



Tuesday 19 February 2019  
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**The Presbytery of Western Australia Meeting was held on Saturday 9 February at The Billabong Uniting Church. More than 110 lay and ordained members from our congregations and faith communities around the Presbytery came together for fellowship and to seek the will of God for the business of the Presbytery.**

## Cleansing Smoking Ceremony

Mitchell Garlett, representing the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (Congress) WA Regional Committee, welcomed the Presbytery members to the land in Nyungar and English.

"For me as a young Nyungar man, it's a privilege for me to know my language as it gives me an identity to this place and my culture," said Mitchell.

"My heart feels happy as we gather here in this house of the Lord in this Nyungar place. Welcome."

Cheryl Lawson, Resource Worker, Congress WA Regional Committee invited Presbytery members to begin the meeting by moving outside in a silent act of prayer to walk through a smoking ceremony.

"When you walk through the smoke, the spirits of this



**Members of the Presbytery of WA took part in a Smoking Ceremony to open the meeting, led by Mitchell Garlett and Cheryl Lawson, from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress WA Regional Committee.**

place know who you are and we experience the healing spirit of God," said Cheryl.

## Walk humbly with God

Worship, led by Rev Luke Williams, The Billabong Uniting Church minister, began with the heartfelt singing of 'Build your kingdom here' and 'What a beautiful name' with The Billabong musicians.

Cameron Harries, who helps run The Billabong's 'Amplify Youth', gave the reflection around humility and a reading from Philippians 2:3-8.

"Remaining humble is a huge struggle, yet on the other



side of the coin, false humility is a huge issue. If we do something great, let us not diminish the achievement, but in recognition point the praise towards Christ," said Cameron.



**Cameron Harries, from Billabong Uniting Church, shared a reflection on humility during morning worship.**

"Humility begins with us recognising who Christ is, and how through the grace of God we do all things."

Cameron finished with Micah 6:8 and a challenge for the presbytery to reflect upon.

"Pay attention to who's in charge, be a part of the team and walk humbly with God," said Cameron.

**Rev Luke Williams, minister at The Billabong Uniting Church, led morning worship.**



### The church needs 'weird' Christianity

Following worship, Presbytery members were led by Rev Greg Ross, Strategy and Mission Planning Committee (SMPC) chairperson, in response to a request by the Presbytery Standing Committee to remind the Presbytery of the decisions made at the February 2018 meeting and to see if the *Basis of Union* may shed light on future directions.

Greg began by outlining statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) of the decline in church attendance, people identifying as 'Christian' or of a 'religion' of any kind. The only reason some Christian Churches seem to be maintaining a reasonable number attending is largely because of migration. Their numbers are because of the large number of Christian people coming from other parts of the world who are finding their new spiritual home by filling our churches.

The 2016 NCLS data for the Uniting Church WA revealed that only 3% of our current members were new to faith in the last five years.

However, Greg is really excited to be part of the church at this time.

"We can no longer do what we have always done. Now we actually have to think, observe, pray, test and review how the spirit of Christ is calling us to share the gospel in our different communities," said Greg.

"The number of people who are interested in 'spirituality' is on the rise."

Following Greg's recap of the journey so far, the members of Presbytery began their work with discussion in table groups.

In their groups, they discussed three questions:

Recap the journey so far this morning to bring to the notice of every congregation and faith community the reality in which we live.

Do you agree with what Greg said?

Share what you have heard?

Each table group recorded their responses on paper to share with SMPC.

Secondly, following the reading from the *Basis of Union* Paragraph 1, in their groups, they discussed three questions:

What do you understand this paragraph of the Basis of

Union calls all members of the Uniting Church to do?

How many people in your community of faith could you identify that are genuinely 'new to faith'?

How ready are you to share your faith story and invite others to follow the way of Christ?

Greg referred to the Anglican Bishop of Wellington, Justin Duckworth who talks about the need for much of the church in this post Christian, postmodern world to acknowledge that many of our churches are simply run down. We can't expect people to come if we don't welcome them, are mean to them, if the worship and music are poor, the preaching is bad, if there is no or very poor pastoral care and administration.

"Bishop Duckworth asserts that the western church is on the whole out of alignment with God because it's compromised, flabby and idolatrous," said Greg.

Thirdly, following the reading from the *Basis of Union* Paragraph 3, in their groups, they discussed five questions:

What would a truly 'pilgrim people' look like to the people in our community?

How would people recognise pilgrim people?

Where would pilgrim people be going?

What are pilgrim people seeking?

How does the church/these pilgrim people know if they're losing their way?

"Given the data on our church, I have more than a hunch that on the whole, our part of the church may indeed have lost our way," said Greg.

"The message that the church brings does not and is not resonating with the communities we live in, in Western Australia.

