



COUNTRY, COAST & CAPITAL



Viewpoint

Volume 2 Issue 2 Winter 2019

A quarterly magazine of THE CANBERRA REGION PRESBYTERY of
The Uniting Church in Australia - also online at canberra.uca.org.au

How we are responding to the Gospel call to follow Jesus ♦ What Ministry Agents want to say to the Church



THIS ISSUE Reflections on our theme for the May Presbytery meeting:

DISCOVERING NEW FUTURES - LETTING GO OF THE OLD

EDEN celebrates the opening of their Community pantry p7 ♦ Rev RIANA KOK, Yarralumla and new interfaith connections p5 ♦ Rev Dr PAUL CHALSON, Canberra City shares a viewpoint p6.

View from the Chair

Changing Seasons



Only a short time ago we were in prayer for the terrorist events of Christchurch.

Since then there have been other attacks on places of worship around the world including Sri Lanka - it is difficult to keep track. It is a tragic indictment upon humans that we even have to hold up in prayer those that have been struck down in prayer or impacted by such horrific events in peaceful places of worship be it a Church, Mosque or Synagogue.

Events like these often remind us of how out of kilter the world can be, with media barely reporting on a murderous event in one country whilst well over \$100 million pours in for repairs to the damage of Notre Dame. What strange creatures we can be about the things on which we place priorities and importance.

Amongst the loss of lives and properties, we are however reminded that we are in the period of Easter, that there is new life after death, there is hope and,

In Transition...we can thrive

I am sure you all can see that Presbytery is entering a period of transition and change. Kevin has retired, Geoff moves to Saltbush and John and Ian join us in their supply ministries while Amy holds us together as Janise recovers from a major operation. In the midst of these circumstances flows an opportunity to find new ways of working with our congregations and faith communities to be the followers of Jesus. Delia calls us all to lift our faces to head into the new seasons of Life, Church and Earth remembering Jesus words to Simon Peter "Follow me". That is exactly what we will do, each in the way we are called.

My richest experience in my two years with you has been the sitting, listening and praying with folk who were faced with hard edges; in times of sharing the faith, letting the Spirit run and excite us. From these times I have seen people grow and find strength and wisdom to re-build and to see new futures when surrounded by ashes. It is Jesus' promise that we would see Him in Galilee that I see being fulfilled and lived out in the courageous lives of so many folk across this Presbytery. Being followers of Jesus usually leads us to service and witness in some most unexpected ways. I see this happening in all sorts of ways across the diversity and richness of our collective experiences of being a pilgrim people. So while much changes around us the fundamental spiritual pilgrimage we share is to continue doing what Delia suggests: follow the way of Jesus in all its complexity, mystery, wonder and joy.

John Williams, Presbytery Co-Chair

even though it is sometimes hard, that even in painful moments God is within us.

At our last Canberra Presbytery gathering **Rev. Capt. Stuart Haynes** gave us a presentation relating to the Tathra fires and told us of such God moments, where there were sudden partings of smoke and lives were saved from the raging fire.

Within our Presbytery there are a number blessings and God moments that we should recognise such as; the joy on the faces of the family of **Dr. Julie Fletcher** as she was commissioned as Pastor at **Braidwood** on Palm Sunday, the God moments of feeling the warm sun on our faces as we participated in *The way of the Cross* on Good Friday, the smiles on faces as they sang at the **Grace/Goulburn** new *Your Worship* services, the glorious voice of **Rev. Dr. Amelia Koh-Butler** singing praise at the service celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of the beautiful man that is the former Moderator,

Rev. Alistair Christie, and of course we will with fondness celebrate the blessings that **Geoff Wellington** shared across this Presbytery.

We now welcome **John Squires** and **Ian Diamond** into supply roles to assist us during this period of change at Presbytery. Let us all lift our faces to head into the new seasons of Life, Church and Earth remembering Jesus' words to Simon Peter, "Follow me".

