

Report for 31st Queensland Synod October 2014



Report from **The Downs Presbytery**

Context:

The Presbytery (the district council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other church members as are appointed thereto, the majority of elders/leaders and church members being appointed by Elders'/Leaders' meetings and/or congregations, on a basis determined by the Synod. Its function is to perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the church in the area for which it is responsible, except for those agencies which are directly responsible to the Synod or Assembly. It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another's faith, to bear one another's burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus. It will promote those wider aspects of the work of the church committed to it by the Synod or Assembly. *Basis of Union Para 15 (c)*

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Enabling a demonstrated commitment to the shared Call and Vision

Together on the way, enriching community vision and direction is intentionally engaged at Presbytery meetings. Banners are displayed at Presbytery gatherings including inductions and commissionings.

Ministry agents are encouraged to address responses to the *Together on the way* process in annual pastoral dialogues.

Congregations engage with the priority directions when preparing congregation profiles. Some congregation bulletins and pew sheets refer to statements and directions.

Some ministry agents refer to *Together on the way* values in ministry profiles.

The Presbytery minister incorporates *Together on the way* themes into sermons, prayers and addresses to church, wider church and community gatherings

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The Presbytery is awaiting leadership from the Synod in order to further this priority direction.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Promoting a discipline of prayer and spirituality (individual and corporate)

- Retreats
- Presbytery worship and rituals
- Presbytery minister shares prayer resources appropriate to the liturgical season
- participation in ecumenical and interfaith gatherings such as the Service for Peace following the MH-17 tragedy
- Matters for prayer are shared across the presbytery network.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

We will continue to create opportunities to practise, model and experience prayer disciplines.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Developing sustainable mission orientated organisation (way of being) for the Church in Queensland

- Intentional conversations about property utilisation (sale of five properties)
- Attention to risk management best practice
- Attention to actioning

- Attention to reporting, for example annual congregation reports and returns, as an essential accountability practice
- Regular reporting against mission plans/roles responsibilities/regulatory functions at Presbytery meetings
- Participation in Synod budget submission processes.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

A stewardship training program will be conducted across the Presbytery by consultant Carolyn Kitto in 2014/2015.

A marketing strategy will be developed to fund the Leichhardt Patrol into the future.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the Church

- renewed emphasis on Continuing Education for Ministry (CEM), supervision and Code of Ethics and reporting requirements
- annual pastoral dialogues
- regular cycle of congregation consultations
- renewed emphasis on Period Of Discernment (POD)
- Connect Group established for connecting lay ministry teams through Skype
- processing applications for two pastors and one candidate for the ministry of deacon
- provision of courses within Presbytery; lay preacher training, sacrament training for lay presiders, Pastoral Counselling Cert IV, Hospital Pastoral Care Course
- ministers in the Presbytery encouraged to give leadership in areas for which they have been gifted
- reshaped Presbytery Resource Minister role to focus on mission projects across the presbytery
- celebration of congregation mission initiatives
- advertising courses and conferences widely
- ministry agents attend various conferences and report back learnings to Presbytery meetings
- engagement with Synod Mission Project Officer
- engagement with Synod Discipleship and Formation Officer.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

- plans to host a conference in 2014/15 titled *Small and Strong*
- continue to promote leadership training opportunities
- identification of gifts and competencies for leadership
- identification of mission projects
- planting faith communities
- identify and train mentors for POD program
- continue to work with pastors to review competencies
- establish a lay preacher network.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships

- building strong relationships with Blue Care, ecumenical partners, Scots PGC College and state schools through chaplaincy and religious instruction
- participation in the commissioning service of Scots PGC principal Simon Shepherd
- chaplaincy and ecumenical pastoral care in hospitals
- ecumenical response to community loss and grief, for example the MH-17 Prayer for Peace service
- childcare: connecting with Education Queensland and the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care in Mitchell and Lifeworks Toowoomba Outside Hours School Care
- participation in the Downs Ecumenical Environmental Group affiliated with Queensland Churches Together
- Leichhardt Patrol is a Presbytery patrol in its second year of operation
- strong relationships with Frontier Service patrols
- engagement in the Coal Seam Gas (CSG) conversation through release of a media statement, support for the Tara Coal Seam Gas support group, ongoing conversations with mining company public relations officers (for example Origin), Gasfields Commission Queensland and the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, and advocacy for farmers
- supporting congregation community projects for example the Lifeworks move to the Glenvale property, building new multipurpose community hub facilities, and The Centre at St George.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

- Explore the use of underutilised property to house asylum seekers and associated projects to assist with the assimilation of asylum seekers into the Toowoomba community in partnership with Synod research officers, community and wider church organisations
- Establish a Presbytery Social Justice Committee that will further discussion and action on social issues pertinent to the region such as CSG impacts, drought, homelessness, asylum seekers, mental health.

Key achievements/initiatives

- 1. Welcome a new congregation at Highfields:**
Highfields is the largest growth area in Queensland. The Presbytery has responded to the mission opportunity that this represents by encouraging the activities of a small home group intentionally focussed on engaging with the community. This home group was recognised as a faith community, growing to a worshipping community of more than 100 people worshipping in a local Catholic school and now in the Highfields Cultural Centre. Most of these people have had no prior connection with the Uniting Church and represent a diverse cultural and denominational group. The faith community has recently elected to become a congregation.
- 2. Mitchell ECEC:**
Mitchell is a town 80 km west of Roma. It was nearly completely destroyed by the 2011 floods. The community is characterised by levels of disadvantage particularly in the area of early childhood education. The State Government determined to address this by providing a funding package for the building and establishment of a kindergarten and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Lifeworks Uniting Church was the successful tenderer. Together with the Uniting Church Maranoa

cluster a partnership was formed to manage the new centre, supported by the Synod and the Presbytery. The centre opened in September 2013 and provides early childhood education and support for families based on Christian values. A chaplaincy service is provided by the Maranoa minister.

3. The Tara Community Resilience Project:

This is a collaborative mental health project aimed at building the capacity of the Tara community to enhance and maintain individual and community wellbeing and resilience in the face of massive changes resulting from CSG development in the area. Partners are the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service (funding), Centacare (service provision) and the Toowoomba Catholic Diocese. Our specific role, together with the Toowoomba Catholic Diocese, is to provide oversight of the project.

Challenges/risks as we progress:

- the growing number of lay-led congregations that are emerging as a result of the inability to fund ordained ministry
- Presbytery's capacity to train lay leaders
- fresh expressions of church in areas where congregations do not have the capacity to continue to "run the church"
- leadership and resourcing for fresh expressions projects
- growing churches that are small and strong
- the diminishing capacity of older leaders to provide leadership as change agents
- financial support for congregations struggling to meet ministry costs
- there is a range of children's ministries conducted by congregations such as kids' clubs, religious instruction, kids' games, day camps, playgroups, Mainly Music, Outside School Hours Care, kindergarten and day care. Sunday schools, whilst present in some places, are no longer the way congregations routinely engage children with the Jesus story. Follow up is the key to growing relationships with these children and their families for whom Sunday is a day for other activities.

Issues to be addressed:

Training of resource ministers to work across ministry areas rather than training that assumes a "one minister one parish model".

Recognition by the Synod that an essential ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia in rural areas is a ministry of presence and community engagement. This ministry style is more akin to chaplaincy and diaconal ministry models. How do we equip people for these contexts? How do we fund new initiatives, for example a diaconal placement in a town where there is no capacity to fund a full-time ministry agent?

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