



Bendigo Vision

Discerning Praying Serving Together



Number Twelve

December 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.

Sharing Together: Worship in Different Ways

The Bendigo Vision Implementation Group (BVG) is initiating a series of worship opportunities in 2010, that will enable people to come together to share with each other in different patterns and styles of Worship.

It all starts on the morning of February 28th, (and continues on the 4th Sundays of May, August and November). Details are still to be confirmed, but it is planned that there will be four different approaches to worship on offer.

On the first occasion these will be:

- Contemporary Service at Eaglehawk. 10.00 am.
- Family Service at Neale St. 9.15 am.
- More Traditional Service at Golden Square. 11.00 am
- Nature Service in the bush. (TBA) 10.30 am

Other occasions will see us exploring other approaches, too, and other venues; and we welcome your suggestions.

Bendigo Congregations have received initial informa-

tion about these arrangements and more details will be available in the new year. We understand that some congregations may have locked in their plans for February, but hope that others can be flexible. Congregations are asked to help people to get to their preferred worship service.

The services will be organised locally. The organisation of future services will be the responsibility of the newly formed *Worship and Ministry Task Group*.

We hope that all of our people will make the most of these services, and use them to form new connections and discover all that they have in common with their sisters and brothers in other congregations. They could also provide occasion to invite new people.

There may be some concern about offerings on these days. Regular envelopes will be directed to the appropriate congregation. Special envelopes will be available at each venue so that loose offerings can also be so directed.

Lenten Studies —Let's All Mix In

Responding to an initiative of our team of Ministers, the BVIG is supporting a Bendigo wide program of Lenten Studies.

It is planned to have groups of people meeting in private homes to work with a couple of different studies. People will be invited to choose a group that meets at a convenient time and location, and to accept the joy and the challenge of perhaps making some new friends in the process.

We are asking people to make their homes available to extend Christian hospitality to other Bendigo UCA people. (The host is not necessarily expected to run the study!). All that is needed is a large enough room and seats for 8—10 people. An average lounge room would be fine!



Choose a time that suits you, and pass on the information to Ken Rookes: kro23808@bigpond.net.au or 5446 8312, preferably by early January. (People who would like to lead can also contact Ken.)

We'll take it from there and get details out in early February, so that people can register for their chosen study group.

It is expected that the studies will last 6 weeks, and begin the week commencing 14th Feb, to allow them to finish ahead of Holy Week

Grasstrees producing flowers after a bushfire.

Where do you see signs of new life for our church?

Published by the Bendigo Vision Implementation Group.

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Theology of the Vision

For the first year of publishing the *Bendigo Vision* Newsletter, we featured the objectives as set out below. It was – and is vital, that our processes and our outcomes reflect our commitment and faithfulness to our calling in Christ Jesus.

The purpose of undertaking the Bendigo Uniting Church strategy is to:

- discern a shared vision for the Uniting Church in Bendigo that arises directly from our calling to serve Christ, the head of the church.
- provide direction to congregations and agencies within the Bendigo area and to the Presbytery to achieve the shared vision.
- identify ways to build up God's people in faith, and to bring new people into God's kingdom.
- identify ways to assist the church to strengthen its relationships with the community.

A number of people have asked about the theology behind the vision. Here, in the limited space available, we expand our theology with an invitation to engage in further discussion and dialogue.

The Headship of Christ

Paragraph one of the Basis of Union tells us that the uniting churches *“declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word; and they seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

At its heart, the Bendigo Vision affirms the headship of Jesus Christ. The Vision has been forged through much struggle and prayer, and we believe that it seeks to reflect the ministry of Jesus and his call to love and care for our neighbours. The Vision itself will continue to be shaped by the demands of faithful discipleship.

Without Christ we can do nothing. We are nothing.

The Call to Discipleship

Unless we hear anew Christ's call to discipleship, the church is lost. In recent generations, the church has struggled to make clear her Lord's gospel call. In calling for a renewed church, the Bendigo Vision is calling each of its members to a renewed discipleship, and to a deeper commitment to the work of prayer and study and of sharing God's good news.

Discipleship is not the same as membership, although the responses made by newly confirmed members (UIW) provides a convincing pattern of discipleship. Those who see themselves as

members may find themselves concerned with their rights and privileges, those who understand themselves as disciples will be concerned about living for and serving Jesus.

