



34 SYNOD 2019

Report from
**Presbytery of
Bremer Brisbane**



Ordination of Rev Santina Waugh at Ipswich City Uniting Church March 2019

The Bremer Brisbane Presbytery consists of diverse congregations that include affluent suburbs close to Brisbane, multi-cultural, Indigenous and socially disadvantaged communities in the south and west of Brisbane with growth areas at Forest Lake, Springfield, Ripley as well as developments around Ipswich and the rural communities south and west of Ipswich.

Presbytery is bounded by the Great Dividing Range in the west and includes the Brisbane, Bremer, Lockyer and Teviot Valleys. It includes the West Moreton district of South East Queensland, the regional city of Ipswich, and the western suburbs of Brisbane.

It is experiencing strong growth. Growth within the inner-city areas of Indooroopilly and Toowong as well as new estate areas in Forest Lake, Springfield, Ripley and surrounding areas. Towns in the West Moreton area are experiencing significant social change as population growth occurs. Ipswich city is being rejuvenated; socially disadvantaged populations are transferring to places in Ipswich and towns in West Moreton as costs of living in Brisbane increase. The western suburbs of Brisbane are still attractive places for professional and business people. The Presbytery includes significant educational and corrective services facilities.

Focus since the last Synod

The Presbytery continues to focus on its four mission priorities: Discipleship, Community Engagement, Leadership and Sustainability.

Discipleship is seen as the key to re-vitalising our congregations and looking for new areas of growth. There is some success in our engagement with youth and children and their families both at congregational and Presbytery level. The focus of community engagement is to work in areas where congregations have less engagement but could be encouraged to do more.

This includes working with the Queensland Community Alliance and First Peoples. Leadership is developed in congregations with the Presbytery offering some training and support. Presbytery events provide opportunities for young people to extend their leadership experience and expertise.

Our strategic locations task group has commenced working with congregations identifying what type of congregation they are and what they may need to grow or imagine a different future.

Highlights:

The continuing work of congregations as they seek to engage in their local contexts.

- An increasing number of young people engaged in activities at both local and Presbytery level.
- The major consultation work being undertaken to re-imagine a new future in Ipswich.
- The work done by various task groups that seek to offer leadership into new areas and new ways of being the church.

Priority Directions

There is a strong correlation between the Presbytery's strategic plan and the Synod's discerned priorities. As such it is helpful to reflect upon the Presbytery's efforts and achievements in terms of those Priority Directions.

To be Christ-centred, at prayer, and listening

The church at its very core is called to be Christ-centred, at prayer and listening to the Spirit as it discerns its way forward. Prayer undergirds the worship, witness and service life of congregations with most congregations having regular prayer groups and prayer gatherings. Several congregations run prayer days and prayer vigils; Fassifern

has hosted a prayer weekend for the last three years and decisions at congregational and Presbytery level are enveloped in prayer.

The challenge is always to hold the balance between action and contemplation, between word and deed, between being fed and nourished and being engaged in mission. There needs to be a deliberateness to the listening but also an intentionality that enables us to move and respond to the Spirit's call.

Discipleship

Discipleship has been a clear focus of the Presbytery, with a full-time Presbytery worker to support the work being done in congregations. POD numbers continue to be high and are going well.

One of our major challenges is that everyone is at a different place and space and has different needs. There is no one-stop shop that will meet everyone's needs and it is a challenge and a calling to help our people continue to grow and respond to God's call upon their lives and to continue to grow in mission, witness and service. The other challenge is for all congregations to see that discipleship and to encourage their people, at whatever age and stage, to be active in worship, witness and service. We need to regain an urgency about sharing the faith in ways that are relevant and appropriate. All congregations need to take this seriously if they are to thrive.

Leadership

Leadership is a key issue for the church and for the Presbytery. Ministers and lay people offer leadership within their congregation and community. Individual congregations conduct leadership training and mentoring as people undertake leadership roles. Leadership training is an important part of many of our youth and children's programs both at congregational and Presbytery level.

Without restating all the events, they do provide leadership and training opportunities while being mentored by a more experienced person. These include Easter Madness, Renovators, Stretching Faith and so on. The Presbytery conducts evenings for church council chairs, secretaries, treasurers and property people to support and inform their leadership roles. Many of the Presbytery's ministers avail themselves of leadership opportunities including the Synod Leadership Training program and national and regional conferences provided by the church, other churches and parachurch organisations.

A number of our people, both lay and ordained, have been active in the Queensland Community Alliance and have completed two and six-day training with them. There are several congregations that are strongly involved in Emmaus and Chrysalis and the Uniting Church provides strong leadership into those communities.

The challenge for many congregations is with the aging of the church, having the next generation of leaders to hand over to. Nor is there a guarantee that the new leaders wish to take over the current structures and processes.

Connecting with communities

Community connection is the lifeblood of most congregations who achieve this in a variety of ways. Supporting other organisations, at times providing strong leadership into them, running community-based programs, usage of facilities; all of these provide the potential for strong connections between congregation and community. These include but are not limited to Messy Church, Mission Shaped Ministry, Crossroads, support of chaplains and parachurch organisations, Habitat for Humanity, various community clubs, eisteddfods, OP shops and welfare support.

The Presbytery is engaged in the Queensland Community Alliance with people in key roles within the organisation. The Alliance allows us to engage with unions and community groups around creating a better society and working for the common good. There have been some very good connections and actions that have come out of working with the Alliance.

The challenge in many congregations is the balance between building up the body and connecting to the community. Though we know that reaching out to the community builds the body up, there are congregations whose limited people power is involved in pastoral care and keeping the church going rather than reaching out into the community. In other congregations, the balance between inward and outward focus by ministers, lay leaders and church councils is an ongoing tension.

Youth, children and families

The Presbytery's Discipleship Facilitator continues to engage in this space. The challenge is to facilitate Presbytery events such as Encounter and Stretching Faith with the increasing demand upon Presbytery staff time, as well as meeting with and supporting youth leaders and pastors. Many congregations are running youth groups, playgroups, Sunday Schools, Messy Church, involved in schools teaching RE and active on school committees and communities.

The Presbytery regularly runs the Safe Ministry with Children training and has a dedicated team of trainers. Three congregations run day camps and there are several congregations partnering with parachurch organisations as they work with children and young people. There are congregations with active and vibrant ministry with young people and young adults. Presbytery staff and members have had key leadership roles in Easter Madness, the planned Synod young adult retreat and Renovators.

The challenge is that many congregations are older and are struggling to connect with the young people in their community. Neither do they have the critical mass to hold young families if they do come. For the congregations that do have young people, the challenge is to provide suitable leaders, activities and training opportunities to grow this important ministry area.

Challenges/risks as we progress

- The increasing demands upon congregations and Presbytery around areas of compliance and oversight create challenges as we seek to focus on the mission of the church.
- The gradual decline and aging of congregations mean that we have to imagine and live a different future but we are not prepared for that.
- The lack of resources at the Presbytery level to live out its function and purpose.
- Re-invigorating a culture of discipleship within our congregations to facilitate a revitalisation within them.

Proposal

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

Contact for report questions

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