Outcomes of a Summit involving representatives of the:

Anglican
Catholic
Lutheran
and
Uniting Churches
in Queensland

Highfields
September 14-16, 2009

LIVING CHURCH IN RURAL QUEENSLAND
(LCIRQ)

‘Bringing our treasures to the table’

The Synod Standing Committee (20-22 August, 2010) endorsed the document Living Church in Rural Queensland and recommended it to:

(a) rural congregations, agencies, Trinity Theological College and Pilgrim Learning Community for discussion and action; and
(b) all congregations as a resource when considering the “Ecumenical Question”.
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1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In recent years the Church world-wide has seen a growth in rural networking and the expression of an authentic rural voice. This voice can be heard in rural Queensland, and the faithful ecumenical response of the churches testifies to the movement of the Holy Spirit among them.

We who have gathered\(^1\) in 2009 affirm the 1996 declaration, “Being Church in Rural Queensland” (BCIRQ)\(^2\) as a foundational statement which has spoken to the Church in this state. In the light of our experience we believe it is time to build on this foundation, incorporating structures and processes that will continue to promote the BCIRQ vision and address ecumenically the changing spiritual and pastoral needs of rural communities in Queensland.

*We affirm our faith in God as Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This faith allows us to celebrate our unity while recognising our diversity. In our diversity we are united by baptism. This baptism incorporates us into the one Body of Christ. Christ calls and empowers us to continue his mission in the world. Our calling is to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour in word and action, in order that the Kingdom of God may be manifest.*\(^3\)

Across Queensland we celebrate the living expressions of Church that have been empowered by the priorities articulated in the original 1996 document. These priorities have inspired the writing of inter-church covenants and brought the people of God together in both word and action.

In thankfulness for this experience, and pointing in hope to what might still be possible, this document outlines a number of proposals. These are commended to the churches in rural Queensland and to the wider Church, encouraging them to “bring their treasures to the table” as part of the ongoing journey of Living Church in Rural Queensland (LCIRQ).

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1 Please see Appendix A for a list of those who participated in this Summit.
2 Please see Appendix B for a copy of this document.
3 This paragraph re-states and affirms the theology underpinning the original BCIRQ document.
2. WORKING TOGETHER

2.1 Introduction

Ecumenical activities and projects of a diverse nature have been undertaken across Queensland, particularly in recent years. Some have involved formal covenant agreements with specific authorizations from participating churches, while others have emerged from local communities taking the initiative, building upon existing community connections and felt needs. Such arrangements and agreements range from a commitment to pray together to the sharing of church buildings and infrastructure. A sample of local covenants is included in Appendix C. In addition to these existing initiatives, the Summit recognised that there are at least three other areas of ecumenical cooperation that might be encouraged, particularly on a state-wide basis. These include: Orders of service for ecumenical worship, Religious Instruction and Pastoral care.

2.2 Orders of Service

2.2.1 Context

The Summit noted that in 2001 the Faith and Unity Commission of Queensland Churches Together endorsed a document entitled *Ecumenical Worship–Guidelines for those who meet together on a regular basis*). These Guidelines are based on the existing services of the four churches represented at the Summit. The Summit concluded that these guidelines could be reviewed and augmented by orders of service to address the needs of particular celebrations.

2.2.2 Recommended Goal

To review, promote and generate Orders of Service which will equip faith communities with a set of exemplars for ecumenical worship.

2.2.3 Strategies

It is recommended that

(a) in the light of experience, and new contexts in rural areas of Queensland, the current Guidelines be reviewed, updated and formally adopted and disseminated for ecumenical weekend services.

(b) new ecumenical orders of service be developed for special occasions (Anzac Day, community festivals, community experiences of trauma, loss and grief).

(c) new non-clergy-led ecumenical orders of service be developed for regular services.

