

renewal

FAITH FOR A NEW SEASON ▪ SYNOD 37

Report from Presbytery of South Moreton



Summary

South Moreton has articulated its vision, mission, values, guiding principles and strategic priorities for 2023-28. This will shape and focus its work as a council over that period. We have further secured our presence at Flagstone through a property purchase, clarified church plant oversight with Newlife and Moreton Rivers Presbytery, continued to support Congregations in identifying and responding to opportunities for mission and community connection, and have been engaged with property development considerations, Act2 and enhancing governance. Among our challenges have been resourcing the church's people-heavy processes, and, with our Presbytery Minister concluding this year, finding the best shape for Presbytery ministry leadership going forward. Green shoots are celebrated in the emergence of new faith communities, Congregations on a revitalisation pathway, and an emerging strong regional network in Gold Coast City.

Context

South Moreton encompasses traditional lands of the Turrbal-Jagera, Quandamooka and Yugambah (Kombumerri and Mununjali) people, and the local government areas of Brisbane City (south), all of Redland City, Logan City and Gold Coast City, and part of the Scenic Rim and the Tweed.

The demographic trajectory is defined by rapid population growth, particularly in Gold Coast City (to double in size by 2050, especially in the northern corridor around Pimpama, Coomera and Oxenford), parts of Redland City, and the south and west of Logan City.

We have 31 Congregations and Faith Communities meeting in 41 locations; an active ministry list of 48 agents in Congregations and 11 in chaplaincies and agencies; four candidates in formation (two of them exiting this year); and six Period of Discernment participants.

In our recently adopted Strategic Plan the Presbytery expressed its vision in these words: United by the centrality of Christ in its life, the South Moreton Presbytery will be an effective, vibrant council committed to enhancing healthy Christian community, ministry and mission within its context.

Priorities

MISSION PLAN

A key piece of work that has only recently been adopted is the Strategic Plan developed by the Presbytery. In this plan, the Presbytery outlines its mission:

The Presbytery's purpose is to foster health, capacity and connections which enable individuals and communities to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and in their service to the world, within the life of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The Vision and Mission are undergirded by the values of Hope, Compassion, Generosity, Innovation and Gratitude. These values flow into our four core priority areas:

1. Making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. Growing vital, healthy mission in Congregations and other contextual expressions of church.
3. Optimising health, responsibility and capacity in our organisational life.
4. Cultivating connections and collaborations within and beyond the church.

Alongside these four focus areas we also have named some guiding principles as overarching considerations in all our work. These include our diversity and differences in culture, language and generations; the priority of engaging with children, youth and families; the need to draw on the skills and resources within the Presbytery; and an openness to collaboration within and outside the church. Whilst in its early days, the prayer is that, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Presbytery will engage with its Strategic Plan more closely and bring focus to its work.

FLAGSTONE

Across the Presbytery there continue to be significant pockets of new development and population expansion. One area of Presbytery focus has been the Priority Development Area of Flagstone, between Jimboomba and Beaudesert.

The Flagstone Community Centre (FCC) established by Presbytery in May 2020 continues to meet vital needs, and in May 2023 the Presbytery drew on its Mission Development Fund accounts to purchase the house it had been renting for this purpose. Since the 36th Synod, Susan Hawke concluded as our Community Development Officer and FCC Coordinator, and Mr Jack Bravo has been appointed the new Coordinator. Presbytery continues to seek partnerships to sustain the Centre's operational costs. A key extension of this work has been the appointment of Rev. Faye Talatonu as our first community chaplain based at the Centre, thanks to the financial assistance of UnitingCare Qld through its Connect100 program.

The Presbytery Standing Committee is discussing the best governance model for the Centre moving forward, as well as exploring possibilities for working with others to gather a Christian community together for worship, discipleship and mission.

PROPERTY POSSIBILITIES

Among the growing challenges for Presbytery in recent years, has been taking on greater responsibility for the management of some of the properties within its bounds. One major property is the Sunnybank site, which now has a recognised Faith Community meeting there. The buildings on the property need significant work and the Presbytery has been engaged in consultation for the best long-term use of the site. We hope to be in steps towards redevelopment by the time of the next Synod. In discussing the redevelopment of the site there is a clear desire to consider how the property may have a missional purpose but also provide an ongoing source of income. The greater level of responsibility for managing properties has involved paying a Property Officer and required the Presbytery to pick up other unforeseen costs.

