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# PROPOSAL 4 - Beyond 10 year Extension of Rev Greg Ross at Wellington Regional Mission (Bunbury)

That the Presbytery of WA

1. agree to the Beyond 10 year extension of the placement of Rev Greg Ross with the Wellington Regional Mission (Bunbury St Augustine and Waterloo) congregations for a period of 5 years, commencing on 1 February 2020 to enable:
  - the new church council membership to be mentored into their role.
  - the new style of team leadership to be fully implemented
  - Encouraging and supporting the new ways of operating with the Mission Shaped Ministry approach.

## **RATIONALE**

Rev Greg Ross is now in the tenth year of his placement in the Wellington Regional Mission (WRM).

In order to ascertain whether the WRM, the Church Council and Greg were seeking an extension and in order to give Presbytery a range of information and observations, a review was requested.

The Presbytery were given ample opportunity to meet with the Waterloo congregation, the members of Church Council and Rev Greg Ross and with individual members who may have wanted to express an opinion.

The meetings were cordial and constructive with a free flowing exchange of honest and open dialogue.

We thank the members of both Waterloo and St Augustine's congregations for their hospitality, welcome and willingness to contribute to constructive discussion. The congregations were all very helpful in providing several documents to allow the review to be conducted in good time.

Two meetings were held on 5 and 6 April 2019 between the WRM, ministry teams, the Church Council and Rev Greg Ross. At both meetings, Rev Ross explained the process that Presbytery undertakes when a minister is seeking an extension of their ministry beyond 10 years in one place. The second part of the meeting, Rev Ross was excused and a wide range of issues were canvassed with many highlights raised and more difficult issues discussed in a constructive and open way.

The Waterloo membership is a small congregation comprising of around 16 with a number of people from one large extended family with strong historical links to the church plus members who travel from Collie, Harvey and Brunswick Junction because they value the style of worship and there is no longer a Uniting Church service in their towns.

The church was built in 1956 and while retaining some attractive art deco features particularly the curved frontage and the original sheoak church furniture, is very run down and requires significant investment to maintain it to a satisfactory standard. Of serious concern is the state of disrepair of the ceiling. Ongoing maintenance items are dealt with by the congregation and often funded by them individually.

The worship service takes place twice a month on the second and fourth Sundays at 8.45am. Occasional social events are also held. The preaching plan ensures the Waterloo congregation are provided with a minister, retired minister or lay leader to take the service and is organised by the Chair of the WRM, Glenys White. Any costs associated with the provision of ministry services are met by the WRM. The congregation transferred \$8500 to the WRM in 2018 and also generously supported Uniting Care Easter, the Red Cross Drought Appeal, Bunbury Foodbank and the Christmas Bowl. At the end of 2018, they had available to them \$6684.06 of which \$2000 was invested with the UCIF.

The congregation expressed their sadness and sense of loss at the departure of Rev Karyl Davidson more than two years ago and failure of the Eaton Millbridge Community Project to bring to fruition the dream of Waterloo being integrated into a larger extension of the Uniting Church's mission in the area. They spoke of their envy at seeing the growth that is taking place in Baptist and Church of Christ churches locally. They clearly care deeply for both their church and their local community and can see that the world around them is changing.

Due to the difficulty with overlapping service times, it is not currently possible for Rev Greg Ross to take a service at Waterloo and return in time to take the St Augustine's service. Consequently, Greg's involvement with the Waterloo congregation has been minimal and while two members of the Waterloo congregation sit on the WRM, interaction between the Waterloo congregation and the remainder of the WRM particularly St Augustine's appears to be very limited.

Accordingly, they generally felt that the decision to extend Rev Greg Ross' term beyond 10 years was not of particular relevance to them. Most members present expressed no objection and were very happy to have been consulted but felt the decision would have little impact on them. One member took the opportunity to make a written submission that does not support an extension of ministry and stating that 10 years is a fair allocation of time. The congregation did however recommend that the PRC review the Wellington Regional Mission and the relationship between Waterloo and St Augustine's to enable a better way forward for both congregations.

**Messy Church at St Augustine's** operates on the second Saturday of the month and there was only a small response from members of the group. The average attendance at Messy Church is about 50 to 60. They expressed their great gratitude to Greg and the team for the Messy Church congregation. They are fully supportive of the request for an extension to Greg's ministry and expressed a fervent hope that it would be granted.