Delia Quigley, Presbytery Co-Chair

VIEWPOINT



NEXT ISSUE - Articles and contributions are due mid-July in time for the 17 August Presbytery meeting. Please send to the Editor, Carolyn McAllister, viewpoint@cruc.org.au
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THIS ISSUE - Cover photo by Bec Minear from Uniting. L-R a customer joins Pam and Peter Skelton at Eden Community Pantry. **CRP logo** - Bill Lang. **Photo** p2 by Delcho Dichev from Pexels **VIEWPOINT** (Presbytery News ISSN 1322 8323) is published by Canberra Region Presbytery, Uniting Church in Australia and printed by Elect Printing, Fyshwick. **Opinions and advertisements** in Viewpoint do not necessarily reflect the views of the Canberra Region Presbytery.





Good bye, and God's Speed

There is always a need to make room for the Spirit and allow things to be shaped as they emerge, not rushing ahead of our time or being stuck in past time ... LPr Geoff Wellington, Presbytery Minister - Congregation Futures.

Recently I have been listening to some music by Powderfinger and one song in particular – “These Days”.

In this song the chorus starts off with the lines,

*“This life well it’s slipping right through my hands
These days turned out nothing like I planned”*

This seems rather apt for me at the moment as I prepare to leave the Canberra Region Presbytery. There is so much to do at the moment to finish things, pack my belongings, say my goodbyes and head off to a new placement with the rural church.

Time and life and plans for things to encourage congregations and individuals to engage with, are slipping right through my hands at present.

As things are put in place to keep some things going, others to take a break for the moment and to focus people’s attention around what’s really important, these occupy my time.

But thoughts also turn to the past five years and all the things we have done together. In February 2014 I attended my first Canberra Region Presbytery meeting at Burgmann College and spoke of four things that would shape my ministry with you.

1. **Working with points of energy – to have a go at new ways of being church**
2. **Building Relationships and Networks**
3. **Building on Uniting (Care) Partnerships**
4. **Attending to Christian Spiritual Practice and discipleship formation**

These things have indeed shaped my time and energy with you but perhaps not always in the ways I first imagined.

There is always a need to make room for the Spirit and allow things to be shaped as they emerge, not rushing ahead of our time or being stuck in past time but attuned to this moment of time. The Church at times speaks of Kairos time – God’s Time.

It has indeed been a Kairos time for me having come from a role with the Synod somewhat bruised and battered and finding my feet once again here in the Canberra Region Presbytery. I will always be most grateful to God and yourselves for the blessing of this season with you.

Working with points of energy – to have a go at new ways of being church

There have been many points of energy to work with, places and spaces like Grace Faith Community, Alpine’s Op-Shop and their food ministry, the Inner North conversations and the many, many conversations with congregations as they worked through profiles and mission plans.

As a presbytery we spent much time paying attention to the Health and Wellbeing of our Congregations. While the conclusions of such introspection can feel somewhat threatening, I do hope that congregations see this as an opportunity to discern where they are being called. The message of the gospel remains and it calls and sends us to God’s reconciling and renewing work. This work of the Spirit transforms and changes us the Church as much as it does those we encounter.

Building Relationships and Networks

The network of relationships has grown over the time and it has enabled so much of the role of Congregation Futures to be effective across the region. It is the strength of our relationships that holds us together in the more difficult times we experience in our shared ministry.

As the presbytery team, that has changed and been added to over the time I’ve been here and the Team has worked hard to learn from each other and support each other in our primary roles. At the same time, there have been many times we have worked together as a team to run a whole range of events in the presbytery, engaging with the Synod and the Assembly.

.../continued on the next page



Geoff continues from the previous page

A big thank you to Kevin, from whom I have learnt so much these last few years, for wrangling us and keeping us on track. Thanks to Carolyn and now

Amy for the office support and Janise who has taken up the role of Operations Manager.

Building on Uniting (Care) Partnerships

Early on in my time in the presbytery, UnitingCare changed its name to Uniting and the role that Briony Griffiths has held during that time has officially changed several times but the one thing that has remained constant is Bri's great capacity to connect congregations with their communities and enable them to build on their strengths and have a go at helping others you come in contact with.

Bri's introduction of Uniting – Church conversations have enabled much co-operation and networking across the whole presbytery and continues to add to the ministry of the Uniting Church.

Attending to Christian Spiritual Practice and discipleship formation

One other major theme that the presbytery has focused on is the invitation to focus more intentionally on Christian Spiritual Practice. I strongly believe that this continues to be a critical area for our church.