CHURCH PLANTING

South Moreton has continued to work with Newlife Church in its strategy for church planting. One significant piece of work in this space has been the revision and strengthening of an agreement between Newlife, South Moreton Presbytery and Moreton Rivers Presbytery to cover Newlife church plants in northern Brisbane and the CBD. The agreement that has been developed should serve as a model for other potential church plants across Presbytery lines. The questions raised by the discussion reflect the complexities of our current geographic-based Presbytery model when dealing with Congregations or Faith Communities that are strongly linked across Presbytery boundaries. These circumstances, and the growing non-geographic online presence of many Congregations, invites serious thinking about how we exercise the episcopal authority of the Presbytery outside geographic definitions.

Two new Faith Communities have been recognised by the Presbytery as new gatherings of church – the Sunnybank Hills Uniting Church, which began with people from the closed Sunnybank Congregation but now includes a wider range of people; and the Tongan Uniting Church Logan City, offering worship and fellowship for the Tongan community of Logan City.

AMALGAMATIONS

The challenge of reinvigorating church life has taken other forms. In recent years, the Presbytery has helped guide and resource processes where clusters of Congregations have undertaken to discern a future together. Two significant groupings are Southside Uniting Church, which saw four Congregations amalgamate from January 2020, and Redlands Uniting Church, which formed from five Congregations amalgamating from January 2022. Large amalgamations such as these are very complex and challenging, putting strategic, pastoral, operational, resourcing, missional and governance questions all on the table, and it is fair to say that both groups are still finding their way. Southside has undergone a fruitful intentional interim ministry phase through 2022-23 and has called Rev. Andrew Gunton as their new Senior Minister to start January 2024. Rev. Dr David Ferguson started as ministry team leader at Redlands in November 2022.

Two other amalgamations should be reported to the Synod. Burleigh Village Faith Community and Burleigh Heads Uniting Church joined to become Burleigh Village Uniting Church as of 1 July 2022 (with Rev. Ralph Mayhew in placement), and Beaudesert Uniting Church and Canungra Uniting Church became Scenic Rim Uniting Church from 1 September 2022, maintaining weekly worship at both places (Rev. Dr Je Cheol Cook in placement).

PEOPLE

A key challenge we are grappling with is the availability of people for positions, whether in placements or Presbytery roles. Our way of discernment and governance does require many people and the constancy of the work of the Standing Committee, Pastoral Relations Committee, Property Committee, as well as the constancy of Joint Nominating Committees, Vitality of Call and Covenant, Life and Witness Consultations, and so forth are at times a burden. Our Treasurer is filling this role in two Presbyteries as is our Finance Administrative Officer. We have struggled to fill committees and positions, and although we have a Presbytery Chairperson in place this person came to the role only after a long search and with numerous people 'acting' or serving for short times. Key leadership members are also often drawn into complex and urgent issues which demand substantial time and

attention. Given the amount of work that is on our horizon, with the conclusion of our current Presbytery Minister through 2023, the Presbytery created two Presbytery Minister positions focusing on mission and strategy, and ministry and pastoral. However, after a search process over several months did not result in a recommendation for call, the Presbytery approved a revised arrangement and a new Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) process for a new Placement Description is just beginning.

ACT2

In response to situations and concerns such as outlined above, the Presbytery has sought to be actively engaged with the Assembly's Act2 consultation process, which is examining how fit for purpose our Regulations are 50 years on from when they were written. We pray that the conversations and new directions which emerge will be life-giving for the Presbytery and the whole church.

