

# CANBERRA REGION PRESBYTERY REPORT

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## 1. PROVIDE A REFLECTION ON THE PERIOD SINCE SYNOD 2017 – HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

### Highlights

This year the Presbytery office is entering a period of transition and change. Vanessa Crimmins completed her term as co-chair and Delia Quigley took up her co-chair responsibilities. Kevin Dilks has retired, Geoff Wellington has moved to *Saltbush* and John Squires and Ian Diamond join us in their supply ministries until John Squires is able to take up his position as Presbytery Minister Wellbeing in February 2020. Meanwhile Janise Wood is shaping our new position of Operations Manager and with Amy Junor drives our administration support to congregations. Carolyn McAllister, now as a volunteer, continues to bring her ministry to us through our regular Presbytery publication "*ViewPoint*".

Amid these changing circumstances flows an opportunity to find new ways of working with our congregations and faith communities to be the followers of Jesus. Delia calls us all to lift our faces to head into the new seasons of Life, Church and Earth remembering Jesus' words to Simon Peter "Follow me".

That is exactly what we have striven to do, each in the way in which we are called. Our richest experiences in the two years has been the sitting, listening and praying with folk who were faced with hard edges; in times of sharing the faith, letting the spirit run and excite us. From these times we have seen people grow and find strength and wisdom to re-build and to see new futures when surrounded by ashes. It is Jesus' promise that we would see Him in Galilee that I see being fulfilled and lived out in the courageous lives of so many folks across this Presbytery.

Being followers of Jesus usually leads us to service and witness in some most unexpected ways. We see this happening in all sorts of ways across the diversity and richness of our collective experiences of being a pilgrim people. So, while much changes around us, the fundamental spiritual pilgrimage we share is to seek to continue following the way of Jesus in all its complexity, mystery, wonder and joy.

A highlight has been the strength and diversity of our ministry leadership teams. It was with much joy that we celebrated the ordinations of Rev Keith Robinson and Rev Daniel Mossfield in 2018 at Crookwell where both were nurtured by this country congregation. Over the 18 months we saw four candidates for ministry making good progress in their



formation by way of presbytery supervision and overview of UTC and engagement with CSU programs. This is exciting and continues to draw on the diversity and availability of our ordained and lay ministry folk.

Since 2017 we have celebrated eleven Induction services for new ministry agents with their congregations. We have seen answers to prayer in ministers and lay coming forward to provide supply in important rebuilding, nurture and healing situations.

Another highlight has been seeing new ventures in ministry and engagement by small congregation in providing services and care to their communities. Some examples are St Columba's Uniting (see <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6223641/a-kind-of-ptsd-what-its-like-sleeping-rough-in-canberra/>), Alpine Uniting at Jindabyne (see <https://www.facebook.com/The-OP-SHOP-Jindabyne-1541231149461729/>) and St George's Uniting at Eden (<https://eden.uca.org.au/eden-community-pantry/>). These are all stories of small numbers of dedicated folk who see ways to put their faith as followers of Jesus into action... 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' as the folk at Eden say.

Presbytery Congregations were well represented at Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees; that *"Enough is Enough"* and in 2019 we strive for *"ALL OFF Manus and Nauru"*. We have a huge challenge to turn this dreadful situation around ...not anymore to allow the words of fear and lies to drive us to the worst in us. As Australians we can do better. We can turn these dreadful, destructive and expensive policies around. Many Presbytery congregations shared reflection and engaged with National Sorry Day and we were assisted by the reflection *"We are sorry, we recognise your rights, we seek to be reconciled"* by John Squires (<https://canberra.uca.org.au/presbytery-news/we-are-sorry-we-recognise-your-rights-we-seek-to-be-reconciled-a-reflection-on-national-sorry-day-by-rev-dr-john-squires/>)

But perhaps a highlight above all has been how various Canberra congregations have been able to engage and share in moving ways with our Muslim communities over the mass shootings at the Deans Avenue Mosque and the Linwood Masjid in Christchurch. Presbytery in March passed a motion and sent letters of condolences which included *"As people of faith our hearts go out to our Muslim sisters and brothers. An attack on people of faith is an attack on us all, who seek to worship in safety and peace."* Members of congregations met at Mosques and expressed their sorrow at these killings and attacks. Then on Wednesday the 24th April, flowers and cards were found placed at the door of Yarralumla Uniting Church to convey solidarity with and peace to Christians from within the Muslim Community after the bombings at churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. Many constructive and moving sharing of experiences continue with congregations and Muslim communities.

## Challenges

We are a Presbytery in transition. We have moved to deliver our administrative and operational functions and support to congregation through our Operations Manager. This seeks to relieve the secretarial/administrative workload of the two Presbytery Ministers thus enabling our ministers to be more involved in the life of the Presbytery through more active engagement in pastoral support of ministry agents, our congregations and faith communities. And so together we would live out vibrant worship, authentic witness and serve enthusiastically the mission of God. We see that it is working but it is evolving and providing new opportunities to address with congregation the challenges we all face of:



- Congregations moving forward at different speeds and with diverse understandings of what it means for them to be church – increasing anxiety in some congregations
- Increasing number of congregations without a ministry agent in place in coastal and country locations.
- More congregations experiencing ageing membership, decline in attendance, membership, and financial capacity.

Some of the challenging questions we face are:

- What are the gifts that an ageing/aged church brings? How to encourage and facilitate, foster new vision?
- How do we affirm the primacy of local expressions of the church and nurture this primacy?
- Presbytery and Synods cannot make congregations do anything they do not want to do. How do we listen, wait and learn? How then do we increase the value of the resourcing that Presbytery can provide for congregations in their own decision-making and visioning?
- How can we stimulate congregations' exploration of why we do what we do and how we are doing it?
- Now, more than ever, we can no longer assume anything about how and why we do what we do and who we are.

