

From the Minister

I don't know what kind of weather you are reading this article right now, but I hope you are basking in warm and bright shiny spring day. Are you ready for the new season? How much are you looking forward to the warmer days? I know some of you are looking forward to it.

In many countries, especially those in the Northern Hemisphere, Spring season is considered as the beginning of a new cycle where life blooms again after the dormant season in winter. There is a sense of cleansing, reorganizing and reorienting and even starting anew in Spring, as the sun brings more energy. Interestingly, in the last month, through the lectionary readings, we had been invited to look inward and around us, to review, evaluate, discern within ourselves personally and collectively to find new motivations and purpose. Jesus' teaching on wealth and treasure challenges us to find real assurance, hope and security in what God has already gifted us. It is also a call to see joy, grace, and a new growth in whatever state we are. All that is required is the willingness to see things differently.

This month, I have been in touch with some of you through visitations and calls. I also have learned recently that some of you have seen and experienced the pain and the struggle of small congregations in other places. With the question currently looming at Hampton Uniting Church I can see the silent grief mixed with hopefulness.

As I was writing this, I am reminded of the Synod 2025 that is going to commence this weekend, from 30th August - 2nd September 2025. One of the major tasks that the Synod members will do is to discern how the church collectively move forward faithfully as a church and witnesses of Christ in this current world with its particular characteristics and challenges. The church would have to seek a different vision to be a visible church. It is an opportunity for us to pray together for our future.

Meanwhile, the Monday meditation group has been steadily gathering and supporting each other with average attendance 8-10 people every Monday. Every week, I have been out on visitation which has been a privilege. One highlight of my pastoral visits this month was when I had the opportunity to visit Jean Marks and she will now be in my regular pastoral visit list. I am also aware that some of you also had been having some health challenges that kept you from church gatherings. I hope that things are continued to improve. If you need me to send you my sermon or prayers please let me know.

Lastly, let us continue to encourage each other through prayers and warm fellowship as we continue to be faithful congregation. Keep our physical, mental and spiritual health in check. (A reminder that September 11th is "R U OK? Day")



May the transforming power of God, the gracious love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the renewing strength of the Holy Spirit within you and upon you always!
Blessings in Christ,

Karis Abadani

Let it go

This song forms part of the presentation by Rev Anneke Oppewal that is outlined later in this edition of NUCH

I let a dream go today
Let it fly far, far away
I'd been holding on so tight
Praying for it every night

Now I see, I must let it be
Hold on to faith and just set it free
And if it's meant for me to keep
(I know) it will come back to me

Let it go, release the fear
Let it flow, every drop, each tear
Let it go, the time is near
Let it go, just let it go

Feed your dreams and watch them grow
Let them blossom with the truth,
and you know
Life has seasons
with showers and storms,
If you bend with the wind
your seeds will sow

I let a dream go today
Let it fly far, far away
Now I see, I must set it free
And if its mine to keep,
it will come back to me
If it's mine to keep,
it will come back to me

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Hampton Uniting Church



17 Service Street Hampton VIC 3188

www.hamptonunitingchurch.wix.com/hampton-uca

WORSHIP Sundays 10am

ZOOM <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4111712080> Passcode uevX6a

SUPPLY MINISTER:

Kharis Abadani

0402 084 230

rev.k.abadani@gmail.com

CHURCH COUNCIL CHAIR:

Ian Menzies

12 Littlewood Street

Hampton, 3188

0403 727 080

menzies.ian.robe@gmail.com

CHURCH COUNCIL SECRETARY:

Margaret Ackland

2/136 Linacre Rd

Hampton, 3188

0429 136 629 or 9598 0190

margackland@bigpond.com

NUCH EDITOR: Ian Menzies

dayspringcontact@hotmail.com

In word and deed Bill shone

by Andrew Humphries

I never had the pleasure of meeting Rev William (Bill) Pugh, but every so often he would send me through by email another contribution for the monthly collection of online pew sheets for congregations to use.