2.3 Ecumenical Religious Instruction

2.3.1 Context

Religious Instruction currently takes place mostly in state primary schools or gatherings associated with the School of Distance Education. Churches are cooperating to provide ecumenical Religious Instruction programs, in accordance with Education Queensland guidelines, in many state schools throughout Queensland. The Summit identified opportunities to introduce suitable programs for Religious Instruction into high schools and more broadly support the spiritual development of high school students.
The Summit noted that the Federal Government is developing a National Curriculum for all schools. Such a development may offer opportunity to revise and re-articulate the goals, content, pedagogy, focus groups and delivery of Religious Instruction. Moreover, the Summit recorded a moderate risk that new developments in curriculum may impact the current nature and flexibility of delivery of current religious instruction programs in Queensland.

2.3.2 **Recommended Goal**
To sustain and further develop ecumenical Religious Instruction programs for delivery in rural areas of Queensland.

2.3.3 **Strategies**
It is recommended that

(a) National Curriculum developments be pro-actively tracked to ensure that the right of churches to provide Religious Instruction in state schools is retained, with flexibility as to the content and process of such instruction.

(b) the leaders of Queensland churches encourage their national church counterparts to support processes of collaboration with respect to the National Curriculum.

(c) a structured sharing of information about high-school ecumenical Religious Instruction be pursued.

2.4 **Pastoral Care**

2.4.1 **Context**
The Summit noted that providing pastoral care in rural areas of Queensland for those who are sick (and their families), for the aged, and for a growing number of children and young people who are at risk, can present challenges for the churches. Notwithstanding this, exemplary programmes have been established to address needs.

2.4.2 **Recommended Goal**
To respond creatively, and where appropriate ecumenically, to the pastoral care needs of the community throughout rural Queensland, utilizing existing programmes as a starting point.

2.4.3 **Strategies**
It is recommended that

(a) a structured process be set up that will enable churches and/or agencies to share information and learn from innovative local initiatives in the area of ecumenical pastoral care.

(b) accredited training for ecumenical pastoral care workers be promoted through the churches in Queensland.
3. NURTURING MINISTRY

3.1 Formation and Leadership

3.1.1 Context
Being Church in rural Queensland unfolds in a context of diminishing resources and increasing costs. The situation is exacerbated by the size of some congregations in small towns and supporting isolated Christians living on stations and homesteads scattered over vast distances. These problems have been recognised for years and in a growing number of situations, ecumenical approaches have been adopted.

3.1.2 Recommended Goal
To ensure that all pastoral leaders working in rural areas are encouraged and assisted to work together ecumenically where practical and appropriate.

3.1.3 Strategies
It is recommended that
(a) churches familiarise all ministers, but especially those who will be working in rural areas of Queensland, with approved ecumenical forms of worship as well as with ecumenical programs and projects.
(b) formation of pastoral leaders include regular updates on ecumenical initiatives being undertaken in Queensland.
(c) formation strategies continually offer the opportunity to pastoral leaders to contribute to the directions and policies concerning ecumenical endeavours.
(d) at times of changing leadership at a regional (e.g. diocesan) or state levels, consideration be given to continuing ecumenical endeavour.

3.2 Change Management

3.2.1 Context
The Summit recognised, with compassion and understanding, that worshipping or working together ecumenically is not easy for those who have not done so before. It often requires changes to the ‘hearts and minds’ of congregation members. This may include changes to deeply held beliefs; involve feelings of loss and grief about the passing of the old and familiar; and, perhaps the loss of a familiar worship space.

Importantly, local congregations need assurances from their church leaders that they are open to the development of local ecumenical approaches with the potential to produce outcomes for building the Reign of God in those communities. Such an approach was commented upon by Summit members as ‘permission giving’ to explore and generate ideas and possibilities for ecumenical practices. Sharing ‘good news’ stories of successful ecumenical engagement in other rural situations was considered to be an important element of imparting hope and building confidence to balance the ‘losses’ that may be experienced.

