

# Heartbeat and legacy

24 November 2024

## WELCOME

This morning is the final worship service here for the Croydon North congregation, so while today is a sad occasion, we come to celebrate and give thanks to God for all that has been fruitful and life-giving in this place, just as we also open our ears to God calling us to new adventures in faith.

## SONG

We stand in thanks before you (3 verses to tune Thornbury)

We stand in thanks before you;  
our God we give you praise  
for mercies never ceasing  
that brought us to this day.

For those who've gone before us,  
whose vision led the way,  
we lift our hearts, rejoicing,  
remembering them today.

Lord, help us carry forward  
their hope from long ago;  
here be your faithful people  
your loving grace to show.

The message of the Gospel  
to tell out loud and clear,  
the cross our inspiration  
as year succeeds to year.

In bread and wine and water,  
acknowledging God's grace,  
this 'Church upon the Highway'  
has yet a human face.

O, Holy Spirit, fill us,  
and strengthen us today  
to spread throughout this neighbourhood

your light, your truth, your way.

Words Jean Hill, member of Croydon North UC

## BIBLE READINGS

Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for our feet,  
**and a light to our path.**

[Ecclesiastes 3:1-12](#)

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

... God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live.

[Colossians 3:12-17](#)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Lord, may your word live in us  
**and bear much fruit to your glory.**

## MESSAGE Heartbeat and legacy

The first time I tried to visit the church here, I saw the big steel cross as I sped by on Maroondah Highway and realised I'd missed the earlier turn into the service road.

I remember driving into Gifford Village and it all seeming very modern and contemporary – a large block with lots of townhouse style accommodation and a bigger building in the centre, which houses this worship space and community centre. It didn't look like a traditional church site at all. Like every church, of course, Croydon North Uniting Church has a story to tell, some of which we have heard this morning.



It started 88 years ago as a church plant from Croydon Congregational Church. Its first Minister was **Rev Isabelle Merry**, who was the first woman ordained as a minister in the Congregational church in Victoria, back in 1937, and Croydon North was her first placement. So even back then this church was breaking new ground.

The Croydon North suburb we know today was largely developed in the 1960s through to the 1980s, as housing replaced farms and orchards. The Croydon North Congregational church was firmly embedded in the life of the community ... running a kindergarten and youth groups ...



In 1972, shortly after the new church was built on the site, the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the area got together to form the **Croydon North United Church**, as shown on this sign. This was five years before the formation of the Uniting Church from these same three denominations.

Again Croydon North was breaking new ground.

Fast forward to the early 2000s ... when Roger Gough from Uniting Care Harrison had

the vision to develop the Croydon North church site into independent living units that could be rented to people who struggle to find places in the commercial market, what we might call social housing. The vision also had a community centre at its heart, which could be home to the recently established community art program Gifford Arts which is still going today, as well as being a place of worship for the congregation. For the congregation, Gifford Village would be a lasting legacy to their witness and service to the community, again breaking new ground.

Gifford Village as we see today opened in 2014.

Uniting Care soon started the Gifford Village meals program that offers nutritious home-cooked style meals each week and also a welcome to community. When the program was threatened with closure due to the withdrawal of Uniting's Community Engagement Officer and the onset of Covid lockdowns, the congregation took over the running of the meals program and it morphed from dine in to take away.

Again it was an example of breaking new ground while serving the community.

The meals program continues to thrive and this year has seen a surge in numbers attending as many in the community struggle with the increased cost of day to day living.



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What is it that encouraged this congregation to fashion new ways of being church and new ways of engaging in God's mission in the world?

First is the **independent** and sometimes **non-conformist** way of thinking that was a feature of the Congregational movement, where nothing is ruled out and people are encouraged to try new things.

Second is a **mindset** that is confident enough to think that the church has something of value to offer the community, namely the good news of Jesus that makes a difference in the world.

Part of that mindset, which is something of a motto for the congregation, is summed up in the phrase '**Come as you are**'. Jesus welcomed everyone as they were, whether rich or poor, social influencer or social outcast, whether healthy or struggling with physical or mental illness. In a similar way, people are welcomed here just



as they are.

The reading today from Colossians is a good summary of this mindset.

It's a reading that is sometimes used at weddings as it neatly links together some of the ingredients for healthy relationships and healthy communities: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace and gratitude. And at the heart of all this is doing everything in the name of – or in the way of – Jesus Christ.



Third is a **heartbeat of service** that turns an **attitude** of welcome into **action**. This congregation is remarkable for how they just get on and do things, without fuss and without drama. That's not to suggest that this approach to mission is always easy or straight-forward. It's not. The types of people who live here at Gifford Village, and nearby, and the types of people who come to the meals program are most often struggling with some issue or another. We most often are not able to resolve these issues, but what we can offer is welcome and hospitality in the name of Christ.

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Most things do not last forever, whether ministries or congregations. They tend to follow a natural lifecycle of birth, growth, maturity, reproduction, decline and eventually death.

This cycle of life and death is eloquently captured in the well-known reading from **Ecclesiastes** that there is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to weep and a time to dance, a time to love and a time to live in peace.



While this reading is often used at funerals with its reference to a time to die, it has more wisdom to teach us.

- God makes everything beautiful at the right time.
- God has given we humans the yearning to know God, yet who remains forever a mystery.
- God has also shown us how to live – through the teaching of Scripture, through



the person and ministry of Jesus, and through the prompts of God's Spirit at work within us and among us.

- The writer concludes that there is nothing better than to be happy and to do good as long as we live. This has been part of this congregation's DNA.

It's similar to John Wesley's credo:

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*Do all the **good** you can,  
by all the **means** you can,  
in all the **ways** you can,  
in all the **places** you can,  
at all the **times** you can,  
to all the **people** you can,  
as long as **ever** you can.*

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As a community you have discerned that now is the right time to finish up as a worshipping congregation.

You are taking this step with independence and with grace.

What of the future?

The mission and the church's presence here at Gifford Village will continue.

The welcome and hospitality in Christ's name will continue.

But the members of the congregation will worship elsewhere, with the majority planning to join the congregation at Croydon, with whom strong links have been built over the last several years, including through the meals program.

That's enough from me.

It's time to sing a rousing hymn that asks God to hold us, feed us and lead us on our journey through life, and to help us give voice to our praise.