livingtoday
Good news. Locally. Mooroolbark & surrounds.
Issue 97 // Summer 2026/27







Bethlehem comes to town

Gardens of Mooroolbark • Christmas activities • Our Chin community

Hello from the Living Today team



"We'd like it done before Christmas!"

This is not an uncommon cry we hear, or say ourselves, at this time of the year as the pressure rises. Christmas Day might as well mark the end of the year, the summer break, the school holidays, and the summer travels all rolled into one. If things are not done by Christmas, well, it's likely you are going to have to wait until well into the new year. Needless to say the lead up to Christmas, with all that this time of year entails, can be quite busy. This is all in the hope that after Christmas there might be a time when things can slow down a little.

In this summer issue of living today we bring some ideas together to do just that – to help you slow down, to reflect and engage with others and what matters the most.

Our lead article features the many gardens and green spaces in Mooroolbark. Just the mere placement of ourselves around tall trees or plunging our hands into the soil to garden naturally slows us down. I am sure there are studies about that sort of thing. We have some wonderful community led gardens in Mooroolbark. So why not test it out and check a few out if not done already.

Books also lead us to times of slow reflection. Our local Mooroolbark librarian, Sue, says in her article that "Summer is the perfect time to slow down, relax and enjoy a good book", and the library, fresh off some renovations is ready to show you the way.

Finally, we feature some of our Christmas events going on. We here at Living Today revel in this time of the year where we can reflect on the big story of God with us in the smallness and humility of a baby. The story is told many ways and one of them is the biggest event right on our doorstep. You can read about the "Road to Bethlehem" and the many thousands of people which are expecting to visit again in December this year.

Finally, it is also the first time that we have an article from the Australian Chin Community (Eastern Melbourne) Inc to recognise the appreciation of this growing community in our area.

Christmas lawmhnak nan dihlak cungah um ko seh.
May the happiness of Christmas be upon you all.

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

Photo: magnific.com

livingtoday

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GRACE COMMUNION MOOROOLBARK

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Like to contribute?

If you have a good news story about people or groups who are an inspiration to the community, contact us via the details above.

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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

GRACE COMMUNION MOOROOLBARK

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mooroolbark.gci.org.au

We meet every Sunday at 10.30am in 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 gardens of Mooroolbark

by Randall Bourchier





Life is pell-mell these days! Demands, distractions, deadlines…

Stop! Take some time-out! Create some space to reflect!

Good advice! Our mental and physical wellbeing – not to mention our spiritual wellbeing – depends on it.

I grew up in a city where beautiful gardens, leafy streets and wide attractively cultivated avenues had been deliberately created in the mid-1800s by far-sighted city leaders wanting to transform a landscape heavily scarred from years of intense mining activity during the goldrush.

Ballarat has since been described as the Garden city. As a child I remember regular refreshing visits to the beautiful lakeside botanical gardens home to a shady, mysterious fern-house and hothouse displays of magnificent multicoloured begonias which inspired the annual Begonia festival – Ballarat's equivalent of Melbourne's Moomba.

Beauty – such a gift! And human consciousness – this sadly taken-for-granted gift that enables us to reflect on and appreciate beauty as well as create spaces and places that lift our spirits.

Having experienced the positive effects of a garden environment as a child made me appreciate Mooroolbark when we settled here 40 years ago. There's so much beauty to see and enjoy in this place if we take the time to amble instead of scramble and allow the brain time to relax and reset.

Have you ever taken a slow, refreshing wander through the shaded laneways of Bickleigh Vale? Those several shaded hectares bordered by Pembroke, Cardigan and Pine Roads - a village community designed by







Australia's famous pioneering landscape designer Edna Walling. Give it a go this summer and as you wander, be respectful of private properties.
bickleighvale.com.au

My wife Mary and I have long enjoyed walking to Mooroolbark along the treed beauty of Cambridge Road as it heads eastward to Five Ways. You might recall Yolande Pickett's article on Mary's shop-front artwork in Manna Lane – Celebrating Fields of Wildflowers – wildflowers that grew years ago in Cambridge Road. **mooroolbark.gci.org.au/livingtoday/uploads/LivingToday_Spring2025_FA_digital.pdf**

When you next visit the Library, you might think about taking time to enjoy the beautiful artwork decorating that building and sit for a while in Hookey Park. Enjoy the tranquil shade of the trees and the sounds of children in the playground. Or you might choose to linger in the Rotunda next to the rose-garden backed Mooroolbark War Memorial where you might reflect on the sacrifice of so many who preserved the freedom we enjoy in Australia. **yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Explore-Yarra-Ranges/Parks-Recreation/Hookey-Park**

You could also cross the road on Hookey Park's western boundary and visit the Mooroolbark Community Garden. Take time to enjoy the beauty of the place and appreciate the contribution that a small group of volunteers has made to our town in transforming what was a nondescript car park until September 2023 into a vibrant, green community hub.