It was obvious from reading each one that here was a gentleman with a deep and abiding faith, and a love for the world and all of its (sometimes quirky) inhabitants.

And in each pew sheet was the simple message that time spent with God was, indeed, time well spent.

Bill passed away aged 92 on July 29 and, along with sadness that he has departed this life, comes the knowledge that he leaves behind a wonderful legacy, both as a servant of God and a man of words, his humble offerings often giving us pause for thought and consideration.

After graduating from Ormond College in the late 1950s, Bill began his ministry work in the Mallee region, serving the Sea Lake and Woomelang congregations.

He also served as a teacher and chaplain at Carey, Haileybury, St Leonard's and Ballarat Clarendon colleges, and within the Otway parish.

Fellow pew sheet contributor, and friend of Bill, Ian Menzies said those early years in ministry helped shape Bill's commitment to pastoral care, and to making deep and lasting connections with people.

"In his early placements as a young minister in the country, and being largely unsupported, Bill faced challenges such as assisting police identify suicide victims and helping the local undertaker prepare bodies," Ian said.

"These experiences profoundly influenced him and his pastoral caring for others throughout the rest of his life.

"As a school chaplain, Bill was often allocated some of the more challenging classes, but still managed to develop good, and often lifelong, relationships with his students.



"Bill's awareness of the needs of small rural congregations led to his weekly reflections, published online by the Synod for inclusion in pew sheets or newsletters.

"These were shared widely, including beyond the Synod, and Bill greatly appreciated the many warm responses he received about them."

Of the many pew sheets Bill sent through, all thoughtfully and carefully compiled, I can recall marvelling at the simple beauty of one last year reflecting on Anzac Day.

Bill wrote of his grandfather being told that his son, Bill's father, had been killed in France during WWI.

Three days later a telegram came informing the family that the information was incorrect, and that Bill's father was still alive, though badly wounded and in hospital.

"(My father) came home again and gradually healed, except his nerves were never the same and he walked with a limp," Bill wrote.

"We have a copy of that telegram in our family history.

"This Anzac Day, and every Anzac Day, I give thanks for Dad's safe return, and I pray for peace and all families affected by war in troubled lands today."

In the same spirit, it seems appropriate to give thanks for Bill's contribution to the life of the Church, with deep appreciation and understanding of the fact that his words, and deeds, carried a simple but beautiful weight in this world.

"Bill was a quiet, empathetic and deeply spiritual man who was much loved by so many, and he will be deeply missed," Ian said.

A memorial service for Bill was held at Hampton Uniting Church on Sunday August 3.

*Andrew Humphries is the Synod's Communications and Media Relations Officer
This (slightly edited) tribute first appeared in "Crosslight"*

Grief is personal

What a nice poem we heard. *"Death is nothing at all, I have only slipped away into the next room ... Speak to me ... Laugh ... Play, smile ... there is absolutely unbroken continuity ... I am but waiting ... somewhere very near, just around the corner ... all is well. Nothing past, nothing lost."*

Then we heard: *"Stop the clocks, cut off the telephone, prevent the dog from barking ... Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come. Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead, scribbling on the sky the message 'He Is Dead' ... I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong."*
So wrote W H Auden.

Beautiful words, grim reality, but the truth.

And I am with Auden. I don't want to be 'massaged with words'. Our loved ones really die, tragedy happens, all is not always well, grief is personal, experienced.

Yet, and yet, there is news of a life beyond, a glorious hope that all will be well. A promise from him the true witness, the first born of the dead. This is the gospel of the Lord, again and again to be read and preached.

Thereby, blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Bill Pugh

and as previously published in *The Age*

On Sunday 3 August the church at Hampton was filled to capacity, with extra seating needed in front of the organ, as family, friends and colleagues gathered in person and via Zoom to participate in a fitting tribute to mark the life and witness of Rev Bill Pugh.

Long-time family friend Rev Shirley Coxhell led the service, assisted by Ian Menzies, whose long association with Bill stretched back to being a student of his in secondary school.



