

Presbytery of North East Victoria
Chairperson's letter of Encouragement – October 2025

Dear friends,

I love the story of Jeremiah buying a field. I have always loved it. You can read the story in Jeremiah, Chapter 32, but it goes something like this. The Babylonian Army has Jerusalem under siege and things look desperate for the city and the surrounding countryside - terrible in fact. Jeremiah's, cousin Hanamel, cynically sees an opportunity, and offers to sell Jeremiah a plot of land in enemy held territory. It is a sign for Jeremiah that confirms something that God has prompted. Jeremiah buys the land and makes a big show of the purchase, including entering it into the public record so that both those present, and future generations, will know what he has done. It is a visual statement that says that despite current indications to the contrary, God can be trusted. There will be a time when *houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land (Jer 32:15).*" It is bit like someone today buying a plot in northern Ukraine or Gaza and announcing it as a sign of their trust in God for a future.

For the story to have its full impact, we need to know what happened. Not long after this Jeremiah was forced into exile in Egypt. The invading army took many into exile in Babylon, where, given a degree of freedom, they thrived. Eventually, some returned. Houses, fields and vineyards were purchased, but more importantly in that exile, a fresh understanding of the freedom of God emerges – one that we still share today. God is not limited to a particular place, or to a particular way of doing things. It was, and is still, a big shift in understanding.

It is the role of faith leaders to see what is real and to help those led come to terms with that reality. Sometimes that reality is about endings, but they are never endings without hope. Hope: the trust that the kingdom of God is bigger than us. Hope: the understanding that the arc of God's time is long. Hope: the belief that despite every current indication to the contrary, God will prevail.

On this hope, I have built my life.

We are in a time of transition. We are moving from one way of being the church to another – from being God's gathered people, to being God's scattered people. From institutional life (life as it is now) to something akin to a missionary movement. There is plenty of historical precedent, so I have some ideas about the 'how' of this, but still the overwhelming sense, the overwhelming prompting of the Spirit, is to call the people of God to an extended period of prayer- seeking the way for us – prayer which is listening more than speaking. By all means pour out your heart, engage in lament for what is passing, but then listen. Listen deeply. Parallel to this time of prayer we will continue to be guided by scripture. We will seek an understanding of the broader culture and we will look to our history – to the ways people have responded in similar times of transition. These will be our guide. My encouragement is to do this individually and for leaders of congregations to gather people for prayer, in worship, in meetings, in set-aside times. Together, I am confident that we can fix a course faithful to the God who calls us out of death into life.

Gereldine