You might find yourself drawn to the Hobbit house – especially if you have children with you. Or you could select some of the free garden produce. Everyone is welcome to harvest ripe fruit, vegetables and herbs, as long as there is a green sign next to the plant. Please select only enough for one meal, and, if able, a gold coin donation in the slot in the shipping container door enables the garden to continue to flourish.

You'll notice some well-organised propagation igloos where volunteers raise punnets of vegetable, herb and flower seedlings for planting out in the garden and for reasonably priced public sales.

You might even consider helping the friendly band of volunteers who offer their time, skills and energy to make our Community Garden a reality. They say: You don't need to have gardening experience, just a willingness to donate a few hours of your time. We need skills from all walks of life. Maybe you could help at our fundraising BBQs or write grant applications.
mooroolbarkcg.org

If tall established gum trees inspire you, there's a memorable stand in the space between the Senior Citizen's Hall and Mooroolbark's Community House in Brice Avenue. I love these smooth trunked giants with their dappled colours.

If you time it right, you could drop into the Community House where the Living Room volunteers are happy to offer a cuppa and a chat, before taking a peek behind the Community House. You'll be surprised to discover some garden beds organised and maintained by the Garden Club. The Club grows food in these garden beds for those who visit the Living Room to harvest as they have need. The garden is organic – using no pesticides or herbicides.

When I wandered past a few days ago, the produce looked impressive, as the photograph shows! If you enjoy gardening and want to learn more by sharing hints, tips, tricks, seeds and cuttings over tea, coffee





and biscuits you're welcome to join the Garden Club which is a term-based activity organised by the House. **mooroolbarkch.org.au**

We're not done yet! Wander easterly across the playing fields and you'll discover a local treasure on the corner of Hull Road and Taylor Road – just up from the Mooroolbark Fire Station.

It's a marvellous place, Candlebark Nursery. Currently served by over 130 volunteers this community nursery, its staff and financial members are committed to helping us care for our environment through growing and supplying indigenous plants sourced from our area.

Why local indigenous plants? Quite apart from our native fauna, such as birds and insects, depending on our local flora, these indigenous plants are well adapted to local soils and climatic conditions. According to the nursery: Once established, many need relatively little watering or maintenance, making them a practical choice for gardeners who want an attractive garden without excessive demands on their time or water supply.

Pop into Candlebark during opening hours. Wander around, buy a plant, visit the frog pond, chat to the staff and volunteers about why they're so enthusiastic about our local flora. You might even want to become a volunteer and share in collecting seed, propagating plants and looking after them as they grow. **candlebark.org.au**

Mooroolbark is such a gem! We're spoiled with options for wandering through garden settings, for learning to grow and propagate plants, for gathering fresh produce for a meal, for volunteering with any of the groups I've mentioned. And for places where we can reflect, be refreshed and restored.

Mary Oliver, Pulitzer Prize winning American poet in her 2007 collection *Thirst* described our experience of taking time to enjoy our surrounds as something akin to prayer:

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch
a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway
into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak. lt







MUG Forum 2026

by Jane Monk, Secretary, Mooroolbark Umbrella Group

On Wednesday evening 14 October 2026, Mooroolbark community gathered for the annual MUG Forum and Quiet Achievers Awards at the Mooroolbark Community House.

This year we were honoured by the presence of Ram Siakhel as our Keynote speaker. Ram is the Secretary of Australian Chin Community and shared courageously about the challenges people from Burma / Myanmar have faced in their journey to escape from a country that does not want them, to create a new life in Australia. Mooroolbark has one of the largest Chin communities (from Burma/ Myanmar) in Victoria.

