

Perspective

Volume 20 Issue 92 | Autumn 2014

*Property - its place in
mission and ministry*



**uniting
church**
Canberra Region
Presbytery

Editorial

How do we reconcile the idea of ownership and property with a movement of the Spirit and hold lightly that which has become so imbued with a deep sense of the sacred?



How can we avoid being weighed down with a sense of responsibility so heavy, it denies us freedom and flexibility, responsiveness to the Spirit blowing through God's church to bring life in all its fullness. How does it all relate to the New Testament call to be 'living stones' and the prophet Isaiah's promise that God's people would call their walls salvation and their gates, praise? (*1 Peter 2:5 and Isaiah 60:18*)

I'm not sure we have the answers to all these and other questions but read on and discover what Niall Reid says about letting go of a deeply loved family home. Read what Jean Shannon says about how the Spirit is moving in a hospital multi-faith setting. Aimee Kent tells of the newly forming Grace Community in Goulburn where 'church' happens in the bush and around the dinner table as well as in other contexts. Gwenda Bramley speaks of South Woden's 40 year experience without their own church property and what that means to them.

Read also of the lessons learned by Mark Faulkner, Minister at the most recently built of our churches in Gungahlin.

We've also included the 5-year plan to be presented at the meeting of Presbytery. It includes responses to the property issue as well as other big picture items we need to address.

Introducing "Glimpses of the Spirit"

Perspective brings in written form, the presentations given at the Presbytery meeting to help us all keep abreast of the broader issues affecting our Presbytery and to receive teaching in relation to these issues.

A new venture - an online magazine of two pages called 'Glimpses of the Spirit' - will aim to help us stay connected with Spirit-driven grass-roots initiatives taking place in individual congregations and agencies.

Contributions to 'Glimpses of the Spirit' will rely much more on networking and spontaneous offerings (anything up to 500 words plus a photo or two) than on systematically asking certain people for articles. "Glimpses of the Spirit" will be distributed monthly or as soon as we have two pages. These will be able to be printed off by congregations for members who prefer hard copy.

Please send us stories, testimony about what God is doing in your congregation (whether long-standing or a new initiative), the stirrings of movement, the faith response - whatever has potential to build us up, to pray more effectively, to inspire, affirm and help us remain connected, co-ordinated and grounded in what God is actually doing throughout the Canberra Region Presbytery as a Christ-centred faith movement.

Carolyn McAllister



Situated in the beautiful Murrumbidgee River Corridor, close to the junction of the Cotter and Murrumbidgee Rivers, Greenhills is a place for learning, renewal and retreat... Canberra's premier rural camp and conference facility, only 15 minutes from the city centre!

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Presbytery Minister (Pastoral & Administration) Report to Presbytery meeting on 17th May 2014



In my office I have four prints of paintings by Stanley Spencer, an English painter (30 June 1891 – 14 December 1959) who was noted for his unconventional depictions of Biblical scenes.

In my four prints Spencer has depicted Jesus in four poses:

1. Considering the lilies (actually daisies) of the field
2. Lounging with the foxes who have no holes
3. Picking up a scorpion without being stung
4. Rising from sleep in the wilderness

Each Biblical setting is familiar to me. Spencer's depiction of Christ is actually quite confronting – not like the Jesus I grew up with at all. Each one of them is different. Most disturbing for me is the one that looks remarkably like an old friend whom I have not seen for many years.

These prints constantly confront me with a few questions:

1. Is my Jesus made in my image, ie as I want him to be, or is he free of my personal prejudices?
2. Am I prepared to see Jesus in the faces of the people I meet as I travel around the Presbytery?
3. Do others see Jesus in my face?

There is currently a conversation being held right across our Presbytery concerning how we can best use the resources we have: our people, our money and our properties; for the future of the church.

We live in an age unprecedented in its suspicion of the motives of other people (them in Sydney, or in Canberra, or ...) and in its need to blame someone (other than ourselves) for the predicaments we find ourselves in. It is not easy for us to enter into conversations about how we might best resource the church for the future, particularly when we are suspicious of those asking for the conversation.

As I travel around our Presbytery I meet people who are serious about their faith and who give considerable time, energy and money to ensure their congregations continue to serve Christ. Some of these congregations are small and feel their resources are dwindling. Others have old buildings that cost more to insure than we can afford.

Yet others have new buildings that require significant investment in their upkeep. In one way or another all of us are asking – what future does our church have and will our investments in our church buildings be a blessing to that future?

I do not have any simplistic answers (beware the simplistic answers to life's complex questions!). I do believe, however, that our faith calls us to leave behind parochial attitudes and dare to see beyond personal gratification. Surely this is partly what is meant by the scripture that tells us Christ forsake his place beside the Father and gave his life for the world.

As I go about my administrative tasks I keep reminding myself that I do them for the sake of the congregations that form our Presbytery, people who have been faithful to God in the past and long to be so in the future.

As I respond to my pastoral responsibilities I keep being reminded that our Presbytery is blessed with faithful, courageous, gifted ministry agents who dare to believe that there is a future for our church, 'though we do not know what form that will be.

