

# Croydon Uniting Church

## *Planning for a sustainable future*

- God through Jesus always calls us to follow in love
- It is clear that the congregation is undergoing significant change, along with the widespread and deep-seated changes that surround us in a globalised world and multicultural western society.
- The Church Council is working hard to explore ways to address these changes, to faithfully share the Christian good news in the wider community, and to keep *making a difference* in Croydon beyond 2025.
- This bulletin contains some of the messages and dreaming from worship and AGM on Sunday 22 March 2015, and outlines some of the next steps.

*Edited by Rohan Pryor for the Church Council, May 2015*



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA  
CROYDON CONGREGATION

*Communication bulletin May 2015*

## ***It's time to talk faith!***

The Christian faith is clearly not about buildings, and isn't even (simply) about worship. The Christian faith is about the whole gospel, for the whole of the community, for the whole of life. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the Church in our time is the need to talk faith in the everyday language of our neighbours.

Bronwyn and the Church Council encourage you to explore the following three questions in conversation with others:

1. *What do you love about our church faith community?*
2. *What would you like our church faith community to look like in 10-15 years' time?*
3. *If our church faith community were to change what would you like to keep from the present?*

Is there anything further you wish to add?

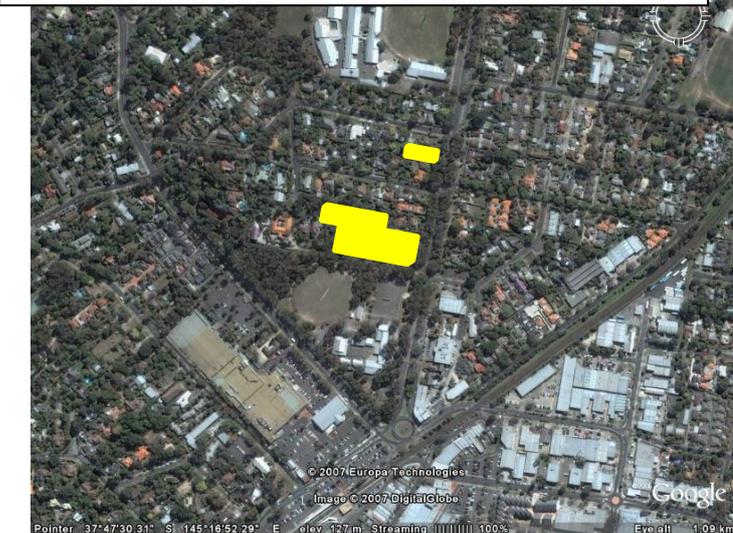
You might talk over a drink, a meal, a walk or a prayer. Visiting Elders can assist the conversation, and Church Council wants your answers. It's time to talk faith!

Like Jeremiah, despite the turmoil and uncertainty that surrounds us, we can still live with hope. Perhaps we can't see what on earth God is doing, and feel abandoned, and judged. Perhaps we would prefer to find a safe sanctuary somewhere, to hide and pray for deliverance.

But Jeremiah stands in the courtyard of the guard, in the midst of the turmoil, uncertainty and conflict, knowing that exile and further suffering are coming. He makes a prophetic statement of hope, and takes concrete action (see the verses following).

Buying a block of land like Jeremiah, or planting an acorn, is a faithful long-term statement of hope. Constructing a complex of church buildings and creating a Christian community are faithful actions too, statements of hope we have inherited from previous generations. None of these actions brings fast results, and none of them are simple or static: growth and decay are both essential parts of living.

We live in times of widespread uncertainty and unsettling change, but we can live in the confidence that God is faithful, that God still calls us into mission, and that we can continue to be God's people even in what sometimes feels like exile in a strange land. We can live with courage and in hopeful expectation of the good news that is coming, and is already here amongst us in the Spirit of God.



