



Report from

Presbytery of Central Queensland



Longreach – April 2020

Report

This report reflects the collaboration, communication, and care within our Presbytery and has been compiled by a group of voices from across the Presbytery.

The challenge before the Presbytery of Central Queensland, is to see and hear how the Spirit is calling us to use our expensive building assets in a different way and to efficiently deploy our ministerial agents to support the many congregations who are finding it difficult to financially support them.

About our Presbytery

This report includes contributions from churches in the cities, and churches in small rural communities; all have a regional and ecumenical ministry, that range from formal worship and preaching to those who seek a service with its country atmosphere.

We are a portion of God's people living within very diverse situations; from the coast with all its resources and infrastructure to the very remote who must use their finite resources very wisely.

The mental and physical efforts of people, the wise use of buildings, vehicles, equipment, and the varying environment in which we live, requires a certain innovation and opportunism. This does not mean scarcity; it means an abundance of hope and expectation that produces inspiration and innovation.

"As the family of Christ, we acknowledge the wisdom and spiritual undergirding of the Basis of Union that is a standard for the life of the Uniting Church in Australia."¹

"We honour the individual members of the Presbytery, who are called to treat their occupation as their Christian vocation and demonstrating how to live a life worthy of Jesus by introducing others to Him. The Churches within the Presbytery are called to go into the world and preach the gospel, to encourage the faithful and build them up in their faith and mission and lead them in worship."²

"To help members to meet with the presence of the Triune God (worship) and, by that, they grow in faith (witness) to be involved in the church and town community (service)."³

¹ Rick Thomson, Armitage UCA, Mackay

² Laurel Hunt, Capricorn Coast UCA, Yeppoon

³ Heather James, Clermont/Capella UCA

Focus since the last Synod

Following on from previous reports, natural disasters are part of the life in Central Queensland. 2019 was dry and warm with an annual rainfall 20% below average. This led to drought conditions throughout the Presbytery. Bushfires swept through areas of the Capricorn Coast in November 2019, offers of help came in from across the wider church. Then in January many parts of Central Queensland experienced flooding rains and in April a freak hailstorm caused extensive damage. All these conditions and events focus the Presbytery on reaching out to the people affected.

Since the time of Covid-19 lockdown, the Presbytery has been operating with a Supply Presbytery Minister, Rev Suzy Sitton. The work of the JNC and the Presbytery during this time has been fruitful in selecting the incoming Presbytery Minister, Rev Scott Ballment.

CQ Connect had gone live in a small way before Covid-19 hit which accelerated the uptake. Northside Mackay and Rockhampton South led the way initiating streaming services. A Presbytery-wide Alpha series online, assisted many as they took up the challenge of Zoom.

“Others within the Presbytery have concentrated on maintaining connection, particularly with those without digital resources by providing and delivering paper-based resources and phone calls as required.”⁴

“The joy of the 140th anniversary celebrations in Emerald, and continuing Walk to/through Bethlehem, is a significant and broadly-based outreach into the community. The work of Chaplains in Aged Care.”⁵

Some churches have become faith communities, and some have closed which has meant dealing with a lot of property matters. There have been finance issues for treasurers, and compliance issues for church councils and ministry agents; the need to deal with insurance claims, WH&S, Covid-19, financial recording, Safe Ministry with Children and care for the vulnerable have added to the workload. There was also the cancellation of the Presbytery annual youth event, Country Madness, for the year because of Covid-19.

We have been busy *“Promoting a healthy appreciation of theological concepts that engage with the social justice aspects of the Gospel at work in a post-Christian world.”⁶*

“Grappling with Covid-19 directives and restrictions for worship and church activities has taken a lot of time and energy as well as stress trying to “get it right”. The guidance and help provided by the Presbytery has been appreciated.”⁷

⁴ Laurel Hunt, Capricorn Coast UCA, Yeppoon.

⁵ Rev Jim Pearson, Emerald Uniting Church, Emerald

⁶ Rick Thomson, Armitage UCA, Mackay

⁷ Heather James, Clermont/Capella UCA

Remote Mission Ministry - As a mission project funded by the Presbytery, the Remote Mission Ministry has successfully enabled the resourcing and pastoral care of small rural communities within the Presbytery to connect and support each other. Finding an ongoing funding source to continue this mission is a priority.

Highlights:

We have achieved Presbytery meetings and other meetings by electronic means. Keeping communication and pastoral care open using electronic means; a heightened awareness of our vulnerable people in our congregations; identifying and overcoming, where possible the limitations within our buildings. The strengthening of collaborative work between the leadership in the Presbytery and an awakening to new possibilities.

We have learnt how far the church is behind the expectations of the wider community i.e. the expectations of young people, the use of technology, our non-acceptance of change and how stagnant we have become. We have learnt that our buildings are a financial drain not matched by the limited advancement of the Kingdom.

