



34 SYNOD 2019

Report from
South Moreton Presbytery



Language support group at work in the Presbytery Office with POD participants and applicants for ordination

South Moreton Presbytery encompasses 39 congregations and five faith communities across 1750 square kilometres, serving some 1.8 million people from Brisbane’s southern suburbs through Redland and Logan, Gold Coast and west to Beaudesert. Three Uniting Church schools, the significant presence of UnitingCare and Wesley Mission Queensland services, and a range of chaplaincies contribute to our missional footprint. We have oversight of over 80 active ministry agents (ordained and pastors), serving in congregations, schools, hospitals, UnitingCare and other contexts.

Diversity is a hallmark of Presbytery life, including the size of our congregations, their demographic and geographic contexts, and their cultural background. At least 12 of our congregations and faith communities are migrant/refugee-based or significantly multicultural, and worship is conducted in at least 10 languages each week. Broader demographic trends constitute a significant challenge in maintaining current patterns of church life and resourcing new mission in new spaces. The Presbytery includes some of Australia’s fastest-growing urban developments (e.g. Coomera-Pimpama and the whole Gold Coast City), an emerging major urban centre (Flagstone-Bromelton), significant new residential developments (e.g. Redlands, western Logan City and Yarrabilba, Beaudesert) and evolving suburban transformation (e.g. Brisbane’s inner and central southern suburbs). Consistent with the Uniting Church in Australia national demographic profile, most congregations comprise mainly middle to upper age groups. Newlife Church Robina (Gold Coast) remains Australia’s largest Uniting Church congregation with up to 1700 attending worship each week.

The Presbytery’s mission statement is “Cultivating an inclusive, growing and energised church”. The agricultural notion of cultivating carries two important reminders for the Presbytery’s work: we are stewards of the resources (seeds, soil, tools, labour, time) given to us for manifesting the reign and purposes of God in our time and place, and we are called to fruitfulness. Our prayer and goal is that we may encourage, equip and enable our people, congregations and agencies for their participation in Christ’s mission in the world, bearing witness not just in what we do but how we do it and who we are together in Christ’s name.

Focus since the last Synod

The direction set in the 2017 mission plan has continued to play out in the Presbytery’s life. This plan identified six broad areas for attention: responding to areas of population growth, undertaking regional discernment for congregation revitalisation, church planting, multicultural congregation development, innovative mission and Fresh Expressions, and children, youth and families. Key aspects in these areas are reported in ‘Highlights’ below.

Transitions in Presbytery leadership and organisation have been significant. Rev Alan Robinson retired as Presbytery Minister and Rev Dr David Mackay Rankin concluded as Presbytery Chairperson, both in December 2017. Since January 2018 a new Presbytery Minister, three people serving as Presbytery Chairperson, a new Project Officer Multicultural, new Treasurer, new PRC Chairperson, a reconfiguration of property oversight with a new committee, chairperson and Property Officer, new POD Coordinator and a new office staff member have all created a highly fluid environment and a re-forming of team roles and relationships over the past 18 months.

An emerging focus of our work since the 33rd Synod has been the impact of the 15th Assembly’s proposals and decisions on same gender marriage, felt in different ways by congregations and ministry agents across the Presbytery. Dozens of people, some of them key leaders, representing varying views on this issue, have left congregations. The loss of people and finances has been keenly felt in some places. Some congregations have had people join. Some congregations and church councils have experienced division and pain as they have discussed their response to the Assembly decision. Ministry agents have had their own reactions to the decision

and to what has happened in the church since. Several of our migrant/refugee congregations and groups have been troubled by this decision, and there are conversations about leaving the Uniting Church. This issue has become a focus for Presbytery in responding to concerns and providing advice, support, pastoral care, information and resources

Highlights:

From Yarrabilba to Greater Flagstone – a way ahead

Our report to the 33rd Synod indicated a proposed church plant to be underway at Yarrabilba by December 2018. Further research by the social planning consultancy Communitas identified a more strategic and missional opportunity for the Uniting Church lay in the much larger development emerging at Greater Flagstone and Bromelton, just west and south of Yarrabilba. This will become a new residential, industrial, transport and services centre two and a half times the size of Yarrabilba and with greater potential for the Uniting Church to significantly impact the emerging community through a whole-of-church offering including education, community services (especially disability and families), community development and a local congregation. Partnering with UnitingCare, Wesley Mission Queensland, Real Life Christian Church and Calvary Christian College, South Moreton Presbytery is taking the lead in appointing a Community Development Officer who will create strategic networks and opportunities to facilitate a Uniting Church presence that will serve community needs, enhance community life and commend Christ in word and deed.

