumbs up to agree, clap hands etc.  
Voting delegates (representatives) online will be asked to vote with a thumbs up (or down).

The meeting may be recorded for the purpose of accuracy of the Minutes of the AGM, and will be deleted when the Minutes are finalised.

Please send any questions or comments you wish to submit prior to the meeting to:  
Anita John, VCC Administrative Officer, [vcc@vcc.org.au](mailto:vcc@vcc.org.au)

## VCC AGM (Annual Conference) Agenda

- 8.30am Registration – name tags, voting slips, bios of nominees for President.
- 9.15am Worship (upstairs in the new building – a lift is available)
- 9.40am VCC business meeting begins which will include:
- Welcome, acknowledgement of country
  - President’s report – Rev Deacon Dr Joseph Leach
  - Annual Report - questions/comments  
Chellev fund and other updates
  - Financial report, budget. Auditor.
  - Presentations:  
Korus Connect                      Dawn Penney, CEO  
VCCM                                      Rev Sion Gough Hughes
  - Welcome to new Member Churches  
- Chinese Methodist Church in Australia  
- St John’s Lutheran Church Springvale
  - Legislation. Responses of Member Churches
  - Elections  
Appointment of scrutineers  
Elections for President, Deputy President, Standing Committee
- 10.40am Morning tea
- 11am Hon Peter Khalil MP, first Special Envoy on Social Cohesion
- 11.30am Meeting resumes  
Announcement of new President, Deputy President and Standing Committee  
Prayer  
Finish any outstanding business  
Liturgy for conclusion of President/induction of new President
- 12.15/12.30 Lunch (grace offered by the new VCC President)  
[Brief meeting of new SC and officers plus decision on co-options]
- 1pm Conclude

Grateful thanks to our hosts at St Mary’s Coptic Orthodox Church, Kensington

Note: the following AGM report is largely in plain text for ease of printing at home.

A colour version with photos is available to view [here](#).

A printed version is also available. Please contact Anita John if you wish to have a copy posted to you.

Anita John, [anita.john@vcc.org.au](mailto:anita.john@vcc.org.au)

## President's report

As I reflect on my term as President of the VCC, my mind focusses on two things: violence and war overseas (with all its ramifications for communities in Victoria) and local disappointment. I have come to believe that the ecumenical project now faces a crisis and must find a new way forward. What we have been doing up to this point is at risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant.

In the face of war in both Ukraine and Gaza, the VCC has posted statements calling for peace and the respect of human rights. Particularly in the case of the Gaza conflict, these statements have often been difficult to draft. While these events occur far away and we have no way to affect the outcome, our multi-cultural society is inevitably impacted. Communities and individuals suffer when their homeland is attacked. In our statements on Gaza, a path needed to be found to reflect our horror at the devastation and suffering in Gaza while at the same time recognising the criminality of the actions of Hamas and refusing to fuel the rise of antisemitism in our local community. Still, we needed to speak even if no one wanted to listen.

On the local front, two disappointments stand out: one the result of the Voice to Parliament referendum and the other the response to the VCC's 75th anniversary. The Referendum is done, and the result will work its way through our society for good or ill. On our 75th anniversary, our Executive Officer worked hard and well to mark this as a significant event with a series of seminars. The engagement from our members and community was disappointing as were the responses to the survey that followed it.

While one of our main activities is to act as a voice to Government, this has become increasingly difficult as the government pursues a 'progressive' social agenda. For some of our member churches, these changes are matters of justice, while for others they stand in direct opposition to Scripture and are in opposition to human flourishing and the common good. While we have spoken out on many issues of common agreement, such as the treatment of refugees, care for our planet, and gambling reform, on many of the most contentious issues, these differences inevitably reduce the VCC to silence and mean that our role as a voice to government is necessarily limited.

This raises another issue. We need to talk. It seems to me that the ecumenical movement has now picked all the low hanging fruit. The sectarian bitterness of the past has largely gone, and we can work and even pray together. This is a real achievement and should not be underestimated. It is, however, the low hanging fruit, and it has become clear to me that we now need to reach higher. We do not always understand each other, and worse, often misunderstand each other. We need to talk about the difficult issues, the ones that mark painful divisions and do not make for polite conversation. We will not resolve these issues but talking about them is the only way that we can come to understand each other and at least know why each of us believes as we do.

In this, the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, I leave this as a challenge to my successor, to find a way to encourage these difficult and awkward conversations. As I said, I have come to believe that the ecumenical project now faces a crisis and that it is in these conversations that we may well find a new way forward.

*Rev. Dr. Joseph Leach, Deacon of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne  
President of the Victorian Council of Churches 2023-2025*

## **VCC Standing Committee Membership (2023-2025)**

<https://vcc.org.au/standingcommittee/>

The VCC Standing Committee meets monthly

Rev Dr Joseph Leach (President) - Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Rev Dr Jacob Joseph (Deputy President) - Syrian Orthodox Church)

Sieneke Martin (Deputy President) - Religious Society of Friends/Quakers

Dr Graeme Blackman (Past-President) - Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Mr Ashok Jacob - Treasurer (Mar Thoma Church)

Rev David Fotheringham - Uniting Church in Australia

Rev Dr Avril Hannah-Jones - Uniting Church in Australia

Rev Dr Satvasheela Pandhare - Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Prof Nasir Butrous - Chaldean Catholic Church (co-opted)

Rev Dr Shenouda Boutros - Coptic Orthodox Church

Captain Manikya Mera – The Salvation Army

(Captain Star Conliffe (Salvation Army) resigned due to an overseas placement).

Rev Sandy Boyce (VCC Executive Officer) is ex-officio on the Standing Committee.

Elections for President, Deputy President and Standing Committee (2025-2027) will take place at the 2025 AGM.

Mr Ashok Jacob has faithfully served as Treasurer and has indicated he would like to conclude his term. The VCC is seeking expressions of interest for the role of Treasurer. The Treasurer is a member of the VCC Standing Committee and the VCC Finance Committee. [vcc@vcc.org.au](mailto:vcc@vcc.org.au)

## EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

The following section offers an overview of VCC activities, affiliates, and related networks over the past year. It should be read alongside other sections of this report, which provide detailed accounts of specific events and initiatives. Together, these materials offer insight into the breadth of the VCC's work. It is important to note that this summary is indicative rather than exhaustive, as many other ecumenical activities also take place in Victoria.

### ECUMENICAL GUESTS

In 2024, the VCC hosted several international ecumenical guests including:

**Rev Dr Prof Jerry Pillay**, General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Jerry was a guest of the NCCA for the 11th NCCA Forum in Adelaide and was available for a brief visit to Victoria where he made an evening presentation, hosted at St Athanasius College in Melbourne. He spoke about ecumenism from a global perspective, the imperative of church unity amid fragmented communities and escalating conflict, and what the global church might look like in the future for the sake of common witness and service in the world. The responding panel was Tim Molineux (Uniting Church Justice and International Mission unit), Joshua Lourensz (Catholic Social Services Victoria) and Dr Audrey Statham (Social Responsibilities Committee, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne). Dr Pillay also spoke with Church leaders the following morning

**Rev Dr Grace Ji-Sun Kim**

Grace is a Korean-American and leading theologian, currently Professor of Theology at Earlham School of Religion, Indiana and prolific author &/or editor of 23 books. She was a guest of the Uniting Church in Australia for their National Assembly in Sydney in July 2024 and was hosted in Victoria by the UCA Korean Churches. During her stay, she made two presentations hosted by the VCC. The first was *Surviving God: A New Vision of God Through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse*, the title of Grace's 2024 book. The second focussed on the theme of her 2024 book, *When God Became White: Dismantling Whiteness for a more Just Christianity*, with a response by Dr Daniel Sihombing. This event was co-hosted by the Wesley Centre.

**Rev Dr V. Devasayaham**

When Bishop V. Devasayaham (retired Bishop, Church of South India (CSI)) visited Victoria, the VCC EO was able to connect him with the Melbourne CSI, as well as Uncle Canon Glen Loughrey and others during his stay.

**Dr Victoria Turner**

Victoria was the keynote speaker at the VCC recognition of 75 years in August 2024. The topic of the first presentation at the one day conference was *Ecumenism-in- Migration: Movement in the Ecumenical Movement*. Her presentation at the VCC dinner was on *Emerging Ecumenism: Is there Space for Visions from the New Generations Today?* where she highlighted that the impetus for the ecumenical movement came in part from the audacity of young people. Does the ecumenical movement today have space for the righteous audacity from visionary younger people?