Ram helped us understand how the Chin youth are caught between the Australian culture and the Chin culture embodied by their parents and grandparents, and how the parents and grandparents struggle with the English language and trying to instil in their children the cultural values and practices they have relied on in their home country. Ram also shared the struggle of their being quite different cultural groups from Burma / Myanmar who speak different languages and have different cultural practices that can create challenges in cross cultural dialogue.

Ram shared his deep gratitude for the way in which the Mooroolbark community are embracing the Chin community, offering a place of welcome, and opportunities to start a new life here in Australia.

Three people were presented with the Quiet Achiever award.

Randall Bourchier spoke about Van Kheng Lawt, who is President of the Hornbills Sports Club. Van was invested in helping provide opportunities for young people to excel through playing soccer and volleyball, and at the same time assisting in helping these young people avoid antisocial behaviours.

A club goal is the commitment to building bridges between the diverse dialect/cultural Chin and Burmese groups. Thus, the Hornbill teams contain players from various language groups, in the attempt to avoid the competitive “silo mentality” that can readily take root between groups.

Van’s humble approachability, good humour, and capacity to engage so personably with others is a gift to our Mooroolbark Community.

Marion Stott spoke about Jimmy Dunne who consistently shows up at key public events in Mooroolbark, such as Celebrate Mooroolbark, ANZAC and Remembrance Day services, to help with sound systems and general logistics in making these events happen. Jimmy contributes his love of music and his kind and generous heart to our community.

Matt Gudze spoke about Craig Ingham who was recognised for a job that if all goes well you don’t notice him. But if something goes wrong, guess what? All eyes move over to him. Craig has provided the sound system at many of our outdoor events at Hookey Park such as Celebrate Mooroolbark, the annual ANZAC and Remembrance Day services. Craig takes great delight in doing what he does so well and not being noticed! Craig puts his hand up to provide the sound systems at community events because he sees it as an opportunity to use his talents and to give back to the community.

To round out the evening there was an acknowledgement of Randall Bourchier’s significant contribution to the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group over the past 14 years as founding President, having stepped back from this role at our AGM in April this year. The Mayor Richard Higgins presented Randall with a letter of appreciation for his contribution to the community.





Chin community

A Story of Resilience, Self-Reliance and Contribution

by Ram Siakhel (Secretary of Australian Chin Community (Eastern Melbourne) Inc.)









The Australian Chin Community in Eastern Melbourne represents a compelling story of resilience, self-reliance, and meaningful contribution to Australia's multicultural society. For many Chin families, Australia provided a place of safety and opportunity, enabling us to rebuild our lives while contributing to the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of our new homeland.

Since its establishment in 2007, ACC-EM Inc. has been characterised by a strong tradition of self-reliance and collective responsibility. Guided by values of cultural identity, shared experiences, family, faith, service, and hard work, community members have supported one another in settlement, education, employment, and community development. Through volunteer-led initiatives and mutual support networks, the community has consistently demonstrated its capacity to address challenges while fostering independence and resilience.

Today, the Chin community, like other multicultural communities across Australia, makes significant contributions across a wide range of sectors. ACC-EM Inc. members are employed in health care, aged care, disability services, education, manufacturing, transport, construction, hospitality, and agriculture. Many have established successful careers while others have created small businesses that contribute to local economic growth and employment opportunities.

The community has also produced a growing generation of university graduates, teachers, nurses, social workers, engineers, accountants, community leaders, and public servants who are actively contributing to Australian society. Young people continue to excel in education, leadership, sports, and community engagement, reflecting the high value placed on learning and civic responsibility.

Beyond economic participation, the Chin community contributes extensively through community service. Community leaders, faith-based organisations, and volunteers dedicate countless hours to supporting newly arrived families, assisting with settlement, interpreting, mentoring young people, organising cultural events, and connecting vulnerable community members to essential services. These efforts reduce social isolation, strengthen community wellbeing, and promote social inclusion.

The community is deeply grateful to Australia and its people for the opportunities and support provided over many years. We are thankful to the kindness, care, and professionalism we have experienced in schools, hospitals, government services, local councils, and neighbourhood communities. Such experiences have fostered a strong sense of belonging and reinforced the values of inclusion and mutual respect for us.