In many instances it seems to be that as a church we have forgotten this most important element of the Christian Faith. It is this base of core worship, discipleship making and how we order our life together that enables our joining in God's interests in the world.

It has been a great joy in the last six months or so to work with St Ninian's Congregation and **Benedictus** (<http://benedictus.com.au>) as they consider what a partnership might look like. I do pray that together a new centre of spiritual practice can emerge there. It is not without its difficulties but as a church we proclaim a story of death and resurrection and the call to choose life rather than death is a biblical theme we do well to remind ourselves of often.

As I take my leave of the presbytery can I encourage you not to lose heart in the gospel message. The Church as "institution" is in great difficulty in its current configuration but as talked about so much over the last few years, the Church is also "movement" and the spiritual life of people is alive and well, waiting to hear good news - gospel; to be good news - gospel to others.

So, God's speed to you all as we go our separate ways, and may you know the blessing of God as I have experienced in you these last years.

Geoff Wellington [joining Saltbush: <https://ume.nswact.uca.org.au/our-work/rural/saltbush-welcome/>



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Farewell Geoff



After five years of wonderful ministry to us, Geoff now moves to the next stage of his discipleship with congregations and faith communities across "Saltbush".

We sense that this call to build connections across scattered communities is one that sits powerfully with Geoff's grounding in faith and witness. We rejoice in seeing opportunities arise that will flourish from the foundations he has built in seeking new ways to be church in our rapidly changing society, both rural and urban. We will however greatly miss Geoff's ministry which has touched every corner of faith communities and congregations across our Presbytery. His gracious quiet nature disguises the wealth of diverse ministries he has planned, nurtured and mentored.

He has stepped up on so many occasions when he saw tasks that needed attention. As we have said before he has played the rugby fullback and covered the whole field of Presbytery and congregation need by being willing to recast priorities and give where we critically needed his presence, wisdom and action.

Geoff has worked very long days and weeks to hold us together, to think ahead and discern the need and to act. For all of this and more we give him our thanks. Geoff has not only pressed gently for folk to build new visions for being church. In our inner northern congregations we see new green shoots emerging. His patience and willingness to sit with people, listen and wait for the right time to move forward is a rare skill that he has. We thank him for that. His long term vision for Grace is bearing fruit and the seeds planted and nurtured may germinate and flower in the Kippax connections to Ginninderry developments on the Murrumbidgee.

As you go, Geoff, know that you have built foundations for the future. Thank you. We will seek to nurture and bring to harvest that which you and the people faithfully planted. Go knowing you go with our love and prayers for a wonderful future as you walk into your new Galilee and meet Him there just as he said He would. *John Williams and Delia Quigley, Co-Chairs Canberra Region Presbytery*

Late afternoon, on Friday the 15th March, when the Christchurch shooting occurred, I received a phone call from our church administrator, Ian Lynch, saying he had received a call from Rob and Sue Page, from St Peter Chanel's Catholic Church in Yarralumla asking if



'Grieving with you' - flowers and a card placed at the door of Yarralumla Uniting Church

Willem and I would accompany them to the Mosque in Yarralumla, to convey a message of peace and standing with them in solidarity. Rob and Sue had attended Shrove Tuesday's pancake dinner at Yarralumla on the 5th, and have been friends of long standing at Yarralumla Uniting.

We met at the mosque and

Making connections, sharing peace together



presented a bouquet of flowers and a condolence card to some members attending a prayer session at the time, who came out to meet us. We apologised for interrupting their service but that we were representatives of the other two faith communities in Yarralumla who would like to reach out to our Muslim neighbours at such a time. A week later on the 22nd of March, two men approached Willem working in the garden at the manse, inviting us to attend an interfaith gathering on the 24th of March. They were representatives of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association Australia which I understand to be connected to the Cameleers who came to Australia to work on the building of the Outback Railway lines. In celebration of "Harmony Day", an event was to be organised and held at the ACT Legislative Assembly's Reception Room.

Willem and I attended where speakers of different faiths participated in discussing the topic, "Coming of The Messiah", which features in different ways in these various faiths. Speakers from the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant Christian Communities participated to share the different views each have of "Coming of The Messiah". One aspect all had in common though, was the peace-seeking for all of humanity through "The Messiah".