Victoria is a Lecturer in Theology and Mission at Ripon College Cuddesdon and associate lecturer at the University of Oxford. She is co-editor of the International Journal of the Study of the Christian Church with Rev Dr Stephen Burns (Pilgrim Theological College, Melbourne) and book review editor for the journal, *Modern Believing*. Her PhD is in World Christianity where she explored the shifting models of mission in the 20th century. She has 3 edited books with SCM Press and multiple book chapters and journal articles published. She won the Lombard Essay Prize from the World Communion of Reformed Churches for her essay on transformative ecumenism.

## Victorian Church Leaders Network (VCLN)

The VCC serves as Secretariat for meetings of VCLN which happen 4 times a year. VCLN serves as a connecting point for leaders to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern, as well as for prayer, mutual encouragement and information sharing. Meetings are hosted in church venues in Melbourne. These meetings are also open to leaders of denominations that are not members of VCC. In 2024, Hon Ingrid Stitt MP spoke was a guest and church leaders spoke with her about matters of importance, including her portfolio of Multicultural Affairs.

## Invitations

The VCC receives invitations to events within the Christian Church communities, as well as interfaith networks and community events. Where possible, a representative from the VCC Standing Committee is available to attend. Events include the service to recognise His Eminence Mykola Cardinal Bychok, the Commemoration of the 110th anniversary of genocide of Armenian, Greek and Assyrian people; Interfaith Network events; St Patrick's Day dinner and Oration, Government House Australia Day ceremony and the Repose for the Soul Mass for Pope Francis, Chinese Methodist Church in Australia 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## Government

The VCC serves as a link to Government but does not speak on behalf of the Member Churches unless there is consensus to do so. (Constitution - Section 14). Legislation in this reporting period includes the Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Act, the proposed protest laws, and the review of the Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation. A response was provided to the ABS about proposed changes to the 'religion' question in the census. Social cohesion is currently a primary focus in response to challenges in the global and local community.

## NCCA 11<sup>th</sup> National Forum

*'Messages of Hope in a complex world'.*

The VCC was represented at the Forum by the President and Executive Officer. A key focus was the development of the NCCA Strategic plan, reports and presentations.

## Communication

The VCC EO

- regularly updates the VCC **Facebook** page, with updates from Member Churches and promotion of events for VCC and Member Churches. It's also a way to stay in touch with the highlights as well as concerns for Member Churches.
- maintains and updates the VCC **website** with links to resources, events and other information.
- prepares the **fortnightly e-news**, with links on the home page of the VCC website, and also to a post on Facebook.
- arranges to meet with **communications personnel** from Member Churches

## Promotion of ecumenical and other events

Including World Day of Prayer, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Refugee Week, as well as church, community, cultural and interfaith events such as Refugee Week, National Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day, 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, World World for Peace in Palestine and Israel, holy days in the Christian Churches and other faiths.



## **Aboriginal Matters**

### **Unfinished Business – Voice, Truth, Treaty, Reconciliation, Closing the Gap, Yoorrook Commission**

Ongoing connection with Aboriginal networks, resourcing Member Churches, promoting key dates of significance and acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People - as per the Constitution 5.1.b - Objectives:

to encourage and enable the Member Churches in the light of the Gospel to be a prophetic voice to each other and the community by:

- speaking out on behalf of oppressed people;
- acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People;
- responding to human need and acting on issues of justice, peace and creation.

### **International Diaconate Centre /IDC (Catholic Deacons) <https://diaconia-idc.org>**

The VCC EO, Rev Deacon Sandy Boyce, was an ecumenical guest at the IDC (International meeting of Catholic Deacons) meeting in Rome in February 2025 and spoke at the meeting of the Australian Catholic Deacons in Adelaide on her return.

Sandy has served as President of the Protestant DIAKONIA World Federation (2013-2025) and will conclude her term at the DIAKONIA World Federation Assembly in July 2025 in Moshi, Tanzania when Deacons, Deaconesses and diaconal ministers from all around the world, and from diverse Protestant denominations and networks, will gather. Rev Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC General Secretary, is a keynote speaker at the DWF Assembly.

**2025**  
**VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES INC**  
**January 2025 to December 2025**

<b>Account</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Income</b>	
Affiliate Contributions (41300)	\$400.00
Distributions from Investments (42400)	\$50,000.00
Member Churches' Contributions (41100)	\$160,000.00
Other Miscellaneous Income (46900)	\$2,000.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$212,400.00</b>
<b>Less Operating Expenses</b>	
Audit expense (61005)	\$2,500.00
Bank fees (61020)	\$60.00
Bookkeeping Fees (61010)	\$3,300.00
Casual Staff Expenses (61024)	\$1,200.00
Catering (65020)	\$600.00
Computers - Supply (61025)	\$1,000.00
Conference Fees (61030)	\$1,200.00
Conferences and Special Events (65040)	\$3,000.00
Consultancy Costs (62820)	\$2,400.00
Contingencies (61999)	\$2,400.00
Contract Worker (61037)	\$1,200.00
Donations Made (61045)	\$600.00
Dues & Subscriptions (61050)	\$600.00
Equipment Maintenance (61070)	\$500.00
General Admin Costs (61100)	\$1,200.00
General Occupancy Costs (66900)	\$1,200.00
Mobile phone (68900)	\$600.00
Honoraria (62830)	\$1,200.00
Hospitality (61810)	\$1,200.00
Insurance (61300)	\$7,000.00
Professional Supervision for EO (62840)	\$2,400.00
Legal (61500)	\$15,000.00
Postage (61700)	\$720.00
Printing & Copying (61750)	\$2,400.00
Rent (66100)	\$3,000.00
Software Charges (61817)	\$3,600.00
Staff Training & Development (62930)	\$2,400.00
Stationery (61900)	\$1,800.00
Telephone & Fax (68100)	\$600.00
Travel (64100)	\$6,000.00
UCA Salary Payment - Admin Fee (62103)	\$1,200.00
Salary Payments (EO + Staff) (62101)	\$120,000.00
Salary Payments - Super Component (EO + Staff)	\$14,400.00
VCC Commissions Expenses (66400)	\$1,200.00
Venue hire (65010)	\$1,500.00
Website & Domains (68300)	\$500.00
Workers Compensation (62720)	\$1,800.00
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$211,480.00</b>
<b>Surplus/Defecit</b>	<b>\$920.00</b>

## TREASURER'S REPORT 2024

In 2024, VCC had an operating surplus of \$70,885. This combined with the increase in value of our investments during the year by \$266,464 has resulted in a healthy balance sheet at the end of 2014.

VCC is financially stable due to the generous support of the member churches and affiliate organisations as well the disciplined management of the finances. I would like to thank the Finance Committee for the role it plays in the financial management of this council. Over the recent years, we have optimised VCC's financial management with low cost of operations and investment of the retained surplus with a reputed ethical fund manager in multiple investment portfolios. These investments have performed well in 2024, providing good distribution income as well as substantial increase in valuation.

Due to the decision by our insurer to not include the affiliate inter-church councils (ICCs) in the policy, VCC provided grants to two ICCs so that they could take public liability insurance for the ecumenical events they had planned. VCC is working with the ICCs and the insurer to establish a process to get the public liability insurance coverage for these local ecumenical events.

VCCs budget for 2025 is a very lean budget of approximately \$210,000 with very little discretionary expenses. About \$150,000 of the budget is for wages. A further \$25,000 is on committed agreements such as Insurance, Work-cover, Book-keeping, Audit services, IT Support, Website hosting and Software licences. The cost of these non-discretionary expense items increase every year. Prudent financial management requires that this cost of operations must be met by the annual member contributions. The trends from recent years indicate that we have a shortfall of about \$80,000 per year in member contributions to achieve this objective of cost of operations is fully covered by the voluntary contributions of members. We welcome opportunities to discuss the financial contribution from Member Churches and Affiliate organisations so that this gap is filled.

Due to our strong balance sheet, we get a substantial income every year as distributions from our investments. Good management requires that this amount is prudently used for growing the work of the council. Accordingly VCC recruited a part time Administrative Assistant in 2025 to assist the Executive officer, thereby providing more capacity for the work of your council. Our policy is to avoid drawing from the capital of our investments for the day-to-day operations and our disciplined management has enabled us to achieve that in recent years.

