

livingtoday

Issue 96 // Spring 2026

Good news. **Locally.**

Mooroolbark & surrounds.



The **Hornbills** have landed

Food relief • The Living Room • Quiet Achievers

Hello from the Living Today team



Sport is a great bridge builder. In my younger and fitter years, I played in several sporting teams alongside women and men, young and old, captains of industry and school students, and those with years of experience or none. There is something special about being on a sporting team together where, once the referee blows that whistle, all those distinctions take pause, and the life of the game joins us all together for those 40 minutes or so.

In this issue of Living Today we are delighted to introduce many of you to the Hornbill Sports Club. But it is more than just a sporting club. Hornbill Sports Club aims to be an bridge builder through sport by bringing together both soccer and volleyball players and providing a service to the wider Burnese community. It is also great news for Mooroolbark as they plan to build a home base here in the main business area in a disused shop front. They have big dreams. To begin with, their new home will provide a place to do sporting club business and run tournaments, but they also plan to offer education classes and connection to local services. Or, for those not into sport, to drop in and provide essential social connections.

Food is also a great bridge builder. We all need it, and it makes things even better when we enjoy food together, as all sorts of people, generations and ethnicities can enjoy the meal. Sadly, access to food is not equal across the board and the financial means of feeding yourself, let alone a family, can be quite a demand on resources. So, in this issue we also highlight a local volunteering outfit that steps into the breach to provide emergency food relief.

Finally, I'd like to welcome a new writer to the Living Today stable. Dave Edgren joins us for the first time and, among others things, has a knack for writing children's stories. Welcome Dave, and thanks Ross (our talented graphic designer) for the wonderful stories you have provided over the last several years.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Matthew Gudze, Lead Pastor, Grace Communion Mooroolbark (sponsors of Living Today) on behalf of the Living Today Editorial Team

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Like to contribute?

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Mission statement To contribute towards and help foster a growing community spirit within our neighbourhood. We seek to achieve this by:

- Highlighting the many positives within our community
- Encouraging partnership in community initiatives
- Contributing to the process of identifying and addressing community needs and concerns



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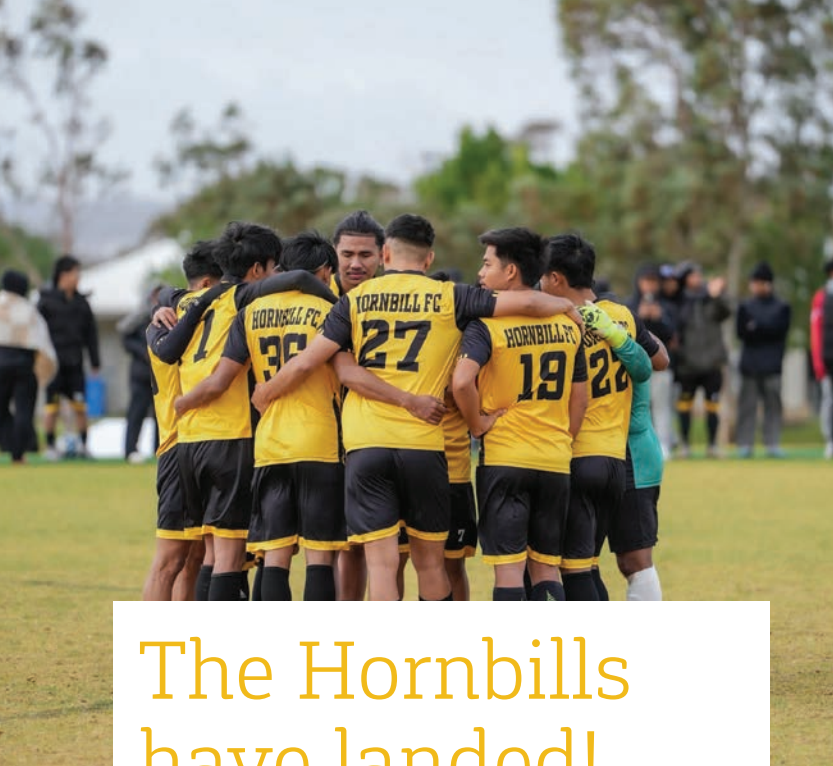
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We meet every Sunday at 10.30am at the Mooroolbark Community Centre. Come along and enjoy a service and stay for a chat, with delicious tea, coffee and biscuits.

