

Thrive Mission Committee 25 Year Mission and Property Strategy for the WA Presbytery of the Uniting Church in WA

14 June 2023



Uniting Church in Australia
Presbytery of Western Australia



A WELCOMING
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Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia will celebrate the 46th Anniversary of its formation on June 22, 2023. Since that long awaited beginning in 1977, our journey as a pilgrim people in Australia, has taken us through many changes and challenges in almost every area of our lives as congregations, parishes, presbyteries, synods and assemblies.

Despite those who have predicted the complete demise of the Christian church in the west, including the Uniting Church in Australia, Thrive Mission Committee continues to have a strong call and agreement that our Uniting Church has a vital part to play in the transformation of our towns and cities to the values of the Kingdom of God, announced in Jesus Christ.

This sense of call to prepare and enable congregations to be the resurrected living body of Christ in their community continues to spur us on despite the challenges of difficult conversations and decisions. We know that from now on, being church in a majority of places will not look, sound or feel like the church of even five years ago, let alone 46 years ago.

In every place and in every congregation in our presbytery there are major challenges and opportunities before us. People who identify as Uniting Church no longer represent the communities we serve. Some congregations enjoy the blessing of fine buildings and adequate finance. Other congregations have buildings in need of major renovation to meet current building standards and limited finances. In some of our Local Government areas we have an over-investment of buildings and congregations while in others, particularly new and growing areas, we have no footprint in terms of people or buildings.

At a special meeting of WA Presbytery on February 10, 2018, Presbytery agreed by consensus “that the Presbytery of Western Australia request each community of faith, congregation, church council agency and committee meeting within the Presbytery give the first portion of their agenda at every meeting to consideration of the ways in which their participation in the mission of God is growing the church by

1. Developing ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’,
2. Deliberate, wise and prayerful mission planning and community outreach,
3. Working to be part of and create Collaborative Networks of faith communities.

With this reality before us, in October 2021, Thrive Mission Committee commenced a research project with the aim of enabling and assisting the development of a 25 year mission and property strategy for the Uniting Church in Australia WA Presbytery. Presbytery engaged Dr Srebrenka Kunek, principal and founder of My Pilgrim’s Way who conducted research “to identify existing and potential buildings and sites; to enable congregations to be missional, namely, an apostolic witness in their broader community.”



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In order to enable this, Dr Kunek and her team provided a framework of reference for mapping out the communities where our churches are located. In her research Dr Kunek provided socio economic data sourced from such locations as Local Government Area Community Profiles and Australian Bureau of Statistics and associated data, to identify the broader community context for congregations. Throughout the study Dr Kunek conducted three workshops with members of Thrive Mission Committee. This diagram summarises the reports presented to Thrive as a result of Dr Kunek's research.



Following the completion of Dr Kunek's report a Discussion Paper was developed for Thrive based on government and community information about future developments in both the metropolitan area and regional Western Australia. Thrive then used this information as well as Dr Kunek's data to develop a spreadsheet of congregations within the Presbytery to further determine future directions based on this information. All of these documents now sit as background material that can be used to inform Presbytery decisions into the future.

This report seeks to bring together the findings of Thrive throughout the process of this research study and to engage with all congregations and agencies in planning to play our part in the Mission of God for at least the next 25 years.

Rev Greg Ross
Chairperson
Thrive Mission Committee

Rev Rob Douglas
Presbytery Minister
Mission



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National Church Life Survey

The 2021 National Church Life Survey produced a snapshot of congregations within the WA Presbytery. The profile was based on 1288 responses from attenders aged 15+ and 62 responses from children aged 8-14 years. The following data, along with access we had to individual snapshots, provides a valuable background to this report:



Demographic profile

Gender



66% are female

34% are male

0.1% are other

Marital Status

65% are currently married

Ethnicity

60% are born in Australia

40% are born overseas

13% speak a language other than English at home

Employment

19% are employed full-time (30 hours plus)

60% are retired

Education

49% have a university degree

28% have a trade certificate or secondary school education

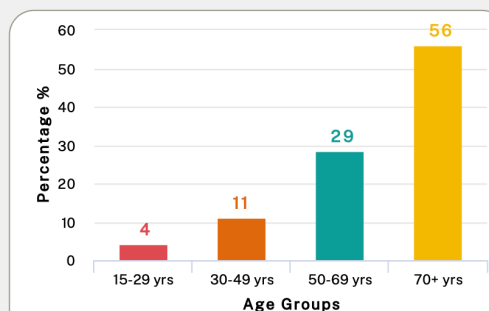


Age and intergenerational ministry

68 yrs is the average age of attenders over 15

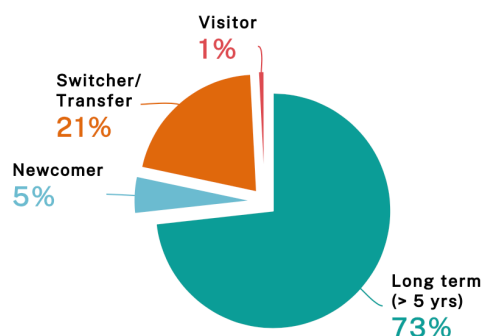
54% are satisfied with what is offered for children aged under 12 years

36% are satisfied with what is offered for youth aged 12 to 18



Church background

27% of attenders are new arrivals to their local church in the past 5 years



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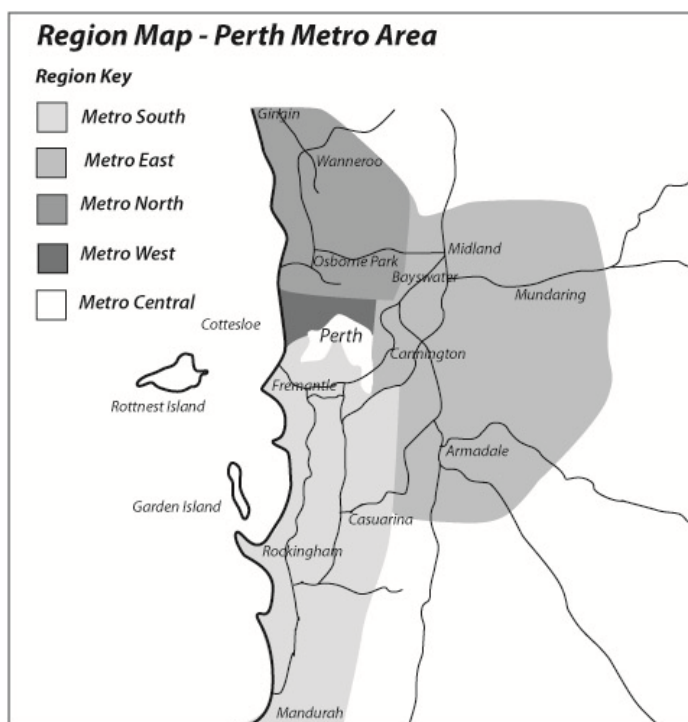
Regional Profiles

There are 10 historical regions within the WA Presbytery, five metropolitan and five rural. To achieve the purposes of this document, this profile will highlight areas within each region that represent future potential for the Uniting Church in WA and will make observations where there may be concerns, without necessarily offering solutions.

In many cases in this profile, the names of congregations are mentioned without discussion and it needs to be stressed that no judgement is intended. The listing is to give readers an understanding of what congregations exist within the WA Presbytery and, in some cases, their physical relationship to each other.

Such an examination of the spread of congregations across a very large state is complex. It is noted that some congregations have strengths as a result of local leadership and a range of other factors either historical or demographic and the size of the community is not necessarily a guide to the size of the congregation. Some relatively small towns in regional WA are host to quite healthy churches while there are struggling congregations in some large, growing locations.

**Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.
For whoever has despised the day of small things shall
rejoice... (Zechariah 4:9,10 - New Revised Standard Version)**



As a general rule this listing highlights locations where population growth has occurred and where relevant government and commercial agencies have predicted growth in the future.

The Perth metropolitan region generally includes 30 local government areas from City of Wanneroo in the north to the City of Rockingham in the south. The WA Presbytery has included the City of Mandurah as the southern-most local government area within the Perth metropolitan area.

The Uniting Church in WA has 45 congregations within a city of just over two million people. Perth is the fourth most populous city in Australia and 80 per cent of the state's population live in Greater Perth.