I would like to thank our book-keeping service provider Wilson Business Services, our Auditors DFK Kidsons and our investment fund managers U-Ethical for their professional services and support.

Ashok Jacob, Treasurer (for the Finance Committee)

Note: the audited 2024 financial report and Management Representation letter are available as separate documents, and also available on the VCC website here, <https://vcc.org.au/agm-2025/>

## REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

### Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce (ACRT)

**ACRT** is a national ecumenical activity of the National Council of Churches, with voluntary membership from many churches - Quakers, Uniting Church, Catholic, Baptist, Assyrian, Lutheran, Salvation Army and Churches of Christ. ACRT seeks to provide leadership to promote a shared Christian vision of compassion and hospitality for refugees and asylum seekers and to resource Member Churches and their congregations including resources for worship, and to encourage congregations and local networks of churches to be engaged in practical and prayerful ways. Along with NCCA and its Member Churches, ACRT contributes to providing a strong moral voice in the public space relating to debate and policies for refugees and people seeking asylum, and to advocate for just and humane policies, and is planning a major campaign for those stuck in limbo in the failed 'fast track' process. ACRT, through co-chair Rev Sandy Boyce, reported to the 11th Forum of the NCCA in July 2024. ACRT lodged submissions to Government on refugee policies in 2024, held a World Refugee Day ecumenical service online and produced resources for congregations. ACRT is engaged with a number of advocacy networks for refugees and asylum seekers including Refugee Advocacy Network (Victoria). A number of ACRT members based in Melbourne are also actively involved in planning for the annual Palm Sunday event. Note: Co-Chair Major Karen Elkington has concluded her role due to a change in her work role.

The [ACRT Facebook page](#) is regularly updated with stories, links to campaigns and events.

The ACRT page on the NCCA website can be found [here](#).

### PALM SUNDAY EVENT – Stand Together for Justice and Kindness

Around 1,000 people attended the Palm Sunday Action for Justice and Kindness in Melbourne on 13 April 2025, uniting to call for a fairer future for refugees. Comedian and social justice advocate Tom Ballard was MC for the rich program featuring refugee speakers, Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs, faith representatives, school students, and music by Sebastian, Eldakatur, Melbourne Drumming Circles, and the Melbourne Mass Gospel Choir. Around 100 community groups, including faith groups and unions, endorsed the event.

On this very warm autumn day in Melbourne, Dr Mohamed Mohideen, Deputy Chair of the Faith Communities Council of Victoria, opened the program, followed by words from faith representatives Jasbir Singh and the Very Reverend Dr Andreas Loewe.

The refugee panel raised key issues including the injustice of the Fast Track system, long-term visa insecurity, and the urgent need for permanent protection. On the panel were: Bra-haan-ee from Ethiopia, a mathematics academic forced to flee political violence; A-feef-a from Iran, who arrived by boat in 2012 and has faced long-term visa insecurity due to the unjust Fast Track process; In-tiz-ar from northern Pakistan, a community leader still awaiting a permanent visa while deeply concerned for his persecuted relatives in Pakistan; Ak-shay-aa, a young Tamil from Sri Lanka who has spent more than 12 years on bridging visas; and Li-da, a Hazara woman from Afghanistan who founded Women For Change to support education and empowerment projects for girls and women in Afghanistan.

Speakers included leading human rights lawyer Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs and Bahaa Dabbagh, a Syrian engaged in the revolution in Syria, who shared his experiences of settling in Australia.

Young people featured prominently this year: 15-year-old Sebastian, grandson of Palestinian refugees, sang a song expressing a yearning for peace. School students Ayden Linsley (Marian College, Ararat) and Tavishi Seneviratne (Sacred Heart Girls' College, Oakleigh) led 8 other students from Catholic schools in a moving *Laments and Statements of Commitment* tableau, with support from Xavier College's Social Justice Network.

Attendees were invited to participate in the *Wishing Loom*, weaving their hopes for justice and kindness for refugees into the loom – a symbolic act representing unity, protection, and the possibility of change. Information stalls from several community, refugee and refugee advocacy groups provided resources, including the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum, Palestine Australia Relief & Action (PARA), QAIM Foundation, Refugee Advocacy Network, Sister Works, Free West Papua, and Women for Change. A food stall was also provided by Egyptian Tummies.

The Palm Sunday Action is organized by a planning committee, and we welcome anyone interested in joining the committee which meets on Zoom. The committee aims to build on the strong participation of young people this year, as educating the next generation and involving them in activism is crucial to the refugee movement and our democracy.

Regardless of the result of the May 3 Federal election, we must continue to celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion while rejecting divisive narratives that dehumanize refugees, migrants, and minorities. To join the planning committee or help connect us with faith-based or school networks, please contact convenor Marie Hapke at: [info@refugeeadvocacynetwork.org.au](mailto:info@refugeeadvocacynetwork.org.au)

*Report by Dr Audrey Statham, member of Palm Sunday organising committee, representing the Social Responsibilities Committee, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.*

The 2025 Palm Sunday event theme was on the kind of Australia we need to be in a multicultural and multifaith society - to stand together for justice, and show kindness (and empathy and compassion). Elon Musk is quoted as saying "The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy" (Feb 28, 2025), and yet empathy and caring for neighbour and the stranger are embedded in Christian faith. The moral imperative transcends political and cultural divides. At its best, empathy drives volunteer work, fosters connection, builds trust and reduces conflict.

## **HOLDING THE LIGHT**

Holding the Light is an annual ecumenical church service remembering victims and survivors of family violence. In this service, we name the dimensions and dynamics of violence; we name survivors and victims of family and domestic violence. We also name God who is present in and through all our efforts to create lives free from violence, seeking to hold the light for those who are in dark places and for those whose lives are emerging from darkness. This service trusts that truth, however painful, can set us free to respond with vigour and work for justice in the world that God so loves. And so, through silence, naming, prayer, singing, candle lighting and reflections we come together as a community to honour affected women and their families.

Holding the Light is held during the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against violence towards women (25 November – 10 December), and while the main service was held at Wesley Uniting Church in Melbourne, 2024 saw several other services being held around Victoria. The organising committee was especially aware in 2024 that there had been multiple tragic deaths in Ballarat, and was pleased to be able to support an ecumenical service to be held there in the week following the Melbourne service.

The Victorian Council of Churches makes a significant contribution to this service each year. In 2024, Rev Sandy Boyce served on the organising committee, expanding the vision and supporting promotions. Sandy also provided networks for communications, including a speaker from NCCA, and funds to support his travel costs.

*Rev Rachel Kronberger (Convenor, Holding the Light Organising Committee)*

## INTERFAITH MATTERS

The VCC relates to a number of interfaith groups and networks including:

- FCCV - Faith Communities Council of Victoria (representatives from 9 peak faith bodies including VCC)
- MAG - Multifaith Advisory Group (part of Victorian Multicultural Commission) comprises religious leaders from various Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Bahá'í communities. MAG assists the Victorian Government to understand and appropriately respond to faith-related issues in Victoria and to support people from a diverse array of cultural and religious backgrounds.
- MAC - Multifaith Advisory Committee for the Coroner's Court
- Religion and World Views Education, an initiative of Faith Values and auspiced by FCCV (see *separate report*)
- Religions for Peace Australia and plans for a national Multifaith Council of Australia
- CCJ Victoria (Council for Christian and Jews) - a statewide forum for Christian and Jewish engagement
- Peacebuilding networks, Interfaith networks and festivals, and invitations to attend/speak at special events
- Victorian Multicultural Review - Victorian Multicultural Commission and portfolio of Multicultural Affairs

Events include interfaith events organised by VMC, an interfaith Shabbat organised by the Jewish community, invitations to Iftar dinners, interfaith speaking engagements during Ramadan, "Peacebuilding through Contemplation, Compassion and our Common Humanity", Yom Hashoah 2025 - Jewish Holocaust Remembrance, and gatherings of interfaith leaders to pray together for peace.

Government consultations on legislation that impact multifaith and multicultural communities including anti-vilification and social cohesion, and the proposed protest laws. It should be noted that the VCC is not in a position to make any public statement on such legislation unless there is common agreement amongst Member Churches. Member Churches are encouraged to have their voices heard on legislation, including critique and affirmation that may be constructive in helping to frame legislation.

