



Nov 28 2020

# Praising God

Even in the  
Wilderness...

Introduction



Victorian Adventist  
COMMUNICATIONS

Publications & Media



Victorian Adventists



How can anyone put his faith in Christ if he's never even heard about Him? How can he hear about Him if no one tells?

Romans 10:14

#### IntraVic Staff

Editor:  
Pastor Graeme Christian

Assistant Editor:  
Sherrie Courtney  
sherriecourtney@adventist.org.au  
PO Box 215 Nunawading, 3131  
Phone: 03 9264 7750

Website:  
vic.adventist.org.au  
Victorian Adventist.TV

Facebook:  
@VictorianAdventists

#### Issue Schedule:

DEADLINE	IN CHURCHES
Jan 20	Feb 25
April 15	May 26
July 15	August 21
August 15	November 22

Want to receive your copy of IntraVic by email? Register at <http://vic.adventist.org.au>

Notices available at <http://vic.adventist.org.au> under the News & Notices tab

#### Cover Photo Credit

pexels-eberhard-grossgasteiger-701353

Victorian Adventist  
COMMUNICATIONS

## A note from the Editor's Office



### Church Remains Open

I'm so glad our churches are open. Our buildings have been closed – but our churches are open and have been, right through the COVID days, weeks and months of this year.

We've played by the rules of lockdown. We've worn masks and learnt new terms like social distancing. Our freedoms have been curtailed. Routine religion has been disturbed. We've been isolated. We've lived-streamed our services

because we couldn't meet in person. We've prayed together online, or by phone. We've learnt a lot about Zoom. We've been obedient citizens, subject to the governing authorities as we should be (Romans 13:1). And we've faithfully and cheerfully rendered to God the things which are His – as Jesus said to do (Matthew 22:21).

Worshipping together, praying with each other and fellowshiping together – in person – mean a lot to the people of God. After all, the scriptures tell us not to forsake assembling together (Hebrews 10:25).

It's been tough for so many – not being allowed to get together – a wilderness of sorts. Yet in spite of COVID 19 and while obeying the rules, our churches remain open, although church buildings have been closed.

Remember, we are the church. The church is a living organism, a body of people. And that church isn't closed.

Many ask what the church will be like after COVID. But more important is this question: 'What is the church like now?' What it is now will determine what it will be then. Churches that are busy serving the community through ADRA – providing food to the growing number of needy people as jobs are lost – those churches aren't closed. Churches that continue to provide excellent pastoral care – they're active. Churches that are reaching out to those who are searching for answers in these uncertain times – they're openly carrying on the business God gave us to do.

We have to be aware of what we cannot do, but as we've focused on what we can do, we've been open to the God's leading through His Holy Spirit. I've heard stories of many people awaiting baptism. Pastors and members are studying the scriptures with seekers. Creative solutions have been found to reach people. A Centre of Influence has been turned into a Channel of Influence as online methods have been developed and needs have been met. Praise God!

I thank God for the faithfulness of His people. In this edition of IntraVic, you can read just a few of the great stories from active, open churches... even in COVID days. And as you read, look up and praise God.

Enjoy.



SCAN ME

A number of articles have been included in brief, you can read the full article on our Conference Website at IntraVic News under the News and Notices tab. Use your phone camera or QR Reader to scan the code, or go to [Vic.Adventist.org.au](http://Vic.Adventist.org.au) to access full articles.

## IntraVic November 2020

# In this issue...



### 04 Wandering the Pandemic Wilderness

Justin Bone takes a look at liminal spaces such as what we have experienced in 2020 and the growth that can result from time spent in them...

### 06 My Story is His Story

We are part of a bigger narrative. In this series we will be sharing personal testimonies – please contact us if you would like to share yours



### 06 Church News

2020 has been tough, but good things have also happened, and we are sharing some of these stories from our churches. Let's choose not to look in, or around, but up, and praise God in all circumstances



### 09 Conference News

The Conference, our pastors, departmental officers and their support staff have continued to serve the church throughout this year, although it has largely been by remote and using the digital platform. We take a look at how God has used and blessed their efforts...

#### News Delivered Fresh to your Inbox!

During 2020 we have combined the weekly email that goes to the bulletin secretaries, pastors and head elders with IntraVic, to offer a weekly update of news and notices from around the Victorian Conference. This email is now available to all church members and a must if you hold church office, as it is our main way of sharing important notices relevant to your work.

Sign up here - [shorturl.at/moAFP](http://shorturl.at/moAFP)

#### Conference Calendar

For 2020, we will be releasing a digital calendar that can be integrated with your phone calendar, and will include downloadable advertising posters, maps and more. Look out for more details in the weekly e-newsletter



# Wandering the Pandemic Wilderness

Written by Justin Bone  
MINISTERIAL SECRETARY

Liminal spaces are places and times of insecurity and fear. They are also where God meets us, taking us to the other side and further... if we let Him.

I remember the first time my family drove to Adelaide from our small hometown of Broken Hill. We wondered at the big city sights, at so many people, so many cars.

We went to a shopping mall, something we hadn't done before, and did that long circling drive up the car park building searching for a car park. Finally, my father found a space and we got out of the car. I wasn't sure where we were. I couldn't see any shops, just parked cars everywhere! But my parents led my brother and I to a small concrete room with an exit sign. It opened onto a staircase and we trailed down this flight of stairs, our footsteps echoing around us, for what felt like hours. At one point another family emerged from a door on a different level and started following us. It did not seem safe.

We eventually reached the bottom and emerged into the shopping centre and I breathed a sigh of relief. We had arrived.

That stairwell is an example of liminal space.

Liminal comes from a word meaning threshold. In other words, it's the space you go through on your way from one place to another. These spaces don't always feel safe.