Disciples understand that this will be costly and sometimes painful, shaped, as it is, around the metaphor of taking up one's cross. Discipleship is not a comfortable calling. The vision is truly a call to move from being members of the church to growing as disciples of Jesus.

The Unity and Care for the Body

The body of Christ is at its best when each member is using the gift's that God has given. Each is called to use her gifts for the building up of the whole body. It is when the body is working as one that the good news is most powerfully heard – and demonstrated.

Christians deeply value their relationships with their sisters and brothers. In our small congregations there can be a powerful sense of unity and closeness. The Vision recognises the pain and disruption that comes with a renewed church. A key part is the importance of maintaining and building these relationships through care groups.

The Body Depends on Each Member

The Bendigo Vision calls all members to serve God with passion and commitment. Whilst we are fragmented, and whilst many people are working hard just to keep their own congregations afloat, we don't seem to have much time or energy for passion and commitment. If we can begin to see ourselves as part of the one body we could make much better use of the richness of gifts that are found across the Bendigo Uniting Church.

God is Doing a New Thing

Our current multiplicity of congregations is the product of a vastly different age. So much has changed in the last century, and indeed, the past 50 years. The patterns of the past are no longer working – we have only to look at our diminishing and struggling congregations to see that. The Vision respects and honours the faithful witness of past and present generations, but acknowledges that change is essential.

The Christendom church is not suited to the post-modern age. The church no longer finds itself at the centre of society. Some suggest that our place in the world is far more like that of the early Christians who were a persecuted sect on the fringe of their own society. Whatever our situation, we are challenged to live faithfully, and to find ways to build a faithful church in the midst of an ever-changing world.

Christians, of all people, should have no fear of change. They are followers of a Lord who came to

turn things upside down. Jesus confronted the keepers of the old religion with the gospel message of the new thing that God was doing. Some believed eagerly and came with him, others resisted, sometimes violently. The Vision affirms the faithfulness of God, and calls God's people forward to a risky and unknown future, but one which holds no fears.

Loving Christ in One's Neighbour

This call is at the heart of Jesus' message. The Vision has been written as much for those who are not part of our church as for those who are members. It includes a clear call to be at mission, reaching out in love towards the people of Bendigo. Further, it assumes the affirming attitude that is a special part of the Uniting Church's understanding of mission, that of respecting our neighbours and affirming and celebrating their unique journeys in faith. We confidently embrace people with Jesus' message: The Kingdom of God is near!

Mission is an unavoidable part of our calling as a Uniting Church. The vision provides opportunity to build upon and grow our practical sharing of our faith

The Gospel

The good news of God's unconditional and life-changing love for us all as revealed in Jesus Christ is needed today as much as in any era. Sadly, we have not been very successful in interpreting this message to present generations. In calling for renewed discipleship, our Vision is calling us to the hard work of living and communicating the gospel to our neighbours, and prayerfully calling people to God and God's Kingdom.

Stewardship: Faithfully Using What We Have Been Given

Our ancestors erected our church buildings to bring glory to God. But crumbling buildings that serve about 15% of the numbers for which they were built do little to enhance the work of the Kingdom. The maintenance requirements of many of our buildings will prove beyond our means.

The Vision invites us to look at our buildings and other properties, and to see how these investments from the past can be best put to use to serve the work of the kingdom today.

A new church needs facilities that will meet the requirements of today. On the other hand, new forms of church will almost certainly emerge that have no need for specially designated buildings, and we should be open to these.

We invite you to consider these thoughts, to discuss them and to make your responses. If enough people are interested, we could come together for some vigorous dialogue.

Update

Task Groups

The BVIG has just completed the process of forming its Task Groups and appointing Convenors. Thank-you to everyone who has offered themselves for these tasks. We had hoped that all Task Groups would have met before Christmas, but it has taken a little longer than we expected.

The Task Groups are:

Worship and Ministry. Convenor: Michael Dobson

Outreach and Mission. Convenor: Judy Causon

Care Groups and Discipleship. Conv: Merrill Cole

Property and Finance. Conv: to be *finalised*.

The View from the Poppet Head

At our gathering of Elders two months ago, Revd Tim Angus led us through a process of reflecting on our faith and our mission, and how we respond to the challenge of change. Many found it to be helpful, and it was suggested that elders could lead their people through the same exercises.