Note: JMCA (Jewish Muslim Christian Association) closed down in 2024 and Building Bridges is in recess. Both had been engaged in school programs fostering interfaith understanding and respectful dialogue between peers of different backgrounds, as an antidote to the fear, prejudice and violence arising from ignorance of those who look or act differently because of their religion or culture. It is disappointing that such good programs that make a difference have been negatively impacted by what is happening overseas, and impacting interfaith relationships here in Australia.

## PAX CHRISTI VICTORIA *Harry Kerr April 2025*

Pax Christi Victoria is a branch of Pax Christi Australia, the Ecumenical Christian Peace Movement, a division of the worldwide movement: Pax Christi International.

In 2024 Pax Christi Victoria celebrated 50 years of peacemaking since its founding in 1974 by Dr. Joe Camilleri. This year Pax Christi International celebrates 80 years of peacemaking since its foundation in 1945 at the end of World War II by French and German Christians. Pax Christi Australia belongs to the Asia Pacific region of Pax Christi International which includes groups and contacts in New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan India and Pakistan. Our convenor is Sister Catriona Devlin and our secretary, Sister Patricia Fox. We also publish the Pax Christi quarterly journal "Disarming Times" edited by Revd. Harry Kerr.

In 2024 Pax Christi Victoria embarked on a new project; *From Military Security to Human Security, a Vision for Australia*. The intention of this project is to redefine Security from military strength to the security needs of people. We need to integrate security with economic and social wellbeing, human rights and environmental values. Read more [here](#). Australia must move towards a holistic approach which:

- Acknowledges and seeks to heal the wounds of Indigenous dispossession and colonial violence
- Respects nature and protects the ecosystems across air, land and sea on which all life depends
- Calls into question the fears that have compelled Australia's visceral attachment to imperial power
- Cherishes our rich cultural diversity and constructively engages with our Asian and Pacific neighbours.

Human security means protection from all that threatens the life and dignity of human beings. As well as being alive to the dangers posed by external military attack, terrorism, nuclear weapons, it is equally concerned with transnational crime, drug trafficking, failing states, piracy, human rights violations, refugee flows, climate change, pandemics, and economic arrangements that enrich the wealthy and exploit the poor. A viable human security framework must engage the whole of government and the whole of society.

We therefore aim to promote a national and community consultation which will lead to a cultural shift towards Human security on an international, national and community level. Pax Christi has convened two Roundtable conversations involving a number of community organisations, including peace groups, faith communities, people involved in schools and universities, Human rights groups, groups concerned with the environment and community welfare organisations. We are also examining the spiritual and theological dimensions of Human Security and held conversations with Dr Naomi Wolfe, First Peoples Co-ordinator at the University of Divinity and Revd Dr Deborah Storie who has spent some years living with a rural community in a conflict affected region in Afghanistan. We listened to Archdeacon Uncle Glenn Loughrey challenge us on relationships with First Nations Communities following the defeat of the referendum on the proposed First Nations Advisory Body to Government.

Pax Christi supports the work of the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network. Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and other peace organisations. We sponsor and participate in the ANZAC Day service of Lament, Repentance and Hope at St Paul's Cathedral.

## CARE FOR CREATION/CREATION JUSTICE

**Five Leaf Eco-Awards** is an ecumenical environmental change program for churches and religious organisations. It uses a series of non-competitive awards. The program assists, inspires and rewards faith communities for taking environmental action and becoming more sustainable in response to God's call to care for creation. <https://fiveleafecoawards.org>

***Laudato si'***, Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical entreating us to care for the earth has been [adopted](#) by the Uniting Church at its 2024 National Assembly as a continuing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (10 year anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical this year).

**ARRCC - Australian Religious Response to Climate Change:** a multi-faith network committed to action on climate change, and a catalyst for churches making a public stand on environmental matters and networking locally.



### God's Faithfulness and His People

As we reflect on the past 12 months, we are reminded again of God's unwavering faithfulness and the steadfast support of His people, including the VCC. We give thanks for our dedicated chaplains, community connectors and volunteers, who have faithfully served in schools and communities, sharing His love, hope and grace; and for our supporters who undergird the work with their advocacy, prayers and financial support. Through every challenge and triumph, God has guided our ministry, strengthened our efforts, and provided for our needs. This year has been a testament to the power of faith and partnership in bringing hope, encouragement, and value to those we serve.

### School Chaplaincy and Community-Based Pastoral Care

Principal's Reflection: *"Having a chaplain at our school has been life changing. Their support, encouragement and their presence create a safe space for everyone. I am so grateful for the guidance and care they provide."*

Our school chaplaincy and community-based pastoral care programs continued to provide vital support to students, staff, and families. Our chaplains worked closely with schools to foster a sense of belonging and hope and ran wellbeing programs that promoted resilience and positive mental health. Similarly, our community connectors and community-based chaplains provided wraparound care for their communities, liaising with local organisations to strengthen the pastoral and practical care provided.

### Special Religious Instruction

Student Reflection: *"Every week I look forward to SRI. I appreciate the volunteers who take the time to teach us about God."*

This year, we maintained a strong commitment to providing Special Religious Instruction (SRI) in schools, in line with parent wishes, enabled by school leadership. SRI Programs helped students explore how Christian beliefs and values might be applied to daily life.

### Looking to the Future

**Working Better Together:** By fostering collaborative partnerships between schools, churches, and community organisations, we are able to amplify our impact and support more people in need. Through sharing resources, we are building a stronger network of support that ensures long-term sustainability and growth.

**Training and Development:** As part of our commitment to equipping individuals for impactful service, we continue to offer training opportunities through Korus Connect. Our programs provide essential skills for chaplains, community connectors and volunteers, ensuring they are well-prepared to support and serve others. From pastoral care to leadership development, our training initiatives play a crucial role in strengthening our work.

**Student Reflection:** *"I valued the discussions and knowledge of the presenters. I felt more informed and equipped to handle situations of grief and loss as they arise in my role as a chaplain."*

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to improving our services in response to the evolving needs of schools and communities, through new professional learning content, more responsive administrative services, new SRI resources, and strengthening our partnerships with educational and community organisations.



## Celebrating 80 Years of Service

**Donor Reflection:** *"Being part of this 80-year journey has been an honour. Seeing how many lives have been positively impacted by the work of this organisation is truly inspiring. I look forward to seeing how it continues to grow and serve future generations."*

This 80-year milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on our rich history and the countless lives touched by our work, to celebrate the present and look with expectant faith to the future that God has planned for Korus Connect.

Thank you for your continued support and interest in the work of God's people through churches and other Christian organisations. We look forward to another year of making a meaningful impact in the lives of those we serve.

*"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."* 1 Corinthians 1:4 (NIV)