CQ Connect has proved to be invaluable during Covid-19 and demonstrated the value of using technology to reach out to remote communities as well as those close by but isolated. The plan had been to stream services and meetings for youth, young mothers, Bible studies or whatever people needed. People have learned not to fear technology and to use it to make connections, friends meet people from other parts of the Presbytery and indeed other parts of the church.

“From the outset of Covid-19, we maintained worship and connection as strongly as we could during lockdown and the principal learning experiences have been the use of technology.”⁸

“Radio Church has provided a high-quality production to a wide audience – including to elderly and immobile parishioners who may not have access to the internet. This ministry has recovered and reshaped an important outreach of the church from the golden days of radio. Radio station websites allow the ministry to reach an international audience and copyright is covered under the broadcasting licences of the radio stations.”⁹

“Pastoral Relations Committee, Church Council, and prayer meetings have been held via Zoom. Many technological “bugs” have been worked through and presentation improvements made along the way. We have learned that it is possible to make good connections with people using technology. We have learned that even people who are scared of and reluctant to use technology can learn to do so. We learned yet again that in times of crisis people turn to the church and we have to learn how to engage with them long enough to really connect with God.”¹⁰

⁸ Rev Jim Pearson, Emerald UCA, Emerald

⁹ Rev Dr Julia Pitman St Pauls/Armitage UCA, Mackay

¹⁰ Laurel Hunt, Capricorn Coast UCA, Yeppoon

“The Uniting Church offers the middle ground in our communities and this encourages us to persevere, be patient, be faithful and trust that God still has plans for our congregations.”¹¹

Project Plenty

Our presbytery was one of the first to have conversations with the Project Plenty team; we have continued to engage and are waiting in expectation for the outworking of the conversations and possibilities that will assist and inform us as we continue to be the people of God in this vast region.

“Some members have been involved on the Project Plenty advisory committee (through Zoom) to share some of the issues facing our small congregations in a rural setting.”¹²

Challenges/risks as we progress

Central Queensland lives with the challenges of climate, natural disasters, resource fluctuations and diversity of people. There is the need to continually review and adjust to the varying finances, resources of ministry, building maintenance and purpose, and the impact of heritage listing.

We wait on God to guide and lead us along the path that it is before us, which causes us to be very flexible in the use of our resources.

“To put resources into proclaiming Christ in word and deed. It might be schools, church plants, chaplaincy, hospitals, etc but it must be mission and kingdom building.”¹³

“To express the Gospel in the relevant power of the inherent truth which changes lives.”¹⁴

“To discern God’s vision – the new thing God is doing - and how we are to continue to partner with the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Most of our churches consist of older people, with the desire to reach young people and families and to keep our churches meeting in some form. In a world where many non-Christian people regard the church meeting as boring, irrelevant and strange because of the language used, we struggle with the challenge to overcome these views. We are meeting the challenge of carry out our mission on-line and endeavouring to connect with those who don’t know God’s saving grace. To find new ways that challenge and fire up God’s people to carry out the mission Jesus has given us, that reminds us that this is our main purpose and motivation in life.”¹⁵

¹¹ Heather James, Clermont/Capella UCA

¹² Heather James, Clermont/Capella UCA

¹³ Rev Jim Pearson, Emerald UCA, Emerald

¹⁴ Rick Thomson, Armitage UCA, Mackay

¹⁵ Laurel Hunt, Capricorn Coast UCA, Yeppoon

Following are two similar comments received, one from small rural and one from a larger coastal community:

- Compliance issues and “one size fits all” is very challenging and the risk is that it will get all too hard.
- The ever-increasing government regulation presence affects our churches and poses both a challenge and a risk.

We intend to address these challenges/risks

By planning a mighty prayer fest throughout the Presbytery to discern God’s vision for us, so that we can claim our shared purpose and participate in the work designed for each location in the Presbytery.

“To be faithful and determined and do what we can while we can.”¹⁶

To provide training in technology, helping churches set up helpful websites, Facebook and other communication methods. To find ways of complying with Government regulations that do not drain life from the church.

“With God’s help, to proclaim the gospel in all its dimensions.”¹⁷

The challenge before the Presbytery of Central Queensland, is to see and hear how the Spirit is calling us to use our expensive building assets in a different way and to efficiently deploy our ministerial agents, to support the many congregations who are finding it difficult to financially support them.

For consideration

There is a great desire for a transforming church, gathering together to be a time of joy and love, interesting, challenging, relevant and always about Jesus and what he has done for us. We are yet to reach this goal.

Proposals to the 35th Synod

It is proposed the 35th Synod receive this Report.

Contact for report questions

Name Rev Suzy Sitton
Position Supply Presbytery Minister March-September 2020
Email suzysitton@bigpond.com
Phone 0418 875 408

¹⁶ Heather James, Clermont/Capella UCA

¹⁷ Rev Jim Pearson, Emerald UCA, Emerald