



A Placement Profile

A1 Presbytery	Yarra Yarra Presbytery		
A2 Name of Placement	Plenty River Cluster		
A3 Placement city/suburb/town	Epping and Mernda		
A4 Church/Office location(s)	There is a minister's office at Plenty Valley church 180-188 McDonalds Road Epping 3076. Mernda church and hall are at 97-103 Schotters Rd Mernda 3754		
A5 Congregations and agencies associated with this placement	Nil		
A6 Ministry leadership being sought	Specific ministry role:	<input type="text"/>	
	Minister of the Word <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Deacon <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ministry of Pastor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Ordinand <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
A7 Specific details	Additional placement <input type="checkbox"/>	Replacement placement <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Full Time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Part Time <input type="checkbox"/>	Time fraction	<input type="text"/>
	Earliest Start Date:	1/03/2025	
A8 Placement term	Undefined <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Up to	years (see Reg 2.7.3(a))	
	Fixed Term	Required for non-congregational placements (see Reg 2.7.3(b))	Years <input type="text"/>
A9 To be completed by Presbytery, with reasons given on page	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.:</i>		
	Is permission sought to advertise?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Is a Priority Placement recommended?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
A10 Website	None		
A11 Social Media	Facebook: @mernda.uniting.church https://www.facebook.com/Plentyvalleyunitingchurch		
A12 Google map link	Mernda: https://maps.app.goo.gl/1Ww3KAqXUeUXra3b6		

A13 Area map (paste image)

Plenty Valley:



Mernda:



B The Congregation

B1 Tell a potential minister about this placement and yourselves, in your own words and pictures, in no more than one page. Share something of your congregation's values, beliefs and ways in which you live out and share the gospel message.

Include comment about why you need a new minister. How will this placement be exciting, challenging, and attractive to a minister? How can God be served in new ways here? What do you want the Minister to do with you and for you?

This is your chance to 'be creative' and catch the attention of someone who is thinking of sharing their call, their gifts, their life with you.

The shared vision of the congregations of the Plenty River Cluster is to work together collaboratively in building up mission and ministry that is authentic and relational in the communities of which they are a part and of the broader region.

We want to spread the gospel of Jesus as a living church receiving from God, growing in God, outreaching with God.

Sunday worship is the most significant activity of the Cluster, together with personal prayer and discipleship. We have a great love of worship and value the intercultural nature of their congregations with a range of cultures attending. Approximately 20% are of Samoan heritage at Plenty Valley, and Mernda is majority African through joint worship with a Zimbabwean Methodist congregation.

Both congregations meet on Sunday mornings, so it is not anticipated that the minister would lead worship in both places every Sunday. Instead, they would negotiate with the congregations to spend some Sunday mornings at one and other Sunday mornings at the other. Both congregations have arrangements in place for conducting worship in the minister's absence. The minister might, for example, alternate between the two congregations and on the 5th Sunday of the month we could organise our own service or have a joint service. Communion services are currently held on the first Sunday at Mernda and the second Sunday at Plenty Valley.

Without a minister a dedicated ministry of leaders has concentrated on the basics of sustaining the congregations, averaging 60 at both sites, and enabled this resilient community to continue to worship and to care for each other during COVID.

To enable us to do this we have been fortunate in having the assistance of many lay preachers, including a team of dedicated Zimbabwean lay preachers and a member of the Plenty Valley congregation, who holds accreditation as a presider. A minister in association has offered monthly Communion services in Mernda. This has enabled us to hold Holy Communion services at both sites each month, a strong commitment and desire of the congregation. We have also been able to conduct Baptism services, which has enhanced the strong commitment of the congregation.

Several talented musicians support the leaders and are highly valued as we love to sing both choruses and well-known hymns. Plenty Valley has a Sunday School, of young people aged 5 to 14 which is also part of our mission focus. This is prepared for and run by two dedicated members of the congregation, with the support of the congregation. The children are encouraged to take part in church activities, e.g. reading the Bible readings, sharing Sunday School activities, partaking in communion services. Mernda has regular children's talks as part of worship.

A small group at Plenty Valley, run by a congregational member, gather together for Bible Study on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month. Members of the congregation are kept in informed of duties by rosters, a monthly notice sheet and by electronic media produced by a member of the congregation. There are a team of elders and church councillors who meet regularly once a month. This keeps the church running successfully.