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The Hornbills have landed!

by Randall Bouchier



On a recent beautifully sunny, warm yet brisk Saturday afternoon I walked to the Dorset Recreation Reserve to watch a game of soccer. Two teams were playing, one of which was a local club, the Hornbills.

As the game progressed, I struck up a conversation with a family group – grandparents and the mother of a player on the other team. When I mentioned that I was the chaplain of the Hornbills they wanted to know more about this team made up of players whose families once called Myanmar (formerly Burma) home. As we chatted, my new friends were fascinated by the Hornbill story. Before departing, they thanked me for introducing them to a little of the story of the ethnic Burmese groups who have gravitated to and settled in our region.

The Great Hornbill – see picture – is the state bird of Chin State in mountainous north-west Myanmar. Chin State is made up of culturally and linguistically distinct Chin tribal communities. In our eastern Melbourne region, the main groups represented are Hakha, Falam, Tedim, Zomi and Miso.

Many of the Chin people who have settled in our neighbourhood have experienced severe challenges and trauma in what was frequently a long journey to Australia – often via difficult, stateless years spent in India, Thailand or Malaysia. As I wrote in a previous article about a Chin family, many thousands fled their homeland to escape arbitrary arrest and detention, religious persecution and a range of human rights abuses from Myanmar junta forces.

The Hornbill Sports Club was established by six brothers and some friends with the intention of providing an opportunity for young Burmese people to come together as one on the sporting field with the important goal of building bridges between the diverse cultural and ethnic groups who have settled here.

Although I've been involved with the local Burmese and Chin community for 15 years, I became aware of the Hornbills only last year when I first met their President, Van Kheng Lawt who was working as an integration aide at a Mooroolbark Primary school where my wife and I mentor each week. Van and his wife Fam (who met whilst school students) were among the earliest Chin to arrive in Australia. Van and Fam completed secondary and tertiary studies here, and live locally with their three children.

Van was warmly welcoming when we met, and Mary and I admired his giftedness in connecting with and positively impacting the students with whom he worked, and their families.

They encourage players to play hard but fairly, and to remain respectful of opponents and officials.

As our friendship grew, we became increasingly aware of the positive work Van, and the Hornbills, were doing in the wider Chin community. Not only did the Hornbills seek to represent the best of their cultural heritage, they are also committed to providing opportunities for young people to excel through playing soccer and volleyball in local competitions.

The Hornbills champion the kind of behaviour that the predominantly Christian Chin community aspires to. They encourage players to play hard but fairly, and to remain respectful of opponents and officials. The Club's proactive approach to helping Chin young people excel and avoid antisocial behaviours finally convinced my wife and me, despite being time-poor, to commit to the club chaplaincy.

We've enjoyed attending soccer and volleyball games as we've been able – watching and building relationships with the players and coaches.

As well as seeking to build bridges within the Chin community, the Hornbills have sought to contribute to the wider community by becoming involved, for example, with our local community group, the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group (MUG).

Significantly the Hornbills actively seek to partner with a variety of public entities. Earlier this year, I accompanied the club management team to meetings with Victoria Police, Maroondah Council, Maroondah Nets and the Maroondah Volleyball Association, that, with their partnering support culminated in the Hornbills hosting a very successful volleyball tournament in early June for local and interstate Chin and Karen teams.

As I write, several months of conversations between the Hornbills, MUG, Mooroolbark Traders, Yarra Ranges Council and a number of community members have led to the securing of a Mooroolbark Terrace shopfront which the Hornbills plan to use as their Club headquarters. They plan to also use the premises for a range of activities, such as offering a connection point – a place where Chin young people and their neighbourhood friends can “chill” together in a safe, supervised space. The Hornbills particularly desire to connect with young people in their community who are isolated. They plan to also use the space to provide opportunities for young, gifted Chin graduates to start small community businesses. The Club is extremely grateful for the generosity of all those who have generously supported their dream.

The Hornbill initiative is an extremely important response to some of the generational challenges faced by young Chin and the older generation. These challenges are not Chin-specific but are faced to one degree or another by all nationalities who come to our shores. It's the challenging tension that arises when the older generation's traditional ways of doing things, rubs up against – sometimes abrasively – different ways of living which the younger generation are exposed to through their schooling and wider-community involvement.

The Hornbills hope to be able to help families navigate these challenges. One way will be by helping the parental generation understand the positive contribution that sport can make to their children's wellbeing and flourishing in Australia – encouraging parents to encourage participation and then supporting their children by attending games where possible. They plan to offer courses to help parents navigate raising a family in Australia. Equally importantly, the Club will continue to educate and help the younger generation appreciate the sacrifices, the hardships and traumas their parents have experienced in leaving Myanmar and settling here.

