

GREVILLEA

June, 2016

Welcome to the twenty seventh edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Making Courageous and Wise Decisions.**

Karen Burchell –Thomas, the Presbytery Resource Minister for the Macquarie Darling Presbytery in the NSW/ACT Synod, writes out of her rural experience and also mentions the recent Synod decision regarding rural ministry. Jason Kioa, Chairperson of the Tongan National Conference, has reflected on the developments in the Tongan National Conference which gathers over 1,000 people each year from across the country at a conference site in Western Sydney. Niall Reid, a former Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod and now Minister at Northmead Uniting Church, considers the regulations and how these can be used flexibly. Christine Bayliss Kelly writes about the Consensus decision making process. A project team consisting of Naomi Nash, Alison Bleyerveen and Lynne Taylor describe some of the research they have done in relation to learning from innovation that has been carried out in the UCA.

Let me draw attention to two books. One I edited, *Being and Doing Church: a Uniting Church Perspective* has a range of subjects written by different people in the Uniting Church. It is available from MediaCom. So too is Ian Robinson's book, *Burning Hope, A Progressive Evangelical Road to Renewal*.

Grevillea is available online on the Assembly website in the Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship section under Other Resources. Past editions can be accessed there: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/cuwd> Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is: chrisw@nat.uca.org.au

I hope you are encouraged by this edition of *Grevillea*.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Making Courageous and Wise Decisions in times of change

Karyn Burchell -Thomas

It was interesting to see the amount of change that had taken place when returning to ministry in a rural setting after being away to minister in a suburban setting for as short a time as five years.

My previous rural placement had been as Minister to a well-established Congregation in a significant regional centre. During my time there it was clear that many adjustments had taken place in the life of that Congregation for the then 160 years of its official existence. Longer, if you count the years it took to erect the substantial buildings on the property, during which time the Congregation was at work in ministry and service in the community, setting firm foundations for generations to follow.

Once the main, substantial buildings had been erected, made of solid stone and brick, it soon became clear that more was needed, such was the growth of the Church and enthusiasm of its members at the time. This growth and development was clearly a reflection of the growth and enthusiasm of the town, soon to become a city, in which it was established. These were the early growth years during the colonisation of Australia in an area rich in natural resources blessed with good soil and conditions for food crops.

Over the years buildings had been added and extended, interiors altered and re-arranged and new technology installed as it became available. For example, the original furnace that heated the building and required careful personal attention had at one time been replaced by oil heating. Electricity had been introduced at another time. Phone cables were installed. At another time a mezzanine floor had been added to the very large worship space to accommodate the many who attended services. In more recent times data projection had been introduced to the point that now they have an electronically controlled screen that is largely unseen except when in use. This has been a place of activity in the centre of town for a very long time.

This Congregation has a long and rich history and there is no doubt that each generation has left its mark on the buildings as well as on the wider community. Over the years playgroups have been formed, a telecare program has been in place, youth groups have met filling the halls with sound and activity, fetes have been held, working bees formed, art expos hosted, bands have played, concerts held, the list goes on.

Today this same Congregation is just as active as ever touching the lives of people across all age groups. This Congregation does well, yet like all Congregations is challenged as modern life demands that more is done with less. People and resources are stretched. Those of working age seek jobs whenever possible leaving little time and energy to devote to activities outside of their family's immediate needs. Modern living demands, whenever possible, that households have as many people working as possible. Gone are the days when one person could support the rest of the family sufficiently to educate them, pursue their lifestyle and promote their interests.

Ironically the city has grown and continues to be a prosperous community. Yet it too, at times, struggles as once vibrant industries die or move overseas, needing to be replaced with something else that will support and provide for the livelihood of families in the area. If not, they too will need to move to find work elsewhere.

The city has been good at re-inventing itself. The Church has needed to do the same. Certainly the evidence of so much change and adaptation, evident in the Church's suite of

buildings that has taken place over the years, indicates that the Congregation has been able to respond to changes and developments around it. To do so requires looking up and out (as opposed to down and in) and being in touch with the community in which they are located. For it is amongst the people in their neighbourhood and wider community, that they have a calling to be bearers of the gospel and in ways that are relevant.

Regardless of the time, regardless of the situation, regardless of resources and availability of people, being bearers of the gospel remains our calling as disciples of Christ, in partnership with God, as the era of God's eternal reign (kingdom) is established. The presence of the Church is evidence of this era having begun, yet still in the making. (See *Basis of Union* paragraphs 2 & 3.)

It is easy to adapt and change when it is connected with growth and the excitement that comes with it. Perhaps it is too easy as we get swept up in the emotions of feeling important and successful in an environment that clearly supports growth and development. At such times the challenges relate to how quickly change can take place and how soon the new ministry or service can be made a reality.

