



Presbytery Meeting- 16 March 2024

Proposal 6

PSC – Rescind Presbytery Decision

That the WA Presbytery agrees:

To rescind Decision P9.1/06-2018 of the June 2018 Presbytery Meeting.

Rationale

At its meeting in June 2018 the Presbytery agreed to the following proposal

- “1. That existing Congregations with less than a total of 16 confirmed members and members in association normally be designated as a Faith Community (Reg 3.9.2 (a)) providing that such congregation may request to be designated as a small congregation in terms of Reg 3.9.3.***
- 2. That Presbytery hold a copy of the membership records for each Faith Community (Reg 3.9.2 (b))***
- 3. That the Presbytery in consultation with the Faith Community appoint a designated specified minister for each Faith Community to provide guidance, encouragement, development and accountability (Reg 3.9.2 ©)***
- 4. That in accordance with the current Presbytery Rule P2.1.3 each Faith Community may appoint a participant who is a confirmed member of the Uniting Church as a member of Presbytery.***
- 5. That the responsible body for property used by Faith Communities shall be the Presbytery when and if the Faith Community is no longer able or willing to be responsible for the property (Reg 4.5.1 (b))”***

This decision of the Presbytery has never been properly implemented and in some cases is contrary to Regulations.

In relation to clause 1, it appears that any congregation who were reporting an average worship attendance of less than 16 were designated as Faith Communities on the Presbytery Roll. This was in contravention of the decision which said that only those congregations with less than 16 Confirmed Members or Members in Association should become faith communities. There was no consultation with congregations about this designation in contravention of the decision which said each congregation had to decide whether to become a Faith Community or continue as a Small Congregation. The result is that congregations impacted by this decision are only now becoming aware of it.

Also, according to Regulations, the only way a congregation can be dissolved and re-constituted as a faith community is by decision of a Presbytery meeting, but in most cases

no such decision was ever made by the Presbytery. The only two faith communities recognised by the Presbytery in recent years have been the Tapu Nuie and Waterloo faith communities. Apart from these two faith communities, all the others previously listed as faith communities on the Presbytery roll remain congregations as the Presbytery has never agreed to dissolve them as congregations and re-constitute them as faith communities. Some of the churches previously listed as faith communities on the Presbytery roll have now been moved to the congregation list. We are in process of contacting others listed as faith communities to find out what they want to do. Many wish to be dissolved as congregations and some of these want to be re-constituted as faith communities. A proposal will come to this meeting to make these changes. However we have not had sufficient time to consult with all affected groups so proposals on other churches will need to come to the June Presbytery meeting for decision. This is a work in progress which may take some time to work through.

Clause 2 was never implemented and it is questionable whether the Presbytery has the capacity to manage the membership rolls of all faith communities. . Clause 2 is also contrary to the Regulations which says membership records for a faith community can be held by a congregation or the Presbytery.

Clause 3 was never implemented although PRC has considered how best to support small congregations without a minister in placement.

In relation to Clause 4 faith communities have been able to appoint members of Presbytery and some have done so.

In relation to Clause 5 there has been no consultation with faith communities about whether they are willing and able to be responsible for their property or not. As a result the Presbytery has never become the responsible body for any property used by a faith community. The Regulations say that faith communities should be accountable for their resources, which may include property. If they feel no longer able to maintain their property they can recommend that it be sold or handed over to another church or community group.

In rescinding this decision, the Presbytery still acknowledges that there is a serious issue of congregations which are struggling and in some cases it would be helpful if they became faith communities. Becoming a faith community relieves small groups of the many requirements of being a congregation and may free them to continue their ministry and mission. If over time they are able to grow in strength to the point where they can fulfil the responsibilities of a congregation again, they can request the Presbytery to again recognise them as a congregation. Another proposal coming to this meeting will set out an alternative approach on how to identify and work alongside congregations who are struggling which takes more factors into account, is more consultative and pastoral and opens up a range of options for such congregations.

Mover: Rev Bev Fabb (Deacon)

Seconder: Sue Strutt