"It seems to me, that on the whole, the church as a whole, has lost its connection in speaking the hope and life of Jesus.

"We didn't recognise that we had become out of alignment with the community, and like the people in our scriptures, that most likely means that we were also out of alignment with God."

Our scriptures and church history teach us that every time the church is out of step with God and can no longer speak the word of God effectively into their culture, God seems to raise up a movement who take on the culture in such a way that God is able once again to speak the word of hope, healing and salvation.

"The church is moved a few steps closer toward the heart of God and the church is renewed," said Greg.

Greg continued by outlining that people of the inherited church offer gifts of resources, validation, stability and the holistic gospel, whilst the 'weird one percent fringe people' offer gifts to the whole church of being highly passionate and committed, heroes and innovators.

Having read the *Basis of Union* Paragraph 4, in their groups, they discussed three questions:

Through what ways have you noticed God renewing the church in your lifetime?

Can you identify some 'weird for Jesus' people who encourage you to be more passionate about your faith?

How, or whom, might God be using to reach out to command our attention today?

Over the past year, SMPC has been sharing the message that there is not a 'magic bullet' to fix the church.

Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM) is a tool box that invites you to start, explore, observe and see what the spirit is doing in your community. Grants from SMPC and the Commission for Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) make it possible to stop talking about doing something different in ministry that is more in line with our culture and the heart of God – and get in there and do it.

"MSM and Fresh Expressions gives permission to people who are called to this pioneer ministry to gather round them some people who share that passion, no matter how crazy it may seem to us, and just do it," said Greg.

Greg said one of the key lessons of MSM is that if it is of God, then you will find the means to do it.

"If people are really called by God to do this crazy thing, then part of the refining and testing process will be: how to do this thing; how to mix it between paid work and work

in the community; and how to invite others who support this crazy, weird, God thing to affirm it with their financial commitment" said Greg.

"The church often kills off these initiatives when we put a time limit on them to meet our success markers.

"It's also necessary to have mission coaching to provide extra encouragement and support for people as they respond to the creative and fresh ways of creating church."

The final piece of the puzzle was to read together the *Basis of Union* Paragraph 18.

Presbytery members applauded Greg for facilitating how we can regenerate and turn around the future of the Uniting Church WA.

"If this has sparked passion or anger in you, then please come and explore the way in which God is calling the Uniting Church WA to be a pilgrim people through the MSM course," said Greg.

**Rev Greg Ross led two workshops on Mission and the Basis of Union.**







## Access and Welcome

In the afternoon, Cindy Gorton, Uniting Church WA's Safe Church/Royal Commission Officer facilitated an in-depth discussion about access and welcome in our churches.

The 15th Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, held in July 2018 in Melbourne, approved the 'Statement of Access and Welcome' which seeks:

- (a) to embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people;
- (b) to ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised; and
- (c) to advocate for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.

At the December 2018 meeting of the Synod Standing Committee (SSC), it was resolved that the adopted 'Statement of Access and Welcome' will be circulated within the Uniting Church WA family with a view that each part will develop a response within their context to develop a 'Disability Action Plan', where they haven't already done so, in accordance with the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The aim is to eliminate access barriers pertaining to attitude and theology; communication; and physical environment.

Presbytery members were blessed to hear from Robbie Muir, member at Maylands Mount Lawley Uniting Church,

**Robbie Muir, with his mother Gill, shared some of his experiences as a visually impaired person attending church.**



who's been visually impaired since birth, share some of the challenges he experiences at church.

"I have had many problems in church, as most functions are visual," said Robbie.

"Church congregations are ageing, more people have sight problems, and like me, hearing problems. There is nothing worse than the loop not working and many responses on the overheads. You might as well have stayed home and watched *Songs of Praise*."

Members spent time in table discussion answering questions:

What does disability access and welcome look like in your church?

What does the Statement require of us?

What is our response to it?

Discuss how you and/or your church has identified and overcome barriers to disability access, welcome and participation in any of the focus areas.

Identify the types of communication barriers people with a disability participating in your church have faced.

What do we need to do in our churches?

How do we achieve meaningful access and participation for all people?

Discuss the strategies you have used or could use to overcome the identified communication barriers.

Members began a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) template.

Resources from the discussion are available on the Presbytery Meetings page of the Uniting Church WA website.

Presbytery members applauded Cindy for facilitating an informative workshop on how we can work towards eliminating access barriers pertaining to attitude and theology; communication; and physical environment.

## New Presbytery of Western Australia chairperson-elect



Following a ballot, Bob Hunt was elected as Presbytery of Western Australia chairperson for a two-year term to begin at the 14th Annual Meeting in May.

Bob currently volunteers as a financial counsellor with UnitingAid, is a member of the UnitingAid Board, Trinity North Uniting Church Council and Congregation Chairperson, and the Synod of Western Australia's Ministerial Benefits Committee Chairperson.

