



All of this is us



Secretary of the Presbytery of Western Australia: “ALL OF THIS IS US”

Transitions abound in life and in the life of faith. The Bible is full of movement. Abraham goes on a journey. The Israelites are called out of Egypt and it takes a generation to get to a place of promise. Once settled, God’s people “journey” together as tribes, under a monarchy, and through exile and return. Through the changes, God was present, leading and accompanying faithfully. Often – especially during transitions – God calls people to re-think who they are and renew their commitment.

Jesus brought change in this ministry. While he was very patient with his disciples, they were often not patient with each other. We are called to follow Jesus; like the original disciples, we are not always patient with each other. Periods of transition require patience. Early Christians moved out of the familiar and journeyed to many places – ultimately, the whole world – learning to adapt and change, while remembering Jesus’s promise, “I am with you always ...”

Christians are still called to “journey”. Jesus still brings change. The Church does not exist to be the Jesus of Nazareth Society (as Rowan Williams puts it), rather to be the community that knows and affirms that Jesus is “Emanuel,” God with us. John Wesley’s last

words are reported to have been, “The best of all is, God is with us!”

After ten years of our previous structures, we resolved to move to a “new” way of being the Presbytery of W.A. (In fact, it is going back to what the Regulations say.) In doing this, we seek to respond to God’s call for this time. The particular purpose of presbyteries is to exercise

“... oversight over the congregations within [their] bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another’s faith, to bear one another’s burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus.” [*Paragraph 15(c) of The Basis of Union (1992 edition)*]. A Presbytery shall “... stimulate and encourage the Congregations ... providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and their participation in the wider aspects of the Church.” [*Uniting Church in Australia Constitution, 26*].

Central to the call is our shared responsibility for strengthening, encouraging, stimulating in order to exercise mutual oversight.

In this meeting, we consider again the core purpose of a Presbytery and, by reviewing our



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Rules, will clarify how we operate. There is a lot of continuity; there is also change. We have been guided by our core document, the *Basis of Union*, which puts Jesus Christ at the centre, as well as the Constitution and the Regulations of the Church. Establishing “new” ways of operating will take time. The Presbytery’s distinctive role as a council of the Church has been obscured in the last decade.

The Regulations assume that Presbyteries will make their own decisions. This is possible when Presbytery meetings are held frequently. It is not possible when they meet only twice a year. Therefore, decisions are delegated to Presbytery bodies. This makes Rules important and the appointment of members of such bodies very significant. Regulations provide specifically for a Presbytery Standing Committee, a Pastoral Relations Committee and a Property Committee. Other committees or groups may be established, as we have. I believe that we will need to keep our Presbytery structures under review. At a national meeting of Presbytery ministers recently, I noted that we have more committees than anyone else I spoke to, including South Australians (who also have only one Presbytery, which has the same boundaries as the Synod).

In my view, we have too many committees and bodies.

It has been suggested by one of our Chairpersons that all committee chairs are brought together to discuss how we work and what we might do to increase our efficiency and effectiveness. I support holding such a meeting and will be encouraging holding this after the elections have been held at Presbytery. I sense that we can do things differently; however, that needs to emerge out of the Presbytery itself. This will require patience as we work out what to do. That can be frustrating. It takes time. However, when seen as basic upkeep and maintenance, it will enable us to travel more safely. If we keep travelling with improvised repairs, we might keep moving; however, it might also involve frequent stops. If we can have fewer committees, I believe that this will free up people to be involved directly in the work of the Church.

Together, we are the Presbytery; we are all involved in oversight. “We” are all “us.” Our 40th anniversary theme is “all of this is us.” When it comes to the Presbytery, the Presbytery’s life and work is “us” strengthening, encouraging, stimulating, and serving **one another**.

Even though we cannot all be involved in every task required of a Presbytery and mostly delegate work to committees, it remains **our** work. Together, **we** exercise our oversight and fulfil our responsibilities by:



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- hearing from bodies established to serve the Presbytery's purposes,
- appointing people to continue delegated work, and
- sharing aspects of our worship, witness and service, as we look to our future.

The reports, the business, discernment about nominations, elections, and the decisions we make at our meetings are **our** responsibility. Paul says of the church that, together, we are the body of Christ, and individually members of one another.

What might appear to be aimed only at ministers is not only for them; often it will be about the Presbytery's oversight, and therefore a matter for the whole Presbytery. Similarly, what seems related only to particular congregations or Presbytery bodies is the work of all of us. We are in this together. This means following the way of Jesus in order to be the body God calls us to be.

As Secretary, I have found the first six months to have been complex in the range of issues we are grappling with – and it seems to me that we have a long way to go to recover the vision of the life of a Presbytery within our Church.

It may often seem that the Presbytery is not “doing” much or that what is being done doesn't happen fast enough. My experience is that this is often a matter of perception and if this is your perception, I invite you to take another look. Think about that recent visit from the Mission Planner, maybe you attended Summer Spirit back in February or one of the many events Presbytery runs throughout the course of a year. Perhaps you participate in the work of a Joint Nominating Committee, or you're in touch with the Pastoral Relations Committee, a Rural Ministry Consultant, the Multicultural or First Third committees or need to know about some congregational community service activity – all of this is the Presbytery at work. The Consultants are Presbytery consultants. They work with and for you. Their purpose is to encourage and strengthen congregations and members. They may not be visible to you as an individual – and even to your congregation – however, they serve the Presbytery as it works with that purpose. Please contact them if you have a need.

Regulations require Presbyteries to appoint a **Treasurer**. So far, we have not found a person willing to undertake this role. The role includes being a contact for congregations about financial matters, advising congregational Treasurers, and overseeing the Presbytery's part in relation to the Mission and Service Fund. This role will allow the Presbytery to have a fuller grasp of the state



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of congregational finances and giving. The Standing Committee is working on this issue. This position needs to be filled.

Regulations also require Presbyteries to appoint a **Property Committee**. We have not had a nomination for Convenor and were unable to find a person willing to take up this role. The Standing Committee directed that I convene meetings of the members, the results of these will be summarized in the Presbytery Standing Committee report and proposals. These are likely to propose a fundamental review of how we deal with property, that will be different from the pattern that was envisaged in the Rules approved in November 2016.

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