During the consultation process, the following questions were dealt with:

**1. How would you describe the match between the needs of the congregation and the gifts of the Minister?**

- Greg's range of gifts were variously described and highlighted by many speakers. These gifts included that he is entrepreneurial, able to take the wide visionary view, hardworking, welcoming, pastorally caring, genuinely inclusive, informal, well connected, has a community profile, musically talented, thought

provoking preaching skills, challenging, totally focused on mission, encouraging of others, looking for ways to strengthen the team.

- St Augustine's is a growing congregation with most growth coming from people moving to Bunbury or choosing to worship at St Augustine's instead of another denomination. St Augustine's confirmed members number 156, with an additional 60 – 70 adherents and members in association. The Messy Church congregation has steadily grown over time and now numbers 50 – 60 regularly attending. It is the focus for young families, many of whom are from a non-church background.
- Greg's range of gifts have been well used and the growth in numbers, the growth in the spiritual journey of individuals and the growth in the leadership team and their skill set through Mission Shaped Ministry training clearly demonstrates a minister and congregation working together to harness the best that the Minister has to offer.

## **2. What have the most satisfying aspects of the present placement?**

- The welcoming, inclusive nature of worship was raised as a highlight. Visitors comment on this and the openness of the Uniting Church to diversity was seen as a key reason some people had chosen to worship at St Augustine's.
- The Mission Shaped Ministry training and the development of four key teams with responsibility for Welcoming, Enabling Faith, Serving and Administration which encompass the vast majority of the components of operating and growing the mission of the church. An oft repeated comment was the need for the leaders and members of each team to step up and take on the roles ascribed to them to relieve Greg of many minor tasks.
- New members of Church Council with a wide range of skills and interests is seen as a really positive move releasing long-time members from heavy responsibilities while remaining available to mentor and support new folk coming through.

## **3. Have there been any areas of concern in the present placement?**

- Generally there was minimal negative commentary. It was noted that sometimes when they went to do a task that they thought had been agreed was their responsibility, they would find Greg had already gone ahead and completed the task.
- The matter was raised about Greg's wide involvement with Messy Church both at a state level, nationally and internationally plus his leadership and championing of Mission Shaped Ministry training and his role as Chair of SMPC and other Presbytery duties and we asked how the congregation balanced his absence with his ministry responsibilities. The leadership group confirmed that Greg gave ample notice of proposed absences, worked hard to be well prepared in advance, generally tried to be back in Bunbury for Sunday services and the total of his absences was no greater than the allowed number of weekends off, annual leave and study leave applicable to all ministers in placement.

## **4. How would the congregation plan for a transition process over the next five years if Greg were to remain?**

- A number of key initiatives which are bearing fruit and require further time to be fully developed and the consensus view seemed to be that a few more years under Greg's leadership would allow these important projects to be consolidated, leaders and teams to be trained up and well placed to step up to additional responsibilities and an intentional plan implemented to deal with the possible difficulty of finding a new minister resulting in a gap in ministry.
- Messy Church has grown and is an exciting example of mission to the unchurched. It has relied on Greg's enthusiasm and leadership to grow it to its current numbers (around 55 – 60) but the leadership team is now able to operate without Greg's presence and there is a desire to continue to become independent and able to function as an effective unit regardless of Greg's availability. This augers well for sustainability of the Messy Church congregation past the tenure of the current minister.
- The Leadership teams were planned and implemented last year but are yet to be fully embedded within the congregation. The members of Church Council indicated a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring they 'stepped up' as leaders to relieve Greg of many tasks that could be assumed by others and consequently reduce the congregation's dependence on a strong leader. The operational plan is well written and details the many interconnecting facets of congregation life with definitive goals and actions to be achieved. The intention is to lift the Church Council to a more strategic overseeing role and make use of the teams to look after the operational role. Greg's leadership and experience will be well used as this process is embedded but once in place, the Church Council will be stronger and able to be more mission focused.
- There was a clear understanding on the part of the Church Council as we met with them that Greg's ministry tenure is finite and the remaining years, assuming an extension is granted, will need to be put to good use strengthening the many great programs and mentoring and growing the skills and enthusiasm of new and emerging leaders.

**5. Is it good for the ministry and mission of the congregation for the placement to continue?**

- The consensus view seemed to be that the work undertaken in the past ten years but particularly the last few years is at a pivotal point in its development and needs some additional years to bring it to fruition. Examples include bringing new people onto Church Council and mentoring them to take over leadership roles that have been held for long periods by the same people. The growth and development of the Messy Church congregation continues as an intentional process with strong membership and the need for a continuation of the process that empowers the team and does not require Greg's presence or involvement to make it happen. The development of the teams around Welcoming, Serving, Enabling Faith and Administration needs further development and growth in the confidence of people to take on these roles and relieve Greg of some aspects of his work.
- Another aspect of Greg's ministry that was raised was his witness in the wider community and standing as a respected minister and Christian person. He conducts an annual Remembrance Service for those who have lost loved ones in conjunction with the local Funeral Directors and it is very well received by people of all faiths and those who would not identify as having any faith. He is not afraid to talk about faith and God

and is known as a person of integrity which is a great witness to the mission of St Augustine's.