Yet in the history of this particular Congregation there would have been times of challenge that required a different approach to ministry and presence in the community, a different understanding of who they are and how they should relate and act. For example, during the early years of colonisation when the local indigenous community was being displaced, during the depression when employment was low, in times of war when so many lives were lost in far flung places overseas, times of drought when crops failed and times of industrial change that threatened the whole community. At such times the Church's theology and use of its resources, standing tall and strong and looking rich in the middle of town, would have been challenged and even questioned. Of course, as we look back and see the marks of adaptation and change on the walls of these solid buildings, we might be forgiven for thinking that the Congregation just took it all in their stride. I wonder.

Chapter 3 of the *Basis of Union* begins with "The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work." We are not alone, nor is our calling to work in isolation from God's guidance and divine inspiration available through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. So, any decision we make, any ministry we undertake, any service we provide, is not a witness to us (and our perceived success) but to God's guidance and inspiration acting through us. Sometimes I wonder if we might, on occasion, forget that, just a little. The lure of success by worldly standards is at times, compelling. The measure of a disciple's ministry, let alone the measure of a Congregation's ministry, service and witness in a community, is not by the size or even existence of its buildings but by the impact of the gospel proclaimed amongst people so in need of being made whole, healed, loved and free. For this, there is no greater model to follow than the life of Jesus himself.

Having returned to rural ministry, now in a Presbytery Resource Minister's role, I am privileged to work across a large rural Presbytery and more precisely, with a number of Congregations each with their own unique context of size, history and local expression. The Congregation mentioned above remains active and challenged, as always, as it should be. There are other significant Congregations in regional centres, each with their own history and set of challenges. There are smaller Congregations in smaller towns. There are remote communities with small gatherings of the faithful, some Congregations, some faith communities, some with historical connections to other Congregations, some autonomous. Yet as I looked more closely, I noticed change, in communities and in Congregations even in the short time during which I had been away.

In times gone by, many of the Congregations outside of regional centres would have been served by Ministers who visited them as part of a circuit. Visits would have been regular but not particularly frequent. The patterns of Baptisms and Weddings would have reflected the availability of the Minister. In-between visits, these Congregations managed their own worship, witness and service in their community.

Those Congregations more closely grouped were often linked as part of a parish. These Congregations were used to regular visits by their Minister with the benefit of their leadership at meetings and for planning. In particularly good times, some were able to support a Minister to serve in their location alone. Since changes to our polity following the 1997 Assembly, Congregations have for the most, needed to make their own way as Congregations. Some remain linked but often such links are tenuous.

Modern living, the changing of seasons, of farms amalgamated with caretaker managers owned by companies, corporations or co-operatives otherwise located, of younger generations seeking work elsewhere, of technology taking the place of many workers, the introduction fly-in-fly-out workers, has placed even more challenges on many rural and particularly remote communities. Yet the need for food and building materials, the stuff of primary industry, remains and is expected to do so in an even more competitive global environment than ever. Increasing challenges take their toll. Sadly physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion, depression and suicide are everyday occurrences. This is no time for the Church to leave rural and remote communities. Rather, it is an important time for the Church to be present more than ever, to build and support community, to nurture well-being, to care for and value people whose lives are dedicated to primary industry which serves us all and undergirds the very modern lives we live and enjoy in cities and suburbs.

The story in regional centres is somewhat different. Populations in these centres are growing with corresponding changes to standards of living and lifestyle. This has also led to discrepancies between some parts of the community and others as employment and lifestyles are out of sync. As this takes place, industry grows, made more possible with the advent of technology that links regional centres in ways never possible before. Young families, able to take their work with them, are opting for the open spaces and the less stressful lifestyle of regional centres. These are truly wonderful places to live but not without corresponding challenges. Churches in regional centres need to adapt to the changing demographics, living patterns and work choices of those now forming their community. No longer do all inhabitants have their foundations on the land or in primary industry while Australia's First people continue to struggle to be recognised and valued. Changing times require that the Church changes and adapts too.

So how do we adapt? How do we change? How do we live out and proclaim the gospel as we try to do more with less in a fast changing, at times isolated and under-resourced environment? It is not simply a matter of trying to do the same things as in the past. It is about responding to our circumstances and attending to those in our midst as they and we experience life together, now.

The Presbytery in which I now serve as Resource Minister has for over 10 years had in place a plan to strategically resource ministry across its many and varied Congregations and faith communities. Lay Leadership Teams have been trained and equipped to continue with the life of their Congregation in their location without the regular attendance of an ordained Minister. This includes the training and authorising of celebrants to conduct Marriages, where necessary, preside at the Sacraments, as Lay Preachers and as Worship Teams, Leadership Teams and Church Councils. Ongoing refresher training and equipping is in place to support them along the way.

Regional Congregations too are encouraged to equip their Lay Leadership Teams to the point where everything is not left to their Minister who can then further resource other Congregations in the area either directly or by the Regional Congregation sharing its resources of people and expertise to enhance and support the ministry and mission of smaller Congregations in its vicinity. This linking of Congregations is less like a Parish and more like a Cluster of Congregations or Mission Area.