I'm looking forward to seeing how things unfold with a greater Hornbill presence in Mooroolbark. If the success the Club has had on the sporting field is any guide, we can anticipate healthy, positive outcomes.

As I write, the men's soccer team is preparing for the finals of the Australian Chin Community league after finishing on top of the ladder. One of the players, Jonathan Tung Dim, received the Golden Boot award in his division at the conclusion of this year's Victorian Churches Football Association season. The women's volleyball team recently won back-to-back titles in the Maroondah Volleyball League, remaining undefeated through the season. Recently, the team travelled to Adelaide where the women were the champions at the CCSay Cup. This year saw the formation of a men's volleyball side that competed for the first time in the Maroondah League. For the Club, the "icing on the cake" this year was receiving a Service to Volleyball award from Volleyball Victoria.

As they say, a picture paints a thousand words! I hope you'll enjoy the photos that accompany this article and that you'll join me in celebrating and supporting the Hornbills as they contribute to enriching our lives together! 





Providing food to those in need

by Mary Bourchier

Operating out of Shop 13, 66-74 Brice Avenue, Food Relief Inc. has been providing free, healthy and nutritious food to those in need since February 2026. Providing on average 20 tonnes of food rescued from landfill to those in need every month, this amounts to 110 tonnes of fresh food rescued from landfill in the past six months, from February to August, 2026.

This service provides over 400 families (1000-plus people) with fresh fruit and vegetables, baked and frozen foods, and long-life goods. Magazines and flowers are often an extra bonus and received with delight by recipients!

Run by Jenny and Bob and their dedicated team of over 40 volunteers, food generously donated by food industry partners is daily collected and sorted, cleaned, re-packaged and stored for distribution for daily free food stalls held at Shop 13. Food is also given out at weekly "markets" held in the Mooroolbark Terrace on Wednesdays from 12.00-1.00 pm, and on Saturdays from 12.30-1.30 pm.

Those receiving this assistance are asked to provide information regarding family size, locality where they live and cultural background. This information is kept private and helps Jenny and Bob and their team to better cater to the community's specific needs.

On alternate Wednesdays, hot pizzas are also on offer, generously donated by our local Domino's Pizza shop. And each Saturday, hot soup (made from any excess produce) and hot drinks with bread and cakes are also given out from the central Kiosk in the Terrace. These soup and cuppa activities have become a real hit with participants and provide an opportunity for community connection.

So, thank you Jenny and Bob and your tireless team for providing this huge assistance to those in need in our local community of Mooroolbark.

For more information or to volunteer to help: mooroolbarkfoodrelief@gmail.com 



The Living Room

Come in and make yourself at home

by Debi Slinger

There was plenty to celebrate at the official opening of The Living Room, as local residents, volunteers, staff, committee members and representatives from community groups gathered to mark an exciting new chapter at Mooroolbark Community House.

The story began in 2022 with the Mooroolbark Community Connect Program at Shop 16 in The Terrace. The program was established through a partnership between the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group (MUG) and the Mooroolbark Traders & Community Group (MTCG), funded through a Yarra Ranges Council Partnership Grant and coordinated by Cumulus Rising.

The owner of Shop 16 generously leased the space to the partnership, providing a home for the program from 2022 to 2026. Coordinators Ashleigh Clingin, Renae Jones and Beck Carter, together with a growing team of volunteers, helped create a welcoming place where people could meet, exchange ideas, take part in activities and feel more connected to their community.

Shop 16 also brought more people into The Terrace, creating activity, conversation and a greater sense of connection while supporting the businesses operating there.

Most importantly, the success of Mooroolbark Community Connect helped lay the foundations for Mooroolbark Community House. The people,

programs and connections developed through Shop 16 demonstrated the value of having a permanent community house in Mooroolbark. Renae Jones, who had coordinated Shop 16, was appointed Coordinator of Mooroolbark Community House, while Shop 16 continued to flourish and welcome new volunteers.

By mid-2026, an assessment of community needs showed that the program would benefit from a new direction. As Mooroolbark Community House already provides opportunities for social connection, activities and community programs, it made sense to incorporate this part of Mooroolbark Community Connect into the House.

The Community House Committee, Renae and Beck worked closely with the Shop 16 volunteers to make the transition as smooth and inclusive as possible. The Living Room was born after Volunteer Coordinator Rochelle declared that every house needs a living room, and she was right.

