

Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26

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Preamble to Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26

The Uniting Church in Australia is governed locally, regionally, and nationally by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world. The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 15).

The local councils of the Church are the Congregation and its Church Council. Regionally and state-wide, the councils of the Church are the Presbytery and Synod respectively. The national council of the church is the Assembly.

As the Canberra Region Presbytery undertakes mission planning, it is to give heed to the other councils of the Church.

Congregations and Church Councils – local

The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit of Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 15a).

The Church Council is responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 15b).

One of the ways Canberra Region Presbytery listens to these local councils of the Church for its mission planning is through listening to the members of Presbytery who include ministers and elected lay people of Congregations.

Synod – state/territory

The NSW/ACT Synod has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service in our region (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 15d).

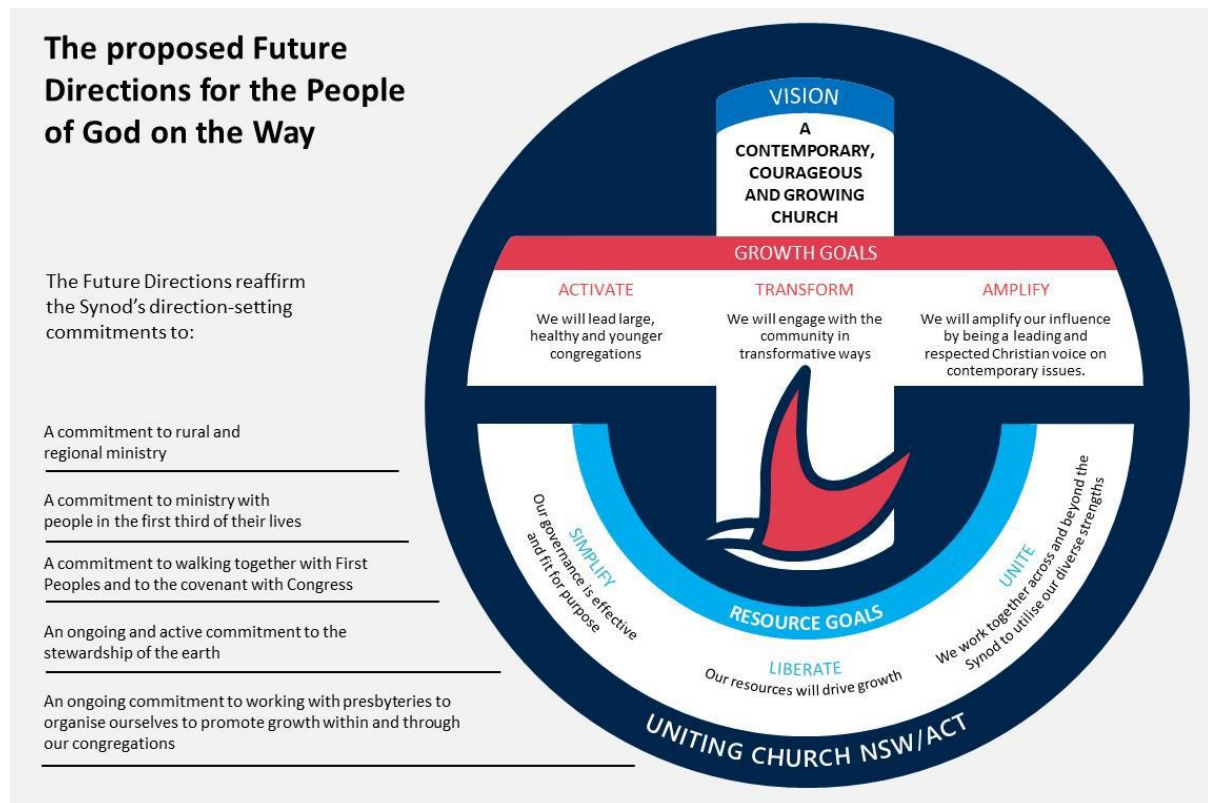
Over the last few Synod meetings, this Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT has made several direction-setting resolutions, including resolutions relating to Saltbush (2016), Pulse (2017), Makaratta (2019), Climate Action (2019), and Growth (2019). The "Focus on Growth" report presented at the Uniting Church's NSW and ACT Synod 2019 meeting states:

That the Synod commit, over the next three years, that we will organise ourselves, and request our Presbyteries to so organise themselves, to prioritise and enable growth in discipleship, in relationships, in number and in impact within and through our congregations.

