

Project Plenty

What we heard



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2nd HALF 2019 1st HALF 2020

35th SYNOD

COMMENCE PROJECT PLENTY

LISTEN AND DISCERN

REFINE AND TEST

COMMIT AND LAUNCH

Introducing Project Plenty

Project Plenty is the working name given to the whole-of-Synod future visioning exercise that commenced at the 34th Synod in Session. Through this process, we are turning our collective attention to a question we should never stop asking:

How can we as one church contribute most effectively to God's mission in Oueensland and the world?

Project Plenty is the next stage in our endeavour to discern the answers to this timeless question, in the context of an ever-changing world. It's a process where we are looking together at our life as one church, giving thanks for the extraordinary blessings we have, and discerning how best to contribute to God's mission for the life of the world.

The last time we undertook an intentional process to develop a shared vision was in 2010. Since then, the world in which we live, work and participate in God's mission hasn't stopped changing and evolving—and nor has our church.

In the *Basis of Union* we declare that the Uniting Church is open to ongoing change in or practice of worship, witness and service. We know that the world has significantly transformed in the past decade, including such influences as rapidly developing technology, the rise of digital engagement, changing social contexts and growing awareness of global issues.

The time is right for us to balance how we operate in a hyper-connected world, even as the world cries out for meaning and belonging. Christ's church should be grounded in responding to that cry.



What the Holy Spirit is saying

The second phase of **Project Plenty**, "Listen and Discern" has concluded. This phase has seen members of the **Project Plenty** team travel to all corners of Queensland, speaking to Uniting Church congregations, presbyteries, agencies, commissions and committees. Individuals have conducted their own engagement sessions using resources on the **Project Plenty** website.

Before **Project Plenty** shifts to the third phase, "Refine and Test", it is vital that we first take stock and reflect on what we have heard.

This report provides a high-level overview from across the various engagement workshops and town halls held in congregations and presbyteries, and with agencies across the state. It looks at what the Holy Spirit is saying, the key issues that are prevalent in our community and some potential responses to these challenges.

While there were many important and valuable contributions, **eight key themes** that were continually raised and discussed include:

- 1 Focus on discipleship as core business.
- Active in things that matter in our communities—particularly mental health.

- 3 Develop tighter collaboration and integration across the Queensland Synod.
- 4 Refresh approaches to training and equipping lay people and ministers with skills such as reading the context, understanding community and evangelism.
- 5 Churches as community hubs (21st century manner, not 1950s).
- 6 More effective use of physical assets (revenue, mission, community).
- 7 Improved church structures, governance and compliance to ensure we enhance rather than inhibit mission.
- 8 Develop capacity and willingness to make hard decisions.

I trust that you find this report informative.

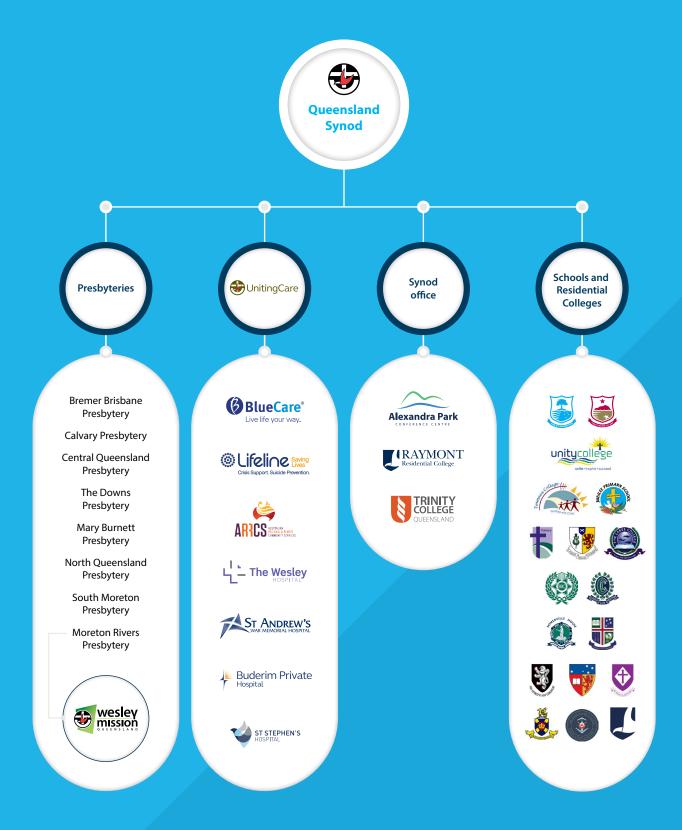
A reminder that this process has not finished. For information on the next steps involved, please refer to the section "What's next" on page 18.

