



#realunitingchurch

Report from **Bremer Brisbane Presbytery**



Context

The Bremer Brisbane Presbytery consists of diverse congregations that include affluent suburbs close to Brisbane, multi-cultural and socially disadvantaged communities in the south and west of Brisbane with growth areas at Forest lake, Springfield and Ripley as well as developments around Ipswich and the rural communities south and west of Ipswich. Presbytery is bounded by the Great Dividing Range in the west and includes the Brisbane, Bremer, Lockyer, and Teviot Valleys. It includes the West Moreton District of South East Queensland, the regional city of Ipswich, and the western suburbs of Brisbane. It is experiencing strong growth. Most of this growth is in urban, dormitory suburbs. Towns in the West Moreton area are experiencing significant social change as population growth occurs. Ipswich city is being rejuvenated; socially disadvantaged populations are transferring to places in Ipswich and towns in the West Moreton as costs of living in Brisbane increase. The western suburbs of Brisbane are still attractive places for professional and business people. The Presbytery includes significant educational and corrective services facilities.

Priority Directions

There is a strong correlation between the Presbytery's strategic plan and the Synod's discerned priorities. As such it is helpful to reflect upon the Presbytery's efforts and achievements in terms of those priority directions.

To be Christ-centred, at prayer, and listening

The church at its very core is called to be Christ-centred, at prayer and listening to the Spirit as it discerns its way forward. Prayer undergirds the worship, witness and service life of congregations with most congregations having regular prayer groups and prayer gatherings. Several congregations run prayer days and prayer vigils, Fassifern has hosted a prayer weekend for the last two years and decisions at congregational and Presbytery level are enveloped in prayer.

The challenge is always to hold the balance between action and contemplation, between word and deed, between being fed and nourished and being engaged in mission. There needs to be a deliberateness to the listening but also an intentionality that enables us to move and respond to the Spirit's call.

Discipleship

Discipleship has been a clear focus of the Presbytery. The appointment of a full-time person with the role of facilitating discipleship is a key part of the Presbytery strategy commenced in November 2016. A mission matrix is being developed that will help congregations assess their life, ministry and mission against their own particular context. Particular activities aimed at encouraging our young people will be covered in that section but they are aimed at encouraging young people to explore the Christian faith in the context of their lives and relationships. Each congregation is encouraged to disciple and grow the people within their midst and the Presbytery seeks to encourage life-long learning and faith development within their local setting. Particular Presbytery events include a discipleship week presented by Craig Mitchell in combination with The Downs presbytery. The Presbytery has shared the leadership of the MSM (Mission Shaped Ministry) program with the Moreton Rivers and South Moreton Presbyteries. One of the outcomes of this emphasis on discipleship is the increased number of people enrolling in a Period of Discernment with currently 11 people enrolled and more expressions of interest.

One of our major challenges is that everyone is at a different place and space and has different needs. There is no one-stop-shop that will meet everyone's needs and it is a challenge and a calling to help our people continue to grow and respond to God's call upon their lives and to continue to grow in mission, witness and service. The other challenge is for all congregations to discipleship and encouragement of their people, at whatever age and stage, to be active in worship, witness and service. We need to regain an urgency about sharing the faith in ways that are relevant and appropriate. All congregations need to take this seriously if they are to thrive.

Leadership

Leadership is a key issue for the church and for the Presbytery. Ministers and lay people offer leadership within their congregation and community. Individual congregations conduct leadership training and mentoring as people undertake leadership roles. Leadership training is an important part of many of our youth and children's programs both at congregational and Presbytery level. Without restating all the events, they do provide leadership and training opportunities while being mentored by a more experienced person. These include Easter Madness, Renovators, Stretching Faith etc. The Presbytery conducts evenings for church council chairs, secretaries, treasurers and property people to support and inform their leadership roles. The Presbytery has set up an education and training committee with the specific intent of resourcing congregational leaders.

Many of the Presbytery's ministers avail themselves of leadership opportunities including the Synod Leadership training program and national and regional conferences provided by the church, other churches, and para-church organisations. These include but are not limited to UL16 and 17, president's conferences, MSM, 3DM, and other conferences. Many of our people, both lay and ordained, have been active in the Queensland Community Alliance and have completed two and six day training with them. There are several congregations that are strongly involved in Emmaus and Chrysalis and the Uniting Church provides strong leadership into those communities.

The challenge for many congregations is with the aging of the church, and being able to hand over to a new generation of leaders. Nor is there a guarantee that the new leaders wish to take over the current structures and processes.

