



## Your **local** bank manager

Community banking • Community Tai Chi • Community Christmas



# Hello from the Living Today team



Last Christmas season more than 40 per cent of Australians travelled.<sup>1</sup> This year, at the end of 2025, it will most likely be the same and our family will add to the numbers. Christmas-time family travel for us rather feels like a necessity, as two or three weeks at home with two energetic young boys in a hot Melbourne home would be almost unbearable. We need a destination, a plan, a trip, even if it is just for a day or two. So, each summer holiday we pack the trailer camper, stock the car with food and toys and sunscreen, and off we head.

Oh, how it is an endurance, and how it would be cheaper, simpler and perhaps less stressful to stay home. But once you are on your way up the highway there is something special about going to a destination together. When I say destination what I mean is not entirely a place on a map but people to travel with, to visit and stay with.

Travel, as I understand it, is at its best when people are a destination. It's about making memories together. It is about the meals and the hot summer swims together and the tears as we depart. Christmas, for all its demands, is essentially a time that we work towards to pause for relationships, which does have its difficulties, no doubt, but seems worth it in the long run.

In this Christmas issue of Living Today there are a few stories of people and events that thrive on human connection and perhaps touch on the challenges and the joys of this time of the year.

We wish you all very merry Christmas and happy New Year, and may your travel be safe and a time of some good people memories.

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?

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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1. <https://publicchristianity.org/article/traveling-at-christmas-the-castle/>

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**Mission statement** To contribute towards and help to 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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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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# A banking life

by Randall Bouchier



**It's hard to believe** that it's been a year since Manji Wijesiri was appointed branch manager of our Community Bank Mooroolbark. She's been out and about during that time, along with David Green, who she coaxed out of retirement to mentor and help her in building and enhancing community connections.

I've both seen and heard of Manji's growing and passionate community involvement – for example, Mooroolbark Miniature Railway, Celebrate Mooroolbark, Living Today, Eastern FM, business and sporting groups. Others agree – she's both visible and personable. And she's prepared to go out of her comfort

zone. I recently met her as she apprehensively prepared to be interviewed on radio, which she told me later went much better than she had anticipated.

The big plus for us in our community is that Manji intends to continue in her role at the bank for many years to come. Rowan Alexander was a standout former manager who was committed to our community for the bulk of his career until he retired. Until Manji arrived, those who succeeded him, although no doubt very competent bankers, were short-stay managers not invested in our community for the longer term.





Since opening in 2002, our Community Bank has been a very helpful and supportive presence in our township. More than simply a presence, the bank is known as an active partner which channels 80 per cent of its profits back into Mooroolbark and surrounds. Without this outstanding ethos, I know personally that many community initiatives would have struggled financially – perhaps even been unable to survive.

For instance, I recall the early days of Celebrate Mooroolbark when the bank stood by us through several years of lean attendances. We at Living Today are also very grateful for the ongoing financial support from the bank – partnering with us to enhance our life together. As bank branches of all stripes throughout Australia continue to close their doors, we're thankful that the Bendigo Bank provides the lone banking presence in Mooroolbark. It's an open secret that towards Easter 2026, the branch will relocate from its current location in the Terrace to 6 Brice Avenue.

Many locals hold accounts at the bank. The long-serving staff know us by name, and we know them. It's a mutually friendly relationship. In a recent conversation with Manji, I was impressed by her gratitude for these friendly relationships that her staff have built with customers over many years, and the enthusiastic passion that newer staff have for community banking. She appreciates their dedication and support, describing them as "a happy team who enjoy working together". Manji is likewise impressed with the Board and Board Chair Greg Green. "We have the best Board and I'm so grateful for their supportive guidance."

In November 2024, the bank posted on its Facebook page:

"We are excited to announce that Manji, our dedicated Lending Manager, has been promoted to the role of Branch Manager!

"With over a decade at Bendigo Bank and more than 20 years in the banking industry, Manji has consistently demonstrated her dedication, expertise, and leadership. Her passion for supporting our customers and guiding our team makes her the perfect fit for this important role.

