



## Report from Presbytery of North Queensland



### Ministry/congregational life data

Area covered (sq/kms)	682,801	No. of pastors (Stream A)	5
Population	526,001	No. of pastors (Stream B)	4
No. of congregations recognised as such by Presbytery	28	No. of lay ministry teams	1
Faith communities	7	<b>Placements</b> No. of congregational placements FTE	F/T: 11 P/T: 7

Ecumenical communities	1	No. of non-congregational placements FTE	F/T: P/T:
No. of 'cluster' arrangements	7	No. of joint placements FTE (i.e. ministry agents, support staff, total number of people)	F/T: 1 P/T: 5
Total weekly worship attendance across Presbytery	1329	Presbytery staffing FTE (i.e. ministry agents, support staff, total number of people)	2.5
Percentage of congregations in the Presbytery with Sunday children's and youth ministry with over 15 average attendance	30%		

## Report

In September 2014 the North Queensland Presbytery began a three-year trial of having two presbytery ministers; one primarily focussed on pastoral and visioning issues and the other primarily focussed on compliance resourcing and property issues.

As we are now 18 months into this trial, we are beginning to see the fruits of this arrangement begin to ripen. By concentrating more effectively on the key strategies of the Presbytery and having two presbytery ministers to interact with the wider church and community, a number of clear trends and factors have arisen.

Firstly, the Presbytery has had a number of issues around Child Safe Church and property compliance that are now being addressed in a systematic way. New systems are now in place around blue card recording, property compliance and child safe church resourcing. By employing newer technology that allows for data sharing and by charging Rev Barry Cox, Presbytery minister administration, with the task of primarily attending to these issues, we have seen a greater focus on training, supporting, equipping and resourcing congregations across the Presbytery in order to assist them in navigating their way through complex compliance issues.

Manse inspections and a closer monitoring of the financial dealings of congregations have revealed deficiencies across the Presbytery that are now slowly but surely being addressed. Anecdotally, there appears to be a much higher 'buy-in' to the issues of compliance with better understanding and less fear about the requirements and consequences of becoming a safe and inclusive church community.

Secondly, by freeing Rev Garry Hardingham, Presbytery minister pastoral, from having to be bogged down in administrative and compliance issues, this has allowed a greater focus on the apostolic mission of the church. More time can be spent alongside both ministry agents and congregations and seeking to understand what God is calling them to as a community of Christ within their particular community and as an interconnected body within the wider Uniting Church.

There is now more time available for regular visits to congregations and to engage more deeply in the conversations around models of ministry and discipleship.

One of the key tools for this has been a renewed vigour in using consultations as a way to engage the whole congregation as well as give a better snapshot to church councils, ministry agents and the wider Presbytery about where new ministry opportunities can be found both locally and across the Presbytery. Where in times past the consultation report contained little more than a reflection back to the church council and ministry agent, current consultations result in a living document that explores much more rigorously the challenges and joys facing individual church communities. This process is also identifying weak points that need to be addressed, strengths that can be used in resourcing other congregations, and laying the ground work for strategic growth that can be sustainable into the future. By focussing on the emerging demographic of a community as well as the gifts and resourcing within a church community, strategic planning for future church plants or development can be undertaken with a higher level of understanding and ownership of the local congregation.

This groundwork within the North Queensland Presbytery has given us a clearer picture of the way in which we can engage in the priorities identified at the 31st Synod.

### **Worship gatherings that can include people who have never attended worship or belonged with church**

By getting a better understanding of the DNA of a local church, a number of congregations are becoming more confident in understanding that God has equipped them and continues to equip them to meet the challenges of the current time.

A greater confidence is beginning to emerge to engage in processes and programs that engage the wider community. Some of these strategies with a long history, for example the 'Big Boys Toys' day in Ayr and Atherton with their 'Afternoon with Andre Rieu' and 'Armchair travel' nights, are being joined by numerous fresh expressions such as Innisfail's regular Messy Church services and Mt Louisa House of Praise's morning tea ministry. There is a growing confidence that these social events can become acts of worship within the community.