May you be encouraged by the Christ who sits beside you in the pew each Sunday. And by the Christ who serves in the Food Pantry with you each week. And by the small child who plays with others in the playgroup. And by the Christ who asks difficult questions. And by the Christ who asks of you more than you are able to give. And by the Christ who offers you pastoral care when you are distressed.

Kevin Dilks

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Presbytery Minister (Mission & Education) Report to Presbytery meeting on 17th May 2014



Thank you to the many folks who have made Meryl and I very welcome to the Canberra Region Presbytery over the last couple of months.

It's been a generous and warm welcome and we look

forward to getting to know people and the region better.

In the last few weeks as I have started to focus on the role of Presbytery Minister: Mission & Education, my attention has been drawn to the 2008 mission statement this presbytery works with.

"The Presbytery will assist the congregations and other bodies within its bounds to:

-Discern the mission of God in their local areas:

- Discover, access and develop the resources that are available to enable them to live out the mission of God."

This is the classic and universally accepted statement on mission by churches around the world. The Uniting Church also articulates this understanding of mission in the Basis of Union. God seeks reconciliation and renewal through the work of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Church is called to serve that end. God has a mission and the church in its local expression is tasked to get on board with the enabling of the wider church.

In the context of change that congregations and presbyteries experience, we may well ask. "How do we start to discern where God is active?"

The gospel writers seek to answer this question in a number of different ways in response to encountering the risen Christ. Matthew sets up the contrast of two different kingdoms. One of Rome and Caesar and one of God reflected in Jesus. Matthew's response is one of an organized society that lives in particular ways. The Sermon on the Mount found in chapters 5-7 highlights what God's kingdom looks like.

Mark takes his readers on a journey of discovery of this man/Son of God; one who preaches, heals and feeds. Mark takes us all the way to an empty tomb and poses the question of discovery. Who is this Jesus? The Jesus whom you will meet ahead of you, the one who is "good news" the Son of God.

Luke in contrast invites us into the world of the socially excluded, the poor in body, mind and spirit. Luke's Jesus seeks the transformation of poor and socially excluded people making meaning and purpose of people's lives in relationship to God.

John on the other hand shows us the cosmic Christ, part of God's major plan for reconciliation of the world. Jesus enters the struggle of life and death, not to judge the world but to be its savior.

We might also consider one of the readings chosen for my commissioning. That is the call of Moses at the burning bush and God's self-revelation (Exodus 3: 1-15). There are a number of ways this particular text is translated into English to give it its fullest sense. God's name is I AM WHO I AM, or I AM WHAT I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE. There is a sense that God's mission is discovered on the way and it's only on the journey and with deep listening that we discover what God is on about.

So, what do congregations and presbytery start to discover about discerning God's activity in and for the world?

God invites us to encounter the WHAT, WHO and IS of God on the journey of faith.

God seeks the fullness of relationship with the whole creation and is particularly concerned for the poor and marginalized.

Jesus is Good News and seeks the transformation of people where they are. Death is not the last word on life and the way in which humans live together matters, for God is a God of justice and love.

God's mission is not so much about us, our church, our institution or our buildings. But about God's interests of a reconciled and renewed creation that worships, witnesses and serves a loving creator.

The church community needs to be listening deeply and looking with Jesus eyes for the risen Christ in the most unlikely of places and joining in.

Take a look at your church activities, the resources you have and what you spend your time on. Do they reflect the interests of God? How can you as the people of God be more Christ like, a foretaste and sign of the reign of God to the community you live in?

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the family home moving on



Rev Niall Reid, when Moderator of NSW/ACT Synod, held a radical vision of how we might change our attitude to our property resources which the Uniting Church sees as a critical issue. Niall is now helping facilitate a conversation across the Synod and, in this capacity, attended the May Presbytery Meeting.

At the beginning of March 2013 I, with my four siblings met in my parents' house in Canberra where they have lived since 1967.

It was new when they bought it; the place where, with some help from their young children, they laid the parquet floor which my mother has polished for nearly fifty years, giving it that beautifully aged shine; the place where grandparents came from Scotland to live with us for six months, ten people living under that one roof - and yes, to make a place for Granny and Grandad, my brother and I moved into what was effectively the tool shed, a sauna in summer, a freezer in winter. It is the place which is the source of many stories and where many stories have been told; of Christmas and birthdays, 21sts, even a wedding, Scottish dancing in the garage and up the drive - many special occasions - shared and cherished by an ever expanding Australian clan.

Today the house looks somewhat weary, things growing where they ought not to be, cracks in the walls witnessing to the little earth tremors Canberra has experienced over the years, musty books that haven't been opened in a generation, ivy reaching ever further over the white cement rendered brick, the marks of its previous assaults before being ripped away clearly visible on the never once painted walls.

A house once sparsely furnished is now jam packed with furniture, some of which graced family homes of previous generations in India and Scotland, knick knacks, inherited or acquired, the mementos of holidays with family and friends, things left behind by children who would collect them some day - a place no longer housing ten or seven or five - just two - my 88 year old father and my 85 year old mother. Oh for their age you might say, they are doing pretty well. My mother helps at the Seniors' lunch at their Church looking after the oldies, some no doubt younger than her, but the house is too much these days and my father, although he keeps on keeping on, senses that his days are numbered, and Mum wouldn't stay there on her own.

