

Rural Ministry Proposal

That the Presbytery approves:

1. the placement of two extra FT equivalent ministry agent positions (making a total of three FT equivalent placements) to work with rural and small communities to assist those communities in their missional life and outreach;
2. the funding for these positions to be made available from the start of 2019 for an initial 5 year period and
3. that the Rural Ministry Committee, in communication with other Presbytery bodies, put together job descriptions for the new positions.

Rationale

Within the space of a few years we have gone from a rural ministry team of three people down to one. At present, a single person is expected to resource, maintain contact and to encourage mission for a variety of congregations and faith communities over an area nearly the size of New South Wales. This is a non-workable and poor situation for our church to have set up. Not only is it doomed to burn out and demoralise the single ministry agent, but by this action the Presbytery has indicated that it has given up on much of the rural church, and it is expecting many Uniting Church faith communities to die away.

The rural church is not going to die away. There continue to be a number of vibrant and hopeful rural communities from Dongara to Denmark to Margaret River to Kojonup to Northam. By virtue of their being situated within often unique communities, these generally small churches continue to work creatively and ecumenically, and often have a far greater impact on their wider communities than the majority of our Perth metropolitan churches.

It is inevitable that some rural churches will close. This can no longer be helped, but our wider church still has a role to ensure this happens responsibly and with dignity. But that is not the only story coming out of the country! Many of our rural areas are vibrant and alive, and there are many possibilities open to us.

We have for the last decade been resourcing rural communities that are no longer able to afford stipended ministry. This has primarily been in the areas of leading worship, education and pastoral care. Many of our communities are moderately stable in those aspects of their ministry. What these small communities need now in particular is support from ministry agents to re-imagine and explore new forms of missional interaction with their local communities. What is also strongly needed is the face to face contact made possible through ministry agents to link small faith communities to the wider Uniting Church community and ethos

Two extra FT equivalent positions will allow the Rural Ministries Team to deliver a more individualised and needs based approach to encourage and support congregations and small faith communities. These may be in the form of two individual FT positions, or could

be three or more part-time positions where some work could be undertaken by ministers/lay leaders already in rural locations. A creative and multi-faceted approach will be needed.

The strong emphasis for the proposed new ministry positions will be on enabling change and missional community engagement. This will include a variety of tasks such as:

- Assisting churches to understand their passions and local missional settings – through their spirituality, through the Biblical witness, and through their current social setting;
- Assisting church members in forming new community links and relationships and strengthening existing ones;
- Assisting church members in obtaining educational or training opportunities to engage in mission (e.g. in conjunction with CEDAL);
- Encouraging church members in their current mission, and emboldening them for further mission;
- Helping churches to re-imagine new and creative ways of being church in the 21st Century.
- To liaise and help communicate with other Uniting Church resources, agencies and institutions.

In short, the new positions are intended to help implement the Synod Strategic Plan that has recently been promoted. It is the strong belief of the Rural Ministry Committee that our Strategic Plan will not find substance in many rural areas unless there are also deliberate and dedicated human resources to enable this Plan to take shape.

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