People in Bible-times understood them: the wilderness places; deserts; high mountaintops; or deep waters. These were the in-between places, the not-quite-safe places of the ancient world. We see this reflected in scripture as it describes deserts as a place where impure spirits dwell (Matthew 12:43) and deep waters as places where ghosts reside (Matthew 14:26).

In our modern world of GPS and global mapping, we don't fear those physical places. Liminal spaces that we feel unsafe in are different. When we go through major life events, we transition from one time in our life to another. When we lose a loved one, change careers, or move house, everything changes: it is a time of transformation. An opportunity to change.

The exodus of God's people from Egypt to the land of Canaan is one of the formative stories of both the Jewish and Christian people worldwide. It shows God calling His people out of one existence into a better one. He led them through a liminal space, in this case, a literal wilderness.

The journey, however, was not easy. There were enemies, a longing for the past (Egypt) and internal division and rebellion against Moses and against God Himself.

Why would God call His people to endure such a journey? If impure spirits dwell in the desert, why would He call His people there?

In Exodus 7:16 God instructed Pharaoh to "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." God wanted His people to be free of the influence of Egypt so they could be drawn closer to the One who loved them. God wanted to lead them through the wilderness so they could be reconsecrated as His people. But also, God knew the journey through the wilderness would lead to the Promised Land.

God often calls His people into the wilderness. We see David fleeing from Saul into the wilderness, and his time there was spent faithful following God. We see John the Baptist emerge from the wilderness, calling the people from the cities and countryside to repentance. They came to John, to the remote area where he was, to respond and be baptised. Paul was in the wilderness between Jerusalem and Damascus when Jesus spoke to him and transformed Paul's life. Jesus Himself was called into the wilderness to be tested, proving His reliance on God alone, before His ministry commenced.

I've presented for a few churches lately on how I believe the time we are going through now is one of those wilderness journeys. This global pandemic has changed the world forever.

We are currently living in the liminal, in the in-between, having left the life we knew behind but not sure of what is immediately ahead. Changes have come about in 2020 that will be permanent, both in our culture and ourselves. We aren't quite out the other side yet, either. Covid normal is coming, but we aren't completely sure what that will look like. We are in the stairwell at the shopping centre hoping to emerge sooner, rather than later.

This liminal space has not been comfortable, the journey difficult. We have lost loved ones, restricted from

saying a proper goodbye. We have been isolated for so long that the year has disappeared before we even knew it. Church events have been cancelled or moved online. We've lost touch with many. Many have been sick and we haven't always known. We have missed out on the usual markers of the year. Birthdays with family, anniversary meals out, sports and social events have all been cancelled. Usual school events couldn't happen and parents became home-schoolers. Some have lost employment and financial security. There is anger, frustration and anxiety to a greater degree. We certainly weren't prepared for this.

The world as we know it is in the process of being forever changed and the future, uncertain. We are also in the process of being changed by the events happening around us.

Our church is changing as well.

Be reassured. It is not for nothing. It is times like this, times we are in a wilderness, that God uses to greatest advantage. When we are set adrift from the normal, when we are going through times of struggle, we find ourselves calling out to God, and being open to Him. To lead us, to change us, to transform us. To set our minds free from what was holding us back before and to remind us that with Him anything is possible.

It isn't just a time to endure, it's an opportunity to be seized.

I am privileged in my role at the Conference to hear about some of the new things that are happening around Victoria. There has been an explosion of creativity in worship and a resolute dedication to continuing the gospel work despite the difficulties. I hear about food banks that didn't exist before Coronavirus came. ADRA and local churches are working together and communities being blessed by those pantries. People in need are coming to get food, and are being greeted and welcomed and are so grateful for help from loving people. I hear about churches, worshipping online now, welcoming back long-lost members of their congregation. Connections are being strengthened between those groups and evangelism at a local church is now world-wide! I hear about youth groups coming

together in prayer and building up the local worship service. I hear about connections being made across the world; international speakers who never could have come otherwise are now speaking at our churches and some of our local online services are being watched by international groups who have found their service online. I hear about online churches coming together and long talks into the afternoon. I've felt incredible fellowship with people through a screen that I wouldn't have been able to hear or meet with if not for technology.

These things are not happening despite the pandemic, they are happening in response to it, and are overcoming it.

Because God cannot be put into lockdown.

Because God is doing a new thing in our midst. Can't you perceive it? "I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland," (Isaiah 43:19). God has promised to lead us through the liminal spaces of our lives, and not only lead us through, but help us thrive through it.

Even when we think we are in the middle of the worst this pandemic might have to offer, God is near us. He speaks to us in His still small voice, telling us He is doing a new thing. Do we perceive it?

There's no doubt the pandemic has presented serious challenges to our church, but what if we can become a church where people who are lost in their own wildernesses, in the liminal spaces of their lives, could come and find support and help to navigate through it? Find a connection to One who supplies living streams of water in the wastelands?

What if we could say to the searcher "Come with us, we know the way." – Then I think it might be worth walking through the wilderness after all.





# MY STORY is His story

Sharing stories of how God is at work  
in the lives of our members...

## A Part of a Bigger Narrative...

Ministry has been a significant experience in Tau Poasa's faith journey, for as long as he can remember! He has kindly shared his journey with us. You can read the full account at [vic.adventist.org.au](http://vic.adventist.org.au) in the news section. But to recap, as a child, Tau was always inspired by his Sabbath School teachers and he longed to do something bold for God. Public speaking was not something he was keen on, so being a pastor was completely out of the picture, but he often contemplated other ways of sharing his faith.

In his 20's he moved to Australia and lost his focus. Priorities changed and for a time he 'wandered.' But he firmly believes that no matter how far off track he went, God was present, showing up in numerous ways, reminding him that God had a plan for his life.

And eventually God called Tau back to what he originally aspired to and more, as he is currently undertaking his ministerial internship at Geelong church – as a pastor!