## **2. HOW WILL YOUR PRESBYTERY ENGAGE WITH THE SYNOD MISSION STRATEGY – LIVING CHURCH IN MISSION TOGETHER?**

Our vision is to be a region in which congregations and faith communities worship vibrantly, witness authentically and serve enthusiastically the mission of God in Christ. Stretching from country, coast and capital, the Canberra region presbytery guides and supports, stimulates and encourages congregations and faith communities to respond to the call of God in Christ within both their context and a changing world.

We see **Synod Mission Strategy** to be well aligned with the future directions our congregations have determined. Future Directions is expressed as having the five pillars of Presbytery activity namely:

### **Resourcing congregations to function in healthy ways**

- Provide leadership and guidance to Congregations for their development and growth in mission and ministry. Support ministry agents and lay members and office bearers through professional development and training in faith formation, ministry delivery and governance.
- Provide mentoring, guidance and support for those in specified ministry (e.g. Ministers and Lay Pastors) who are seeking to lead their congregations in mission.
- Provide opportunities for congregations to share their experiences and expertise with others and relate with each other in new ways.

### **Work with congregations to discover new futures**

- Facilitate the sharing of stories and activities across the Presbytery to foster innovation, discovery, reflection and experiential learning.
- Support the discernment and development of new missional activities.



- Provide opportunities for engagement with mission planning processes, creative worship, discipleship and fresh expressions of church.

### **Care for congregations facing radical change**

- Support and encourage Congregations experiencing growth and witness to build on their potential to expand their mission.
- Provide care and pastoral support for fragile congregations to assist strategic thinking and decision making regarding their future missions.
- Provide administrative and operational support to implement strategic decisions.

### **Governing efficiency-Increasing innovative and accountable leadership**

- Promote leadership development opportunities for staff, office bearers and committee members.
- Provide clear, effective and efficient governance structures and financial management.
- Expand and update information technology and other systems to support new requirements.

### **Deepening connections-working with the wider church for mutual well-being**

- Work closely with Synod to communicate and progress new programs and changes and development across the Uniting Church.
- Communicate and collaborate with Uniting NSW/ACT to assist delivery of initiatives with and across Congregations and communities.
- Deepen relationships with Uniting, UAICC, Ecumenical and Interfaith bodies.

We see that all three Synod Mission Priorities as central components to the activities of the five pillars outlined above.

### **Growing Healthy Congregations**

*To support existing, grow new and renew missional focus in congregations and service agencies.*

We see this as essential to our pillar 2 activities to **work with congregations to discover new futures**, to facilitate the sharing of stories and activities to foster innovation, discovery, reflection and experiential learning. To support the discernment and development of new missional activities. And to provide opportunities for engagement with mission planning processes, creative worship, discipleship and fresh expressions of church. It is exciting to see this priority.

The priority area also relates to pillar 1. **Resourcing congregations to function in healthy ways** and pillar 3 **Care for congregations facing radical change**

The task in all these action areas is that we must build with congregations the connections to the Synod program and link up and foster collaborative arrangements with the resources and ministry agents and leadership in Synod to work with our people. We have a working example in how we have had the support of Cameron Eccleston, Mission Facilitation Consultant, in the re-thinking of mission and witness of the five Inner north Canberra congregations. We valued the presentation made by David Cornford, Head of Mission Strategy to our Presbytery. Our challenge is how to plan and develop connections and effective delivery with our congregation and the Synod resources. How



to be a Presbytery that plans and connects is our challenge. But our needs and Synod Priorities are well aligned.

## **Developing Vital Ministry**

*To equip and empower disciples for missional leadership and ministry*

This is of critical importance to all our five pillars. It is particularly true in 1 **Resourcing congregations to function in healthy ways** by providing mentoring, guidance and support for those in specified ministry (e.g. Ministers and Lay Pastors) who are seeking to lead their congregations in mission. The provision of leadership and guidance to Congregations for their development and growth in mission and ministry. Supporting ministry agents, lay members and office bearers through professional development and training in faith formation, ministry delivery and governance. Again, we need to foster planning conversations between Synod teams, Presbyteries and Congregation to work out effective ways to deliver what is needed. I see Presbytery having a planning and connecting role. Maybe the meeting of Presbytery Chairs can help facilitate some of this planning and working up teams and actions with congregations and Synod resources. Using CRP in training and formation of our lay and ordained ministers with UTC and CSU, offering opportunities to look at minister formation with Presbyteries and Congregation in new ways is important. Technologies for distant learning and sharing make all this possible.

## **Transformative Community Engagement**

*To serve, lead and advocate with our congregations and communities to create a world that is inclusive, just and connected.*

Fostering better understanding and connections and deep engagement with our communities is absolutely vital to thinking of renewal and future congregational function and form. I think we do this very badly. We have some example in our Presbytery where it has been done well. Uniting Care Kippax is one such case, as is the work of a smaller groups in Eden and Jindabyne. We would like to engage strongly with what is planned here. We highly value the work of Uniting Connection consultant Briony Griffiths who has taught us how we can better link the mission of congregation to the activity and support of Uniting. We do have some good news on this front but it just a glimpse of what we need to take us forward.

The big gap is in our pillar 5: how to foster, link and find relevant connection with our Indigenous communities. These folks we stand with on special occasions, but we fail to foster their everyday welfare and inclusion. The same is true but to a less extent with Korean and other non-European cultures. So, this priority is well aligned with our needs in all our five pillars. Again, how to plan together and work together so rubber hits the road is our challenge but a task to which we are committed.