Then on Wednesday the 24th April, the flowers and a card in the photos were found placed at the door of Yarralumla Uniting Church to convey solidarity with and peace to Christians from within the Muslim Community after the bombings at churches and hotels in Sri Lanka.

At each of these occasions, we made a special note of it at our Sunday services to emphasise our continued prayers for each other and for standing together in peace.

Riana Kok, Minister, Yarralumla Congregation





What I want to say to the church

Rev Dr Paul Chalson,
[Canberra City Uniting Church](#)

*a regular feature where
 we hear from Ministers of
 Congregations*

What does it mean to be the church in this time and place? What might be the future for the church and how might we engage within the ministry of Christ as the church here in Canberra?

This publication is called *Viewpoint* and this article is my viewpoint on these questions. To that end, whilst I could talk “fresh expressions,” missional projects or the call upon each of us to be witnesses for Christ; in this article I am focusing on congregational life. Specifically, I will identify three characteristics with which I believe every congregation needs to engage.

Firstly is the intentional reimagination of worship.

Often we continue with the worship style in which we were nurtured and with which we are comfortable. We may make nominal changes in an attempt to be more relevant or inclusive. On the whole, however, worship is pretty much what we know and like.

To be a church engaging in the ministry of Christ and with the broader community we must intentionally reimagine our worship. Rather than continue out of habit with what we know we need to reflect upon our mission as a congregation and reimagine our worship accordingly, shaped by the context in which we live out our faith, by ministry we perceive that Jesus is calling us to and the vision of the people we believe Jesus is calling us to be. This will involve the loss of many cherished aspects of worship which have been beneficial in the past. However, the way in which Jesus leads us is the way of laying down our life, that in doing so, life is found.

Secondly is the call to be an intercultural church.

This is different to being a multicultural church. Multiculturalism recognizes and celebrates our diversity. Interculturalism invites us to be vulnerable to being impacted and shaped by our diversity. A multicultural church has many different cultures present but may otherwise be unchanged. Intercultural church makes space to hear each other's stories, including our stories of pain.

Intercultural church makes space that language, practice and values across our diversity is experienced and it shapes who we are as a people of God. Intercultural church surrenders and shares power across our cultural diversity.

Our communities are culturally diverse, and we must engage with this diversity. The church in the book of Acts was incredibly diverse culturally. This was not always an easy journey for the early



*Rev. Dr Paul Chalson on guitar
 and Rev. Miriam Parker-Lacey on
 clarinet. Photo: Jenny Rowland*

church but as we read New Testament we discover how the church engaged with this diversity and was enriched and shaped by its intercultural nature. The church today and into the future must similarly engage with the call to being intercultural. In doing so we more fully express who we are as God's people and are enriched in our life and ministry.

Finally, may our life and ministry as the church embrace all creation.

For too long the dominant Christian theologies and practices have ignored or even dismissed the fullness of the world in which we live. This has been contrary to the biblical story, to our own diminishment as the church and to the detriment of the ministry to which we are called. Our faith has so much to offer the world in the ecological crisis we currently experience. We need to embrace all creation in our theology, spirituality, worship and mission for the sake of the world.

As said, this is not the entirety of being Christ's church into the future but I believe the engagement with these three characteristics of intentional reimagining worship, being an intercultural church and embracing all creation in our life and ministry will lead us on the way.

Paul Chalson,
Minister, Canberra City Congregation

From little things ...

St Georges at Eden celebrates the opening of [Eden's Community Food Pantry](#)

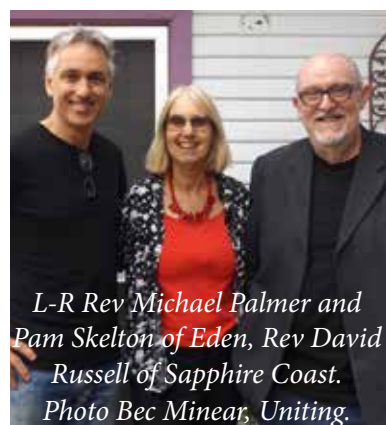
How are great ideas born?

When do we tell a story and where does it start or finish?

