

Perspective

Volume 21 Issue 96 | Autumn 2015



**ALL FOR ONE
AND ONE FOR ALL?**



**uniting
church**
Canberra Region
Presbytery

The cover image: O'Connor Uniting Church Triptych banner - see also the article, "Front cover", on page 9.

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Perspective Q and A

- *How often do you publish Perspective and in what quantity?*
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- *Who is responsible for collating the information content?*
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- *What is the cost to Canberra Presbytery?*
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- *How is the document funded?*
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Christ-centred unity

“And let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint.” Galatians 6:9

What did Jesus have to say about unity?

In the Gospel of John 17 v18-23, He prays: “

... may they be one as you, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe and be convinced that You have sent Me.” v 21.



God’s grace alone enables us to be one in the Father and the Son, but how can we be more receptive?

Back to basics

Being with God through Jesus is beyond our understanding but not our faith. Some ways into that sacred unity include

- Time spent silently in His presence,
- Immersion in the Word,
- Living Christ’s instructions to us **when and how we are led by the Holy Spirit**, and
- Being courageous in our expression of His life.

I have one goal in the first year as Chair of this presbytery and that is greater unity.

[from Vanessa’s address to Presbytery, Feb 2015.]

Jesus stresses unity with His Father, and prays that we may be in one with Him and the Father so that the world may believe He was sent from the Father. If as individuals we are not in unity with God, how can we be in unity within the church? If we are not “one in us” as Jesus said, why should the world believe that Jesus came from the Father?

Before we look at unity within this presbytery, even within our congregations, intimate unity with God and His Son at the personal level enables us to love others in our church – or at least be less negative towards them – and so bear witness to our discipleship.

Unity in the church, for all the world to see, brings honour to God, re-presents Jesus today and gives the Holy Spirit’s fruit a nurturing environment in which to grow and flourish. Christ-centred unity is not an optional extra for us, it is our point of difference in the world and flies in the face of individualism and narcissism.

This church does so much good and works hard to live the gospel, to be the leaven in the lump, and I believe we will thrive, no matter what the numbers or the dollars say, when we unite and support each other individually and congregationally across this presbytery.

Time out or burn out

Being in harmony with others can be hard if you are feeling worn down by too many expectations of yourself and others. Jesus told us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light and I think, at times, we make our walk with Him harder than it need be.

We know what He told us to do to spread the good news and tend to those in need, but what good are we if we burn out in our effort? We cannot fix the world’s problems but we can bring God’s love and care to those problems through action when led, and prayer at all times.

Meditation, silence or quiet reflection are important elements of our spiritual well-being which can be easily overlooked in our busy lives. Paul gives us some practical advice for every day in his letter to the Philippians 4:8:

Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. (The Message Bible)

Fast and Pray

Jesus withdrew and spent time alone with His Father, praying in solitary places and we are told to do the same. It is hard to ignore the white noise of the world when in silence, waiting, but I have been taught to just let distractions play out and not fight them and simply be still, in the moment. He knows. It takes faith to surrender to silence. I know we are a time poor society but even five minutes is better than none.

So, in pursuit of unity within the Body of Christ in this presbytery, may I call on you to put aside time for prayer and fasting? By fasting I mean withdrawing from the incessant stimulation of news, advertising, television, iphones or whatever acts as a distraction to you.

.../continued on next page

All for one and one for all?

Working for social justice

Social justice is all about ‘all for one and one for all’, not in a narrow sense of loyalty within an in-group or fraternity but where the ‘all’ means literally everyone and anyone.

For our neighbour, the person for whom the Gospel asks us to have equal regard to ourselves and our loved ones, can be anyone, including a person far removed from us, our community and life situation.

Drug law reform

The dependent drug user is the paradigm of the outsider, excluded from families and friends, cut off from their own dreams.

They find themselves in this position by their own choices and by an unforgiving society that by its laws, policies and attitudes fences off the drug user with insistent demands and obstacles.

These push the user back into the pit out of which they so desperately seek to scramble. We confront the image of God in the most marginalised. Jesus preached a gospel of radical hospitality. In the Kingdom of God the drug user has a seat at the table.

At its February 2015 meeting, Presbytery endorsed a proposal from the group calling on Assembly to help initiate a national conversation on drug law reform.

Another and very large group in society for whom we need to show solidarity are those who cannot access decent, secure and affordable housing. The consequences of ‘housing stress’ include poverty, overcrowding and poor health, interrupted education, diminished family and community life and, at the extreme, homelessness.

Indeed there is much overlap between illicit drug use and homelessness explained by many shared risk factors.

