



Number Ten

# Bendigo Vision

Discerning Praying Serving Together



June 2009

*The vision is of a dynamic and growing church of committed Christians, engaged with their community, developing their faith and reaching out to enact the love of Christ.*

## Keep the Comments Coming

Alongside a widespread acceptance of the need for change are concerns being expressed by some people who believe that they have seen it all before.

It's true, we have seen congregations come together under a range of circumstances—and especially since church union in 1977. Over the past four decades church membership and church attendance have declined, and the combining of congregations seems to have done little to arrest that decline. So, it is argued, why are we being put through this all again?

We live in a world where change is inevitable, and we can either change towards a vision of God's kingdom, or we can meander around, resisting the changes until there are very few options left.

Our vision—reflecting the broad views of Uniting Church People, is one of gospel engagement—with the people of Bendigo and with the future.

It's a vision of faith, arising out of our call to discipleship. Disciples journey in faith and obedience, uncomfortable as that may be, seeking that God's Spirit should shape themselves and their church.

The BUCS Steering Committee has undertaken to visit and talk with all our congregations. The task is almost complete. Members of the Steering Committee have listened to, and noted the concerns that some people have—along with the excitement of others. In some cases they have referred people to

the *Vision* (published in *BV 7*) and the *Action Plan* (*BV 8*), where some of these concerns have already been addressed. Other issues are addressed on page 2 of this newsletter.

Please continue to make your concerns known the Steering Committee. Talk to a member, (see *BV 9* for a list), or write or email to the addresses below.

### Care Groups, Small Groups, Discipleship Groups, Cell Groups . . .

We don't mind what you call them, but they are a key feature of the Vision, and the main means by which the people of God offer pastoral care to each other.

As members of the Steering Committee have moved among and talked with members of our congregations, it has become clear that many of our smaller churches already function as a *Care Group*, with members offering encouragement and support for each other. They particularly value the intimate nature of their small congregation's life that enables them to work in this way.

We celebrate this, and encourage them to continue to share in this way when the time comes to embrace a new congregational structure. In other words, take your *Care Group* with you!

### Combined Service Call to Live as Disciples

Some 370 people attending the combined service on 14th June heard Moderator-elect, Isabel Thomas Dobson, remind us of our calling to move forward in faith, assured that God's Spirit is with us.

The gathering of UCA people, with a luncheon following the service, provided opportunities for fellowship and sharing. An offering of \$902.80, (after some modest expenses are deducted), will be directed to outreach work through BUCO.

*What wondrous sounds we make when we come together. The combined choir from the service on 14th June. An intriguing metaphor!*



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## Where we are up to.

At its meeting on 16th May, Presbytery reaffirmed the Bendigo UC Strategy Objectives and encouraged congregations to explore ways in which they can work and share together as they move towards greater organic unity, and the implementation of the Bendigo Strategy and Vision.

Presbytery also agreed to appoint the members of the *Bendigo Vision Implementation Group (BVG)* to manage and support the process of implementing the Strategy and Vision as described in *Bendigo Vision 7* (November 2008).

Presbytery has considered the terms of reference for the *BVG*, which include:

- Membership of approximately 12 people with a range of skills, passions, some from the Strategy Steering Committee, ministers/lay, gender balance,
- Accountability to Presbytery and the people of the Bendigo Uniting Churches.
- A commitment to ongoing consultation.
- Responsibility to implement the Bendigo Uniting Churches Strategy.
- Reference to the Vision and the Action Plan.
- Responsibility to assist and support the Bendigo congregations through the changes.

**People who are willing to be part of the *BVG* are invited to contact the Steering Committee, (see addresses on front), without delay.**

## Elders' Meeting.

Plans have commenced to organise another meeting for Bendigo Uniting Church Elders. It is expected that this will include a major input on *Pastoral Care and Change*, as this need was strongly identified at the previous meeting with elders.

This meeting should be held around the end of August, and some time will also be given to some of the other concerns raised, including how we can build on our relationships and find new ways to work together, and pushing ahead with the *Care Groups* vision.

## Let's determine to continue

### • To build relationships.

Many of us have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities of these recent years, of getting to know our sisters and brothers from other congregations, and finding the same sense of commitment to God's kingdom and its mission. Let's make sure we come together whenever we can.

### • To pray

Prayer for our sisters and brothers is both a privilege and a responsibility. In love, we seek the very best for each other, and for the people of Bendigo. We invite you to commit yourself to pray for our church and its leaders, and for each other, so that together we may bring the good news of Jesus to the people of our community.

***Our Eaglehawk friends invite us to pray with them on the 2nd Sunday of the month, 1.00—4.00 pm. Come when you can and stay as long as you like.***

## FAQs

**Frequently Asked Questions that have arisen from our meetings and discussions with elders, congregations and leaders.**

**Each Congregation is individual—will we retain our individuality?** Having four Worship and Ministry Centres, (*WMCs*), (*BV 9*) enables us to provide a variety of styles of worship and mission emphases. One of the next tasks will be to identify these directions. The ministry team will be selected according to the priorities so determined.

**Travel: if my local congregation were to close, how would I get to my preferred church?** The *Vision* and the *Action Plan* address this at point 9. Developing a transport plan for those in need is one of the *Vision's* priorities.

**How will we care for those who might otherwise slip between the cracks.** Our elders and others who currently offer care and support will continue to fulfil their tasks. If each member is a part of a Care Group, (or a congregation that sees itself as a Care Group), then there will be people looking out for the interests of each member.

**What about people who choose to join another church that might be in their neighbourhood?**

They do so with our blessing, and the prayer that they may be a blessing to others.

**And those who decide that it is all too hard and simply stop attending worship?** We already have people who are unable to attend worship regularly. We don't stop caring for them. Those who understand that they are called to be disciples will do what they can to serve God as part of God's church. And we will help them to do that.

**When will it all happen?** Not fast enough for some, too fast for others. As we move towards the implementation of the *Vision*, there will be overlaps between the old and the new. Presbytery has agreed to appoint a *Bendigo Vision Implementation Group (BVG)* to begin the process. The formation of a *Bendigo Uniting Church Council* will be a key stage in the process. The full vision should be largely in place within 2-3 years.

**Will the finances be centralised, and if so, where will the power lie?** It is hard to see how we could function as one Bendigo church without centralised finances. Many congregations continue to operate as part of parishes, and the proposed structure works in this way. *Worship and Ministry Centres* will have responsibility for local worship and mission, and there will be some central coordination too. (See *BV 9* page 3)

**Will my current church be closed?** All current churches will enter into a new beginning in company with sisters and brothers from other Bendigo churches. The sites for the renewed *WMCs* will be determined by the *Bendigo Uniting Church Council* in line with the recommendations in the *Vision*. Some of our current church sites will become surplus to our needs.