"We all have scars from life in one way or another," he says, and his own



Tau appreciates the opportunity to work side by side with Geelong church members

body bears scars that daily remind him that it is through God's grace he is alive. Each scar we have tells a story and if we let them, they can remind us "to strive forward each day with a prayerful heart asking God to heal and forgive."

COVID-19 has brought a whole new experience in my ministry," Tau says. "It's been a challenge for me, particularly because using an online platform is a whole new dimension. I had to learn and adapt my mindset to the changes, as I was not tech savvy. However, with those changes and struggles I can honestly say it's been a rewarding experience." Tau has found connecting with the church family via zoom each Sabbath, prayer meetings throughout the week and Bible studies have been a blessing despite the uncertainty and the unprecedented times we are living in. "It takes me back the early church of Acts 2. How, despite the hardship and persecution the faithful followers of Christ faced, they remained committed to fellowship and were eager to hear and learn of the good news about Jesus."

*Tau's full testimony is available at [vic.adventist.org.au](http://vic.adventist.org.au) under News & Notices*



Ayan will be baptised with her sisters, as soon as restrictions allow

# Church News

## Studying through Corona

### Werribee and Point Cook Churches

Ayan and her sisters grew up believing in God, and have recently joined the Adventist community in Werribee and Pt Cook with their family, learning to love the time apart from their daily worries, and the fellowship with each other and the wider church family every Sabbath. At the beginning the pandemic, the three of them commenced Bible studies with Pr Danijela Trajkov, and they are looking forward to baptism when restrictions ease to allow it.

## Pandemic Paves the Way

### Springvale Spanish Church

During these months that the pandemic has been keeping us apart, Jaime, living in Chile, has gone from a sceptic watching his brother get baptised and married via Zoom here in Melbourne, to a newcomer joining other Springvale church members in Zoom Sabbath School each week, to undertaking Bible studies with a pastor in preparation for his own baptism. For his family, this is nothing short of a miracle. Praise God.

USE THE QR CODE ON PG 2 TO READ ARTICLES IN FULL



From mocking his sisters' faith, to a believer, Jaime is hoping to be baptised soon



After multiple date changes due to the pandemic restrictions, Jenny was overjoyed to finally be baptised

## Dodging Covid to be Baptised

### Geelong Church

Raised in the Adventist church, Jenni turned away as a rebellious teenager. She suffered much and numbed herself from the world and its pain through substance abuse, becoming dependent. Her health declined and she knew she needed to find peace with herself but didn't know how.

"I began my pathway back to Jesus," says Jenni, "with just a prayer every now and then." With encouragement from her sister, Donna, and books such as Steps to Christ, her strength grew, she became aware of the Holy Spirit in her life, and found a relationship with Jesus, talking to Him often. "Now," she says, "I have now found peace in Jesus." She thanks God every day for the healing of mind and body He has given.

Many have helped Jenny on her journey. She had Bible studies with Donna and the church pastor, for more than a year and then had to postpone her baptism twice due to Covid 19.

Finally, she was baptised in Geelong Church on Tuesday, 4 August, bringing the occasion forward from the weekend due to the impending lockdown the following day.

Fortunately, restrictions were such that 20 of her family and friends were able to be with her for this very special day. Despite the hail and being officially the coldest day of the year, her heart was filled with joy and the warmth of God's love.

Gavin Rowe



Carlos and Anna have found that when we let Him, God can bring good out of our personal troubles

## All Things Work Together for Good

### Gilson College Church

Gilson members were asked to share what good God had done in recognition of how He has moved in each individual's life differently, during the pandemic. Here are some exciting responses!

"During the early stages, Providence guided me to a virtual seat at an evangelistic series 'Re-imagining God'. From just a few YouTube videos, my perspective of God flipped from a God who condemns because He is just, to a God whose mercy is revealed in His justice. Applying this perspective of God to my previous life experiences, I now knew that the God, who is Love, is the God who had allowed my trials and encounters to happen, so that I can grow into the person He created me to be.

Motivated to share God, I decided to study His Word in depth. Fast-forward, God has blessed me with opportunities to profess who He is to my work colleagues through my personal testimony and by sharing His Word with them.

I praise God for the extra time given me by the pandemic, allowing for personal prayer and devotion, reflection and praise and opportunities to declare His persona of love to those around me.

Carlos

"I have learnt to really live out the verse 'be still and know that I am God'. For hours I have exercised within my radius, listening to podcasts and deepening my understanding of God's character and love, listening to praise songs and watching the swans I pass grow up month after month.

I've enjoyed the simplicity, and in this space I have found more time to question, wrestle, listen and grow... and simply be with God."

Anna



## Welcome Clyde Group

The Dandenong Filipino Australian church has been building a church plant project in the Clyde area of Melbourne. The plant was recently granted Group Status by the Conference administration. Congratulations. We look forward to watching your growth to a Company and ultimately joining the Sisterhood of Churches.

## Pr Laien Hao

Pr Hao joined our pastoral team serving the Gateway community part way through this year after previously serving as youth director and regional director for the Chinese Union in Hong Kong. He is passionate about sharing the gospel and especially in empowering youth and young adults to be active disciples of Jesus.

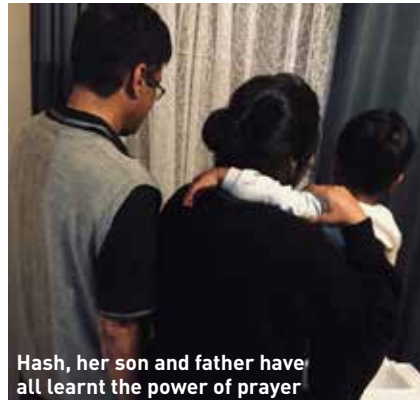
He met his wife in a church plant in Hong Kong, and they are blessed with two beautiful boys.