Dawn Penney, CEO, Korus Connect, <https://korusconnect.org.au>

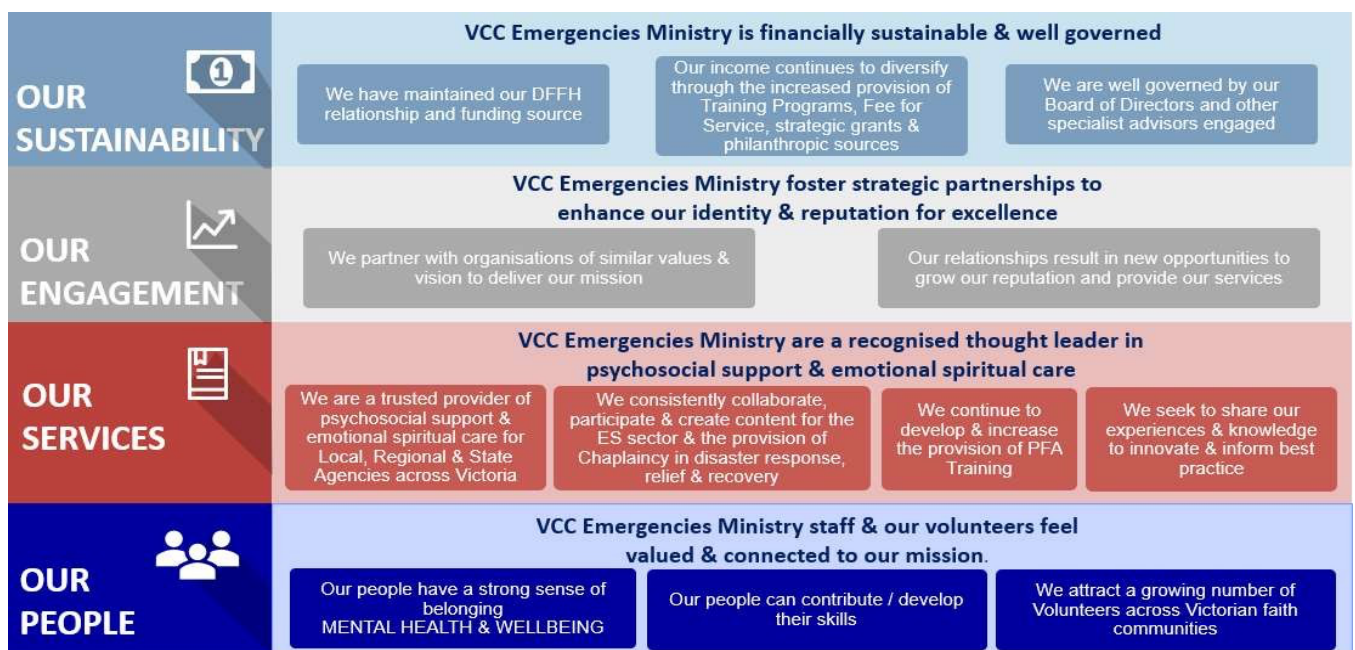
# VCC EM Report

## (VCC Emergencies Ministry)

VCCEM team: Edmund Murphy, CEO; Michael Downing, Chief Operations Officer; Marie van der Weert, Training and Education Manager; Nick Tsigos, Support Officer; Karen Austin, Volunteer Admin Officer; Max Tennison, Ambulance Victoria Program Coordinator

VCC EM continues to provide excellent support and service to disaster and emergency affected communities across Victoria, Emergency Management Agencies, Local Government municipalities (LGA) and the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (DFFH) with the start of 2023 marking a significant milestone for VCC EM with additional funding provided to support 12 LGA's affected by the severe flooding events in October and November last year in partnership with Australian Red Cross (ARC) to provide psychosocial support services, foster community connection through outreach and community recovery committee activities and events. This report has been created to align to our Strategic Plan and identified priority areas as below:

## Our Strategic Plan to 2026:



## Our Sustainability

VCC EM continues to operate on a financial-year accrual basis for its accounting standard with no significant variations or events to our approved plan and budget for the Financial Year 2024/2025 and is expected to return a net profit for the current Financial Year ending on 30 June 2025. We continue to focus on income diversification strategies to reduce our reliance on core Government funding.

Other notable activities during this period have included:

- Financial Year 2023/24 Audit completed, and all required submissions completed, including our ACNC Annual Information Statement and DFFH certifications.
- Ongoing financial stability with VCCEM in Year 3 of 5-year funding from DFFH (to FY2026/2027)
- Commencing year 4 of a 5-year Service Level Agreement with Ambulance Victoria to provide Volunteer Chaplains
- A Grant from Emergency Management Victoria (EMV-VESEP) to fund new I.T. equipment for our Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) to upgrade old and outdated equipment.
- Increases in fee for service income streams and ongoing development of each of our Training Programs that are being adapted to wider audiences by our Training and Education Advisory Committee
- Development of 5 online training modules hosted in EMV's Learning Management System (LMS)
- Renewal of Office Lease Agreement with a significant cost reduction for a further 3 year term

## Our Engagement

VCC EM Staff and Volunteers are active members of the below:

Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) Stakeholder Council	DFFH Psychosocial Reference Group Emergency Management	Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) State relief and recovery team (SRRT)
Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership (MEMP)	Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF)	Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) Learning Network
Shared Responsibility Framework for People Most at Risk in Emergencies	Australian Volunteer Emergency Chaplaincy Association (AVECA)	Victorian Emergency Workers & Mental Health Community of Practice(COP)
CFA/Red Cross/VCC EM EPAS Program	Communicating with people most at risk in emergencies – (COP)	Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) Community Recovery Advisory Group

## Our Services

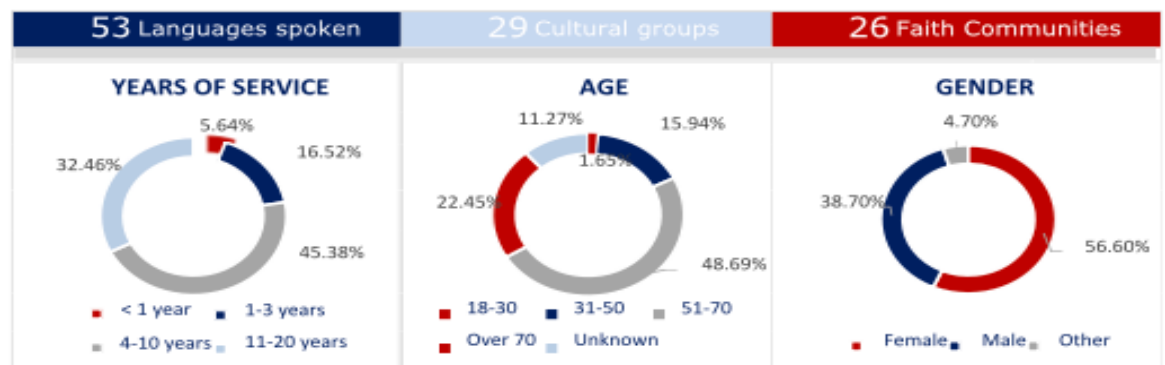
VCC EM has been deployed to 75 separate incidents over the past 12 months (1st July 2024 to date), which represents over 407 volunteer days of service equating to almost 3,500 hours of volunteer hours of service. During this time our volunteers supported 1,300 affected members of the community and visited over 1,000 properties during multiple outreach events. In addition to the deployments listed below, VCC EM has continued to participate in both Agency and LGA exercises, Regional, Municipal Emergency Management and Recovery Committees and several Community Service organisation and faith community events and conferences.

Quambatook homicide outreach	Mordialloc Double Fatal Incident	Caroline Springs Café Bombing
Reservoir Public Suicide - Outreach	Parkville Suicide	Frankston Shooting – Outreach
Diggers Rest House Explosion	McCraw Landslide	Single incident Unit Fire Geelong West
Fatal House Fire - Truganina	Daylesford Accident Anniversary	Wyndham Vale Fatal Stabbing - Outreach
Colac Fatal Car Accident	Auburn Road Fatality – Outreach	Maribyrnong Community Region
Montrose Bushfires	Teesdale Road fatality - Outreach	Mount Alexander Phone Outreach
Whitehorse ERC Exercise		

## Our People

**VCC EM Office team:** Edmund Murphy, CEO; Michael Downing, Chief Operations Officer; Marie van der Weert, Training and Education Manager; Nick Tsigos, Support Officer; Karen Austin, Volunteer Admin Officer; Max Tennison, Ambulance Victoria Program Coordinator

Our **volunteer numbers** currently sit at approx. 1,200 Statewide, and we are very pleased to welcome over 80 new volunteer Chaplains and Personal Support workers in the last 12 months. Over 60 of our current volunteers also conducted refresher training during this period. Our people represent:



## **CHRISTMAS BOWL - Celebrating 75 years of acting for peace together**

*Ruthann Richardson, Act for Peace*

In 2024, churches across Australia came together to mark an extraordinary milestone - 75 years of the Christmas Bowl. Since Rev Frank Byatt first placed a bowl on his family's Christmas table in 1949, inviting them to "share your good dinner with hungry children in other lands," the Christmas Bowl has become a powerful expression of Christian unity, compassion, and action. The Christmas Bowl legacy runs deep - through families, across generations, cultures, and denominations. Together, we have answered God's call to love our neighbour, and in doing so, lives have been changed and bridges of solidarity built.

Since 1949, Australians have raised more than \$115 million to provide life-changing support to families who are displaced. It is a remarkable legacy - shaped by the enduring commitment of churches, communities, and individuals who have chosen, year after year, to act for peace.

In 2024, we were delighted to launch the 75th anniversary of the Christmas Bowl at St Peter's Eastern Hill in Melbourne with a special celebration, held in partnership with the Victorian Council of Churches (VCC). The gathering brought together voices from across the church and community. Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood reflected on the vision of Frank Byatt; Rev Brian Polkinghorne shared stories from his experience in Tanzania, supported by Christmas Bowl funds; and the South Sudanese choir from Grace Community Church (Melton) filled the church with joyful song.