A copy of Tim's process has been sent to all elders, and we encourage congregations to engage in it. Talk to your elders, and set aside some time to work through it.

A Team of Ministers

Impending Ministry changes, along with the situation of current vacancies, confront us with the need to address the question of how a ministry team might function across Bendigo.

The Vision presumes a model of shared ministry, but with each Minister having primary responsibility for a particular grouping or congregation. As the Team is formed and shaped it will be important that we hold before us the Vision and its principles.

The Team could include a combination of Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Youth Workers and Pastors. It could also include specifically directed ministries, such as chaplaincies and aged care, youth and family ministries. The BVIG is looking at ways of determining mission and ministry priorities across Bendigo.

The current Ministers are exploring ways in which they can build their sense of becoming a team. They are looking at occasional pulpit swaps and have committed more time to meet to share and explore matters of ministry and preparation together during 2010.

It is important that Congregations and Church Councils continue to discuss these matters with their ministers so that mutual understandings of changing circumstances can be developed.

Timelines

BVIG is considering Pentecost 2011 as the date when we will formally become one Uniting Church in Bendigo. This will be in accordance with the strategy outlined in the 2008 Vision, and in line with Regulation 3.1.3, referring to "relating congregations."

Task Groups

Terms of Reference

The Task Groups represent an important way that the BVIG has chosen to undertake its work. We publish their **Terms of Reference** here for your information.

The BVIG appoints the following Task Groups:
Worship and Ministry
Care Groups and Discipleship
Mission and Outreach
Property and Finance.

Task Groups are convened under the auspice of the BVIG, which was established by the Presbytery of Loddon-Mallee to implement the Bendigo Uniting Church Strategy Action Plan.

Task Groups are responsible to and report to the BVIG. A Convenor for each Task Group will be appointed, and a secretary elected to maintain records and keep minutes of meetings. Task Groups should report regularly to the BVIG.

Task Groups will undertake tasks in accordance with the priorities defined in the attached sheet. Task Groups will diligently undertake processes of research and consultation as appropriate. Initial tasks should be completed, or be well underway, by the beginning of April 2010

Task Groups will make recommendations to the BVIG. The BVIG will consider the recommendations and authorise Task Groups to take action in response, or other actions as the BVIG sees fit.

Convenors shall have free access to the BVIG, as befits a close partnership.

If you have a particular concern you might like to speak directly with someone from the appropriate Task Group. Refer to the list of Convenors on page 3, or contact BVIG and we will put you in touch with the Task Group.

Local Initiatives

The people of **St Andrew's** and **Forest Street** have been building upon their sense of unity, a process that has been accelerated by preparing to receive joint placements. They are currently meeting together for worship on the first Sunday of the Month.

The **Social Justice Group** which was formed jointly from the above congregations, is keen to see itself as a group serving the whole of the Bendigo Churches, and provide education for social justice across Bendigo. Interested people from other congregations can contact the BVIG and we will put you in touch with the Group.

The **Neale St** Congregation, with BVIG support, continues to discuss with **Uniting Aged Care**, various options for a relocation to the **Strath Haven** site.

Let's be Creative

On page one we identify four different approaches to worship. There are far more than four; what of Taizé style, contemplative, charismatic, alternative, reflective, 'praise and worship,' . . . ?

Let the **Worship and Ministry Task Group** know what you are interested in and what you would like to be involved with.

And what about the contributions that music, poetry, song and art make to our worship and reflection. So many styles and possibilities. Wouldn't it be great to have a traditional choir, a gospel choir, a rap group, a big band, smaller rock groups, a capella groups . . . the possibilities are limitless!

Talk to the **Care Groups and Discipleship Task Group** about your creative passions and how they might be linked with the passions of others.

Let's Pray

**God, help us to be faithful people,
disciples of Jesus,
that we might share with the Spirit
in the work of building your Kingdom.**

Have a Joyous Christmas,
& may the New Year bring you
the Blessings of God's Kingdom.



One divine word;
a whispered murmur
on the lips of shepherds,
sung sublimely by a choir of angels,
and written in straw:
come.

Annunciation Ken Rookes Linocut Print. 2009

Previous editions of Bendigo Vision

are available at: <http://victas.uca.org.au/>
Go to *Presbyteries* and click on *Loddon Mallee*