The plan is for them to build a granny flat at the rear of my younger brother's house - thus the family meeting - arranged around the dining room table, a table crafted in Kashmir sitting on a rug, a Christening gift to my mother from a Maharaja - seven of us, sitting in a way and in places we had not for 30 years or more, knowing that it probably wouldn't happen again and that this place that has been our home, our sanctuary, a sacred family place, the backdrop for countless photos, a castle of memories, a symbol of who we are, soon would be no more.

It is hard and yet it is time. It is sad but inevitable. It is good because as a family all that matters is what is best for our mum and dad - what is fair. Who gets what in the end doesn't matter. Four of us decided that it is up to our parents and if our younger brother should end up with a bigger house, a larger part of the estate, so be it - he has a young family and it will be good for him in addition to the responsibility that comes of the commitment he makes for one or two or ten years. Our inheritance is not something we deserve or have any right to. Yes, I built the rockery steps at the side of the house, now overgrown. I painted the interior of the house and many other things but I have no claim because of that - it was but my contribution to the family home which sheltered and cared for me, which held me close, encouraged me, shared abundant life.

Who knows how the future will pan out. New things will happen; this and that will be planted in other houses as pictures and furniture find new places to contribute to the life of a family, spanning back a century or more from Glasgow, to Bombay, Greenock to Canberra, sparking memories of things long past, part of creating new ones for a generation yet to come.

Niall Reid

South Woden Uniting Gathered in my Name

How, you ask, can a church be a proper church without its own building?

The answer is: creatively.

In 1967, South Woden United Church started meeting in Pearce School hall with Rev Geoff Bridge as minister.

Nearly 50 years on we still meet in the same venue, now Pearce Community Centre. We have 75 active adult members with average attendance at Sunday worship of 50 including 2-10 children. Rev Rachel Kronberger is our minister in half time settlement.

Over the years (but especially in the early years) the question of a building of our own came up, largely because this was the model of church most of us were familiar with.

Much debate, discussion and consultation took place before the decision not to build was reached. Voting gave a majority; nevertheless some members chose to move to congregations with buildings.

- Key issues that underpinned this decision were:
- The church is the people not a building
- Financially, the cost was high and we felt that money was better spent going to wider work
- At the time we did not have a mission that required a building
- Woden Valley was well supplied with many and easily available facilities.
- The passionately held belief that as a vital congregation, our Christian mission is to encourage, affirm, empower and support members to go out into the wider community (as individuals or groups), to infiltrate and insurrect, to form alliances, and to be the face and hands of God in the world.

Within the church community

No building, no sacred space. Not true. We are free to create our sacred space anew and as appropriate each week using banners, cloths, candles and flowers for adornment - and light weight chairs for seating. The accompanying photo shows our Palm Sunday set up with a long table on which symbols of the events of Holy Week were placed as the story was recounted.



Image by David Cran

Yes it is sometimes a chore to set up each week, but think: no cleaning or lawn mowing rosters; no outgoings for utilities and no ongoing maintenance and repair. Outside of worship, meetings, study and discussion groups and social occasions are held in the homes of members.

Reaching out

We tell people we are here with a large billboard and an active website (very successful). Financially 20% of our budget has and continues to go to wider work.

In and for our local community, a Craft Group and *Phoenix Knitters* meet in members' homes, while 'Carols under the Stars' is held annually at Pearce Shops with *The Gospel Folk*. Sunday Community lunches (much anticipated by our guests from nearby Masonic Homes) have been held in Pearce Community Hall. Mind you, it is a challenge to provide hot lunch for 60 in a facility with no kitchen – we had to be very creative there!

In the wider community many and varied are the contributions of our members: earlier initiatives included the setting up (and handing over) of Woden Community Services and ACT Hospice Society. Currently there is much support for refugees, the Homeless Shelter at St Columba's and Hospital Chaplaincy.

Come and visit us.

Gwenda Bramley
South Woden Congregation

Aimee's journey Caravan of values

Recently I had the great pleasure of visiting a new faith community called 'The Commons' located in the Hunter Presbytery.

It is an arty café space run by a group of younger adults, located on the top floor of an old building next to the Hamilton Church. It is a meeting space for climate change action groups, wilderness protection communities, book clubs and yoga groups. There are regular music gigs and game nights and most Fridays, if you walk into the space, there is coffee brewing and lively conversation afoot.

For me, stumbling into this space for the first time, I was struck by how obviously the values of 'The Commons' community were expressed in 'The Commons' space. Let me explain.

At its core, 'The Commons' is built around a series of values, things that they strive for in their mission statement. Their vision is to be a community of hospitality, creativity, sustainability and justice and what I discovered was that these values permeate the building, the space, as much as they do the community.

The community insists on serving fair trade tea, coffee and food within their café, as well as re-purposing whenever possible old furniture and belongings.

The community values common knowledge, with one wall hosting a collaborative library of books that have inspired the lenders.

Even when the café is in full swing, there is a free 'make your own' tea and coffee station in the corner, with equally good produce, so that anyone who wants to be part of the community, whether they wish to buy coffee or not, can feel that they are welcome. In short, 'The Commons' café is as much an expression of the faith of the community that gathers there as the people themselves.