The taking on of a greater ownership of our faith as Christians in community, calls for courageous people to make well informed and wise decisions as individuals and Congregations who face life's challenges together. It calls for people to stand up to be counted for their faith, to take on leadership, to be actively present in their communities in ways that was once, rightly or wrongly, left to ordained clergy. These days it cannot be left only to the Minister to be aware of what is taking place around them and in their community as they walk alongside people who may not share their faith, their ethnic or cultural background, their family traditions or their politics. It calls for Congregations to be pro-active in a number of areas otherwise felt to be 'too hard' and left for the ordained to deal with. It calls for the Congregation truly to live out its calling as the Body of Christ.

Very recently our Presbytery's Mission Plan 2017-2020, which began a decade ago, was further developed and adopted. It begins with a Vision:

In order to continue to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ by word and presence in our local communities, that by 2020 each Congregation will be able to clearly state the specific way they fulfill their calling as a Christian witness in their local community, encouraged to do so in fresh ways according to their context, supported by regular, close access to well-equipped and informed Ministry there to resource each mission area, funding for which is shared by Congregations, Presbytery and the wider Church and partners in mission wherever possible.

Clearly being courageous is not left to people to deal with in their local setting alone. The Presbytery has made a commitment to organise its life and resources in ways that promote and support the Vision. This is not ministry for the light-hearted, whether ordained or lay.

At the recent meeting of our Synod, in April 2016, a vision for rural and regional ministry was proposed. Known as the 'Saltbush Project' it includes an holistic approach to providing ministry across the vast expanse of rural and remote areas that links Rural Chaplains, Patrol Ministers, Resource Ministers, the work of Uniting and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress in ways not possible in the past. This all grew from the grass-roots with people working in those ministry areas ready and planning to do so with enthusiasm. It calls on the wider Church to be part of the vision that goes way beyond one Presbytery indeed it links three western rural and remote Presbyteries to a common vision, while allowing each to have their own approach according to context. This vision was embraced by the Synod and further developed to cover more than the three western Presbyteries. The vision now calls for all Presbyteries to find ways of working together, supporting one another for the common good, resourcing and sharing resources for the sake of the Gospel.

This was a courageous Synod, ready to risk stretching its already limited resources. This decision requires all involved to work together, to pool resources and have a common purpose in ministry. The adoption of the Saltbush Project actually makes a statement about the kind of Church we are and indeed seek to be known for in the future. It's not about having more to work with, nor is it about some losing out while others gain. It is about declaring that we are a Church that does not give up when times get hard, but that we have purpose in what we are doing as we seek to live out our calling that is to all people and not just those on the coast or in cities, and not just to those in rural and remote places, but to all. It was a landmark decision that will have effects long after the minutes of the meeting have been filed away and archived.

How will this all pan out? We do not know. But we do have a vision and that vision requires commitment, as does any. A commitment to live out our calling, to adapt to changing circumstances and to love, support and value one another throughout. This is courageous living in a time that requires courageous people who have made a commitment not to live for themselves but for the sake of the gospel, in the wider community and indeed wherever God may call. I pray that we will be open to the guidance and inspiration of God as we do.

I began this article by thinking I would talk about us being people of the resurrection. We are indeed, people of the resurrection. To be resurrected one first needs to die to something and to self. I believe being courageous is doing just that as we let old ways go and take on new ones. Not because we feel strong or invincible but perhaps just the opposite, in the knowledge that what we are about is ultimately, God's work and we partners in it.

(Rev Karen Burchell–Thomas is the Presbytery Resource Minister for the Macquarie Darling Presbytery in the NSW/ACT Synod.)

The Life of The Tongan National Conference in The Uniting Church

Jason Kioa

The Tongan National Conference was formed in June 1987, two years after the declaration by the Assembly meeting in 1985 that the Uniting Church in Australia is a 'Multicultural Church'. It began as a three day conference in Sydney, called by the National Mission and Evangelism Unit of the Assembly as part of its responsibility to look after the ministry and the general welfare of the ethnic congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Tongan National Conference was originally made up of members of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga who have migrated from Tonga and have made the Uniting Church in Australia their 'home' Church.

Since it began in 1987 the Tongan National Conference as the first national conference of this kind, it has grown to be the biggest national conference. It meets every year over the Queen's birthday weekend in June. There are now twelve national conferences that exist in the Uniting Church: The Tongan, the Korean, the Indonesian, the Fijian, the Samoan, the Filipino, the Chinese, the Tamil, the Niuean, the Vietnamese, the South Sudanese and recently, the Middle Eastern.

The purpose of the first Tongan Conference was to help the leaders of the Tongan Congregations in Australia to understand and participate in the life of the Uniting Church. This was taking into account some of the difficulties that Tongan ministers and lay members face in trying to relate to a new culture and moving from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and are now participating as full members of the Uniting Church in Australia. These difficulties are to do with language, the structure and ethos of the Uniting Church as compared with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Naturally, as diaspora communities of faith migrate from Tonga, the relocation and finding a place to worship became an issue.

