



Bendigo Vision

Discerning Praying Serving Together



August 2010

Number Fourteen

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.

Gathering Affirmed

The Bendigo-wide gathering of UCA people on June 20th was warmly affirmed by many of the 70+ people who attended.

Many especially appreciated the worship, beginning and closing the gathering. It included a celebration of the anniversary of the Uniting Church. We enjoyed singing a hymn* written by Jeff Shrowder that drew upon the language and ideas expressed in the Basis of Union.

All but one congregation was represented, and a person from each congregation was invited to share what they most valued in their congregation's life—and that they were determined to see included in our renewed Bendigo congregations.

A pre-recorded presentation *The Future Church?* encouraged us all to think about what our churches might look like in five years time if much of the Bendigo Vision is implemented. Many people found this helpful in thinking about what God might be calling us to become. The script for this presentation is published on page 3.

People also had the opportunity to share their wisdom, insights and concerns in small groups. To the question, *What is the most important thing you have heard so far today?* many answered about the importance of maintaining existing care and support groups. People were also invited to share their wisdom as to suggestions about how we can move towards the new church.

Members of the BVIG were thanked for their continued efforts.

**(The words are available on the Presbytery Blog:*

<http://loddon-malleeuca.blogspot.com/> posted on 13th June.



Combined Services

Sunday 22nd August

Many people have expressed their appreciation for our combined services which give our people the opportunity to share together in new ways across existing congregational boundaries.

You are invited to attend one—or more, of our next series of combined services.

These will be:

- **10.00 am at Arnold St UCA**
Traditional worship
- **10.00 am Nature Service.**
Meet at Axedale UCA and we will move together to the site.
- **10.30 am at Kangaroo Flat UCA**
Contemporary/Traditional worship.
- **6.30 pm at Eaglehawk UCA**
Relaxed/Contemporary.
(This service will feature a guest speaker from the Salvation Army Eaglehawk Corps, Captain Sherelee Gray.)

The descriptions of these services will mean different things to different people. If, in attending a service you feel that it could be better described, then share your ideas with the *Worship and Ministry Task Group*.

Please take your regular offering envelopes to the service you attend. There will again be offering envelopes available at all services to assist in the direction of otherwise loose offerings. Filling in a response form will help the Task Group in planning future services.

Some earnest discussion at the whole of Bendigo gathering on 20th June.

Congregational Links

Most Congregations have responded to our survey entitled *How does Our Congregation Understand its Mission ?*

Using these responses we have grouped congregations together in ways that reflect both their location and their ministry needs and priorities. We offer this summary as a starting point for further discussion, and for exploring the types of ministry, mission and worship that might be offered at the four Worship and Ministry sites.

The ministry emphases reflect existing commitments and interests, and should not be seen as restrictive. The groupings are suggestions, and should be seen as invitations to explore togetherness.

Central

Forest Street – St Andrew’s Bendigo/Axedale – Arnold Street

- Connection with BUCO
- Social justice emphasis
- Pastoral care for the aged
- Traditional worship
- Openness to other forms of worship
- Emphasis on (more formal) music
- Openness to divergent theological understandings
- Desire to grow children’s/family ministry
- UCAF groups
- Mid-week service

North West

Eaglehawk – Long Gully – Marong

- Renewed Small Groups
- Local outreach initiatives
- Creative opportunities for spiritual reflection
- Picking up previously connected people
- Worship incorporating traditional and contemporary influences
- Traditional worship for older people.
- Ministry with children
- Ministry with youth
- Ministry with families
- UCAF

South

Chum St – Quarry Hill – Golden Square – Kangaroo Flat – Lockwood

- Ministry with children
- Exploration of newer music in worship and liturgy
- Active BUCO Connection
- Creative connections with community inc. market, luncheon
- Community use of property inc. Cornerstone group, Palliative care

- Support for chaplaincy
- Development of Care Groups
- Commitment to engaging with and responding to the scriptures
- Opportunities for both traditional and exploratory worship.
- UCAF
- Resourcing ministry
- Support for the aged

East

Strathfieldsaye – White Hills – Neale St.

- Mutual and organized Pastoral Care and visitation
- Care/Small Groups
- Worship / Faith Development / Outreach Commission
- Participation in preparation and leadership of worship
- Ministry with children: SS, KUCA
- Ministry with youth inc. NCYC
- Advent Workshop outreach
- Ministry with aged people: Strath-Haven / White Hills-Haven
- Support for Dingee congregation
- Ministry with Students: University Chaplaincy / Accommodation
- Camping Activities
- Commitment to connect with Strathfieldsaye community, inc. development of arrangement with Anglicans
- Monthly fellowship at White Hills Haven
- Support for CRE
- Creative use of music in worship

In addition to all the above, it is hoped that a grouping might commit itself to such ministries as:

- Spirituality and the Arts
- Nature Service
- Alternative worship
- UC Clownz
- ...