We welcome them to the Victorian Conference and pray they have settled in well, in spite of the difficulties faced moving countries and resettling during the pandemic.



Pr Laisen Hao joins Gateway





Hash, her son and father have all learnt the power of prayer

## Tragedy to Triumph Traralgon church

*Born into a traditional Indian culture, Hash is from a Hindu background. Her parents arranged her marriage with a man living in Australia, whom she first met when she moved here several years ago.*

Unfortunately the marriage was difficult, and in the middle of one night, her husband threw a pregnant Hash out of her home, with just \$2 in her pocket.

Finding her way to a train station, and with the help of a police officer who got her on the train, Hash was able to go to South Eastern suburbs, where she had friends.

Able to stay with her friends, who are Christian, Hash joined in when they studied the Bible and her interest in Christianity was sparked. She began learning to pray to God for His blessing on her life.

When her baby was born, Hash found a house for her family and left her friends to move there, with her father who was visiting from India. She also started looking for a Christian church near her home that she could attend. One day she struck up a conversation with a lady she happened to meet at the supermarket. Her father, who was visiting again, mentioned to the lady that she was looking for a church to attend. The lady invited her to Pakenham Church that Sabbath but the timing was not good. She invited her again the following week but again, Hash could not make it. The following Sabbath, the lady was going to her son's place for the afternoon and invited Hash again. Hash enjoyed her time in their home and so, when asked again, she agreed to go with

them, this time to Traralgon Church, the following week.

Hash was overwhelmed, her first week at Traralgon, by the way she was welcomed into the church family. She met one of the elders, Hank, who was willing to help her study the Bible, although they had some difficulty finding a suitable time and it took about three months before a regular study time was lined up with Hank, his wife Jean and Hash. But during this time, she continued to attend church.

Her father, who has been with her during the pandemic, joined in. Together they learned that Jesus is the most important person. "Learning about the love of God, Dad and I want to be baptised" Hash says. "When Dad returns to India, he wants to tell the rest of the family."

God keeps coming through for Hash. He has helped with her housing. Her employment. Leading her to a church family. She is so grateful to Him, and to the elder who has so patiently taught and explained things to her and her father. And together they are looking forward to the day they can testify to their faith through the waters of baptism.

God has turned a tragedy into a triumph, the effects of which will be felt as far away as India when Hash's father returns home.

*Hash with IntraVic*



The Lilydale Kids Club team rose above the lockdown restrictions to engage kids in their own homes as they took part in this year's Kids Club

## Kids Club in a Box Lilydale Church

**USE THE QR CODE ON PG 2 TO  
READ ARTICLES IN FULL**

*For the last eleven years, Kids Club during the September holidays has been on the Lilydale Church calendar.*

Unsure how it could be done during Covid-19 lockdown, the team decided to give it a go and threw everything they had into it. It was certainly a challenge: import delays; procuring needed items locally during a 5km travel restriction;

retail only happening via online orders or click and collect; filming drama skits, with each person in a different location... But it was a huge success, with over 136 kids attending, a large percentage being from unchurched backgrounds.



# Conference News

## Executive Update From the President

Acting CEO for AdventCare, Mr David Reece reported on the redevelopment plans for the Whitehorse facility and the Independent Living Units at Whitehorse and at Yarra Ranges.

He also provided reassurance that safety and wellbeing are of paramount importance at all times. Updates from health and medical authorities are continually monitored and followed and the recent High Tea which was incorrectly reported in the media as a staff party, was a staff initiative to lift the spirits of the residents. AdventCare maintains appropriate use of PPE at all times, and staff wore masks at the afternoon tea. During the brief dance routine, the dancers did not wear masks, but immediately put them back on afterwards. This is in line with DHHS guidelines for face coverings in workplaces and this has been validated by the Department. It is clear that the media misrepresented the nature and intent of the High Tea. This has been confirmed by the numerous positive reports from those who were there for the event. In March this year, the layout and seating of our dining areas was revised to meet State PHU guidelines for social distancing. For more information, please contact Mr David Reece.

We thank God that there have been no COVID 19 cases at any of our AdventCare facilities and we invite you to pray that God will continue to protect and lead AdventCare.

An update on Pavilions was received from Mr Galen Gan. We are excited that if all continues as planned, those who've purchased a unit will be able to move in before Christmas! The units that have been completed are looking just great! There is still an opportunity to buy in to Stage 1 – so if you've been looking, it's time to make the move!

And we received positive financial reports from Mr Graeme Moffitt for the Conference, Schools and AdventCare. We thank God for His blessing and for the faithfulness of His people.

Big Camp 2021? We continue to evaluate whether it will be possible to run Big Camp in 2021. There are some positive signs, but it is still too early to be sure. So we plan to run Big Camp if we can – and if not, we're leaning towards an on-line camp experience at Easter time and regionally based smaller camps where it is possible.

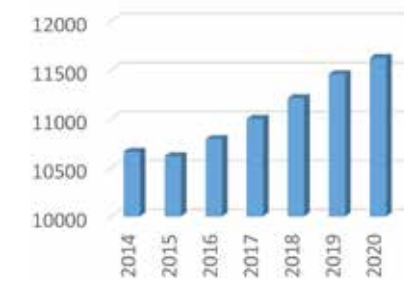
Please continue to pray that God will open the way as we go forward in anticipation of greater freedom in the future.

Thanks for your faithfulness.

*Graeme Christian*

Regarding membership growth, comparative data to the end of the 3rd Quarter 2020 shows growth similar to 3rd quarter last year in spite of a whole new set of COVID related challenges. We know there are a number of people awaiting baptism and look forward to the time when that will become reality and we can see the result of the work that's been done in 2020.