### **Making faith sharing a priority for the Uniting Church**

By being strategic in the way we place ministry, oversee that ministry and equip those placements, the Presbytery is seeking to equip and encourage all members of the Uniting Church for faith sharing and discipleship as a core part of being church. By encouraging faith sharing within the congregational setting, we are endeavouring to give people the skills and confidence to take this sharing out into the wider community. The more that this is seen as a 'normal' part of being a Christian and the more people come to realise that the desire for seeking faith within the wider community remains, the more the need for effective sharing tools to provide a growing confidence.

A good example of this has come from the Atherton congregation where the new ministry of Rev Johnson Makoti is encouraging people to speak more confidently about their faith in the local community. This has resulted in almost doubling the congregation in less than a year.

### **Church planting**

As part of our strategic congregation consultation program, there is an intention to target those areas identified both within the government and the Synod with high growth potential. It has been an unfortunate reality that some processes within the Uniting Church have made us slow to react to new developments happening in our midst, or poor or hurried plans have been put together that have not successfully targeted the growth areas. An example of this is the Jensen church that, while placed in the growing Northern Beaches area of Townsville before the boom occurred, was physically located in the wrong area as a result of the selection being made on economic grounds rather than strategic planning.

The Presbytery is targeting and preparing strategic congregations and faith communities in locations where the church can take advantage of future growth. This involves not just preparing the local congregation but engaging a wider community of churches as well as planning for the right ministry agent to be in place to drive the church plant or expansion. This also requires cooperative work to ensure that congregations with available mission development funds can be joint 'owners' in the planned development.

The key areas in North Queensland for potential for either new or continuing growth are Mt Peter, part of the Edmonton area, south of Cairns; Redlynch/Smithfield on Cairn's northern and western fringe; the Northern Beaches area of Townsville, where Jensen may yet play an important role; and Alligator Creek and Rocky Springs (proposed new satellite city), both south of Townsville where congregations like Wulguru may act as potential support bases.

It is expected that within the next two years the Presbytery will be in a much stronger position to target these areas.

### **Developing church planters – pioneers and entrepreneurs**

The North Queensland Presbytery, along with the moderator, has identified a number of potential church leaders within the Presbytery who are being targeted for future development. While this is still in its infancy, there is strategic thinking about how these leaders may be part of bringing about both successful church plants as well as strengthening the overall leadership within the Presbytery and Synod. The difficulty, of course, is around isolation and ability to attend the necessary training. It is hoped that in cooperation with Trinity College Queensland, programs can be developed that will overcome these barriers of distance.

In 2015 the Holistic Cancer Help Centre (HCHC) was established as part of the Wulguru Uniting Church. This unique facility offers a place for cancer sufferers and their supporters to find information and strategies for dealing with the spectre of life-threatening illness. There is energy growing within the Presbytery and a desire to see this model of care replicated in a number of other centres. Hopefully, in time the HCHC will become established enough for this to occur. Our thanks go to Rev Phillip Hulme whose vision and passion has made this ministry possible.

### **Holy Spirit as defibrillator**

As part of developing the sharing of faith within our congregations, there is in its infancy a desire for congregations to really seek the Holy Spirit and to ask the fundamental questions of why their church exists and how might the gifts within the congregation bring new life and opportunities to minister in the future. Too often in the past we have been afraid to use 'Holy Spirit' terminology but from a Trinitarian perspective the Holy Spirit is the active ingredient necessary for individual, church and community empowerment.

### **Formation for ministry**

One of the most difficult aspects of rural and remote presbyteries concerns the way in which we raise up, train and equip our ministers into the future. The changed nature of society and changing expectations due to technology are making the ability to raise up ministry candidates and ship them off to Brisbane more difficult than it has ever been. While the Presbytery has had a student successfully complete a POD in 2015, it became necessary for the student to move to Brisbane in order to be in a position to formally candidate.

While there are a number who are interested in entering the ministry, the barrier of distance, particularly in terms of how they might support themselves and their family while in college is a major deterrent.