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Metro Central

Three city churches operate under the single church council, as Uniting Church in the City. These are Perth Wesley, Trinity and Ross Memorial and have extensive property holdings. St Andrew's, South Perth and Star Street are also included in this region, as well as a small congregation at Rowethorpe aged care facility. There are ministers at all congregations except for Rowethorpe. The Tapu Niue Faith Community is based at Star Street

Significant growth is planned for the Perth CBD and the suburbs directly surrounding the CBD into the future and this will impact the future of churches in Metro Central. A proposal to establish a campus of Edith Cowan University in the CBD will be a game-changer for Wesley and Trinity in particular, but will also impact St Andrews, Ross Memorial, South Perth and Star Street as students and staff look for accommodation close to the campus. The university will bring students into the city, including many international students.

Congregations within this area will need to ensure they are ready to provide ministry to a much younger demographic than they currently support, to address issues of English as a second language, and to welcome international students who are living away from home.

Metro West

Congregations of the Uniting Church in Metro West are Claremont (Town of Claremont), Floreat (Town of Cambridge), Mosman Park (Town of Mosman Park), Nedlands (City of Nedlands), and St Peter and Emmaus, Wembley Downs and Scarborough (all of which are in the City of Stirling). St Peter and Emmaus is a collaborative congregation between the Uniting Church and the Anglican Church.

This represents a high concentration of churches in a relatively small area including three in one local government area, however, the population of these suburbs is also highly concentrated. Considerable growth is anticipated with major plans for development in both Scarborough and Claremont over the next few years. This will mean that congregations need to consider how to address changing demographics and be prepared to ensure that their buildings are suitable to allow for changes in their missional activities.



The Indonesian congregation, GKI, has outgrown its Mosman Park buildings and is looking for alternative accommodation. Since the members of GKI travel from all over the city, it is not essential for the congregation to be based in Metro West. It is vitally important a new home is found in the immediate future for this congregation. The congregation's Mosman Park buildings will become part of the funding of the relocation.



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Metro North

Congregations of the Uniting Church in Metro North are Maylands/Mt Lawley (The suburb of Maylands is located within both the City of Bayswater and the City of Stirling), Noranda (City of Bayswater), Osborne Park (City of Stirling), Trinity North (City of Joondalup), Northway (church situated in Beldon within the City of Joondalup and also a worshipping community at St Stephens School Carramar campus), and Crossways (City of Wanneroo).

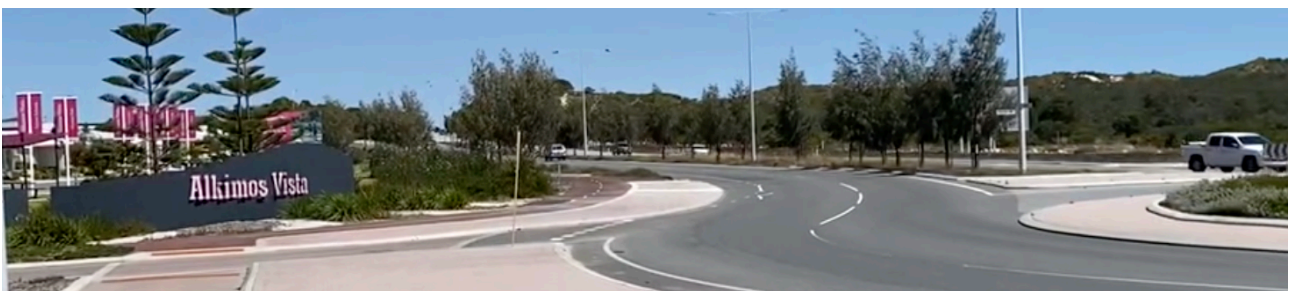
All of the Presbytery documentation places Gingin as Metro North, but because it is a more rural location, for the purposes of this report it will be included in Mid West.

While the churches in Metro North do not face the same problems experienced elsewhere with heritage buildings, most of these buildings are starting to see the effects of ageing and will be looking at significant maintenance issues in the next decade. Along with these issues serious thought needs to be given to identifying the best location for a future Uniting Church footprint in the northern suburbs.

There is an exploding population in the north metropolitan area, but the Uniting Church only has five churches and there have been no new congregations for many years. Much of the demographic growth in Metro North has occurred within the City of Wanneroo where a current population of 220,000 is expected to expand to 350,000 in the next 20 years.

Most of this growth has occurred in Alkimos (19,762 per cent growth), Yanchep (147 per cent), Landsdale (16.3 per cent) and Two Rocks (77.3 per cent).

Source: Growth between 2011 and 2021. <https://watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/the-sprawling-suburbs-soaking-up-perth-s-growing-population-20220720-p5b33c.html>



Crossways, situated in Wanneroo, is the most northerly church in the metropolitan area but is about 20km from Alkimos where the largest growth is occurring. Trinity North has two buildings, one in Greenwood and another in Duncraig but meets for worship services in St Stephen's School in Duncraig. The congregation is currently reviewing its property footprint in the light of ageing facilities that are not meeting their current needs. Trinity North is situated close to Madeley/Darch/Landsale which has been listed as one of the fastest growing areas in the northern suburbs.

Serious consideration needs to be given to the location of all congregations in the northern suburbs in the light of changing demographics and the sprawling growth further north.



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Metro South

The Uniting Church has its biggest metropolitan footprint in the south metro area with 15 congregations in an area similar in size to North Metro where there are only five congregations. Mandurah is included in the south metro, but not Pinjarra and Waroona which are in the Peel region, but will be incorporated in the South West region.

Congregations in Metro South are: Applecross, Mt Pleasant, Bicton, Kardinya, Korean (congregation meets in Kardinya building), and Leeming, (all within the City of Melville), while Willetton is in the City of Canning. Billabong is in Canning Vale which is within the City of Canning and City of Gosnells. Congregations in the City of Cockburn are Spearwood (situated in Spearwood), Beth Shalom (situated in South Lake) and Maaman "O" Mia (situated in Coolbellup). Fremantle is an inner city church in the City of Fremantle and further south are Rockingham (City of Rockingham), Mandurah and South Mandurah (City of Mandurah)

There are two Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) congregations in Metro South: Beth Shalom (Tongan) and Korean (Kardinya). Given the growth of multicultural congregations within the Uniting Church, it is probably more important for these congregations to have their own buildings and provide rental accommodation to small Anglo congregations rather than the other way around.

Maaman "O" Mia is a predominantly indigenous congregation based in Coolbellup. During the writing of this report an inauguration service was held for the Trinity-BKI Community Fellowship. This is a joint initiative of Trinity in the City and an indigenous group based at Beanang Kwuurt Institute (BKI), a community services organisation in Queens Park (City of Canning).

Billabong, situated in Canning Vale is the newest congregation and is in the process of planting a new congregation in Piara Waters, which is the second biggest growth area in the region (339.3 per cent growth), behind North Coogee (547.2 per cent) and just ahead of Harrisdale (206.7 per cent).

Source: Growth between 2011 and 2021. <https://watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/the-sprawling-suburbs-soaking-up-perth-s-growing-population-20220720-p5b33c.html>



It is important to note a high concentration of congregations within the City of Melville which is a local government area with a total population of just over 107,000. Future planning for the Presbytery must take into account the high concentration of congregations and property in a relatively small area. Leeming receives income by renting out its buildings in Farrington Road and chooses to gather for worship in a scout hall adjacent to a playground, BMX track and tennis courts and finds itself in a strong position to be a congregation with a missional emphasis.



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The way congregations use their property resources to generate income for mission is vitally important in determining the future for all our churches.

Spearwood is active in missional activities, building on its strengths in hospitality and the care of those in need. Given it's location close to the fast growing area of North Coogee, consideration should be given to supporting future growth in this area.

Fremantle is an important location for the Uniting Church with its presence in the heart of the city, associated with the service programme of Uniting WA. Serious consideration needs to be given to staffing to ensure that ministry to homeless people and care services can be further developed.

By 2046 the City of Rockingham anticipates a growth rate between 2021 and 2046 of 73.25%, representing 103,000 people. (Source: <https://forecast.id.com.au/rockingham/population-summary>). Since there is only one Uniting Church congregation in this location, future opportunities should be taken into account.