But what does all this have to do with the Grace Community I hear you ask? The Grace Community, for all intents and purposes, doesn't own any property. Some of our individual groups meet in the great outdoors but most rely on the generosity and hospitality of the North Goulburn Primary School, Goulburn Uniting Church (where we utilise the Wesley Centre), and people's homes.

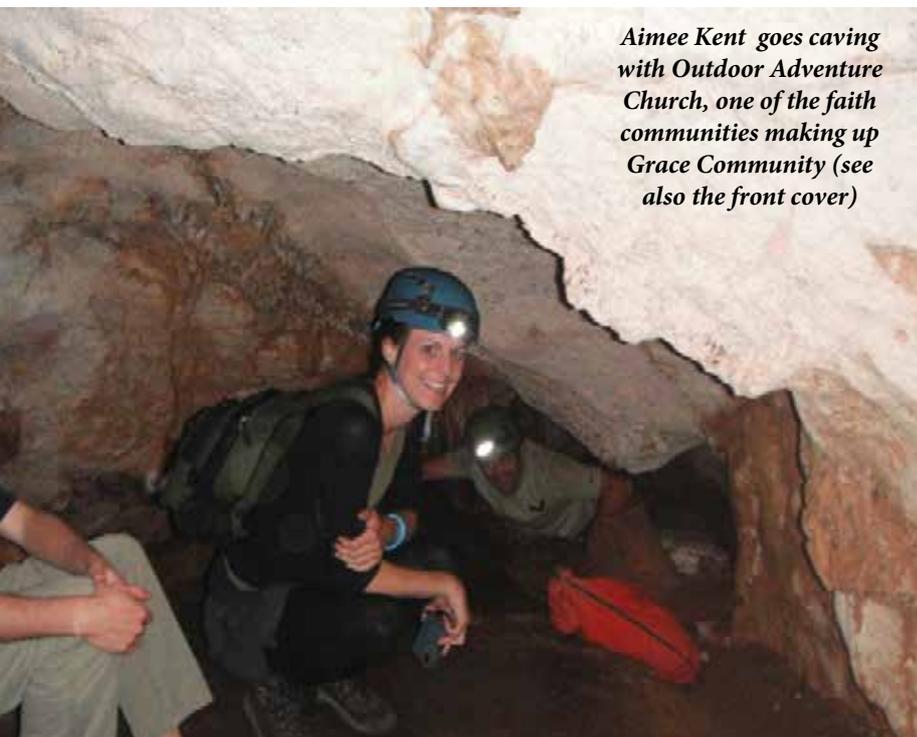
One of the things that this means is that, unlike 'The Commons', we don't get to choose the artworks on the walls, the fixtures or the posters.

We can't decide on the structures or whether the space has compost bins, and so we must rely on embodying our community values via our people, and by being willing to be a bit of a travelling caravan. While it might sound like a bit of a pain (and at times it can be), this arrangement also comes with great benefits.

Practically, we don't hold the responsibility for maintenance or insurance of any particular property. This frees up our time and resources for other purposes. Even more importantly, our travelling circus allows us to build strong relationships and partnerships with other local groups, working together whenever possible for the mutual benefit of the broader community. While it does mean that we don't get the perks of a space like 'The Commons' where we can infuse our meeting place with our ethos and values, it also means that we are able to take our community wherever it needs to go to share our presence, our vision and our hope with others, rather than just expecting them to always come to us.

Aimee Kent
Minister at Grace Community, Goulburn District Parish

Aimee Kent goes caving with Outdoor Adventure Church, one of the faith communities making up Grace Community (see also the front cover)





PROPERTY

Mark Faulkner, Uniting Church Minister in Gungahlin ACT, site of this Presbytery's newest church building, brings almost 20 years' experience and observation of contrasting mission and property settings and concludes with thoughts and imaginings for the future.

From country town...

My first placement as a Minister was in Tenterfield, a country town of 3500 people. Each fortnight, after first having my service in Tenterfield, I would travel over the border into Queensland to the very small town of Wallangarra to lead their service.

The Wallangarra congregation had a membership of six elderly women, four of whom were widows, (Jesus had a few stories about widows) but each fortnight we would meet in the Union Church in numbers ranging from six, down to my smallest ever congregation of one. This church was a small, white, wooden building, set on a large block of land. Over the years an invisible someone always mowed the grass and even when something needed painting or doing it was suddenly done. When it was time for me to leave my placement, knowing there would be no one following me, the widows suggested we simply have a meeting one night so anyone who was interested could come and hear what was happening. When I arrived for the meeting there were cars everywhere, standing room only in the church and, while they were not angry at me, they were there because this was their church; it belonged to the community and my parting was seen as a loss.

... to country city

While in Tenterfield I was asked to consider going to Wagga Wagga; the largest inland city in NSW with a population of 60,000.

Wagga Wagga had a team ministry of two Ministers, a youth worker, a secretary, four congregations in three church buildings, four Church Councils, three property committees, four houses and a little bit of land somewhere off in the bush. And... they had been talking about building. (Jesus had a few stories about buildings) In spite of my initial reluctance I was settled there for seven and a half years.

