



## **BECOMING FAITH COMMUNITIES**

### **Being Church Differently:**

#### **Meeting the challenge of Congregational decline and guidance for the formation of Faith Communities of the UCA within a rural setting.**

*Adopted by the Standing Committee to be made available as a resource which offers a process for an alternative structure for use by congregations within the Presbytery. 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2015*

#### **PREAMBLE –**

This document has largely been based on and adapted from a document ***Being Church Differently, a report to the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the UCA*** authored by Rob Bos (National Consultant, Theology and Discipleship) Jill Tabart and Des Cousins.

*The purpose of that document was to encourage Presbyteries and others to discern prayerfully and creatively where God is leading us as we seek to live and share the life-giving good news of Jesus Christ. It suggested some new directions for joining with the Spirit of God in making and nurturing disciples.*

It stated that:

*For previous generations, the church was often the centre of community and social life. Church attendance was a mark of respectability in the community. We could rely on habit or custom or even social pressure to maintain participation in a community of faith. For many parts of the church in “western” nations, this is no longer true. Rather than providing a religious legitimization of cultural values, the Christian faith now, as for the early church, has the opportunity to support people as they give their first loyalty to Christ and have their lives shaped around the alternate values of the Reign (Kingdom) of God.*

*It further asserted that people usually are not Christians in isolation and that faith-sharing of an individual Christian may begin to interest people in the Christian faith and to help them consider the claims of Christ seriously, but to become a disciple requires the ongoing support of a community. It takes a Congregation to evangelise people and to be the Spirit’s agent in reshaping their identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ. How does this happen? Where are the points of contact? Fewer people look to the church to help in negotiating the “passages” of life through baptisms, weddings and funerals. Of those who still do, only a small number make the transition from, say, having a wedding in a church building to participating in the ongoing worship, witness and service of a Congregation. There are also fewer Sunday Schools and youth groups than three or four decades ago to incorporate children and young people.*

*The Uniting Church is widely involved in community service agencies and schools. The Church sees these as an expression of God’s mission to the world and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many initially grew out of a Congregation’s concern and compassion for the needy in the local community. These services have now largely become highly professionalised. The community service agencies may still have links with Presbytery, Synod or Assembly and so have structural links with the church as institution. The church may also provide important chaplaincy services. Yet the distance between community service agencies and the life of a Congregation has increased.*

## “Being Church Differently” asked WHAT IS NOT ESSENTIAL AND WHAT IS?

### 1 What is essential to being a Congregation?

- *In short, three things are essential to being a Congregation: worship, witness and service. The Basis of Union states that: The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, **worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ**. Its members meet regularly to hear God’s Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world. (Par. 15a)*
- *A Congregation of the Uniting Church needs to be recognised by a Presbytery (Reg. 3.1.1).*
- *The responsibilities of a Congregation include:*
  - *appointing Elders and other members of the Church Council,*
  - *appointing one or more representatives to Presbytery,*
  - *making arrangements to call a Minister,*
  - *providing facilities and resources (Reg. 3.1.1).*
- *To fulfil its responsibilities, a Congregation shall:*
  - *bear witness to Christ’s gift of unity,*
  - *build up the members and adherents in faith and love,*
  - *sustain the members in hope,*
  - *equip people for worship, witness and service,*
  - *discipline members in love,*
  - *maintain pastoral oversight,*
  - *encourage participation,*
  - *provide the means for sustaining the members in the Christian life .*
- *The responsibilities of the Church Council are extensive and are spelled out in Reg. 3.1.2)*