The intended purpose of this proposal is to provide, should the Synod agree, a lens through which our Synod and Presbyteries may deliberately focus their life and witness over the next three years.

This Growth focus was adopted and subsequently re-affirmed at Synod 2021 through the *Future Directions for the People of God on the Way* resolution. Church leaders in presbyteries and congregations are invited to reorient their thinking about church and mission and reorganise themselves for being a contemporary, courageous and growing church proclaiming Jesus Christ in worship, witness and service. For the full report and resolutions about *Future Directions*, please see <https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9996/future-directions-for-the-people-of-god-on-the-way.pdf>.

Below is a summary presentation:



Assembly – national

The Assembly's determining responsibilities include the promotion of the Church's mission. At its triennial meeting in 2022 the Assembly received the Act2 report. Act2 is a process of discernment about how faithfully following Christ in our time and place shapes the Uniting Church into the future. You can read more about it at this link – [Act2: On The Way - Uniting Church Australia](#)

Further to the Act2 report, the Assembly's resolutions included ... "to identify ways to strengthen and develop the local expressions of worship, witness, service, and the making and forming of disciples, in the various forms of communities of faith".

Presbytery – regional

According to the *Basis of Union* (paragraph 15c), the role of a Presbytery is:

"To perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the church in the area for which is it responsible ... It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its

bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another's faith, to bear one another's burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus."

The Constitution sets out the following responsibilities for the Presbytery at Section 26:

"The Presbytery shall have such oversight as is necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area committed to it; it shall stimulate and encourage the Congregations within its bounds, providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and in their participation in the wider work of the Church."

Referring to these above provisions, Rev Dr Peter Walker (Principal of United Theological College) summarises the role of the Presbytery in the following terms: to exercise [the] ministry of oversight, doing so for the sake of the faith and unity of the congregations within its bounds, in ways that encourage and strengthen the congregations in their mission.

Mission Planning of the Canberra Region Presbytery

The Canberra Region Presbytery listens to its congregations and the above directions of Assembly and Synod. Giving heed to these councils of the Uniting Church, the Canberra Region Presbytery at its open meetings in 2022/23 engaged in mission planning for the Presbytery to discern the following Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26.

Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26

A plan for across our diverse congregations, faith communities and agencies

Leading the Church to our Local Communities

Building Deeper Connections Across the Presbytery

Together as Canberra Region Presbytery we have told stories of God clearly at work among us, we've listened to Scripture, we've noticed what is being born and how we can help it arrive, and we've dreamed of what we would look like at our best.

Out of this we affirm:

- ❖ God is always present, preparing the way and calling us into mission
- ❖ God is doing new things in us and through us in unexpected, surprising, and amazing ways
- ❖ God is calling us outward to be present and engaged in our communities.
- ❖ God's faithfulness leads us to share and grow our faith, calling and forming new disciples.

JESUS TOOK THE LOAVES, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE DISTRIBUTED THEM

John 6:1-15

THEN THE SPIRIT SAID TO PHILIP, "GO OVER TO THIS CHARIOT AND JOIN IT" — Acts 8:26-40

And together as Canberra Region Presbytery we are committed to:

Being church together – Building deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church – *Becoming more cohesive, while valuing our diversity, and growing from each other's experiences*

Helping each other grow connections with our local communities – *Expressing what we do in different ways to push into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context. This is bound to be uncomfortable for us*

IF YOU OFFER YOUR FOOD TO THE HUNGRY AND SATISFY THE NEEDS OF THE AFFLICTED, THEN YOUR LIGHT SHALL RISE IN THE DARKNESS ... YOU SHALL BE LIKE A WATERED GARDEN ... YOUR ANCIENT RUINS SHALL BE REBUILT

Isaiah 58:6-12

Being part of each other's lives – friendly and supportive – *Having Presbytery members, committees and staff very much part of the life of congregations, faith communities and agencies as a supportive source of vitality, inspiration, fellowship, and practical resourceful assistance*

Using property to resource God's mission – *Having property that is fit for mission purposes, and working cooperatively and creatively to better share our property to expand our resources for mission*

Engaging in social justice, equality, and local issues – *Speaking and acting out as a safe church*

THE SMALLEST OF ALL THE SEEDS, BUT
WHEN IT HAS GROWN IT IS THE GREATEST OF
SHRUBS — Matthew 13:31-32

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Joining in with living out our commitments ...