Imagining a Destiny Together

Six congregations (one of them in Moreton Rivers Presbytery) in Brisbane's southern suburbs are pursuing the possibility of amalgamating to become one congregation on multiple campuses, to offer a range of strengthened and new missional ventures. In September 2018 each congregation accepted in principle a proposal for that direction called Destiny Together, which emerged from a journey of collaborative discernment facilitated by Bruce Mullan through the preceding 18 months. The proposed final shape and implementation steps are being developed for final decision by each congregation in October 2019. Rev David Fender began 1 January 2019 as the Destiny Together lead ministry agent (a three-year Presbytery placement).

A similar collaborative discernment journey has begun among the five remaining congregations in Redland City (Thorneside Uniting Church closed in December 2018), with a view to evaluating and reimagining the Uniting Church's missional footprint across the Redlands.

New and revitalised churches

On 6 May 2018 a Presbytery service marked the inauguration of Uniting North Coomera congregation. This was an amalgamation of one of the oldest congregations in the Presbytery with the newest. Coomera Uniting Church had been established in 1874, barely a decade after white settlement; Uniting North Gold Coast began as a church plant of Newlife Robina at Pacific Pines in 2012, graduating to be recognised as a congregation only in 2017. Uniting North Coomera is based on the old Coomera church site and is developing a strong plan for mission and growth in this rapidly growing area.

Burleigh Village Church, established from Newlife Robina in 2017, continues as a faith community based at the Burleigh Heads Uniting Church site but engaging local community outreach in many different ways and places. They have seen a number of people come to faith for the first time and this year are praying for every person in Burleigh as well as launching an initiative where people are equipped to help their neighbours. The launch of Newlife Brisbane at Albert St Uniting Church in March 2019 has been jointly supported by South Moreton and Moreton Rivers Presbyteries. Newlife is in discussion with another congregation in South Moreton about a different model of church plant and revitalisation to commence January 2020.

The challenges of revitalisation and mission growth are also being addressed with creative energy in many places such as Beaudesert, Nerang, Southport, Real Life Springwood/Carbrook and Broadwater Road.

Pioneering and Fresh Expressions

Building on the Uniting Church national pioneers conference in Queensland in March 2018, South Moreton has continued to encourage and resource local expressions of innovative mission. Seed funding continues to be offered through our Mission Initiatives Grants scheme.

Messy Church has been a growing edge for congregations. Presbytery holds training events and Messy Meet-ups for congregations already doing Messy Church and those who want to find out more. Revs Beth Nicholls and Janie French attended and presented at the inaugural Australasian “Being Messy, Being Church” gathering in Melbourne in February 2018. Eight congregations at present conduct regular Messy Church, although over the past two years two have gone into recess and three new Messy Churches have started. Other congregations do a variety of creative family ministries. Mainly Music is popular and effective. Encouraging and equipping churches for innovative forms of worship and outreach remains a priority area resourced by the Project Officer Mission.

The newly-formed Mission Development Reference Group seeks to help build missional capacity in congregations. It anticipates running the newly revised Mission Shaped Ministry program in 2019.

New multicultural support

The appointment of Pastor Levon Kardashian as Project Officer Multicultural has brought fresh skills, capacity and direction to this role. In addition to working with our various migrant/refugee congregations and groups, Levon has brought an active interest in refugee support, relationship with Middle Eastern Christian communities, domestic violence training, inter-faith conversation and cross-cultural awareness training for the whole church.

The multicultural space continues to present opportunities and challenges. Starting a weekly Sunday morning English-language service has been a significant missional step and adjustment for Brisbane Taiwanese Uniting Church. A language support program has begun to assist Period of Discernment participants and ordination candidates with their English fluency and comprehension. Visa issues for ministry agents from overseas continue to impact; this was a factor in the closure of Calvary Korean Uniting Church in February 2018, and the reason Brisbane Taiwanese lost their minister in July 2018. Equipping and supporting local multicultural leaders, including through their POD journeys and towards ordination, is a significant aspect of this role.

Priority Directions

To be Christ-centred, at prayer, and listening:

- Eucharist at start of each Presbytery meeting.
- Annual retreat for ministry agents.
- Additional retreat days and resources.
- Structured discernment journeys for congregations (Destiny Together, Redland City).
- Special Presbytery services (e.g. lament services December 2018).

Discipleship

- Development of Period of Discernment oversight and support (17 current participants, six completions since 33rd Synod), including English language support.

- Same gender marriage: resources, information sessions, Theological Conversation on Marriage to encourage listening and ongoing discernment across our differences.
- Faith-encouragement editorial in fortnightly Presbytery newsletter.
- Recycling ministry and theology texts and resources in the first Great Ministry Book Sale (10 November), which also raised over \$300 for UnitingWorld's support of theological work by our Pacific church partners.
- Year of Luke seminars for worship leaders and preachers led by Rev Dr Malcolm Coombes (three in the Presbytery covering different parts of the lectionary year).
- Launch in 2019 of the Worship Academy at Newlife College, Robina, offering a one-year Diploma in Ministry focusing on worship leading and preaching. This was part-funded by Presbytery.