### 2 What is not essential to being a Congregation?

- *It is not essential to meet on a Sunday. Sunday is symbolically important, because it celebrates the completion of creation and the renewal of creation in the resurrection of Christ. It also looks forward to the consummation of all things in Christ. It may therefore be helpful symbolically to worship on a Sunday, but not essential. A group of Christians may worship at any time.*
- *It is not essential to meet in a church building. The architecture of a building may help (or hinder) the worship of God. The sense of continued worship over many years in one space may be helpful. But the Uniting Church does not regard it as essential to worship in an especially dedicated worship space. Christians may gather for worship in any house or building, or in the open air.*
- *It is not essential for a group which gathers for worship week by week to have a full time paid minister of the Word or Deacon. To have a person who has been selected by the church, trained for the purpose and recognised by the church as having the gifts and graces for ministry through the act of ordination is a rich resource, but is not essential. An ordained person may serve part-time or be a volunteer (Reg. 2.7.1). Lay people, especially accredited Lay Preachers, Lay Ministry Teams, Lay Pastors and Community Ministers, may be authorised to lead worship. Presbyteries may also authorise lay persons to conduct the sacraments following appropriate training and formation (Reg. 3.1.3p).*

#### **Identify:**

As you ponder the future of your congregation and your community:

1. In your context what do you want to maintain as being essential for you
  - a. As an individual
  - b. As a congregation
2. In your context what do you consider as being not essential
  - a. for you
  - b. for your congregation

### **3 What about “Faith Communities”?**

- *The Uniting Church also provides opportunities for people to explore the Christian life together without the full range of privileges and responsibilities of a Congregation. Such a group may be recognised by a Presbytery as a “Faith Community” (Reg. 3.9.2).*
- *Faith communities may choose to develop and progress towards recognition by the Presbytery as a Congregation (Reg. 3.9.2 e).*

*Faith Communities are not defined as necessarily being “the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” and have fewer requirements placed on them than Congregations.*

#### **What about the Sacraments in a Faith Community?**

The **Being Church Differently** document states that *the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) are Christ’s gift to the Church. They are communal celebrations at a time and place publicly announced. We celebrate an “open” table i.e. the Lord’s table is open to baptised persons who love and serve the Lord, and are in fellowship with any branch of Christ’s Church. They are presided over by persons authorised by the Councils of the Church. The sacraments should not be presented so as to make people feel under some compulsion to participate, or that others feel excluded.* If a Faith Community is recognised then it will be the responsibility of the Presbytery to ensure that the members of that Faith Community are not deprived of the sacraments. Arrangements will be made to ensure that an ordained or authorised Lay Presider is available.

#### **Membership Rolls**

*Membership rolls need to be kept, as for any other Congregation (Reg. 1.6.1).* A person’s membership will either be with the Presbytery or with an existing Congregation that the Presbytery has authorised to provide oversight on its behalf of that Faith Community.

#### **Governance**

*The legitimate role of elders and church councillors must be recognised by all parties (Reg. 3.1.2).* in the formation of a Faith Community. Whilst, a Faith Community is not required to have a Church Council or Elders, however a designated leader will need to be identified.

#### **Identify and Own**

As you itemised those things that for you and your congregation were essential and non-essentials – identify those factors that are a stumbling block for you making it difficult to think of yourself as a Faith Community rather than as a congregation.

Regulations were developed by the Assembly in response to the adoption of the **Being Church Differently** report but they are premised upon a faith community having been formed, and, as it grows disciples then it may develop into a Congregation. .

Though congregations continue to meet regularly and faithfully both church and community now exist in different contexts. The challenge for many small rural Congregations in the Presbytery of Western Victoria is that of the opposite of the scenario posed by the **Being Church Different** report. As these congregations look forward all they see is a bleak future. It is understandable to want things to stay the way they are or were. Some people may have the desire to connect with a new reality but don’t know how because in their struggle to connect as they are still connected to the old structures that often no longer apply. Some people may have a strong inner sense of “have to”; of being loyal to what they have inherited and what they believe they need to pass on to the next generation intact. As people age they may become introverted and “stuck” for, although there is a desire, and sometimes a passion to see their church restored to the glory of past days the reality is quite different from their dream: their resources are much more limited, their energies are sapped and they want life to just continue and for others to make the decision, but after they have died. There is considerable pain associated with any decision to close up and sell the building. The Church needs to celebrate and give thanks to God for their faithfulness and join in the acclamation – well done good and faithful servant.

