

**Presbytery of North East Victoria
Chairperson's Letter of Encouragement, June 2025**

Dear friends,

Like most of you I suspect, I am looking for rain today. It has been forecast, but as I look at the radar, it seems unlikely that we will get anything much, though my record as a weather forecaster is not great. We have had a long, warm autumn without a significant "break" and while some of us have enjoyed the warmth and the colours, we are fully aware of the stress and strain that this weather non-event places on others.

A long time ago, in another place, a friend shared a story from the Age Newspaper that appeared during Holy week in 1999 – a lifetime ago really, but pertinent. It was a mother's description of the agony and the joy of having a severely developmentally delayed child. The article began with the words, "I have decided today to put our daughter into foster care" and then went on to describe the exhausting, frustrating and unrelenting daily experience that led to such a painful decision. By the end of the article the decision had been revoked, and the courage and selfless love undergirding the mother's determination to keep going, even though "tomorrow may not be any better" offers us a way of thinking about our own lives.

My friend wrote to the mother and received a reply concluding with the words: "Autumn is coming slowly to our side of the mountains this year. Farmers are burning their crop stubble making it difficult to tell where the mountains stop and the sky starts. It is not unlike my relationship with my daughter in a way – difficult to tell where the frustrations stop and the love begins." This is a story of holding on and letting go, of difficult decisions and sacrifice. It is a story of unconditional love and its cost. It is a story that helps me understand better the unconditional love of God, and Jesus' part in it, as he made the difficult choice to go to his death for love's sake.

Autumn has officially ended, and as I write, we are also coming to the end of the Easter season - that time of reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' death and the possibilities of resurrection. Sometimes I think we focus too much on the idea of Jesus' death as a sacrifice to appease an obscure God, and as a consequence, we fail to see it as the sacrifice, the offering, of an immense love. Sometimes, I think we are so intensely focused on Jesus' rising from the dead (its plausibility or otherwise) that we fail to see that resurrection is for us – life out of death, life despite death. Ours is not a faith that ignores difficulty or paints over it, but is one that enters and loves and gives and in so doing finds meaning and purpose. This is the Way of Jesus. The hard part often, is finding the balance, the rhythm that keeps us in the game of loving, that does not wear us out, which may be what the mother in our story was grappling with in the end. As my friend said, as we grapple and at the right time, the cloud of obscurity clears and we will know the way forward. I leave you to ponder what resurrection meant for the mother and daughter of the Holy Week story, what it means for you and for us as followers of Jesus. In this season of our lives what do we hold onto, what do we let go, what is important or maybe even essential? What is life-giving?

The peace of Christ between us

Gereldine

so that like the mother in this shared story, like the story of Jesus loving, serving, even, becomes the mark of who we are. When I first wrote the sentence before this I wrote loving and serving sacrificially.

Gereldine