Like many migrant communities, the Chin community has faced challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustment, and navigating unfamiliar systems. Equally, the broader community has often had limited awareness of our history and experiences. However, through engagement, partnership, and open dialogue, these challenges have become opportunities to build stronger relationships and greater understanding between the Chin community and various government agencies and local communities in the Outer East regions.

As we look to the future, the Australian Chin Community (Eastern Melbourne) Inc. remains committed to contributing to Australia's prosperity, diversity, and social cohesion. Our journey reflects not only the resilience of the Chin people but also the success of a multicultural society where newcomers are empowered to participate, contribute, and thrive. Through hard work, service, and civic participation, the Chin community continues to make a positive and lasting contribution to the nation we proudly call home.

For many Chin families, Australia provided a place of safety and opportunity, enabling us to rebuild our lives while contributing to the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of our new homeland.





Mooroolbark Library

Join, renew, reconnect... read!

by Sue Walters Team leader, Mooroolbark library on behalf of the team Hanna, Emma, Isabell, Matt, Shelley and Russell

Mooroolbark Library has returned to the Station Street location after extensive roof renovations, with everyone welcome to visit us, attend events and of course borrow items!

Summer is the perfect time to slow down, relax and enjoy a good book. This year, Your Library is inviting you to make the most of a library membership by taking part in two exciting seasonal reading programs: BIG Summer Read for children and young adults, and Readers' Choice for adults. These activities offer a wonderful reason to join the library, reactivate an expired membership, or rediscover everything Your Library has to offer. Both programs run from 1 December to 31 January.

The BIG Summer Read encourages children and young people aged 0-18 to keep reading during the school holidays. Participants can read books, listen to audiobooks, enjoy graphic novels, picture books, or have stories read to them. Every reading experience counts.

The challenge is free to join and participants who track their reading throughout summer can earn digital badges and enter prize draws. Last year, thousands of young readers across Victoria took part, making it one of Australia's largest public library-supported reading challenges. You can also keep track of your reading through a paper entry.

For families, it's also a great opportunity to explore the extensive range of children's books, audiobooks and digital resources available through a free library membership.

While children are tracking their summer reading, adults can join in the fun through Readers' Choice.

This popular program encourages readers to discover new authors, share reviews and recommendations, and help identify the books our community loves most.

Whether you enjoy contemporary fiction, crime, memoirs, romance or history, Readers' Choice is an opportunity to celebrate reading while connecting with fellow book lovers across the region.

Join, Renew or Reconnect

Both programs highlight just how much value a library membership provides. Members have access to thousands of books, eBooks, audiobooks, magazines, online learning resources, events and programs, all at no cost.

If you've recently moved to the area, have never been a member, or haven't visited the library for a while, summer is the perfect time to sign up or reactivate your membership. A membership card is free and unlocks access to both the BIG Summer Read and Readers' Choice programs, as well as a wide range of services designed to inspire learning, creativity and connection throughout the year.

Visit Mooroolbark Library this summer, at 7 Station Street, Mooroolbark, to join the challenges, borrow your next great read, and discover what's waiting for you at Your Library.

Visit your local branch or go online at www.yourlibrary.vic.gov.au for details and registration information.

Photos this page: magnific.com

The big day
Part two

from *A stone's throw* by Dave Edgren

The day started early in the morning. It was an hour before we needed to leave for school. I was sitting at the table with Mum, Dad and my sister Jo.

"You're going to need a healthy breakfast to have enough energy for today!" Mum said as she walked up to the table holding a stack of plates. She laid the top plate, filled with pancakes, in the middle of the table. Then she put the other four plates in front of us and sat in her chair.

"Yeah," I said as I grabbed three pancakes. "I can't wait for the jog-a-thon this afternoon."

"You've done a good job getting sponsors," Dad said as he loaded his plate with pancakes. "How many did you end up getting?"

"17" Jo answered for me because my mouth was full of pancake.

Dad looked at Jo, "17 Sponsors! Are you his manager?"

I laughed, "Yeah she manages to annoy me - a lot!"

Max jumped to my shoulder and smacked me on the side of the head. "Be nice, you bully!" I tried not to flinch too much from the smack. Nobody else could see my imaginery monkey Max and he knew it. He was always trying to tell me what to do! Sometimes I responded to Max and everyone acted like I was crazy. This time I held my cool.

Dad asked, "How much money did you raise?"