"We're confident that under Manji's leadership, our branch will continue to thrive and deliver outstanding service to our community."

I thought you'd enjoy learning a little about Manji's background and what prompted her to pursue a banking career.

Manji was born and raised in Sri Lanka and completed her schooling and university studies there. Whilst studying at university, she began work as a bank teller and has worked in the banking sector ever since. As the only child of a bank manager and his wife, Manji was inspired to follow in her father's footsteps. Her father is retired now, and he and his wife live in Colombo and regularly visit Manji and her family.

Looking back at her childhood, she recalls that it was a very happy time, surrounded as she was by a large and energetic extended family. Having experienced Sri Lankan hospitality, I can imagine the enjoyable and noisy mealtimes friends and family shared. Manji speaks of her love for goat curry, seafood and fruits such as mangosteen and rambutan. I can imagine the not necessarily tuneful, but enthusiastic, karaoke that Manji and the family would have shared, and the games that she and many cousins would have enjoyed playing together, cricket no doubt featuring prominently.

Manji grew up in the small town of Nuwara Eliya in the central highlands. As one of the coolest regions in Sri Lanka it is a popular destination for people escaping the heat. It has been nicknamed 'Little England' due to its former popularity with British colonialists. Many buildings survive from the colonial period along with English-style lawns and gardens. Later, the family moved to the much larger Kandy where Manji completed her studies.

Manji performed well as a student. Although her main focus was on succeeding academically, she played in the school band and enjoyed dancing – both western dance and traditional Sri Lankan dance – Kandyan. She enjoyed playing a variety of sports, particularly netball, but she chuckles ruefully about her complete lack of talent for drawing and the visual arts.

Following her university studies, Manji moved to Colombo for work. She had no intention to leave Sri Lanka until she met her husband-to-be, Eranga, who was living and working in an IT role in Australia. The two families knew one another, and Eranga and Manji corresponded and spent time together when Eranga visited Sri Lanka.

After marrying, the couple established a home in Melbourne, first in Mitcham before moving into a newly built home in Croydon. Their son Cayden is progressing through a local primary school and both father and son play cricket locally. Manji would also like to be more involved as the demands of her role allow.

Manji is not only a personable presence in our community, she's also keen to grow the bank's business. That our Community Bank thrives is a clear win-win for bank and community. Not only

are we able to access professional, yet personal banking services provided by friendly staff, but as the bank's business grows, our community benefits as increased profits are funnelled back into enhancing our community. We'd hope that even more residents and businesses would bank with our Mooroolbark Community Bank, thus bringing benefit to us all!

In the 2025 Annual Report Manji reported recent growth: "Despite a challenging year marked by interest rate rises, Community Bank Mooroolbark achieved a remarkable lending milestone of \$60 million by the end of the financial year. Both our lending and deposit balances have grown, now standing over \$240 million in total. We have also seen growth in insurance, wealth products, and business banking, reflecting the trust our expanding customer base places in us as the only bank in Mooroolbark."

The growth hasn't gone unnoticed. Manji continues: "On top of this, I am thrilled to share that the Community Bank Mooroolbark Branch received two awards at the regional awards ceremony: the Lending Growth Award and the Deposit Award." On top of that Manji won the Leader Lender Award in the region, which shows her continuous lending capabilities.

Another award went to staff member Debbie – the 'Ben Make a Difference' award, in recognition of Debbie's commitment in going above and beyond the call of duty with community activities.

Well done Community Bank Mooroolbark! May you continue to be a growing, thriving presence and community partner for many years to come!

**"That our Community Bank thrives is a clear win-win for bank and community ... profits are funnelled back into enhancing our community."**



# Moving in unison in Mooroolbark

by Matthew Gudze

If you've ever wondered what goes on at the Mooroolbark Community House on Monday morning, well wonder no more. If you ever drop in at that time, you'll see a group of people moving in unison led skilfully by Jeff Davis. Jeff is one of the regular Mooroolbark Community House program leaders and offers weekly Tai Chi classes at the House. You might have also seen Jeff at other Houses where he offers classes – Japara House in Kilsyth, Olinda Community House and Orana Neighbourhood House in Wantirna. However, Mooroolbark is a special place for him, and we are fortunate to have him here as this is the only class which he walks to.