Over my time in Wagga we sold two churches, one house and the little bit of land somewhere off in the bush. We brought three congregations together to a school hall and began the process of looking for and buying land. The years have passed and in a few weeks, at the end of June, I'm going to the opening of the new church, which is still called Pilgrim Uniting. The two churches we sold were built in the days when people could help out and there are photographs of members of the congregations, putting in foundations, painting, hammering and yet they were prepared, enthusiastically, to hold a bigger vision as a pilgrim people, beyond their loved buildings.

... to bush capital

Then I was asked by Synod to consider Gungahlin Uniting. And... they had been talking about building. And here I am in my eighth year of Ministry with the Uniting Christian community at Gungahlin. When I arrived the congregation had been meeting in a school hall for ten years. We began the difficult task for any community group of planning to build; dealing with ACT Land Development Agency, the Synod and Uniting Financial Services, architects and project managers, builders and interior designers, not to mention working this through with the congregation, fund raising and financial responsibility, week after week and month after month of late night meetings. All this we did without conflict within the congregation, giving shared responsibility to different groups and individuals and embracing the gifts that each had to offer.

However the most important task of building and change is the encouragement and building up of the Christian community; the people.

If Gungahlin Uniting had stayed in the school hall, hidden away in some suburb, setting up every week, confined to just a Sunday morning, I don't think we would have a Gungahlin Uniting Christian Community today. We now have a congregation that has around 27 different nationalities represented, we have new people who come along most every week, most stay, some don't.

being a Pilgrim People

We have also now built on our land our own food store with funds from the congregation, business groups and Uniting Church seed funds; this food pantry (and our café) is now open each Thursday, (day and now nights). We have a church and community centre that is used most days and nights of the week, by both the church and wider community groups that all reflect our core values as a congregation.

A building also brings other challenges, for example the approach (eight to date) of other denominations and religious groups all believing they have been led in some way or have the right to use the buildings. This might sound like I'm keen on a building project, but really I'm not, although I do have a few thoughts about buildings and property.

Property issues

While I agree that the Uniting Church needs to discuss the issue of property, I firmly believe the issues are vastly bigger than those presented in our recent special *Insights* magazine. The issues are not only about money, or value, not simply about our theology, or regulations (law), but also about ethics, about the way we identify the mission of God (as opposed to the mission of the church), the way we view faith communities and the vision we hold for the future. I do agree however that every congregation, including those who don't feel property is an issue, need to discuss property, mission and a vision for the future.

Is Gungahlin the last such building our church will build? Do we believe there is no point in planting new congregations? Do we believe that local congregations don't matter? Do we believe the Uniting Church doesn't have a future? Do we believe that congregations don't need a "space"?

Five of my thoughts.... and imaginings!

► I believe the places where Christians gather need to be where the community ordinarily meets too; next to the banks, restaurants, supermarkets etc. What if the \$2-3million cost of building was invested and the interest made available to a congregation for leasing a shop front/space/coffee shop and then each week offering a space to gather and have "simple church" with conversations about faith and life along with other community building events?

► Over the years there have been many stories of individuals sent to start new congregations without adequate resources. Imagine, if land was bought, a useful community space built and we put a team of leaders in who can work together to create community.

Or do we simply believe that places like the great bulk of Western Sydney have no need of a Uniting Church presence? Do we really believe that this idea will in the long run have a greater cost?

► We desperately need to be able to identify those places where the Uniting Church can be missionally strong, and those places where we don't need to be present for one reason or another; (the presence of other denominations or religions, the reality of various regions being overly secular or the population size being too small.) There is nothing wrong with this! Perhaps it is the role of Presbyteries to make these decisions. Imagine if \$10,000 was given to 50 strategic congregations and \$10,000 was given to 50 regional congregations to use at their discretion for mission. For a congregation it is easier to make \$10,000 into \$20,000 for local mission than begin with nothing and make \$0 into \$10,000! And... Imagine, if any money raised from the sale of buildings by the Synod for mission and not simply to cover losses/debts/short falls etc. Imagine if we knew and affirmed our strategic and regional congregations remembering that some strategic congregations may even be made up of just a few people!

► Whatever is the case about legal ownership I believe it is unethical for any size faith community to be forced to vacate their property. As I have found, the buildings mostly belong to the wider community and to the people who have built them through hard labour and their own personal finances. But if we want to ask ourselves "what mission are we called to for the future", then we need to at least be able to ask questions about our properties, which is partly what the latest issue of *Insights* is doing. Imagine if as a people of faith, we would not simply allow time to mould us, but we be shaped in the present time as a missional people for the future.

► Property is not simply a congregational matter, but an issue for the very life of the whole church body. Imagine if Presbyteries and the Synod were able to discuss their own missional values and property in the same way congregations are being asked to discuss these matters, so that together we could be a pilgrim people!

Being a Pilgrim People means going from somewhere ... to somewhere. But before any people leave a place... you have to answer the last part first... where is the Somewhere that we are going to? (Jesus had a few stories about being "on the way" too!)

Mark Faulkner,
Gungahlin Uniting Christian Community



Image by Brian Rope

Can we gift wrap the Holy Spirit ?