Leadership

- Re-establishment of Presbytery's Ministry Support Fund, offering subsidies for theological and ministry studies/training for lay preachers, pastors, candidates for ordination, and lay people serving in ministries.
- Junior leadership training stream as part of Discoveries Camp.
- Training courses: sacraments for lay presiders (annual), resolving church conflicts (February 2019), mentoring, church growth (proposed).
- Building peer support networks through monthly Healthy Ministry Breakfasts for ministry agents.
- Support for Unite Young Adults retreat.
- Renovators youth leadership program.
- Support for Next Gen Arise and emerging second-gen leadership.

Connecting with communities

- New mission ventures: Flagstone, Destiny Together, Visioning the Redlands.
- Mission Shaped Ministry.
- Support for pioneering mission.
- Furthering our relationship with UnitingCare and Wesley Mission Queensland.
- Participation of several Gold Coast congregations in Easter United and Christian witness during the 2018 Commonwealth Games.
- Picking up the Synod's Covenant Action Plan as impetus for congregation and Presbytery engagement with First Peoples.

Youth, children and families

- Presbytery's annual Discoveries Camp (January) for primary school children, annual Kids Camp Out, key leadership of Easter Madness.
- Support for Messy Church, Mainly Music and similar ventures.
- Support for leaders (Children's Ministry Breakfasts).

Presbytery grant funding for a three-year regional Children, Youth and Families Pastor role based at Wellers Hill Tarragindi.

Challenges/risks as we progress

Training

There is an identified need for training church councillors and especially chairpersons, in both Uniting Church governance and church council responsibilities and also in group leadership skills. We already hold Treasurer meetings twice a year and are working towards similar gatherings for church council chairpersons as well as compiling some best practice resources. The Trinity College Queensland one-day course on the Uniting Church: Identity, Purpose and Future will be presented for the first time at Living Faith Uniting Church, Carina Heights, on 22 June 2019, with encouragement for church councillors, elders and other lay leaders to attend. We also identify the need to train people as mentors, especially to support POD participants and those wanting to try pioneering mission initiatives. Conflict resolution is another area for growing skills.

The challenge of sustainability

Declining income and rising costs are placing increasing financial pressure on congregations, reflected for example in placements reducing to less than full-time. But sustainability is also about having structures that allow for flexibility and agility. It is about missional heart and energy: age and capacity of the members, priority given to discipleship and mission, intentional connections with community, and openness to change. Sustainability requires a focus on Christ who calls and holds us together, and not on that which would divide us. Sustainability arises from confidence in the enduring power and purpose of the gospel, and is nurtured by selfless, empowering, spiritually-attuned leadership. These are urgent and ever-present challenges for Presbytery in overseeing ministry and supporting mission.

Reimagining mission collaboratively

Destiny Together in Brisbane's southside and the emerging Visioning the Redlands journey of discernment offer collaborative regional approaches to reimagining how the Uniting Church might better engage a community in mission and service. Whatever the outcome in any particular place, these open-ended conversations draw our attention to current realities, celebrate a shared story of courage by past pioneers, and enlarge our perspective and possibilities for the next chapter of God's story in this place—all in the context of God's overarching faithfulness and purpose. We look forward to the fruits of these ventures and remain alert to other situations where such a framework might release new energy and capacity.

For consideration

Presbytery places on record its deep appreciation for the contributions of those who have concluded service in key roles since the 33rd Synod: Rev Alan Robinson (Presbytery Minister), Rev Dr David Mackay Rankin (Presbytery Chairperson), Rev Andrew Ross (PRC Chairperson), Rev Ross Mackay (MRC Chairperson), Rev Helen Dick (Presbytery Chairperson), Rev Dr Paul Walton (acting Presbytery Chairperson), Jordan Whittaker (Treasurer), Rev David MacGregor (POD Coordinator), Bruce Mullan (Destiny Together facilitator and MRC Admin Officer).

We also thank those who have stepped into leadership roles to serve the Presbytery: Rev Dr Marian Zaunbrecher (Presbytery Chairperson), Rev Bob Miles (PRC Chairperson), Dale Ham (Treasurer), Greg Rowe (Property Committee Chairperson), Bruce Binnie (Property Officer), Dr Lyn Gilmour (POD Coordinator), Neil Ballment (Lay Preachers Coordinator).

Proposal

It is proposed that the 34th Synod receive this report.

Contact for report questions

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