## ***Living with hope in uncertain times***

*Extracts from a sermon by Rohan Pryor on Jeremiah 31:31–34*

Jeremiah was the one of the great prophets of Israel, writing in a time of change and deep hopelessness. Many generations before God had led the people out of Egypt, shown them to the promised land, and blessed a united kingdom. But by Jeremiah's time half of that kingdom had been destroyed by Assyrians, and the southern tribes were being overrun by Babylonians. The remaining Israelites couldn't see what on earth God was doing, and felt abandoned, and judged. Jeremiah certainly tells the people they are being judged for their faithlessness, but also continues to give them hope. "The days are coming," the prophet says, conveying God's message to the people, "when I will make a new covenant with my people".

The passage we read today is the high point of Jeremiah's prophecies, and is the only Old Testament passage to use the phrase "new covenant". Jeremiah declares that the days are coming when God will make a new covenant ... and with the benefit of hindsight we know that Jesus Christ embodies this new covenant in his life, ministry, and death. This is not the old covenant of moral laws, food laws and sacrifices, but a new covenant of relationship: "I will be their God, and they will be my people".

## **What can you imagine?**

*Extracts from the info session by Rohan Pryor on 22 March*

In times of significant change, imagination is required to find creative ways to share faith and address challenges.

Think about some of the young children and teenagers you know and love. Think about the twenty younger people who participate at Croydon UC regularly. Picture them in your mind. Imagine their delight in discovering the beauty and intricacy of the world, and their joy in simple loving interactions with other people, including you. Thinking about the many people we love assists in 'big picture' and creative thinking, neurologically.

What can you imagine? I have begun to imagine possible futures for this faithful community and the facilities that could support our vision and mission goals. I can imagine a lot ... but this is not about everyone getting on board with my vision; my purpose in sharing is to encourage you to imagine too, because together we can imagine so much more than I could on my own. So I am going to share some of the things I can imagine, and then we will invite you to do some imagining on your table groups too.

I can imagine ...

- worship and gathering patterns that support and enhance our faithful discipleship for mission which are much simpler than the current traditional patterns that take so much work for formal weekly worship;
- richer links between the activities of the congregation and the local schools, the local service organisations, the local community groups, in serving the needs of folk in Croydon;
- collaboration between the Uniting churches in our region, with each church focussed on the needs of different segments of the population – rather than each just wishing we had “more young people”;
- if I really stretch my imagination ... this sort of collaboration between the other churches in Croydon;
- small groups of people reflecting on what they heard in a sermon and felt in worship, and experienced in their daily lives, in order to live faithfully in their everyday vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world;
- small groups of people gathering each week to share their lives and deepen their faith, and a larger monthly gathering to celebrate in worship together.

I can imagine ...

- building facilities with more accessible toilets, more diverse and flexible patterns of activity, and that need less maintenance than our current properties;
- flexible individual seating that can be configured and clustered in a range of patterns and orientations, enabling us to see each other face to face, and allowing

us to share with each other the difference that our faith makes to our daily lives;

- opening up the walls of the worship space that face Croydon Road, extending that building towards the road and behind the sanctuary to include flexible fellowship spaces, toilets and kitchen – all on one level;
- building three or four units in place of the Croydon Road manse and selling them off to fund further development of the Tallent Street site;
- demolishing the two aging halls, developing the current car park with town houses or an apartment complex, selling some and keeping some for sustainable income, and one as a manse.

I can imagine more, but it's not about my imagination alone ... it is about our faithful imagination together. Our buildings and facilities only exist to support God's ministry and mission in Croydon, rather than take up so much of our energy and money to maintain, and as a continual focus of our attention. How is God calling us?

## **What did we imagine?**

*During worship on 22 March, table groups were invited to write or draw what they could imagine: ideas for shared vision, key questions, & possibilities for us to explore further. The full list will be put on display in fellowship space.*

**Younger members** wrote on pages with an acorn & cap:

- church to be more fun, more hands on activities
- more activities at *KUCA* and *YUCC*, sleepovers
- less songs, cool music, different songs
- more big events involving many churches' youth
- being a community, better communication with the community and other churches
- new layout of grounds, 'new' hall space, pool
- start church at 10:30 so people get to sleep in, afternoon or evening service, notices at end of church
- a gardening program so people can help the garden outside the church; share the produce from the garden with the community.