The population growth of the Peel region has significantly exceeded that of WA and Australia over the past 20 years and it is anticipated will grow by 58.8 per cent from 2016 to 2031. It is expected that by 2031 the Peel region will rival the South West as WA's most populous region outside Perth. Mandurah has emerged as a preferred location by retirees. The Mandurah Uniting Church is ideally situated halfway between the Mandurah Forum and the CBD on Pinjarra Road. The church has significant land-holdings which are adjacent to land owned by Juniper. There is potential for this property to be redeveloped jointly by the church and Juniper providing a model for sustainable property development long into the future. There is another congregation, South Mandurah, about 15 minutes drive south at Wannanup, also within the Mandurah growth corridor.

Metro East

Congregations in Metro East are Cannington (City of Canning), Gosnells (City of Gosnells), Armadale (City of Armadale), Byford and Mundijong (Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale), Kalamunda and Foothills St Martin's (City of Kalamunda), Mundaring, and Glen Forrest (Shire of Mundaring), and Guildford, Swan View and Gidgegannup (City of Swan).

Kalamunda and Foothills St Martin's operate together as a cluster, along with the Perth Samoan congregation which has now become a devotional group, attached to Foothills St Martin's. The three congregations meet together for worship on the fifth Sunday of each month. Kalamunda is the only congregation in Metro East with a full time minister and is sustainable with both property and staff. It has a number of active outreach programmes for all ages and runs Messy Church once a month as a separate congregation.

Armadale has a growing church community with active participation by community members in Messy Church, Razzle Dazzle, a movement to music programme for toddlers and their parents, and a food hamper programme. As a growing church, there are major issues with their very small building situated in a residential area. The congregation is currently investigating opportunities that would involve moving to a site with larger



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buildings that enable their mission to continue to grow. Armadale is seen as a strong strategic centre for the future. The State Government has invested \$50 million into redeveloping Armadale. Within the City of Armadale and 3km from the city centre Wungong, according to Development WA, is set to become one of Australia's most innovative and sustainable urban developments.

The City of Swan is the largest metropolitan local government area (by area) and has some of the fastest growing suburbs in WA with significant population increases since 2011 in Brabham-Henley Brook (322.7 per cent), Aveley (170.4 per cent) and The Vines (130.6 per cent). The Uniting Church does not have a presence in these suburbs. Guildford and Swan View are both within the City of Swan and could lead future church planting opportunities within the City of Swan. Guildford is a small but active congregation centrally located on a main road.

Source: Growth between 2011 and 2021. <https://watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/the-sprawling-suburbs-soaking-up-perth-s-growing-population-20220720-p5b33c.html>



Byford and Mundijong are small congregations within the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale where there is a population of just over 20,000 and expected to grow to more than 30,000 by 2036.

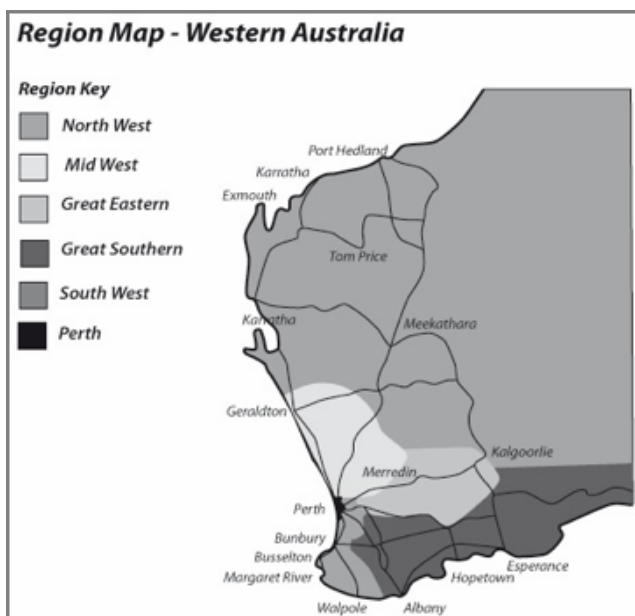
Although Cannington Uniting Church buildings are home to several congregations of other denominations, a sustainable plan for both Uniting Church congregations in Cannington and Gosnells needs to be developed to enable the future ministry and mission of the Uniting Church in these communities. Both sets of buildings require major works in the coming years to provide suitable premises from which ministry can sustainably thrive and grow.



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REGIONAL WA is divided into five regions for the purpose of this report: North West, Mid West, Great Eastern, Great Southern and South West. The Kimberley region of WA comes under the Northern Synod, so this will not be covered here.

Western Australia occupies 33% of Australia's land area and according to Wikipedia is the second largest country subdivision in the world.

The Uniting Church has less than 50 congregations in regional WA, a state 3.7 times the size of Texas

North West

The Uniting Church has property in Port Hedland (Town of Port Hedland) and Tom Price (Shire of Ashburton), but no congregations in these towns. A patrol bush chaplain is located in Meekatharra and a position for a bush chaplain is now vacant for the Pilbara patrol based in Tom Price. The only north west congregation is at Carnarvon (Shire of Gascoyne) where the Gascoyne patrol is based. Bush chaplaincy is funded by Frontier Services.

Karratha (City of Karratha) has a population of 22,000 and Hedland 16,000, both of which are recognised as regional centres for the Pilbara. Karratha is locally recognised as the regional centre for the west Pilbara and Hedland the regional centre for the east Pilbara. Negotiations should be held with Frontier Services to have a bush chaplain based in one of these towns where a sustainable new congregation could be established.



Depending on which town was seen as the best option for the future, the property in Tom Price and/or Port Hedland could be sold to fund a new church plant in one of these regional centres.

Carnarvon is an important horticulture centre, so attracts seasonal workers from the Pacific which impacts the Uniting Church congregation from time to time.



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Mid West

Congregations in the Mid West include Northampton (Shire of Northampton), Geraldton (City of Greater Geraldton), Dongara (Shire of Irwin), Badgingarra (Shire of Dandaragan), Three Springs (Shire of Three Springs), Carnamah (Shire of Carnamah), Coorow (Shire of Coorow), Moora (Shire of Moora), Dalwallinu (Shire of Dalwallinu) and Gingin (Shire of Gingin).

Geraldton Lighthouse Church does not have a minister, but is an active congregation of about 130 people and a youth group of about 60 young people on a Friday night. A youth group leader is employed. The church owns considerable property and attracts commercial rentals. Geraldton provides a lay preacher every second week to Northampton where there is a small congregation including some youth.

Dongara has a small heritage building and a minister and the congregation has an effective ministry in this local community that benefits significantly from tourism.

Congregations of the North Midland Anglican Parish and Uniting Church members share facilities and services at Three Springs, Carnamah, and Coorow. The Uniting Church has a building in Moora where the congregation meets every first and third Sunday for worship. On alternate Sundays a service is held in Miling. These congregations are small and ageing.

There is a Uniting Church building in Dalwallinu that is not used by the congregation, but is rented out to another church. The small congregation worships with the Anglicans and runs an op shop in town.

Decreasing numbers in some of these smaller communities may result in closure of some of these congregations in the next few years and if this occurs the sale of buildings is the most likely outcome. Conversations need to be held with these congregations to determine how they see themselves and their likely future.

Great Eastern

Congregations in the Great Eastern region are Kalgoorlie-Boulder (City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder), Southern Cross (Shire of Yilgarn), Merredin (Shire of Merredin), Bencubbin (Shire of Mt Marshall), Mukinbudin (Shire of Mukinbudin), Trayning (Shire of Trayning), Kellerberrin (Shire of Kellerberrin), Tammin (Shire of Tammin), Cunderdin (Shire of Cunderdin), Toodyay (Shire of Toodyay), York (Shire of York), Quairading (Shire of Quairading).

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder has a population of about 30,000 people and has potential for a sustainable congregation. The small congregation has a heritage listed building and hall, as well as two manses, one of which is heritage property that is now disused. A bush patrol chaplain provides services throughout the Goldfields and as far south as Esperance, and also supports the Kalgoorlie congregation. A fresh expression of church could be considered a valuable contribution to this important regional centre.