On the second Sunday of the month at Plenty Valley, during Holy Communion donations are collected for a designated project, currently Food Bank as part of Plenty Valley's "Word and Deed" actions.

Pastoral care is a high priority, and we look forward to a minister with excellent pastoral care skills to care for and support the members.

We are a warm fellowship and offer a hand of friendship in faith to all who visit us. We take pride in the appearance of our properties. Plenty Valley holds a working bee every second month and Mernda employs a regular groundskeeper.

A men's group, with both church and non-church members, meets quarterly.

With no minister for a number of years, several members have moved on to other churches or commitments.

We have high hopes that a minister in placement would create more energy, to inspire and rejuvenate the dedicated, committed group of leaders, who have worked so tirelessly to address our needs, someone who would encourage younger people by introducing programs and activities to attract families/children and young people to keep our church alive.

There are many opportunities for a minister to build community links perhaps working with the Salvation Army; and the nearby aged care facility; and providing pastoral care and End of Life care to Uniting Church Members as necessary.

Our worship is fairly traditional using the basic pattern of Uniting in Worship II and its Holy Communion service. At Mernda hymns in the Shona language are included, and at Plenty Valley the Samoan choir leads hymns in the Samoan language. Zimbabwean services are vibrant with enthusiastic singing in both Shona and English and preaching is in English.

The Mernda congregation has a valued relationship with the Mernda Neighbourhood House including a formal agreement by which we make our buildings and rooms available to The Neighbourhood House for its operations on Wednesdays and Thursdays as well as Fridays when necessary. We jointly run a monthly Community Lunch which brings 50-60 people together for a cooked meal and human connection on a gold coin donation basis. The Neighbourhood House is not considered a tenant of the Uniting Church. Rather, we consider ourselves mission partners, with our shared mission being understood as the meeting of human need in the surrounding community. Uniting Church members and adherents are invited to volunteer in the programs and activities of the Neighbourhood House and a member of the Mernda congregation serves on the Neighbourhood House Advisory Group. While it is recognized that individuals connected to the activities of the Community House may wish to participate in the life and worship of the Uniting Church

and are welcomed. it is not the intent of the congregation to engage in religious proselytizing, and no religious test is applied to any of the services and activities connected to the Agreement.

The Plenty Valley Church hall is available for hire by community groups. At present it is used/hired by a pre-school group and a community group on weekdays. The church facilities are also used by a Cook Island worship group for worship services and activities.

The Mernda Uniting Church Hall is also used by community groups on almost every day of the week. This reflects a missional heart to make our assets available to the whole community. It is also an income stream that supports our overheads. Activities include Alcoholics Anonymous, a Gospel choir, dance classes, piano lessons, scouts, and others. The Hall is also the site of a missional congregation known as *Haven*, described as 'A safe space to explore faith with others' being led by Baptist minister, Rev. Martin Boutros. It was launched on 13 October 2024 and meets every second Sunday afternoon for worship, a meal and faith-based conversations. Martin has preached at one of our services and we fully support this initiative in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation.

Both congregations are mostly older people (many still working in professional and business capacities) though we have several families with school age children, including two families with high school children who became members in 2022.

We are an Affirming cluster that fully supports the Assembly's decision to allow liberty of conscience on the issue of same sex marriage. Even though some of our members hold to the traditional view of marriage, we want to be a safe space for LGBTQI+ people and would want a minister who would be willing to officiate at same sex weddings.

B2 List and explain any particular priorities which the congregation has identified and which it will address in the next two to five years?

The Shared Objectives in the MOU of the Plenty River Cluster are as follows:

1. The flourishing of ministry and mission across the City of Whittlesea through the sharing of resources, including ministry gifts shared across the Cluster.
2. The discernment and implementation of a Cluster vision for ministry and mission.
3. The clear demonstration of a valuing, nurturing, and resourcing of lay leadership
4. The support of a full time (1.0) paid Ministry Agent to serve the needs of the Cluster.
5. The sustaining and developing of vibrant ministry sites, missionally engaged with their surrounding communities.

