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Report from

Rural and Remote Ministry Task Group: Interim Report

Context

The report is intended to capture a number of factors that are influencing the form of the church in rural and remote communities.

Contents

Introduction

The approach taken in this paper is to set a framework of understanding through which decisions around rural and remote ministry can be made. It doesn't require a large community for church members to be seen to living out their faith. **Ministry of place** is a term used to describe how the context of a community influences the form of the Christian response to that community. Christian worship, witness and service has had many and varied forms over time. However the overarching expectation that God will guide the church in its tangible presence is one that is captured in the Uniting Church's understanding of itself as a pilgrim people.

The report is intended to capture a number of factors that are influencing the form of the church in rural and remote communities. Each section is intended to unpack some of the real consequences of our changing community structure. The final section allows us to imagine what the community of Christ might look like with some intentional and appropriately resourced strategies in place.

1: Background

The Rural and Remote Ministry Task Group was formed as a result of a decision of the 32nd Synod. The decision states:

> It was **RESOLVED by Consensus** that the Synod –
> (a)   receives the Report of the Presbytery of The Downs
> (b)   appoints a Rural and Remote Ministry Task Group, under the supervision of Synod Standing Committee (SSC) to:
>   (i)   define "rural" and "remote" as it will apply to this ministry setting
>   (ii)   identify the needs and the opportunities in rural and remote locations
>   (iii) review current resourcing for ministry in rural and remote locations
>   (iv)   identify future forms of ministry that are appropriate
>   (v)   provide progress reports to SSC meetings
>   (vi)   make recommendation(s) to SSC to secure long term, sustainable resourcing of Rural and Remote Ministry in this Synod;
> (c)   requests the Rural and Remote Ministry Task Group to finalise its work by the end of May 2017.

The Task Group was assembled in August 2016 by the Synod Standing Committee and consists of:

- Heather den Houting (Synod, Convenor)
- Garry Hardingham (North Queensland)
- David Ferguson (Mary Burnett)
- Rob McFarlane (Moreton Rivers)
- Jenny Coombes (Central Qld)
- John Case (The Downs)
- Scott Guyatt (Synod, resourcing to the Task Group)

2: Definitions

Define "rural" and "remote" as it will apply to this ministry setting

It is no simple task to determine a clear and straightforward definition of rural and remote locations. The matter has exercised state and federal Government agencies for over 40

years with numerous models and iterations. A very helpful summary is provided in a paper written by Douglas Jones [1].

Conform to ASGS standards

For the purposes of this project, the remoteness structure which forms part of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will be used to assess degrees of rurality and remoteness. In essence, this structure defines remoteness on the basis of road distance from service centres of five (5) various sizes [2]. The remoteness structure is divided into five (5) values of remoteness and these have been equated to rural and remote definitions for the purposes of this report as below:

1.   Very Remote Australia   Very Remote
2.   Remote Australia   Remote
3.   Outer Regional Australia   Outer Rural
4.   Inner Regional Australia   Inner Rural
5.   Major Cities of Australia

Conforming to standards established by the ABS will:

- ensure that the church will be applying a consistent methodology to any other recognised body
- allow access to and the use of consistent mapping tools and statistical data should it be required
- facilitate the incorporation of additional definitions such as socio-economics profiles and an indigenous areas structure

Maps outlining these boundaries on both a state and national level are contained in the appendices.

Manage anomalies by exception

It is acknowledged that within these various measures of remoteness, apparent anomalies may appear when considered in the context of congregational ministering. For example, the Lockyer Valley is considered to have the same degree of remoteness as a larger centre such as Rockhampton as a result of the methodology that uses distance from several classes of service centres including a large centre such as Brisbane. However, when such anomalies may impact on matters contained within this project, the impact on considerations and outcomes can be dealt with by exception.

It is also acknowledged that these measures do not necessarily provide a separate definition for "rural". Such as definition could perhaps more appropriately be based on economic boundaries rather than geographical, and incorporate those areas where the community is predominantly reliant upon primary industry and therefore subject to a more varied impact by nature of climatic and seasonal influences.

However, similar impacts can be seen in any community that relies predominantly on one industry or employer such as an educational centre, transport hub or research facility. Such community wide impact can even encompass micro communities within a more urbanised area. For example, changes at the Sanitarium factory in Brisbane can have a significant

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[1] Jones, Douglas. 2014. A Contribution to the National Consultation: Understandings of Remoteness in Australia
[2] http://www.adelaide.edu.au/apmrc/

impact on the local Seventh Day Adventist congregation and school. The recent closure of vehicle manufacturing plants have decimated Geelong and northern Adelaide changing growing epi-centres. While these are interstate examples they indicate impact on urban areas and also reflect outcomes in Acacia Ridge in 1984 when 1,000 jobs were lost with the closure of the GMH factory. Acacia Ridge was built around the manufacturing plant and streets still carry the names of cars produced. Along with the job losses, the closure of the factory impacted on all the local businesses where workers shopped.

Given there is no accepted methodology in place to establish boundaries based on economic dependencies and such a piece of work would be time consuming and subject to change, it is proposed that the nature of rurality may be more appropriately considered within the sociological aspects of later sections of this report.

Use SEIFA as an index

Using the ABS definitions also opens the door to the use of a socio-economic index, SEIFA (2011)[3], which can be overlaid onto a remoteness map to better define those areas that may be impacted by remoteness. The ABS primarily defines socio-economic status on the basis of "*people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society".* There are four (4) indexes that provide a slightly different aspect of the socio-economic conditions in an area. In summary, these indicate relative disadvantage or advantage on a general basis or they apply a lens based either on income and wealth or education and occupation. Usually individual indices are summarised to one overall measure which is generally used. However, there may occasions when specific measures may be of greater value when contextualising.

3: Needs and Opportunities

Identify the needs and the opportunities in rural and remote locations

It is widely acknowledged that rural and remote areas are facing significant challenges impacting on economies and lifestyle. Ageing populations, physical and mental health issues, difficulty in accessing support services and the lack of long-term employment are contributing to declining populations and the resultant breakdown of communities and social vitality. This section outlines not just the current situation or needs of these communities but also some of the opportunities presented and open to the Uniting Church by the changing face of rural and remote locations. It touches upon a range key points in order to set the scene for considering possible future models. This section of the report particularly acknowledges the work of Rob Stoner from the Mission Resourcing Network UCA Presbytery and Synod of SA in his 2006 paper *What does it mean to be "Church" the Rural Community?*

The changing nature of Sunday worship

Sunday worship in the past was the entrée to a wider social fabric of church activities but now it is frequently the only activity of a church. Simply changing the nature of the service to attract more attendees isn't practical if there isn't a suitable community to draw from. Maintaining the focus on traditional Sunday worship gatherings can be a considerable burden to an ageing and shrinking congregation. Such gatherings could in some cases be more readily operated from a community or private location. Small group gatherings, emphasising the discipleship practice of hospitality, could be more varied in terms of approach, including options such as house church, prayer meetings, bible study or more open life question forums. The meeting place could be private houses, community space, or

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a local café or pub. That said, encouraging a group of people who are set in their ideas of what church is to engage with and trial change, is likely to take time, patience and sensitivity. In such circumstances, change will only happen where the leader has established they are present for the long term and relationships involving two-way trust and respect have formed.

Infrastructure

The use of technology

Changes to technology have opened up many different opportunities for supporting churches in rural or remote settings. While the virtual approach opens many doors, it is highly unlikely to completely replace the need for people to gather and worship. Nevertheless there are many opportunities that can be explored to determine ways in which technology can be utilised to enhance and/or support church communities. A fuller treatment will be given to this issue elsewhere in this paper.