### 3rd Quarter Membership Growth Comparison



Pr Gillis also reported that our Conference has more pastoral workers per member and less office workers per member when compared with all other conferences in Australia (see below). It was reported that we have one field staff member for every 126.4 members – representing the best ratio of pastors per member of any conference.

Other comparative data shows that in 2019, Victoria had the second highest total tithe for the year and the second highest tithe returned per member of any conference in Australia.

Mr Brian Mercer, Education Director, presented a detailed positive report of the operation of our school system in the face of COVID challenges. We thank God for our wonderful students and their families, our excellent leadership team at ASV, our principals, teachers and support staff.

	VICTORIAN CONFERENCE	AVERAGE OF ALL AU CONFERENCES
Pastoral Staff: Member ratio 1:	126.4	1:163.9
Pastoral Staff/Total Staff	73%	61%
Tithe per member	\$1424	\$1362



## Pavilions Blackburn Lake

Construction is progressing, despite the pandemic restrictions having impacted site works. Both the workforce and supply chain have been significantly effected requiring the project team to adjust rapidly to the changed work environment. Completion is forecast for mid December, having only been delayed a few months from the previously expected October date.

Through out this time, the project team maintained communication with the purchasers, keeping them informed and helping them know they were cared for and supported.

Since restrictions eased the allowed work force has increased to 85% capacity and the builders quickly moved to accelerate the construction within allowances, reconfirming their expectation of completion of Stage 1 mid-December.

The project team have also reintroduced viewing appointments with the easing of restrictions. If you or someone you know is interested in a closer look, please make an appointment by calling Mary George on 0455 616 337.

We ask you continue to pray for the success of this project, for the current and future purchasers and everyone involved in the Pavilions development.

The display unit is furnished and ready for inspection





# Adventist Schools through COVID-19

Our schools have faced similar learning, teaching, infrastructure and technological challenges to all other schools here in Victoria. It has been difficult, very time-consuming and emotionally draining for our teachers yet our schools have continued to offer high quality Christian education through these difficult times.

I have seen ingenuity, creativity and concerted hard work from our team. Schools have adapted to online learning and morphed their programs to meet this rapidly changing environment.

Teachers have also taken the 'covidunities' presented to showcase their extraordinary talent and have used the online medium to demonstrate the true essence of Christian Education. Loving Christian care and concern has been most notably seen in the way our team has ministered to our communities. For example, online Chapel programs have been a feature of our schools. Chaplains have been outstanding in their creativity and message. All school families have been invited to online worship, with many accepting these invitations. Schools have delivered, along with learning materials, well-being packs to families, with special hand-written messages from their teachers and our bus drivers have exhibited outstanding service in delivering these packs.

Our Team members believed that school enrolments could be affected by both COVID-19 and subsequent economic challenges. At this stage we are not seeing this scenario, but rather, our student numbers are remaining at record levels and more importantly, enrolments are strong for 2021 – praise God.



Gilson College



Edinburgh Primary



Henderson College



Heritage College

The Early Learning Centres (ELC's) have continued to function throughout this time and have not skipped a beat, with student numbers higher now in our ELC's than before Covid struck! A BIG thank you to our ELC educators and staff who continued to provide exemplary on-site and online learning for our little ones. These continued enrolment prospects, I believe, are evidence of what has already been expressed – that the parents have 'seen' the ministry of our teams to their families. The feedback from our school communities has been so positive, with schools receiving a huge number of emails, messages and heartfelt notes along with food, flowers and gifts from their grateful communities.

God's leading has also been evident through the building programs that have been able to continue through this time. All our schools are growing and we are needing infrastructural change to support this growth. These projects have continued unabated this year, as it has been determined that they are critical infrastructure development and we have received significant funding through both the State and Commonwealth

governments.

A number of building projects have been completed this year including the Gilson (Taylors Hill) Year 7/8 expansion; Gilson ELC Building; Henderson College Arts/Food & Nutrition building, as well as the much anticipated completion of Edinburgh College's four new primary classrooms in October. The biggest of these projects is at Heritage College, (Officer Campus), where we received a \$5 million grant towards a \$5.9 million project. The primary school has outgrown its four classrooms and this project will add ten new classrooms to its campus. This project only started in July yet it is on track to be open by the commencement of school in 2021.

Our leaders and teachers are delighted to have our students return to the classroom. Brick and mortar schools are nothing without having our students in attendance. Through this crisis we have had clear evidence of both the working and blessings of God and we believe that through the witness of our teachers, our schools have championed the spirit of Adventist Education.

Brian Mercer

## Limitless Children's Ministries

*What a year! There have been so many times when I've wondered if I'd been transported into some kind of action movie where there's people trapped in their home during a pandemic while someone runs around saving the day. Mind you, in this scenario I am definitely not the hero! Not even one of the main characters. Just a barely seen extra trying to get through each day with minimal tantrums and tears (from both myself and my kids!).*

But while much of this year has seemed like an uphill battle, there have been reasons to celebrate and I have no doubt our kids will remember this time in their lives. For those with kids at school, we now have a whole new level of appreciation for our teachers!

One of the things that has been most incredible to see is the way that parents and churches have still prioritised their kids' spiritual development. In a time when we all just wanted to go hide under the covers and wait till the year was over, parents have been spending time helping their children to know and love Jesus even more. To rely on Him through this tough time. Sabbath School teachers have invested time each week making sure

that kids still get to experience something special on Sabbath. That it is still a day where we put aside the rest of the week and focus on Jesus.

It's been such a steep learning curve, figuring out how to do everything online. I'm so grateful to all the Children's Leaders who have put so much time and effort into doing this. Who have gone the extra mile to make sure the kids stay engaged.

We are not limited by our circumstances, because we have a God who is bigger than anything we can experience here on Earth.

Continue to let God be your guide as we navigate this weird and wonderful world we live in!