Should you have any questions, I invite you speak to a member of the **Project Plenty** team.

I encourage you to join the **Project Plenty** conversation and share your thoughts today to shape our future for tomorrow.

Rev David Baker Moderator Queensland Synod

Queensland Synod structure



Listen and discern statistics



21 congregations, presbyteries, agencies and councils







600+ people attending



173 social media posts



264 social media comments



285
Facebook group members



1875 social media reactions



124 emails received



1675 total video views



4796 website page views





729 podcast plays (9 episodes)

For the period 17 May to 3 December 2019.

What we heard from our presbyteries and town halls

What is the Holy Spirit saying?

- Return to the foundations of our church, be the gift that God intends for us to be in and to the world.
- Look to what God has provided us, we have our guiding tools in hand already. Scripture and the Holy Spirit provide the answers if you are open to the call.
- Be emboldened to take God's message into the community and not hide behind that which we have created for ourselves.
- The spirit of God will take us to new places. God has already won the battle for us.
- Growing disciples is our business, not making money. We must journey together and put differences aside.

Key issues in the community

Faith

- There is a lack of clarity over mission, purpose and shared values.
- Aging congregations are not being renewed with youth membership.

Community

- Social isolation is being manifested through issues such as drug use, suicide, mental health, relationship breakdowns and domestic violence.
- Secularisation of society generally and a lack of proactive response to this decline. Also contributing to the marginalisation of Christian beliefs.

- Societal intolerances being fuelled by misinformation and a lack of genuine dialogue.
- There is a shift in economic models moving people away from traditional models of employment.
 This is accelerating the decline in regional employment. Technology is also serving to exclude traditionally skilled workers from employment.
- Lack of a multicultural voice in the activities of the church. Need to find ways to engage with our growing multicultural faith communities.
- Relationships with our First Peoples in seeking greater social justice and providing economic support.

Well-being

 Environmental pressures such as effects of climate-related realities, for example droughts and natural disasters, are driving people away from regional communities.

Responses to these challenges

- Overwhelming emphasis placed on the role of congregations and not the structures of the broader church. Congregations are seeking lighter structures, and structures that are support-focused rather than governance or compliancefocused. There is additional concern that the bureaucracy within the church hampers things getting done.
- Concern over the use of resources in the church generally. Clarity about how resources are being utilised to support grassroots ministry.
- Using technology in a way that allows us to reach into the

- community but does not detract or stop us from being able to have meaningful person-to-person connections.
- Responding to the environmental crisis and supporting our young people on matters that are important to them.
- Supporting those suffering from mental health issues within their communities.
- Using resources more creatively, in particular the use of our buildings.
 If this means that church property should be sold to support new areas of mission, then that should be considered.
- Make new disciples and reach out to local communities.

What excites you missionally?

- Faith—God's promises to claim.
- · Ecumenical relationships.
- Local initiatives are providing great opportunities for us to carry out mission.
- Diversity in our church including the female representation in our leadership and multicultural communities.
- The opportunities for youth engagement.





What we heard from our agencies

What is the Holy Spirit saying?