The place of the church building

Together with providing a home for the congregation and its activities, an identifiable church building symbolises that the church is present in a community in a physical, tangible way. Any closure or sale of the building can impact not only the congregation itself, but the broader community through a sense of loss and further abandonment or removal of institutional support for the community.

Nonetheless at a time when the maintenance of property is becoming a significant financial and human resource burden on many congregations in rural and remote areas, we must be open to theological and practical consideration of the place of the building in the life of a community. A discipleship community can take many forms – only some of which are dependent upon a purpose-built facility, and a church can take its place in the life of a community in many ways, only some of which are dependent on a physical site to operate from. Investigating different models and relationships between congregation and property would be a worthwhile investment of resources.

The role of a ministry agent

Historically a minister formed part of the professional network within a community; someone who brought in fresh blood and new ideas for the period of their appointment. Along with leading the community of faith in worship and discipleship, the minister often filled an invaluable role as confidante for the problems and secrets of life in complete trust. This may be part due to the nature of minister as being part of the rural or remote community but also viewed as slightly separate due to the cycle of placements, and in part due to the nature and perception of ministry itself. Reliance on this model however, can have the side-effect of limiting the capacity of the congregation to meet these needs itself, and with declining resources in many rural communities the minister-centric structure may no longer be viable in its current form. In the absence of an ordained minister, an effective lay-led congregation that can engage with the broader community is key for vital engagement. Having a person that is committed to their community, and physically part of it, is highly valued. Value is also ascribed to a leader of both standing and time as many areas suffer from newcomer fatigue and the degree to which they are prepared to share their life is dependent on the commitment and longevity they observe. Often a community looks to the church to provide a recognised figure head for those special occasions that form part of the rhythm of a community. While lay leaders may be comfortable in taking a role within the church, this broader community representation can be challenging. In addition, lay leaders who have formed an integral part of the community over many years are often not able to play the role of confidante as they do not hold the same degree of separation that a minister or external lay leader does.

Changes in this area may push the church to consider its understanding and practice of ordination, and the ways in which both ordained ministers and lay leaders function. In many rural and remote presbyteries around Australia the role of the ministry agent has been transformed into resource ministry. This means that, rather than stretching ministers more and more thinly doing the traditional roles of pastoral care and preaching, ministers are now supporting congregations to live out their worship, witness and service. This means that ministers are now primarily focussed on oversight, equipping, teaching and team-leading. This has profound implications for selection of candidates for ministry, how they are formed, and their continuing education.

Partnerships

Finding the rhythm of the community - responsiveness to local community changes

There is a need across all societies for true and authentic communities that incorporate belonging, acceptance, trust and interdependence. There is a need to develop enablers for the church community to foster such environments and as such it is important to identify the rhythm of each individual community. Such rhythm may be grounded in community events, a fly-in fly-out workforce or harvest times, for example. Questions regarding the 'what' and 'where' of gathering points within the community need to be asked and answered in order to build a church that syncs with this rhythm.

Church members living out their faith are the backbone of a church community. This doesn't mean flawless perfection but approaching relationships, work, business and socialisation as people with a depth and meaning to life, trust-worthy, honest, forgiving and with a heart for others. This will require church members to give themselves to their community — not carrying the community on their shoulders but responding to the Spirit of God in choosing how to use their time and efforts. This is, in a sense, the process of a missional discipleship.

It is key for any church community, whether rural, remote or otherwise, to be active in developing faith in Jesus Christ among its members and adherents. This includes offering entry point opportunities across all ages through community activities that engage those outside the church community. Particularly in small communities, if services and activities are going to be successful they need to appeal to the wider community, much of which does not have a church involvement.

There has been much discussion as to the needs of the church community in these locations and the Kitto[4] report outlines a number of successful strategies currently utilised across the synod. It is critical to ask what would the broader community want, value, expect or will gladly accept from the church community. This is an opportunity to be explored in each congregational context as part of a robust, intentional and strategic planning exercise.

Collaboration across all Uniting Church activities

When establishing the rhythm of each community and looking at contextual solutions, it is important to consider the interplay of activities across the whole church. This includes the role of service agencies as well as aligning strategies across various bodies such as the UAICC and Frontier Services. These can be valuable platforms upon which to base intentional church gatherings as well as a vital part of the wider community rhythm and social support structure within communities being affected by economic and demographic factors.

Local ecumenism

An effective collaboration with other denominations to develop faith in the community rather than an attitude of competitiveness is one way to harness the necessary resources to

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[4] Kitto, Carolyn, Spirited Consulting. 2016. Life & Mission Consultation Queensland Synod Presbyteries

support a church community. While this appears to be a logical and straight forward solution, unexpected complexities frequently surface to hinder implementation. Such collaborations are difficult and depend on individual relationships and/or community cultures together with structural factors. Sometimes blockages occur at the grass roots, while at other times they are experienced at more senior or structural levels. Support from and between denominational hierarchies is integral to greater success.

Social Capital

The General Social Survey[5] (GSS) measures resources that reflect the wellbeing of individuals and communities, with social capital being a particular focus. Social capital is conceived as a resource available to individuals and communities, and founded on networks of mutual support, reciprocity and trust. Research links strong social capital to increased individual and community wellbeing. It includes elements such as community support, social participation, civic participation, network size, trust and trustworthiness, and an ability for individuals to have a level of control of issues important to them. The survey is undertaken every four years with the following information comparing results between the latest surveys in 2010 and 2014. In 2014, people were less likely to be involved in social groups such as sport, recreation, arts or religious or civic participations such as professional political, union, environmental or human or animal rights associations. Since 2010 involvement has decreased by some 4-5%. An individual's perception of their ability to have a say in their community has also similarly been reduced. While non face to face contact with family and friends has remained stable, face to face contact with those outside the household has decreased. However, the ways in which people support each other such as care within or outside the home has remained stable. In particular the number and variety of attachments that people have remain high with 95% or people feeling they could access support from outside their house in time of crisis.

The change in social capital is assessed across a range of demographical cohorts including on the basis of remoteness. A variation of 10% was reported in the ability to access services between outer rural and remote Australia compared to major cities (note this comparison excludes those in inner rural areas). The main services noted were doctors, dentists, telecommunication services and government services such as Centrelink and the main difficulties expressed were wait time or suitable appointment times with the lack of services being less commonly reported.

While those in outer rural or remote areas were less likely to have participated in a sport, recreational or cultural activity; they had greater levels of community involvement. They were more likely to participate in a community support group or feel they have a say within the community on important issues. The greater distance between neighbours did not prevent individuals from interacting in person and they were more likely to have had face to face contact outside the household than their urban counterparts. However, they were less likely to have used technology for communication and their access to technology varied according to geography.

Training and preparation for leadership in a rural and remote community

Leadership is an integral part of such community involvement and is an essential component for effective rural and remote ministry, particularly in this changing environment. Supported communities can be very creative but threatened ones will go to default. There is a reputational risk to the church when leading churches to change as relationally close communities can mean that disharmony with one person or a small group is likely to affect many relationships in the community.

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[5] http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0

Leaders need well developed transitional and change management skills to support communities to adapt to a new way of being; along with the capacity to manage conflict and to support and manage the associated grief that change brings. Particular challenges within broader communities that are undergoing significant economic and social changes include a capacity to identify and subvert unhealthy church practices. It is critical to recognise that both ministerial agents and lay leaders engaged in bringing change to communities need ongoing support through these challenges. The process will be long and complex requiring a great deal of patience and resilience. Leaders who are innovative and who are adept at offering a flexible approach to nurturing faith need to be trained and resourced, raising the challenge of how such resources and training can be developed and delivered.

