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HOPE
SYNOD 36



Report from

Mary Burnett Presbytery



Report

Context

Give us a description of your part of the church. Who are you and what are you called to do?

Mary Burnett Presbytery (MBP) is a diverse region of many contrasts. It is composed of busy urban centres including bustling coastal communities along the Sunshine Coast, Fraser Coast and Coral Coast; regional centres such as Maryborough, Kingaroy, Bundaberg and Gympie; and small rural communities such as those dotted through the Burnett region. It literally extends from the mountains to the sea - from the Glasshouse Mountains, up to Eidsvold and out the picturesque beaches of Burnett Heads and Bargara.

Our primary focus is on the mission Jesus calls us to of making disciples. This task is achieved through the local mission of our congregations, agencies, faith communities and chaplaincies. The Mary Burnett Presbytery provides the pastoral and administrative oversight, as well as guidance and encouragement to fulfil this life and mission

Tell us what your key priorities since the last Synod have been.

The past two years since the last Synod have been marked by particularly the following matters:

- The proposal and establishment of the Burnett Network of Churches (BNOC) representing all the congregations in the West (Inland Corridor) and the calling and induction of two ministers for this area. It is likely that the practical implementation will still require much discussion to develop a unified understanding of the working of BNOC.

The leadership of the Presbytery has experienced some change:

- The position of Mission Engagement Officer had borne much fruit in developing the understanding of local congregations of the mission, discipleship and evangelism.
- With the early retirement of the former Presbytery Minister, much effort was giving to the drafting of a profile, job description, discernment and placement of a new Presbytery minister to lead MBP into her next chapter of MBP life and witness.
- With the relocation of a long serving Chair of Presbytery, this role is also newly filled.

Shared Life, Flourishing Communities

In what ways have you been approaching the challenge of making disciples of Jesus?

Tell us about how you are building a discipling culture

Discipling necessarily means equipping people to follow Jesus and become more Christlike. It also involves evangelism. In the former we have deliberately promoted the training and education opportunities, such as 'Mission Planning' and other intensives available through Trinity College for lay people. The Presbytery encouraged various ministry agents to take part in programs including

Plentiful Leadership and the Post Grad Cert in Ministry Leadership. The Presbytery has committed 40% of the funds gathered at induction services, for ministry training, to training lay leaders.

The establishment of a Mission Engagement Officer has led to a focus on evangelism. The role has emphasized urging congregations and faith communities beyond a community service mentality to deliberate witness and sharing of Jesus' Good News.

Some local congregations have used the Project Plenty Discipleship material to run a 6-week discipleship series with at home studies and discussions.

Tell us about how you are engaging children, youth, young adults and families

Local efforts of individual churches in worship, youth groups and holiday activities, include: Day Camps at Bundaberg and Surf Church Stoked at Coral Coast.

Some congregations have made an intentional shift from Sunday School based ministry to inter-generational ministry in a move to change a format that is quite clearly not producing the results that it once did.

Messy Church also forms a vital part of our outreach to young families, and also intentional modelling the worship teams on a philosophy of participation not perfection, meaning that we have very young people being given the opportunity to serve in church services

Beyond the activities of local congregations, The Presbytery has partnered with YWAM and the Burnett Network of Churches to establish a youth mission base in Childers. By providing our (almost) unused manse, hall and worship buildings, we have enabled outreach to teens and young adults, including seasonal workers, in communities around the region. It seems likely a new worshipping community of 'unchurched' teens and Pacific Islanders will form in the Biggenden-Childers circumstance, where approximately ten traditional UCA members remain between the two towns.

Tell us how you are reimagining the identity and posture of the church, in your community, in a changing world

On the Sunshine Coast we are praying for God's blessing on a number of faith communities and 'fresh expressions' of church:

- *BELLS Faith Community*: With no building and a half time pastor is at a critical juncture after almost seven years. With a focused commitment on equipping the people of God for works of service that build up the body of Christ, this missional community's aim is to be less dependent on a paid ministry agent for its life of Community, Worship and Mission in the neighbourhoods where its people live.
- *Uniting Life* is an intentional 'church plant' faith community together now for almost two years. Meeting in homes, this community has gathered young families to explore the ways of discipleship in their households and daily environments. Its shared leadership includes an unpaid ordained minister, who has a fulltime job just like everyone else in the community.
- *Maroochydore Korean Church* is a Korean faith community served by a Korean pastor and it is integrated into the Maroochydore Faith Community.

The formation of clusters or network of churches, like BNOC and others along the Noosa Coast are being actively explored.

In what ways have you been drawn into Transforming your Community?

Tell us about how you have responded to the rising challenge of wellbeing and mental health support

- Various members of Presbytery are deeply involved in school chaplaincy committees, police chaplaincy and mentoring (establishing a presence in the schools and Uni campuses).
- The establishment of a *Conversation Hub* with community partners to facilitate difficult family conversations and so help prevent Domestic and Family Violence (DFV).
- The establishment of *Red Benches* upon congregational and public spaces with community partners to encourage conversations about DFV and so help prevent DFV.
- Pastoral and spiritual care to residents of private aged-care homes.
- Participation in community centres.