Table Talks

The social justice group along with UnitingCare is supporting a Synod initiative for Table Talks within congregations about affordable housing.

These are conversations within small groups to share stories about housing problems, to put forward ideas for improvement both in public policy and in the Uniting Church’s stewardship of its own property holdings, and to generate action.

If you would like to know more about, or contribute to, any of the above or other social justice and environmental issues with which the group is involved, please contact Evan our convenor [evan.mann\[at\]netspeed.com.au](mailto:evan.mann@netspeed.com.au)

Or come to our next meeting at 7-30pm, Monday 15 June at O’Connor Uniting Church, cnr Brigalow and Scrivener Streets, O’Connor, ACT.

Presbytery Social Justice Group

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An ageing population of prayerful elders is a precious asset in our church and can provide the backbone to this fast, praying also for those with less time. Putting aside some time each day, even those five minutes, means we can spend more time waiting on God, to find out what He wants us to do, not what we or others think He wants us to do.

Perhaps the time is spent simply being, waiting on Him, watching a sunrise or sunset, expecting nothing. A sacrifice of time dedicated to God. Within your quiet time I hope you will find time to read and pray the Gospel of John chapter 17.

Pentecostal reflection

As they say, timing is everything. Pentecost Sunday is 24 May and given its significance it seems like the perfect time to start.

One observer notes:

“Pentecost presents us with an opportunity to consider how we are living each day. Are we relying on the power of God’s Spirit? Are we an open channel for the Spirit’s gifts? Are we attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Is the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) growing in our lives?”

I need to draw aside. Would you consider joining me for whatever time you can for two weeks from Pentecost Sunday? I do hope so.

Vanessa Crimmins
Chairperson
Canberra Region Presbytery

All for one and one for all?

Community mobilisation



**Em Prof Bob Douglas
speaks on
*Motivating people
in a
challenging world***

Bob Douglas joins the May Presbytery Gathering as a guest speaker with vast experience in community mobilisation. The following is an abstract from Bob's presentation.

Human civilisation now faces a series of new and unique challenges that will not be addressed without transformative change in the way we, especially in the Western world, live, move and have our being.

The Christian church should be at the leading edge of this transformation along with the other great religions of the world.

Bob Douglas retired from his post as the Foundation Director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the ANU in 2001.

His forty-year medical career spanned work as a specialist physician in Papua New Guinea, being Dean of the Medical School at the University of Adelaide and Chair of a Geneva based World Health Advisory Group. He was honoured for contributions to medicine by the award of Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2000.

Following his retirement in 2001, Bob, with five colleagues from various walks of Australian life, established a new body, Australia21 the Board of which he chaired for 10 years and continues as a Director. Australia21 is building networks of thinkers and researchers on some of the large challenges which face Australia in the 21st Century.

Arising from his experience in Australia 21, in 2006 Bob published a small book entitled "*See-Change Centres Grey Power and Hope*".

The book summarised the mounting evidence that humans are placing unprecedented strains on the planet and argued that a positive outcome to the current human predicament would depend upon a major culture shift.

Yet, in Australia and many other Western countries, the Christian church is in serious decline.

Much of my time and energy has been directed to seeking to engage Australians and particularly, residents of Canberra, in bringing about essential transformative change from an anthropo-centric to an eco-centric world.

I encourage you to explore the movement around the International Charter for Compassion as well as the way in which Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC) can help to engage diverse groups of people to take action to promote a fairer, safer and happier world.

In my experience the KTC approach could be used in congregations to help to generate a new understanding of Christian discipleship in the current setting.

It could also be used in diverse neighborhood groups to empower people to re-engage politically with bringing about the kind of world we will leave our children.

Bob Douglas



He proposed that in Australia this shift could be initiated by a coalition of thoughtful older and younger people acting together through networks of newly evolving structures and grassroots community activities.

A Canberra group of experts from diverse professional backgrounds met in a roundtable to consider the need for a new body and SEE-Change is the result. Bob chaired the SEE-Change committee for six years until 2012. He continues to work on two major projects in the SEE-Change program.

The first is 2020 Vision, a school-based program that is encouraging children from all ages to engage with the sustainability challenge. The second is a program initiated by the Belconnen SEE-Change group on Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC), which seek to re-engage Canberrans in ownership of, and action for the future.

To find out more about SEE-Change and the KTC process, go to: <http://www.see-change.org.au/>



Image by Brian Rope

Since our first Presbytery meeting for 2015 I have been engaged in a range of conversations about the possible futures for our Uniting Church.

Whether it be at Synod gatherings/meetings, with people from other presbyteries, or the ministers, church councils and congregations in our own presbytery, one theme keeps recurring for me – we cannot be what we once were so how do we discover what we could be?