How do these faithful people move from being a Congregation who has built a property maybe 160 years ago and who has survived the many challenges that change of rural life has thrown up? Buildings designed for a traditional worship are not flexible in their interior design to allow for contemporary forms of worship. Buildings designed for large congregations which celebrated the return of many men and women from war time service but are now like mausoleums; hosting a congregation for as few as 4-10 people in a facility designed to seat 200-300.

### **Assess**

As you assess the future of your congregation,

1. What of the past are you able to acknowledge and celebrate?
2. What is the pain you face in your decision-making?
3. How is your building enhancing or hindering the worship, witness and service of your congregation in your community?

***Being Church Differently*** recognises how society has changed over the generations. But besides the massive change in the rural landscape, the decline in rural population, and the lessened priority of that population to give expression to spiritual things in the institutional setting, there have been a number of other contributing factors which are major challenges to the capacity of local communities to maintain their place of worship. The following issues, however, are common across both city and country congregations and communities, but their effects are being felt much more acutely in rural areas:

- Age of building,
- Cost of maintenance
- High cost of insurance with replacement values determining the cost of that premium when that style of building would never be replaced
- Listing or being registered with Heritage Victoria
- Fire services levy now moved from insurance premiums to Council rates has identified many properties in the Western Victoria about which the Church had no knowledge of its ownership
- OH&S requirements
- Disability access requirements
- Food handling requirements
- Meeting the cost of maintaining legislative requirements of essential services provision (old cabling, external pan toilets! etc)
- Cost of provision of essential services – water, gas, electricity.

An unknown is the possibility of a change in legislation removing the exemption of church properties from rates and land tax.

Often it is people outside the church who create a subtle pressure as they see the presence of the church building as a symbol of God's presence in their midst. For them, the Church building is the place which provides a community service around which or in which the community may gather for special occasions for thanksgiving or celebration. But, such is the impact of these external factors on some congregations coupled with perceived community expectations that the only option they see for themselves is to close down as they feel they are powerless to address or resolve them.

However, there may yet be a more important factor at play which, rather than being external and therefore over which people may feel they have no control, is internal. In conversations about the future, the spirit of the idolatry of rite, tradition and property often has an all-consuming power. Whatever (Whoever) we worship will always hold us in its (His) grip. The "whatever" will constrict and sap life from us. The "Whoever" will hold us gently and be life-giving. (Matthew 11: 29-30). The "its" is impersonal whereas the "His" is relational. Jesus taught his followers much about life and death. Unless the seed falls to the ground and dies it cannot bear fruit. I am the bread of life. But maybe also his teaching about those who want to save their life must lose it, and those who lose it will find life may apply not just to followers but also to the community of followers – the Congregation.

If for a time a Congregation were to address the internal factors which are sapping energy and life, then they may discern that closing down is not the only option it has.

Tensions within these small congregations may be summarised by the following dichotomies:

- Maintenance and mission
- Faithfulness and fruitfulness
- Hopelessness and hope
- Religious rite (and sometimes right) and relationship
- Death and resurrection
- Being and doing church

Congregations need leadership to help them transition from death to new life – from being a Congregation and all its restrictions, structures and limitations to being a faith community with all its freeing possibilities.

When our focus moves from maintenance of property and back to the core calling of the Church a Congregation may take heart from the Scriptures of the first letter of John: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason that the world doesn't know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, *now* we are children of God, and what we are yet to *become* has not yet been made known.

### **Property**

Whether as a Congregation or not, may we always be on the journey of **becoming faithful communities** of faith. Probably the issues of property will be the sticking point in any discussion and decisions about the future. It would need to be clearly understood that a Faith Community, although provided for in the UCA Regulations is not a legal entity. Historically, and legally, it has been the congregations and the local communities who have built and maintained the property over the generations and at the local level there is not a clear understanding about property ownership in the Uniting Church and the role and responsibilities under the Act of Parliament which brought the Uniting Church in Australia in to being in each of the different states of the Commonwealth. The Act of Parliament in Victoria vests all Uniting Church property into the Property Trust. This Trust is the only legal entity empowered to buy, sell, lease, enter into and sign contracts, property transfers etc. A Congregation is the constituted body provided for in the Regulations to which the Property Trusts bestows "beneficial use" of a property. Beneficial use means beneficial responsibility.