"$42 a lap," I said proudly. "That means I'm easily going to make hundreds of dollars for the school. Maybe even thousands!"

Dad laughed, "We will be proud of you no matter how many laps you do. You've told a lot of people about the good things the school is doing in the community!"

"That's true," Mum said. "Now what about this morning? Have you decided which animal to take to the Animal Parade?"

Jo clapped her hands. "Take Thumpy, he's so cute!" It was true. Thumpy, my sister's rabbit, was very cute.

"What category will he win?" I asked. "There will be lots of cute things. Winning that one will be the hardest."

"What are the other categories," Dad asked.

I slid off my chair and ran to my room. "I'll get the list," I shouted as I went. "It's on my bed."

Moments later, back in my chair, I read the bottom of the advert for the Animal Parade. "Each child must lead their animal a short distance. Animals will be expected to walk in front of a panel of judges. Awards will be given in the following categories: Cutest, fastest, tallest, smallest, loudest, quietest, funniest, most amazing, most intelligent and most obedient."

"We have a lot of animals to choose from," Mum said. She was right. We lived on a small farm and had goats, chickens, rabbits, ducks, geese, cats, dogs, fish and birds. "Maybe you should think about which animals could fit each category."

I was deep in thought. Suddenly I blurted, "I know! We can win the 'most amazing' category."

"How?" Jo asked.

"With Goose Goose," I said confidently. "She follows my red wagon wherever it goes."

Dad laughed, "Does she really?"

"Haven't you ever seen that?" Mum clapped her hands, "What a great idea, Danny!"

"So," Dad said, "what happens?"

"Go get the wagon," Mum said. "Walk in front of the windows. Show your Dad."

I jumped down from my chair and headed toward the back door.

"Wash your hands, first," Mum said.

After a quick stop in the kitchen, I headed to the barn. I grabbed Redzy - my little red wagon - on the way. I went to the pen where Goose Goose slept and opened the gate. Then I walked back to the house pulling Redsy behind me.

Max sat facing backward on my shoulder. Looking at the wagon and Goose Goose following close behind, he said, "That goose is seriously in love with Redzy!"

As we walked past the front window Jo was clapping, Dad was laughing and Mum was nodding her head.

I came into view first. Redzy bounced along behind me. And clucking away, her head down, eagerly following the wagon, waddled Goose Goose.

When I came back into the house, Dad was still laughing. "She does that every time you pull the wagon?"

"Yup," I said. "Every time."

"Well," Dad said, shaking his head, "That is certainly amazing!"

To be continued

Background: magnific.com



Image created by Google Gemini

The unspoken hero of Christmas

by Dave Edgren

Christmas is a time of family gatherings, gift-giving, and the inevitable need to pretend, with all your heart and face, that you really like the knitted jumper Grandma Gertrude made for you. Nodding, as your eyes fill with tears of manufactured gratitude, you listen as she says again, "You've grown so much! I just knew last year's jumper wouldn't fit anymore!"

Ok, I'm being a bit cynical. But you know what I'm talking about.

Sometimes gift-giving is more about the giver than the gift.

"Thanks, Grandma," you say, and meaning it, you add, "I love you!"

From my childhood, a sketch from the children's TV show Sesame Street comes to mind.

Bert is in the bath when Ernie's favourite toy, Rubber Ducky, floats up through the bubbles. "If only Ernie had a place for that duck," Bert thinks.

Ernie finds a paper clip on the floor and returns it to its home, Bert's prized paper clip collection. "If only Bert had a place to keep his paper clips," Ernie thinks.

Secretly, they each make a private trip to Hooper's Store to buy Christmas gifts for each other.

Bert trades his paper clip collection for a soap dish.

"Ernie will love this," he says to Mr Hooper. "It's for his rubber ducky!"

Mr Hooper asks, "Are you sure? You love these paper clips!"

Bert is sure and leaves with his gift for Ernie.

Later, Ernie enters Hooper's Store with Rubber Ducky. "I need a gift for Bert," he says. Then he sees a wooden cigar box on display. "Could I trade you for that cigar box? It will be perfect for Bert's paper clip collection."

Mr Hooper asks, "Are you sure? You love your rubber ducky!"

Ernie is sure and leaves with his gift for Bert.

You can imagine the manufactured smiles and tears as Bert and Ernie open their gifts on Christmas Morning and hear excited explanations from their best friend.