Seongja Yoo-Crowe said that the declaration of "The Uniting Church as a Multicultural Church" at the meeting of the Fourth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1985 was a historic, bold commitment in response to the calling of God to the churches of Australia in our time (Yoo-Crowe, Uniting Church Press, 1998). The Statement adopted by the Church affirmed that its membership comprises people of many races, cultures and languages. It is essential to provide for the full

participation of Aboriginal and ethnic people, women and men, in decision making, in the councils and the life of the church because it is part of its commitments to its ethos and the *Basis of Union* (UCA Reg., 2012 Edition).

The Tongan National Conference meets annually over the Queen's Birthday weekend in June at Merroo Christian Convention Centre in Kurrajong, New South Wales. It moved from the Marrickville Community Centre five years ago after having met there for many years. The reasons for the move were: the venue had become too small for the growth of the Tongan National Conference; the community centre had also become unsafe for children and young people because of the open accessibility to the public; and the vitality of the intergenerational nature of the conference which was comprised of all age groups. The change of venue was also a huge cultural change for the Tongan people because at Marrickville Community Centre, the congregations around the Sydney area were used to catering for the meals for the Conference for the whole weekend. Feasting and sharing meals (*Fakaafe*) is a major factor in why Tongans come to the Conference. The members of the local congregations felt the very act of catering was part of their stewardship to God. In effect, they did not attend the other programs, fellowship events and worship because of their involvement in the preparations of the meals. Food is part of the Tongan cultural activities which is very important in their church life. Feasting is seen as part of the ecclesiological activities in Tongan congregational life. Around the food table which the feast is on are speeches that are shared by leaders which becomes a learning field for the listeners who understand the Tongan language. Now that the Conference has been held over the last five years at Merroo Christian Convention Centre, it is a fully catered venue which meant that people can attend the Conference programs instead of cooking and catering for the meals and missing out sharing in the Conference programs.

The meeting of the Tongan National Conference is an opportunity for the Tongan born members of the Uniting Church to get together annually and have fellowship in a cross cultural way. Most of the parents were born in Tonga. The younger generations of second and third were born in Australia. However, these second and third generations value learning from their Tongan heritage. This is why the Tongan National Conference is now run in two languages (English and Tongan) and the programs are run in both languages as well. There has been a suggestion to separate the adult conference from the second generation programs and perhaps on a different date and venue. But the responses and feedback from the second generation team leaders and next generation members is that, they want to share and learn from the adults as well. It is the gathering of Tongan-Australians of all ages who are members of the Uniting Church in Australia. It does not matter whether they belong to a Tongan congregation or to an Anglo Celtic/Tongan congregation or Anglo Celtic congregations but have some Tongan heritage. They are all welcome to attend. In between Conferences there are two meetings in October and February around different States of Australia to encourage the involvements of Tongan-Australians nationally in the life, worship and mission of the Uniting Church.

In 2014, the Conference attendance reached the 1000 mark for the first time at the new venue at Kurrajong, New South Wales. People of all ages came from the Synods of Queensland, Victoria/Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and NSW/ACT. The number of those attending included those who stayed on site throughout the whole weekend and those who commuted from the Sydney area. The guests to the

Conference were the President of the UCA, the Assembly National Directors of Uniting World and Multicultural Cross Cultural Ministry, the President of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and sometimes theologians and educators from the United Theological College in Parramatta.

Because of the range and diversity of conference attendees, there are two programs that run parallel during most parts of the weekend. One caters for the adults and seniors and is run mostly in the Tongan language. It deals with the issues of educating the older Tongans who came from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga tradition and have found home in the Uniting Church. The *Basis of Union* and some parts of the *Constitution of the Uniting Church* have been translated into Tongan to provide this learning to happen. Other activities are just discussions amongst the members of the differences in the way Tonga congregations work in the Uniting Church around Australia. Some congregations are worshipping in both English and Tongan. Some only have Tongan members and worship only in the Tongan language.

The other program runs in English and caters for the young people and Sunday school ages. It is run by the Next Generation Team which is a feature of the Tongan National Conference. The Next Generation Team represents a desire to pass on the baton from the older generation to the new younger. Some of the issues they discuss and engage with in the Conference are more particular to them; for example, cross cultural identity, youth violence and why a lot of Pacific Island (and Tongan) youths are in prisons; there are issues to do with the relocation from Tonga to Australia in sociological, economic, ecclesiological and theological understanding.