Succession planning is also a priority at this time given the potential rate at which rural and remote ministers will retire. The challenges of working in rural and remote areas is making it difficult to fill these placements. In addition to the work related challenges there are barriers due to employment opportunities for partners and schooling opportunities for children, particularly at the secondary level and beyond. These barriers can be more perception than reality and opportunities need to be taken to ensure potential candidates are well informed.

Compliance

There is a community and governance expectation that church and church activities will be safe and accountable places. In the wake of ongoing misconduct scenarios, compliance is being tightened across multiple fronts. Compliance requirements are only likely to increase over time, at the same time that churches are looking for innovative approaches to community engagement. This results in a heightened risk environment and as church communities become smaller, compliance requirements around safe ministry as well as financial obligations become more burdensome. Models of Presbytery or Synod supported compliance are necessary, particularly for more remote communities.

4: Current Resourcing

Review current resourcing for ministry in rural and remote locations

Resourcing is a term with a wide and varied meaning. In this case it has been interpreted as encompassing financial, staffing and attendance figures at both the congregational and presbytery level.

The data – congregational returns

In order to gain an overall understanding, a brief review has been undertaken of the 2015 Annual Financial Returns submitted to the Synod office by individual congregations within each presbytery (excluding Calvary, for whom very limited data was returned). For the purposes of this exercise Bremer, Moreton Rivers and South Moreton have been regarded as urban presbyteries while Central and Northern Queensland, Mary Burnett and The Downs are regarded as rural and remote (R&R). It is not suggested that this review is all encompassing but it does scope some comparable resource related data from the information that is available.

- 2 out of 4 of the R&R presbyteries have a similar level of congregations with appointed ministers as the urban presbyteries, although it is acknowledged that this does not take account of congregation size or the FTE of ministerial appointments.
- R&R presbyteries have a larger proportion then their urban counterparts of congregations who have an improved financial position (surplus/deficit) in 2015 than was the case in 2013. The proportion of congregations in surplus in 2015 is generally slightly lower in 2 R&R presbyteries than the average urban presbytery. However, the highest performing presbytery is R&R and the lowest is urban.
- The proportion of congregations whose annual attendance has improved since 2013 is fairly evenly matched across urban and R&R presbyteries with the exception of 1 R&R presbytery which has a lower proportion.
- The number of attendees per congregation (averaged across the whole presbytery) varies across presbyteries but generally, numbers in R&R presbyteries are not considerably lower. In considering individual congregational sizes, with the exception of 1 presbytery, R&R presbyteries have a similar proportion of congregations with less than 50 attendees to urban presbyteries. However R&R presbyteries have a larger proportion of these with less than 30 attendees.
- Attendances as a proportion of population (as assessed from the last Presbytery reports to Synod in Session) shows that the proportion who attend a Uniting Church is, generally, slightly higher in R&R areas than urban.
- General Offerings received per attendee also varies across presbyteries but the performance in R&R areas is similar to urban profiles. Similarly, total income per attendee shows similar profiling.
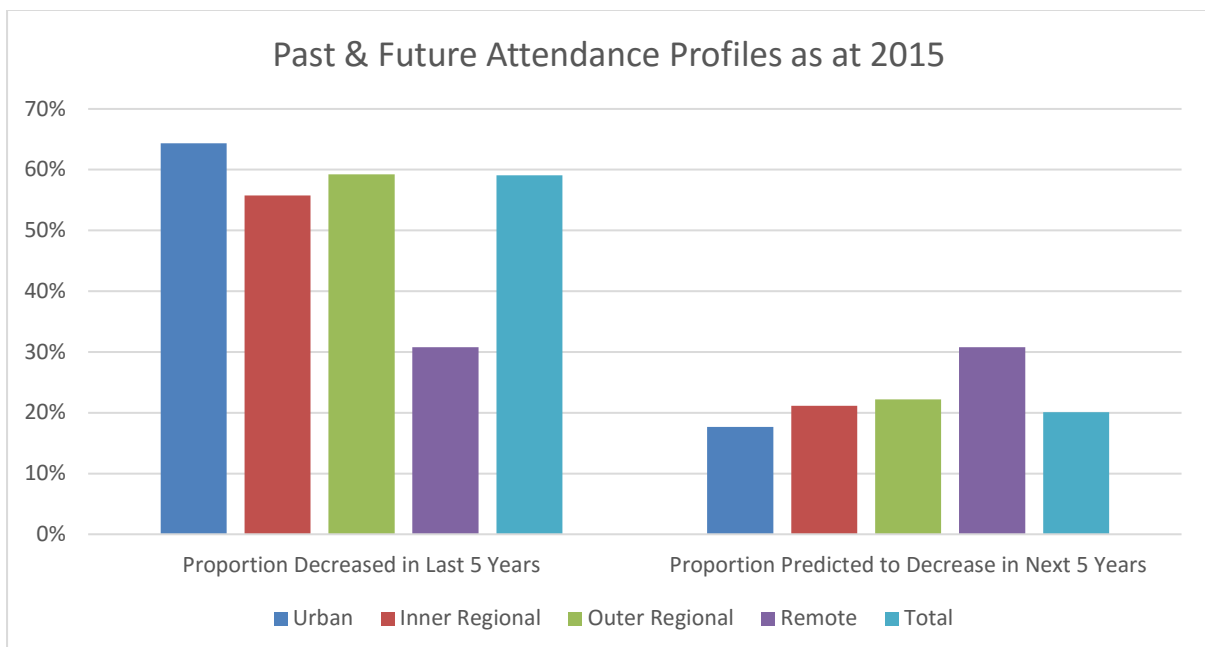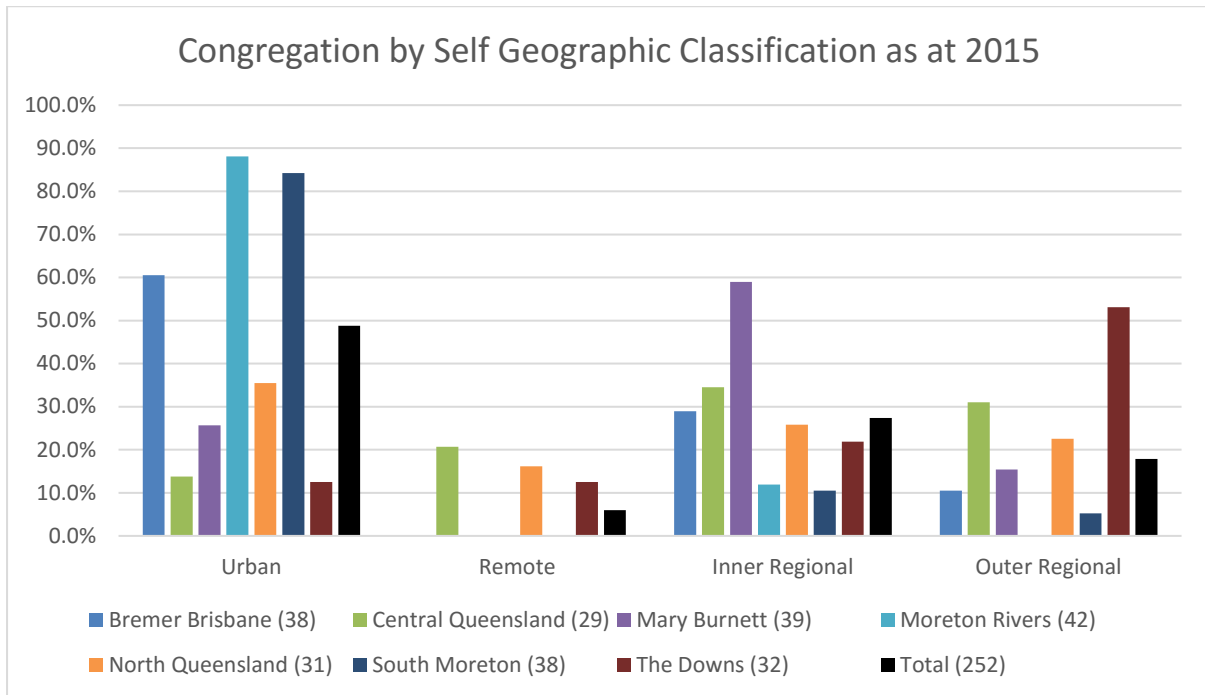
The data – property utilisation survey

There is one set of relevant data gathered from congregations in 2016 as part of the property evaluation tool. This tool requests congregations to provide attendance figures over a 5 year period. In this tool, congregations also have a nominated geographic status of either urban, inner regional, outer regional and remote. Even though the definitions do not match those established in this report, this self-selective geographic summary, which is graphed below, provides some insight into the proportion of congregations within each Presbytery.