His journey into Tai Chi began with a casual nudge from a friend. "Oh yeah, I'll give it a shot," Jeff said – and that shot turned into 35 years of teaching. Jeff did a year of training in Australia and does a form of Tai Chi called 'Long Yang', or '108 steps'. It is one whole

movement which takes 25 mins; however, in the classes he teaches his students each take part cumulatively. He says that Tai Chi is basically martial arts done slowly.

Jeff has lived in the area for many years. He grew up in East Burwood and eventually moved to Mooroolbark, then Mount Evelyn for a few years, then back to Mooroolbark. What keeps Jeff passionate about Tai Chi is the people. He loves hearing their stories and witnessing the 'light bulb moments' when a move finally clicks. "It's not as easy as it looks," he says, noting the balance and coordination required to master the art, as you move in a way than you might not have expected.

**If you are interested in joining Jeff's classes, please come and watch or join in. His classes at the Mooroolbark Community House are on Mondays from 11.30 am to 12.30 and the cost per term is \$100.**





# Theatre, lighting and community

by Randall Bouchier

Did you know that the Mooroolbark Community Centre was officially opened on 5 March 1980?

And did you know that the Mooroolbark Community House will hold its official public opening celebrations almost 26 years to the day, on 13 February 2026?

Our community is excitedly watching the unfolding partnering of the Community Centre and Community House – the sharing of our superb multi-faceted building! Yarra Ranges Council administered events and bookings will continue, alongside and in consultative partnership with the Community House and its growing programme of activities administered by House coordinator Renae Jones and the newly-formed Governance Committee.

A 1980 newspaper account had this to say about the new Community Centre: “The \$600,000 fully air-conditioned centre has been designed with one major thought in mind - flexibility to suit the needs of the many groups in Mooroolbark.

“The large auditorium can seat up to 320 people but it can also be divided into 3 separate areas... the stage can be extended and the glass doors

at the rear allow the stage to be used for the proposed outdoor theatre. The centre has a fully equipped audio/projection room with lighting, p.a. system and sound equipment to cater for theatre groups, discos, dances or film groups.

“The coffee shop area can seat up to 180 people. Councillors and the Centre’s coordinator hope this will be used as a drop in coffee shop and folk and rock music evenings.

“There will also be two art/craft studios... dressing rooms, creche and a kitchen to cater for 120 people.”

Wow!

It’s time for a fresh beginning as our community looks forward to this wonderful building increasingly serving the needs of the many groups in Mooroolbark – and becoming a welcoming, safe place for people to drop in and/or enjoy whatever activities are on offer.

I recently met local resident Graeme Barnett who was a long-time member of the Mooroolbark Theatre Group which operated for decades in the Community Centre auditorium.





Graeme explained: "For some reason the lighting possibilities in the auditorium were very limited. In the control booth we had a 40-panel board, but only 15 had been wired. We really struggled to produce much variety in the lighting.

"After talking with the Centre coordinator, Brian Jackson, we decided to wire all 40 panels. Brian bought the cable. I crawled up into the ceiling and ran all the wires through to their appropriate end points. We had it all roughly lined out before an electrician friend came in to attach the cables and sign off on the work. We finished up with the 40-panel board delivering 10 outlets from each of the back and front lighting bars in the auditorium and 20 outlets on stage. I also ran a few extra audio cables so that we had more flexibility for sound on stage."

An interesting slice of history which enabled the Mooroolbark Theatre Company to mount two excellent productions each year for decades. In

2008, Living Today quoted long-time director Arline Myers on MTC's 30th anniversary: "During the '80s our group matured and found our niche in comedy. Our purpose is to involve anyone interested in any aspect of theatre in the community, and our home since 1980 has been, and I hope always will be, Mooroolbark Community Centre where our audiences have grown over the years..."

I'm looking forward to writing an article about Graeme's life and rich contribution to Mooroolbark in a later edition of Living Today but wanted to share a small 'taster' of his contribution to the theatre group and also to the auditorium in our Community Centre/House.