'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

Matthew 18:20 (NRSVA)

We are just beginning to negotiate chapel space in the new Canberra hospital.

That is, the old building we currently inhabit is about to be demolished, so we have to find temporary accommodation for 3-5 years while they build the new hospital. And before that, we have to lay claim to space in the new building before it is built.

The hospital chaplaincy team leaders and the community visitors have to consider, 'What kind of space do we want? What makes a place holy and how do we share it with others? Or do we?'

Many, many years ago, when the chapel was opened at the Canberra Hospital we were predominantly a mono-cultural city. Yes, there was a Jewish community but really, that was about all the visible multiculturalism to be seen. The chapel was essentially a Christian prayer space. All that has changed now.

Many of the medical staff are Muslim and as you probably know, they are required to pray 5 times a day. We have been offering them a corner of the chapel for their prayers. Prayer times depend on the sun and can change seasonally so sometimes their prayers coincide with my chapel service.

Quietly, I have always been delighted that they are welcome and comfortable enough to come in and pray. I have felt enriched by the sense that this holy space is glorifying God in many languages and in many forms. I am honoured.

Recently, a Muslim colleague shared with me that she feels the same but, she added, as people of the book, she doesn't want to disrespect the Bible by turning her back to it. However, the direction of her prayer and the layout of the Chapel mean she has to, so she apologised to me. I have spent a long time thinking, 'How do we make this new holy space welcoming to all and avoid that kind of embarrassment?'

When I am giving bedside communion, I ask in my gathering prayers, 'Please make this bed a chapel to hold and celebrate our worship'. Is it Holy just because I say so? And then I remember Matthew. It is because we are worshipping together that makes it special. We could be standing in the car park, it wouldn't matter.

If you go into the chapel at the Canberra Hospital at any time of the day, you will see people in some form of communion. They may be actively praying, sitting quietly, meditating or softly playing music.

Unless they are engaged in some ritual, you usually cannot tell whether they are Christians, Buddhists, Humanists or just human, waiting for some meaning to enrich them. I am becoming more and more convinced that it is their silent prayers that make this place Holy. We only borrow it for ritual.

As pastoral carers in the hospital or the universe, we owe it to each other to make open, welcoming spaces, even when they might be virtual as with bedsides or car parks...it is not the bricks so much as the attitude that make a place Holy.

I am reminded that after the destruction of the temple, the Jewish people had a more intimate relationship with God: the God of everywhere, not just the Temple.

Their relationship was more direct and not just through priests. When a person has been brought down by illness, in many ways, their temple is destroyed.

We need to find a way to have an open door without having a door at all.

Jean Shannon
Hospital Chaplaincy Co-ordinator

To find resources or discover ways of contributing, see Jean's website page: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/hospital-chaplaincy/ or contact Jean by email: jshannon@netspeed.com.au or phone: 02 6244 3768.



Why a five year plan now?

In 2008 Presbytery recognised the need to move into a more intentionally “missional” phase and developed a 5-year plan to that end.

This focus was summarised in the Mission Statement :

“The Presbytery will assist the congregations and other bodies within its bounds to:

- a) Discern the mission of God in their local areas;*
- b) Discover, access and develop the resources that are available to enable them to live out the mission of God.”*

Central to the fulfilling of this mission was the creation of a staffing team with skills and experience to:

“Work with

- a) Congregations and other bodies to identify, engage, help and train people to live out God’s mission; and*
- a) Congregation based Ministry staff to enhance their experience of leading the congregations in mission.”*

The focus is and will always be the mission and ministry of our congregations and other bodies.

In large part the goals of that Mission Plan have been met. Most importantly we have a staff that have clear directions for the work they are to do in the name of the Presbytery:

Rev Kevin Dilks - Presbytery Minister (Pastoral & Administration)

Geoff Wellington - Presbytery Minister (Mission & Education)

Briony Griffiths - Presbytery Community Development Worker (UnitingCare funded)

Carolyn McAllister - Admin Assistant

It is time, therefore, for Presbytery to consider its next 5 years.

A new phase

The last Mission Plan was predominantly about setting a foundation for effective engagement with Congregations and Ministry staff.

Now we are in a phase when more focussed engagement in the ongoing mission and ministry of our congregations is required and possible.

Who is going to do this?

Obviously **Presbytery Staff** have an important role in the Presbytery’s desire to ensure our congregations and other bodies are able to respond to the call they each sense concerning their local missions.

Alongside staff are the various **Committees of Presbytery** who have specified responsibilities: Pastoral Relations Committee, Finance Committee, Property Committee.

Each of these people and groups will contribute towards supporting and encouraging congregations and their ministers and other church organisations in their ongoing mission and ministry.

What is achievable?

Too many plans have high ideals but are lost in the dust of bookshelves never to be referred to again. The intent of this plan is exactly the opposite. Therefore each staff person and committee have been asked to respond to a simple question:

“What 1, 2 or 3 things can you do in the next 3-5 years that will mean our congregations, organisations and ministers can respond more effectively and faithfully to the call that is theirs?”

Thus the plan is realistic, achievable and a faithful response to the calling placed on the various people and committees of Presbytery.