Members of Congregations are invited to use the above as a basis of discussions about their future.

Prayer

Please remember to pray for your people, and the members of congregations across the city of Bendigo.

And take the opportunity to share with people of other congregations as often as you can, so that your prayers might be more personal and informed by the needs of particular congregations.

Pray for those who grieve the potential loss of their sense of identity and history, that they might find fulfillment in the new things that God is doing.

An Evolving Process: What BVIG is Doing

Hurry up and wait is a well known catch-cry in the SES. It reflects the tension between the needs for a rapid response to a situation requiring action, and that of working safely and confidently to bring about the required result.

As circumstances and needs change, the BVIG has adjusted its priorities and reassessed the requirements of the Bendigo churches in moving towards the goals outlined in *Bendigo Vision*. Here is a brief report on the current state of play:

Community Development Worker.

Members of the BVIG work very hard in their tasks, as well as holding down regular jobs and other commitments to families, church and community. There was provision in the *Bendigo Vision* for a person (or persons!) to work with BVIG in fulfilling its work. Presbytery has encouraged the BVIG to employ such a person, funds having been set aside for such a purpose.

A job description has been prepared for a suitable person to help the BVIG in its work, possibly half-time for up to two years, and will be submitted to Presbytery for approval. We expect that the position will be advertised within a month or two. (If you know someone who might be suitable you could draw their attention to the advertisement when it is made public.)

Combined Worship.

These services are receiving good support, and many are finding them helpful in developing relationships across our congregations. We will look at the possibility of continuing them in 2011.

Governance.

We continue to give this matter our attention, and are grateful for the input and suggestions that people have made. We are probably a little closer, but are not wanting to hurry the issue. Please continue with your comments.

Communication.

We were pleased with the way that our visits to Church Councils were received, and appreciated the opportunities for listening to people's concerns. We intend to continue this process, but we will wait until the current processes towards ministerial placements have taken place before we proceed with another round.

Larger gatherings.

These have been a helpful source of encouragement, and we expect to call people together, as a whole of Bendigo gathering, and/or in their linked groups, after the ministry and placement processes have been worked through.

Task Groups

The work of Task Groups continues at various rates. If you would like to contribute to a Task group then please contact us.

Finding Faith

The *Bendigo Advertiser* will again publish this special feature in a couple of months. The BVIG will coordinate the UCA presence on behalf of all our congregations. We know that many people drew encouragement from our church's presence in the feature last year.

Moving towards a Transitional Ministry Team.

Many of you will be aware that by the time we reach the end of 2010 there will be only one minister left in congregational placement in Bendigo. This is a matter of some concern, even allowing for the fact that there will most likely be a number of retired ministers offering supply ministry.

The *Bendigo Vision Implementation Group* has taken this matter up with Presbytery, and Presbytery, through its *Pastoral Relations Committee*, is proposing to seek a transitional team of ministers to minister with the churches of Bendigo and to help us through the changes of the next few years. (Of course, the ongoing placement of Revd Doug Turnbull will continue, but it is likely that Doug will be asked to provide oversight to one or two other congregations as well as Eaglehawk.)

For this purpose, congregations will be invited to link themselves into four groupings, each of which will have their own minister to provide oversight and ministry. The groupings will reflect existing connections. Joint Mission Studies (JMS) will be conducted as part of the placement process, in accordance with current procedures. Where Joint Mission Studies have been recently undertaken, these will be incorporated into the new processes.

In addition to the four groupings, it is hoped that up to two other ministry persons offering particular ministries might be appointed to offer ministry to all the churches. The congregational groupings would be expected to contribute financially to these positions.

Presbytery Ministers Mike Lewis and Gordon Bannon have begun a process of meeting with all congregations, explaining the process and inviting them to become part of a grouping. They will be accompanied by members of the Presbytery Standing Committee and also the BVIG.

It will be a challenge to fill the positions quickly, as there are increasing shortages of ministers across the Uniting Church, and we are looking towards the Synod Placements Committee to make these placements a priority.

The Future Church?

This is the script of the presentation that was made at the Bendigo-wide gathering on 20th June. We present it here in the hope that it will stimulate your own imagination.