I'm excited in anticipating the auditorium becoming a lively, well-used community space enriching our community life together for years to come!



## Road to Bethlehem

8 – 11 December, Edinburgh College, Lilydale

The Road to Bethlehem, an outdoor, walk-through theatrical presentation, will be presented again this year at Lilydale College, beginning at 6pm, with 45-minute walking tours every six minutes, starting from 7pm. Food and kids' activities kick off from 6pm.

Full of live animals and amazing sets, the Road to Bethlehem will help you step back in time and be immersed in all the excitement and drama of the first Christmas. It has been running annually for more than 70 years in multiple locations across Australia and over 30 years in Lilydale.

Family-friendly event. Pram/wheelchair accessible. AUSLAN session 9 December at 8pm.

Book your **free** tickets online or over the phone on 9264 7770 (between 9am and 5pm) from November 24 to December 5.

For more information, visit [roadtobethlehem.org/event-details](http://roadtobethlehem.org/event-details) or get free tickets on the night for sessions after 7.30pm.

## Christmas light show


12 – 24 December, Oxley Stadium, Chirnside Park

Life Ministry Church welcomes you to the Christmas Light & Sound show for 2025!

The **free** event will be held from December 12-24 from 9am to 1pm every night at Oxley Stadium, 15-49 Old Melbourne Road, Chirnside Park. Shows run for 25 minutes beginning at 9pm, 9.30pm, 10pm and 10.30pm. Picnic on the grass or perhaps watch from your car while tuning in to 89.5 FM. Free entry and light refreshments available. No smoking or alcohol permitted.

The Life Ministry Church lights began in 2006 with a desire to provide the community with a spectacular event that families could come and enjoy each year during the special season of Christmas. We also want to remind people of the true meaning of Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ. Donations are welcome and will go to help support the Amari school in Uganda.


For more information and updates on shows, including weather updates, follow [facebook.com/lmclights](https://facebook.com/lmclights).




2025 CHRISTMAS

YOU ARE INVITED TO  
CELEBRATE WITH US

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE 6PM



PEACE ON EARTH



GRACE COMMUNION  
MOOROOLBARK

125 Brice Ave, Mooroolbark Community Centre





# Christmas 2025

## Santa's in town!

**Shop 8, Mooroolbark Terrace**

Get ready to meet Santa and snap your own photos – for free! Santa will be making his way to Mooroolbark this December and you're invited to capture the festive fun at one of our free DIY Santa Photo sessions.

Bring your phone or camera and visit Santa at Shop 16, the Terrace Shopping Centre, where his elves have been creating a magical Christmas scene perfect for your photos.

While you wait to see Santa, keep the kids entertained with Christmas activities provided by Mixed Makers Studio. They can also post a letter to Santa in Santa's Mailbox – just remember to include a clear name and address so Santa can reply – at the Terrace and also at the Library from November 21 until December 13.

Santa's Mooroolbark Schedule – proudly supported by Mooroolbark Community Bank:

**Dec 1:** Santa arrives Mooroolbark Library 10.30 - 11.30am

**Dec 5:** Santa visits Mooroolbark shops 4.30 - 6.30pm

**Dec 13:** DIY Santa photos 11am - 12.30 pm

**Dec 18:** DIY Santa photos 5pm - 6.30 pm

**Dec 20:** DIY Santa photos 2pm - 3.30 pm

**Dec 23:** DIY Santa photos 11am - 12.30 pm

Stay up-to-date with all the holiday cheer at [mooroolbark.vic.au](http://mooroolbark.vic.au) or the Mooroolbark Facebook Page.

**Let the Christmas magic begin!**

## Community carols

**Sat 13 December, Mooroolbark Community Centre**

Did you know that Mooroolbark has not hosted its community carols event for five years? With two years of COVID and three years of bad weather, it's time to change that, as carols make a welcome return to our suburb.

Whether the weather be fine or whether the weather be not, the show will go ahead! If the sun's out the festivities will be at the rear amphitheatre but if weather 'does a Melbourne' and turns on us, the show will go on inside the building!