Similarly, attendance data is outlined in a graph below but in summary shows that numeric decline in remote congregations is much lower than other groups, and that urban congregations are declining at the highest rate. It is interesting to note that self-assessed

predictions of the size of congregations in 5 years' time are generally far more positive in all areas than remote, where they remain stable.

Overall these factors indicate that while some presbyteries face higher resource challenges than others, this is spread relatively evenly across urban and rural and remote presbyteries.

Congregation by Self Geographic Classification as at 2015

Legend: Bremer Brisbane (38), Central Queensland (29), Mary Burnett (39), Moreton Rivers (42), North Queensland (31), South Moreton (38), The Downs (32), Total (252)

Past & Future Attendance Profiles as at 2015

Legend: Urban, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, Total

5: Future Forms

Identify future forms of ministry that are appropriate

No clear individual model has been devised as part of this report. It is clear that each situation involves a range of factors, both quantitative and qualitative that need to be considered in order to formulate the most appropriate strategic and intentional approach. Neither does this report outline a range of models from which to choose. Rather, a series of possible approaches or components of forms of ministry and worship are offered that may be useful for future implementation. An attempt to describe and model different styles of churches in a more concrete manner will form part of the Synod office key change initiatives 2017-2020.

For new models to be successful, they need to be tailored for the different environments and scenarios in individual locations. This is the premise of Ministry in place. Communities, both within and without the church must be willing to engage in the process of planning the most appropriate approach. Arthur Tutin[6] examines similar concepts via the work of Mario Weyers [7] in his book that explores the notion that belonging to a church community comes before believing in Christ.

Research undertaken by the University of Southern Queensland shows that community health and vitality across a range of factors is reflective of an engaged and willing participation by members in their own destination. Leaders placed by the church into these environments must be skilled in gaining community support and participation.

Kitto Report

The Synod is aware of the need to consider both current health and vitality and future forms of church and in 2016 Carolyn Kitto[8] (Spirited Consulting) was commissioned to undertake a review of the life and mission of Queensland Presbyteries. There are several observations and recommendations particularly relevant to ministry and mission in rural and remote Queensland.

Kitto uses the original work of Sharonne Price[9] to outline the nature and vitality of churches into four quadrants as shown below. She advises that the synod is losing the Quadrant B churches and they are becoming Quadrant A or D. Quadrant C or B churches are not being planted and it is lack of people resources which prevent churches becoming B or C.

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[6] Tutin, Arthur, Remote Area Ministry Major Report 2017, Presbytery of Central Queensland
[7] Weyers, Mario, "Belonging to the Church before Believing in Christ. A Missionary Ecclesiology in the Making. Understanding the 7 C's of Connecting your Community with your Church." MediaCom Education, Unley, 2016
[8] Kitto, Carolyn, Spirited Consulting, Life & Mission Consultation Queensland Synod Presbyteries, 2016
[9] Price, Sharonne, The Capacity Quadrant Model, Pastoral Relations and Mission Planning, SA Synod, 2016.
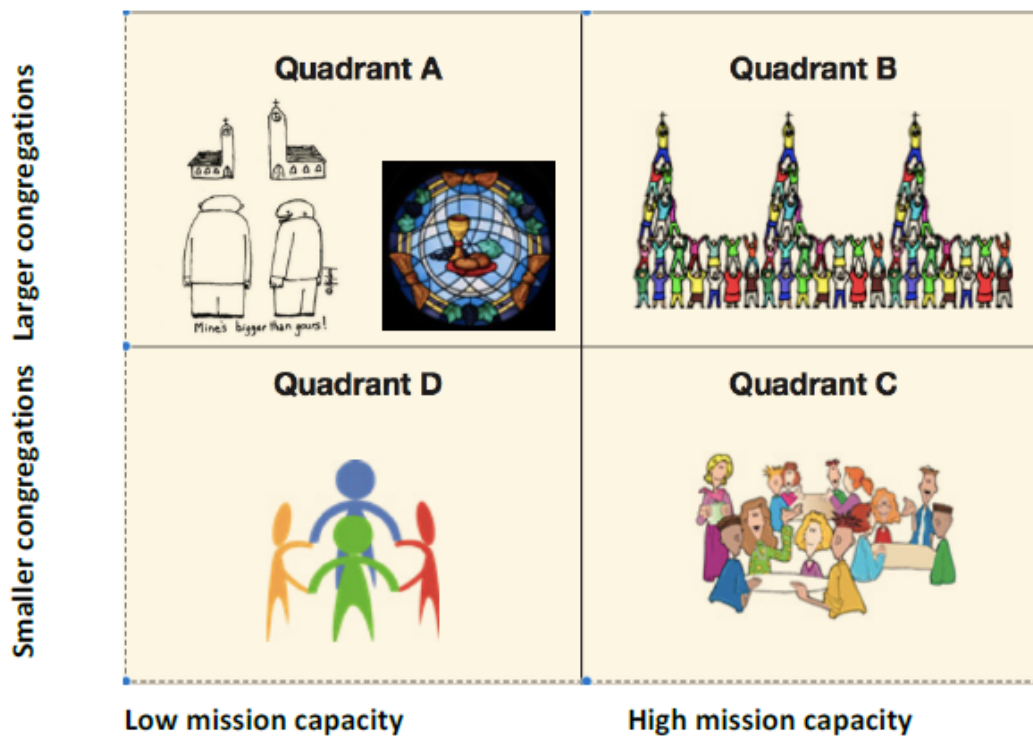
In addition, Kitto has proposed an analysis of congregations as first-third, middle-third and third-third in terms of life and vitality, indicating a likely ongoing increase in the proportion of third-third congregations.

First Third Quadrant B or C	Middle Third Mostly Quadrant A, B or C	Third Third More likely Quadrant A or D
A clear agreed mission focus and conversion growth occurring	Rely on the inspiration of the minister/leadership to be moved to mission.	If 2-5 key people or families died or moved away, the church would struggle to be viable
Effective pastoral care in the church and helpful care in the wider community	Pastoral care is often focused on looking after the members.	Leaderships time spent on worship, pastoral care of members and urgent but unimportant problems
Processes for, and a focus on, growing disciples	Majority of lay leadership time is spent in worship or administration	Reluctant to consider new models or collaborate
Strong leadership team of focused on mission and leadership succession	They rely on 30% or more of their income from outside the congregation	Part-time appointment minister's time or cycling vacancies with placements.
Stable and growing generous finances from multiple sources	Their property is well maintained and used as a source of income	Rely on income from outside subsidies or property rental
Well maintained property with a priority of use for church mission purpose	Need help with the compliance	Unable to do compliance on their own

Kitto observes that the church has inherited the locations of most of its church properties. At the time they were established, they were located appropriately, however in many cases the location of the centres of communities has shifted. New highway alignments mean once thriving regional centres are now in decline, and mining or industrial downturn means

regional or rural centres can go into rapid decline. In this environment, the church needs to be clear on where it needs expressions of worship, witness and service for the future. During her consultation process, she became aware that there can be differing views between presbyteries and congregations as to future models and structures, resulting in tensions. There is, therefore, value in presbyteries intentionally working to develop common language and understanding around mission and ministry.