The event closed with a beautiful blessing of the bowls, led by Executive Officer of the VCC, Rev Sandy Boyce - a sacred reminder of our shared call to love and serve.

From supporting refugees after World War II, to caring for families affected by famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s, and more recently, people fleeing war-torn Ukraine - over the last 75 years, the church community has made an incredible difference through the Christmas Bowl.

The Christmas Bowl is more than a tradition - it is a movement for peace that continues to cross generations and borders. We are deeply thankful for the Victorian Council of Churches, and for all who have journeyed with us over the past 75 years. Together, we honour this legacy of compassion - and look forward with hope to the impact we can continue to have long into the future.

<https://christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au>

## **Lutheran Church of Australia & New Zealand & Uniting Church in Australia Dialogue**

*By Greg Pietsch, Lutheran co-chair and Paul Stephens, UCA co-chair*

This Dialogue dates from the 1980s, and with some breaks has continued since then. It comprises theologians appointed by each church, has over some forty years, been working through each church's respective confessions of the faith. Much has been learned and done along the way, including coming to a Declaration of Mutual Recognition with its commitment to work toward formal altar and pulpit fellowship, and in the meantime preparing resources for local cooperating congregations.

In recent years the Dialogue has been very active and has been blessed with new members from both churches. The Dialogue has developed a pattern of meeting twice a year for two days in person, along with two shorter catch-up meetings on Zoom. The Dialogue most recently met in person during November 2024 at the UCA's Centre for Theology and Ministry in Melbourne and will soon release a Study version of the two churches' agreed statement on Holy Communion called *At the Table*. This will be made available online.

November's meeting shared details of each church's rapid change in local congregations (decreasing size and viability) and in the supply of ministers/pastors (also rapid reduction in numbers) as well as changes in ministry itself, with more lay people taking significant roles. All this is in the context of the large-scale secularisation of society. The Dialogue remarked on the similarity of our situation and grappling over responses.

There is a clear correspondence in the two churches' understandings of ordained ministry and the centrality of God's word and sacraments. That the Lutheran Church has recently resolved that both women and men can be ordained, has been significance for the work of the Dialogue. The Dialogue is asking not just how the two churches face each other, but how they face the wider world; and not just alone but potentially together. Resourcing and encouraging local engagement and cooperation is an important part of this, as is learning from each other's service and witness in the public domain. This work will continue as the Dialogue serves our common life in Christ.

## **AUSTRALIAN STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT (ASCM)**

The Australian Student Christian Movement and the World Student Christian Federation continue to provide an international network of ecumenical engagement for students. In 2024, the ASCM appointed two part-time staff members, a National Director and a Victorian worker.

Nationally, the Rev. Karl Hand has been appointed as National Director. Karl has a doctorate in New Testament Studies from Charles Sturt University. We see the internet as our potential 'front door' for students and we welcome Karl's leadership in making this real. The paragraph below is a self-introduction from Karl.

From Karl:

My name is Karl Hand, and this is my first year working as the National Director of the Australian Student Christian Movement. I am a Christian pastor, working within the Metropolitan Community Churches. I'm also a theologian, and I wrote a PhD thesis on the origins of the Gospel of Luke. Since then I've written and published in the areas of Historical Jesus, and Postcolonial and Queer readings of the New Testament. My work in ASCM has provided great opportunities to connect with students, teachers, and chaplains on university campuses, and build our online presence and ecumenical relationships in Australia, and with other student groups in the Asia Pacific. In ASCM, we see a great opportunity right now for a renewal of university faith movements which emphasise ecumenism and faith-in-action.

In Victoria, Jeff Wild (previously employed by Act for Peace in Victoria) has been renewing contacts with university chaplains and students and other interested people. We are planning meetings around a visit to Melbourne from Karl Hand in the near future.

*(Rev. Dr.) Sandy Yule for the Victorian SCM*

### **MINISTRY RENEWAL RETREATS VICTORIA (MRRV)**

Ministry Renewal Retreats Victoria exist to minister to encourage and sustain Christian workers in their ongoing work of ministry by forming medium term (2-3 year) covenant communities who share in an annual retreat and times to catch up through the year. MRRV exists to minister to the ministers. Retreat Groups foster personal renewal and mutual support for people in Christian ministry. Times are set aside for God to touch each person through His Word, His Understanding, His Love and His Healing. Time is also set aside for fellowship and encouragement of each other. Workshops on personal and ministry issues are incorporated as desired.

### **PALESTINE ISRAEL ECUMENICAL NETWORK (PIEN)**

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network Inc (PIEN) is a network of Australian Christians and supporters, seeking lasting peace and justice for the people of Palestine and Israel. PIEN organises events and campaigns. PIEN also promotes ecumenical dates such as WWPPI - World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel (third week of September, coinciding with UN International Day of Peace). Congregations and individuals around the globe who share the hope of justice shall unite during the week to take peaceful actions, together, to create a common international public witness.

In 2024, the main WWPPI theme was "Whatever you did...you did for me." (Matthew 25:40). On International Human Rights Day, PIEN invited ecumenical churches to contribute to a [campaign](#) calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. PIEN organised a webinar with a panel discussion with Jewish, Muslim and Christian voices, sharing their stories and visions for peace. PIEN relates to a number of ecumenical and other organisations including the World Council of Churches. <https://pien.org.au>  
<https://www.oikoumene.org/events/world-week-for-peace-in-palestine-and-israel>



## AUSTRALIAN CHURCH LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

Updates on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/AusChurchLibrary/>

### HOLDING THE LIGHT

Holding the Light is an annual ecumenical church service remembering victims and survivors of family violence.

In this service, we name the dimensions and dynamics of violence; we name survivors and victims of family and domestic violence. We also name God who is present in and through all our efforts to create lives free from violence, seeking to hold the light for those who are in dark places and for those whose lives are emerging from darkness. This service trusts that truth, however painful, can set us free to respond with vigour and work for justice in the world that God so loves. And so, through silence, naming, prayer, singing, candle lighting and reflections we come together as a community to honour affected women and their families.

Holding the Light is held during the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against violence towards women (25 November – 10 December), and while the main service was held at Wesley Uniting Church in Melbourne, 2024 saw several other services being held around Victoria. The organising committee was especially aware in 2024 that there had been multiple tragic deaths in Ballarat, and was pleased to be able to support an ecumenical service to be held there in the week following the Melbourne service.

The Victorian Council of Churches makes a significant contribution to this service each year. In 2024, Rev Sandy Boyce served on the organising committee, expanding the vision and supporting promotions. Sandy also provided networks for communications, including a speaker from NCCA, and funds to support his travel costs.

*Rev Rachel Kronberger, Convenor, Holding the Light Organising Committee*

### ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM PALESTINE ISRAEL (EAPPI)

EAPPI is a program of the World Council of Churches, run through Act for Peace for the National Council of Churches. It was created in 2002 by the WCC in response to a letter and an appeal from local church leaders to create an international presence in the country.

EAPPI provides a continuous presence of Ecumenical Accompaniers, who serve in placements for 3 months, accompanying local people and communities, offering a protective presence, and witnessing their daily struggles and hopes.

EAPPI is guided by “principled impartiality”: it takes no side in the conflict nor discriminates against anyone, but it is not neutral in terms of human rights and respect for international humanitarian law.

Rev Sandy Boyce is part of the National EAPPI Committee and participates in the training. There has been no active recruitment for Australian volunteers since October 7th and the war in Gaza. There are a number of volunteers ready to take up placements in the future.

## **FAITH VALUES AND WORLD VIEWS EDUCATION PROJECT**

Faith Values is a Christian not-for-profit organisation working collaboratively with major faith community groups to lead the development and delivery of Australian Curriculum-aligned Religion and Worldviews Education resources (RWE) in schools. Rooted in a Christian vision of human flourishing, Faith Values facilitates multifaith partnerships, resource development, and policy engagement to improve religious literacy and social cohesion across Australia's diverse educational landscape. With a commitment to respectful dialogue, inclusion, and educational excellence, Faith Values plays a coordinating role in the RWE project and broader national conversations about faith and education in Australia's multicultural society.