3.2.2 Recommended Goal
To assure rural pastoral leaders and their congregations/communities (including isolated Christians) that suitable ecumenical approaches are encouraged and consistent with the participating churches’ doctrine and teachings.
3.2.3 Strategies

It is recommended that

(a) emphasis be placed on appropriate formation and training of rural Church communities concerning the lived experience of ecumenical endeavours in other rural contexts.

(b) as far as possible the initiative for local ecumenical endeavours be taken locally through prayerful and collaborative discernment. At the same time it is recognized that ‘permission giving’ on the part of church leaders is very important.

(c) processes be set up to assist in the regular review and renewal of any ecumenical endeavours in rural areas.

3.3 Information and Communication Technologies

3.3.1 Context

Significant to being Church in rural Queensland is the availability of a wide range of information and communication technologies (ICT). These are in widespread use for diverse personal, family, business-related and other organisational reasons in rural Queensland.

Many technologies (especially mobile phones and related technologies) are used by children and young people.

The Summit noted that the Church’s mission in rural areas could be greatly enhanced by better use of technology to overcome problems arising from distance and scarcity of resources. There are a number of Church agencies that already have considerable skills and expertise in the use of modern ICT to support a wide range of educational and other applications.

3.3.2 Recommended Goal

To ensure that congregations and ministries are equipped with, and able to use, appropriate technology.

3.3.3 Strategies

It is recommended that

(a) Churches proactively share information about how they are using ICT in supporting ministry and mission in rural areas.

(b) Churches in Queensland consider how best to harness existing expertise and skills (perhaps through one or more ‘centres of excellence’) in order to:
   i) assist rural pastoral leaders and others with the identification and (where appropriate) introduction of ICT
   ii) identify ICT training material that can equip rural congregations;
   iii) facilitate the development of ecumenical guidelines for appropriate uses of ICT in the area of pastoral care; and,
   iv) where appropriate, jointly develop ICT resources.
4. STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

4.1 Context

In its deliberations, and particularly in recording strategies, the Summit recognised that awareness and ownership of this document will be essential to its efficacy. The Summit also concluded that a structural framework was required to promote the spirit of this document, to facilitate an ongoing ecumenical ‘conversation’ concerning the mission of the Church in rural Queensland and to resource ecumenical activity in a sustainable manner.

4.2 Recommended Goal

To apply appropriate collaborative processes and structures in order to build ownership, awareness, accessibility and contribution to the goals recommended in this report; enabling objectives might include:

(a) To raise awareness of this document and the BCIRQ document.
(b) To secure appropriate authorisation of this document.
(c) To raise awareness of this authorisation in churches (‘permission-giving’).
(d) To enhance ownership at all levels of the churches.
(e) To increase accessibility and usage of resources ecumenically in all parts of Queensland.
(f) To promote “success stories” from rural Queensland as an impetus and inspiration for the evolution of Church in this state.
(g) To set up a coordinating and information-sharing network and mechanisms of maintaining it.
(h) To find ways of reviewing progress.

4.3 Strategies

It is recommended that

(a) appropriate church and secular media (including linkages) be engaged to raise awareness of ecumenical endeavour in rural Queensland.
(b) Heads of Churches authorise this document and then actively promote LCIRQ/BCIRQ.
(c) Queensland Churches Together (QCT) engage in and support the implementation of recommendations in this document.
(d) networking and co-ordination of the implementation of the Summit conversation be progressed through appropriate structural considerations, taking into account that:

i) this Summit group has established an interim steering committee.

ii) the interim Steering Committee will liaise with the Heads of the four participating churches, or their nominees, with a view to establishing a standing Steering Committee of four members and generating terms of reference for approval by the leaders of the participating churches.

iii) the Chair and Secretariat for the Steering Committee be provided by one of the four participating churches on a rotational basis (suggested for a three-year term).

iv) the Steering Committee establish a standing Working Group that is representative of at least the four churches and different regions of Queensland.
This Working Group would ideally be responsible for:

(i) developing action planning sheets for each goal in this document

(ii) reporting regularly to the Steering Committee

(iii) consulting where appropriate with existing networks

(iv) acting as a forum for dissemination of information under the guidance of the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee may establish reference panels in areas of ongoing need, such as Youth; Indigenous; and Information and Communications Technologies.