Julie Catton

## ADRA in the Thick of It...

*As you can well imagine, ADRA has been...well...thriving, for want of a better word through 2020.*

While the circumstances have not been good, through God's grace, relationships have been built, church members have become more active as they have volunteered their time, and bridges have connected ADRA, as Christ's hands and feet, with the wider community.

Just this year, since the pandemic was announced, eleven churches not previously active in this way, have joined forces with ADRA. Most started with the goal to provide food for the needy, however with Rebecca's encouragement, their influence has expanded as they have liaised with other Conference departments to offer more, such as healthy eating and depression and anxiety recovery programs.



Thank you to all our volunteers

In the wider humanitarian aid community, ADRA has developed a reputation for its reliable support. After its support in the Bairnsdale region during and after the fires earlier this year, when the pandemic began spreading in Melbourne, the Shire nominated ADRA Bairnsdale to be linked with the COVID hotline for those needing deliveries of food and care parcels. The organisers of the Queen Victoria Market have expressed gratitude The Welcome Place sent a letter of commendation. (Use QR code on page 2 for full story).

Rebecca Auriant

Normally October would have seen our churches out collecting. Without the annual income from the Appeal and our Op Shops remaining closed for most of the year – ADRA needs your help more than ever. .

You are still welcome to raise funds for the ADRA Appeal – it does not need to be just in October. Go to [www.adra.org.au/hangon](http://www.adra.org.au/hangon) where you can donate, or register to fundraise and ADRA will get you started.



If you or your church are looking for ideas for your children while we are not able to meet in person, there are a number of pre-recorded programs online that can help!

Beginners/Kindy  
Happy Hearts [shorturl.at/fpFJM](http://shorturl.at/fpFJM)  
Primary  
Kings Kids [shorturl.at/dtzGJ](http://shorturl.at/dtzGJ)  
Juniors/Teens  
Reset [shorturl.at/exzF5](http://shorturl.at/exzF5)

Our yearly Advent Calendars are now available. This calendar helps us keep the 'real' meaning of Christmas alive in our families. It is aimed at preschool/primary aged children. Each day there is a Bible verse to read together along with a question to discuss. There is also a 'Challenge' – some which can be done as a whole family and others to be reported on at the end of the day. Each challenge is designed to get kids thinking about how they can show love and kindness to people in their community.

This year the challenges have been adapted to be COVID safe.

The calendar sells at cost (\$10). If you would be interested in purchasing one of these calendars, either for your own family or as a gift, please email [juliecatton@adventist.org.au](mailto:juliecatton@adventist.org.au).





# Leading the Way in the Tech Age!

## VicYouth

When COVID struck at the beginning of 2020, VicYouth had already been using Zoom and other online platforms for two or three years for Pathfinder Advisory meetings. Technologies like Skype and Hangouts made it possible for more remote and regional leaders to have access to the Advisory, giving broader representation to Pathfinder ministry (with the greater Melbourne-

COVID has had a real domino effect. Instead of only one or two connecting into Advisory meeting via video each month it was now every member Zooming in for every meeting.

A downside of COVID which has become more apparent through our many zoom meetings, is what is known as survivor guilt syndrome. As many

mean so much to everyone across our ministries. Mindful of this and the sense of isolation; hearing of people struggling and despondency setting in, we initiated a number of e-huddles.

We started with Pathfinder directors and leaders initially, to introduce them to both a national emergency Pathfinder curriculum and modified

interest from all over the world; South Africa, Brazil, Germany, China, USA, Kenya, Canada South Africa and more! Over the course of seven weeks, I ran six sessions of "Community Connect" and we had over 60 people participate from fifteen countries.

Participants would meet together on zoom and following a brief introduction, each person would have seven minutes to talk to someone before moving to the next person.

The feedback from the Community Connect sessions was encouraging; people enjoyed meeting others that they would not have otherwise met.

Adversity begets creativity. This is not something I would have tried, had we not been in this COVID season.

Community can be fostered in the online space and this venture showed me that this is an area which has a lot of potential. I am looking forward to developing this into the future – whatever that may look like!

*Rosemary Andrykanus*



based advisory members still attending in person). It has been a real blessing to have regional clubs represented, giving them a voice at the table in the direction and future of Pathfinders in Victoria.

Of course everything changed in March this year when the pandemic struck, putting everyone and everything into a spin. Up until this point, VicYouth's ministry involved predominantly face-to-face events. These all had to be cancelled or postponed; some indefinitely, some until 2021. Even now some have been pushed forward again, into 2022.

of our meetings are "borderless", the contrast between what different people are experiencing and feeling has been increasingly evident with the severe restrictions we have been experiencing in Melbourne. To quote one person who responded after one meeting recently, "...sorry for my being very quiet tonight. I struggle and feel guilty when I hear all the trials you all are going through."

This is a reality we haven't experienced before and for which we are trying to effectively minister to. Because nearly all our in-person events have been cancelled or postponed this year we have lost those significant "touch points" that

Victorian Pathfinder award criteria. We have had two Zoom meets with Pathfinder leaders; two with our Youth leaders and Adventurer leaders.

These meetings have been a real encouragement with the support that comes from sharing of ideas and challenges and the realisation that there is someone else going through something similar. And that there is a bigger picture... one where God is still in control. We would come away from each meeting with a deeper level of understanding and empathy and a renewed sense of community and shared hope in our God.

## A Testimony from VicYouth

People like being with people, even introverts! When lockdowns started in March, no one knew how long they would last. And in Melbourne, the duration certainly exceeded all expectations! This has proved to be a time where many have experienced feelings of loneliness.

When it started I wanted to do something to help foster community in the online space. I run an instagram page targeted towards 18-35 year old Adventist young adults which currently has over 1500 followers from around the world. I started wondering how I could use this platform to help people find community

in the virtual world. After seeing a few Instagram pages run their own versions of "speed friending," I was inspired to try this out too.