The challenge for the church, according to Kitto, is to identify strategy locations for worship, witness and service. She advises the church can no longer afford to treat every congregation (whether rural or urban) with the same priority or strategy when they are seeking placements, using investment and property funds as primary income and wishing to use those funds to support what she describes as a steadily declining model of ministry. She notes for example that a significant number of placements are moving to part-time as a way of managing a declining situation. Kitto expresses the view that while this can sometimes work in the favour of the minister and congregations this approach should not become the norm, nor should such placements be prioritised for filling without other options being considered. While it is important to maintain presence to serve rural community, it is also important to develop a range of models including resourcing strategy, patrol ministry, strategic hubs and partnerships with UCA care agencies

Her report identified that many "third-third" congregations are unable to continue to meet the requirements of a congregation under the regulations and, additionally, use proceeds from property rental as the primary source of funding for the maintenance of a congregation that cannot otherwise support itself. "There are a number of areas in the life and mission of the church where Presbyteries have authority and responsibility to take action and have huge potential to shape the culture of mission and ministry for the future directions of the region" she states. Kitto advises that Presbyteries will need to make what may be difficult decisions about the future of such congregations and explore alternative models. Some processes and strategies Kitto suggested to assist presbyteries to work with congregations in these bands include:

- Offering mission planning resources and workshops for congregational teams
- Resourcing elders and leaders to strengthen spiritual and pastoral oversight
- Identifying and supporting leadership culture, qualities and styles that are proactive in empowering the future
- Releasing mission and services funds into strategic places
- Streamlining of compliance practices, including delegation of responsibilities from Presbytery to Synod should be considered in order to preserve presbytery capacity for focussing on future oriented work

Possible structural models

Throughout 2016 and 2017, Central Queensland Presbytery has undertaken a Remote Area Ministry (RAM) project. The project has consisted of a range of research and prototyping initiatives led by Rev Arthur Tutin. Some of the content from this report has been included within various sections of this report where it adds to the discussion. In his draft report Tutin summarises the following church structure models, many of which are already in existence across the Synod:

- Parish minister/pastor model with one person pastoring a single congregation. This person may be lay or ordained, and may work full-time or part time.
- Multi-centre, linked congregations with several congregations served by one minister.
- Cluster congregations in which a team, perhaps of combined ordained and local lay people, cooperate in leadership.
- Ecumenical cooperation incorporates various arrangements such as sharing buildings and/or ministry with congregations of other denominations.

- Community ministry in which a specialist person is employed by a congregation/parish to work in ministry in the community, such as a youth worker.
- Intentional short-term ministry for an interim period, or a short block of time to meet special needs or to serve during a holiday period.
- Lay ministry team involving local lay people chosen by the local community to take responsibility for leadership. These people may be resourced from a larger church or by a regional minister.
- Faith community or home group church where a group of believers meet to worship, perhaps informally in a home or a café.
- Patrol minister, where a person travels large distances connecting with people in remote communities or on properties
- Partnerships involving both trained and lay members from one congregation contributing to a smaller congregation to offer mutual support and encouragement which may take the form of preaching, visiting, music, prayer, financial support or joint workshops.

While the Remote Area Ministry Report is written from and for a Central Queensland context, parts of the report offer great insight to rural and remote ministry contexts beyond Central Queensland. Making the report, and the learning and opportunity captured in it more widely available may prove beneficial.

Infrastructure

Digital support models

Ongoing developments in digital communication tools and technology, and the steadily improving availability of such tools for regional and remote Australia dictates that significant consideration be given to the use of digital support for remote and rural ministry. There are several first steps that could be considered:

- Streaming worship to and from rural and remote congregations: Live streaming of worship in a two-way sense (rather than a simple one-way broadcast) could be trialled between congregations. This particularly enables congregations with limited capacity to independently lead their own worship services to continue with high quality worship, and to actively participate in the leadership of such worship services as may be appropriate. The challenge remains to ensure that worship, including preaching, responds to the particularity of each context and community, rather than simply being "city" worship broadcast to "the bush"
- Training for lay leadership: Rather than having to travel to regional centres, or to Brisbane, technology now allows for the conduct of training and development activities for lay leaders in rural and remote locations. The Mission Shaped Ministry course, for example, could be streamed for rural and remote participation, as could lay preacher courses offered by Trinity College Queensland, or Moreton Rivers Presbytery's Learning for Living initiative
- Training for ministry candidates: Ministry candidates from rural and remote locations may be able to access some of their theological training utilising digital communications models, rather than having to relocate to Brisbane on a full-time basis. Such "in-situ" training assists local communities through keeping key leaders in place while training is undertaken
- Digital Youth Discipleship: The Synod's Digital Youth Discipleship project is seeking to model the development of on-line communities of discipleship practice for young people. This is particularly important for congregations where there are only a small number of young people, and with limited capacity to network with other young people owing to distance and travel limitations. The project (known as "Breadfishtoo") aims to link real-world discipleship practice with on-line community and encouragement. Learning from this youth-oriented project may offer insights for wider digital discipleship practice.

Beyond the building - reconsidering the use of church resources

Maintaining church buildings, particularly those that are rarely used, absorbs resources that could be directed to God's work in many other ways. A process of strategically considering existing resources alongside existing and future needs can guide the development of a sustainable long-term plan. Such a process is being considered as part of the Synod priorities 2017-2020.

Presbyteries and congregations in particular can be asked to consider how buildings or the land they occupy be more effectively used by the community? Some ideas include:

- identifying one or more alternative location(s) for worship,
- maintaining a building in partnership with other denominations, or other faiths,
- selling property/fittings and reinvesting into community infrastructure,
- demolishing and using materials to rebuild a broader community-use facility,
- combining with other Uniting Church service agencies to construct or offer broader services such as nursing or aged care,
- re-purpose land into a community garden or park...

Training for ministry in a rural or remote setting

Ministerial Agents are a critical component of a discipleship driven congregation but a new model may be needed for ministry placements within rural and remote settings. Ministerial agents need to be trained for the specific needs of rural and remote placements, many of which will involve multiple smaller congregations in the surrounding area and a requirement to resource via teaching, training, encouraging and supervising a number of lay leaders. A clear picture of whether this is a specialist form of ministry must be formulated. Careful reflection as to the type of personality best equipped to minister in rural and remote areas, the core competencies required for such ministry and how to develop and deliver appropriate training need to be prioritised. Such core competencies may include the capacity to read and understand culture and community which is a heavy focus of the *Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry* training course, training and equipping others, team development, resilience in isolated settings, change management approaches and leadership in resource-poor contexts

There are bigger issues too around the identification and preparation of suitable candidates who have displayed suitable heart or temperament for rural and remote work or sense a particular call to that context. This might include not only ordained ministers, but those working in agencies or as lay leaders. Consideration for the special nature of rural and remote ministry might be included in period of discernment processes and resources, theological training, field placements, third ministry phase support and a rural and remote stream of continuing education.

Leadership development is a current synod priority. Progress has been made with the development of a leadership framework and this framework, along with the appropriateness of involving Trinity College will be explored further as part of the ongoing Synod Office strategic mission workload. Consideration will also be given to the identification or development of resources that will assist in the growth of skills in inspirational, agile and transitional leadership as well as managing change and conflict — skills useful in rural and remote contexts as well as urban and regionally-based leadership.