In 2014 the Tongan National Conference contributed to the discussions surrounding the ABC TV series of "*Jonah from Tonga*." It is an Australian television series written by and starring comedian Chris Lilley. The 'mockumentary' series follows Jonah Takalua, a rebellious 14-year-old Australian boy of Tongan descent who had been introduced in Lilley's 2007 series *Summer Heights High*. At the conclusion of that series, Jonah was expelled from Summer Heights High. In this series, his father, Rocky Takalua, has sent him back to his homeland of Tonga to live with his uncle and their family in order to get Jonah's life back on track. The six part series was produced by Princess Pictures and Chris Lilley in conjunction with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/jonah-from-tonga/). The TV series portrayed, in Jonah, misleading aspects of the Tongan cultural upbringing of a Tongan young boy. The Tongan community in Australia took offence and raised the issue with the ABC through the Assembly Office and the Uniting Church Media Officer. The ABC Sunday program invited the Chair of the Tongan National Conference and the Leader of the Next Generation Team to participate in a live panel on the ABC Sunday night radio program. It had wide media coverage about the role of the Tongan National Conference in speaking in the public media on issues about Tongan/Australian identity. The entire series was available for streaming online for one weekend from 2 May to 4 May on BBC iPlayer and ABC Review, before starting a six-week run on ABC1 on 7 May 2014 and from 8 May on BBC Three. This was a first for a major Australian TV production. The series itself was a "ratings

disaster" for both the ABC and BBC. It was later announced that the entire series would screen at select cinemas in several Australian cities followed by a Q and A with Chris Lilley. These events were subsequently cancelled, with refunds given and the website created to promote them removed. This is an example of how The Tongan National Conference played its part in public ways.

In 2015, the attendance at the Tongan National Conference held from 5th-8th June was 1,200. It is envisaged that this year, the Conference will be well attended too, with the Tonga Parish in Sydney attending and also some members from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga congregations in Sydney.

(Rev Jason Kioa is a former Moderator of the Vic/Tas Synod currently serving as Minister at Manningham Uniting Church. He is chairperson of the Tongan National Conference. Again over 1,000 people attended this year's Conference which had an extra program for young adults called 'Step Up'.)

Regulations – Law and Gospel

Niall Reid

To what extent do we need to pay attention to the regulations of the Uniting Church as we seek to live as Christian Community? I have on a number of occasions over the years heard people say that they do not care what the regulations say because they only pay attention to what the Bible says. I doubt if it is true that they only paid attention to the Bible and I believe that the regulations do not stand apart from the Bible but in some sense are intended to flow from it and the Gospel message it proclaims. However, I think it is true that the regulations are not intended to be understood as some sort of sacred inerrant scriptural writ.

When I became a theological student I do not think I was even aware that the Church had regulations. Somewhat naïve for someone who had graduated in law! I am not sure that I knew there was a document called *The Basis of Union*. I definitely had not read it. I might have imagined there was a constitution but I had not read that either. For the first few years of ministry I had little cause to refer to the regulations. As I took on various roles in the Church such as chairing boards of the Synod and Presbytery I had cause to refer to them from time to time. It was only when I became Moderator more than 25 years after ordination that I found I really had to pay attention to the regulations, particularly as they related to matters of discipline. This was also true when subsequently I became the chairperson of Sydney Presbytery. Despite what I may suggest in what follows, in circumstances of conflict and discipline, where there is a concern that due process be followed, the regulations should be followed as closely as possible.

Having made that acknowledgement, I can say that I and the parishes and congregations of which I was a part seemed to function fairly well without a great deal of attention to the regulations. Elders and Church Councils were elected without the required notice and without constant reference to the roles and responsibilities either of the minister or the councils. Yet I do not think the congregations or I ever strayed very far from the path. On occasion when we were not sure of the appropriate protocol we would check the regulations to guide us. Once there was a question about whether all elders should have a list of members for whom they were responsible for visiting. The regulations at the time said, "The Council of elders would visit the congregation" or words to that effect. Some thought this meant that each elder should visit, some thought some elders should have that responsibility, taken literally one might have said the whole council had to visit. In the end we determined that the Council of Elders was responsible for the pastoral oversight of the congregation and that included ensuring that there was pastoral contact whether this was through small groups, pastoral partners, telephone contact or in other ways. Interestingly enough the regulation now states that the Church Council will have responsibilities that include "sharing with the Minister(s) in mission and in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the congregation." Reg 3.1.2 (b) (i)

The spirit of the regulations was fulfilled however the elders determined to provide pastoral care of the congregation. The law is imprecise but the Gospel it seeks to encapsulate is about creating caring, compassionate, inclusive community to which people have a real sense of belonging.

Quite often the regulations are rather general in the way they are phrased. So for example the duties of the Moderator shall include:

"giving general and pastoral leadership to the Ministers and people within the bounds." Reg. 3.6.3.2(a)

What does that mean? Some people, in effect, thought it meant visiting individual Ministers with pastoral problems, being a form of servant leadership – leading by example. For me in the role that would have been an impossible task and the intent of the regulation was really about pastoral care for the Church as a whole and not particular individuals – that would be the role of Presbytery ministers, Ministers in congregations and elders. Pastoral leadership by the Moderator would be expected in the Moderator's role as chairperson of the Synod meeting and of its Standing Committee, through engagement with the Church "within the bounds" in speaking and writing exhibiting a pastoral heart and love for the people.

The regulations in this instance were not too specific but provided some general direction.

