



**uniting  
church**  
in Australia  
Canberra Region

# **TOWARDS A VISION FOR OUR PRESBYTERY**

*COUNTRY, COAST & CAPITAL*



## TOWARDS A VISION FOR OUR PRESBYTERY

In 2014 Canberra Region Presbytery adopted a five year plan, entitled **2014 and Beyond**.

This plan was intentionally quite loose, but none-the-less attempted to give some degree of direction to our Staff and to the committees (PRC, Standing Committee, Finance & Property) that serve us.

This rather loose approach was intentional, in recognition that local congregations are responsible for listening to God and discerning their own mission plans for their own contexts. The role of Presbytery in this is to support, guide, encourage and, where appropriate, help facilitate the growth of the ministry and mission of our congregations. It is not the role of Presbytery to dictate a top down plan. History shows us that when this is attempted our congregations, understandably, reject such autocratic behavior.

In the last two years since the development of **2014 and Beyond** there have been a number of developments in the wider UCA that have increasingly impacted all presbyteries.

As a result of the wider issues:

- a) decisions are being made as to how to make the Synod Budget sustainable
- b) Presbyteries are engaging in conversations about futures that are characterized by cooperation and commitment to the common good rather than isolation and competition
- c) analysis is being conducted on the needs of Presbyteries and development of proposals for greater co-operation and support across Presbytery boundaries
- d) re-thinking is happening with respect to the future uses of proceeds from sales of properties, with a particular focus on how those who “have” can support those who do not.

All of this can produce a sense of instability and uncertainty across the church. The fruit of this is congregations feeling devalued at best and abused at worst.

When congregations feel devalued they find it hard to move into the future, trying new things, trusting God to remain faithful, living with hope and being signs of the Spirit in the world.

How do we respond to this?

We cannot move into the future of the church as if it is simply a business, though we must bring good planning, management and governance principles to bear in whatever we do in the church. It is not as simple as setting out a business agenda and moving forward with it. Volunteer organisations such as congregations cannot be “ordered” to go anywhere they do not feel is right for them. Yes - there are congregations that are unhelpfully resistant to creative change but congregations do not move from resistance to faithful movement into the future by top down directives nor by top down priorities.

We must not retreat into an isolationist, protectionist mode, cutting ourselves off from the rest of our Uniting Church as if this will somehow protect us. As well as addressing our own local issues we must also play our part in the wider issues of our church. And we must do so from a sense of capacity and faith, rather than from defeat and despair.

To that end it is time for our Presbytery to clearly articulate its purpose and vision. We need to do so in such a way as to:

- a) build up the congregations that are our Presbytery, and
- b) encourage the ministry agents who have such important roles in our congregations discerning what God is calling them to be and do.

Overall, Presbytery exists to stimulate and encourage (Constitution para 26) the primary ministry and mission of our congregations and the ministry agents who lead them. The Presbytery must always be secondary to the congregation.

The following is offered as a beginning to a conversation about a motivating vision for Canberra Region Presbytery.

**Canberra Region Presbytery seeks to be a Presbytery in which:**

**a) Congregations:**

- a. Know they are appreciated and valued as the first line of the mission of Christ in the Community;
- b. Are encouraged to seek the signs of the Spirit within them, calling them to authentic Christian community and mission that is appropriate to their context;
- c. Recognise they are part of a larger whole that is not a threat to them.

**b) Ministry Agents:**

- a. Know they are appreciated and valued in their roles with congregations
- b. Are encouraged to offer and receive support with colleagues;
- c. Recognise they have a key role in helping their congregations discover their authentic calling as Christ's people

**c) Presbytery Staff:**

- a. Guide the Presbytery in considering future directions by looking for and responding to signs of the Spirit in timely and effective ways so as to "get on board" with what God might be doing in contexts we might not have expected
- b. Grow the confidence of ministry agents, lay members, congregations by being available and present to the needs and opportunities that emerge in our Presbytery;
- c. Ensure that, in an age of increased compliance requirements, ensure that the decline in volunteer engagement does not hinder the effective business of the church.

**d) The Presbytery:**

Is able to participate with other Presbyteries and the Synod as a whole in discovering the call of God on our Church; and

**addressing the issues facing our church with transparency, trust and honesty.**