Connecting with communities

Community connection is the lifeblood of most congregations who achieve this in a variety of ways. Supporting other organisations, at times providing strong leadership into them, running community-based programs, usage of facilities; all of these provide the potential for strong connections between congregation and community. These include but are not limited to Messy Church, MSM, Crossroads, support of chaplains and para-church organisations, Habitat for Humanity, various community clubs, eisteddfods, opportunity shops, and welfare support.

If we seek to be Presbytery-specific then the work within the Queensland Community Alliance has been invaluable in giving us a connection and purpose as we engage with unions and community groups around creating a better society and working for the common good. There have been some good connections and actions that have come out of working with the Alliance. Training in MSM and 3DM also provides training opportunities to help people connect to their communities. Though many churches have programs it is worth noting that the Indooroopilly Asylum Seeker program and the Active Faith program (university chaplaincy) are both assisted financially by strategic project funding.

The challenge in many congregations is the balance between building up the body and connecting to the community. Though we know that reaching out to the community builds the body up, there are congregations whose limited people power is involved in pastoral care and keeping the church going rather than reaching out into the community. In other congregations the balance between inward and outward focus by ministers, lay leaders and church councils is an ongoing tension.

Youth, children and families

The Presbytery's discipleship facilitator has re-energised this space. Presbytery events have been revitalised with Community on the Green, Encounter and Stretching Faith as well as meeting with and supporting youth leaders and pastors. Currently there are six dedicated youth and family pastors as well as other pastors and ministers working in this area. Many congregations are running youth groups, playgroups, Sunday Schools, Messy Church, and are involved in schools teaching RI and active on school committees and communities.

The Presbytery regularly runs the Safe Ministry with Children training and has a dedicated team of trainers. Three congregations run day camps and there are several congregations partnering with para-church organisations as they work with children and young people. There are congregations with active and vibrant ministry with young people and young adults. Presbytery staff and members have had key leadership roles in Easter Madness, the planned Synod young adult retreat, and Renovators as well as the training facilitated by MSM.

The challenge is that many congregations are older and are struggling to connect with the young people in their community. Neither do they have the critical mass to hold young families if they do come. Also for the congregations that do have young people, providing suitable leaders, activities and training opportunities to grow this important ministry area.

General issues

The Bremer Brisbane Presbytery has many positive aspects to its life. Some of our highlights over the recent Synodial term include the opening of Forest Lake in its new home in Ellengrove and the growth that is being achieved there. The opportunity shop is creating wonderful community connections as is the welfare support, free bread and the links to local schools and wider community. Forest Lake has the potential to become a regional church and with good strong leadership it is moving in that direction.

The church plant in the Ripley Valley is continuing to move forward. Weekly gatherings have begun and Rev Kath Behan has been working well grounding herself in the community and creating good connections with residents and developers. Supported by Wesley Mission Queensland (WMQ) there is a relocation subsidy being offered for people willing to move and become a part of the Valley Church Faith Community. Conversations are also exploring other mission initiatives involving WMQ in this community.

Active Faith is a strategic project looking at connecting university students to three congregations: Indooroopilly, St Lucia and Toowong. Particularly working through the Uniting Church's colleges, this project is aimed at leveraging off our connections and seeing ourselves as partners with these colleges.

The Lockyer Valley consists of three congregations in the communities of Gatton, Laidley and Hatton Vale. The congregations are in different places but work is being done collaboratively to look at how we approach ministry in the region. Similarly, the Ipswich churches are being encouraged to revisit the collaboration begun under Imagine Ipswich which was the impetus for

the Ripley Valley church plant. There is also an intentional two-year placement shared between Kenmore and Brookfield to help determine future ministry directions.

Challenges/risks as we progress

We have a number of congregations which are made up of older members who prefer a traditional style of worship and have increasing pastoral care needs. These congregations tend to be decreasing in numbers and their viability both financially and of resources continues to diminish. How to continue to provide appropriate ministry for them while still having energy and resources for green shoots.

The funding and resourcing of new initiatives and church plants is a key issue for the church and for our Presbytery, as we have a tendency to under-resource people, resources, funds and time before we expect them to be self-sufficient.

The challenge is to engage people at Presbytery and regional level when their lives feel so busy and their first commitment is to their local congregation. Finding fresh impetus and energy into the Presbytery space.

Some congregations suffer similar issues around people resources with much of the work being done by a dedicated few.

Proposal

It is proposed that the 33rd Synod receive this report.

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