The epistle readings in the first part of the season after Pentecost are from Paul's letter to the Galatians where Paul speaks of a Gospel that is not about adhering to the law:

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. (Galatians 2:15-21 NRSV)

At one point Paul speaks of the law as a curse (Galatians 3:10) and then goes on to say in Galatians 3:23-25:

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,

In these passages Paul recognizes that the law has place and yet it is not paramount. The law is necessary, but for Paul it is the law itself that reveals it is inadequate - "For through the law I died to the law" (Galatians 2:19). It is a discipline that seeks to give some shape to what salvation might look like but if anyone thinks keeping the law can save them they will fail. It is only through faith in Christ that we experience salvation. It is God's gift and not achieved through adherence to any law.

I think this can be instructive for us as we think about the law of the Church, recognizing that, unlike the circumstances Paul was addressing in Galatians, adherence to the Church's regulations has never been regarded as a means of salvation. However, we can think of the regulations as seeking, in some sense, to codify Good News, Gospel, and yet never able to

encapsulate that Gospel adequately. That is why they are in constant need of re-visitation. The *Basis of Union* paragraph 17 makes this clear:

17. LAW IN THE CHURCH

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law. The aim of such law is to confess God's will for the life of the Church; but since law is received by human beings and framed by them, it is always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel. The Uniting Church will keep its law under constant review so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of humanity under God's sovereign grace.

Sometimes the practice precedes the change in the law. The Church by slavish adherence to the regulations will find that it fails to reflect the new humanity, the new creation being brought to life in Christ (*Basis of Union* para 3). Indeed it is as we live by the Spirit of the regulations that they are revised to reflect the practice. This is what has been the experience as the Church struggles with the role of elders/leaders.

The regulations have a role in providing structure and direction but always there will be the need to discern the Gospel that undergirds them and which, ultimately, must not be compromised by them. Of course that is not always easy. At a meeting of The President of the Assembly and Synod Moderators a number of years ago there was a discussion around whether only the baptized should be allowed to receive the elements in a service of Holy Communion. Of those present the consensus seemed to be that the open table policy of the Uniting Church should mean that anyone present would be welcome if they love the Lord and desire to participate as is implicit in the invitation given in the liturgy:

*Christ our Lord invites to his table
all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another. (UiW 2 p162 and p209)*

Yet the *Basis of Union* (para 8) states, in relation to Holy Communion: "In this sacrament ... the risen Lord feeds his baptized people."

Doc.bytes Worksheet 8 from the National Working Group on Doctrine comments:

All baptised Christians are welcome to share the meal (*Basis of Union para 8*), but not all may be permitted by the laws of their Church to receive communion with the Uniting Church. This needs to be respected as we continue to pursue the unity to which Christ calls us.

Is it only possible for paragraph 8 of the *Basis of Union* to be read as being exclusive or is it possible to say that it is true to say that the sacrament feeds baptized people without excluding those who are not? What is the Gospel interpretation?

In the end there are times when the regulations need to be followed closely, times when they are a guide where fulfillment of the intent is sufficient and other times when Gospel practice shows up the regulations as inadequate and demanding of change. Nothing is ever perfect and discernment and grace is always necessary.

(Rev Niall Reid is a former Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod and is now Minister at Northmead Uniting Church.)

The consensus decision making process

Christine Bayliss Kelly

I can remember the 1994 Assembly in Sydney when the Consensus process was introduced. I can remember having the opportunity to talk in a small group about the particular process we had been asked to explore. It was an opportunity to actually hear some of the concerns, the support for, the challenges which might arise because of that proposal, the objections but most importantly the opportunity to hear from each other- all of us.

The following Synod I recall introducing the Consensus process with Rev Niall Reid and we used the image of flowers in a vase. As we spoke we talked about the two colours which we had tended to hear- from the voices who were loudest or from those who were the most eloquent speakers. Then we began to add different coloured flowers. Soon the vase was full of colourful flowers- a sign that we are richer because of hearing from more people. It was an interesting Synod in having two members of the Synod who had missed the training on consensus appear ready to enter into their competing and eloquent arguing over a specific issue. It was so encouraging to have the voices of all people empowered rather than just the voices of the one- or the two- and the silence that came when these two were silenced with the gentle words saying 'gentleman, we don't do things that way anymore'.

Driving home from that Synod I was listening to the person who had travelled up to Synod with me each year. She had gone each year for many years. But this time she was so excited because for the first time in all of the times she had been to

Synod she had the opportunity to speak and to be listened to. This is one of the basic elements of Consensus- the ability to listen to every person and value their contribution. Perhaps most of all, it is the principle of listening well to each other that help us listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is nearly 22 years since Consensus was introduced and there are places where it is used well, and other places where has not been used well. In the smaller communities of our church councils we tend to use consensus in a less formal capacity. We take time to know each other, and to listen to each other. If there is a disagreement about something we take time to listen and try and work that matter through because ultimately we need to 'live' with each other so we try and work together as best we can.

