

Croajingolong Calling

with Jude & Andy Benton • June 2025



Easter is a peak holiday period in Croajingolong, and with the late Easter leading straight into ANZAC Day, it was particularly busy. On Palm Sunday, we were joined at St John's Cann River by members of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. Together we celebrated the whole Easter story with music, poetry and reflection.

On Good Friday, we held a 'funeral service for Jesus,' which was a creative way to retell a story we can be over-familiar with. Then, on Easter Sunday, we met on Betka Beach for a sunrise service, followed by a barbecue.

A challenge for us at Easter is that many locals are away when church is the busiest, so it was wonderful this year to have one of our regular Easter holiday-making families offer to cook the dawn barbecue and let the locals enjoy the service. What a blessing.

We then had a communion service at St Peter's, which was filled to bursting with holidaymakers, including many children – we pray that the seeds of faith planted will be carried back to their home communities and grow.

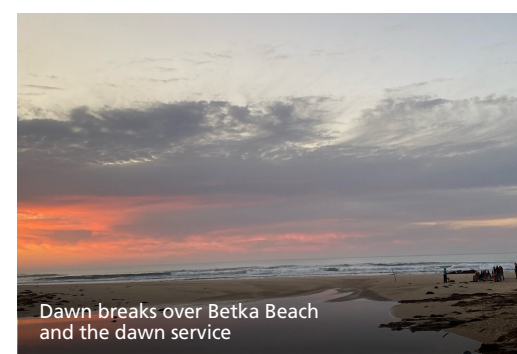
Usually, life in Croajingolong starts to slow down after Easter, but this year has been full steam ahead throughout April & May... and many people are feeling ready for the quieter season of winter.

Community engagement

Two years ago, the local RSL closed due to a lack of membership, and since then, the local pony club and the Bunker Museum have run an informal ANZAC service. This year, I was asked to lead the prayers and was also able to reflect on how visiting Gallipoli last year, as part of our Long Service Leave, had

given me a greater appreciation of the strength and courage of the ANZAC soldiers.

It's always nice to be invited to participate in community events, as it demonstrates the importance of relationship-building that goes on in a small community. This year, I have also been co-opted onto the Mallacoota P-12 School Council as their community member.



Dawn breaks over Betka Beach and the dawn service

In June, I am participating in a community memorial event in Cann River to remember a police officer killed 50 years ago in the line of duty. We pray that each community engagement leads to further opportunities for relationships and evangelism.

Pilgrimage/HOPE25

Back in 2023, a few of us began feeling that we needed to combine prayer and the environment, and we explored the idea of

Banner Image: Mallacoota from the air

Circle Image: Jude & Andy

Middle Image: BBQ breakfast after the dawn service

Bottom Image: The dawn service



Communion on a fishing table, converted from an old ironing board

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pilgrimage. In July 2023, a small group of parishioners walked and prayed from St Peter's in Mallacoota along 32km of the Wilderness Coast Track at the Eastern end of the Parish. The feedback was excellent, but with our Long Service Leave taking up much of 2024, it was only now that we had the opportunity for the second part of the pilgrimage.

Over the first weekend of May, 11 people (seven men, four women) camped at Wingan Inlet, an isolated campground one and a half hours from Mallacoota or Cann River, and is geographically close to the centre point of the parish. We started and ended each day in prayer and reflection on the Psalms, then spent much time walking, talking, laughing, praying and getting to know each other. Although our walking was limited to about 10 kms, it was a valuable time together.

We concluded with an outdoor communion, set up on a fishing

We concluded with an outdoor communion, set up on a fishing table by the inlet – rather fitting for our following of Jesus, who called the fishermen

table by the inlet – rather fitting for our following of Jesus, who called the fishermen. This was one of our two HOPE25 project ideas. With half the attendees regular parishioners and the other half family members or friends, it was a great time of gentle evangelism and relationship building.

There is great enthusiasm to have another pilgrimage later in the year around Cann River at the Western end of the Parish. Perhaps



At the top of Trig Point on one of our walks

this could also include a working bee on the St John's garden, if BCA Nomads would like to join us?...