Every home needs somewhere to relax, connect, share stories, enjoy a cuppa, read a book, play a board game or simply spend time together. It is the heart of the home, where everyone is welcome and community comes to life.

That is exactly what The Living Room has been created to offer. It is a warm, informal space where neighbours can become friends and conversations

Photos this page: magnific.com



A warm, informal space where people can pop in for a chat, neighbours can become friends and conversations happen naturally.

happen naturally. People can pop in for a chat, join an activity, meet friends or simply find a friendly place to sit for a while.

The Living Room will continue to provide basic pantry items, a DVD library, a book exchange and craft activities, with other ideas and opportunities developing as part of the wider Mooroolbark Community House program.

Beck Carter's position has now been redefined as the Mooroolbark Community Connector, a role funded through the Yarra Ranges Council Partnership Grant. Her work will focus on building relationships, developing programs for Mooroolbark's migrant community and connecting local people with services. While closely connected to the work of the House, this is a distinct role with an important new direction.

The launch also provided an opportunity to acknowledge the many people and organisations who helped bring the program to this point, including the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group, particularly Jane Monk and Ian Skurrie, the Mooroolbark Community House Board, Yarra Ranges Council staff, Cumulus Rising, MTCG and the dedicated volunteers.

Rochelle and her team provided a warm welcome and light refreshments, with the sort of generous hospitality that made people want to stay, talk and enjoy the room.

The opening of The Living Room is not simply the end of the Shop 16 chapter. It is the beginning of something new, bringing its spirit of connection into the heart of Mooroolbark Community House. There are already exciting projects and activities being planned, with plenty more possibilities ahead.

The furniture is in place, the kettle is ready and the door is open.

Come in, make yourself comfortable and enjoy our Living Room. *lt*

Debi Slinger is *The Wandering Reviewer*, a travel writer and storyteller, collecting stories of people, places and the road between. You can follow her stories at linktr.ee/thewanderingreviewer.

Quiet Achievers

by Randall Bouchier

As I grow older – getting closer to “falling off the perch” – I’ve noticed that my delight and gratitude for people and this beautiful world we inhabit has grown enormously!

As a young bloke, I’d taken so much for granted. I hadn’t appreciated the value and significance of the people who week by week remove our household garbage, the dedication of nurses and others in the ready availability of health care, the gifted teachers who contribute so much to our lives, and the crucial importance of the volunteers whose giving of themselves ensures the survival of sports and service clubs, churches, community events and so on.

Last year, as has been the custom for well over a decade, our township group – the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group (MUG) honoured three “Quiet Achievers” for their long-time, sometimes unnoticed, dedicated contributions to our sharing of life in community.

Each of the three pointed to the collective contribution to the wellbeing of others in the settings in which they served.



Peter Stephenson

Peter Stephenson, long-time servant of the Barkers, our Mooroolbark Soccer Club, said of club volunteers, “We are people who believe that we are temporary stewards of something we want to see keep going.”

And of his Barkers involvement: “I love it! I love the game. Love the people! It’s a great social outlet. I love the very nature of volunteering, and without volunteers local sporting clubs cannot survive. I love the way the junior teams provide kids with a chance to get away from their screens to exercise, form friendships, have fun with their mates and learn some important life skills.”

I appreciate the crucial importance of the volunteers whose giving of themselves ensures the survival of our community.



Patrizia Parisi

Patrizia Parisi agreed to accept her award only if it was recognised as on behalf of the whole team at Mooroolbark's family-owned fruiterer, Mooroolbark Fresh.

Patrizia has a knack for connecting with people and offering her undivided attention – always offering a compassionate listening ear and a warm smile. She generates a spirit of welcoming kindness, so much so that one of the younger members of staff said they wanted to be like Patrizia – warm, welcoming, always smiling, helping people feel great about themselves.



Cindy Furby

Our third recipient, Cindy Furby, led a group of dedicated volunteers for over 25 years as the group knitted, sewed and crocheted appropriately sized garments and keepsakes for bereaved families as part of the Treasured Babies Program for Red Nose Australia (formerly SIDS).

Regularly involved for 60-70 hours a week, Cindy loved working with her team to help grieving families – to make a practical difference to families during perhaps the worst time of their lives. According to Cindy, Treasured Babies supports grieving families, enabling them to avoid the extra stress of searching for an appropriately-sized garment to dress their baby in.