- "Go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).
- Empowering people locally, and communities to respond locally.
- We need to be more outward-focused on how the church can make a real difference in the community as opposed to inward-focused. Need to convert beliefs into action.
- The church will be more powerful if it is intercultural, not multicultural.

Key issues in the community

Faith

 Secularisation of the Australian community, in particular how this manifests in the political system.

Community

- The decline in social connections leading to increases in demand for mental health resources and treatment of associated illnesses resulting from drug use, domestic violence and suicide.
- The changing employment environment with business models shifting to embrace emerging opportunities whilst not isolating or excluding access.

Well-being

 Increasing concern over environmental conditions which include climate-related weather events.

Technology

 The challenge of how to use information gathered in a socially responsible and ethical way.

Governance

- There is growing distrust in our community in the capacity of our structures to deliver on our mission.
- The increasing oversight of governmental and regulatory bodies in response to royal commissions and enquiries. This is serving to reinforce general distrust in institutions and particularly those with a faith-based perspective.
- Changing funding models including reduction of government grants or funding and ability to source funding through congregational fundraising or donations.

- Ineffective communication across the breadth and depth of the church. Links between agencies and congregations and inter-agency are inconsistent and in some cases non-existent.
- The services that UnitingCare Queensland offers are by and large historically congregational services. In the early 2000s the church moved to central governance in order to meet compliance and governance needs. There is still hurt within various parts of the church about the loss of direct involvement in services for congregations. This action, while necessary, has had the impact of driving a wedge between services and congregations.

What are your aspirations moving forward, and what will your organisation or the church look like in 2030?

- Actively pursuing the well-being of our people and the broader community by delivering service with a faith-filled message.
- Visibility across the breadth of the church for what is being done (by the church) through effective communication.
- Proactive self-care tools to avoid burn-out and encourage support for one another, for our staff and volunteers.
- Focus on unity—don't focus on our differences.
- Connecting and being relevant to those outside formal church.
- Recognition that we deliver mission in a competitive environment for all aspects of resources (time, financial, attention and so on).
- Better coordinated activity would enable a stronger contribution in terms of advocacy, relationship with sector and government.
- Greater links with our communities through communication and supporting local initiatives where they align with commercial interests. In some cases, can we be of the community as opposed to being in the community?
- Search for sustainable sources of revenue.
- Reimagine the use of assets to support mission needs and essential services.

- Seeking greater alignment to provide pathways for the Uniting Church community to work in our organisations.
- Consider reshaping our asset portfolios to be incomeproducing so we can support the congregations in delivering missional outcomes.
- Make a prophetic vision/statement about the future of the Uniting Church. Call the church in behind it.
 Develop entrepreneurial, apostolic, energetic leaders.
 Aim big—not just surviving in small churches, but for healthy big churches.

How might the wider church support you in your vision?

- Rationalise the role, remit and direction of the Synod in allowing local congregations to pursue their aspirations and missional goals.
- Move to align Uniting Church agencies with congregations to share resources and leverage the network effect.
- Develop a revenue-sharing model that makes the most of our assets and promotes grassroots mission work.
- Drive the relevance of the church in the activities undertaken by agencies generally.
- Enhanced collaboration across the church in areas such as governance, best practice, leadership development, persons of concern.
- Establish links between the agencies so that they can mutually support each other so we can retain the financial benefits where possible in the Uniting Church.
- Move to a long-term financial sustainability view.
 Understand that financial resources are what enable agencies to support mission projects.
- Improve the link between Synod and real-world ministry.

What we heard from our schools

Key issues in the community

Faith

- Uniting Church schools enable and develop faith in a supportive environment.
- Faith resonates better with students when they are actively engaged and are "doing", rather than when they are preached to.
- School communities should be enabled to challenge secular philosophy without isolating sections of the school community.

Community

- Service projects that allow students to contribute in a physical way are essential.
- · The school is seen as a community hub.
- The expectation on schools to "parent" students is rising.
- Schools are interested in connecting with other agencies including UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland.