In the larger meetings such as Presbytery, Synod or Assembly meetings there are too many people to sit and listen as a whole body- so cards are used. Only in NSW and ACT Synod do we use a yellow card- signifying a question or a statement. We do use the orange cards to signify we feel warm towards a proposal, or we are in support of that issue- or something speaker has said. We use the blue cards to identify our coolness towards a proposal or issue or something someone has said or to indicate we disagree with the proposal or the speaker. It is interesting that if the consensus process is used well we can introduce a proposal about an issue, spend time in a small group to discuss the proposal and listen well to each other, then bring the proposal back for further discussion and decision. The blue and the orange are two colours which can be identified by people who are colour blind- so it is a gesture of being inclusive.

So consensus, if used well, enables people to have a say and speak into the process of decisions about specific things. However we have also seen Consensus used in a way which has stalled some discussion or some movement forward.

Consensus process does not mean we **have** to reach consensus or we have failed. Consensus process is about listening well to each other. If we cannot reach a place of 100% support then we can ask the question- do we need to decide this now? If the answer is yes then we can (and perhaps should) move to formal decision making and this usually results in something like 97% in favour (or against). This is so much greater than the past when 51% 'won' and 49% 'lost'. We can still move forward but we can listen well to each other. **The challenge for people who may be in the minority is to know that just because people don't agree with you it does not mean they have not heard you.**

One of the challenges is to listen to those who might disagree (blue cards)- but to not give the major focus to only those who disagree. It is important to listen, but that also means giving people the opportunity to speak and then for them to recognise that most people might have a different view. This can be done with respect so no one is left feeling they have 'lost'- they simply hold a different opinion to others.

Another challenge is when we might have an issue where there is very clear division in the body of the meeting. I have seen this on discussions around sexuality, the preamble, and property.

In 1997 I coordinated the Facilitation Group for the Assembly in Perth. We discussed the Report on Sexuality, changes to church structure and the Education of Ministers in relation to the code of Ethics. I listened to every single group in relation to one of these matters- and it was clear that whilst the loudest voices were towards different poles- most people were in the 'middle'. They were undecided for a range of reasons and it became clear that we were not going to be able to make a decision at that time. That was a very painful experience- especially for those on different poles of the issue. Yet we listened so well to each other, honoured the differences of opinions and most importantly listened to the leading of God's Spirit.

Divided opinion usually means more work is needed or we are simply reflecting the diversity of our church about a matter of how we understand the scriptures about a particular issue. It may simply be the time is not yet right. And so we need to respect God's time.

So 22 years on, we have learnt a lot- but we seem to have slipped in using the group aspect of the consensus process. And this brings us the challenge- how can we continue to listen well to others- in a diverse church in transition? May we continue to listen well, in doing so show respect for each other, and continue to discern the will of God as we move forward.

Learning from Innovation in the UCA

Project team: Naomi Nash, Alison Bleyerveen and Lynne Taylor

"The Synod of NSW & ACT is determined to learn from experiences of innovation in order to better express the understanding that God's mission has a church. It seeks to understand how context and decision making have affected missional communities, in order to be faithful and effective stewards of human, material and financial resources."

Why look at innovation?

'Innovative' may not be the first word that comes to mind when describing the Uniting Church. However, the research team that has been part of the 'Learning from innovation' project over the last eighteen months, would like to commend it to you as a potentially suitable descriptor.

Over the last few decades there have been numerous experiments, church plants, missional projects, and initiatives across the life of the church. We have had more than one season where stepping out into new spaces in the community, reimagining church, and exploring new forms of worship and discipleship have enjoyed a great deal of focus and resource. In many ways as a Church we have practiced being hopeful, taking risks and investing in the future. We can proudly say that as a pilgrim people, we have been alive to the value of innovation since long before the Prime Minister made it a focus for the country.

In the midst of this perhaps prophetic work is an acknowledgment that efforts in innovation don't always result in the intended outcomes. The task of discovering new ways forward and

exploring unknown territory is difficult, sometimes even painful. You don't have to glance far across the pews on any given Sunday, to find someone who has attempted to start a ministry, encourage change, pioneer a project, or revitalise a dying congregation: someone who carries some grief at how things have worked out.

The 'Learning from Innovation' project was created partly out of a desire to acknowledge the breadth of views and experiences around innovation in our Church. It has also been driven by the recognition that while we have experimented widely, we haven't always learned all we could from these experiments. The research project is an opportunity for the Church to reflect intentionally on its own stories of innovation; to capture insights and discoveries; and to create a community of learning that can strengthen our decision making and practice into the future.

About the 'Learning from innovation' research project

The key objectives of the project are to:

- Learn from experiences of innovation about the mission of God & the role of the church
- Discover how context and decision making affect the viability and sustainability of innovative expressions of church
- Discover new ways of building and sustaining teams of innovators
- Build an effective community of learning around innovation
- Develop a community of wisdom holders who can share their experiences of innovation with the wider church

Our approach to achieving the objectives above has involved three major elements. First, the formation of a research team and design of a methodology that would enable us to gather relevant data from individuals' first hand experiences across four project sites. At each of the sites we conducted six to twelve individual and group interviews capturing perspectives from a range of different people, who had varying levels of involvement and responsibility. Two of the chosen sites were active communities, two had ceased to formally operate. There were a range of forms, styles and approaches to ministry within the four sites, including church plants, missional projects, and informal gatherings.