NUCH readers will be familiar with Bill's writing, exemplified by the example above. These reflections were but a small selection chosen from the many pieces Bill has written over the years for distribution through the Synod for use in weekly pew sheets and newsletters.

Bill had an influence spread so widely he would likely struggle to accept it as plausible, and he will be greatly missed.

We extend our sincere condolences to his wife Lesley, and to his extensive family, extending through the generations to great-grandchildren.

Ian Menzies

Zoom in to worship

Our in-person worship services are also available via Zoom 10am Sundays. To join simply copy or click on this link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4111712080>
Passcode: uevX6a



To join in using your phone only, call 7018 2005 and when prompted enter Meeting ID 411 171 2080 # #
To mute/unmute yourself press *6

September Birthdays

Congratulations and birthday greetings during the coming month are extended to:

13 September	Joan Gouldsmith
28 September	Malcolm Adams

Presbytery presentation The Importance of Trying

I recently participated in a very interesting on-line presentation and discussion event facilitated by our Presbytery and led by Rev Matt Harry with Michael Henderson.

It focussed on creating and sharing an understanding of how to facilitate new and effective ways to address the ever changing challenges in our churches.

Michael quoted Isaiah Chapter 43, verses 18-19:

*'Do not remember the former things
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.'*

The central idea presented was that in any organisation or church there is a 'core' leadership group, for example the Church Council with its key role of maintain the ongoing functioning of the church and its congregation, and a set of matching gifts of its members. The idea of 'edge' includes those who have important gifts or ideas for future support and innovation, for example a small trial of an idea, supported by the core and evaluated as to its success, such as establishing a social justice event.

These concepts for our emerging future appear to be very fruitful. Michael elaborated on a number of successful outcomes with 'core and edge' structures; offered to assist with working together with interested people from the presbytery; and most importantly, emphasised how supporting the concepts helped promote the Synod's *Faithful Futures* and *Team Ministries* programs.

Ailsa Drent

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke 13: 10-17

Now [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, *"Woman, you are set free from your ailment."*

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, *"There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured and not on the Sabbath day."*

But the Lord answered him and said, *"You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him.

Woman bent double

The following is the text of the video creative reflection exploring this reading from Luke that was shown by Rev Anneke Oppewal at Hampton on 24 August. A link to that video follows.

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath and just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years."

Suddenly he is there.

Suddenly she is there.

And somehow something connects between them. What was it that made him single her out that Sabbath morning?

What was it that made him decide he would straighten her up and show his opponents he was not beholden to their narrow-minded views on healing?

Was she the only wounded and crippled human in that congregation?

By that time the sick and suffering followed him everywhere.

Did she try to look up at him, catch his eye, and so conveying her longing for healing, her yearning for a word or two that would give her some solace and support? Or did she look at him defiantly and defensively?

"Look at me, how crippled I am, I bet you, you won't be able to fix me! I am a lost case, hopeless and helpless in the hands of this spirit that has crippled me for the last eighteen years. You try and fix me mate and I'll show you I am unfixable!"

Is that what happened?

Could he then not withstand the challenge?

Was that what caught his eye?

The defying glance of a woman yearning for healing?

We will never know.

But somehow their eyes met, hers from inside her bendedness, glancing up and out for a moment, ready to withdraw. His from across the room, seeking to penetrate her defences, looking for an opening. Driven by the desire to touch, move and heal inside that curled up figure riddled with pain.

The spirit had been with her for eighteen years, bending her in and around herself. What spirit was this? Was it an illness? Or was this crippling bending a result of mental wounds inflicted on her earlier in life? Had her body over the years involuntary but very effectively folded itself around to protect her vulnerability and enable her to hide her deeper self from those around her? Had she developed a curvature ducking further blows and avoiding further hateful treatment, making herself smaller so as not to be noticed? Was she abused, or raped, or both, and had she, over the years, discovered that bent women are less attractive to violence, that hiding your face and covering your vulnerable inner parts would keep you from harm that would otherwise most certainly come your way?