Technology

- Advances in technology present great opportunities for the diversity of educational experience.
- · Technology must be part of the education experience.
- Technology alone is not the answer to education and comes with its own challenges.

Well-being

- There is a trend of declining student and faculty wellbeing. This is reflective of the broader environmental issues experienced in society.
- Providing for the well-being of students and faculty is increasingly seen as the remit of the school.

Governance

- Develop alternate revenue streams through new markets or funding models.
- Enable collaboration and break down silos to establish centres of excellence to drive exceptional student outcomes.

- Values-based education is at the core of the Uniting Church schools offering.
- Our schools are identified as and should remain employers/organisations of choice.
- Schools need to retain autonomy within their local context but leverage the value from the network.

Seeking support of the church

- Schools are seeking support in providing the Christian perspective in the work that they do.
- The church to more clearly articulate how students can participate in faith journeys.
- Access to well-being programs that could be hosted/ developed by the church community.
- Gaining access to resources to expedite the delivery of a school's mission.
- Representative and coordinated body for the external lobbying for funding/legislation and so on.

Demographics

- The demographics of school communities are changing across a number of measures including cultural backgrounds, faiths and socio-economic capacity.
- There is a trending decline in boarding students.
- There is a general aging and under-representation of males in the teaching community.
- There are challenges providing education to students from other faiths in a Christian context.

Education

- There is a growing emphasis on equipping students for a rapidly changing world.
- Increasingly schools are having to step outside of the traditional Years 1 to 12 education model to provide ongoing learning opportunities and support.
- Human interaction cannot be replaced in the delivery of education.
- Access to centres of excellence where facilities or courses are not locally available.

How might the wider church support you in your vision?

- Support our schools in understanding and approaching a multi-faith context among their student population and the community.
- Provide access to services offered through agencies including UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland (e.g. mental health programs, community support/development to address well-being issues).
- Access to business systems of the larger Queensland Synod. This might include procurement programs, business services, IT/software solutions or compliance and governance support. This can also extend to exploring partnership opportunities across strategic, intellectual and financial portfolios that leverage shared services.
- Explore connections for senior school students with other Uniting Church schools for leadership development programs.
- Extending relationships with local congregations and presbyteries.
- Explore relationships and integration with other Property Trust schools, Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association entities and residential colleges.
- Leverage the whole of Uniting Church commitment to social justice and community action.

What are your aspirations moving forward, and what will your organisation or the church look like in 2030?

- Schools pivoting towards relationships as primary objectives—including in staff selection.
- Place of community (community hub for parents, staff, students and the wider community).
- Digital learning spaces. Parents are accessing the school and its services more digitally, based on their own busyness, rather than just physical location. This may also mean exploring more opportunities in the VET sector and in online education.

- Schools should take a global view, rather than a local view, exploring partnership opportunities with universities for research and staff development.
- Develop programs that help students beyond Year 12.
 Embed programs that assist students in the four to five years beyond the school years.
- Focus on formation programs that include biblical formation to enable critical thinking students in the hope that church congregations will capture this group moving forward.

Enable collaboration and break down silos to establish centres of excellence to drive exceptional student outcomes.



Unite Young Adults Retreat **Photo:** Ben Rogers

What we heard from our youth and young adults

Key issues in the community

Community

- · Aging population.
- Becoming a multicultural society.
- Unstable politics.
- Job security/future of work/personal financial sustainability.
- · Housing affordability.
- Reconciliation between First and Second Peoples.

Well-being

- The effects of climate change.
- The impact of social media upon mental health.

Technology

 Advancements in technology have changed the way we communicate; digital, social, face-to-face, issues of loneliness, social image, validity of information. There is also increasing concern over privacy and other ethics within this space.

Faith

- Church showing more love/compassion.
- Keeping relationships where technology is taking over (participating in church in real life).
- · Keeping our eyes on Jesus and his way.
- More love, more compassion.
- Social image of church in society.