What follows is purely hypothetical; it represents an exercise of the imagination. Our capacity to dream and imagine is a key aspect of our grasping hold of the future. Your imagination might take you somewhere else, and that might be helpful, too.

We've been trying to imagine what the Bendigo Uniting Church might look like if we were able to reshape it according to our vision. Let's project ourselves forward about 5 years and see where we find ourselves.

We have effectively four Worship and Ministry centres: lets call them **Central**, **Kingdom** in the North West, **Pilgrim** in the South, and **Trinity** toward the East. It's just over a year since Trinity opened its new buildings on the Strath Haven site.

"The new buildings are great, but it's been a bit of a wait. Many of the residents at Strath Haven attend our traditional service, but there's a good number of families and young people involved too, especially at our earlier service. And once a month we have a Saturday night family service, with a fellowship meal. We really do things differently there. And we're pleased that our ministry with students has begun to develop and grow."

"We've just had a master plan drawn up for the Central site at Myers St. BUCO is based there, and the site has great potential being so near the centre of the city. We want to build upon our connections with the city and its people, and we offer some alternatives for people wanting to engage with spirituality in the midst of their busy lives. We recently established a space for alternative worship, where people can come and go when they wish, and reflect upon what God might be saying to them. A social justice group meets there, but it has members from all the Ministry Centres"

In fact there are a broad range of small groups and care groups, across all the churches. Some of the special interest groups – such as the Art and Spirituality group, the Gospel Choir and the Progressive Christianity group are linked to a particular Centre, but draw their members from all churches. Many of these groups are not just about belonging and caring for each other – they provide important opportunities for growth in faith and discipleship.

"At Kingdom Ministry Centre we are committed to share the good news with our local community, which has historically seen itself as slightly apart from the rest of Bendigo. So we have a range of outreach programs, like our Playgroup, our Youth group, our Monday and Wednesday morning coffee groups, our Sunday School – I could go on. It shapes our worship, too – we have a relaxed, contemporary style that enables new people to easily fit in. Our Youth Group regularly participates in combined activities, including NCYC, and we are keenly aware that we are a part of our wider Bendigo Church. We also work hard with our ecumenical relationships."

The Uniting Church is open to new ways of thinking, and of being the church. The Pilgrim Ministry Centre, to the

South, has sought to offer a range of options in worship and spirituality.

"We are constantly seeking to source good new music for worship. We use the Gospel Choir whenever possible, and encourage our people to try their hand at writing songs and prayers. We also take responsibility for the nature service each month, and we also invite the Arts and Spirituality group to help us set up an alternative worship space once a month. With monthly Taizé and Meditation Services, we've got most weeks covered. We feel a strong sense of call to witness within our local community, and want to take our worship out there. We are looking at creative ways of developing our site to better make these connections."

Each of the four Worship and Ministry Centres is responsible for its worship and mission with oversight provided by a Joint Church Council. It is sort of like a parish arrangement. The Joint Council is responsible for calling the team of ministers, who bring a range of gifts and insights to the Bendigo Church. A range of Ministers have primary responsibility for particular Worship and Ministry Centres. The Team currently includes Ministers of the Word, a Deacon, Pastor, a Youth Worker who also works as a school chaplain, and a part-time Administrator. The Deacon also works half-time with BUCO, and one of the Ministers works part-time as Hospital Chaplain.

"We've been really pleased with the changes in the church. As our children have grown older, we felt keenly the need to mix with people of different ages, including their own, and for them to explore and discover the Christian faith for themselves. We mostly go to Pilgrim, but our kids go to youth group at Kingdom, as do some other young people at Pilgrim; so we attend there once a month, too."

When the new church was formed, most of the old congregations continued in one form or another, so we didn't immediately close all the old churches. Some buildings have since been sold, but others have continued to be used for a range of purposes. A number of groups from former congregations still meet, but they don't all use church buildings

"In 2009 we began to explore an ecumenical partnership with The Anglicans. Our site at Strathfieldsaye is very central, and the Anglicans, who were also committed to outreach work at Strathfieldsaye, recognised its strategic possibilities. As the partnership developed we were able to continue with KUCA and other family outreach initiatives. The Trinity congregation accepted responsibility to maintain the partnership, and most of us are members there."

It hasn't been easy; in fact for some people the journey has been painful. It isn't easy to let go, and some no longer journey with us. Others realised that the church couldn't continue as it had, and found the strength and the grace to join with others, often coming as a group so as to maintain existing relationships of care and support.

The stated vision for the UCA in Bendigo was "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. We may not be there yet, but we like to think we're getting closer.