A look at the early church

Acts chapter 2 paints a picture of an enthusiastic early church caring for each other. Those who had much gave to those who had little or nothing, even selling property for the sake of their struggling brothers and sisters in the faith. This was a laudable attitude to have and one that was recognised by others in the Mediterranean world as a defining characteristic of the movement begun by Jesus of Nazareth.

At this point I feel I need to stress that this is not a paper advocating selling our properties and amalgamating congregations. If this is your first thought after reading the last paragraph then I encourage you to

read what follows very carefully for I am proposing something more central to our faith than mere property rationalisation.

Throughout its history the church continued to try to emulate the Acts 2 example of radical “communal” discipleship and participation in the body of Christ.

Monasteries grew from places of retreat to be places where the poor could come and find help. Churches established hospitals, ie homes in which the poor with no one to look after them could be cared for in their old age.

Overseas missions called the church to open its eyes to the needs of others across the seas and to open its heart to offer practical help as well as the hope of the Gospel, simply because God gave the Son to the world.

A change of direction

Of course the ability of the early church to maintain their early generosity proved to be limited and before long the generosity directed to brothers and sisters in need began to be directed towards the building of grand cathedrals and other symbols of the strength of faith. This change of direction, ie from generosity to brothers and sisters in need to generosity towards the building program, meant the focus of faith shifted selfless caring to protection of the things that seemed to ensure security and safety, ie buildings.

The present situation

The UCA across Australia is going through an amazing transformation.

Diminishing financial resources has meant we can no longer continue to be the church that was secure in the knowledge we had the financial and people resources to look after ourselves and the institution of which we were part; that we had excess by which we could demonstrate our commitment to the Gospel by giving to those in need, usually overseas.

Suddenly, or so it seems, we find our Synod having to deal with less money to do the things we were used to doing.

‘In a time of need are we prepared to emulate the church in Acts and express radical commitment to each other?’

Disappointingly we have had to face the fact that our churches in remote and rural areas are struggling. Certainly city congregations are generally better off than those in country regions, but even in the cities many of our congregations are being confronted by:

- their inability to fund full-time ministry agents
- an apparent disconnect between the congregation and the community in which the congregation is located.

Possibilities

Considerable conversation has been happening across the Synod about how, like in Acts 2, those congregations with greater resources could assist those with little. Alongside this are questions like:

- Do we want to have a UCA presence in unsustainable and remote areas?

Administration

- Can presbyteries find ways to cooperate and support each other?
- Can small, property –rich congregations in the metropolitan areas of Sydney release their resources for churches in new development areas?
- Does our church actually know how to successfully grow new congregations?

Closer to home

Across our own Presbytery there are congregations who have taken seriously the Gospel “imperative” demonstrated in Acts. However, as any congregation’s capacity changes it is all too easy to retreat into a protectionist position, afraid that one’s own existence is threatened by any attempt to emulate the Acts church.

Salt and light

Across our presbytery there are congregations that are prayerfully seeking how they can creatively respond to the call of God to be the church in their particular contexts. There are congregations that are thriving, being salt and light in their communities. Some are small, others are larger. Some have a wide range of ages involved. Others are ageing.

It seems to me that one of the things that is generally evident in these congregations is a willingness to look beyond self-preservation.

If it is possible for congregations to have egos, then these congregations seem to be able to put ego aside and focus on what could be rather than what once was. And this is not for the sake of continuing or preserving the congregation but for the sake of the yet-to-be-fully-revealed “kingdom of God”.

Co-operative futures and radical commitment

When does it make sense to have conversations with neighbouring congregations about cooperative futures? Usually the answer is, “when we can no longer afford a minister ourselves”.

I wonder if things would be different if we actually had these conversations before we reached a point of incapacity; if, rather than joining our weakness/need with the weakness/need of another we look at joining strength with strength, capacity with capacity.

Adding one group’s weakness to another group’s weakness does not, I think, promise the emergence of a new strength (though I am not prepared to categorically say this can never happen). On the other hand adding one group’s strengths to another group’s strengths seems to me to offer greater hope.

Should we wait to have conversations with our neighbours until we are forced to do so by necessity?

This edition of Perspective, and the input at the meeting of Presbytery on 16 May, asks the question “All for one and one for all?”. In a time of need are we prepared to emulate the church in Acts and express radical commitment to each other?

‘Does the idea of unity of the Body inspire or threaten you and your congregation?’

But more than out of necessity could we dare to ask the more basic question: is your congregation focussed on self-preservation or on openness to cooperative futures? Does the idea of unity of the Body inspire or threaten you and your congregation?