Tell us about your commitment to the Uniting Church's ongoing work of covenanting with First Peoples

While we do not have a significant First People's Presence within our Presbytery, we are committed to the ongoing work and vision of covenanting, not only with First Peoples, but with many different cultures across the multi-cultural nature of the Uniting Church

Tell us about your how you are building a deeper understanding about what is possible as a church, called to care for all of God's creation

Some congregations intentionally identify September as a month to focus on creation and stewardship using QCT and other resources

Tell us about any other ways you have sought to listen and respond to the needs of your community

Some congregations continue to serve communities through feeding schemes and community centres. In recent times, the church communities in regions such as Maryborough and Gympie have played a significant part in supporting the local community in the aftermath of floods

In what ways have you been sought to reshape your part of the Synod, to be Fit for Purpose and wise stewards of all that God has given you?

Tell us about changes you have made (to systems, policies, technologies, governance) that has brought life and freedom into processes that had become stuck or burdensome

An Online ministry presence has become the new 'normal' for churches right across the MBP. COVID accelerated the online ministry of many congregations (many accelerating from almost no online presence to full on social media presence including all the technology and equipment needed to facilitate this). COVID helped break a mindset that many churches had that there are sacred things that can't be touched and changed. It brought the value of buildings into their true perspective as many churches began to operate completely outside of the building. While the importance of a place of fellowship and belonging isn't forgotten, we have found that decisions can be made quicker and that the most important thing isn't the building, but the people.

The faith communities mentioned above are a fresh way of being a church, however, it is found that some form of structure and governance is required. It is not possible to function fairly and without conflict without basic governance. The challenge is to find the most simple and effective model.

With a new leadership team, the Presbytery has embarked on an exercise to determine the most effective way of governance, like clarifying the responsibilities of the Standing Committee and Pastoral Relations Committee, and examining the roles of the Chair, the Presbytery Minister, the Mission Engagement Officer, Secretary and Administrative officer.

Tell us about the pain points you identified in your operations that need to be addressed in the next season

We have a number of local congregations where ‘membership’ is actually below both regulatory and practical numbers to sustain the requirements of being a “congregation”, but people cannot imagine new ways of being the church. The idea of “faith communities” is not well understood and sometimes seen as second-rate. While some networking, such as in the Burnett region, appears to be working, other amalgamations are essentially based on scraping together finances to pay a ministry agent, rather than grappling with missional purpose and growth.

The ageing nature of many of our churches. The church needs to become more relevant to people for whom the church holds no relevance currently. The UC is ageing, but the solution lies not in finding other Christians who are disgruntled in their own churches, but rather in becoming a life-giving relevant body for people who currently are not in church.

The issue of “relevance to wider community” needs more focussed attention. We are encouraged by the amazing work of the Childers Uniting Church illustrating that a church taking the “Kingdom view” that Childers have, where there is a willingness to allow our facilities to be used in a way that won’t necessarily suddenly fill the UC, but rather meets a community need and grows the Kingdom and promotes ecumenical sharing of resources and strengths.

Tell us about how you have stewarded your property and assets to best facilitate healthy and vital mission in your part of the Synod

Across the MBP our churches have sought to actively engage in the MDF consultations, resulting in the majority of our churches taking a good look at both their assets and their missional plans and (at the very least) becoming aware of the fact that what we have is to be used for Kingdom building with local congregations working together with one another and with the Presbytery as they discern God’s voice for their future.

The MBP continues to utilise its MDF in the employment of the Mission Engagement Officer, who’s ability to engage with, give thought to and work in specific area of concern and outreach to the Presbytery, has been invaluable.

Tell us about how you have sought to identify, develop and release leaders to participate in the ongoing work of the church

Presbytery has established a lay preachers register to encourage lay preachers to help with leading worship across the presbytery.

A congregation (Gympie Regional) has introduced an internship scheme with a young person working as an intern in the congregation.

In what ways have you sought to collaborate with others across the Uniting Church as an expression of our commitment to doing Life Together?

Tell us about a part of the Uniting Church's history, DNA, story and culture that has come alive for you

It has been a difficult few years, but the reality of the truth and hope embedded in the Basis of Union continues to be revealed through the life and witness of the church. In Paragraph 4 we read the words, *"The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church."* Regardless of Covid-19 and changes to society and the nature of the church, we can still trust that Christ will continue to rule and renew us as his church - however that may look in the future.

Tell us about ways in which you have both benefited from and contributed to other parts of the Church

Through Project Plenty, the Presbytery released the Mission Engagement Officer to work with the Discipleship Working Group that produced the Lent Backyard Discipleship' series.

The small rural churches have benefitted from the experience of NSW/ACT Synod's Saltbush community.

At least two of our local churches have sought to engage with Uniting Care's Connect 100 project.

Tell us about where you see relational tensions that need to be addressed over the next season

The smallest of our congregations are worn down by what they see as paperwork and compliance from Synod. To quote the secretary of one country congregation, "If we leave the Uniting Church, it won't be about theology, it will be about the bureaucracy." The language of "returns", "registers" and "audits" is not relational.

The head-office assumption that small town volunteers have the skills (or even the internet speeds) to fill out templates and use various software leads to frustration, isolation and alienation.

The experience that Synod and some of its projects/requirements are not related to grassroots contexts and the gap between small local (especially rural) congregations and Synod is growing

Threats and opportunities as we step into the future together

Opportunity: Torbanlea: The next large outreach possibility in the Presbytery could be from one of our smallest, most fervent churches. Four minutes from Howard, a new railway rollingstock factory will be built at Torbanlea employing >800 workers.

How will we share the good news of Jesus Christ with them and their families as they come to live in Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Burrum Heads and Howard? These are the questions we as Presbytery and the local churches are asking ourselves and praying about.

To seek ways in which we can deepen the Uniting Church's ongoing work of covenanting with First Peoples.

Proposals to the 36th Synod

It is proposed that the 36th Synod receive this report.

Contact for report questions

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