2026 Awards

I'm eager to learn who will be the deserving recipients of MUG's Quiet Achiever awards this year! I hope you'll join us for the 2026 Annual Forum at the Mooroolbark Community Centre, 7.30 pm on October 14. Guest speaker Ram Siakhel will give us a glimpse into the challenging journeys from Myanmar to Australia made by some of the Burmese who have settled locally. [tt](#)



Colour in the soccer and netball loving hornbill!

Get creative and send a photo of your finished art to us at editor@livingtoday.org.au with your name and age – we'll publish a selection in the next issue!

Hard head

Part one

Kids story by Dave Edgren

Most of the blood on my face was dry by the time Mum drove up. It had only been a few minutes since the incident – or was it an accident? I sure know what I'm calling it.

"He threw that rock on purpose," I told the friends around me. "It hit me right in the head!"

"Yeah, but there's a huge wooden fence between us and them," one friend said. "He couldn't have aimed specifically at you."

Max, my shoulder monkey, climbed the fence and studied the angle of the throw. "It had to be a really high lob to get to you," he shouted. He jumped off the fence and ran over to me. Max got back on my shoulder – the shoulder not next to the cut and the blood. He said, "It's just bad luck, Danny." He continued mumbling, until Mum arrived, "Bad, bad luck! ... Bad, bad luck!"

The gooey mess on the side of my head, where the rock had hit, was still sticky and squishy. It felt like a sponge filled with day-old syrup. The kids standing around me kept telling me to stop touching it. But I couldn't. It felt weird and didn't really hurt anymore.

I pulled open the side door of the van. As the noise of the sliding door stopped I said, "Mum, I think I need stitches."

"What's new," she said. "What happened this time?"

"Sean threw a rock and hit me in the head," I said.

"I'd better have a look. Come up here."

I climbed onto the long bench seat behind Mum and leaned forward between the front seats so she could see the cut. The late afternoon sun lit up my head as it came into Mum's view.

"Oh, wow!" Mum said, "You're right. That's a pretty big gash. Buckle in."

"Told ya," Max said. "It's gross, too!"

As we drove to the hospital Mum asked lots of questions.

Yes, I was sure it was Sean. Because I heard him laughing after it hit me.

No, I didn't do anything to deserve it. I couldn't even see him when he threw it!



No, I don't know why he threw it. He's just a bully.

Yes, it hurt. Not as much as when it first happened.

When we got to the hospital we waited for a long time in the waiting room. Long enough to eat two chocolate bars from the vending machine and drink a can of 7-UP while watching an entire episode of M*A*S*H on the TV in the corner.

Finally, we were taken into a small room and two people made short work of my cut. A male nurse cleaned the area around the wound, put some numbing cream on it and shaved the hair around the cut. Then the doctor stitched it up with a needle and thread. "Seven stitches," he said. "Good thing you've got a hard head! This could have been much worse. Your skull is fine. Just a surface cut."

"Just?" I said.

"Well," the doctor laughed, "compared to the other things I've stitched up today, you can count yourself lucky!"

"Oh," I said. "Thanks, I guess." I wasn't sure what was so lucky about getting hit in the head with a rock.

When we were back in the van, driving home, Mum said, "You've had a pretty amazing day. I'm sorry it ended this way. Now tell me the whole story. What happened?"

To be continued



Lead with that!

by Dave Edgren

On the weekend of August 19-20, 2023 a man was arrested for lighting 12 small fires in various outdoor areas of Frankston, where he was living rough. August gets very cold in Melbourne, so it's no surprise that he wanted to be warm.

Amazingly, not one news outlet led with the other way the man attempted to stay warm. At the police station, when officers searched him, two live ducklings were found in his underwear.

Now, I don't know if ducklings are particularly warm, but what I do know is that two ducklings in your underwear beats 12 small fires, any day. So, why didn't anyone lead with that?

There's another extremely well-known story with a buried lead. Most of us have heard it and even used it to describe someone who is wasting their opportunities. "He's a bit of a prodigal son," we say. "She wouldn't be struggling if she wasn't such a prodigal."

The prodigal son is a well-known story told by Jesus about a rich kid who said, "Dad, I'm tired of waiting for you to die. Give me my half, NOW." Amazingly, the father does it. The young prodigal takes his new bank account to the city and wastes it on everything warm and shiny. A few years later, the money is gone.

The buried lead – The Loving Father – waits at home, pacing the porch, hoping for his son to come home.

All the while, the older brother gets up at dawn, heads into his father's fields, and returns after sunset. Every day. A hard worker.