Religious freedom

Evangelism with future of work

Governance

 Politics and divisions in the church, how can the constant threat of splits and people leaving the church over recent decisions be managed?

Responses to these challenges

Mental health

- Help raise awareness and promote acknowledgement and acceptance through advocacy.
- Visibility for what is being done (by the church) through effective communication.
- Mental health channels and tools available when you need them, and when someone else needs them.
- Proactive self-care tools to avoid burn out and encourage support for one another.

Inclusivity in our church

- · Focus on unity—don't focus on our differences.
- Give people from diverse religious/lifestyle/gender/ culture/age/sexuality the invitation and opportunity to participate.
- Events to celebrate diversity (e.g. multicultural event)—encourage shared dinners themed on inclusivity.
- Church needs to be ready to pass on the baton to young people—leaders need to support the people of the church.
- People need to feel welcomed and loved.

Youth outreach

- Need a team that is responsible for leading outreach programs rather than leaving it up to young adults.
- Have events outside of church (buildings) to be less intimidating.
- Be clear that all are welcome.

Discipleship

- · The solution is love.
- Important to recognise and facilitate the value of mentoring.
- Promote behaviours of empathy and compassion.
- Real Bible studies (real-life issues).

Environment and climate change

- Is it our job to change this as a church?
- Implement mandatory and widespread solar installations on Uniting Church properties.
- · Reduce waste.

- Provide support in the case of extreme weather events (e.g. flooding, drought).
- How do we as the Uniting Church use fewer resources (paper, programs, electricity) in our life/work?
- How do we encourage more responsible use of our resources and encourage others (consider this within large agencies such as UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland)?

What excites you missionally

- · Project Plenty and similar initiatives
 - · It shows we're invested in our future
 - · It shows we're willing to listen
 - · It shows we've noticed something is wrong
 - · It shows we may be ready for change.
- · New approaches to church/mission that are emerging
 - · Local churches reaching out beyond their buildings
 - · Welcoming young adults into leadership.
- · Actively engaging in Synod leadership.
- Encouraging those who are paying attention to faith formation in young adults
 - · Church planting.
- · Ministry opportunities and experiences
 - Northern Madness, Country Madness, Easter Madness, Unite camp opportunities
 - · Day camp
 - · Digital community.
- · Covenant relationship with First Peoples.
- · South east and regional Queensland
 - · Attention to context in decision making
 - Learning to be in partnership across the geographic divide.

What we heard from the Synod office Senior Leadership Team

What is the Holy Spirit saying?

- Empowering people locally, and communities to respond locally.
- Move and act.
- · Do not be afraid to voice an opinion.
- · Doing nothing is not an option.
- · Must adapt.
- · Share the good news (stories).
- More outward-focused on how the church can make a real difference in the community.
- Are there points of successful communities that can be shared when trying to localise thinking?
- The messaging has not changed—we need to learn to connect

Key issues in the community

Community

- There is increasing pressure on rural and remote regions with depopulation and de-servicing.
- Aging demographics and populations which are resulting in declining church congregations.
- There is a distinct rise of the Asia Pacific and our connections with Asian cultures/communities.
- Poverty and/or economic inequalities in living standards.

Technology

 There have been considerable advancements and digital connectivity that are impacting the way the church does business. These advancements have many positives and many negatives, including mental health and the declining need to physically attend church—we can access everything we need digitally.

Well-being

- Increasing prevalence of loneliness and loss within the community with connections to substance abuse.
- · Obesity and other related health challenges.
- The threat of climate change and environmental pressures.

Faith

- There is a shift away from church/faith/formal religion—encouraging young people to engage with the Bible/Christian faith in a post-modern world.
- How does church and community proactively respond to outcomes from various royal commissions while rebuilding trust?
- How does the church respond to new population centres/developments with an integrated church presence?