I believe the Uniting Church is experiencing a wonderful thing, as difficult as it is to sit within it. When the Uniting Church was formed there was great joy at the celebration of the birth of a Church that took unity in Christ seriously.

Are we equally able to face the transformation that our church (congregations, presbyteries and synod) is being forced to go through at the moment with a joyful embracing of the thought that we are in this together and together we will find new hope, new vision and new priorities.

History tells the truth about how we have been in the past.

Faith tells us the truth about what we are called to be from now on.

All for one and one for all?



Kevin Dilks
Presbytery Minister, Pastoral and Administration

All for one and one for all?

Mission and



If, like me, your first thoughts and images on hearing the theme title of the next presbytery meeting went to the “Three Musketeers” or more likely the “Three Mouseketeers”, you might want to contain the laugh for just a moment.

The presbytery staff hasn't gone completely mad but we do enjoy a laugh now and again. 😊

There is of course a serious side as well to this theme. So let's have a short exploration of that before returning to the Mouseketeers. I want to explore this idea of “*All for one and one for all*” through images.

In popular culture the role of “image” has become all-pervasive. Think Facebook, My Space and the Internet. Consider TV, Film, Advertising. Still not convinced? Then, if you must, have a look at political messages and even church notice boards.

Messages, ideas and concepts that shape and, some would say, control our lives come via images. There is however nothing new about this. It is just that our 21st century western culture has taken images to a whole new level of accessibility with 24/7 saturation.



Even thousands of years ago images on coins were used to stamp rulers' authority and power over people. Every time a coin was used to pay for something they were reminded of being subject to the emperor or king. However I suspect this image on a coin was more of a reminder of “all being for one”.



Sporting teams of course thrive on this notion of “*all for one and one for all*”. Without such an approach to this common goal, a sporting team never learns how to win. The role and place of the individual is changed for the common good of the whole team.

The recent 100-year celebration of the landings at Gallipoli on ANZAC Day is sometimes used as an image of individuals coming together as one for a common purpose. It is said by some that this image defines Australian character and ethos as “mateship” or perhaps I could say “*all for one and one for all*”. I think this image is problematic though.



As an image it does not deal with the reality that we are talking about - war and its horrible destructive consequences; that there is more than one party involved and they were pursuing different goals and objectives to the British Empire. This image also tends to make no room for the redemption of suffering and loss other than to justify continued warfare as a way of resolving world conflict. But it does hold a provocative place in the Australian imagination that supports, mourns and holds together all those touched by the sacrifice of war.

Images in the Bible ...

Biblical images of “*all for one and one for all*” include John's gospel image of the vine and branches (John 15: 1-17). “*I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing*”.



Paul's image of the parts of the body in 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 is another: “*Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many*”. Paul goes on to expound this image of the body as being one in Christ and joining with the risen Christ in the mission of God. Here I see the image of “*all for one and one for all*” more clearly reflecting the sense of God's incarnation of Jesus joining with the whole creation in its reconciliation and renewal.

... and the Basis of Union

The Basis of Union picks up the image of participating with God and joining together in God's mission. Clearly the fledgling Uniting Church (UCA) saw the leading of the Holy Spirit to come together in Union (Par 1 BoU).



Education

The UCA saw this union of churches as part of belonging to, and informed by, the wider *“One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”* (Par 2 BoU).

Paragraph 13 of the Basis of Union (Par 13 BoU) goes on to draw all people into the ministry of Christ; exercising gifts and service for the Church to *“order its life in response to God’s call to enter more fully into mission”*. There are many more images in the Basis of Union that speak to the theme of *“all for one and one for all”*, including the structures and governance of the UCA and the way in which we listen to the interpretation and leading of the scriptures and creeds.

All for one and one for all?

The image of *“all for one and one for all”* can be a confronting one in the individualistic society that we live in. The message that individuals often receive from society is one of *“getting all you can”* and this sometimes spills over into the life of the church.



Canberra Region Presbytery and congregations are faced with many opportunities for ministry and mission but within a changing societal context that is not so focused on the whole but on the individual.

These changes will test the resolve of the Uniting Church and its commitment to *“all for one and one for all”*.

“Musketeers and Mouseketeers”

We know that in these stories the individuals involved regularly mess up, get things wrong and mayhem and confusion reign supreme. It seems only by chance that things work out. However in reality they muddle through by holding on to their motto of *“all for one and one for all”*.