"It's a cigar box! For your paper clip collection!"

"It's a soap dish! For Rubber Ducky!"

Neither knows what to say. So, they both just offer a quiet, "Thank you."

The uncomfortable silence is interrupted by a knock at the door. Mr Hooper has a gift for each of them. You already know each gift. Ernie and Bert are truly tearful and grateful as they receive their favourite things.

"Thanks, Mr Hooper!" the best friends say together. "But we didn't get you anything."

"I've received the best Christmas present ever," Mr Hooper replies, "to see that everybody has exactly what they want for Christmas."

Mr Hooper is the unspoken hero in the story, as are all adults at Christmas. The gifts match the kids because we know our children. Likewise, God knows His children. You and I, like Bert and Ernie, are being watched over by a kind and loving grown-up. God sees us, loves us, and gives us gifts that complete us. This is why God sent his Son, Jesus, as a baby to be born and live here in our world.

Christmas reminds us that Jesus is our eternal gift from our Father above. No manufactured smiles or tears needed. God knows precisely what we need and gives generously even today, as he did on that night in Bethlehem. May you feel as blessed this Christmas as you truly are!

lt

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.

Doesn't Christmas have pagan origins?



by Amy Galliford, Centre for Public Christianity.

Days before the start of Advent, a Muslim friend asked me why Christians celebrate Christmas when its roots are so tangled up with pagan traditions.

Initially, I was thrown – he had a point. Historians debate the details, but it is widely suggested that the Roman festival of Saturnalia coincided with Christmas in both calendar and custom.

Fast-forward to our contemporary celebrations, clad in plastic and steeped in consumerism, and you could argue that the pagan entanglements of the season only persist. Our Christmas celebrations are as far a cry from Christ's nativity as the pot-bellied Santa Claus is from St Nicholas – the fourth-century bishop from whom he inherits his name.

This blending of the sacred and secular is often met with resistance in both camps. But, where we insist on separating such categories, the Christmas story seems to disregard the distinctions altogether. Here is God himself subject to the fleshiness and filth of birth in a stable, to the demands of a Roman Imperial census, and to the adoration of foreign kings and lowly shepherds alike.

The Christmas story is, in fact, most profound where it is most profane. It boldly declares that, in taking on the untidiness of time and flesh, bureaucracy and custom, God demonstrates his will to be with us. The divine did not demand that we shed our humanity or the particularities of our time, place, and culture; rather, it offered itself within them. Wherever it has travelled, Christianity has donned the customs of its host culture – but so did Christ.

This aspect of the Christmas message is echoed in one of the names assigned to Jesus: "Emmanuel", meaning "God with us". Such a story suggests that God is entirely undeterred by the chaos of our culture – however pagan, profane, or plastic it might be.

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

GRACE COMMUNION MOOROOLBARK

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

Living Today is brought to you by GRACE COMMUNION MOOROOLBARK

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

Christmas around Mooroolbark

Community Christmas carols

Featuring The Mooroolbark Singers.



Mooroolbark Community Centre auditorium
125 Brice Ave, Mooroolbark.

Saturday 19 December 2026

6.00pm BYO picnic on the lawn
7.00pm Doors open
7.30pm Carols

There will be a mix of seating and room for kids to dance. There is limited capacity so to reserve a seat, scan the QR code and complete the form.

Lilydale Community Christmas lunch



A big welcome is extended to all to come and join in the 2026 Lilydale Community Christmas Lunch! This family friendly event will again be hosted by the cheerful volunteers from Holy Fools.

Holy Fools, an independent, grassroots, nonprofit organisation has supported individuals and families experiencing homelessness and trauma in the Yarra Ranges since 2009. Creating community, giving material aid and advocating for change at every level of government, in 2025 Holy Fools was honoured as the Yarra Ranges Australia Day "Community Group of the Year."

This free Community Christmas Lunch will be held on Friday, 25th December 2026 from 12 noon to 2 pm at St. Patrick's Parish Community Centre, 40 Jones Street, Lilydale.

Come along and enjoy delicious food, drinks, fun, entertainment (including a visit from Santa) and a Christmas Hamper!