A Faith Community will be better served if it is free from property constraints and costs as they are better released to worship, witness and serve.

### **Fact Checking:**

#### **Study your Congregation's Financial Statement in the Annual Report.**

1. What does it cost your Congregation in essential services just to maintain the building over a 12 month period? (Electricity, gas, water, sewerage, garbage, insurance, )
2. Compare this figure with how much is put in the offering plate? Is there a shortfall or is there enough? (As a guiding principle our offerings are for ministry and service and other sources (like rental etc should cover property)
3. Walk around the outside and the inside – what repairs are needed. Where do alterations/additions need to be made to make the building compliant with OH&S, Food handling, security, disability access etc? What will these works cost? How will they be funded?
4. Do the financial accounts show an excess of income over expenditure? Or, if there a shortfall how does the Congregation manage the deficit?
5. What expenditure is listed to show congregation support of mission type activities? Local, in the region, nationally or internationally?
6. List some activities that you would like to support if you had the money to do so?

## Some Stories to Ponder

The stories are real but the place name concealed.

### 1. Willacaddy

This is a small farming community about 20km from its a local regional city. Wheat, wool and pig farming thrived and in its heyday the township consisted of a school, bank, a few shops, a soft drink factory, an vibrant football, netball and cricket club and an active Presbyterian church which met for worship in the local hall.

Through lack of interest, as the population declined and cars were more reliable and efficient, the congregation closed. Those for whom coming together with others for corporate worship was still important travelled into the then Uniting Church in the town, a practice they continued for at least 20 years. Their Uniting Church embarked upon a Stewardship program, and, as preparation for this program, members were encouraged to form small groups. These groups would meet weekly over the period of a month to explore different aspects of stewardship. As there was a freedom to determine times and places, those few who came in from Willacaddy decided that there were sufficient numbers of them to form a group of their own and that they could take it in turns and each of the Willacaddy people would host one evening in their home.

The success of this Stewardship program was not measured in terms of dollars promised. Rather it was the experience these Willacaddy people had of coming together in each other's home and talking about "spiritual things". This experience had such a positive impact on them that they decided to continue to meet. Without using any label, they, in effect, became a faith community. They decided to meet on the fourth Sunday of every month. A box of hymn books and bibles was created and at the end of the "service" another person would offer to take the box and host the service that next month. Lounge rooms were packed each month as whole families would gather. Anywhere from 10-30 people ranging in age from 6 years to 80 years came together and it was not unusual for the presiding minister to sit on the floor at the side of the fireplace to lead worship – a traditional format was used but in a very informal setting – a sermon delivered, but in a way that invited and encouraged comment or question as it was delivered. Communion was celebrated quarterly. Supper always followed.

Whereas if these people had gone into the Church building they would have sat with their backs to those behind them, been in and out with one eye on their watch and noting how long the service went over the hour. They may have gone across the road to another building for the after church cuppa. But, in this community of Willacaddy, people were still there at 10-30pm sharing with each other, encouraging one another, supporting one another – and this was critical in one year of rural economic decline and adverse weather patterns and all the families were subject to negative income. Rural people are often too proud and too private to share their deep needs or to ask for support – they would just try to negotiate with their bank to extend their indebtedness. But this faith community gathering allowed ministry to address these needs and allowed other parts of the church to provide support in a manner that enhanced people's dignity.

The minister provided pastoral care and the Congregation in the city church elected from its members an Elder who resided on a farm at Willacaddy. Another, by virtue of his gifts was a member of the Church Council. Their membership was on the one roll for the Congregation.

One of the elements that were life-giving to this faith community is that it was not encumbered by property and yet it was a community who **worshipped, witnessed and served as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ** whose members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world. (Par. 15a)

### 2. Jerseyville

This is a small dairy community about 20km from its nearest regional city. There is no "town" centre, just a Church building carefully concealed behind trees and the top of a hilly rise and so the road goes through a cutting. The Congregation, however, does not relate structurally

to the large regional church but forms a “parish” with three other rural community churches. The demands on time for a dairy farmer make it almost impossible to attend church at 9am in the morning and so over the years attendance was basically the domain of the women and children.