The theme of the presbytery gathering reminds us of God’s invitation as congregations, groups, agencies and presbytery, to embrace resurrection life. That encounter with the risen Easter Christ is experienced in community, in offering radical hospitality with shared bread and poured out wine. Then face to face with the risen Christ in the mayhem and confusion of our lives we start to grapple with what it means to be *“all for one and one for all”*.

Geoff Wellington
Presbytery Minister
Mission and Education



Front cover

The framed image on the cover of this issue of *Perspective* is of a Tryptich, a large banner in three pieces which hangs from ceiling to floor in the O’Connor Uniting Church hall.

The Tryptich’s imagery focuses our attention on the transforming power of relationship in Christ, the ‘One for all’. It was created some thirty years ago during the charismatic renewal that was sweeping through denominations and was fully embraced by O’Connor around the time the Uniting Church came into being.

In July 2013, the ABC’s Compass Program aired *‘Whatever happened to the Charismatic renewal?’*, focussing on O’Connor Uniting Church.

Regarding this focus, Brian Medway, a Minister of O’Connor 1984-94, says in his blog (www.brianmedway.com.au/2013/07/23/whatever-happened-to-the-charismatic-movement/):

“As a sample it presented a fair and reasonable set of reflections....as a statement on the overall impact of the Charismatic renewal it could hardly be said to have touched any of the core issues, either then or now.”

This impact, looked at *“in the only real context it can be fairly placed...the global context”*, includes:

“The awakening of the sense of unity created by the Spirit through the Charismatic renewal cannot be understated. Unlike any time in Christian history the sense of unity and the breaking down of denominational and theological walls has outlasted all attempts to resist. ...This and the revelation of the kingdom of God have set unnumbered believers on a path that no longer wears denominational or theological systems as a badge but provides those distinctives, as they really are – tools for the trade.”

This awakening, this sense of unity, finds expression in the Tryptich. It may well have relevance as we reflect on our theme: *“All for one and one for all?”*

Carolyn McAllister, Editor

All for one and one for all?

Church planting -

“Christian evangelism is the holistic process of initiation of persons into the reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and anchored in the Church for the transformation and healing of the world”. (Heath Elaine A. 2014. Page 24.

Missional. Monastic. Mainline. USA Cascade Books)



Grace Community, Goulburn was initiated in 2011 by the Canberra Region Presbytery and the Goulburn Parish.

It was funded through the Synod Mission Resource Fund (SMRF), Goulburn Parish, Presbytery and the Grace Community.

The overall objective was that a ministry agent would work with a team to develop

a new congregation in Goulburn, focused primarily on young families. The key aims of the project would be:

- The establishment of a new faith community in Goulburn within 12 – 18 months, which will then further develop into a new congregation of the Uniting Church.
- The emergence of lay leaders for this new congregation
- The development of a vibrant worship life which appeals to and includes leadership by younger people in Goulburn
- After 3 to 5 years, a fully functioning congregation working for the mission of Christ in Goulburn and beyond.

In January 2012, Rev Aimee Kent was inducted as Minister. The project imagined a congregation of 100 – 200 people in 3-5 years appealing to younger people and families that would become the new Goulburn Uniting Church Congregation contributing \$127,500 over the years 2-5.

Grace Community/Goulburn Parish Relationship

The Canberra Region Presbytery sees Goulburn as potentially a regional congregation in a growing population area and set in a socially disadvantaged community.

If Grace Community is to grow and flourish it needs the Goulburn Parish to support and anchor it in the Church.

Goulburn Parish needs Grace Community to give fresh expression and lead the way in “initiating persons into the reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ” in “small, relational and belonging ways”.

Both expressions of church have a place in the interests of God.

One expression cannot remain vital on its own and if the necessary funding can be sourced for the Grace Community then ways of a shared, integrated and organic relationship will need to be found.

This has proved an unrealistic expectation for a fledgling congregation. The history of Uniting Church “plants” in the NSW/ACT Synod show that it takes 15/20 years for a congregation to reach stability and start to become financially viable.

Early in 2013, working with Rev Graham Anson New Initiatives & Congregational Development Consultant, Uniting Mission & Education (UME), Aimee established a slightly different model of ministry from that originally envisaged.

A Small, Relational & Belonging model

What emerged was a collection of small groups that grew out of areas of ‘self-interest’, focused on the strengths, passions and skills of the group to pursue the interest of the group and at the same time explore faith and spirituality in that context. The groups gathered, celebrated and gave expression to their faith through community actions.

Grace, Goulburn report



At present there are eight groups that make up the Grace Community. Ranging from **Grace Youth** to **Messy Church** and from **Supper Church** to **Outdoor Adventure Church**, there are currently around 60-90 people involved with these groups, some of whom are part of more than one group.



