

Presbytery of North East Victoria - Chairperson's letter of encouragement May 2026

Dear friends,

Does it seem to you that the world is increasingly a mess at the moment? I'd like to be able to blame one particularly mad man for this, and probably have, but the truth is we could not have come to where we are without support by some and silence from others. Does the world seem dangerous? The world has always been dangerous. It is naturally so. There have always been wars and economic ups and downs. Some of us have just been better protected from it than others. We need to ask, whether as God's people, have we aligned ourselves too closely with the values of the broader culture to see the damage being done, but have no doubt damage is being done, personally and collectively. The songwriter, Billie Eilish, poignantly asks, *What was I made for?* We need to ask what was I made for? We need to ask have we lost our way?

You will have heard me talk a lot about the kingdom of God, in the first instance because that is what Jesus talked about the most – but increasingly because I think, right now, we need to sort out who we are and what we are made for. Jesus defined the kingdom of God as an alternate kingdom, a place of welcome and refuge for those wounded, those brought low, those locked out by the mad men of the Roman Empire and by the religious establishment of the day. Not just women and slaves and foreigners, but all who were wounded and brought low and because of it estranged from God. For a moment, that kingdom burned bright and every now and then it flares up, burning brighter when the need is great. Think about it, we followers of Jesus, the church - the people not the building - are to be a place of refuge and welcome for anyone who is wounded, brought low, locked out of society for whatever reason, including the ambitions of mad men (and occasionally women) and by the schemes they create and as a consequence separated from God and the inner peace this brings. This kingdom is us - arms open wide, warm and gathering. If any of us think that faith is there to support a particular morality or a way of life that does not grow out of grace, out of loving kindness, out of the compassion of Christ, then we are in the wrong place.

Speaking recently, the President of the Uniting Church, the Rev Charissa Suli, talked about re-grounding the household in Christ. Through the lens of the walk to Emmaus, Charissa invited the church to find its identity in a time of uncertainty and change, and she talked about the Māori practice of beginning with belonging. *Not what you think, not your opinion, not a strategy for growth, but with who you are and where you come from and with whom you belong – naming one's mountain or river, ancestors and people.* Who are we? Where do we come from? With whom and to whom do we belong? It matters.

This morning I woke up from a dream about my mother – a memory. I was eight or nine, maybe younger, watching my mother at her old Singer sewing machine, treadling away, turning a whole bolt of material into one Kakhi shirt after another. Why was she making so many shirts? The answer: so that the boys, in her sister's large family, would each have a shirt to wear to school. Their house had not long burned to the ground and all their possessions with it. We didn't have much money ourselves, and I knew even then it was a sacrifice, but the memory wasn't about money. There she was hour after hour, day after day, sewing something of herself into every shirt. As I woke, I thought of Dorcas and all the women I have known whose lives have been shaped by Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God. Stories like these have made me who I am. What are your stories? Tell them! tell them!

For me, the alternate kingdom is all about people and their dignity. It is about community in which with loving kindness, we give life to one another. Though we are different from one another, it is about making sure that people are recognised and included. It is a life of chosen simplicity, of modest ambition. The costly sharing of what we have rather than giving out of what is excess to our need or wants. Jesus recognised that this lifestyle is a proper response to the beauty and the richness that is the blessing of God. I like the idea of re-grounding the household. Grounded: to feel calm, and steady and connected, and household: all the people with whom we have relationships, everything organised for the benefit and enjoyment of all. This is who we are. This is what we have to offer in a messy world where madmen rule. Hold it out! Offer it up!

Gereldine