**6.30pm** – BYO twilight picnic

**7.30 pm** – Australian and traditional carols

- A visit from Santa!
- Hot and cold drinks available.
- Community stalls

*Presented by the Mooroolbark Neighborhood House, in conjunction with Mooroolbark Umbrella Group, Mooroolbark History Group, Grace Communion Mooroolbark and Mooroolbark CFA.*

## The Showdown. Ish.

### Part 10 of our ongoing kids story by Ross MacKay

I was too lost in the taste sensation that is a soggy banana, sausage and cornflakes sandwich that it took me a few moments to realise that nothing had actually changed.

"Um, it doesn't seem to have made a difference. Morag is still there, there's still jelly dripping from the ceiling and now it seems that the far wall has turned into a chocolate cake."

Nuttingale sighed and looked at me as if I were missing the point. "I never said it was anything to do with Morag! The soggy sandwich was just a highly embarrassing event that I was hoping to remove from existence and it looks like you've done it!" Her face changed from exasperation to excitement. "The past has changed! The soggy sandwich event never happened- that is amazing, I can't believe it!"

Abthwyrd was beaming too. "Such a relief, never again will I be plagued with memories of mashed banana dripping down my... um, you know."

"As ever," I replied, "no, I don't know. What was the soggy sandwich event? Was it related to Morag at all?"

"Not really, I think... it's a bit um, unclear now," said Nuttingale, her face starting to show signs of confusion. "It was just that she sent it back in time triggering the events surrounding the soggy... um what was it again?"

"Pizza... right?" I said, suddenly feeling confused and not sure exactly what we were talking about. "Um, so the events that surrounded the soggy pizza, what were they exactly?"

"I can't remember. Now that you've changed history by not allowing it to go back in time, I have no idea what happened and why it was so imperative to stop it being sent back in time."

"Send what back?"

"I have no idea. What were we talking about?"

I looked to Abythwrd who shrugged. "Yeah, don't know, I just feel that I will forever more have a craving for knowledge that will never be satisfied."

There was silence for a few moments while our memories sorted themselves before Morag reminded us she was there.

"So, if you three are quite finished forgetting events that never happened." I had no idea what she was talking about. "What are we going to do now? I need to be stopped before I tear Aquatia apart!"

"Hold on, what do you mean 'we'?" I said, puzzled. "Why would you want to stop yourself?"

"It's a bit complex," said Morag, "but it feels that ever since you gave me a name, and therefore a personality, it's like I'm two beings. I'm this... Morag, girl with conscious thoughts but at the same time I'm still a machine that's spewing out unreality and causing chaos... Does that make any sense?"

"Yes, no and not really," I said. "But what are you? Why do you spread unreality and confusion?"

"I'm not very good with the science but when I consume reality it means the balance of real and unreal is shifted. The more I consume the more confusion reigns. I don't do it on purpose!"

"Consuming reality? What? I feel this is making less sense the more you talk! What about where you come from, why you exist?"

"Well as it happens I've just discovered a built-in user manual and marketing materials," said Morag, smiling. "It seems I am the product of an advanced civilization who were looking to create a reactor that used an unlimited resource to generate power. Their advertisements seem to indicate that reality is the unlimited resource they are referring to. It doesn't say how, but somehow they've harnessed reality to generate power."



"That doesn't really explain the un-reality part though."

"Yeah, unsurprisingly their marketing materials don't mention the part that went wrong. My best guess is it that there was an unexpected side effect. If you remove reality from, well, reality, you end up with the opposite – unreality. They could generate power but in doing so, started to break down the very fabric of reality. I assume that they decided to dispose of me by sending me to another 'here' via the door, ridding themselves of me and my powers."

"Door? You mean like the door I came through, wh..." I started before noticing that Morag was looking at something just beyond me. In the far corner of the cave was a little red door. It was identical to the one I had come through in the supermarket except that this one was flickering and fizzing and... changing colour! Every five seconds or so it flickered to another colour... blue, green, purple, pink with rainbow polka dots, black, red...