To book phone 1300 133 889

Road to Bethlehem

by Dave Edgren







Get ready to step back in time. Road to Bethlehem promises an unforgettable experience for the whole family, allowing you to walk the dusty path to the manger just as the shepherds did over two millennia ago. Road to Bethlehem is a free re-enactment of the Christmas story for the general public.

From just 800 visitors in 1995 to over 15,000 every year, the total number of Road to Bethlehem visitors is well over 300,000! The Road to Bethlehem walk-through has become a consistent part of the holiday plans of many Melbourne community members.

Road to Bethlehem honours a commitment to delivering a presentation based as closely as possible to the Bible story of the birth of Jesus. From the opening announcement to the finish at the stable, the scenes and costumes are carefully designed to reflect first-century Middle Eastern culture. The guidelines specifically prohibit secular holiday elements like Santa, ensuring the focus remains entirely on Jesus.

One of the most touching traditions of the pageant is the commitment to casting real infants. The production puts out a call for local babies less than three months old to play the role of baby Jesus. This live connection—hearing a real baby cry in the manger—has a profound impact on visitors, bridging the gap between the ancient story and hearts today.

Road to Bethlehem is a free Christmas gift to Melbourne from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The scale of operations is massive, with operating budgets scaling from $15,000 in 1997 up to nearly $120,000 today to ensure a high-quality production. The pageant has introduced everything from live camels and donkeys to sophisticated lighting, sound systems, and dedicated activities for kids.

The roots of Road to Bethlehem trace back to a humble and wet beginning. The first event took place in December 1995 in Nunawading, Melbourne. Inspired by a drive-through Christmas experience in the United States, the plan was made for a walk-through event suited to Australia's mild summer evenings.

That inaugural year was a literal baptism by fire—or rather, by rain. As torrents fell and thunder clapped, water gushing across the ground, a small team of 30 volunteers hosted 800 visitors over two rain-soaked nights. With no idea how the event would be received or what it would eventually become, they pushed through with a vision to share the story of Jesus with the community.

The difference between the first and second year was night and day, with an attendance jump to 1,850. This year, approximately 16,000 Road to Bethlehem visitors will be served by an army of more than 400 volunteers, a far cry from the modest team who braved the elements during that very first production.

The overwhelming response from the Melbourne community has propelled the event to expand far beyond itself. What began as a local initiative has inspired similar events across Australia and New Zealand. Over the years, the Road to Bethlehem experience has been adopted in Mildura, Tauranga, Gosford, Brisbane, Perth, Tasmania, South Australia and Christchurch.

Through decades of weather challenges, logistical hurdles, and even virtual adaptations during the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns, Road to Bethlehem has proven incredibly resilient. Today, it stands as a testament to faith, community, and the enduring power of a simple story told well. We look forward to seeing you on the road this December!

Held on the campus of Edinburgh College in Lilydale, Road to Bethlehem 2026 will run from **Monday 7 to Thursday 10 December**.

Book at **roadtobethlehem.org** or arrive early and get tickets for later in the evening. While you wait, there's fun for all in the food and activities area.

Christmas around Mooroolbark

Santa, elves and more in Mooroolbark



Get ready for some festive fun as Christmas comes to Mooroolbark this December!

Bring the family along for FREE DIY Santa photos, meet Santa and his Elf as they visit local shops, and enjoy FREE children's craft activities with Mixed Makers Studio. Santa will also be making a special visit to Mooroolbark Library, and children can post their letters to Santa at our special Christmas mailboxes!

Proudly sponsored by Community Bank Mooroolbark, bringing Christmas cheer to our local community.

Check out all dates, times and locations below.

We look forward to celebrating with you!

December dates

Santa photos and free childrens craft at Shop 8, Mooroolbark Terrace.

Friday 04 Dec
Santa and Elf roam around Moorolbark Shops
4.30pm-6.30pm

Monday 07 Dec
Santa visits Mooroolbark Library after storytime
10.30am-11.30am

Wednesday 09 Dec
Sensory day - no Santa. Take your own photos with the throne. 11am-1pm

Saturday 12 Dec
DIY Santa photos
2.30pm-4.00pm

Thursday 17 Dec
DIY Santa photos
5.00pm-6.30pm

Saturday 19 Dec
DIY Santa photos
2.30pm-4.00pm

Tuesday 22 Dec
DIY Santa photos
11.00am-12.30pm

+ free children's craft with
Mixed Makers creative studio

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