Partnerships

Regional gatherings

While small communities can worship and witness in small and varied venues, there are some aspects of worship such as singing and preaching that are much better when undertaken in a larger group. People in rural and remote areas currently travel for medical, business, sport and other recreational purposes and could also do so for special church and worship gatherings. A model that supports small local faith community gatherings but offers also larger worship offerings in a central or regional centre all supported by digital opportunities could help in growing faith communities. This model could also include the use of digital technology streaming services into smaller venues and various options in this regard are outlined other sections of the report.

Broader support networks

Rebuilding the presence of ministry agents in rural and remote areas will likely require some degree of cross-denominational collaboration or financial support as many remote congregations cannot support a full-time minister and travel times in some contexts preclude multiple congregation coverage. Ministers placed in remote areas may contribute to wider synod or presbytery work including via digital means. The UNSW/ACT Synod has, for example, committed to regenerate rural and remote ministry via the Saltbush Project which will create 10 Synod placements consisting of Remote Chaplains, patrol Ministers and resourcing Ministers along with a support structure to work across three existing presbyteries and the UAICC Congress. This involves a significant realignment of the existing Rural Ministry Unit and the appointment of a new Director to commence in July 2017 may provide further insight into another potential model to consider. Part of this work will be supported by contributions from urban churches.

Broader support networks need to address particular issues faced by ministry agents in rural and remote settings. These include the obvious issues of distance and subsequent lack of being able to just have a cuppa with colleagues. Related to this, but almost the reverse, is the difficulty of getting away from the local community on a day off, as ministers are not able to become anonymous by going to the next suburb as in a city setting. Just as the minister can't "get away" in the local community, it also has to be recognised that small rural communities do not provide a choice of worship experiences; inevitable conflicts as part of change processes are intensified in small communities, where the congregation has to include all members and is deeply embedded and highly visible in the local community. Further issues include the greater length of time that it takes to build trust in small rural communities, especially if the minister is perceived to be a "blow-in", only there for a short period of time. Finally, the working group identified the lack of suitably qualified and skilled supervisors for ministers as a key challenge in rural and remote settings.

A Spirit of generosity

Congregations, particularly those who are well resourced, should be encouraged to continue to identify ways in which they can use their own resources to support those congregations that are smaller and struggling to maintain their mission. This may include joining in partnership with a congregation or identifying people who may participate in prayers, readings, music, or preaching within worship. Congregations could consider releasing their minister in placement for one weekend per year to support rural or remote congregations. Presbyteries can take an active role in co-ordinating the visits of ministers to other congregations and establishing a mechanism of offering financial support to offset costs for those involved.

Collaboration across all Uniting Church activities

One Church is a Synod 2017-202 key change initiative and is articulated as the community seeing one unified Christ-centred identity for the whole church. As part of this key change initiative, each church activity is encouraged to proactively explore opportunities for whole of church collaboration and equipped to form and maintain partnerships with other entities of the UCA. This includes a strategy to provide opportunities for key Uniting Church leaders in geographical locations to meet, share stories and build connections. As part of this ongoing body of work, particular emphasis will be placed on building models for cross-church involvement in rural and remote areas.

Ecumenical partnerships

As noted earlier, ecumenical partnerships remains one of the clearest opportunities in rural and remote communities. Regardless of the difficulties that have been experienced in many cases, there are also some examples where a community church has been successful. Uniting Church communities may need to look outside some of the more traditional ecumenical partners of the past. Difficulties may still be experienced at both the local and hierarchical levels but the broader the partnerships explored the greater chance that opportunities will be recognised. Ongoing conversations should also be pursued at the regional and state levels with both presbyteries and synod taking a proactive role in pursuing memorandums of understanding. Unsuccessful opportunities within communities may need to be re-visited over time as the health of individual congregations can impact on their willingness to engage. If agreement cannot be achieved at the grass roots level, then progress is likely to stall. However, it may be that communities who have expressed a desire to unite and work together as one in their faith, will need at times to take a firm but respectful ecclesiastical position for the strength of their community.

Change theory and opportunity cost

There is an inherent risk in implementing change, particularly for those congregations with fixed ideas regarding worship models or long established practices. Change in such circumstances requires a long term commitment to gain trust, together with carefully planned and incremental changes.

While there clearly is a need to provide an ongoing service to those who have been long term committed members of the church, at the same time there is risk that other community members looking to the church for a different model may be disenfranchised. Opportunities to bring others to faith might be lost, and this is the opportunity cost of no or slow change.

It may be that the 'mixed-economy' approach championed in the Church of England's "Mission Shaped Church" report of 2004 holds value for us here. Considering the possibility of operating in a mixed economy that includes both traditional Sunday worship and other fresh activities and community engagement that will appeal to a broader range of individuals may bear fruit in rural and remote contexts as in urban areas. Growing something new in parallel may result in a more organic change process rather than necessarily being seen as in competition with the traditional approach. The resources involved in leaders developing new activities over the broader area of a rural or remote community is an issue to be carefully and prayerfully considered. This may be managed by additional resources being made for innovative practices as per Kitto's model or it may result eventually in the need to prioritise. Success in these activities has the potential over the long term to translate into additional resources for ongoing sustainability. It may take time for community activities to translate into church attendance and faith but if the activities are valued by the community then the church is in turn contributing to a social structure that is struggling.

If we recognise that change to existing worship arrangements is something to which we must commit time and effort in order to gain trust and acceptance then we might equally recognise that similar time and effort is justified in growing the health, vitality and faith of a community in need.

Successful and proven models

There are many examples of initiatives that have been trialled and implemented across both the Queensland and other synods. The development of a repository of such models and approaches would assist congregations and leaders access material that would assist in their own planning processes.

6: Ongoing Resourcing

Make recommendation(s) to SSC to secure long term, sustainable resourcing of Rural and Remote Ministry in this Synod

It has been suggested that there is a need to bring the needs of rural and remote ministry to the forefront of Synod thinking and action. This report outlines a number of steps that are involved in progressing considered thinking in the space of rural and remote ministry. Since the recommendations of the 32nd Synod, the Synod Standing Committee has made considerable advancements in outlining a body of strategic priorities and key change initiatives for 2017-20. A number of these will coincide with the need to consider the future form of ministry in rural and remote areas.

Therefore, it is not appropriate at this time to formulate separate recommendations regarding long term sustainable resourcing for rural and remote ministries but rather that this report and a number of specific matters be referred or segued into the ongoing strategic work plan, including further consideration of the purpose and function of the Mission Development Fund.

Proposals to the 33rd Synod

It is proposed that the Synod:

i. Recommends the Synod office develop descriptions and models for different styles of churches within its 2017-2020 Key Change Initiatives projects.
ii. Recommends the Synod office, within its 2017-2020 Key Change Initiatives projects, ensures the development of resources to assist presbyteries to identify strategic locations for ongoing and future development and resourcing.
iii. Recommends the Synod office devise methods that enable churches to measure the health and vitality of their worship locations as part of its Strategic Locations Key Change Initiative project.
iv. Recommends the presbyteries include plans and goals for rural and remote ministry in their Strategic Locations and One Church Key Change Initiatives.
v. Recommends the Board for Christian Formation (BCF) will continue to oversee the development and delivery of specific models for the development of intentional ministry in rural and remote locations.
vi. Requests the Central Queensland Presbytery develop, by the end of the year, a version of the Remote Area Ministry Project Interim Report that communicates general learning and outcomes in a manner useful for other presbyteries throughout the Synod.