Bent, folded in half, facing in and down, avoiding eye contact, shuffling along. Was it a relief when men no longer looked at her with desire and women only took her with a grain of salt? Or was it the grief and the hurt that doubled her over? The pain of loss of dignity and the suffering continued abuse brings? Was it that she could no longer muster the strength needed to keep her head up and face whatever? Could no longer stand tall because she had shrunk and shrivelled inside?

18 years she had been growing smaller, into herself, face down, 18 years she had been bound by this Spirit and made quite unable to stand up. And here she was, on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, bent and all, but close enough to the front to catch his eye.

She must have longed for something, otherwise she would not have come, would not have tried, would not have risked meeting the eyes of this man. Was there still hope in her somewhere? A tiny wisp of a hope that could have been blown away very easily? Was there still the un-bendable conviction that somehow she was worth more than being the woman weighed down by sorrow and pain?

"Woman, you are set free from your ailment" he says, and lays hands on her.

What did those words, those hands do? Did they awaken anger and revolt in her that had been slumbering inside her all along? Or did they make a jolt of electric energy course through her, making her, suddenly, realise that she was alive and that she wanted to live ... tall?

Did *"Who the hell do you think you are?"* cross her mind before the sheer arrogance of those words and that gesture filled her with enough strength to lift herself up and look him in the eye?

Or was it the soft and loving voice that got her, the tenderness of his touch, the question mark in his words pleading with her to let go of whatever was tying her down, to open up and show herself, to him, to the world?

What was it?

Was it a coaxing *"You can do it"* or was it a commanding *"Come on woman, get yourself together"* type of statement that made something inside her decide that it had been enough, that she would stand tall, that she would unfold herself, unbend and open herself to him and to the world? And what happens after the praising of God? What happens after the back has straightened, after the first euphoria of the discovery that she can be whole again has died down?

What happens?

Others rebuke him for healing her. Something that will most certainly have tempted her, urged her, to roll up in a tight ball again. They don't like the tall standing woman, they don't like the unfolding of the fragile and vulnerable into something strong and powerful, they don't like to meet the eyes that were so conveniently covered before. They don't want to be confronted with who she is or what she has been through.

Not on the Sabbath, not in the synagogue. They don't want to know. They don't want to hear her voice speaking up with whatever it is that has been freed up inside her.

What is so threatening about her? Is it the tales she might tell or is it the eyes they don't want to meet because they know what bent her in the first place?

What they don't know and what he leaves her to cope with on her own is the aftermath. A body that has been bent for 18 years that won't let itself be unbent so very easily. After the first euphoria there would have been back pain, muscle cramps, tummy aches, her diaphragm contracting, bruises of the ribcage where bones are poking into soft tissue for the first time in many, many years; nausea, pins and needles in arms and legs and lots of exercise to make the unwilling and untrained muscles do what they were meant to do: keep her body up.

Did she curse her saviour? Or did the triumph and longing to be tall and straight again deep inside keep her going even where at times the pain was unbearable and despairingly persistent in its attempt to bend her down again?

How did the people around her react to the look in her eyes, the tallness that suddenly stood over them, the power and strength that seemed to ooze out from somewhere deep inside her? Did they like the new woman? Or would they have preferred the curled up version?

Did the pent-up aggression of years and years that had made her furl get out, glances that were hidden from the world around her before now showing feelings and emotions that had been carefully packaged up inside the ball she had been? Did the tears she had so carefully kept inside her own embrace get out, flouting her hurt to the world, hurling abuse at those whose delicate senses were not up to whatever the Spirit was that had possessed her?

And how did she feel? No longer protected, no longer safe, no longer held in her own embrace but open, vulnerable, once more susceptible to love, hate, hurt and healing? Did she feel she had lost something?

Did she discover that once you have started to unfurl, once you have set foot on the path of healing there is no way back and there is no stopping either. It will fight itself free, rip things open, tear the bonds asunder, and that it will hurt?



