



Murrumbeena Meeting Place

A community woven with care and intention

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While the surplus we generate is not specifically allocated to individual projects, we take immense pride in knowing that our efforts support vital community services. These services span areas such as social justice, outreach programs, and community support, amplifying the positive impact of our cornerstone clients' work across the region.

Compounding good – the better we do, the more we give.

By Rachel Alembakis

In the light-filled hall of Murrumbeena Uniting Church, the soft click of knitting needles mingles with cheerful conversation. Talk of family, holidays, and upcoming events creates a warm, welcoming hum. This is the Meeting Place: a hub of inclusion, activity, and thoughtful community-building. It is both a physical space and a symbol of the church's commitment to nurturing a vibrant, connected neighbourhood.

Knitting together a new pattern

The Meeting Place is more than just a renovated church hall. It represents years of collaboration between parishioners, community members, and pastoral leaders. Architecturally, it bridges eras: a contemporary addition to the historic church structure, featuring stained-glass windows salvaged from a former congregation during a four-church congregation amalgamation.

"This is a magical space," says Rev Andreana Reale. "We do so much community stuff in here now because anything that happens here, it's like magic. We had a maker's market recently, it was an idea from a local woman Rose. Her dream was to run a maker's market because she'd always been part of markets because she makes jewellery. So she

got all her maker friends and they all rocked up, and it was just this gorgeous, very early spring day in August [2024]. The hall was all lit up and I reckon there were a thousand people who came through."

A well-knit community

On a warm Wednesday afternoon, there was a hum of activity from the knitting group clustered around the padded pews in the Meeting Place – a weekly group that was engaged on our visit in knitting jumpers and beanies for family charity Our Village, Oznam House and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

Longtime parishioner Glynis Ramsay, who facilitates the group, reflects on the church's evolution.

"Church is different now," Glynis says. "When I grew up, the church was the focus. There was youth group, I was married in the church. My husband was president of the Presbyterian Fellowship Association back when ballroom dancing was the thing. I had one dress I wore to all the events. It was marvellous! Times have changed, but fresh ideas keep coming. We even had a creative writing group that really took off for a while."

From vision to reality

The Meeting Place concept was shaped through professional guidance and community insight. Even before Rev. Reale's arrival in 2024, the church engaged a community development consultant. By the 2024 AGM, the Meeting Place had been formally adopted the concept to make community engagement a priority.

"The idea was to see our space users not just as hirers, but as partners," says Andreana. "Interestingly, what really took off wasn't just from hirers—it came from the wider community. People had ideas, and we helped bring them to life."

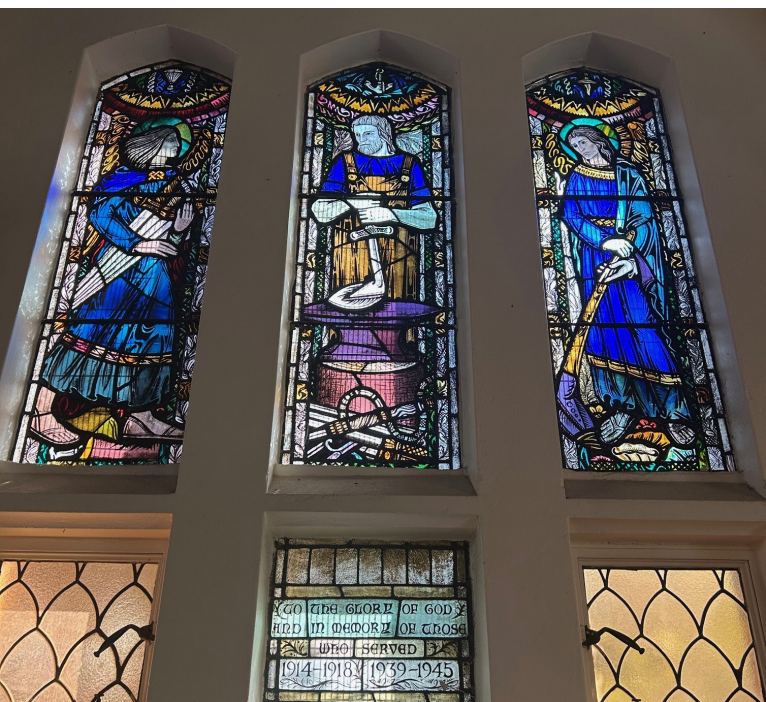
Today, Murrumbenna Uniting Church hosts everything from Friday Drop-in (a bilingual Auslan-English social group) and creative writing, to community singing and art therapy for women. The Meeting Place had its first community art exhibition in one of the halls, and a twice-a-month community meal is starting soon. The key to sustainability? Empowering individuals to lead.

How does a community garden grow?

Out the back, a bustling kitchen garden thrives. Raised beds tended by different community members form a patchwork of productivity.

"The beds are all individually owned, but we have socials and working bees about once a quarter," Andreana says. "Every Wednesday evening we have twilight gardening. So it's just a wave of activity. At the last twilight session, people started talking about getting a path through for wheelchair accessibility and other accessibility, so we had people marking a path and talking about plans to apply for grants. It is really nice to see the community coming together and envisioning it."





Connection over dinner

As with other stories in this series, one of the deep themes of the work at The Meeting Place is fostering connection and banishing loneliness. This has led to the proposed dinner.

"It's more of a bringing together," Andreana says. "We're working out the model, whether or not we want to do a potluck or whether we want to cook, but we're thinking doing it twice a month, which I actually think will be amazing. And I actually think it's the missing link, the missing ingredient that is a place of belonging where people can come and eat together."

Looking ahead

By working together as a congregation and using specific planning professionals, Murrumbeena Uniting Church is creating a Meeting Place that will hopefully thrive well into the future.

"My vision for the church is to be a thriving place where people come and experience the kingdom of God," Andreana says. "It's for people to find a place of belonging, to find places to contribute their skills and their leadership, their passion, their creativity."

"I see what we do as deeply Christian, and so I want to have pathways into that faith as well. But for those who are not seeking that, for others it's enough to just experience that community together."

Get involved

The Meeting Place in Murrumbeena is seeking community members to participate in their thriving community, particularly their forthcoming dinner.

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