(e) The Summit committed to a range of other strategies, including the following:

(i) setting up an email group of Summit participants.

(ii) holding a peak gathering such as the Summit every three years.

(iii) setting up an ecumenical database listing names of people with particular skills/background (to be speakers in particular topics etc.).

(iv) identifying existing networks through which information can be disseminated, including networks of QCT, and setting up mechanisms for this to happen.

5. CONCLUSION

Living Church in Rural Queensland (LCIRQ) reveals variable ministry endeavours and a remarkable life in the Spirit. It arises and journeys towards visible unity in faith and hope through Baptism in the Lord.

We who have gathered at Highfields in September 2009 leave our reflections for wider consideration by the churches and formal consideration by State church leaders at their meeting in March 2010. At the same time, we who have gathered commit to ongoing endeavour and a new gathering for discernment within a three year period.

We challenge ourselves personally to think, live and nurture an ecumenical heart. We are called to be prophetic in the Spirit within our particular denominations and to journey in love, joy and hope in our ecumenical Living Church in Rural Queensland.
APPENDIX 1: HIGHFIELDS GATHERING SEPTEMBER 2009 –
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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<td>Wood, Bishop Clyde</td>
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<td>Anglican Church Chinchilla</td>
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<td>Elliott, Mrs Joan</td>
<td>Anglican Toowoomba Churches Together</td>
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<td>McAleer, Mr Denis</td>
<td>Anglican Toowoomba Churches Together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sultmann, Mr Bill</td>
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<td>Foley, Bishop James</td>
<td>Catholic Bishop Cairns</td>
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<td>De Haas, Mr Peter</td>
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<td>Morris, Bishop Bill</td>
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<td>Cath. Past. Form</td>
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<td>Naylon, Ms Margaret</td>
<td>CEIR Brisbane</td>
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<td>Pascoe, Rev David</td>
<td>Comm. for Ecumenism &amp; Inter-religious Relations Brisbane</td>
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<td>Rohrlach, Rev Lionel</td>
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<td>Von Pein, Mr Ken</td>
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<td>Donges, Mr Eric</td>
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<td>Johnson, Rev Bruce</td>
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<td>Hamlyn, Mrs Glenine</td>
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<td>Shelton, Pastor Ian</td>
<td>Toowoomba City Church</td>
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APPENDIX 2: BEING CHURCH IN RURAL QUEENSLAND (BCIRQ) 1996

Rural Orientation

We have gathered together as Church leaders to make a creative response to the voices of rural Queenslanders.

Rural Queensland consists of a rich and diverse range of communities from remote cattle stations to small country towns to mining towns to large provincial cities, to Indigenous communities, with each cherishing its local traditions. As churches we respect them all, recognising that different places require different responses, based on patient dialogue and close collaboration.

An ecumenical spirit has been gathering in strength over the past 50 years throughout the world, and it prompts our Churches to work together more closely to share and shape the faith we hold in common.

We now recognise that this is one of many opportunities to work ecumenically, and that such endeavours will also help strengthen the life of the local communities as well as that of the Churches.

We deeply desire to share the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, which transforms the difficult present, and invites us on a journey that leads to new life.

Theology

We affirm our faith in God as Trinity - Father, Son and Spirit. This faith allows us to celebrate our unity while recognising our diversity.

In our diversity we are united by baptism. This baptism incorporates us into the one Body of Christ.

Christ calls and empowers us to continue his mission in the world. Our calling is to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour in word and action, in order that the Kingdom of God may be manifest.