Lorraine prayed that Bob's closeness with God may pervade him at all times.

Chairperson, Rev Lorraine Stokes, will finish her term at the 14th Annual Meeting.

**Bob Hunt, pictured here with Rev Lorraine Stokes, was elected as the next Presbytery of WA Chairperson, from May 2019.**

## Moderatorial Nominating Committee

Presbytery members were invited to submit nominations for members of the Moderatorial Nominating Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to seek nominations of people who can provide leadership as Moderator. The Moderator-Elect for the triennium 2020 to 2023 will be elected at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Synod of Western Australia to be held from Friday 13 to Sunday 15 September 2019.

## Deliberations and decisions Reception of reports to the Presbytery

As agreed at the 11th Annual Meeting of the Presbytery of Western Australia held in November 2016, reports to the Presbytery were received individually to enable issues and questions to be addressed and discussed more effectively.

Reports were received from Presbytery Standing Committee (PSC), Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC), Presbytery Treasurer, and the Strategy and Mission Planning Committee (SMPC).

## Membership of Presbytery Standing Committee

Presbytery resolved by consensus to leave the member position vacant created by the resignation of Kalo Fotu on the Presbytery Standing Committee (PSC) until the annual elections in May 2019.

## 2019 Budget

Presbytery resolved by consensus to adopt the 2019 Presbytery of Western Australia budget.

Marilyn Price, Presbytery Treasurer, advised that the process of consultation was complete and the work of revising the budget had been finalised.

At the Presbytery of Western Australia meeting in October 2018, an Interim 2019 Budget was adopted as a working document as at the time, discussions around staffing structure and other income and expenses was ongoing.

Presbytery Standing Committee have effectively eliminated the \$277,714 budget deficit to \$10,710 through reduction in staffing costs through redundancies, reduced working hours, not replacing staff when positions became vacant and combining of work roles; asking congregations to consider increasing their Mission and Service contributions; reviewing income from Trust Funds; reviewing operational expenses to ensure costs are kept to a minimum; considering reduced costs of Presbytery meetings by not providing lunch; and requested the Synod of Western Australia to make a grant to the Presbytery to cover any remaining deficit.

## Presbytery of Western Australia funds

Presbytery resolved by consensus to request the Synod to approve the introduction of the Presbytery's new principle that, in future, any year end Presbytery of



Western Australia funds surplus to the Presbytery's Consolidated Budget be retained by the Presbytery in a Trust Fund, earmarked for future use of the Presbytery, with effect from 1 January 2019.

The knowledge that any surplus will be available for the Presbytery to carry forward to the next year, and not merely be absorbed in the Accumulated Reserves of the Uniting Church WA, will provide the Presbytery with more precision in, and control over, its future financial management and planning procedures.

## Committee Structure Streamlining

Presbytery resolved in principle to a new streamlined model for committee structures, that can more nimbly respond to the current and emerging missional needs of the WA church be established as follows: Presbytery Standing Committee; Pastoral Relations Committee; Enabling Mission Ministry (a new name will be proposed); and Equipping Missional Ministry (a new name will be proposed).

Permission to enact these four committees of the Presbytery of Western Australia will be sought at the 14th Annual Meeting in May.

Rev Narelle Collas, Rev Bev Fabb, Rev John McKane, Yvonne Robinson, Rev Greg Ross and Rev Lorraine Stokes were appointed to work together to ensure that Presbytery of Western Australia Rules are prepared for the Church Law Committee in good time for presentation to the 14th Annual Meeting.

The Presbytery of Western Australia Meeting in October 2018 resolved by consensus to request the Strategy

and Mission Planning Committee (SMPC) to continue facilitating conversations between the current ten committees of the Presbytery: Standing Committee; Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC); Property Committee; SMPC; Congregational Community Services Committee; Multicultural Committee; Uniting Generations Committee ; Rural Ministry Committee; Candidates for the Ministries Committee; and the Commission for Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) with a view to bringing a streamlined committee structure to the Presbytery of Western Australia Meeting to be held in February or May.

Uniting Church in Australia Regulations only define three committees: Presbytery Standing Committee, Pastoral Relations Committee and Property Committee, essential to support and equip congregations and faith communities.

## Less Presbytery Meetings?

A proposal that the Presbytery of Western Australia have three, rather than four formal meetings each year, starting in 2019, was deferred to the 14th Annual Meeting of the Presbytery of Western Australia in May.

## Change of date

The 14th Annual Meeting of the Presbytery of Western Australia was moved to Saturday, 18 May 2019 instead of Saturday 4 May.

## Save the dates

Currently, the Presbytery of Western Australia is scheduled to meet again on Saturday 18 May, 3 August and 9 November this year.