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Merredin has a congregation which also supports other wheatbelt congregations, primarily through a ministry of online services. The church does not have a minister, but has about 40 people in the congregation and works cooperatively with other churches in the region.

The many small congregations throughout the Great Eastern region recognise the need for mutual support for each other but ageing buildings add to the pressure of these small groups. Some of these congregations could satisfactorily exist as home groups without the burden of buildings, particularly if they were recognised as part of a cluster.

Northam, York and Toodyay are larger towns that could support sustainable congregations. Heritage buildings add to the burden on these congregations, including the ongoing cost of maintenance. Northam's building is situated adjacent to Juniper aged care facility.

Decreasing numbers in some of these smaller communities may result in closure of some of these congregations in the next few years and if this occurs the sale of buildings is the most likely outcome. Conversations need to be held with these congregations to determine how they see themselves and their likely future.



Great Southern

Congregations in the Great Southern are: Albany and Lockyer (City of Albany), Denmark (Shire of Denmark), Mt Barker (Shire of Plantagenet), Kojoonup (Shire of Kojoonup), Tambellup (Shire of Broomehill-Tambellup), Katanning (Shire of Katanning), Wagin (Shire of Wagin), Darkin (Shire of West Arthur), Narrogin (Shire of Narrogin), Cuballing (Shire of Cuballing), Brookton (Shire of Brookton), Kulin (Shire of Kulin), Hyden (Shire of Hyden), and Esperance and Condingup (Shire of Esperance).

Albany is the cultural and administrative hub of the Great Southern with a population of about 40,000 people, and is the location of a large Uniting Church footprint consisting of two congregations, significant property holdings, a large aged care facility run by Juniper and a presence from Uniting WA and Good Sammy. Given this concentration of Uniting Church congregations and agencies, any future development should include a master plan incorporating a unified approach to the ministry of the Uniting Church in Albany. Presbytery should initiate the establishment of a forum that brings together all Uniting Church congregations and agencies in Albany with a view to discussing the strategic intent of the relevant stakeholders.



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The next major centre is Katanning which is a thriving community with a large multicultural population. It has been identified as the most ethnically diverse regional centre in WA. There are about 50 language groups in Katanning. There is also a Juniper presence in Katanning. The church has substantial property in



the town, but the congregation is very small. Consideration should be given to a fresh expression of church that addresses the multicultural aspects of the community. Existing buildings may not be essential for such a fresh expression of church in a growing community like Katanning but their sale could fund valuable new outreach prospects.

While small churches provide support to local gatherings of Christians, expensive buildings and property do not necessarily enhance the health of these congregations. In many cases, these small congregations could operate as home groups meeting either in private homes or rented accommodation.

Decreasing numbers in some of these smaller communities may result in closure of some of these congregations in the next few years and if this occurs the sale of buildings is the most likely outcome. Conversations need to be held with these congregations to determine how they see themselves and their likely future.

South West

Congregations in the South West are: St Augustine's in Bunbury (City of Bunbury), Bay Life in Busselton (City of Busselton), Margaret River and Augusta (both in Shire of Augusta-Margaret River), Capel (Shire of Capel), Northcliffe and Pemberton (both Shire of Manjimup), Bridgetown (Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes), Pinjarra (Shire of Murray) and Waroona (Shire of Waroona).

Bunbury is the second largest regional city in WA. The Uniting Church has one church building in the greater Bunbury area, one in Capel and one in Collie. Wellington Regional Mission was established by the Peel Presbytery in 1997 and has responsibility for six shires, Bunbury, Harvey, Donnybrook-Balingup, Capel, Collie and Dardanup, with a population of 107,000, the same as the City of Melville. The urban areas of Eaton and Australind to the north of the city and Dalyellup and Gelorup, both in the Capel Shire to the south, will continue to grow and each of these centres offer church planting opportunities.



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St Augustine's Uniting Church is situated in south Bunbury in an older residential part of town and while it is a thriving congregation with good facilities, it is not well-located to address population growth in the greater Bunbury area. The congregation runs a weekly Sunday service which is live streamed and used by an average of 40 households and congregations each week. Messy Church was established as a separate monthly workshop service in 2010 and has run the annual Messy Church Summer Camp for the WA for seven years. The congregation also runs monthly communion services in Donnybrook and Eaton in homes or facilities of retirement villages. Presbytery and the Wellington Regional Mission need to develop a strategic intent for the fast-growing parts of this significant regional centre and other communities in this southern corridor. This includes Busselton which is also a major growth area.



The City of Busselton has forecast a population of about 50,000 by 2026 based on its current growth rate of four percent per annum. The Department of Planning has also identified Margaret River as critical to future growth in the region. It has reported: "Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates that the Shire (of Augusta-Margaret River) has experienced robust population growth in recent years, with the estimated resident population increasing by 26.3 per cent over the decade to 2015. This is substantially higher than the population growth rate recorded for regional Western Australia (18.0 per cent), but slightly lower than the population growth rates recorded for the South West region (27.4 per cent) and Western Australia (28.8 per cent). The estimated resident population for the Shire of Augusta- Margaret River at June 2015 was 13,807".

A cluster relationship is being re-established between Augusta and Margaret River. In each of these locations it is important that the Uniting Church maintains a strong presence. Further north in the Peel region there is a congregation in Pinjarra led by a lay ministry team and the Waroona congregation is part of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress. Bridgetown, Pemberton and Northcliffe are part of the Warren Blackwood Cluster..

Decreasing numbers in some of some smaller communities may result in closure of some of these congregations in the next few years and if this occurs the sale of buildings is the most likely outcome. Conversations need to be held with these congregations to determine how they see themselves playing their part in the mission of God in the future.



The church is a pilgrim people

Throughout the UCA's Basis of Union the church's existence is imagined as a journey, a movement, a process of ongoing exploration and change – on the way to a known goal: “that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation” (Basis of Union paragraph 3).

It is evident from paragraph 1 [of the Basis of Union.] There the churches that entered the union affirmed their sense of being a people on a journey, not yet at their destination. These churches: “... look for a continuing renewal ...declare their readiness to go forward together ...remain open to constant reform ...seek a wider unity...”

And in the last sentences of the Basis of Union, paragraph 18, the theme is still there:

“The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.”

[Andrew F Dutney, Sept 23, 2013: www.andrewfdutney.com]



Developing Clusters

The Uniting Church in WA is in a critical time with extreme financial pressures, along with the need to address the issues associated with changes in our nation's people identifying as Christian, less volunteer hours, ageing infrastructure, and ageing congregations. Some congregations are facing significant pressure in maintaining heritage buildings with less income due to decreasing numbers of members, and fewer people with disposable incomes. There are probably as many as 150 substantial buildings owned by the Uniting Church around the state.

Planning for the next 25 years will, of necessity, involve all congregations honestly entering into conversations about where the Spirit is leading us as pilgrim people, which will include the closure of some small churches and along with that the sale of property. There is also need for congregations to work more closely together in some local government areas, finding ways to release some buildings to enable mission in areas where we have no presence. There is pressure on this to happen sooner rather than later as the Synod faces huge expenses related to Redress.

The challenge for the WA Presbytery is to find ways to support congregations as they embrace the pilgrim way. Some will face deep sadness and loss as their local church closes so that we can provide ministry for people who are spread across a huge state. Pentecost provides us with the assurance that in times of challenge our God leads us to discover hopefulness in a time of crisis and emboldens us to build principles of growth into the fabric of the Presbytery.



The time has come to develop some new models of church which will involve the way we operate as individual congregations, how we work together and how we mobilise key people to provide leadership and pastoral care. The remainder of this report will seek to develop a number of these new models, and how they may be applied within the WA Presbytery.

Keith Suter in his dissertation "The Future of the Uniting Church in Australia: The Application of Scenario Planning to the Creation of Four "Futures" for the Uniting Church in Australia" (University of Sydney, 2013) speaks for four scenarios in relation to the future of the Uniting Church.

The first scenario: "Word and Deed" examines how the Uniting Church could become a church of a small number of large parishes providing both spiritual activities and social welfare.

The second scenario: "Secular Welfare" examines how the Uniting Church could just let the parishes fade away and instead focus on the provision of social welfare (albeit derived from a Christian tradition).