The Grace Community model is based within an understanding of incarnational theology and emerges out of the context of the Goulburn community and the people's interest. It can be argued that this is the work of the Holy Spirit prompting and "awakening faith to constitute, rule and renew Christ's Church in his own strange way" (BoU Par 4).

The various groups are both individual in their expression and are part of the whole that shows the marks of being Church. The "Word" is engaged and the sacraments are celebrated. There is some limited interaction with the Goulburn Parish and its activities.

Within Grace Community itself, 50% of the people come from "de-churched or non-churched" backgrounds while the remainder have some or limited connection with the Uniting Church or other denomination. In the language of "Fresh Expressions and the sense that the Church is a "Mixed Economy" (Different Expressions and Stages: see R. Williams/S. Croft) churches emerge and grow at different stages of development.

Is the model sustainable into the future?

Yes. But it will not resemble the sort of congregation the UCA currently experiences as church. This raises issues for funding and the role of ministry leadership. Presently active questions are being asked about long-term ministry leadership and the need for this, but in the short to medium term, leadership is required to be present.

It seems unlikely that the Grace Community could remain vital without this leadership in under 5 to 10 years. If funding cannot be viably sourced over this length of time it is doubtful Grace will achieve the objectives of the project. A ministry leadership transition would be required in this time frame to take Grace Community from a startup project to the consolidation phase.

It does however provide an opportunity for Goulburn Parish, Canberra Region Presbytery and the wider UCA to model new adaptive expressions of church for other contexts. This may well be enough of an incentive to find additional funding for the long term and encourage action and reflection around what it means to be the church in Goulburn and other places in a holistic way.

[From a draft report prepared by Geoff Wellington for Pastoral Relations Committee]



All images: Outdoor Adventure Church and above, Rev Aimee Kent.

All for one and one for all?

Behind the scenes

After six months in her role as Presbytery Chairperson, Vanessa saw a need to share her observations concerning the work of office staff. She begins with the question: So what does Presbytery do? In this context, 'Presbytery' refers to the activity of Presbytery staff as they help the movement usually referred to as 'Presbytery', be 'all for one and one for all'.

So what does Presbytery do?

It is a question I once asked. As one who had had only intermittent contact with Presbytery staff, it was not until this year that I observed the breadth and depth of their work. So, with new eyes, I thought I would give you an idea of how the small team in the Presbytery office serves you.



The Presbytery's mission plan describes the primary focus for our staff as assisting congregations to discern and resource their mission. This includes four key ministries; administration, mission, education and pastoral care.

I asked **Kevin Dilks** as Presbytery Minister (Pastoral and Administration) and **Geoff Wellington** as Presbytery Minister (Mission and Education) about their work and pieced together the challenging jigsaw that is their roles - vocational in every sense. They are there in a crisis for any congregation with little or no warning. I have witnessed this myself. Unless you have called on Presbytery for help, it is easy to dismiss it as a bureaucracy. It is not.

Pastoral and Administration

Kevin's pastoral care of ministry agents is an important function involving small groups, one-to-one and response to crisis. He provides much unseen support to congregations, responding to the need for guidance, information or assistance. He also supports ecumenical relationships and representational requirements.

He is involved in policy development and coordinating planning activities for the Presbytery. He brings his administrative skills to bear in the planning, coordination and delivery of Presbytery meetings four times a year; preparation for and follow up on the work of both the Standing and Pastoral Relations Committees as well as support for Finance and Property.

Coordinating the work of the Presbytery office, staff meetings, support of the production of *Perspective* and other communication, usual email traffic, phone calls and minute writing are all part of what he does.

Mission and Education

Geoff works with congregations providing them with resources, assisting with direction and background support and attending worship across the presbytery, often preaching. Strategic support for leadership in ministry and assistance in planning are key elements along with mentoring lay and clergy leaders.

His work includes leadership capacity-building and spiritual and theological development. The Congregational Assessment project involves the gathering of presbytery-wide information, survey development and roll out, collation of data and interpretation for future planning. Geoff also works with Kevin in planning Presbytery and Ministry Agents' meetings and attends Pastoral Relations and Standing Committee meetings.

The wider church

As already indicated, both Kevin and Geoff cover a lot of ground visiting churches across the Presbytery. They also visit Sydney for Synod meetings and to represent the Presbytery as well as liaising with Synod on our behalf from Canberra. Kevin represents the Presbytery on the Synod Standing Committee and attends Synod training workshops as well as meetings of all presbyteries from NSW and ACT. Advocacy on behalf of this Presbytery is part of his role.