One afternoon, the prodigal comes home. He's wearing torn, dirty clothes. He's been living rough. Who knows, he may even have some ducklings in his underwear. He's not the same rich kid who left home. He's hoping to be a servant, not a son. But the Loving Father runs to greet him, gives him fresh clothes and shoes and

invites everyone to a huge party that night, for his lost son who has come home!

As the older son is putting tools away in the barn, he hears singing in the house. He asks a servant what is going on.

"Your father is throwing a party for your brother! He's home!"

The older son refuses to go inside. So, the Loving Father comes out to him. "Your brother is home. The lost is found! The dead is alive! You have been living a life of plenty every day. You can have a party anytime you want. Come inside. Welcome your brother home!"

This story should not be called "The Lost Son" as it is in many modern Bibles. In reality, there are two lost sons. One ran away. The other got lost at home. Both lost their love for the Father. We are all one son or the other, at times.

The true lead character in the story is revealed at the end. God – The Loving Father – loves you and is generous and welcoming in every way. This is what Jesus meant by telling the story. God has a place prepared for you in his house. Lead with that!

Come join us at Mooroolbark Grace Communion Church any Sunday morning at 10:30. The party is just getting started, and you are welcome! 

This magazine is sponsored by Grace Communion Mooroolbark, a congregation of Grace Communion International. If you would like more information or pastoral support, our local congregational contact is Matthew Gudze on (03) 9737 0126.

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As I train my puppy, she's teaching me about God



by **Barney Zwartz**
Centre for Public Christianity.

We have an 11-week-old puppy at home, Bonnie the border collie, and – amid the turmoil, challenges, delights and unbearable cuteness – she has been reminding me of important lessons about God.

The first key truth is her irrepressible enthusiasm and openness to every new experience, even the vet, who shoved a thermometer up her backside, a vaccine up her nose, a needle in her back and drops in her eyes.

She seems to expect each minute to bring something good, whether it is spent in frantic dashing around the garden, leaping into the face of our older dog (the only member of the family not totally convinced Bonnie is a blessing) or in exhausted repose.

As a border collie, she is naturally super-smart. She learned to sit with merely three repetitions of the command (most dogs take 20-100 repetitions, and pugs or French bulldogs around 25,000), showing the importance of attention.

Bonnie's unshakeable trust in me is a model for how to trust God. She knows intuitively that I desire the best for her, even though I know how fallible I am. Unlike me, God does not make mistakes.

Her uncritical acceptance acts as a reminder of God's instruction to love generously and patiently, while – as all dog lovers know – she also brings the sort of simple joy and companionship that is priceless. Dogs offer something of the unconditional love of God, from their own nature rather than because of our virtues.

What most humans – and certainly I – can learn from our dogs is to live in the moment, to rejoice always. Above all is the lesson Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." Every dog knows that, and I should too. *lt*

This article has been republished with the permission of Centre for Public Christianity.
publicchristianity.org

Puppy image: magnific.com



We meet on Sunday for our Worship Service from 10.30am at the Mooroolbark Community Centre.

Come along, enjoy a service and stay for a chat with delicious tea, coffee and biscuits.

For more information visit our website

mooroolbark.gci.org.au

For other local church details please visit their websites:

Life Ministry Church
lifeministry.church

Mooroolbark Baptist Church
mbc.org.au

Mooroolbark Salvation Army Corps
salvationarmy.org.au/locations/victoria/v330/mooroolbark-corps

Mooroolbark Uniting Church
mooroolbark.unitingchurch.org.au

St Peter Julian Eymard, Mooroolbark Parish
spje.org.au

upcoming events



Christmas carols

Mooroolbark Community Centre.

Save the date: 6.30pm,
19 December 2026

Featuring The Mooroolbark Singers.



Community forum and Quiet Achiever Awards

Mooroolbark Community Centre.

7.30pm, Wednesday 14 October 2026

Guest Speaker: Ram Siakhel, President Australian Chin Community

Ram will weave in stories about Burmese refugees illustrating their challenges in coming to and settling in Australia along with stories of gratitude from the Burmese who've settled here.



Mooroolbark Miniature Railway (mmr.org.au)

4th Sunday each month (except December) January to May 11-4, June to August 11am-3pm, September to November 11am-4pm.
Train rides are \$4.00 each, with children under four riding free.

Community Garden Market



The last Sunday of every month

9am-1pm, 8 Station Street, Mooroolbark (opposite Hookey Park)

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