Being Church in Rural Queensland

We encourage, invite and call the people of our churches to journey together in faith and mission: in prayer and worship; study and dialogue; work and service - even as Jesus prayed to his Father “...that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

(John 17:21)

This document reproduces in pamphlet form the statement “Being Church in Rural Queensland” prepared by the leaders of the Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Uniting Churches in Queensland. The original document is available from Queensland Churches Together, GPO Box 2278, Brisbane, 4001.
FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

We propose the following framework for action in humility, acknowledging the faithful and courageous efforts of people in local communities facing suffering and isolation. These twelve issues are identified as priorities, and the accompanying statements indicate our commitment to action.

1. We will encourage regional dialogue to plan how the churches can best meet the needs of people in rural areas. This planning will:
   - involve individual ministers (ordained and lay) who work in rural areas;
   - involve existing groups within our churches who service local needs;
   - identify needs within the local community and seek to fulfill those needs ecumenically;
   - help in certain circumstances where only one pastor is appointed to serve several congregations. In those cases extensive preparation and assistance will be provided for that pastor and those communities.

2. We will seek to develop clear and sensitive guidelines dealing with shared worship. A fully shared sacramental life is a larger and deeper question in each of our traditions and is the subject of ongoing discussion.

3. We agree to enter into dialogue with the appropriate providers of ministry and leadership formation programs within participating churches with a view to developing effective programs relevant to rural areas.

4. Ecumenical structures, particularly at local or regional levels, will need to be established to provide support to those appointed to minister ecumenically in rural areas. These structures might consider planning and accountability matters as well as ongoing formation and support of ministers and their families. We urge local ministers and leaders to consider how this could be achieved.

5. As part of our pastoral planning in rural areas we are committed to exploring how the services of many social and educational agencies of the participating churches could be coordinated with those of rural ministers for the good of rural Queensland.

6. We encourage dialogue and cooperation among Church education agencies with a view to the development of denominational and shared faith education resources in the School of Distance Education mode. These resources should focus on sacraments, scripture, devotional life, theology and church history.

7. We will encourage the utilisation of current and emerging technologies to support the work of ministry training and mission.

8. We support the research project of the Catholic Church to identify the types of resources needed and available, and the mapping processes to identify which resources should be developed. This research could become the basis of ecumenical collaboration to address and identify needs related to this resource issue. In addition, a data base should be established which will allow for better communication of information about available resources.

9. We will work with Indigenous people (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) to recognize and share their spirituality and ministry and to address their needs in their enculturing of the Gospel story. In particular we commend Winnub St Boys and will work with the College in its activities related to the above. We will initiate processes of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We will encourage and equip Indigenous leadership within the Church to enrich their ability to share their Journey in faith and mission with each other.

10. Local leaders of churches will be encouraged to take greater responsibility for promoting the continuing dialogue involving clergy and laity of participating churches. We will explore through Queensland Churches Together how such local efforts might be best supported and resourced.

11. We will cooperate more fully in the exploration of how our combined human, property and recurrent financial resources can be marshalled with a view to assisting rural communities.

12. We will seek ways of sharing this vision with other churches and will welcome their participation.
APPENDIX 3: RURAL AND RELATED ECUMENICAL INITIATIVES

These documents are not listed in any particular order or grouping. It is stressed that these are *examples of what might be possible* and do not constitute a prescriptive list:

1. A Covenant between the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba, including a wide range of matters including prayer, regular ecumenical meetings, cooperative use of churches and resources, and working together in pastoral care.

2. Memorandum of Understanding between Anglicare Brisbane and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Diocesan area of Toowoomba to share information and resources.

3. Injune Covenant between the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches which has led to an agreement for shared use of the Anglican Church in Injune.

4. Covenant by the Maclagen Combined Churches (Uniting, Anglican, Presbyterian) for shared use of the Presbyterian church property.

5. Wandoan Covenant between the Lutheran and Uniting Churches for a single pastoral minister.

6. The Toowoomba Heads of Churches Pastoral Care service for the sick and the aged, developed in close consultation with Queensland Health and formally recognised by them.

7. Pittsworth State High School Ecumenical Religious Instruction Program.

8. ‘Rosies’ at Warwick, an ecumenical pastoral outreach to the community.