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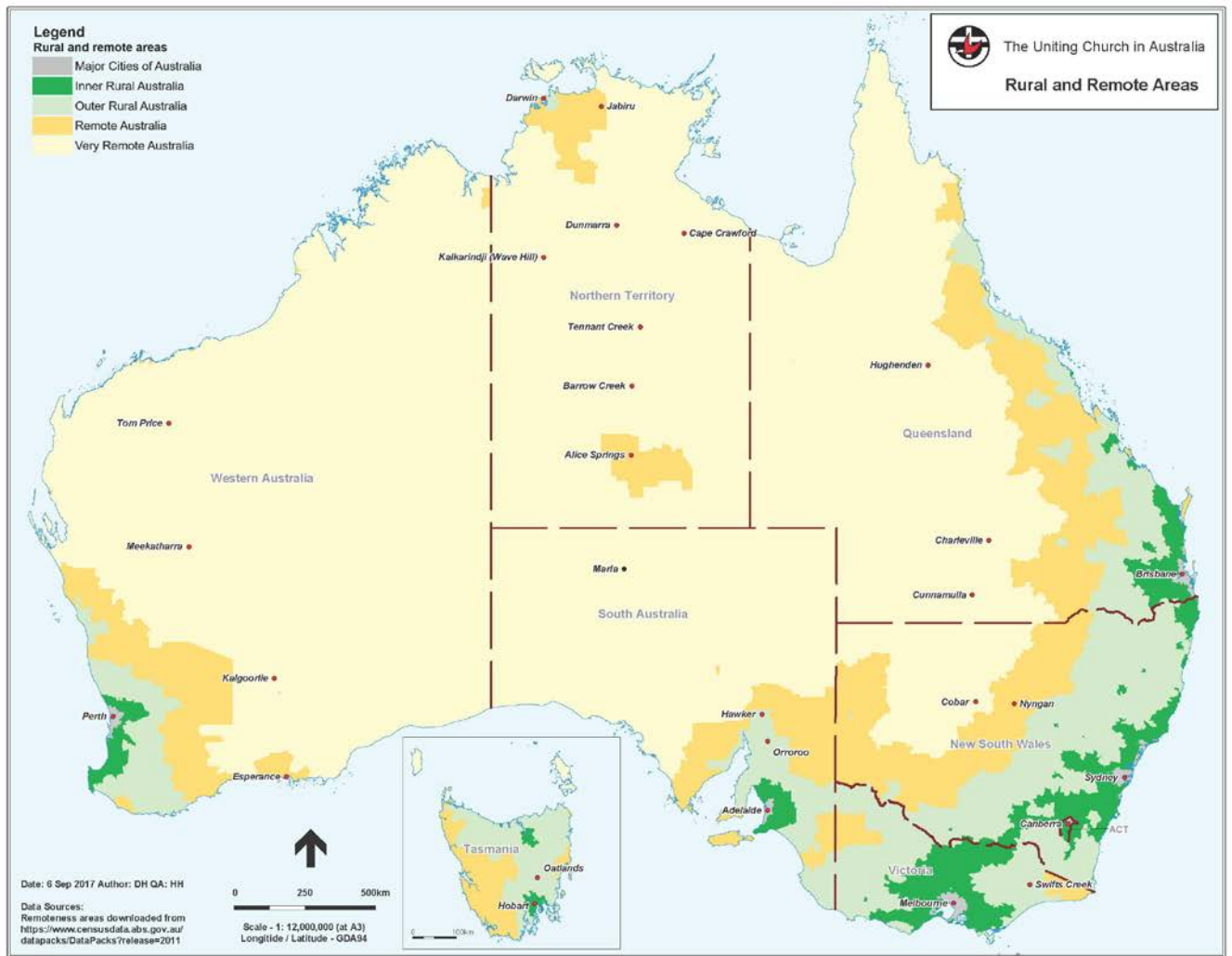https://soundcloud.com/uniting-church-queensland/rural-and-remote-australia-and-the-uniting-church