**Worship at the National Christian Youth Convention (NCYC) January 2014 in Parramatta, Sydney: Croydon Uniting Church sent 8 young adults and 4 leaders.**

**Older members** shared ideas and wrote on blank pages:

- church community that reaches out to the community
- retain a wonderful, holy place capability in the design of a flexible space (not hired facilities)
- rent rooms offsite (e.g. school) for worship, and share property with community, no actual church 'building'
- involve young people in the planning, support our young people in whatever way we can
- use all the land, reduce maintenance in the redesign
- mission leads to service plan (what we do, facilities needed), leads to master plan for the site, giving multifunction worship space, less formal worship
- dislike idea of monthly services: always the wrong day
- let's Skype other congregations for worship
- solar power for our church, double glazing
- sharing ministry between other Uniting Churches and ecumenical services with other churches
- community garden, peace garden
- demolish Croydon Road manse and build 4 townhouses, invest to become (financially) sustainable
- provide, with the community, more programs that would enable use of buildings and alterations to help this happen, for other purposes including gathering areas for small groups, e.g. daily playgroups
- is the present site still viable – could the church relocate and use the proceeds to move?
- more people and a surplus budget; more young people
- subdivide property, sell some (e.g. Croydon Road manse) to employ worker, use for mission, low-cost welfare housing, women's shelter, aged care, ...
- learn from other churches' growing numbers, re-examine our faith and how we should express it (whole Synod/Assembly as well as locally)
- explore cost of using the school car park each Sunday, perhaps helping to fund school chaplaincy
- band could be in the building at other times to just Sunday, interacting with children during the week
- different ways to engage (as Rohan imagined): small home groups each week and maybe 'hire' a large venue maybe once a month (less maintenance), or maybe the refiguration of our own central space
- really still need a central focus (meeting) venue, maybe flexible space e.g. North Croydon, North Ringwood
- combined services with all other churches: Anglican, Catholic, Fundamental, 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist, 'Crossroads', Salvation Army
- recognise that the Chin Christian Congregation of Melbourne is an important relationship into the future
- social media presence, *Facebook & Twitter* for keeping up to date, *Pinterest* for inspiration, use less paper!

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***Who can help us discern mission and property matters?***

Particularly in light of the dramatic Acacia College collapse, the Uniting Church's Synod Property Board and Property Services staff have strengthened both the policies and oversight procedures around property use and project management. This includes support for mission review and strategy development. A key aspect of this approach is the role of the presbytery as our 'discernment partner' with regional oversight and support. The Synod Property Board looks to the presbytery for advice on the vision and sustainable mission of congregations planning any property changes.

### ***What Uniting Church expertise we can rely on?***

Experience in both mission review and property development, and processes to guide us through the processes, do now exist within the Synod Property Services team (John Emmett and Lucia Fitzgerald) and the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra (Robert Elkhuizen). However extracting the best value from each site for each local congregation and the wider church is a larger task that requires more specialised skills in a variety of areas than these staff can handle alone, so they help guide congregations through the processes and to liaise with suitable specialists to explore a range of viable options which are summarised in a ***feasibility study***.

### ***What is a feasibility study, and how much does it cost?***

The feasibility study process includes obtaining quotes from more than one professional services company that can provide the required expertise and feasibility report. The price for the feasibility study/report may be \$15,000-30,000 depending on the complexity of the local situation and the pricing of the company, which is why competitive quotes are obtained.

### ***How can the cost of a feasibility study be met?***

The local congregation can fund the study itself from reserves, raise the funds in other ways, or the Synod is putting in place processes where some surplus funds from the *Uniting our Future* process can be borrowed as 'seed funding' in the expectation that a property redevelopment project would generate funds to repay this loan. The feasibility study report would present several viable options for the congregation to decide upon – whether they are 'palatable' will depend on the local commitments, motivations & willingness to change.