Nuttingale's voice came from the phone: "Yeah, Alllan, just like the door you came through. The dogs studied it before they left. Didn't share much with us, but what we do know – or rather suspect – is that each colour leads to a different 'here'. Aquatia, Earth, Flappajakkadonkywoo, outer space..."

She continued, but my mind was now distracted. I'm ashamed to admit, I was very tempted to dive through the door the moment it was red. I had come through a red door, thus it was reasonable to assume if I went back through a red door I'd be home. Back to the plain, normal, boring supermarket and my plain normal, boring life. Which was actually why I chose not to. My life had become anything but plain, normal and boring since here and I was actually quite enjoying it. Yes there was still the threat of certain DOOM, but I was beginning to suspect that had been over-hyped.

"... and black being outer space." Nuttingale was still speaking. "We have to do it Alllan, we have to chuck it through the black door, to somewhere it can cause no harm." It was probably a good thing that Nuttingale wasn't physically present as I suspected that she'd have had Morag in a headlock and squeezing her through the black door the moment it appeared. "It's dangerous, we need to get rid of it!"

"I'm not an it!" squealed Morag. "You named me, you made me real! It was you that turned me from a metal box to a person, I'm a she, not an it. I am Morag, I'm a being, you can't just toss me through a door to certain death in deep space."

She was right. Had the CFR remained what it had been, a metal box, the answer would be clear, toss her through the black door where the vacuum of space would (probably) crush it, obliterating the machine. Hopefully, I'm not exactly good with

science, and I wasn't entirely sure this fit any category of known science as it was. But the CFR was now a she. It was an impossible choice. If Morag stayed, Aquatia remained nuts! Totally nuts! If she went through the portal to anywhere else, she does the same to another 'here', if she goes through to outer space she, well I didn't want to think about that now that she was a Morag.

"But why do you keep causing chaos and confusion?" said Abythwrd. "Can't you just stop it?"

"I'd love to, but no, I need to consume reality to survive and I can't stop it. I can control some things, like this jelly sword I just made! But it's just a thing that happens around me now. As long as I exist, wherever I exist I cause confusion, I upset the balance between real and unreal."

"How much control?" I blurted out, an idea forming in my head. There didn't seem to be any rules around what Morag could and couldn't do, so anything was worth a try and there was something that she had said earlier that had sparked an idea.

"What?" said Morag as she took a bite of her jelly sword, which turned into a small dragon that flew away before suddenly turning into a handbag and falling to the ground. With a squeak.

"A couple of things you said have given me an idea. Just before you said you can control some things – what do you mean by that, how much control?"

"Well, let's see, I can..." The room turned into a dance floor complete with disco ball and tinny speakers playing 1980s pop music. "I can turn the room into a dance floor complete with disco ball and tinny speakers playing 1980s pop music. Does that help?"

"Well not the disco part specifically, but it's a great start." I took a deep breath and continued with my very sketchy and hastily thought through plan. "You said before you felt like you're now two beings – the Morag part and the CFR part. What if... what if you could control your power just enough to split yourself into two separate parts – the Morag and the CFR, then we toss the CFR part into the black door? I know it sounds crazy, but is it really any crazier than the spaghetti that is currently raining down around us?"

Morag considered this, ate some spaghetti, then said, "I guess it could work, but I'm going to have to get better at what I can control and do with my power."

"Really? I thought that creating a full-on disco was pretty powerful and impressive."

"Impressive maybe, but to be clear all I was trying to do was make a bowl of custard appear!"

**To be continued...**

# Expect the unexpected

Adapted from Greg Williams, *Speaking of Life*



Image by Adobe Firefly AI

We typically don't like the unexpected. We don't like it when our car unexpectedly refuses to start, or our computer unexpectedly crashes. Worse, an unexpected loss of employment creates great turmoil and loss of personal confidence. And we certainly don't like unexpected health difficulties. But these are the realities we face, and we quickly learn to expect the unexpected along with all the frustration and heartache it can bring.