I asked my followers if this was something they would be interested in, and the overwhelming majority said yes! We had over 160 expressions of



*The vast majority of the recent Growing Together summit's participants were very much energised and enthused by the weekend's teaching, equipping and local church-based planning, on how to grow together as a Jesus-centred community.*

To develop a culture that grows all generations of a community in unity around Jesus, the Fuller University researchers encouraged participants from each of our local churches to listen to what the church members, participants and attendees wanted, thought and felt about pretty much every aspect of church life. They discussed including and empowering young members, developing a culture of empathy, intentionally fostering warm relationships, prioritising young people and families in each area of church life and developing a culture of being the best neighbour to our communities.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the summit was the reinforced principle of listening as the first and most vital aspect of leadership and cultivating a culture of growing together as a Jesus-centred church. The researchers presented practical approaches to implementing these values and helped participants in setting realistic expectations for developing a culture in a church setting. They detailed real scenarios, such as the majority of one US-based church who protested to keep their rotting foam roof because it was 'crucial' to their 'church's identity and culture', only then to humbly marvel at the stunning arched wood frame after the rotted roof had been removed - reunited again in awe of the old beauty of their house of worship.

Real stories like these taught participants that any change, even good change, can be met with serious resistance, and that time should be taken to foster a Jesus-centred culture, to listen and to figure out ways to work together on our own church's goals. The best goal, worth putting our energy into, is a Jesus-centred community that constantly grows together - each member, young and... not-so-young serving each other in brotherly love, as Romans 12 puts it.

*Bianca Martin, Attendee*

# Finance Report

It is great that the Covid-19 restrictions are starting to lift in Melbourne. Hopefully by the time you are reading this, even more restrictions have been lifted.

The Victorian Conference has been blessed by the faithfulness of its members during this time, in returning their tithes and offerings. Because of our members' faithfulness, the Conference has been able to meet and even exceed its tithe budget for the year to date. We have been able to continue to function without the need to reduce staffing. Each of our departmental and team leaders have carefully managed their department's expenditure during this year and have been able to save in many expense areas, primarily as a result of having to provide resources and support to our churches in a different manner than previously.

Additionally our Aged Care system has been blessed in that we have not had a single Coronavirus Case in our facilities and over the last 12 months we have seen the finance of the company turn around significantly, so we are now operating with a strong operating surplus.

We praise God for our blessings, and thank you for your faithfulness.

*Graeme Moffitt, CFO*

## Office Closure

Please note that the Victorian Conference office and ABC will close for year end at 12.30pm on Wednesday, December 23 2020, reopening its doors (even if just metaphorically speaking, depending on what restrictions, if any, we are operating under at that time) on Monday January 4, 2021.

Staff take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful and blessed end of year break, praying we will all be able to enjoy this time with our families where ever they are, and praising God for bringing us through 2020.



# A Time to Plant and Harvest

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven...  
A time to plant and a time to harvest. [Eccl. 3:1,2]

2020 has seen a variety of "seasons". After the eventful 2019 harvest unlike any other in Victoria, this year promised more of the same.

Then the fires hit, the pandemic halted the world and restrictions have been our way of life since.

But even in this season, it's fair to ask, "What is heaven's purpose? What is God doing in this 'planting' time, or is He just giving the fields a 'rest'?"

Let's reflect on this reality. Last year the Lord of the Harvest blessed us with just over 350 new believers. In the first quarter of 2020 He added another 91 new believers (a record high for 1st quarter additions to our faith).

Was this all because of Revelation Today? No, the Holy Spirit utilized that event to bring over 70 people through baptism, and more are preparing for that sacred joy! So where did all the others come from?

Maybe it is because God has been teaching us more about discipleship –

remember "Come to Him and go with Him"? What we've seen is the followers of Christ more closely following Christ by preparing people to receive Him, sowing the gospel seed more freely, cultivating the budding plant more diligently and reaping a fruitful harvest. This has been a time to harvest.

Then COVID hit! Now it's more of a time to plant. God has not been surprised or deterred. He continues to do what is in His nature to do – love people to His kingdom. Even with the restrictions and difficulties, God has blessed with over 50 precious people joining our church since April. Most of us, however, have known little of this as our attentions have understandably pivoted to more internal matters of church life – how is everyone coping with the lockdown, how can we distribute essentials to people in need, who is missing at church, and virtual outreach endeavours.

While we've all struggled with the changes, many have endeavoured to blaze new trails.

Visit [Vic.adventist.org.au](http://Vic.adventist.org.au) or use the QR code on pg 2 to read about some of the initiatives that have been born of adversity.

**So what can we expect for next year?** Let's review the basics:

- Jesus commissioned us to make disciples
- Harvest Victoria is about



discipleship – coming to Jesus and going with Him into the harvest field.

- Discipleship is only experienced in relationship to Jesus, one another and the people in our communities.
- In reaching out to people in our community we endeavour to:
  - » Prepare the soil of their heart by genuinely befriending them.
  - » Sow the gospel seed by introducing them to our best friend Jesus.
  - » Cultivate the budding growth of new life by studying the vitalizing truths of God's word.
  - » Harvest the matured plants and love them to the body of Christ.

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray to Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." Matthew 9:37,38

We want to help you realize this vision of Jesus – an army of labourers in His harvest. Come to him every day by abiding in Him and He in you. Then go with Him and see where He is at work. When you see Him working, join Him.

Here is a challenge to every Adventist in Victoria. For 2021, model authentic discipleship by reaching out to two people to lead them to Christ (don't know how? We can help with that). And to everyone in a position of leadership, to our pastors, teachers, chaplains, Bible workers, Elders, ministry leaders...multiply your influence by mentoring two members in your role to become disciple makers themselves.