This section is provided to encourage congregations, faith communities and agencies in how they might join in living out this mission plan across the Canberra Region Presbytery. Below is a restatement of each commitment that sets the direction to which we are committed. Each statement is followed by an **Action** paragraph that recasts the desired directions as actions. For each action paragraph, there are a series of **Key Questions** that are formulated to prompt the actions you might take to live out the commitments. To help inspire your actions, the council of Presbytery has included some ways it would like to live out the commitments.

Commitment A **Being church together – Building deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church** – *Becoming more cohesive, while valuing our diversity, and growing from each other's experiences*

Action – By strengthening and encouraging each other; hearing each other's stories; learning from each other's experiences and sharing our resources equitably, we will become more cohesive while valuing our diversity; and support and develop both unique and common areas of mission and ministry. We will build deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church by enhancing the ways people already interact and communicate; and by creating new networks and ways of communicating and gathering.

Key Questions:

1. In what ways will we strengthen and encourage each other?
2. How will we hear each other's stories, learn from each other's experiences and share our resources equitably? What kinds of resources will we share? (eg people, property, finances, knowledge)
3. In what ways can we enhance our interaction and communication across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church?
4. What kinds of new networks can we create, and how can we establish them?

Some ways to live out this commitment –

- Praying for each other and promoting further use of the weekly prayer page in the Presbytery newsletter (Q1).
- Find opportunities for congregations, faith communities and agencies to “just be” together, for example, picnics involving each other (Q1).
- Support each other's activities around shared interests/mission, and invite congregations, faith communities and agencies to worship together for celebrations or commemorations (Q2).
- Provide stories with photos of activities for publishing in the Presbytery weekly newsletter and quarterly Viewpoint magazine (Q2).
- Creating short videos about aspects of our life and witness to be shared on websites and social media. This appeals to people liking to see people like themselves (Q2).
- Developing networks that already exist, like the treasurers annual meeting; monthly missional gatherings; ethical ministry workshops for lay leaders; zoom Bible study groups. Other useful networks could be established, for example, chairs/secretaries of church

councils, worship leaders. These networks could include structured meetings or informal gatherings over a meal. They might be conducted over social media and include opportunities for mentoring and resourcing each other (Q2,4).

- Presbytery gatherings to include more opportunities for small group story telling (Q2).
- Encourage links between city and bush/coastal congregations, faith communities and agencies (Q3).
- Encourage lay leaders to be available to lead worship at other congregations, faith communities and agencies (Q3).
- Give people the opportunity to move across congregations, faith communities and agencies to share resources, for example, website platform establishment and maintenance (Q3,4).
- Encourage children and their leaders across the Presbytery to attend church wide events such as Synod Kids' Campout. This will help them know that there are similar aged people across the Presbytery and the Synod and enable relationship building (Q3).
- Invest in individuals to develop skills (Q3).
- Simplify administration across congregations, for example, one treasurer for three congregations with three sets of books; one auditor auditing books for several congregations; sharing a Church Council across a number of congregations (Q3).

Commitment B **Helping each other grow connections with our local communities –**
Expressing what we do in different ways to push into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context. This is bound to be uncomfortable for us

Action – We will help each other grow connections with our local communities by sharing our experiences of new ways we are interacting with our communities; developing stronger links with community, volunteer, interdenominational and interfaith organisations; being involved in advocacy work; sharing knowledge of resources; and working collaboratively or cooperatively with other congregations. We will help each other express and share our faith through our connections with local community; and help each other discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context.

Key questions:

1. How will we share our experiences of new ways we are interacting with our communities?
2. In what ways can we develop stronger links with community, volunteer, interdenominational and interfaith organisations?
3. How can we become involved in advocacy work?
4. How can we share knowledge of resources?
5. In what ways can congregations work collaboratively or cooperatively?
6. How can we help each other express and share our faith through our connections with local community; and help each other discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context?