[Eden's Community Pantry](#) began way back with a group of interested folk meeting at a noisy cafe to discuss how best to address food insecurity and the issues that cause this shameful situation in contemporary Oz and more particularly in our own region.

Over the last couple of years a dedicated few have done the hard yards to bring good ideas to effective reality. And then, as we sang at the birth of our Garden of Eden Community Project about 12 years ago, 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'.

The first Pantry to be established in 2017 was [Sapphire Community Pantry in Bega](#), now serving hundreds of members with dozens of volunteers. Eden's Pantry took a different route retaining the original network of interested folk but also collaborating closely with St Georges congregation, and the various support structures within the Uniting Church.



*L-R Rev Michael Palmer and Pam Skelton of Eden, Rev David Russell of Sapphire Coast.
Photo Bec Minear, Uniting.*

The Community Pantry became an obvious extension to the existing community-building and food insecurity initiatives- weekly community lunches and hamper deliveries.

The Uniting Church, more broadly, enabled their corporate resources to be used for this purpose. Beyond the church frontiers nothing could have been achieved without some other essential avenues of support. Accordingly we acknowledge our long-standing partners in meeting food insecurity via food rescue channels - the local Social Justice Advocates of the Sapphire Coast (SJA), Oz Harvest and Coles Second Bite.



Amelia and Claudia with Peter Skelton, cut the ribbon at the opening of Eden Community Pantry. Photo: Pam Skelton

Family and Community Services NSW (FACS) became the source of essential funding through their Social Housing Community Improvement Fund, SHCIF, which enabled a purpose-built extension to our church hall. Other local services supported not only the concept of a community pantry but also gave practical assistance in the subsequent build. Our local Bega Valley Shire Council contributed funds to improve accessibility for all. The number of volunteers grew and all deserve our thanks.

What will this little Pantry, now trading, achieve?

Different things for different people. We expect for most of our "shoppers" it will represent an extension of the open-hearted acceptance and attachment to place that they already experience through our Monday Community Lunches and the present food relief activities. For some the Pantry enables a means of balancing stretched budgets. For others it is an opportunity to contribute their time and energies in constructive ways as volunteers; strengthening our community and sharing in addressing systemic problems in our society.

For the congregation of St George's our Pantry is another opportunity to demonstrate loving service to neighbour in obedience to the gracious love shown to us in the Gospel of Jesus. It also extends our ecumenical and community connections and strengthens our involvement with Uniting services in our area.

So, this is only the first chapter of our Community Pantry story. Where it will lead? We don't know, but we hope and pray that en-route many will be blessed.

*Michael Palmer, Pam and Peter Skelton
Eden Congregation*

John Squires and Ian Diamond an answer to prayer

Presbytery Co-Chairs John Williams and Delia Quigley



Photo: Jenny Rowland



It is a delight to be able to announce formally that on the 1st May Rev John Squires and Rev Ian Diamond commenced their Supply Ministries with Canberra Region Presbytery. In this period of transition with **Kevin Dilks'** retirement and as **Geoff Wellington** moves to join Mark Faulkner in the ["Saltbush" Initiative](#), we feel these ministries are a real answer to prayer. *John and Delia.*

Rev'd Ian Diamond is providing **supply ministry** for the rest of the year - about 30% of a full time ministry. Ian will, in concert with the Pastoral Relations Committee and Staff and Office Bearers (SOB), provide pastoral care and encouragement to ministers in placement, lay pastoral leaders and ministers in supply. Ian is looking forward to spending time with our ministers and congregational leadership and developing networks that assist congregations and ministers to support each other in understanding and practising missional ministry, witness and service.



Ian candidated for the Methodist ministry whilst completing a BA at the University of New England and gained a BD at the University of Sydney. His exit appointment was to Lake Cargelligo, and, following ordination, he served as Chaplain at Wolaroi College [now Kinross Wolaroi School] in Orange. He obtained an MA from the University of Lancaster, UK and following his return home, had placements at Ingleburn, Bowral, Broken Hill and Dubbo.