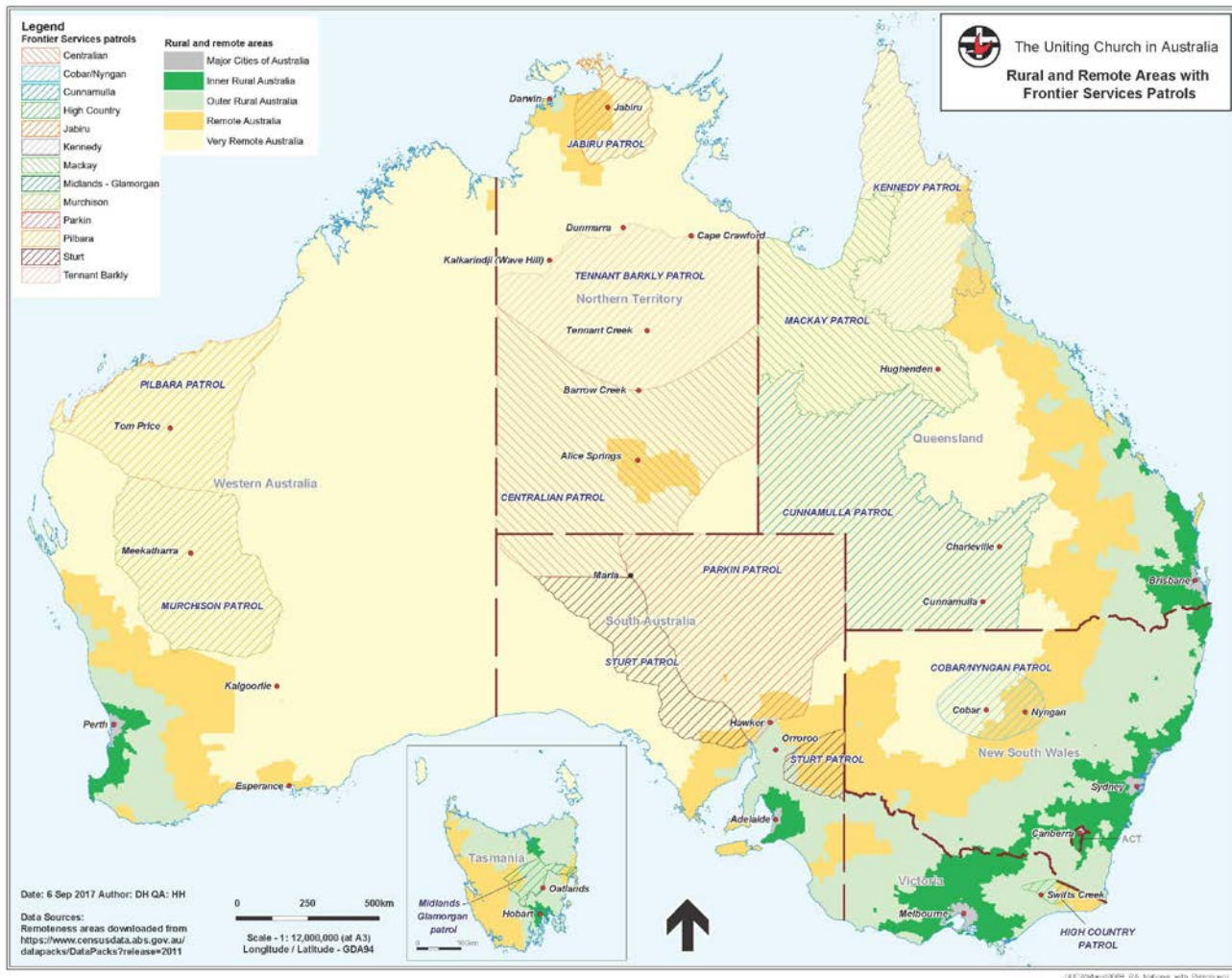**APPENDIX 1: QUEENSLAND MAP INDICATING RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS**
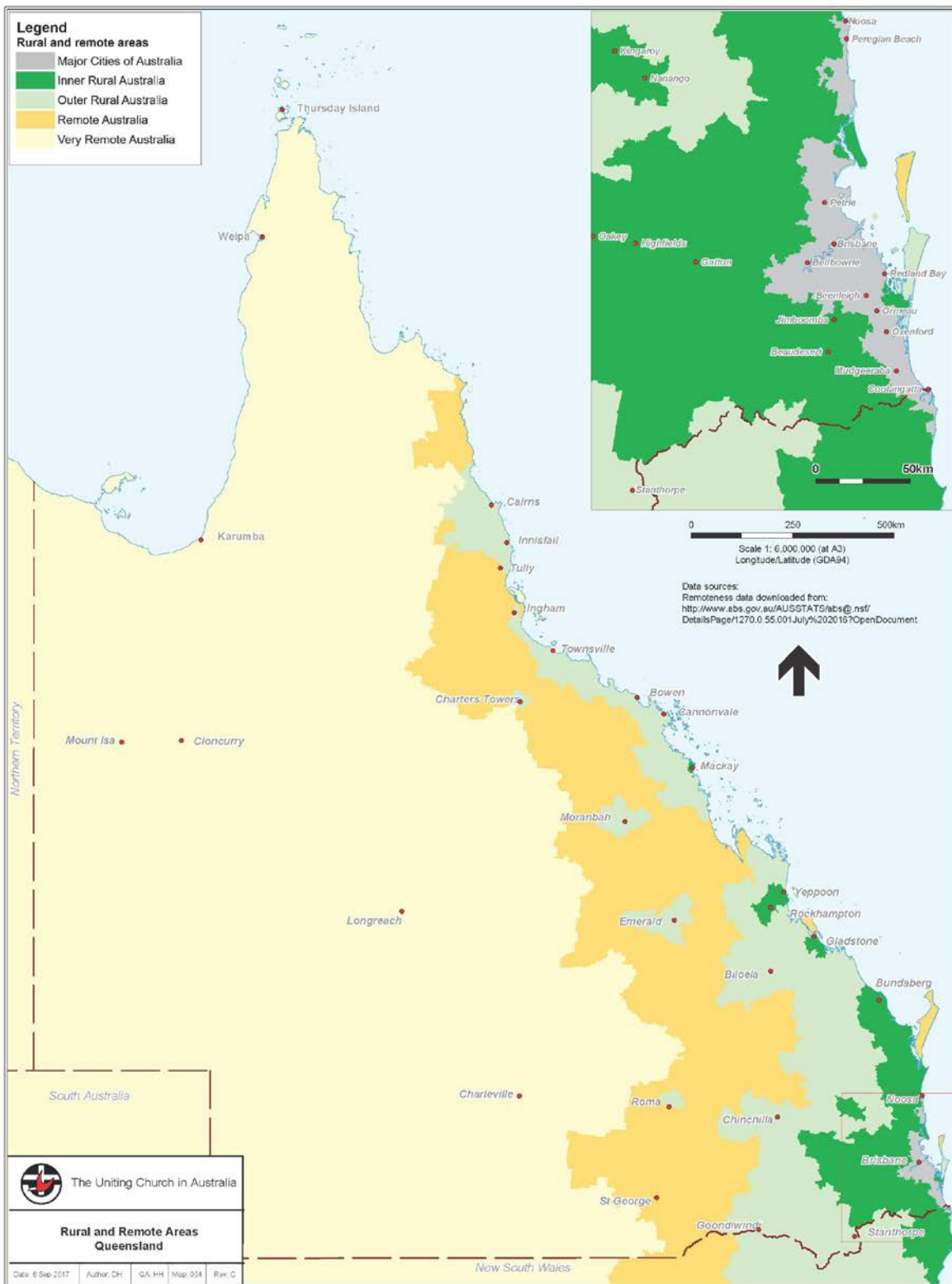
APPENDIX 2: QUEENSLAND RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS WITH PRESBYTERY & PATROL BOUNDARIES
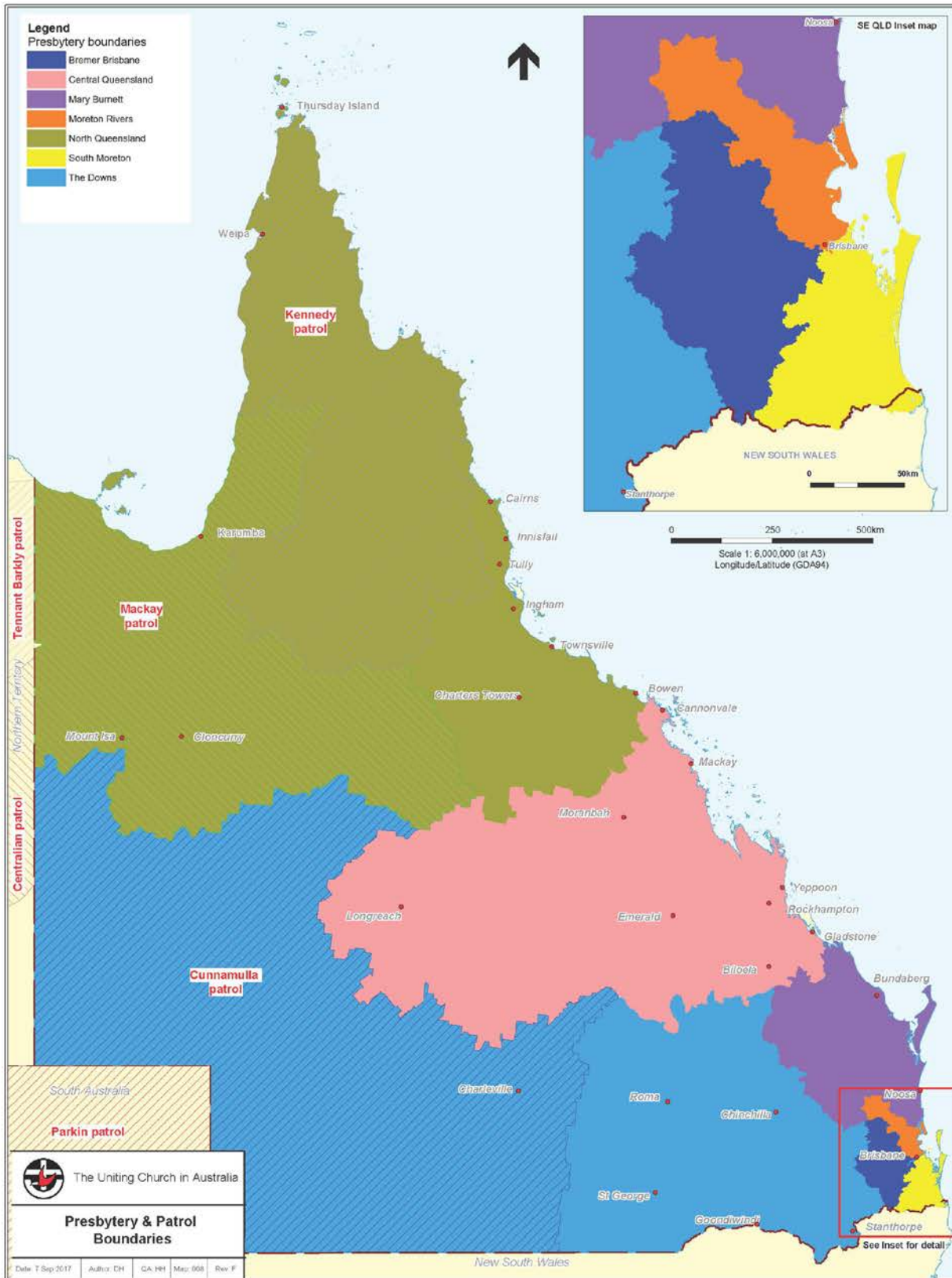
APPENDIX 3: NATIONAL MAP INDICATING RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

APPENDIX 2: NATIONAL RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS WITH PATROL BOUNDARIES

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