However, not all things unexpected are bad. An unexpected gift or pay rise can turn a sour day around in a hurry. I'm sure we can all remember with joy something unexpected that came our way, large or small.

So, here's a question. What should we expect from God? Is he full of unexpected surprises?

The Bible witness seems to present ... well, an unexpected answer to that question. We are presented with a God who is unchanging, yet, at the same time, full of unexpected surprises.

Listen to Psalm 107 about the paradox of God's unchanging nature described by images of unexpected natural events.

"Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

"He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants. He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield."<sup>1</sup>

It's interesting how the psalm refers to God's steadfast love but then equates that steadfastness with great reversals. It appears that he is steadfast in bringing the unexpected. But did you notice the direction of the unexpected? It was always for our good.

With God, there is always good news ahead. Rivers run dry, but he refills them. Deserts become springs of water. It's easy to look around and get discouraged at the state of the world, so he tells us to lift our eyes and look to him. He is the restorer of all things. He is the one who works in unexpected ways.

No one expected the King of kings to enter our world as he did. God loves to surprise with the unexpected – it's part of the mystery of who he is.

Speaking of Life is a public resource video on the Grace Communion International website: [gci.org/videos/media-speaking-of-life/](https://gci.org/videos/media-speaking-of-life/)

This magazine is sponsored by Grace Communion Mooroolbark (previously known as Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship), 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.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 107:31-37 (ESV)

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# In the midst of suffering, there was a light

by Neil Jeyasingam  
Centre for Public Christianity

Every year, Christmas is accompanied by the pressure to celebrate. Christmas is a time of joy. Joy requires work. Plans to make, things to buy. We put on our best faces, and we put our trials aside. We have to, in order to be happy.

But what about people with continuous suffering? How is a person with chronic respiratory issues, or depression, or experiencing domestic violence, supposed to look forward to feasting and merriment?

Suffering seems a fair rebuttal to the assumption that Christmas is a time of joy. But it isn't. The first Christmas was short on joy and heavy with fear. A young maiden with an unimaginable role to play. A pious husband who plans to quietly divorce his beloved to protect her, then discovers he is responsible for protecting the most important life in history. An infant ferried from town to town to avoid slaughter by a jealous ruler. Death, and the threat of it, was everywhere in the night.

In the midst of the suffering, however, there was a light. A light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it.

Christmas is not a story of mere joy, but of hope – that regardless of the insurmountable storms we face, we can make it through. How?

The widely verified mental health benefits of Christmas centre on people coming together. Connecting with each other is how we look after each other, and ourselves. When we celebrate Christmas, we remember – then practise – hope and generosity. Lives are saved one kindness at a time.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that all of the law was bound up in two things – loving God and loving each other. When we do, a little bit of God shines through us.

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



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



**FREE**  
community  
event

Enjoy a fun filled day with  
**entertainment**  
**activities**  
**food, stalls**  
**and more**

[celebratemooroolbark.com](http://celebratemooroolbark.com)

**Sunday**  
**15 March 2026**  
10am to 4pm

Hookey Park,  
Station Street,  
Mooroolbark



YARRA  
VALLEY  
**Wool and**  
**Handicrafts**  
SHOW

**Sunday 3 May 2026, 10am to 4pm**

Our annual show is the perfect destination for discovering a diverse range of yarns, from hand-dyed skeins to unique fibres, all crafted by talented artisans from near and far.

Whether you're an experienced knitter, a crocheter looking for inspiration, or just curious about craft, there will be something for everyone.

For more information please visit:  
[celebratemooroolbark.com/yarra-valley-wool-and-handicrafts-show/](http://celebratemooroolbark.com/yarra-valley-wool-and-handicrafts-show/)

**Mooroolbark Miniature Railway** ([mmr.org.au](http://mmr.org.au))

**4th Sunday each month (except December)** January to May 11-4  
June to August 11-3, September to November 11-4.  
Train rides are \$3.00 each, with children under four riding free.

**Community Garden Market**



**21 December and the last Sunday of every month**  
9am - 1pm, 8 Station Street, Mooroolbark (opposite Hookey Park)

**Jellis Craig**

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