The time for this heavenly purpose is now!  
*Andrew Jasper*

# Living in Aged Care in 2020

We live in challenging times but to date, AdventCare has had no COVID cases in our homes and units. I am proud of our Managers who provide leadership, wisdom and effective quality systems to keep our residents and staff safe. We have strong monitoring and screening processes in place which have proven to be effective. Because of this we are still able to admit new residents who may need to move to aged care or retirement living from the community or hospital.

Since July we have restricted visiting to limited numbers of visitors for clinical and compassionate reasons only. This has helped to keep our residents safe and we have used other methods of engagement such as window visits and Zoom catch ups with their families to maintain social connections.

Earlier in November, we opened up visitation to our aged care homes on an appointment basis and this was welcomed by the residents and their families as an initial step to further easing of restrictions. We will continue to be vigilant and care for our residents and support the staff in making AdventCare a safe and happy place to live.

We have also increased the range of internal activities for the residents



Stage one saw the demolition of the old Blair Wing which was over 50 years old

to provide them with engagement and to lift their spirits in these extraordinary times. Our activity staff have been innovative in organising many events.

We have also been fortunate to have our Chaplaincy team, who have assisted and supported both residents and staff, providing spiritual and emotional support as they deal with the current restrictions and challenges of everyday life. They provided the residents with opportunities for worship and reflection at a time when our local churches are restricted from providing additional worship and support services.

We remain focused on our Mission which is "To provide excellent care in a safe and secure Christian environment". The success of our services reflects this focus and we are motivated to ensure that our residents live the best life they can by caring for their physical, social, spiritual and mental wellbeing.

AdventCare is well connected with the community and this is reflected in the near full occupancy levels at our aged care homes and units at a time when the industry occupancy averages are far lower. There is high demand for our services and the hospitals and referral agencies see us as a preferred provider of choice through many years of service to the community.

AdventCare is doing well and we are grateful for the support from the Church community. We look forward to being able to get out to the Churches in the future to talk about our services and what we can do to help your members now and in the future.

*David Reece*



A camera was installed to provide a live feed of the building works so the residents could watch the progress



Eight new units at Warburton are planned for completion mid 2021



DARP trainees graduated between Melbourne's lockdowns



Two of the new initiatives that were started in 2020



## DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

### AdventCare Whitehorse

We have commenced the redevelopment of the Whitehorse aged care home at Nunawading, which will see an additional 48 aged care beds for the community, along with key new infrastructure improvements including a new kitchen, laundry, cafe and staff areas. This project will be completed in late 2022 and will enable us to meet the increasing demand for our services from the community and local Churches.

Building is expected to have commenced by the time of print and the 48 extra beds will be available at the end of 2021.

We are also rebuilding the affordable Central retirement units at Nunawading, expected to be completed in February 2021, with the builders making good progress.

### AdventCare Yarra Ranges

We will build eight new retirement units adjacent to the existing site and these will be completed around mid 2021. Many local Warburton Church members have shown keen interest in being part of our community and we look forward to being able to extend our retirement services to the community.

### Pavilions Blackburn Lake

AdventCare is shortly to commission and will manage the first stage of Pavilions on the old Camp-ground adjacent to the Conference building, and this will have 41 retirement apartments and an excellent range of facilities such as café, cinema, library and community spaces for residents and their families. There will be a Concierge service to assist residents and we will build a strong Pavilions community as the future stages are planned and developed.



# ROAD TO BETHLEHEM



LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE

IN SPITE OF THE RESTRICTIONS AND UNCERTAINTY WE HAVE BEEN UNDER IN 2020, THE DEDICATED TEAM WHO RUN THE ANNUAL NATIVITY WALK THROUGH HAVE CONTINUED TO WORK TIRELESSLY, COMING UP WITH A PLAN FOR CONTINUING THE OUTREACH EVENT, CONTACTLESSLY.

**WHEN: DECEMBER 13 AT 7.30PM**

Road to Bethlehem will premiere on Youtube  
and for the remainder of December it can be viewed on the Road to Bethlehem website.

**REGISTER: [HTTPS://MELBOURNE.ROADTOBETHLEHEM.ORG/](https://melbourne.roadtobethlehem.org/)**

Register online to attend the premiere virtual event. Invite your family and friends.

## GIFTS: A PART OF OUR EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH

Large numbers of registrations are anticipated but our budget constraints will allow only a limited number of free gifts. So that these gifts can have their intended evangelistic impact for our virtual attendees, we are asking our Adventist church family to please consider declining this offer of a free gift when registering online. This will allow for more families outside of our church to receive the blessing of a free gift and to learn of the true story of Christmas.

However, the Advent Cards are available from the BLESS YOU COMPANY esty store:

<https://www.etsy.com/au/BlessYouCompany/listing/898677125/rtb-advent-calendar>

USE CODE: 'RTB2020' for 20% off

BLESS YOU | COMPANY  
SPREADING LOVE • JOY • KINDNESS • HOPE

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS AND HOW TO DONATE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE GIVES,  
GO TO [HTTPS://VIC.ADVENTIST.ORG.AU/ROAD-TO-BETHLEHEM-2020-UPDATE/](https://vic.adventist.org.au/road-to-bethlehem-2020-update/)

 ROAD TO  
BETHLEHEM

The Editor reserves the right to edit and include or exclude all articles submitted. Those not included or heavily edited due to lack of space may be posted on Facebook and the Conference news website. The Editor also reserves the right to restrict advertising – generally commercial advertising is not accepted and accommodation notices must be accompanied by a reference from the local Pastor. If accepted, notices will appear on Facebook and the Conference website. Neither the Editor nor the Seventh-day Adventist Church is responsible for the quality of the services advertised and posting of them does not indicate endorsement. Photographs of minors must be accompanied by parental/guardian permission to use the photos in print, social media and on the web. Bible verses are from various versions which may include NIV, NKJV and Clear Word.