Since retiring in 2005, Ian has provided supply ministry in City Uniting, is on the ministry team at Wesley and is a regular preacher at Kippax. He has worked with the Probation and Parole Service, on the Central Coast and in Dubbo. He has been a Police Chaplain for 27 years and currently has pastoral responsibility for the Monaro Local Area Command based in Queanbeyan. Ian is married to Kay and they have two sons, Elliott in Bendigo and Campbell in Germany. We do warmly welcome Ian to his new role with Presbytery. We feel his commitment to us is a real answer to prayers. Welcome Ian.

Rev'd Dr John Squires has agreed to provide **supply ministry** to the Canberra Region Presbytery in which he will act as Secretary of Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), contribute as a member of the Staff and Office Bearers (SOB) and engage in the day to day running of the presbytery. This supply ministry will commence on 1st May and run at 25% of a full time appointment until **John takes up his role as Presbytery Minister - Wellbeing on 1st February 2020.**



Many of you will know that John comes to us with a strong background of work within the Uniting Church stretching back to the 1970's. He was **ordained as a Minister** in the Uniting Church 3rd December 1980 .He holds a Bachelor of Divinity (Hons in NT) at University of Sydney and a PhD from Yale University in the USA. John has undertaken Ministerial Placements as Director of Education and Formation and was the Principal of Perth Theological Hall, as well as a shared ministry in the Wauchope congregation and Southern Zone Minister on the Mid North coast. He has been a Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Uniting Theological College and has ministered in the Waverley Parish and the Southern Illawarra Parish.

John also has wide ranging involvement with other faith communities, indigenous communities and the wider UCA. He has a very broad range of experience on committees and in administrative areas of the church.

We anticipate that this rich background will allow John to provide leadership, wisdom and judgement to assist Presbytery run effectively while engaging with **Rev Ian Diamond** who will be providing pastoral care and mentoring to our team of ordained and lay ministers.

It is with a deep appreciation that we thank John for his being willing and able to supply this ministry. We welcome John with much joy to his supply ministry with Presbytery. Welcome John.

[John's wife, Rev Elizabeth Raine, is Minister with Tuggeranong Uniting Church.]



Discovering new futures ... letting go of the old

A reflection from **Rev Dr John Squires**

From this month, I am pleased to be taking up a portion of my future placement in the Presbytery in a 25% supply role; and am looking forward to next year when I will move into the full time role as Presbytery Minister—Wellbeing.

It's a good time for me to be starting the role, as Presbytery considers what it means to be discovering new futures and letting go of the old.

From time to time I hear people reminiscing about “the way things used to be”. You might know the script; it goes something like: “not enough people ‘come to church’ on Sunday mornings ... we have no Sunday School ... there is no Youth Group ... the Women’s Fellowship has closed ... the rosters have empty spaces ... nobody wants to do the flowers ... there aren’t enough greeters.”

I hear these things. I listen. I nod and make empathetic noises.

I start to talk about how things are, indeed, different now. How the church is in a different place in society. How society itself is different, now, from 30 years ago, 50 years ago, 60 years ago. How people are looking for different things, now. How the Sunday morning four-hymn sandwich, sitting quietly and listening to a 20 minute monologue, is not what “younger people” accept as valuable, any more. (And some “older people”, too!)

I might push back a little more.

What does this congregation offer to people who are looking for a place to connect with their faith? How do we welcome people? How do we disciple people? How do we connect with people in the ways that they best appreciate and look for? What are we doing to grow our own sense of what it is that people in the community around us are hungering for?

I wonder whether this is the right line to take. I wonder whether this just reinforces the resistance and strengthens the frustrations of those who express these things to me.

Taking a different line of approach

From time to time, I mull over a different kind of response. One that goes something like this.

The challenge that faces the church as our numbers decline is, in fact, a wonderful opportunity. It is an opportunity for us to renew ourselves. It is an opportunity to become deeply incarnational; to contextualise the way we express and live out our faith. It is an opportunity to discover new futures.

To be incarnational, means to enter fully into the reality of human life that we find all around us. It means to “take on the flesh” of the society of which we are a part.

(Don’t freak out—that is entirely biblical. That is what, we say, Jesus did, when he “became human” and “pitched his tent in our midst”—to paraphrase John 1:14.)

To be incarnational means to live in this world, amongst our fellow human beings, as one of them, bringing into this situation a sense of the “more than” that the Gospel offers; a sense of the “dimension beyond” the immediate that we proclaim.