Further priorities have been identified as:

1. To enable faithful worship and teaching, which would encourage the congregations in their faith, and energise them to live out their mission statement by reaching out to the local community.
2. Appreciation of diversity and commitment to develop the intercultural aspects of the cluster, ministering with people from all cultural backgrounds.
3. To develop and grow ministry for children, youth and young adults.
4. To facilitate the mission of the cluster.
5. Pastoral care for congregations and the wider community.
6. Encourage younger people introducing and supporting existing programs and activities to attract families/children and young people. Younger people are to be encouraged to have full participation in the liturgy.
7. The use of technical/ computer skills that can be offered in worship and in other ways to engage the congregation and wider community.
8. Consider alternative days and times for services.
9. Mernda congregation is in the process of town planning approval for the improvement of its site, including a renewed entrance area that will be closer to the road and more inviting for visitors and the repair and restoration of interior and exterior fittings.

B3 Does this placement relate to more than one congregation?

Yes No

If so, provide details on page Error! Bookmark not defined..

**B4 What ethnic and language groups are represented in the congregation?
What proportion of the congregation does each represent?**

The Plenty River Cluster is very multi-cultural with a variety of cultural backgrounds and heritages in Nigerian, Anglo-Australian, Greek, Macedonian, Malaysian, Chinese, Sri-Lankan, Tongan, Kenyan, Zimbabwean, and Samoan cultures. Approximately 20% have a Samoan heritage, all of whom speak fluent English. We embrace and welcome the language of different cultures into our worship. Our partnership with the Zimbabwean congregation is deeply valued and enriching.

B5 What languages are spoken in the life of your:

Congregation, by		Community, by	
Individuals	Samoan, English, Sinhalese, Shona	Individuals	<p>According to the 2016 census, The top languages other than English spoken in Epping were Arabic, Punjabi, Macedonian, Italian and Greek (in that order).</p> <p>The top languages other than English spoken in Mernda were Italian, Punjabi, Macedonian, Arabic and Greek (in that order).</p>
Groups	Samoan, English, Shona	Groups	

B6 What languages are spoken by the congregation in worship?

All members speak fluent English, therefore the language spoken by the congregation in worship is mostly English. Sermons are sometimes presented in the Samoan language and the Shona language is spoken and sung in worship, along with English.

B7 Describe any involvement your congregation has in covenanting with first nations people.

At present the Cluster does not have any involvement in covenanting with First Nations people. We would be keen to establish a covenanting relationship with Congress but also make supportive connections with other First Nations community groups in our area. We regularly (but not every Sunday) include a recognition of country in our worship.

B8 List any UCA Schools and/or agencies (Uniting VicTas, Uniting AgeWell) with which the congregation has an existing relationship.

Although both Uniting, Epping (formerly, Kildonan) and the Plenty Valley church are situated in the same building, our past relationship has not been able to be sustained. There is currently little contact with UCA schools due to distance. Attempts to form a relationship with the local Catholic Church have proven difficult. Congregation members participate in the annual ecumenical World Day of Prayer with other churches and host the Prayer Day when it is our turn in the church rotation. It is not known if there is a regular ecumenical meeting of local ministers and priests.

Mernda's Minister-in-Association is a member of Yarra Yarra Presbytery and has served as a member of Synod and Assembly as well as two terms on the Presbytery Standing Committee. Some members meet quarterly with Whittlesea Uniting Church, who do not have a minister-in-placement, offering preaching and Holy Communion. A small group of members from both congregations have lunch together afterwards. This is a valued relationship held together by strong long-term friendships, though the effort to draw Whittlesea

into the Plenty River Cluster was unsuccessful. We have also supported Sunday services at Hurstbridge and Diamond Creek.

C Mission

C1 List three of your missional activities that your congregation does best

1. Participation and contribution to the Operation Christmas Child run by the Good Samaritan organisation.
2. A monthly monetary collection and donation to Food Bank of Victoria or another need as identified by the congregation.
3. Monthly community lunch feeding 50-60 people.

C2 What are three missional activities your congregation would like to develop?

1. Youth ministry
2. Developing a safe space for LGBTQI+ youth to explore faith (perhaps through connections in the Neighbourhood House)
3. Pastoral visitation to those connected to us but who cannot make it to worship.

C3 How has the congregation changed in the past two years?