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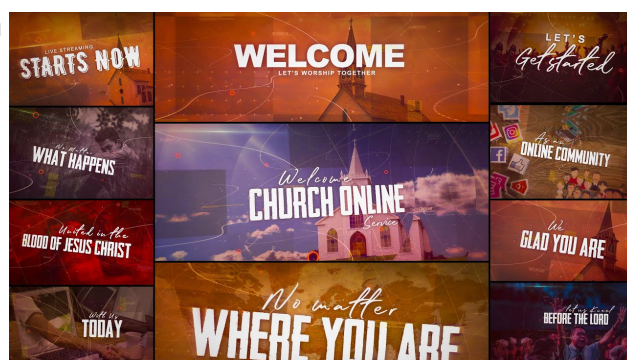
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The third scenario: “Return to the Early Church”, examines how the Uniting Church could reinvent itself as per the first three centuries of the Christian church.

The fourth scenario: “Recessional” (taken from the name of the piece of music played at the end of a church service) in which the Uniting Church is wound up and its assets dispersed.

This report seeks to suggest a way in which the first scenario could be developed and expanded along the lines of a cluster model. Such a model is already being trialled in a small way in a number of locations and various forms have been discussed and attempted over a number of years. Thrive Mission Committee believes that a new approach needs to be taken to clusters recognising them as flexible, collaborative networks. Such an approach may require congregations to undertake a self-examination and to be willing to consider how they may relocate or change in order to join together for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.

The Covid lockdowns of 2020 had a long-term impact on the church worldwide and one of those changes was for churches to begin experimenting with technology and how that would enable them to connect with people who could not attend worship services due to illness. Since Covid many churches have maintained live-streaming and recording services and have discovered this has met a need in their communities. New models of church need to include exploration of the use of technology, not just in live-streaming but in connecting online through small groups. Presbytery will need to look at ways in which congregations that are innovating in this area can access financial and technical resources to improve their skills and opportunities to serve other communities more in the future.



Merredin Uniting Church is situated in a small rural town with members often living away from town on surrounding properties. During Covid lockdowns the church began live-streaming their worship services and continued with this practice after lockdowns concluded. The services are uploaded to YouTube and the church now has an active ministry to smaller congregations around the wheatbelt who benefit from the Merredin services.

Although this is not a formal cluster, there is evidence that this is an ideal way for a church to share its resources with smaller congregations. Congregations in the eastern wheatbelt also meet a couple of times a year for mutual support and encouragement.

Other more formally recognised clusters include the Wellington Regional Mission based in Bunbury and the Albany Regional Council, where each provide a link with other congregations and together cover the costs of a stipend for a ministry agent to encourage and resource lay leaders as they meet in homes, church buildings and aged care facilities.

A cluster model recognises that individual congregations will be diverse in form, style and theology, and will be impacted differently by their location and history, however, it also recognises the principles of 1 Corinthians 12 which describes the unique diversity and inter-dependence of the Body of Christ.



A cluster of churches that is working to support each congregation within the cluster can make it possible for some churches to die with grace, some churches to enter into re-birth by reinventing themselves in a way that recognises changes in society and/or demographics, some churches to grow in health, and for fresh expressions of church and new church plants to spring up with the knowledge they are not alone.

The establishment of new forms and patterns for gathering followers of Jesus in our unique Uniting Church way, is critical to the future of the denomination and must be built into the fabric of the Presbytery. Clusters are one way that would make it possible for new churches of all shapes and kinds to be established within a safe and supportive network and for the mission of God to be enthusiastically embraced by the whole denomination. While there is massive pressure on budgets, last year's Synod decided that funds must be available to support new opportunities that are sustainable in the long-term. This is central to the mixed ecology that has long been promoted in the WA Presbytery through Mission Shaped Ministry.

"It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church's strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognize that a variety of integrated missionary approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Within the WA Presbytery, the latest initiative in starting a new church is currently being undertaken by Billabong who is planting a church in Piara Waters. The congregation has been prayerfully preparing for this for some time and has commissioned some of their members to lead the work in a growing neighbouring suburb.

Messy Church is the most successful form of church planting or fresh expression of church that has been happening in many denominations worldwide for more than 15 years and has been embraced by a number of churches within the WA Presbytery of the Uniting Church. To many people Messy Church looks like a programme within an existing congregation, but its intention is to become a fresh congregation that is reaching people who would not normally attend a traditional church service. There is a vibrancy and freedom about Messy Church, along with its focus on all ages, that has enabled it to be successful in many locations and situations.

Social.Justice.Church is a community that meets monthly for a service at Wesley Uniting Church in the City. It is based around a special interest in social justice and is active in promoting a wide range of social justice issues.



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There is an increasing interest worldwide in developing networks of micro churches, or simple approaches to church that maintain the minimal elements of church, worship, fellowship and mission. This model is compatible with the Fresh Expression model that has been promoted by the WA Presbytery for a number of years and would fit comfortably within a cluster model.

A micro church is a small, Jesus-centered community empowered by the spirit, creatively engaging a particular network or neighborhood, in times of worship, community, and mission, to make disciples and multiply communities in partnership with others to the glory of God. Micro churches exist all over Australia, within many different denominations and traditions.

Bree Mills is the Director of Micro Churches Australia and has spent over 10 years leading networks of micro churches, both alongside existing churches and in independent networks. Rev Mills, an ordained Anglican minister, says this about church planting: "In its simplest form, church is when a group of believers gather to engage in worship, fellowship, and mission together, and planting is when that gathering begins in a new location." In this graphic she explains why we should plant churches.

WHY PLANT CHURCHES?

- 1. Faithfulness to Jesus' commandments**

We are called to the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-31), the New Commandment (John 13:34-35) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).
- 2. New churches reach new people**

"There have to be communities where these and others can hear and see in terms of their own culture the words and the signs of the Gospel."
Lesslie Newbigin, "What is "a local church truly united"?", The Ecumenical Review 29, no. 2 (1977): 122-123.
- 3. Grows the collective wisdom of the church**

New churches promote new thinking and innovation from which the broader church can learn. When a new church plant effectively makes disciples of a different people group, existing churches can learn from their experience.



On the next page we explore what a cluster might look like within the WA Presbytery, taking into account the range of congregations that exist and the spread of congregations across the Presbytery.



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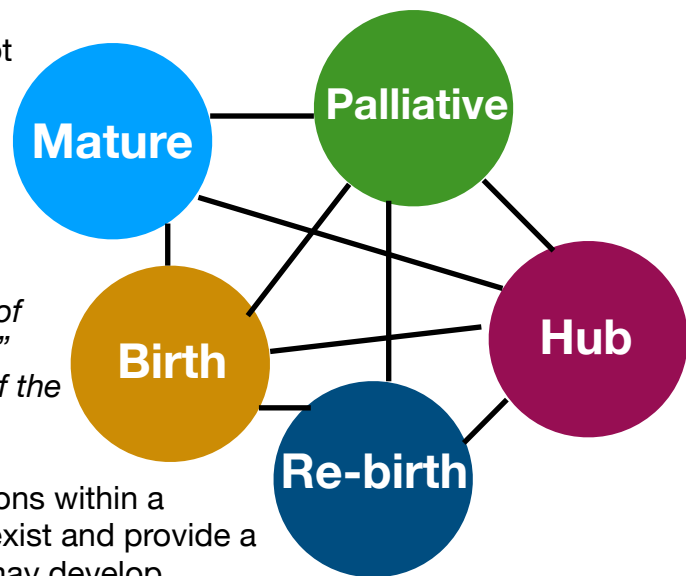
Cluster Model

1 Corinthians 12:4-31

A cluster of congregations does not necessarily have to be connected by region, theology, or practice. There is a recognition of diversity along with a recognition of the need for each other.

“And if the ear says, ‘I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,’ would that make it any less a part of the body?” 1 Cor 12:16.

These different types of congregations within a cluster are examples of what may exist and provide a general depiction of how clusters may develop.



HUB: A hub church may not be the biggest, but will have resources it can share with others. Often smaller churches struggle with administrative or compliance issues that could be resourced from a hub church. In some cases there may be more than one hub church. This is not necessarily a formal description, but there is a natural recognition of the nature of a hub church. In this graphic, the hub is not at the centre, in order to recognise that collegiality is more important than centrality.