Our current student Michelle Cullen has been studying remotely as well as pastoring the congregation of Innisfail, and while she is on track for ordination at the end of 2016 it has been a difficult and costly experience for her as she has needed to make frequent trips to Brisbane to undertake formation. There needs to be new models of training that can utilise both the technology available and the resources within individual presbyteries in raising up and forming candidates for ministry.

Our fear is that we will continue to rely on locally raised pastors to fulfil these roles, and whilst some are very good at what they do, the loss of quality theological reflection that is a hallmark of theological training may ultimately change the very nature of who we are as a church if we don't address the issues of theological training and church leadership as soon as possible. Again, the North Queensland Presbytery is keen to find creative solutions in partnership with Trinity College Queensland.

### **Resource sharing urban/rural**

A German general on the eastern front in World War Two was once heard saying, "We have all the things that we need to win this war ... unfortunately they are still in Germany". This is often the problem we have in the church and the North Queensland Presbytery is no different.

The Presbytery has always been blessed in the way in which congregations have traditionally felt bound to each other in service and ministry. Having said this, there is often a frustration that some congregations still operate in blissful isolation of the whole.

By sharing the stories across the Presbytery through mediums like Presbytery Prompts and sharing times at the twice-yearly Presbytery meetings, there has been a marked change over a number of years in the sharing of resources for the sake of the whole church. A great example of this was the purchase of the share of the Mission Beach church from the Lutheran Church. This was made possible by directing funds in the Presbytery from the sale of a manse as well as generous donations made by congregations across the Presbytery. This occurred because the story was told and there became a universal feeling of 'ownership' across the Presbytery.

As we plan for future church planting, we are praying that new opportunities will arise and that this will bring new life and new stories of encouragement of how God is calling us into wise and courageous stewardship of our resources.

### **Children, youth, young adults and family ministry as a priority**

Demographically, many North Queensland communities have an exodus of young adults and families as they leave their communities for better education and work possibilities in major centres. This results in real challenges in ministry to children, youth, young adults and families within many of our rural congregations where the average age is steadily increasing.

Having said this, there are moves within the Townsville churches to specifically target this demographic in order to grow a significant and sustainable ministry within the city as the Townsville churches share their resources towards this ministry. It is hoped that similar cooperation may occur in the Cairns community once some stability is returned to the church community there.

## Key achievements/initiatives

The creation of the dual Presbytery ministry roles has been a significant initiative within the North Queensland Presbytery. Much of the subsequent initiatives such as regular congregation consultations, strategic planning, resource sharing, strategic planning around ministry placement and church planning have come about because of the space that has been given for these issues to gain some traction.

Whilst still in the early days, there is a demonstrated shift in the way the Presbytery can oversee the complexity of mission and bring some coherence to strategic planning into the future.

## Challenges/risks as we progress

The challenge facing the Presbytery mainly concerns the ability to attract and maintain quality leadership across the whole Presbytery. Without good and inspired leadership many of the initiatives espoused will get no traction at all. Unless we either import or train up future leadership then the opportunities that await the church may be lost as we struggle to maintain a sense of purpose across the Presbytery.

## Issues to be addressed

We identify three key issues to be addressed.

1. Transforming the way in which new leadership is identified, equipped and supported in such a way that removes the barriers of distance and cost whilst still maintaining a collegial training environment. This is crucial in order that we don't lose leaders to the south east corner, or lose them to other denominations with training programs in the north, or have the difficulty of trying to convince those trained in the south east that North Queensland is a fantastic place to provide ministry leadership.
2. Finding ways in which mission development monies held in trust for congregations can be utilised across the whole Synod by making known the stories of potential growth and bringing back a sense of missional imperative and risk-taking that has been part of the Uniting Church's past.

We have lost as a church the understanding of being 'Uniting'. Presbyteries break up the geography of the state and within these boundaries congregations supposedly network with each other; however better networking across the state needs to happen. As said before, storytelling in North Queensland creates a sense of unity throughout the Presbytery but we are not sharing the stories of need and joy—what's working and what is not across all our people. It is when we share that we can find inspiration and help.

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