- It certainly appears that it is good for the ministry and mission of the congregation for this placement to continue for a further period possibly of up to five years.

## **IN SUMMARY**

St Augustine's certainly benefits from the skills, time and experience of Rev Greg Ross. It is evident that Greg and his family have a deep desire to remain in Bunbury for a further period and of the as yet unfinished work which has been commenced but needs additional time to develop and grow.

The situation at Waterloo and the history of the WRM was discussed and there was general agreement that it is time for a review of the function of WRM as the passage of time and various events have changed the purpose for which it was established. Greg is keen to canvass a south west collaborative approach to ministry which could consider ways that smaller congregations – Waterloo, Donnybrook, Collie, Darkan, Capel, Nannup, Dunsborough, Margaret River and Augusta might be better supported and served by a model that treated the whole region as one with a team of ordained and lay people offering worship and pastoral support.

A new mission opportunity seems to be opening up with a new subdivision adjacent to the previous Eaton Millbrook project being developed and the opportunity for land banking needing to be canvassed. The second manse is available and Greg has dreams and ideas for a future Uniting Church presence in the area. He is a visionary type of person who really is able to see the bigger picture.

It can take years to encourage people to take up leadership roles and Greg has worked hard to bring new people onto Church Council to allow others who have served for a long time to step back from their roles. He feels that this work needs more time to be successful and to transition younger people into leadership roles.

Greg is rightly proud of the Messy Church congregation and sees the further growth in confidence of the team as a key role to be encouraged to ensure a sustainable and meaningful future for Messy Church.

There is no doubt that Greg feels that his work at St Augustine's, Bunbury is not yet finished and he is very hopeful that an extension will be granted to allow consolidation of the mission that has commenced but needs more time to be developed. However, comments were also made that Greg's leadership style could be seen as dictatorial and Church Council have given in to his 'demands' on occasion.

Worship services are typically Sunday worship at St Augustine's with about 80 in attendance with a small number of children present. The children were well catered for in the service. There was good music and a well presented power point to assist with worship. There was a friendly supportive feeling about the congregation.

There is a strong and cohesive desire on the part of the Church Council and many other individuals for Rev Greg Ross' ministry to be granted an extension to allow a number of worthwhile and exciting projects and activities to be embedded, developed and moved to independent sustainability over the next few years.

It has taken years of hard work to grow the church and to encourage and grow new leaders from within the congregation and more time is needed to ensure the mentoring and encouragement needed to successfully transition from the old guard to the new.

If Greg was to leave his position now, the disruption to the mission of the church and the work already undertaken by the Church Council would be significant. It is likely that filling any vacancy would be difficult and delayed in the current climate of ministerial shortage and this would impact adversely on the congregation and the Church Council. The enthusiasm currently displayed by Church Council and the congregation would be severely impacted should an adverse decision be reached and the momentum currently in play would be unlikely to be maintained.

**MOVER: REV JOHN BARENDRECHT      SECONDER: REV ALAN JEFFREY**

***EXTRACT FROM REGULATIONS***

***EXTENSION OF CONGREGATION PLACEMENTS BEYOND THE TENTH YEAR***

*2.6.8 (a) (i) A placement in a Congregation may be extended by the Presbytery beyond the tenth year by agreement of the Minister, Youth Worker or Lay Pastor, Congregation and Presbytery.*

*(ii) Any extension shall require a two-thirds majority by secret ballot of those present in each of the meetings of the Church Council, the Congregation and the Presbytery.*

*(b) Such extensions may be for periods of up to five years at a time.*

*(c) A decision to extend a placement may be made at any time during the ninth and tenth year of a placement, or, in the case of any subsequent extension, at any time during the last two years of the current extension.*

*(d) When considering requests for extension the Presbytery shall:*

*(i) consult with the Congregation, and give consideration to the continued growth in the mission and development of the Congregation;*

*(ii) consult with the Minister, Youth Worker or Lay Pastor, and give consideration to the welfare and vocational growth of the minister; and*

*(iii) seek advice from the Placements Committee.*