MATURE: There may be a number of congregations within a cluster that are operating quite successfully. By being effective members of a cluster they are recognising their unique part in the body and are able to share their strengths and resources with others.

PALLIATIVE: There are some congregations that due to the age of members, the size of their community, or natural attrition are coming to the end of life. Such death should not happen alone so being part of a cluster is important. Closing a congregation and selling property is painful, and we have a duty to care for each other and to value Presbytery oversight in these times.

BIRTH: There are many models for church planting. In some cases a larger congregation can agree to send a group of their members to a growing suburb or community where they plant a church; in some cases it can be a small fresh expression of church such as Messy Church. Sometimes churches are birthed through small groups meeting over time in homes, cafes, or even pubs. There is a growing interest across Australia in micro churches which are often established around a missional focus such as a group feeding the homeless, supporting single mums in a new suburb or gathering around a common interest such as sailing, horse-riding or reading.

RE-BIRTH: Over time some congregations that are in danger of becoming palliative can undertake a process of re-birth. This may be the time when it is necessary to remove the burden of property that has become both a risk and an expense, and to look at a new way of being church. By meeting as a small home group, or even using the facilities of the hub church, another church in the cluster or a building of another denomination, this group can re-build its energy and work towards a new future.



Sustainability

One of the biggest problems facing individual congregations is sustainability. With fewer members and growing demands on finances caused by maintaining old buildings, and a general increase in the cost of living, many churches are finding survival next to impossible. Finding new ways to support the sustainability of congregations will become of increasing importance in years ahead.

A number of options should be investigated:

Work with the wider Uniting Church family.

Presbytery committees need to be in regular conversation with Uniting Church agencies, Juniper, Uniting WA, Good Sammy and any interested Uniting Church schools in order to determine where all parties could benefit from sharing property. There are several ways such sharing could occur and there are already some models in place.



Rowethorpe Uniting Church meets in a chapel in the grounds of Juniper Rowethorpe. Many aged care facilities other than Juniper also encourage regular church services, but because of our existing relationship with Juniper, shared use of facilities for worship and ministry should be explored as an alternative to a congregation having its own building.

Examples of shared property relationships exist between Fremantle Wesley and Uniting WA, Northam Uniting Church and Juniper, Noranda Uniting Church and Juniper.

The relationship between Uniting and congregations has been explored in other states and the following observations were made in a report produced by Uniting in Tasmania and Victoria:

In considering the connection between Uniting's founding agencies and Congregations/Parish Missions across the two states, four types of relationship emerged:



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1. share significant physical, personal or financial resources with the founding agencies and now Uniting VicTas. These congregations actively partner through multiple channels including prayer, advocacy for, the provision of goods and money, provide property, volunteers and work alongside Uniting's Identity and direction.

2. congregations that provide some level of support to Uniting including financial assistance, food and goods donations, volunteering, referrals and prayer

3. congregations who are evaluating their community ministry and/or investigating deeper community services involvement or innovation

4. Others: Those which receive Uniting information, but may not support Uniting or may support other organisations.

(A Model of Mutual Engagement: Community Services across the Uniting Church in Tasmania and Victoria. Martin J. Cowling 28.09.2017)

The same report references Uniting Communities in Adelaide who re-developed its head office which was located in and next to a 1960's church building. "The 20 storey redevelopment, branded "UCity" includes a specialist disability short stay accommodation facility, six floors of retirement living residences, specially designed long-term rental accommodation for people living with a disability, retail and office space, 400 seat function centre, and ground floor cafe."

If Uniting, Juniper, Good Sammy and one or more local congregations worked together such a development could be feasible in locations such as Mandurah, Albany, Katanning or a metropolitan location.

Leasing rather than owning. The traditional owners of the land we now call Australia lived lightly upon the land. With colonisation the model of church in Australia was based on a northern hemisphere model where buildings were identified as 'the church' in stark contrast to the 'people being the church.'

Perhaps the time has come for the Uniting Church to move away from the ownership of property and live more lightly by looking for alternatives to the ownership of expensive property. The cost-effectiveness of leasing, sharing, renting, joint partnerships and central hubs serving a larger area, rather than every community owning buildings should be seriously investigated.

Paid tenancies. Churches have often allowed other groups to use their facilities at times when they are not already in use. In doing so we have often taken the so-called "Christian" approach of only charging minimal rent. Most groups that are seeking rooms or halls to rent are willing to pay commercial rates particularly if the facilities include a kitchen and technology. Congregations should refer to Australian Taxation Office rulings on GST exemptions that can apply to rentals less than commercial rates.



Turning Property into Opportunity

By Andrew Boer, Moores Legal

www.moores.com.au

Plenty of charities are in the enviable position of having a large asset base in real estate. For those who are “land rich” in that sense, here are a few ideas to ponder as you ask yourself the question “how could we do more with what we have?”

1. Consider selling lazy land.

If lazy land is doing nothing for your mission and you have no foreseeable need to grow onto it, turn it into something useful. But before you do, consider whether you can add value to the land (lift covenants, obtain permits, create separate access, etc). Make the most of what you have.

2. Consider leasing lazy land or underutilised spaces.

Identify ways to permanently free up space and obtain an income stream. Car parks, office spaces, even vacant land can attract a rental. Hiring arrangements can also produce good outcomes – a ballet school can operate without owning buildings, and might even use the church hall more hours per week than the church itself! Think about whether there might be people or organisations who would be a great strategic fit in your spare space.

3. Develop for sale.

Some charities hate the thought of selling dirt to a developer, so want to develop their property prior to sale. You were cash poor, remember? Are you borrowing to pay for this? This is sometimes appropriate but requires serious consideration of skill, capacity, financial risk and project management. Don't jump into property development simply because you have a board member who has some experience in the field.

4. Develop for lease.

A charity may want to improve its property and make it suitable for creating rental income. This may be appropriate, but beware the vortex of becoming a ‘property management charity’ over time. You should have a sound business case for this kind of venture and a clear exit plan if you ever need to regain that space for your own charitable use.

5. Develop for joint use.

Property can often be developed for blended use. If you've got spaces that will have regular short-term use, then you're starting a business – have a business plan. If you're developing for a specific partner and it's needs, then your partner might put money towards the development, but will want something in return (long tenure, an agreed buy out if they leave early, equity in the property, etc). Whatever you do, don't go into a venture like this without knowing what it might look like when it ends. All lease arrangements come to an end at some point.

6. Swap land for buildings.

That's right, it can be done. It's a variation on option 1 – exchange some spare land for new buildings which can better serve your purposes. These are bespoke arrangements and things can get really creative. This is not nirvana, but can save significant transaction costs and planning risks. Just don't forget to measure the value of the land you're giving up vs the value of the buildings you have been promised.

7. Use the air space above you.

The basic concept here is to partner with a developer to completely rebuild your site, giving back to you a brand new building far better than you had before. The developer keeps building above you and sells the rest of the building into the market (as apartments, office, etc). A profit share arrangement should be on the table in this discussion. The sky's the limit – subject to council approval.

8. Make your property for a different charitable use.

Sometimes the cause should trump the financial returns. After all, charities are primarily about mission, not profit. Consider using the unoccupied manse for affordable housing. Give a 99 year ground lease to a charity and allow them to build on your site. Make some space available for crisis shelter during the winter. Stay open to the possibility of being a partner with another suitable charity.



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Assessing viability

Assessing viability is one of the most difficult issues facing churches in the 21st century. The parables of Jesus offer us so much wisdom when facing these decisions. Matthew 25:14-30 shares the parable we know as the ‘parable of the talents’ where the master leaves servants in charge of various amounts of money and expects each of them to make a return. Those who use their wisdom and skills to make a return are rewarded. Those who bury the money entrusted to them are labelled as lazy and the money entrusted to them is taken from them and shared among those who are acting wisely and making returns for the master. These teachings are hard and sharp, however we ignore them at our peril.

A criterion could be established to measure the return of each congregation in mission terms based on the people served or the number of people coming to faith and when it is recognised that no return is being made the property could be sold off and re-invested in new areas. While such a criteria may solve a problem at one level it doesn’t necessarily take into account the human or spiritual nature of church in both metropolitan and rural and remote communities.

