Reflection Sunday – 15 Nov 2026

It was in the September of 1965. I had driven to a small Methodist church in the rural setting of Meatian, a wheat and sheep farming community, about 25 minutes southwest of Swan Hill. I was the local preacher for the day Meatian, with its Primary School, Memorial Hall, Methodist Church, and a large cement grain silo sat beside a railway line.

Having recently arrived back from a work party on Elcho Island in Arnhem Land, where I had been a laborer under the watchful eye of Ron Gaudian. I came equipped with a slide projector and slides to talk about my experiences working with a group of unknown people on a work party.

My enthusiasm with slides and story took me past the allotted hour for a church service expected by this Methodist farming community. At the end of the service a distant relative suggested my enthusiasm for sharing my experience may have burnt the Sunday roast. However, that experience of working with skilled architects and engineers, builders, chefs, farmers, a doctor, nurses, the gifted mission people working with the first nations people.

We all came together with a range of lifetime experiences, from all walks of life to give of their gifts and skills to build a hospital on a remote island in Arnhem Land. It was another expression of "Church". In Matthew chapter 25 verse 15 Jacinta read these words

"*He gave each one according to his ability. To one he gave five thousand gold coins. To another two thousand. To a third one thousand. Then he left on his trip.*

The parable of the three servants is a parable about individual gifts each one of us has. It sits comfortably with each one of us, for we are all uniquely gifted. For we are all different. As we read through this passage of scripture, we become aware of the differing gifts. One five thousand coins. Another two thousand coins. And another one thousand coins, wisely given by the master.

No servant is given more than they can handle. Each servant is given a different expectation. A different outcome is given by the master to his slave. Matthew in his gospel is saying we are all different. We all have different skills. We all have different experiences. That is what the church is.

The men and woman worked together at Elcho Island to build a hospital. They came with different skills. Different experiences. They all had a go. With different expectations to together build a hospital. And so it was that people from four congregations came together to build a church, create a community around a set of buildings now called Manningham Uniting Church and Community Centre.

But here's the twist in the story. The third servant with the least to lose hid his money, did nothing with it and when he was called to account for the gift he was given said:

Verse 25 "*I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground"*

He had nothing to add to what he was given. He gave it all back. He chose what he thought was the safe option. Then came the excuses. He stepped into the blame game to defend himself. He begins to argue, attacking the master who responded with these words.

Verse 26 "*You bad and lazy servant you knew did you, that I reap harvests that I did not sow, and gather crops where I did not scatter seed*"

This slave has no love for his master. He is only interested in himself. In his own security. Self-preservation comes before service to others. So, he blames his master. Perhaps the Parable of the Talents challenges us as Christians to make full use of the gifts God has provided to each of us, that our own profound Love of God is demonstrated in our faithfulness and our untiring service to others. Perhaps this parable asks each one of us to respect the God given gifts we each have, to exercise them in respect of others, and to further explore the gifts we each have.

As we come to understand we have more to give, this parable teaches us all gifts are precious, no matter how small we think they are. In I Corinthians chapter 13 verse 13 we read these words

"*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is Love"*

These three words, Faith, Hope, and Love define who we are, and for each one of us, we will have our own story to tell. It was these words read by Rev Charles King almost 60 years ago at the marriage of Joan and I. It was these words read by a grand daughter at my mother's funeral service which were special. It is these same words Paul has passed on to the young Christian church in Thessalonian Chapter 5 verse 8

"But we belong to the day. We must wear faith and love as our breast plate and our hope of salvation as a helmet. God did not choose us to suffer his anger, but to process salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"

It is through faith in God that we discover Hope. It is in Love that Hope abounds. Recently Joan reminded me we at MUC are correctly known as Manningham Uniting Church and Community Centre. It is an important reminder to us all. As I reflect on the work in the Hub this week, I have been pondering on the very gifted

people who have chosen to accept an invitation to work with us as “Church”, to take on responsibilities once the role of the congregation.

Perhaps the Hub is now “Church”.as many of us grow old, gifted young people have joined our church community as staff. Many people will have met Steph Jones. She and Cinti came with three old men, Peter Elliott, Peter Hanna and me to the Doncaster Secondary Collage to cook over a thousand sausages on two barbeques for families of the 2027 year 7 students. They came to meet the teaching staff, to find their way around the school, and mingle with current students. Steph and Cinti assisted with the cooking while making connections with staff supporting our mission focus.

Lauren Bacon our communications coordinator was in the HUB working when the truck driver who damaged stonework at the end of the processional driveway arrived to inspect the damage made by his truck and she assisted the driver. Priscilla our bookkeeper who, when I spoke with Chris McRae about the need to send the mango money to the grower, Chris spoke with Priscilla who quickly organizing payment with Chris.

Lisa manages the café with support from volunteers and paid staff in the absence of Rupa and is moving through a process to employ staff. Alison Smith works with the Playgroup children and their mothers supported by volunteers who assist Alison with the children. You add to this list Ruth, Jill and Jeanette and all the volunteers and groups who find fellowship and support from this broad Church we know as MUC & CC.

So what is Church? I ask myself. What is MUC & CC? I have often thought God is present where good people are doing good works.