Some ways to live out this commitment –

- Share stories/experiences (including wins and losses) on Presbytery website, Facebook, newsletter, and Viewpoint. Tell the stories in print with photos, and also through short video (Q1).
- Encourage congregations, faith communities and agencies to repost or retell the stories through their website, social media and pew sheet (Q1).
- Regular sharing of the stories/experiences at Presbytery meetings (Q1).
- Promotion of Presbytery newsletter to increase subscribers (Q1).
- Develop shared interest/mission networks between congregations, faith communities and agencies for sharing stories/experiences (Q1).
- Use Facebook community groups to connect with the local community, build on shared interests and promote relevant church activities/events (Q2).
- Link in with the EMC (Early Morning Centre) and their connections in the homelessness and community sector and other networks (Q2).
- Through our Op Shops; breakfasts in schools; volunteering at schools using programs like “Kids Hope”; through Greenhills; natural disaster support; intergenerational playgroups; through support of First Peoples, refugees and other justice connections mentioned below; with community groups that use church properties; with resident associations and new housing estates, like Ginninderry, Googong and Molonglo (Q2).
- Look for gaps in the wider community where the church can fill that space (Q2)
- Use food and the powerful way hospitality works as a space for connection (Q2)
- Going *out* of the building into the community rather than expecting the people to come to us (Q2).
- From across the Presbytery, bring together children and youth to create critical mass (Q5).
- Need to be intentionally focused on faith. A deliberate activity (Q6).
- Guided by these principles (Q6):
 - Jesus was in the community and his model is what we should copy – it isn’t easy and will be uncomfortable.
 - Looking at what it means to be church is important rather than just “doing it” how we used to. Using opportunities to meet people where they are to meet their spiritual needs.
 - The church has a long connection of community networking to then join with communities to bring a spiritual aspect – important to identify what the community is – and what spiritual aspects are missing.
 - The church is not a business, and “helping people and doing good” is not our core business, but sharing faith is. We are not just another community minded group.
 - There are many and various ways we are interacting with the wider community, but we need to be more intentional about creating pathways for people to engage with faith (for example, fresh expressions), rather than relying only on conventional Sunday worship services.
 - The way we understand how people grow in faith has changed from ‘believe then belong’ to ‘belong then believe’.

Commitment C **Being part of each other’s lives – friendly and supportive –** *Having Presbytery members, committees and staff very much part of the life of congregations, faith communities and agencies as a supportive source of vitality, inspiration, fellowship, and practical resourceful assistance*

Action – We will become a friendly and supportive part of each other’s lives by identifying, acknowledging and drawing on the gifts of vitality, inspiration, fellowship and practical, resourceful

assistance found amongst all Presbytery members, committees and staff; and by making a diverse range of communication strategies available and accessible to all.

Key Questions

1. In what ways can we identify, acknowledge and draw on the gifts found in congregations, Presbytery staff, office bearers and committees across the Presbytery?
2. What communication strategies/resources are already in place that can be improved and in what ways can they be improved?
3. What new communication methods/resources can be developed or added?

Some ways to live out this commitment –

- We can identify the gifts of people through meeting with them and building relationship, paying particular attention to the quieter people who might otherwise go unnoticed. Presbytery staff could meet the people at open times in coffee shops in different regions. We can also use a skills matrix to identify gifts (Q1).
- We can acknowledge the gifts of people through the period of discernment and by inviting similarly gifted people into communities of practice or companion relationships for sharing and encouragement, especially for lay people who may not have the collegial relationships that ordained people have. We can also celebrate the gifts of people serving on Presbytery committees by commissioning them at the start of the year and thanking them at the AGM (Q1).
- Communications strategies include weekly Presbytery newsletter, quarterly Viewpoint magazine, Presbytery Facebook and website, person to person, regional gatherings, ministers' lunches, online gatherings, and Presbytery meetings (Q2).
- Presbytery newsletter could be improved by including menu tab at the top with one sentence summary, by encouraging congregations to send items for inclusion and to pass on newsletter to congregation folk, and by including stories of people visiting congregations in their Presbytery roles. Presbytery website could be improved (Q2).
- Rather than Presbytery creating an additional event for congregations to attend, focus on Presbytery people attending local events that are already happening. Events that are created could be linked to the natural channels of travel, for example, springtime in Canberra for Floriade, sheep sales in Yass, summer walking in Jindabyne. (Q3).
- Assist elected members of Presbytery to pass on to their congregations, faith communities and agencies summaries of what happened at Presbytery meetings (Q3).