To be incarnational is to be contextual. To be immersed in the context. To be part of the community that lives, sleeps, eats, shops, works, plays, and relaxes, within the very neighbourhood where the church is.

Instead of yearning for more people to come to church on Sunday morning, perhaps we should become more active in engaging with people out there in the parks, the shopping centres, the gathering places, in our local community. These are the new futures waiting to be discovered.

John Squires, Presbytery Supply Minister



What are some of the CHARACTERISTICS of a new Christian community?

Rev Mark Faulkner was a guest speaker at the meeting of Canberra Region Presbytery on 18 May 2019 hosted by St Margaret's Congregation, ACT. As the NSW/ACT Synod's Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives, Mark is engaged in the Saltbush Project - Uniting the scattered community. You can read more about Mark's ministry on <https://ume.nswact.uca.org.au/our-work/rural/saltbush-welcome/> LPr Geoff Wellington will soon be joining him as mentioned elsewhere in this Viewpoint.

Letting go of the past and moving into a new future!

In many ways the institution of the Church is still functioning as if the place of the church in society, the size of church membership and the role of ministry is as it was in the 1900's.

As we know all elements of both church and social life have changed and if we are wanting to respond to the call of discipleship then we need honest reflection and discussion about what we do now in shaping our Christian communities (congregations) for the present future.

The Church does not have the trust, voice in society and politics, nor the basic interest that it once held. Yet the church is still clinging to a structure that reflects only a small part of its 2000-year history; a structure from a time and world that no longer exists. In brief our church is now made up primarily of smaller congregations who do not have a Minister, never will have and who live in secular communities.

One writer of the reality of the church context says: "If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world!"

It is not true however that there is no longer a place for Christian communities who are able to discover renewed life as the Way of Christ amongst the lonely, needy, and broken hearted and be vital within their own communities. We need to remember the Church does not belong to us, but is an expression of God.

It is not true that a Christian community has to be wealthy or large to be in mission and that small or local does not belong to the wider body, the Church, and does not have a role to play.

I would suggest that in reality the future of the church will be found in many smaller, not larger, or mega, gatherings. What do you think?

Perhaps it is also true that the future of the church will be found in those Christian communities who can even leave behind some of their loved traditions to simply gather in diverse ways and affirm:

- the presence of God as **experienced in mystery**; love, forgiveness, grace, creation.
- the Gospel is about **relationship and community** lived out within the wider community and world.
- the place of **Hospitality** as the foundation of God's longing for humanity and as a gracious act of welcoming.

If we are to think more broadly about Christian communities for the future, it's good to ponder and discuss the importance of these Characteristics... [see also the diagram and questions on the next page]

Christ centred communities... *Christian communities who are able to reshape how they gather and simply place Christian discipleship as the centre of faith community.*

Mission as relationship... *Christian communities who seek to be in relationship, inspired through their faith, within their "local" community.*

Unity in diversity... *"The unity of the gathered congregation is visible and experienced in the fellowship of people who are in themselves different". Freedom to rediscover, reshape, renew.*

One in Christ with other scattered communities *Christian communities who find encouragement, belonging and meaning as part of the wider body; the church.*

I think a Christian community of the future would be shaped by a theology of both missional community and gathered community central to the expression of love of God and love of neighbour. (Mark 12:29-31)

“... that the Gospel creates community and must be lived out in community with those it is trying to reach”.

McNeal, R - Missional Communities. The rise of Jossey Bass, 2011 p63

The Challenge is: “Can the church ‘for the sake of the world’ once again gain a sense of what it is to be the ‘community’ and join with the interests of God to gather people, break bread and tell the stories?”