The Religions and Worldviews Education (RWE) project, coordinated by Faith Values and auspiced by the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV), continues to build momentum as a collaborative initiative aimed at strengthening religious literacy and intercultural understanding in Australian schools.

This year has seen the development of a new pilot curriculum resource, designed to support students and teachers in exploring diverse religious and non-religious worldviews in a respectful and critically reflective way. The resources have been co-developed by Dr. Julie Mitchell, a highly experienced education consultant and former lecturer at the University of Melbourne Faculty of Education, and Ruth Flanagan, Senior Lecturer at the University of Exeter and leading scholar in Worldviews education. Their work has been guided and strengthened by the input of Prof. Trevor Cooling, a world-renowned academic in Religious education and a key advisor to the project.

The project is grounded in a worldviews approach, which encourages students to engage with their own beliefs while learning to understand the perspectives of others. Preliminary funding from the Templeton World Charity Foundation has enabled the development of these resources and associated research activities. Consultation and content contributions from members of the Multifaith Education Collaboration (MFEC) have been integral to shaping the resources. This work has been coordinated by the FCCV Multifaith officer Sandy Kouroupidis.

In parallel, the University of Melbourne Faculty of Education, led by Deputy Dean Prof. Larissa McLean-Davies, has been conducting research into community attitudes towards religions and worldviews education. Surveys and focus groups have included teachers, students, parents, and faith leaders from across Victoria's education sectors. Earlier this year, Faith Values was invited by the Federal Government to make a pre-budget submission, outlining a national vision for embedding high-quality, curriculum-aligned and inclusive religions and worldviews education across the country. This invitation highlights a growing awareness of the need for thoughtful, well-informed



education around religion and worldviews to support social cohesion in a diverse society.

The RWE project reflects the strength of ecumenical and interfaith collaboration and the potential of educational innovation to contribute to a more cohesive and respectful society.

*Herbert Um – CEO, Faith Values, [herbert.um@faithvalues.org.au](mailto:herbert.um@faithvalues.org.au)*

### **Multifaith Education Collaboration (MFEC)**

- Faith Communities Council of Victoria
  - Buddhist Council of Victoria
- Hindu Council of Australia (Victoria)
  - Islamic Council of Victoria
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
  - Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria
  - Victorian Council of Churches
  - Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Australian Multicultural Foundation
  - Faith Values (Secretariat)

### **Faith Values Board & Executive**

- George Savvides AM – Chair
- Dr Michael Loke – Director & Secretary
  - Ben Trinh – Director
  - Bruce Armstrong – Director
  - Miriam Saward – Director
  - Elizabeth Lucas – Director
  - Harvey Wood – Director
  - Herbert Um – CEO
- Tim Costello AO – Strategy Executive

### **Education Advisors & Project Contributors**

- Herbert Um – RWE Project Director
- Prof. Barry McGaw – Educational researcher and Curriculum
  - Prof. Trevor Cooling – Worldviews Project Director (UK)
- Dr. Julie Mitchell – Curriculum and Program Consultant
  - Ruth Flanagan – Senior Lecturer, University of Exeter
  - Sandy Kouroupidis – Multifaith Engagement
- Prof. Larissa McLean-Davies – Lead Researcher, University of Melbourne

## INTERCHURCH COUNCILS AND LOCAL ECUMENICAL NETWORKS

Inter Church Councils (and local ecumenical networks) continue to do excellent collaborative work which includes (but definitely not limited to):

Winter Shelters  
Good Friday walks and events  
Easter Sunday Dawn services  
Carols in the Park  
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity  
World Day of Prayer  
Special community days/weeks  
Environmental action and events  
Bible Studies  
Swapping pulpits  
Taize worship  
Gippsland Camino 2025 - A Hope 25 event.  
.. and so much more

Some ICCs and networks have closed due to lack of personnel interested in meeting or able/available to organise events. It is hoped that VCC can give more attention to networking with ICCs and local ecumenical networks to learn from and with each other, and to encourage and pray for each other. The active and meaningful participation of local churches and individuals in their communities is a great strength of ecumenism. Engaging in local ecumenical activities allows individuals from different denominations to connect personally, learn about each other's traditions, and build trust. This personal interaction is essential for fostering a sense of shared identity and purpose, and to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diversity of Christian traditions. Local ecumenism connects people, places, ideas, prayers and beliefs, and fosters mutuality and understanding.

The Way of the Cross in Melbourne on Good Friday is organized by Melbourne City Churches in Action (MCCIA), an ecumenical group consisting of Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Church of Christ, Lutherans, Orthodox, Presbyterians, Salvation Army, and Uniting Church working together in unity. The ecumenical walk began in 1998 by collaborating clergy of Melbourne's inner city churches. Originally bringing together the congregations of the city's denominations, the walk now attracts around 4,000 participants from wider Melbourne and beyond. All are welcome. The route is marked by a series of 14 bronze bas-relief sculptures by Melbourne artist Anna Meszaros.

## **VICTORIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS NETWORK**

VPSN began in 2005, with a focus on safeguarding in Christian churches and organisations. Safeguarding is a term used to denote measures to protect the safety, well-being and human rights of individuals, which allow people - especially children, young people and vulnerable adults - to live free from abuse, harm and neglect. The safeguarding and professional standards officers of each VPSN church or organisation attend VPSN meeting, which take place 4-5 times a year. VPSN is also in regular communication with CCYP - Commission for Children and Young People in relation to policies, legislation and child safety standards. Commissioner Liana Buchanan spoke to the VCC AGM in 2024.

The Victorian Council of Churches is represented on VPSN, and helps connect smaller churches with limited resources with larger churches with well developed resources and processes. It is highly recommended that churches and agencies place an acknowledgement of commitment to safeguarding on their website, as a public witness to promote a culture of safety, and transparency in responding to allegations of abuse and misconduct.

## **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER**

The World Day of Prayer is an international ecumenical initiative that unites people in prayer. It is celebrated annually in over 170 countries on the first Friday in March. The 2025 World Day of Prayer was prepared by the women in Cook Islands. The 2026 World Day of Prayer has been prepared by the women in Nigeria, I Will Give You Rest: Come” Matthew 11:28-30

## **CURRENTS IN CONTEMPORARY THINKING ABOUT ECUMENISM**

The August 2024 VCC day conference was a catalyst for fresh reflections on ecumenism, to reflect on ecumenism through a number of lenses including post-colonial, cross-cultural, intersectional, development of diverse expressions in contemporary world Christianity, the changing demographics of global Christianity, the role of leadership and the role of local expressions of ecumenism. Is it now more about the imperative of interfaith understanding? Who is doing the writing and reflection in Victoria? Is there an appetite for VCC to facilitate conferences, or collaborations for conferences or online events? Is there an appetite for publications from the Australian/Victorian context? How do we reflect collaboratively on the changing nature of ecumenism? How might younger adults be encouraged to engage, and what might need to change for that to happen? What boundaries may need to be crossed in order for fresh insights to be generated and observed? Is it a ‘returning to’ a ‘golden age of ecumenism’ or do we look ahead to uncharted landscapes with courage, mindful of history and treasuring tradition, and yet cognisant that God is not bound by the past and is always doing fresh and innovative things (Isaiah 43.19). Where to now for ecumenism?

## **PREMIER'S SHROVE TUESDAY EVENT**

### **... celebrating the contribution of the diverse Christian Churches in Victoria**

In 2025, the Victorian Premier's office asked the VCC to work with them to help organise a special event for church leaders, planned for Shrove Tuesday. The VCC EO was asked to MC, and several church leaders spoke, as well as the Premier. This event was seen as a welcome opportunity to recognise the important work of the diverse Christian churches in Victoria.

Reverend Hoda Ameri, an Anglican priest serving at Emmanuel Iranian Congregation, spoke at the event:

It is a true honour to stand before you today, sharing not just my journey but the stories of many who have found their way to this beautiful country. When I arrived in Australia, I was four months pregnant and had spent 18 difficult days on a boat without food. After almost a year in Indonesia, filled with uncertainty, the first words I heard as I stepped onto Australian soil were, "Welcome to Australia." Those words brought me hope and a sense of belonging. Just three days later, I stepped into a church for the first time. The first thing we heard was, "Welcome to our family." In that moment, the theme of welcome filled our hearts. We felt embraced and understood, surrounded by a community eager to support us. As we gather here, we celebrate the values of welcome, belonging, and service. Arriving in a new country means bringing our hopes, dreams, and cultural heritage. This journey is not just about relocation; it's about finding a place where we can thrive and contribute. As ministers (with husband Rev Kaveh Hassanzadeh), we have the incredible opportunity to guide others on their journey to belonging, both within regular congregations and among Farsi-speaking communities. We are not just leaders; we are bridges connecting stories, cultures, and faiths. Every comforting word and helping hand is a chance to affirm our shared humanity.

