



It was time for the monsoon rains to begin and a very old man was digging holes in his garden.

“What are you doing?” his neighbour asked.

“Planting mango trees,” was the reply.

“Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?”

“No, I won’t live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude.”

At each of its meetings, the Church Council spends time in reflection and prayer. The story above was part of the reflection offered at the October 27 meeting. Following this reflection, the meeting received a report on the process of property redevelopment, which has been slowly proceeding through several councils of the church during the course of this year (congregation, presbytery and synod). The Church Council did so in the spirit of how to express gratitude to those who have gone before us – for the site and its buildings which we presently enjoy – and for what might be inherited by those who come after us.

The story of this process dates back to at least the Annual General meeting of the congregation on March 22 of this year. At that meeting we were reminded 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. We endorsed mission goals which encompassed: nurturing discipleship for mission; sharing God’s love (locally, for the world, and in fresh words and deeds); and building partnerships.

At that same meeting, we worked in table groups to write or draw what we could imagine as ideas for shared vision. A long and exciting list of these ideas was created and subsequently distributed in a Bulletin. The enthusiasm for finding new ways to live and serve as God’s people was considerable. Yet we were also reminded that our financial and human capacity is limited, and our current site and buildings may not be fit-for-purpose for how to live as God’s people in the years and decades immediately ahead of us.

In the intervening months, the Church Council and Executive have continued to work to consolidate our relationship with the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra (the Uniting Church, regionally) and the Synod (the Uniting Church at a state-wide level). Our mission goals were

presented to both of these partners in June (in a considerably expanded form, known as ‘Form 2A’ which actually did take three months to develop), and were subsequently approved by both in July.

Over-simplifying, this process has effectively been Croydon Uniting saying “we wish to be in partnership to develop mission-centred plans for the future, and to engage professional consultants to help us, as appropriate”, and both Synod and Presbytery replying “the ideas are sound and there’s people, ideas and property to work with – we agree that we should get on with it”. This has enabled the Synod Property Services team to seek quotations from external advisors who can lead us through the development of a very significant document, the “Feasibility Study and Business Case”.

This “Feasibility Study and Business Case” will be a very comprehensive presentation of our mission, and how property and finances can be re-arranged to meet our future goals. In a sense we need to build a bridge between what the congregation has been, and still is to a large extent, and what the congregation may become in the future. We know the future will be quite different, but we will have to explore, discover and discern that as we move into the future, seeking God’s guidance.

The details and costs of the quotation were presented to Church Council on October 27, and we are pleased to advise the arrangements for this and what has been agreed to:

When will it take place?

The “Feasibility Study and Development of Business Case” will take place between January and June 2016.

Who will guide this process?

The process is overseen by a ‘Project Control Group’ (PCG) with representatives from Synod, Presbytery and Croydon Uniting. Church Council has appointed Rohan Pryor, Paul Chandler, Charles Popple and Kerry Shearer to be our representatives. They have commenced preliminary meetings to ensure that the full process (commencing in January) will be as efficient and focussed as possible. The PCG will report to Church Council.

How much will it cost?

Between \$63,000 and \$70,000

What will this provide us with?

The Report will physically be a “very thick book” which will be comprehensive in terms of attention to mission, financials, property and engineering and other specialised reports. It will include a small number of realistic options for the future of the physical buildings; the congregation will need to consider these and make a choice about how we proceed.

Who will fund this expense?

Each of the “future options” will be designed so that income is generated to repay the initial study. As to who funds the study up-front, there are two sources. Firstly, the Presbytery has a loan-fund in development, and we have good reason to believe that this will be available by January, and that the Presbytery loan will cover the full figure. Secondly, the Church Council has approved the spending of \$20,000, which is the first stage of the study, in the case of any delays or shortfall.

How long until we see any evidence ‘on the ground’?

The whole process may take between 3 and 5 years. There is unlikely to be any change to the church buildings as we know them until 2017, and certainly not



in the first half of 2016. Further details will become available as the ‘Project Control Group’ undertakes its work.

Is the feasibility study value for money?

The church, hall and 2 manses sit on just over 0.9ha (2.25 acres) of land. Any redevelopment is likely to be in the order of a \$5 million project. We do not have the expertise to manage a project of that size in-house. The cost of the feasibility study is less than 2% of the total cost. It is extremely good value for money.

What about our relationship with partners and hirers?

During the course of this year, the Church Council Executive has been in conversation with both the Chin Christian Church, Melbourne (CCCM) and the Croydon Parish Players (CPP), outlining the strong possibility of site reconfiguration in the future. We will continue to meet and communicate with our key partners and users. There is no imminent impact on the operation of these groups or any others.

So, in about July 2016, we will need to make a decision?

Yes. The “Feasibility Study and Business Case” will provide us with options about our physical buildings and properties, from which we will need to choose. This will be an exciting and potentially challenging time. If we fail to make a decision, there will be a direct cost of between \$63,000 and \$70,000 to Croydon Uniting. The Congregational meeting in March and the recent Church Council meeting have pointed us in the direction that change to the property, to better serve mission in the future, is more-or-less inevitable. It may take 5 years before the ‘final product’ is seen (but hopefully earlier) and the next major decision will be in mid-2016.

Will you keep us informed?

Yes. The PCG and Church Council will keep the congregation informed. There have been some long periods in 2015 when there has in fact been nothing much to report, while we have been awaiting approvals or information. The first half of 2016 is likely to be more ‘active’, and more frequent communication can be expected.

Who can I talk to?

You can talk with our Minister, Bronwyn Daniels, any Church Councillor or the Croydon Uniting representatives on the PCG: Rohan Pryor, Paul Chandler, Charles Popple and Kerry Shearer.

We ask for your continued prayers and support for the Church Council and the Project Control Group as this important work continues.

In Christ’s service,

The Church Council Executive
Rohan Pryor, Bronwyn Daniels,
Paul Chandler, and Carolyne Chandler