All congregations are made up of people who often have a deep personal connection with the church and the building. It was the place they were baptised or married, and the place where the funeral of a loved one was held. The congregation also represents the family of God and spiritual experiences and growth have occurred within these walls and in company with fellow faith pilgrims.

However, at a practical level, many congregations will get to the place where, despite their deepest feelings, the reality of closing a congregation becomes a reality. It is preferable that congregations come to this decision themselves, however one of the responsibilities of every Presbytery is to assess the capability and/or willingness of congregations to fulfil their purpose, functions and responsibilities as stated in Regulation 3.4.3 (a), (b) and (c). We propose the development of tools to assist in this process using some of the work undertaken by Dr Srebrenka Kunek in the development of this report. These tools will also assist the Presbytery as they consider Regulation 3.4.4 - Amalgamation or Division of Congregations “...in the best interests of the mission, witness and service of the Church.”



Redress is a whole church responsibility and not just an undertaking to be borne by Synod. Each congregation should consider its contribution to the financial demands of Redress and whether the model of church it has valued for many years is still viable in the modern day. However, our property assets are a finite source and simply selling a building in order to meet immediate financial demands is not necessarily a solution. Each church in consultation with their neighbour churches and the Presbytery needs to consider its viability both now and into the future and be prepared to enter into discussions with the wider church in an effort to create a church that is sustainable and vibrant in its embodiment of God's Kingdom.

The following should be considered in determining the viability of a congregation and its future property needs, not necessarily making decisions on the basis of just one criterion.

- The size and demographic of the congregation;
- The ability of the congregation to show a five year income and expenditure forecast, and the proposed use of any embargoed funds;
- An alignment between the missional focus of the congregation and the strategic missional value of the property. Even if a congregation is not financially sustainable there may be an overriding missional strategy;
- Does the property meet the expectations of a 21st century church or is it surplus to the organisational needs both current and future?
- Is the property at the end of its life or does it require substantial capital development?
- Are there opportunities to consolidate properties and congregations to better serve the mission, witness and service of the church, as well as providing improved facilities and ongoing revenue streams?
- Are there other Uniting Church agencies that could benefit from the property?
- Are there other stakeholders such as local government or community groups that may be interested in the property?



These are difficult questions, but the future of the denomination will depend on the willingness of each congregation to enter into honest conversation with Presbytery about the issue of viability.



When is a congregation ...

When is a congregation not a congregation? The Uniting Church has two classifications for a group of people meeting under the UCA banner: Congregation and Faith Community.

The regulations for a faith community are complex because there is an expectation that members of this community would have their membership with the Presbytery and come under Presbytery rules.

A Faith Community will order its life, under the oversight of the Presbytery, so as to encourage its participants, develop its mission, and be accountable for its resources, and may seek the guidance of a Presbytery about possible ways to do so. (Reg.3.9.2 (b))

However, there is no practical arrangement in place within WA Presbytery for this to occur, particularly with the level of staffing that is available. It would seem that under such regulations there is little freedom for the Faith Community to become an active mission-focussed group.

The idea of Faith Community was originally for new groups that were just forming, however, it has been suggested this should also apply to groups that have grown too small to continue as a congregation.

This year a Samoan group that was no longer able to continue as a congregation closed and became a devotional group. This is a new category and raises the question, what do we call a group that is no longer a congregation? We would be keen to hear your wisdom.

Some congregations have multiple worshipping communities that meet in various times and places during each month. They are in effect different congregations that work together under the guidance of one church council, sharing facilities, jointly funding ministry agents and working together to play their part in the mission of God. Is there a willingness by several smaller congregations or faith communities to operate in a similar way in the best interests of the mission, witness and service of the Church?

When a congregation decides God is calling them to a new phase of life or to die to enable life to be given to another mission focus they have a number of options regarding their property. Each Church Council has a raft of responsibilities relating to their property [Regulations 4.4.1 through 4.4.4]. Some may choose to hand the beneficial ownership of their property to another congregation they are going to partner with in mission, or to the Presbytery or Synod. Some may choose to continue to meet in homes or use alternative accommodation in one of our agency facilities and operate as small congregation. [Regulation 3.9.3] In 2019, the Presbytery adopted a proposal around the size of congregations and when they should become Faith Communities. Perhaps now is the time to review this decision and explore options for categories of Uniting Church communities.



One example of this is found in Narrogin where the church has recently decided to hand its property back to Synod and at present is meeting as a group in homes and runs services for the residents of a local aged care facility. There is room for such groups to re-form as Fresh Expressions of church and re-birth themselves but an ageing group may not have the energy to make such a bold move. When a group hands back its buildings to Synod and desires to continue to meet in a home, or some alternative facility such as a cafe, local hall, or pub, Presbytery needs to provide assurance about the status of these groups. Presbytery currently does not have the capacity to manage lots of Faith Communities, however, if such groups belong to a cluster the members of the group could become members of the hub church and come under that church council's governance structure. The hub church would then be responsible for ensuring that ChurchSafe and other insurance matters are covered.

The overall principle that needs to be taken into account is that rather than seeing such groups as coming to an end, there is a sense of hopefulness that this is the beginning of something new. There needs to be clear processes in place to help new growth occur.

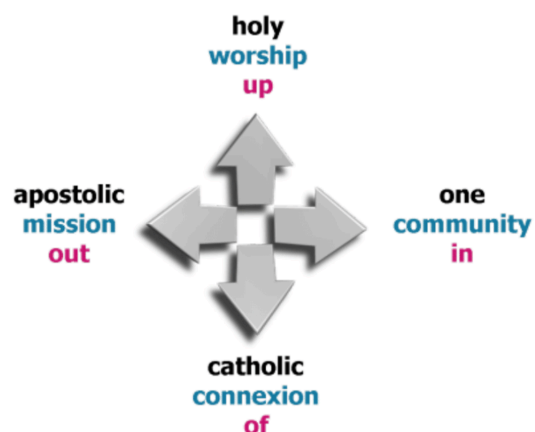
“Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don’t ‘go to church.’”

A criterion that should always be taken into account is the minimal elements of church. The WA Presbytery supports the teaching of Mission Shaped Ministry which describes church in the following way:

All expressions of church are drawn into a journey with an UP dimension – the journey towards God in worship, which must equally be about seeking God and becoming like God in holiness. The

church is led into a journey containing an IN dimension. It is a dimension of relationships, in order to express in practice the oneness of the Trinity and of the body of Christ. The nature of the church includes being sent onto the journey OUT. The sending in mission embraces the breadth of the five marks of mission. This journey on and out is the fulfilment of our apostolic call. To be church we are called to walk on a journey which has an OF

dimension. No one exists for themselves or by themselves. Both the church militant and the church triumphant are expressions of interdependence in the OF dimension as the church seeks signs of being Catholic.



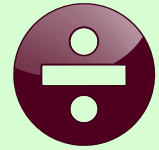
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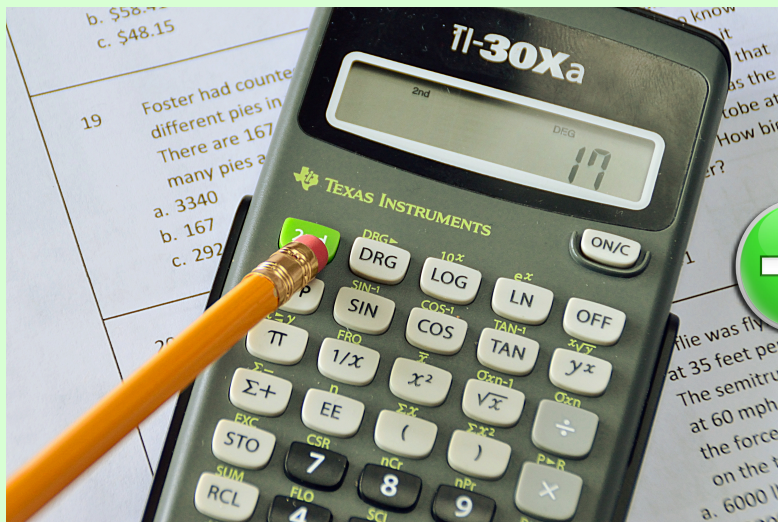
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A Mathematics Lesson

Division: In the past we have seen divisions in the church caused by disagreements. The outcome may be another church is formed, but it does nothing to enhance the Kingdom of God or grow his church. Let's not go that way.