The congregations within the Cluster have changed in the range of ages of members. Many young people in their teens and early 20s now work on Sundays and are unable to attend worship. Several families have left due to lack of an ordained minister. There is a lack of members in the youth and 40–50-year age group. We transitioned well from Zoom services during COVID restrictions back to weekly, face-to-face services. Mernda has spent a lot of time working with Synod Property Services, selling the Hazel Glen property (now a mosque) and are now in the process of selling a vacant block and a manse beside the Mernda church in order to fund improvements to the church and hall, and a ministry placement. The commencement of joint services with the Zimbabweans has enlivened and energised the Cluster, giving new hope and enthusiasm for the future. There is plenty of energy to get behind the direction of new leadership.

C4 What changes and developments are anticipated in the next three to five years?

This is difficult to predict due to the rapid population growth in this corridor further north of both congregations. These include large housing developments in Woodstock, Donnybrook, and Wollert. With a minister in placement the profile of the Cluster will become more prominent. It is hoped that past members may return, and families will be encouraged to bring their children to be baptised and become participating members of the church.

Alternative service/activity times could be offered periodically to cater for the youth and those who cannot attend at the traditional times and worship services. Mernda, Doreen and surrounding areas are a rapidly growing corridor of new homes, infrastructure and families, alongside the existing township and residents.

The Plenty Valley congregation is located near one of the largest shopping centres in the area (Westfield) and is close to new housing corridors opening up between Epping and Craigieburn, and north to Wollert.

The development of the Mernda Town Centre adjacent to the Mernda Station and the ongoing development of housing along Schotters Road will situate church buildings in a more central location. It was announced on 10 February 2025 that the Federal Government has awarded 7.1 million dollars to the City of Whittlesea to develop the infrastructure for building new homes between Schotters Road and the Plenty River.

Maintaining and strengthening a Uniting Church presence in this major growth corridor of Melbourne is highly strategic and an exciting opportunity for any incoming minister.

D The Community

D1 Describe the wider community in which your ministry is located.

The wider community is ethnically diverse with the most common ancestries being Australians, English, Italian, Indian and Macedonian. The age range of the wider community from the very young to the more senior citizens with the predominant age group is 40-45 years of age. There are large shopping centres and railway stations within walking distance of both churches in the Cluster and numerous bus routes. Several retirement villages and aged care homes are in close proximity. The Northern Hospital with an Emergency department is a short distance from the Plenty Valley church. The City of Whittlesea Community Hospital in Mernda is set to open in 2025.

The New Epping Health Hub is situated in the north's largest public-private health cluster, with two hospitals, established education and research facilities, and a variety of medical services. The Meadow-glen International Athletics Stadium, abuts the Plenty Valley church grounds. Although church attendance may be low, statistics state that Christianity is the predominant religion, with Catholic being the main denomination. There is a wide variety of educational facilities in the local community with is a large number of Schools (Primary, Secondary, Private) Kindergartens, a TAFE and RMIT and Child Care within the church's catchment area.

Mernda is a rapidly developing residential area of around 17 square kilometres and one of the fastest growing areas in Australia. When fully developed, Mernda will accommodate over 30,000 square metres of retail space for supermarkets and shops and around 80,000 square metres for commercial use for offices, small businesses, medical facilities, gym and child care.

D2 What makes this an enjoyable place to live?

The area is "green" with many parks and gardens, shopping, sports arenas, public transport, medical facilities, including Northern Hospital and specialist areas and medical centres. There are many facilities catering for families and residents of the local community.

D3 What are the points of stress and pain in the wider community?

The main points of stress and pain at present is the cost of housing, unemployment, change of teenage interests and the same points as in the general community re the cost of living. Mernda police station is understaffed and there is some low-level crime that is probably on the rise with the growing population.

D4 How closely does your congregation reflect the demographics of your local area?

Our ministry reflects the age range of the wider community from the very young to the more senior citizens with the predominant age group being 50-55 years of age. As with the local community there are a number of different cultures within our congregations, thus we reflect the demographics of the community being multi-cultural and welcome people from all cultures.

D5 What community facilities are present in the local area?

Community facilities in the local area of our churches include cultural clubs, Living and Learning centres, including Uniting within the Plenty Valley building complex, Community houses, kindergartens and Child Care centres, sport grounds, parks and gardens and numerous religious facilities.