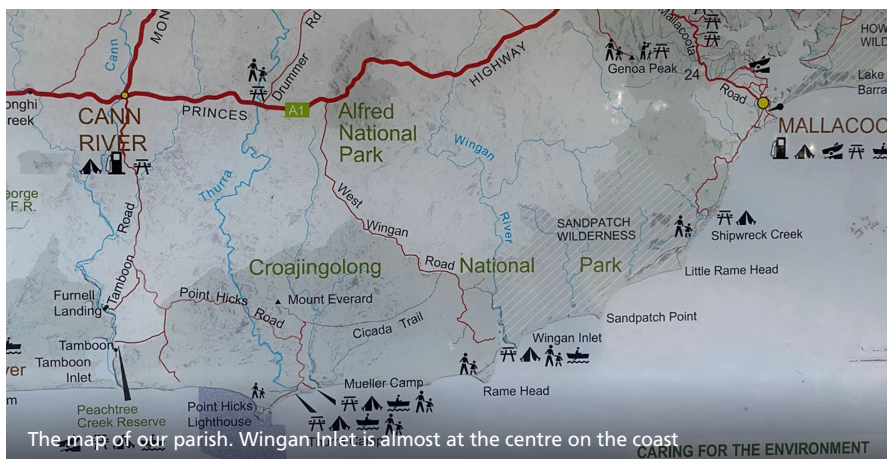
Our second HOPE25 initiative features a series of movies with a theme of hope. With shows alternating between evenings and daytime, we hope to establish connections with a range of people who may attend. The movies we are showing are *Risen*, *All Saints*, *The Blind Side*, *Soul Surfer*, and *Gifted Hands*. We will have time for refreshments and conversation after the movies.

As there is no cinema near Mallacoota, we've found in previous years, when we've run movie series, that several community members have come along. We pray that this may be true for this series as well.

Please pray that the seeds of our two HOPE25 projects may grow in the lives of those who attended.

Study

It's now five years since the Black Summer Bushfires, and yet the



The map of our parish. Wingan Inlet is almost at the centre on the coast

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impact is still being felt throughout the Parish. During and after the fires, I reflected on how scarce resources were for clergy leading a parish through natural disaster. Yet, it is an experience that many of us, particularly in remote and rural parishes, will have. Over the last few years, I've felt strongly that I need to undertake further study in both psychology and theology to begin creating the resource I would have found helpful, with the hope that it will be beneficial for others in similar circumstances.

This year I'm formally studying both a Graduate Diploma in Psychology through Massey University in NZ, & Graduate Certificate in Divinity through Melbourne School of Theology, as I begin to pull together the learnings from the fire. The Parish is enthusiastically embracing this study, as they understand the need for such a resource. For the next term, our Sunday series will delve into the Resurrection encounters in more detail, exploring how these wonderful yet traumatic stories contain parallels that I believe can speak to a church in a time of trauma. The Parish Council and I are both grateful for the support that BCA has also shown me, both while I am studying and working. We ask for your prayers as we continue to work out the balance between church, community,

study, and life.

Pray for my study to be energising and fruitful, with the outcome being beneficial to the Parish and then to other churches going through disaster.

Advocacy

In my last newsletter, I indicated the threat of restructuring that Fisheries and Parks Victoria workers were facing. In February, the VFA (Victorian Fisheries Authority) officially proposed a horrendous restructuring that removes 50 per cent of the fisheries officers across Victoria, including reducing four positions in Mallacoota to two. Although Andy's job is 'safe' it has resulted in many hours of advocacy, letter

writing, social media campaigns and awareness raising in support of his colleagues and their families. When the final restructuring was announced on budget day, it was a great disappointment to everyone in the team that the government had ignored all advocacy and would still force 15 current fisheries officers into redundancy, while removing 17 more vacant positions from being refilled.

This has been a particularly challenging time, and we ask for your prayers not just for us, but also for all the fisheries officers, other VFA staff and their families impacted by this restructuring.

In June, we will celebrate seven years of ministry in this Parish.



**God Bless,
Jude & Andy**

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