## **ECUMENICAL SERVICE – STANDING IN SOLIDARITY**

An ecumenical service held at St. Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne on April 6, brought together members of the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Orthodox communities to commemorate the victims of the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek genocides. The moving service was organised by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in collaboration with the Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Assyrian Churches. The service, which focused on remembrance and unity, was attended by a diverse congregation, reflecting the collective commitment to honour the victims and recognise the historical significance of these tragic events. The event highlighted the importance of acknowledging the past and promoting peace and understanding within the community. Excerpt from article in [Neos Kosmos](#).

*(There are also other occasions when churches and multifaith leaders stand in solidarity on matters of common concern).*

## CONSCIENCE VOTE ON GAMBLING ADS

Rev Tim Costello, a long-standing gambling advocate for gambling reform, invited the VCC to coordinate a meeting with Senator Andrew Wilkie, Independent MP for Clark, and multi-faith leaders in Victoria in relation to a proposed conscience vote on gambling. From the early 20th century, the VCC has made strong public stands against gambling in many forms (<https://vcc.org.au/gambling/>).

At the event, Episcopal Vicar for Justice and Social Services in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Fr John Petrulis, spoke about the call for a conscience vote on gambling advertising to members of Federal Parliament. The Peta Murphy (RIP) report tabled in June 2023 ‘You win some, you lose more’ called for a raft of changes, including to gambling advertising, which have not been enacted. ‘The relentless gambling advertising has caused so much direct and indirect harm to our community,’ Fr Petrulis told the launch. ‘We all have stories in our own personal lives of people who have been affected by the harm of the relentless gambling advertising’.

## 1700 years – COUNCIL OF NICAEEA

The VCC is not planning events for this special anniversary, but will promote and encourage participation in ecumenical events.

.

**1-3 July, 2025** Remembering Nicaea: A Contested Legacy Conference (Melbourne)

**22-23 August** The NSW Ecumenical Council of Churches and St. Andrew’s Theological College in Sydney, along with other partners, is organising a international Academic Conference with the title: “Nicaea at 1700: A Council for the ages?”. (NSW)

**24-28th October** Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, gathering church leaders and theologians of different traditions around the theme “Where now for visible unity?” with a focus on issues of faith, unity, and mission. St Bishoy Monastery, Egypt. (See also the presentation by Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll in the Appendix that follows)

## **Appendix: A recognition of 1700 years of the Council of Nicaea**

*A presentation by Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll, lecturer in Cross Cultural ministry & Theology and Academic Dean at the United Theological College, School of Theology, Charles Sturt University.*

This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea, a council of church leaders called by the Emperor Constantine to reflect on the being of, and the exact nature of Jesus Christ - human or divine or both? The implications of the discussions and debates of Nicaea led to the formulation of one of the great creeds of the church - the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed which began in Nicaea in 325AD and confirmed in Constantinople in 381 AD. Nicaea's main accomplishments were the settlement of the Christological issue of the divine nature of Jesus (fully divine) and his relationship to God and the oneness of the Triune God. The creed affirmed the full divinity of Jesus, and the oneness of God as Trinity. The creed has had an enormous and lasting impact on the understanding of Christian faith and praxis (worship, liturgy, theology) all over the world. In this creed we affirm the Christian faith in saying: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life."

The Nicene creed was the defining moment of Christian orthodoxy. One could say that Nicaea was an attempt to hold together in unity the diverse perspectives on the nature, character and identity of God. But on the other hand, more broadly speaking, one could ask at what cost was this unity/creed bought. It was a creed responding to the context and particular issues of the time. Could the creed be politically motivated in that the Arian controversy was threatening to divide the Empire, and notably Constantine and his imperial colleagues would be concerned? Thus, there are mixed motives for the gathering in Nicaea - concern for the faith, for the unity of the church, undoubtedly, but also issues of power, ambition, control...

The crux of the classical Nicene-Constantinopolitan teaching is that Father, Son, and Spirit are "one God in essence, distinguished in three persons" (*mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*). The intent was to describe the reality of the living God in conformity with the gospel story of Jesus the Word of God become flesh and of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. In opposition to the Arian view, the Nicene creed affirms that the Son of God incarnate in Jesus Christ is "begotten, not made" and is of "one substance" (*homoousios*) with God the Father rather than "like substance" (*homoiousios*) as the Arians contended. The creed was a statement of unity of faith against the so-called heresies of the time.

But the creed also alienated the Greek speaking East through the inclusion of the filioque clause leading to the schism of 1054AD between the East (Orthodox) and the West. The contentious phrase added to the creed of 381AD is found in the last paragraph of the creed relating to the Holy Spirit. The paragraph begins: And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son. [The contentious phrase is "and (from) the Son"]

Orthodox belief is the addition of the phrase “and (from) the Son” is a form of subordination and against both scriptural and Orthodox theology. The filioque phrase, it was argued, places “the Son” in a superior position to the Spirit and as such threatens the unity and diversity of the Trinity by concealing and confusing the uniqueness of the Father as the sole source of the Son and the Spirit.

The World Methodist Council planning committee to mark the 1700 anniversary of Nicaea recognised and affirmed that 1700 anniversary should not be one of blind romanticism of the past, but rather an honest critique and approach to Nicaea and its implications for Christian faith, witness, and unity in all its diverse contexts, cultures and hence expressions. As such it was decided to have regional webinars with the theme, A Wesleyan Response to Nicaea: Reflections on Faith, Unity and Mission, with speakers from each region invited to consider the historical complexity of the 325AD gathering at Nicaea; the Nicene - Constantinopolitan Creed as an agreed statement of faith by Christians of many traditions and denominations; - and to consider the question: what may be the role, if any, of creeds in the 21st century.

The speakers for the Asia/Pacific webinar were Herman Shastri (Malaysia), Te Aroha Rountree (Aotearoa, NZ), Lizette Tapia-Raquel (Philippines) and James Bhagwan (Fiji). All four speakers took an aspect of the creed and contextualized through a Wesleyan and contextual lens. It was both moving and powerful.

Te Aroha considered the creed in relation to the Doctrine of Discovery and emphasized that for Christian faith to be truly transformative, it must be considered with Indigenous Maori ways of knowing. James spoke of a Trinitarian ecclesiology and Methodist theology drawing on “Methodism’s connexionalism - the belief that Christians are bound together in faith and mission and how this mirrors the relational unity of the Trinity.” All spoke of the complexity of the legacy of Nicaea as marking a significant moment in the politicization of Christianity and acknowledging that “while the theological outcomes of Nicaea were profound, the alignment of the Church with imperial power also set a precedent for the colonization of Christianity” (Bhagwan).

Lizette spoke movingly of dis-incarnation, defining it as “a denial of one’s sacredness, of one’s createdness in the image of God, and the divine’s work in and through our hands and feet, our bodies. It is a denial of God’s justifying and sanctifying work in us.” She then went on to speak about “unlimited incarnation” as “the potential enfleshment and embodiment of divinity in our multiple bodies is grounded on the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Lizette argues that “unlimited incarnation empowers us, as flesh and bodies, to act in the transformation of the world. It opens us to encounter and welcome others who are different from us, compels us to give space and listen to those in the margins, and energizes us to work together in acts of salvation and liberation.”

Reflecting 1700 years on, we reflect on the impact of Nicaea on faith through a contextual lens responding to what it means to hold unity in faith and mission that does not seek to homogenise, but allows difference and diversity to truly flourish. Does the Nicene creed still help us to do that?

When we say the creed what are we affirming together?  
What thoughts, and/or questions are raised for you?  
How might you use the Nicene creed in your church today?  
What are some changes you will make?  
How ought our statements of faith sound now?

Both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) church held this creed in honour, though with one important difference: the Western church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase "and the Son" (known as the "filioque") in the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit; this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox church. In its present form this creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). It was accepted in its present form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but the "filioque" phrase was not added until 589.