Responses to these challenges

Mental health

- Provide additional support for families of those with mental health issues.
- Improve use of church facilities/venues and services and establish mental health clinics in geographically remote and un-serviced communities.
- Develop education programs including use of social media and its impact.
- Introduce support groups.
- Lobby and influence government and/or other funding influences.

Connecting and being relevant to those outside formal church

- Start listening to community to understand the issues they face.
- Be fresh expressions of church, not just formal or inherited church.
- Think about the big picture. Who is our customer?
 It's not the congregation, but those we're not yet connected with.
- We need to use all our resources. It's not only about congregational ministers, but chaplaincy—a spiritual face in the community that accompanies/walks alongside.
- The church needs to lead the community, not just respond with the truth of the gospel.

Aging demographic

- Develop better "at home" options—supporting families to help their relatives at home.
- We need to start challenging our society to grow its respect for elders and their inclusion in the life of family/society.
- We need to utilise the skills and wisdom of elders.

Technological development and related issues

- Our schools and theological colleges should start working together to develop guidelines on how to deal with issues related to technology—mobile phones, cyber bullying etc.
- The church needs to continue to experiment with digital discipleship communities that connect rural and remote communities/individuals.
- We need to empower congregations to develop technology capability for issues like pastoral care, giving, administration, community engagement and internal communications.



What we heard from the Synod office perceptions survey

Below are excerpts from responses relating to a question about "What the Holy Spirit is saying" during an internal and external perceptions survey conducted by the Queensland Synod office in October 2019.

"Work together to make a stronger church to acknowledge and interact with the emerging youth and the issues they face so the church continues to grow."

"To bravely step into places it has previously not been with open hearts and a willingness to be present and listen to and guide our younger generations. To bravely take calculated risks and work towards being a true light opportunity by connecting with self, others and God in an earthly spiritual union."

"Big/bold/fast change is needed. Synod office needs many more staff. Presbyteries need proper administration and business staff who report to the Synod office to implement and champion our activities, initiatives and projects. Synod office needs big budgets. Leave religion at the door and stop hiring and putting up with staff because they love Jesus. Basis of Union needs a complete overhaul and modernisation to allow us to succeed in a modern era. Rethink Strategic Mission from the ground up."

"As churches and church members, we need to keep striving to be effective and active members of the communities we belong to, and go to, and care for, the people who are on the margins."

"That we must continue to be led by the Holy Spirit to love and serve our Lord. By doing this we are serving others with joyful hearts, sharing and caring. The job is far more enjoyable when you have this sole purpose. Amen!"

"The councils of the church need to work closer together so that the synergy of the gifts of individuals will have the greatest impact in the communities in which we minister (in whatever form this takes). We need to think more broadly about what ministry looks like in a community that identifies less with Christianity e.g. utilise business acumen and tools to ensure the church has a legacy for the future generation of people in need."

"Proverbs 10:28 "The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectations of the wicked will perish." "Psalm 147:11 But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love." I sense that the concept of **Project Plenty** was inspired by a message sent through the Holy Spirit to the person who professed of it. I sense also that the message is around taking innovative methods and tactics to tackle the growing issue of social dysfunction or injustice in institutions and wider communities. Across the Queensland Synod, it may mean; bold, non-conventional but positive approaches to address the physical or

cyber bullying at our schools (within the realm of SRCC). Children are dying and/or being marginalised. Faith reformation by building inspirations in different mediums and platforms (targeted to young and old). Taking and expressing the church's position on matters of public interest in connection with the Christian way of life (e.g. respect for human life and the environment) etc. The church needs to be visible, confident and courageous as Christ was during his time."

"It's time to make some significant decisions about re-organising and simplifying our structure and the best use of our resources, so that we can be a much more agile and responsive organisation to be deeply engaged in our local communities. We also must invest pro-actively in leadership development and succession planning at all levels, especially executive leadership skills for presbytery ministers. And we need to be more strategic about investing into the faith formation and leadership development of our children, youth and young adults."