The semi-structured interviews were based around a set of open-ended questions, however participants were encouraged to simply share their story and given freedom to focus on whichever aspects of their experience seemed most relevant. Space was also given to offering pastoral care to those interviewed, acknowledging the sacred and the solemn that was present in each story. The naming of achievements as well as grief has been a vital and deeply meaningful aspect of the project for the participants and the researchers.

Secondly, a community of practice was formed to ensure the research findings would have a life and impact beyond written reports. There was a strong view that inviting a group of current practitioners, including young people, and enabling them to both hear from the research and inform the process would strengthen the whole project. We named the group the Wisdom Holders.

Thirdly, a decision was made that one data had been gathered from across all four sites, that a series of resources would be developed, to essentially hand back to the Church as a whole, what had been learned. The exact form of these resources is still being explored, attentive to the breadth of audiences within the life of the Church who may be interested in the learning, and aware of the need to ensure anonymity and confidentiality for those interviewed.

Introducing the Wisdom holders: community of practice

This community of around eight individuals meets once a month to engage in a mix of bible study, community building, sharing stories, case conferences, reading other research and exploring the findings of the innovation project.

This group both blesses and invests in the lives of practitioners. Each person in the group is actively working in the Church in a pioneering ministry and much time is spent on the core task of encouraging each other and providing perspective on issues and decisions that arise.

This reflective group of people, deeply embedded in their work as pioneers, is itself the kind of resource many past innovators in the church could have benefited from. It is a space where there is a great deal of experience, compassion, knowledge and trust on hand: where an innovator can bring vulnerability as well as be challenged.

Initial findings

The primary research phase has been completed, with interviews conducted across the four research sites. Below are some examples of the kinds of questions discussed in the semi-structured interviews:

1. Think of a time when you were part of this project and things were really humming. Can you tell us a story about it? For example, you may have felt purposeful, valued or that the group was achieving its goals. What were the characteristics at play?
2. How have you been changed or encouraged as a result of participating in the project?
3. What were your hopes/expectations at the beginning? How did these change over time?
4. What worked well around decision making? What would you recommend is critical in this area for other people starting projects?
5. What kinds of risks did you take in this project or did this project take?
6. If a group of passionate young people about to start a new 'project' came to ask you advice, what are some of the things you would tell them about the journey ahead?

The research team is still working through the data gathered to identify key learnings, themes and insights. However, at this stage we can point to some of the aspects that are emerging as central. The first is that across the church there are varying degrees of unspoken or unprocessed grief in relation to projects that have discontinued, communities that no longer gather, or changes that were difficult. There is a need for safe and meaningful places to talk about this grief before there can be readiness for people to feel energised and ready to engage any new initiatives or take further risks.

Within all four projects visited, one of the key findings was that each experienced significant transitions. For example, moving from one location to another, or into a new permanent

venue, or when a founding ministry agent moves to a new placement, or a member of the core group chooses to leave. These transitions can be particularly trying for the community within the project. They cause participants to reflect again on their identity, purpose, commitment and can bring uncertainty. Attending carefully to transitions, ensuring everyone has time and space to ask questions, process anxiety and develop ownership of a change is a key skillset needed in those seeking to shepherd these projects through to maturity.

The research heard about the value of establishing teams, of making space for people to step up and contribute. This is a life giving and faith growing experience for people. We heard many different approaches to decision making and structures for organising the life of the community. We heard about the joy of taking a risk together, the sense of purpose and adventure in stepping out of the familiar and working alongside others to create something new.

Perhaps predictably, there have been aspects of the findings that are in tension with each other, demonstrating that in innovation, much depends on the unique context and time in which the project is taking place. Developing intuition, paying attention to what is happening on the ground, bringing wisdom from the external perspective, yet also making space for a healthy local pragmatism are all part of the required mix.

Even though this project is a new approach, a fresh enquiry into how the church grows and changes, in many ways it points to things we already know. That there are no one size fits all answers, or prescriptive steps to fostering a vibrant faith community. No simple solutions to the challenges of growing disciples. But there are also many new learnings that are already resourcing the 'Wisdom holders' group, informing Synod processes and that will be made available in due course to local congregations, Synod and Presbyteries.

Where to next?

The question of how to communicate the findings from the project is a live one. It is likely dissemination will take multiple forms: producing a white paper; hosting events with discussion panels and presentations; creating a non-linear set of 80 stories that address core themes and can be accessed by groups based on their interest; liturgy and bible study resources; and targeted resources for church councils, presbyteries and other synod bodies.

The research team looks forward to engaging this challenge, beginning to hear from parts of the church about their needs and interests and thinking creatively about the way forward.

If you would like to keep in touch with the project and its updates, are interested in participating in the Wisdom Holders group in Sydney or are interested in starting your own community of practice around innovation, please contact Alison Bleyerveen, AlisonB@nswact.uca.org.au.

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