Geoff is a member of the Greenhills board and represents us at the Synod Advisory Committee on Ministry Placements (ACOMP). He liaises with the Synod Uniting Mission and Education for resources, workshop delivery and learning opportunities. He is a member of the Presbytery Task Group which meets in Sydney, is Chair of Barnabas Ministry Board, contact for UnitingCare officers and is our representative at Assembly in July.

Kevin and Geoff are ably assisted by **Carolyn McAllister** as part time office secretary and, adding their expertise to the mix, are UnitingCare staff, **Briony Griffiths** and **Alison Inglis**. With this committed team I believe this presbytery can be the crucible of change for the Uniting Church in NSW and ACT.

Vanessa Crimmins, Chairperson

I know a number of churches have links with and support one another. Please write and let me know how they work and any other ideas you might have to look at church through new eyes: [canberraregionchair\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:canberraregionchair[at]gmail.com)

All for one and one for all?

The patience of patients

Once upon a time, I had a patient who woke up one morning and couldn't walk.

Try as they might, the doctors never figured out what happened and couldn't say if she would ever get better.

Months and months of intensive therapy went by and all the while she asked God, 'what does this mean? What plans do you have for me?'

She never lost faith, she never faltered. Some days were tougher than others but while she waited for the answer she listened to fellow patients; she brought them out of themselves; she helped them discover their passions and find the courage to pursue them...she enticed, cajoled, led by the hand, many back into worship and spiritual awareness. She never judged. To me, this wonderful woman was (and is) as close to the embodiment of what the church is supposed to be. Like Acts 4:32 – 35, I got to witness, just for a moment, the Kingdom of God on earth.

I am constantly amazed at the lessons patients so patiently teach me. I feel obliged to explore how their gifts might have meaning in the greater world. It seems when we have so little left, so little to lose, generosity and kindness is what is left to give.

On many occasions, patients have said to me, 'I'm OK. You need to look after the really sick people. From their beds, they could see a hospital is full of sad stories and even when they had a terminal illness, they would say they had looked around and counted themselves lucky.'

Pastoral care is all about the living. And there is a lot of living going on. The living person in front of us is expressing their view of the world around them – right now. Even as they journey towards the end of their illness, they are acutely alive. Even when we are talking about the future and death, we are doing from the perspective of now. We (the pastoral carers) may have to adjust the 'nows' each time we meet with them because we are changed by life. Just as life changes us.

Patients are very clear on this perspective while other people (family/friends/congregations) spend so much time focussed on the dying (church/person) that we forget to see the living.



Jean Shannon, Uniting Church Deacon and Hospital Chaplaincy Co-ordinator. For resources and ways to help, see Jean's webpage: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/hospital-chaplaincy/

I often have terminal patients explain to me how lonely they are. 'Once people know you're dying', they say, 'people stop visiting. It's like they are waiting for you to be gone.'

Broader lessons

There are some broader lessons to be gained when you take hospital chaplaincy experiences out into our communities. I wonder; if we shift this waiting-to-be-gone behaviour to a congregational setting, whether we can begin to understand why people stay away from churches...and why when new people arrive at the door, they don't stay. Is it possible no one really focusses on them – just on the dull future. We can't see them in the 'now'. So I ask myself, why can't congregations be more like my special patient?

While we are waiting for the answers; waiting to figure it all out; discerning what God is trying to tell us – why aren't we out there doing as much as we can with as much as we have. Why aren't we looking after others, 'less fortunate' - patients/congregations? What have we got to lose?

I can't help but look at what we have to gain.

*Jean Shannon
Hospital Chaplaincy Coordinator*

All for one and one for all?

Courageous



In the history of the Uniting Church, there are many examples of courageous men and women taking action for those most vulnerable in society.

People took risks, rocked a few boats, and were innovative in how they sought to address social inequalities.

In her book of the same title, Winifred Ward describes them as “*Men Ahead of their Time*”. They were men of God who saw that change could happen when we all come together for **The One** and show others that **The One** is for all!

I was recently told of the story of Bill Hobbin’s radical social action in the 1930’s as an example of innovative and courageous action in the Church’s history.

The story goes that prior to his appointment as Director of Social Services in the Methodist Church in 1948, Bill Hobbin had already cut his teeth on radical social action, campaigning against slum housing in Sydney. His action led him to target the slum landlords, many of whom lived in the affluent suburb of Bellevue Hill. Ward writes; “*Hobbin and others would set up loud speakers in the streets of Bellevue Hill and inform residents of the slum situation. While they were speaking, other Legion members [a group that Hobbin had founded] would go to a local telephone booth and ask police to move the speakers. In this way they were assured of publicity.*” ...cheeky, gutsy, and downright effective!