What are some of the big issues that are before our Presbytery

In no particular order:

- **New development areas – Molongolo, Riverview, Googong, Trahlee, and other areas in regional NSW.**
- **The ageing and decline of the church**

continued over



- **Increasing compliance issues, both from the Government and the Church**
- **How do we best value and use our property resources in changing times.**

How will we address the big issues that are before our Presbytery?

New development areas

The Presbytery Minister (M&E) will give this a priority and engage congregations bordering the new development areas to consider how they might take part in the church's ventures into these areas.

Ageing and decline of the church

The Presbytery will engage in a wide-ranging assessment of our congregations to determine where there is potential for developing thriving mission of the Church.

After this assessment the Presbytery will strategize how to best direct its resources so as to both promote growth in those congregations demonstrating potential and pastoral care to those congregations with limited opportunity for growth.

Increasing compliance issues, both from the Government and the Church

Finance and Property Committees will work with the Presbytery Minister (P&A) to encourage and resource local congregations and also to continue to liaise with Synod concerning common-sense approaches to issues of compliance.

How do we value our property resources in changing times.

As part of the missional assessment of b) above the Presbytery will develop a comprehensive property register including costs of maintaining our properties and the extent to which they are utilised by the local congregation.

IN GENERAL

The Presbytery will do all it can to fund staffing so that our congregations and ministry agents can continue to be resourced and supported towards effective ministry and mission.

GOALS

1. PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Consultations

Train a core group of people to participate in consultations for a three year period

Candidates Sub-Committee

Develop its capacity and record in receiving candidates into field placements in both congregational settings and in chaplaincies

Promote the enrolment of Uniting Church members, and especially prospective candidates, in the theology programs of Charles Sturt University.

2. PROPERTY COMMITTEE

Engage in a Presbytery-wide inspection of all manses

Create a Property Register of all properties of the UCA in the Presbytery.

3. FINANCE COMMITTEE

Further the discussion with Synod concerning "loan" to the end that a resolution can be achieved.

Grow the communications between Treasurer and congregations to increase the confidence of the relationship between Presbytery and Congregation.

4. PRESBYTERY MINISTER Pastoral & Administration

Pastoral

Arrange regular ministerial peer group meetings for mutual support and encouragement

Arrange regular one-on-one meeting with ministry agents based on expressed need.

Arrange the annual ministers' retreat

Facilitate Ethical Ministry compliance for ministry agents

Facilitate the Chaplains support group

Visit congregations outside of ACT one weekend each month

Visit congregations within ACT one weekend each month



Re-engage regular gatherings of retired ministers and spouses

Administration

Assist the Presbytery-wide Congregational Assessment referred to in previous section

Develop a common-sense approach to volunteer engagement for the congregations

Review current Office IT facilities.

5. PRESBYTERY MINISTER

Mission & Education

Mission

Familiarise and build relationships with the region and people in areas of strategic importance and possibility for future ministry

Facilitate conversations between congregations bordering Molongolo concerning possible ministry and mission into the new development

Facilitate conversations between congregations bordering Riverview, Googong and other new development areas concerning possible ministry and mission into the future.

Facilitate conversations with rural and regional centres for future missional engagement with the wider community.

Facilitate conversations between congregations in the inner north of ACT and rural congregations concerning cooperative futures and new models of ministry.

Education

Developing resources for congregations to:

Engage the missional context of their ministry.

Provide training for lay ministry – lay preachers, sacraments, etc.

Arrange opportunities for continuing education and ethical ministry events for ministry agents in placements

Prepare and implement training of a core group of people to participate in consultations for a three-year period

Arrange for Living our Values, Safe Church, etc. courses in strategic areas of the presbytery.

Participate in the Synod wide Uniting Learning Network

6. PRESBYTERY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER

Develop strategic responses to the ideas expressed in the Community Development Forum, Appendix A.

7. PRESBYTERY OFFICE

Feed the “movement”

(In conjunction with the Communications Think Tank)

Develop a means to encourage feedback and ongoing dialogue from Presbytery meetings and articles in Perspective

Prepare a “newsletter” that communicates what the Spirit is bringing into being across Synod and Presbytery

Re-focus Perspective to reflect the educational input at meetings of Presbytery.

Facilitate administrative functions

Review office IT facilities to ensure we are achieving the efficiencies we seek

Advance notice Formation, Education, Discipleship

A conversation around discipleship-making with Craig Mitchell from Uniting Church Assembly.

To be held at Kippax Uniting Church, Canberra in the first week of July - date still to be decided.

Please keep an eye out for more details in your weekly notices and on the Presbytery website.