The video of this presentation
is available online at
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/nevealamaqt5kobs21m9d/TheBentWoman.ipad3-copy.mp4?rlkey=zw7y38zlesbw2xucmx8e08633&st=9tlmaook&dl=0>

Frontier Services BBQ this week

Our annual Frontier Services BBQ luncheon will be held after church this week on Sunday 31 August. All welcome. For catering purposes please let Margaret Ackland or Ian Menzies know of your intention to attend and any dietary requirements. Suggested donation is \$10+



New ministries

Last Sunday Rev Esteban Liévano was inducted at St David's Parkdale – a particularly happy event for Ian Menzies and Catherine McNicol who were the Presbytery Liaison People for the Joint Selection Committee in seeking a new Minister. Ian and Ann Simons have been working with Parkdale over a number of years now and are pleased to see such a good 'match' for them.

Earlier in the month, on August 9, Rev Dr Ji Zhang was inducted – and the newly renovated buildings were opened – at Ormond Uniting Church, North Road, in another celebratory occasion ushering in a new era.

To complete the 'triplet' of new ministries, on Sunday 14 September Rev Jan Yun will be inducted as Minister of Coatesville Uniting, East Bentleigh.

We wish all three congregations and their new Ministers well.

The upside-down way

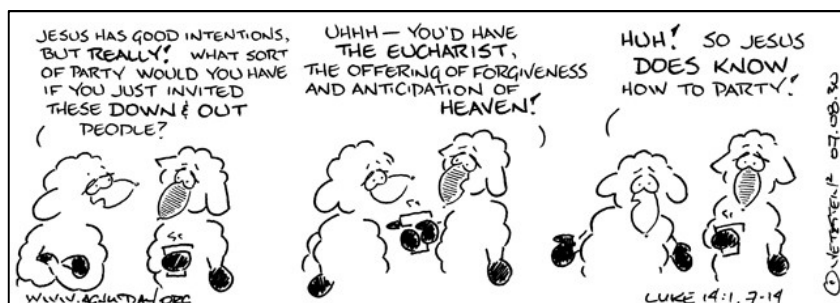
Jesus turns the usual ways of the world – the standards by which we have learned to order our lives – upside down. We have been taught competition over cooperation, revenge over reconciliation, leading over following, enhancing our importance over humbly submitting to one another. When we attend a function, we have learned to scan the room and find those with whom we want to be seen and from whom we can gain personal benefit.

We have been taught to start at the highest positions, seek to be near the greatest and the best. Jesus says we should reverse that strategy. If we want true upward mobility, we should aim for the lowest place in the room. Where else can we go then but up? And we might even discover we like it at that end of the table better than we expected, finding more stimulating conversation with unpretentious people who leave us freer just to be ourselves.

We might even develop a taste for what the world calls the lowly and the least, finding that we crave the spicy flavours of their company.

Jesus suggests we test it in our own lives. Try inviting a new crowd to dinner. Open your doors to the unknown. Expand your horizons. Get to know God's whole family. We have access to a more flavourful feast than we have enjoyed so far. Taste and see how good are God's ways.

A reflection on the Gospel reading for Sunday 31 August, Luke 14:1, 7-14
from the blog by Kayla McClurg at Inward/Outward.com



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September Rosters

Worship

September 28

Kharis Abadani

Anneke Oppewal

Vestry

Sue Dowling

Lectionary

September 7

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Colour: Green

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Margaret

Philemon 1-21

Pollock

Luke 14:25-33

September 14

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

Colour: Green

Psalm 14

Sue Dowling

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10

September 21

Jeremiah 8:18 - 9:1

Colour: Green

Psalm 79:1-9

Val

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Jemmeson

Luke 16:1-13

September 28

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

Colour: Green

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

Ian Menzies

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

Thank you

We extend our grateful thanks once again to Sr Michele Kennan who, with Sue Dowling, will be leading the worship service on Sunday 31 August.

The Last Word

I had a nasty fright and had to double check with my doctor when he told me the medication he had just prescribed had to be taken "for the rest of my life."



"I'm wondering," I asked rather nervously, "Just how serious is my condition, because this prescription is marked 'No Repeats!'"