Subtraction: From time to time two or three congregations combine together to make one church. This often represents an overall subtraction as there are not only fewer churches, but people are often lost in this process. However, sometimes contraction is needed in order for growth to occur. It may be necessary for some churches to give up one property that is expensive to maintain and failing to adequately meet 21st century models of church, in order to share resources under one roof. The Presbytery cannot force such processes but may encourage neighbouring congregations to consider such an option. However, in doing so, the ultimate purpose of contraction should be to consider how that can ultimately lead to growth as a result of the financial savings and sharing of resources.



Addition. Numerical growth has often occurred when a denomination has identified places where demographic changes provides an opportunity for growth so property is acquired and a new church is planted. Such addition is useful but there is a danger that the new congregation can be left isolated and unable to grow. The cluster model would be invaluable in such



a situation to ensure proper care and support is provided. There are some gaps in Western Australia where growth has occurred in both the metropolitan area and regional areas, and the Uniting Church does not have a presence. The Presbytery should identify these areas and prayerfully work with congregations and clusters nearby to investigate opportunities for future development

Multiplication. Jesus method of discipleship was clearly one of multiplication. Jesus worked closely with 12 people who, in turn, shared their love of Jesus with others who continued that process of multiplication. The outcome is seen in the growth of the Christianity to many million people of all nations over thousands of years. The development of clusters in which multiplication principles are taught and practiced is necessary if the Uniting Church is to have a future in Western Australia.



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Congregational Leadership

In the history of the Uniting Church and our predecessor denominations, we lived in relationship across circuits or parishes or clusters of congregations and in these situations leadership and support of lay leaders was shared across the bounds of congregations. The weight of administration, sharing of mission projects and funding a stipended ministry was shared across congregations.

With the Assembly decision to remove parishes from our recognised relationships one of the critical issues facing the future of the Uniting Church is that there are fewer individual congregations that can afford a stipended minister. A companion issue for us as pilgrim people is that there are fewer people candidating and being trained as ministers.

The Uniting Church recognises two ordinations, that of Minister of the Word (to work within a gathered congregation) and Ministry of Deacon (to work within the dispersed people in our communities). As with congregations able to afford a stipended minister, there are fewer placements available for diaconal ministry and we often find ourselves placing deacons in congregational settings. There is little formal training for those called to start something new or fresh, or those who have gifts and skills to regenerate a ministry placement that is tired or passed its effectiveness. Over the last three decades many ministers who came from our uniting denominations or those who entered ministry in the early days of the Uniting Church have retired. A large number currently in placement are rapidly approaching retirement age. New models of leadership need to be explored along with issues of how mission and property affect various models of church that meet present and future needs.

Thrive Mission Committee recognises the need to engage with the Commission on Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) to explore these issues including the way ministers are being trained to prepare for new models of church that address the changing demands of the 21st century.

The Presbytery has recently approved the position of Voluntary Pastor and there is potential for this to become a valuable way of ensuring that each congregation is able to benefit from pastoral care and leadership. The concept of non-stipended or co-vocational ministry is increasingly recognised around Australia in many denominations as a way of addressing the decline in congregations that can afford stipend ministry. Our denomination currently does not ordain any minister unless there is a call to a placement and a placement is not recognised if it is not stipended.



Co-vocational or non-stipended ministry provides opportunity for people who have experienced the call of God to maintain a level of paid employment outside of the church while performing some form of congregational ministry. If this approach is recognised within the Presbytery there would need to be agreement around minimal training requirements as well as recognition of a new form of leadership within congregations.

Perth author, Andrew Hamilton gives an extensive argument for co-vocational (he calls it bi-vocational) ministry in his book, *The Future is Bivocational*.

Having pastoral leaders who are not bound to the church for their income will be a key to leading with integrity and engaging credibly in the world around us.

Secularism, professionalism and consumerism may have combined to create the perfect storm, but it seems we still aren't ready with any kind of perfect response. I would suggest that now is the time to consider how we can help our pastors shift their thinking towards being genuinely and effectively bivocational. In doing so we will offer a way for our small to medium-sized churches (the vast majority) to thrive and continue to serve their local communities in their own unique ways.

A spiritually open generation is a reachable generation. Church leaders who are open to change, who are ready for real dialogue, and who are ready to listen to a new generation will find themselves in the best position to reach Gen Z. - Carey Nieuwhof

In his book, *"The Future is Bivocational"*, Hamilton adds:

I am convinced that if we are to genuinely embrace the missional paradigm, then we will spend less time trying to get the community back into the church and far more time sending the church back into the community. This must begin with our pastors being willing to sacrifice the comfort of their offices, and coffees, with church members, and moving back purposefully into the community alongside their congregation to work and serve and discover what it looks like to be missionaries in their own backyards. If the 'Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood', then we too must consider how to be present in the communities we are part of.

Hamilton, Andrew. *The Future is Bivocational: Shaping Christian Leaders For a Post-Christian World*. Arkhousepress. Kindle Edition.

The Presbytery should see this is an opportunity to explore new leadership structures that are evolving and to become more nimble in the way it moves towards effectively delivering a new form of church for the 21st century.



Uniting Church in Australia
Presbytery of Western Australia



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New Wine Skins

As a pilgrim people, we find ourselves at a crossroads where important decisions need to be made. Both the Synod and Presbytery in WA are faced with major financial challenges, but the challenges are much broader than financial as they impact the fabric of the denomination in WA.

When asked about an issue of legalism, Jesus used an illustration that was familiar to his listeners, though perhaps not as familiar to us in the 21st century:

**“Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved.”
Matthew 9:16, 17.**

The time has come to look seriously at the wineskins of the WA Presbytery and discover some new ways to carry out Jesus’ Great Commission in 21st century Western Australia.

The changes suggested in this report will not work if simply directed by Presbytery, but as conversation is encouraged, it is important for local congregations to self-identify where they sit in the bigger picture and to work with the Presbytery and Synod in becoming a part of the new wine skins.

This will mean that congregations will need to talk to their neighbouring churches about what a cluster means to them and some will need to admit they are palliative and seek help in dying with grace. Other congregations will be in a position where internal changes are needed to ensure that they are working towards the planting of new congregations or fresh expressions of church. Yet others will need to face the hard decision to relinquish their property and to allow themselves to be re-born in a completely new format.

It is critical there is alignment between Congregations, Presbytery and Synod on the principles that need to drive any future change. Mission must drive the property strategy, but there are aspects of property strategy that cannot be compromised if the future of the denomination is to be secured. In all this, it is important that we prayerfully, and with a sense of hopefulness and joy, begin the task of discovering those new wineskins that will make it possible for us to be a church that is sustainable and vibrant in its embodiment of God’s Kingdom.



Conclusion

“I wonder if you can imagine how your community’s agenda might be transformed as you think and pray about your property and resources if you were truly grounded on generosity, grace, forgiveness. Even in the church we are entrusted with unequal portions and the only way there can ever be ‘enough’ for all people is if we are generous in our sharing, gracious in our treatment of others and forgiving of ourselves, those we love, and even our enemies. Only then will we truly be living into our calling in Jesus.”

Towards a Theology of Property and Resources, The Uniting Church in Australia, Presbytery of WA, August 2020

Thrive Mission Committee wishes to thank the WA Presbytery for the opportunity to present this report and commends it to all members of the Uniting Church in Western Australia. Thrive requests that the matters included are considered prayerfully and with grace, and requests that the whole document be adopted by the June 2023 meeting of WA Presbytery as a basis to guide future decision-making.

Thrive is actively planning to go on a “listening journey” to each of our regions and to collaborate with agencies of the Uniting Church, to hear your reaction to developing clusters, to hear your dreams for the future of the church and to give you an opportunity to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. While Thrive may take carriage of this activity, we seek to work collaboratively across the Presbytery and its committees, and to report back on a regular basis to ensure that the recommendations in this report are acted upon and are not lost.

We began this report by saying that as a pilgrim people we have a vital part to play in the transformation of our towns and cities to the values of the Kingdom of God, announced in Jesus Christ. Such transformation needs to begin with us and our structures.

Thrive Mission Committee, June 2023.



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