Courageous Hearts

This year, UnitingCare NSW.ACT is running *Courageous Hearts*, an internal campaign to highlight the courageous action that staff exhibit and witness in the organisation today.

Over 200 personal stories have been gathered that celebrate the brave and bold spirit that staff bring to their respective roles. *Courageous Hearts* demonstrates that a brand is more than just a logo – it is about people who think and act with courage every day because of a belief that lies within. Through courageous actions, we inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

Or in ‘Church speak’, we show our communities the love of Jesus Christ by acting in a way that says I am serving you as He would have done.

In our own Presbytery, there are many individuals who step out bravely and with bold spirit to right the wrongs they see in society.

Marion McConnell (St Ninian’s Uniting Church) comes to mind for her commitment to see Drug Law Reform. She is passionate, she is informed, and she speaks out with courage, welcoming all to join the campaign for change.

Chris Stokman, who coordinates the Early Morning Centre, is just downright amazing! Her understanding of and compassion for her guests is remarkable. Chris and her team think outside the traditional service square and instead, are innovative in bringing opportunities for ‘mainstream’ activities to the homeless – such as organising for a registered training organisation to run a Certificate II community services course on site.



Reflections on our theme ...

As I reflect on the theme of ‘all for one and one for all?’, my instinct says to capitalise **The One**. At the core of all we do, whether it is collective or individual, should be this sense that we are fulfilling the purpose for which God has sent us – all for **The One**.

In the Uniting Church we are privileged to have advocacy and community service as integral parts of our Church life.

action and innovation

Whilst I hear the debate on whether social justice and community service are too dominant or otherwise in the 'work' of the Church, I see congregations providing the space and opportunity for people to live out their faith in practice. Right from the outset, as congregations, we are collectives offering a place for people to feel socially included and to come together with like-minded people working towards common goals.

On the wall at my own place of worship it says, 'A *whole church building a whole community*'. This speaks volumes to me. It says that we recognise that **The One** is for all. It says we want to take the

At the core of all we do, whether it is collective or individual, should be this sense that we are fulfilling the purpose for which God has sent us – all for The One.

love of Jesus to the whole community – in whatever form that needs to take – hospitality, food, shelter, education, etc.

This draws many parallels to the history of service and advocacy in

the Uniting Church. I recently read that Rev. Alex Campbell, who was the President of the Sydney City Mission from 1945 to 1963 is quoted as saying that the Mission didn't say to the down and out "God help you" but "in the name of God can we help you".

As a Community Development Coordinator

employed by UnitingCare NSW.ACT but working in partnership with the Presbytery to support congregations, I often find myself straddling a fence that seems to somehow divide the two parts of the whole organisation. The fence must be nominally placed somewhere between Canberra and Sydney – at least it often feels that way.

In the early days in the role I heard stories of senior UnitingCare staff being shocked when they 'found out' they worked for a church, and similarly, I heard congregation members surprised at the breadth and depth of community-based work done by UnitingCare.

At every point I heard "oh, but there's history Bri" as to why this congregation couldn't work with another, or why this couldn't be done. I would struggle with these reflections and say, "do you want to live in your history or do you want a future". However it has recently been said to me that if you know the history of your organisation, it can help to shape the direction it takes into the future. That being the case, let us all move into the future together with full hearts, open minds and a whole lot of guts!

Briony Griffiths
*Canberra Region Presbytery Community
Development Coordinator UnitingCare NSW.ACT*

This year there are lots of opportunities to work together as one Church uniting for all in the Canberra Region Presbytery.

Table talks

The Uniting Affordable Housing Initiative invites all congregations to host table talks where people can share their experiences of housing stress or instability.

Get involved and have your say on how the Uniting Church might contribute to make housing more affordable for those most vulnerable.

Queanbeyan Safe Shelter

The Queanbeyan Uniting Church is planning to host a Safe Shelter for homeless people in the Queanbeyan region.

Working in partnership with the ACT Safe Shelter and St Benedict's Community Day Centre, we will build the support network available to those at the frontline of housing stress.

Garden initiatives

There are also new garden initiatives in Canberra at present: the Erindale Neighbourhood Garden; Mustard Seed Uniting Food Garden at Gungahlin; and the UnitingCare Kippax Community Garden.

The gardens all seek to make fresh produce available to those who have the least. They will be built in partnership with other organisations and provide opportunities for Church members to participate in church beyond the walls of our congregations.

Want to know more?

For more information on any of these initiatives, please get in touch with Briony Griffiths, Community Development Coordinator

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