Commitment D **Using property to resource God's mission** – *Having property that is fit for mission purposes, and working cooperatively and creatively to better share our property to expand our resources for mission*



Action – The use of property to resource mission is a critical commitment for growth in mission across the Presbytery (and wider Church) and a key issue for cooperation between congregations, Presbytery and Synod. We need to understand our relationship to our property (including in relation to walking together with First Peoples and the covenant with UAICC), ensure all property is fit for

mission purposes, and work cooperatively and creatively to better share our property to expand our resources for mission.

Key questions:

1. How can we ensure all our congregations understand our relationship to our property?
2. In what ways can Presbytery work with congregations to ensure all property is fit for mission purposes and to better share our property to expand our resources for mission?
3. How we help congregations envision new ways of using their property or be willing to let it go if it no longer serves a meaningful purpose?

Some ways to live out this commitment –

- Put succinct/digestible information on the Presbytery website, provide similar material to church councils and even as sermon content. This needs to be repeated at regular intervals. This could be a reduced version of, or material extracted from, the *Resourcing Future Directions and Our Mission* document. It is important to tell stories of what has been done in various locations around the Presbytery and create ideas as to possibilities (Q1).
- Undertake a full property review about what is there, what is being used, and how fully it is being used. Have intentional conversations; while these happen as part of Life and Witness consultations, they can be undertaken any time. Engage the Synod Property Services team and identify priority items. Ideas can then be taken further in conjunction with the Presbytery Minister Congregation Futures and the Property Committee (Q2).
- Listen to the visionaries, and in the diversity of views being expressed around property disposal, take care to check for conflict of interest, and disentangle the self-interest from objective consideration. Noting that our concept of church is too localised (Q3).
- Encourage use of property to grow connections with our local communities through missional relationships rather than simply landlord-tenant relationships (Q3).

Commitment E Engaging in social justice, equality, and local issues – *Speaking and acting out as a safe church*

Action – We will work with like-minded people in the wider community to contribute to the discussion and response to critical issues (speaking out and taking action), especially those seen as an affront to the Gospel. This is a vital part of Presbytery’s mission in expressing our faith and growing in discipleship, and part of its role in relating to and offering leadership within the broader community.

Key questions:

1. In what ways can/will Presbytery contribute to the discussion and respond to critical issues, especially those it sees as an affront to the Gospel of Jesus?
2. What kind of leadership in this area can Presbytery offer in the local/broader community?
3. How will engagement in social justice, equality and local issues relate to and enhance the mission of the congregations and people in this Presbytery, and help us express our faith and grow in discipleship?

Some ways to live out this commitment –

- Further develop the Presbytery Social Justice Group (PSJG) through raising its profile and creating links with congregations, faith communities and agencies. PSJG could engage directly with the council of Presbytery by making presentations and proposals. Further, PSJG could be a standing item on the Presbytery Standing Committee agenda (Q1).
- Write a Presbytery Reconciliation Action Plan (Q1).
- Engage in Walking with First Peoples, refugee support, support for people living with disability, affordable and social housing and crises accommodation, climate change, assistance (including housing) for those in family violence situations, drug law reform, aged care, age of criminal responsibility, LGBTQI+ community, abuse by the church, prison ministry (Q1).
- Engage in public theology through events like city forum on climate, inviting prominent people to address the group so as to approach the whole issue rather than taking just one side (Q2).
- Encourage local partnerships for Sustainability Days, gardening, swap-a-thons etc (Q2).
- Collaborate on social justice education and events with the ACT Churches Council, Uniting's Advocacy Team (which helps mobilise the wider NSW.ACT Uniting Church in pursuing social justice and the renewal of creation) and UnitingCare Australia Advocacy (which maintains bipartisan working relationships across all political parties and with key politicians, public servants and thought leaders at the national level) (Q2).
- In collaboration with Uniting's Advocacy Team, arrange meetings with ACT and NSW members of parliament to present views and policy documents. Likewise, with UnitingCare Australia Advocacy in relation to Federal members of parliament (Q2).
- Point congregations, faith communities and agencies to social justice resources from Synod and Assembly to inform and empower people to be a voice supporting change. It is important that this includes information on faith perspectives for engaging in social justice (Q3).
- Arrange workshops on faith reasons for engaging in social justice, for example, the referendum on Indigenous Voice to Parliament (Q3).