How could the Uniting Church shape

Notes from
Canberra Community
Development Forum
Saturday 15 June 2013

1. Ecumenical/spiritual voice

Ministers/church leaders in the media (need training for all)
Online presence of UC *major voice – blogs
Use talkback radio
Unified UnitingVoice – including UnitingCare
Facilitating regional clergy/leaders gathering (civic religion, e.g. ANZAC Day)
Encouraging ecumenical gathering – voice
Finding an agenda/issue to draw them together (local issues)
Clustering together of churches of different interest – Canberra Alliance, Chain Reaction
Christians for an Ethical Society Parliamentary Fellowship
Inter-faith – working together on issues that concern us all
Prioritise inter-faith dialogue – Inter-church forums, ACCC involvement
Seek out opportunities – at congregation level as well as Presbytery – for inter-faith forums
Identify the common and important society issues that different denominations can unit in addressing
Uniting For Change – website, community forum

2. Youth

Ask for them, listen and respond (more than congregational level)
Provide space (venue)

Modelling church members be mentors for school kids
Church members go out, reach out to where young people are (e.g. school breakfast program)
Not to preach at young people!
Being inclusive! Messy Church
Offering chaplaincy
Social media – Twitter, Facebook
'Grandparent' youth
Musical focus – DJDIDI
Build rapport/relationship
Breakfast meeting group – professional and mentoring
Attention to youth at risk
Church playgroups
Partner with youth services, re mentoring
Coach a soccer team
Supporting parents and family: looking after children
40 Assets for resilience
Generations join in conversation

3. Mental health and disability

'HOME' in Canberra (N.B. Common Ground)
Supporting 'chaplains' in schools that support kids/families with health/ability needs
Welcoming and inclusive in our church spaces – support members with how to...
Linking isolated people with mentors
Share information with our own people in congregations
Provide facilities for use by community groups who work with people with disabilities
In-home practical support
Community needs etc for people in flats etc
Prison-related needs – more awareness and action

Congregation get a better understanding of what is already happening in community
Provide respite opportunity
Mental health issues affect people in the Church just as much as outside – work to remove stigma
Mental Health – art exhibition in Church, Creative Arts
Storytelling
Transport services
Housing services – appropriate residential care services for young people with disabilities
Lobbying for police procedures to be improved for mentally ill people
Provide increased support for the Big Issue
Year 11 – 12 stress – explore health approach
Lobby around the leading edge of issues affecting people with disabilities
Be ready for changes under the NDIS – what will congregations/ UnitingCare offer for people coming for care?
Look at ways to reduce the silos between health and social issues and looking at the whole person – act to reduce poverty – act to reduce obesity

4. Increased equity

Lobbying for new measures of economic health
Leading a public conversation on causes/impact of inequality
Linking equity to issues such as refugees
Conversation/engage with decision makers/power brokers re shaping of nation's resources more equitably
Provide report back to Chief Minister from today
Use church resources to communicate solutions



the Canberra community in this area ?

UCA to model equity
 Demonstrate shared housing models and help to underwrite funding collectives
 Active advocacy on social – equity/inclusive issues
 Argue for better tax systems
 Make middleclass feel ‘uncomfortable’ so that they are encouraged to active practices towards an equitable society
 Have equitable distribution of church-owned property
 Need for concerns for: refugees – petitions; poor; homeless
 Lobbying – letters, media, etc – act to influence how policy is made.
 Combine to create a letter campaign
 Gather like-minded people – add the voice of the church to existing community action around issues of social inequality - note the number of people this represents
 - work out ways to set some of the national equity agendas
 Educate and inform congregations about the causes of inequity to inspire action – through contact as well as information

Participate in existing whole-of-church action around social change (like Uniting for Change, existing UCA (national) campaigns, etc)

Areas for Action:

- cost of living: food, utilities, etc – ways to close the gap
- developing models for mission and outreach for congregations that change the lives of people in the congregations as well (in-sourcing rather than out-sourcing)
- provide practical, innovative policy ideas to politicians

5. Civil society – Kindness and Respect

Recognition of examples of respect
 - from church perspective and from community perspective
 Participating in public conversations – media, schools, e.g. R.A.V.E programs – partnerships
 Supporting people to
 ▲ understanding, ▼ fear,
 ▲ connectedness
 Ambassadors/role models for civil society
 *First of all – transform our own

congregations with civility, kindness and respect – as a core for society
 White Ribbon ambassadors
 Speaking out – ‘naming it’ – when we see disrespect
 Stronger advocates
 Modelling to next generations – in schools – tutoring, mentoring
 Living (at least) basic kindness ourselves
 Having language of respect as our own language
 Advocacy to parliamentarians to support those who are civil
 Knowing each other
 Building relationships with isolated
 Friendliness connection
 Voice for Refugee – elections and all the time
 Writing to Speaker (HOR) and President of Senate Speaker (Assembly)
 One random act of kindness per week
 To not accept what is not acceptable
 Creation of small neighbourhood centres to exchange locally produced food.



The cover image: Outdoor Adventure Church, one of the faith communities making up Grace Community, Goulburn District Parish, at the entrance to South Glory Cave at Yarrangobilly Caves. Image by Aimee Kent.

Perspective (Presbytery News ISSN 1322-8323) is published by Canberra Region Presbytery, Uniting Church in Australia and printed by Elect Printing, Fyshwick. Canberra Region Presbytery is a member of the Australasian Religious Press Association.

Opinions and advertisements contained in *Perspective* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Canberra Region Presbytery.

Presbytery meeting 9th August is when the next *Perspective* will be distributed. Contributions are due by **19 July**. Contact the editorial team at Presbytery Office, GPO Box 221, Canberra ACT.

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