"Be faithful and obedient to God's word. Love the community that we live in. Keep working hard to be the role models God has called us to be."

"We are blessed with riches but shackled with restraints."

What we heard from others

Below is a sample of the feedback received via the Project Plenty website.

"Reliance on volunteers from congregations when congregations themselves are struggling to find an adequate number of suitable people to sit on councils."

"There is a lack of willingness to engage on the radical large changes within all the inter-related councils of the church".

"Congregations and membership are in decline. Structures and processes of doing things are stuck in the past, are unhelpful and encourage poor behaviours."

"We are brave enough to get out and have a go. Put our money into the projects. I get excited when these things are happening and watching people get excited about God moving."

"We need to offer light and hope to the world. We need to offer something sacred. William Butler Yates, "Education is not filling a bucket but is lighting a fire". We want to be lighthouses not bushfires. Learning new ways to be light and hope and not getting bogged down in having to do things in a particular way. We need to build relationships with people in the community."

"There is a need for us in society how can we be the light of Christ, supporting and engaging with our communities broader than church communities?"

"The system is broken. It encourages poor management of resources and frankly we are wasting the legacy capital built up by the past. We are utilising capital for running costs. We need a complete overhaul and change of the policies of the church in relation to property."

"I think, as part of the Uniting Church Synod, there are opportunities for the thousands of staff and volunteers at UnitingCare Queensland to bridge the gap between the church mission and the organisational mission and actions. Simple things like opportunities to do workplace giving (currently we can only give to the UCC Fiji project) or one paid day a year to volunteer your time for the many community projects the Uniting Church is part of. Starting within the large community footprint we have I feel would benefit the employees with a bigger picture of service along with additional supports to those projects out in our communities helping and serving people every day."

"Having more leadership is one of the challenges in our local churches where the 'rubber meets the road'. Our church seems to be top heavy with people who could provide leadership locally."

"The proclamation of the gospel is our first responsibility, including support of Christian missions in Australia (Frontier Services etc.) and the world. Social justice care for the world poor arises out of this gospel, but it is not our main mission."

"The Uniting Church should campaign vigorously to change our own hearts and minds by focusing on moral issues of injustice, bigotry and our indifference to think about and act on issues that make us uncomfortable."

"Looking to new innovative ways to connect with the wider population."

in society—how we can be the light of Christ, supporting and engaging with our communities broader than church communities.



What's next

Scott Guyatt at Wesley House **Photo:** Supplied

The **Project Plenty** team is drafting a set of mission values and priorities for feedback as part of the "Refine and Test" phase of the engagement.

Your feedback and input is invaluable as it will help us shape a draft set of mission values and priorities...

We want to know your feedback to the *What we heard* report. Specifically:

- Do the eight key themes that were continually raised and discussed (detailed on page 3) resonate with you and your local context?
- 2. What reoccurring themes do you see as the highest priority to address? Why and how?

Your feedback and input is invaluable as it will help us shape a draft set of mission values and priorities which we will seek your feedback on before launching them at the 35th Synod in Session in October 2020.

Project Plenty | What we heard report

Find out more

We invite you to join the **Project Plenty** conversation, share your
voice and stay connected and up
to date.

- Talk to your congregation's

 Project Plenty champion
 (speak to your Secretary about who this is)
- Visit the Project Plenty website to access resources, listen to podcasts and read reflections at ucaqld.com.au/ projectplenty
- Join the **Project Plenty**Facebook group to comment,
 like and share at facebook.
 com/groups/projectplenty
- Subscribe to and read the weekly Uniting News at ucagld.com.au/uniting-news
- Read *Journey* magazine which is sent to congregations each quarter
- Contact the Project Plenty team via email projectplenty@ucaqld.com.au.



Share your thoughts today to shape our future for tomorrow. Join the Project Plenty conversation.







soundcloud.com/uniting-churchqueensland/sets/project-plenty