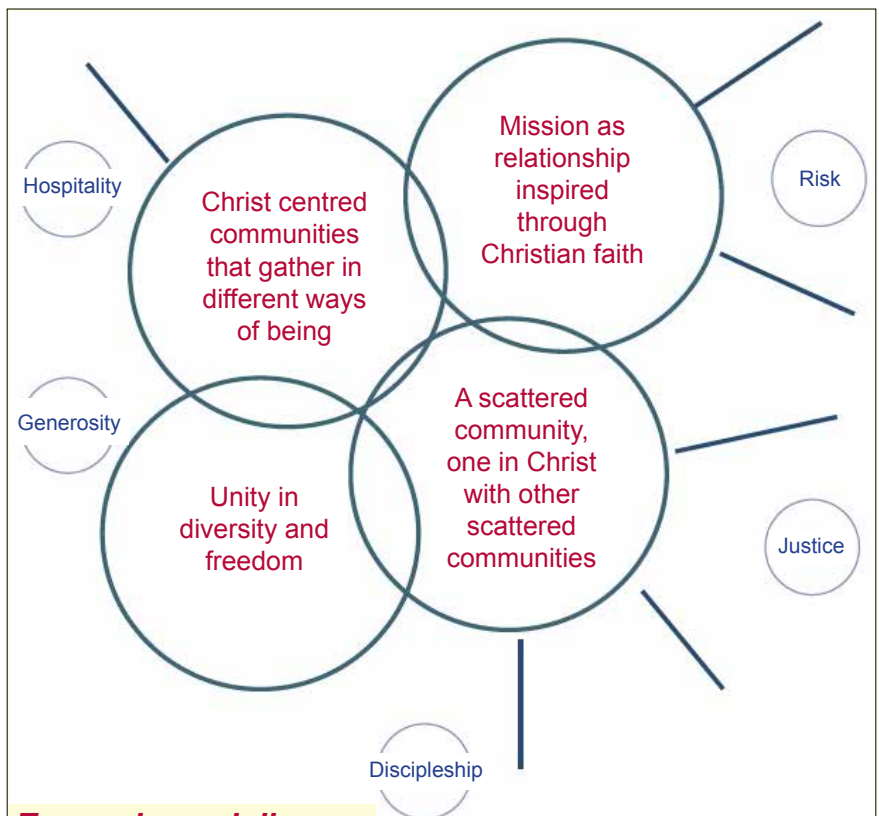
Wellington, G - God Talk: Community: Gather the people, break bread...2018

It is not uncommon for me to hear from congregations on my journeys about the “age” of members, the “few” in number, the “weariness” of volunteers, the “uncertainty” about the future. And yet, from rosters to routine, worship to witness, music to morning tea, messages to mowing, we have changed very little in how and what we do for decades. It is not age or numbers that dictate the ability to be a vital Christian community, but our willingness to change and be in missional relationship.

Reality

The reality is that within our secular society, people are still longing for companionship and meaningfulness. People would belong to a community of people who pondered life and faith and offered genuine hospitality, but not in the ways that the church has been in practice over the past 200 years. At the end of 2018 [Swinburne University released a study on loneliness in Australian society](#) which is a sobering reflection. [Website is at the end of this article]

In part is concluded; “Nearly 30 per cent of Australians don’t feel part of a group of friends, while one in four don’t feel they have a lot in common with the people around them. The research also shows nearly 55 per cent of the population feel they lack companionship at least sometimes, with the number highest in young adults (62 per cent) compared to seniors (46 per cent).”



To ponder and discuss

Some of the questions we may reflect on around each of these areas of character and moving into the future are:

- Q. What does your congregation do now in its gathering/worship that is different from what you did in 1980?
- Q. How does your congregation live out its life within the wider community? Why would a lonely person from the streets around you come along?
- Q. Do you have a future and what the future would look like? When was the last time you sat down openly as a congregation to reflect on this?
- Q. What does it mean to be a Christian community in 21st Century?
- Q. How do you reflect the diversity of your local community?
- Q. What do these following aspects of Christian life mean to your church?

Generosity – Risk – Discipleship – Hospitality - Justice

This means that within the streets surrounding our church buildings people are lonely! We may well ask when was the last time one or more of these people found companionship, hospitality, reflection on life and faith, within your congregation? It seems to me that throughout the gospels Jesus spent less time in rituals and buildings of the faithful than in the streets, around the tables, within the communities and on hillsides, drawing alongside people in their searching, needing and pondering of God.

Surely this is a reflection of living out the gospel as a Christian community!

Mark Faulkner

Swinburne Study: <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/latest-news/2018/11/new-australian-research-reveals-health-toll-of-increasing-loneliness.php>



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