### ***Have any other churches been through this process?***

Both the Synod and Presbytery have examples of other congregations who have recently been through this process. That is a key part of why we have sought early meetings with Synod and Presbytery staff, so that the Church Council can hear some of these other examples as well as clarify the process. Examples of a feasibility study report can be borrowed from Robert.

### ***Are there any other viable options?***

There may well be various other paths, but there are no simple answers to these complex issues, and none of the options are sure to succeed. The Croydon UC Strategy Committee, and Synod and Presbytery staff, have not been able to identify other practical, feasible and faithful paths (nor has the Church Council in related discussions in recent years). We could consider amalgamating with another Uniting Church congregation in the region, or another Christian church in Croydon. We could consider a major fundraising drive, though we have tested the limits of our capacity to raise funds in recent years. We could conduct a major evangelistic drive which would require significant congregational energy, commitment and confidence. These are each challenging options which would require substantial energy, new capabilities, and radical change from current patterns.

Substantial changes in the makeup and size of the congregation over the next ten years will occur regardless, due to our current age profile. The path that appears more likely to sustain us 'much as we are' is to sell some of the spare property we have, effectively converting grass into funds for toilets and hall.

Developing property would likely generate more income than selling an empty block of grass. Redeveloping some of the property for our purposes (hence the focus on our mission goals), and potentially retaining some of the developed property as an income source could provide sustainable income into the future to fund ministry and mission in Croydon.

If we simply sold the Croydon Road manse we could apply to use a proportion of the proceeds: about one third is made available to the wider church (via BOMAR, see p. 16 of *Discerning Mission*), and the other two thirds can be used for local initiatives through joint application by the congregation and presbytery – hence the importance of the presbytery as discernment partner, and their assistance in developing and approving the local mission goals as realistic and faithful.

A feasibility study explores the numerous possibilities to support mission goals through property development, and provides options to realise the best return on the assets of the congregation to sustain mission and ministry in the long term.

So if we could be looking at a large redevelopment project then the cost of the feasibility study is a relatively small cost to ensure we get the best value from the assets and the project. A feasibility study is seen as a very standard part of the due diligence and missional planning now expected by the Synod Property Trust and the Presbytery.

### ***Next Steps ...***

1. The Church Council will continue to explore the options that will most realistically enable the Croydon Congregation to continue faithfully *making a difference* in Croydon well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Please pray for the Church Council, minister and other congregational leaders as they continue to discern God's call to faith and community.
2. The Church Council encourages the whole congregation to explore and share responses to Bronwyn's questions (see *It's time to talk faith!* on page 1), which explore effective ways to share faith in the local community, and to listen for stories of congregations stepping out in faith.
3. The Congregation will be informed about the feasible options and costs to proceed at key points, and will be asked to consider the recommendations of the Church Council for endorsement, or to provide viable alternative strategies.
4. Planning for a sustainable future takes faith and courage, as well as a willingness to reflect on our past patterns and commitments, to reflect on the essence of the Christian faith and inherited cultural patterns, to learn about the fundamental changes in society the whole church is going through and how to share faith in this new context, and to discern God's call to us in this time and place.
5. Our vision and mission goals express the priorities and commitments the Congregation has sustained in recent times. Whether we can sustain all of these into the future requires further discernment. Sharing faith in ways that reach the communities of today has also changed, sometimes in ways we barely begin to recognise. We live in a 'marketplace' of various styles of Christian faith, other faiths, and none. We are not called to attract others to the Church, but to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in the world. That statement needs further unpacking and understanding in the light of the gospel.

*We can be confident of the presence and guidance of God's Holy Spirit as together we explore life in faith and discern God's call to us as a community of faithful disciples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Croydon.*

*Rohan Pryor on behalf of the Church Council, May 2015*