Plentiful focus

The 2023-28 Strategic Plan developed by the Presbytery echoes the Plentiful focus and its four key themes. The report above indicates a range of correlations between the Presbytery's work and the focus areas of Plenty. Here are some additional stories:

- Refreshing our approaches to local church mission and discipleship was the theme of three workshops held across the Presbytery in February 2023 by Phil McCredden, on "How do we sing a new song in a strange land? Congregation mission in a post-Christendom age". We were unable to achieve a follow-up workshop mid-2023 but we hope to make a video recording of this first workshop available.
- Every ministry agent in the Presbytery has received a copy of Peter Scazzero's book, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, from our concluding Presbytery Minister, as a stimulus for personal and communal reinvigoration of discipleship that is deep and transformative. Two retreat days were held using this book as a focus for reflection and sharing.
- Presbytery was proud to support the UCA's national Lay Preachers Conference, held in Brisbane on August 4-6, led by two of our members, Geoff Hill and Neil Ballment. Despite a lot of organisational challenges, including a 3-year delay and a couple of false starts due to Covid, this event was a great success and well-received. Our thanks to Geoff and Neil for their tenacity and commitment to see this through, and also to the speakers from Qld and further afield. Thanks also to the Synod's events team for their invaluable support.
- A significant venture in transforming communities and being 'one church' was led by Pastor Moses Leth of our South Sudanese Nuer Faith Community at Coopers Plains who, over the past few years, has led local fund-raising efforts, and then in February 2023 travelled to South Sudan for six months to help establish a primary school in a high-needs area. Over \$30,000 had been raised and has now been channelled into this project. This has been supported by our UCA partner, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan. The process of moving funds from Australia to South Sudan was complex but we are grateful to God that we were able to achieve the desired outcome for this missional outreach project.
- In another collaboration, since March 2022, the Presbytery has facilitated a quarterly regional gathering of ministry agents and key lay people from our 13 Congregations across the Gold

Coast. Called the Table of Hope (because we meet over lunch, in a spirit of God's hope), the purpose is to foster a Gold Coast City view of the UCA's ministry and missional presence, build relationships, seek to identify ways of supporting and collaborating to help each place flourish, and seek ways to strengthen the UCA's presence in strategic priority areas of the Gold Coast. The consistent high attendance and the depth of honesty and sharing indicates the priority and value which is placed on this event. Some great topics and ideas have been discussed, relationships forged, and awareness raised of the great variety in our Gold Coast churches, and the work of our agencies. A quarterly prayer cycle has been introduced and is widely used. Table of Hope has discussed engagement with First Peoples on the Gold Coast and encouraged participation in a walk on country at Burleigh Heads organised by UnitingCare Qld. It has been a great support for Lisa Mariconti's work with Plenty in developing the Gold Coast mental health pilot.

- Presbytery is always challenged to fulfil its broad responsibilities for oversight. We have adopted a more pro-active approach to oversight and care of our retired ministers, with Rev. Ian Lord accepting responsibility to update our list and coordinate this work, and of our candidates for ordination, with Rev. Jock Dunbar appointed as our Candidates Support. We are also finalising a revised list of Lay Preachers and Neil Ballment continues as our Lay Preachers Coordinator.

Challenges

The challenge that we face in many congregations is that they are not flourishing, and they are struggling with developing their mission as well as in terms of leadership and financially. Helping to move congregation towards a healthier future or towards a decision to amalgamate or even close is difficult. The capacity for some congregations to fulfil their responsibilities is of concern.

Despite a reasonable window of opportunity to find a new Presbytery Minister, especially when we had established a vision of having two positions, the JNC has not been successful to this point in time. The leadership requirements and the capacity of the Synod to provide those leaders is of significant concern and our people-heavy systems often mean that some individuals are required to do inordinate amounts of work. Gaps in our committees and the fact we have some key officers working in two Presbyteries raise serious questions about how we can sustain our current model.

Proposals to the 37th Synod

It is proposed that the 37th Synod receive this report.

Greener Shoots – possibilities and opportunities

We celebrate that we are seeing green shoots of new beginnings breaking through in places which have experienced a period of disruption, difficulty and even division.

We also are seeing green shoots of new missional confidence and efforts emerging in places which are taking an intentional fresh approach to building church-community connections, or a fresh approach to leveraging better missional and/or financial outcomes from the use of property.



We are seeing green shoots of encouragement, stimulation and possibility which come from Congregations with a shared community of interest choosing to relate and partner with each other. When we work well with others, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

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