Until...

With encouragement from the Minister who had oversight of this little community the Congregation decided that as it met only fortnightly they would meet in the morning for one service of a Sunday but on the other fortnight they would meet of a Friday night. Setting a time at about 7pm or 7-30, depending on day light saving, the “service” was not held in the Church but in the hall. Families brought a “pot luck” share meal and the format of the evening was informal, interactive. Members organised the content of the service and led it themselves. They tried to “be church differently” and immediately the men of the family were able to participate as their dairy labours for the day were over and as a family they received not just the material food for life, but also spiritual food.

This little community is, in reality, a faith community but still maintains its “congregation status” yet is not able to meet its Regulatory requirements as a Congregation.

### **3. Oaklands**

Oaklands was once a parish supporting its own Minister. Over a period of 20 years the parish disbanded as other Congregations closed. Oaklands kept going supporting itself. When the nearest regional city entered into a protracted vacancy Oaklands offered to join that multi-sited congregation and linked with two other Uniting Church congregations: Ravensfield and Bullock. The advantage of this arrangement was to increase the critical mass; centralize and streamline decision making and free the small congregation of having to meet the regulatory requirements of a congregation. However, the rural congregation still had to meet the cost of maintaining the properties and services from local efforts while the central church used the central funds. When critical discussions were about ministry, mission and use of resources those involved in these rural congregations felt they no longer had any sense of identity or control over their own destiny. The multi-sited congregation had no clear written documentation which clarified rights, responsibilities and relationships. In reality, the rural congregations continued to meet as separate congregations and strongly asserted their right to self determination. It would appear that the multi-sited congregation model was a flawed version of the old parish model but it's success is very reliant on equality and trust and works when there are no difficulties but breaks down when the outer congregations are lost in the larger council and do not sense that their position or identity is being valued by the whole. Some leaders in these smaller congregations began to express a sense of disempowerment and feel disenfranchised and wonder why they bother to go into the council meetings. Decisions about them were being made for them and felt their contribution to the whole was de-valued.

### **4. Glenogly**

The tiny church building seated about 60 people. Yet the Uniting Church people there were fiercely proud of their Church – the brick building. Situated on the banks of a river and built in 1858 the building was readily subject to flood. Was maintaining this as a place of worship the best use of resources – ministerial, financial, missional? At 9am in the morning, it too was attended by the women of the community as the men were occupied on farming duties.

The Congregation was part of a Uniting Church Parish centred on the regional city about 25km to the east. Although about 4-10 people might be at Church of at either of the Sunday fortnightly services there were at least 50 people who lived in the area and identified as members of the Uniting Church and would call upon its services for rites of passage.

The “city” church decided that in addition to its regular traditional morning services to commence what they called a “Praise Service” to be held once a month. The focus of this service was to sing “hymns, psalms and spiritual songs” more of a contemporary nature leaving the traditional hymns to the morning service. This more informal service attracted around 30 people who enjoyed the fellowship, the singing, even though they may proclaim that they couldn't sing, the fellowship and

supper afterwards. A couple of the Glenogly ladies began to come to this evening service particularly if they had not been able to go to their own service that morning. Some spark began to ignite. The question was asked at Church Council – what would happen if at Glenogly we move one of our morning services to an evening gathering and have it as a “Praise Service”? Let’s give it a go. An evening praise service commenced at Glenogly. Husbands/fathers were free of their farming duties at the evening and were encouraged and enabled to join the family for the evenings followed by a supper – despite there being no kitchen! Quite a number of the “city” church people decided to regularly commit to come out to Glenogly to support them in this venture – and because they enjoyed the singing of praise!

New life was breathed into this community. But, because they were a Congregation they struggled to maintain the old the building, yet they cared for it lovingly. They were required to provide members to Presbytery, representatives to Church Council and meet the ratio of Elders according to the number on the roll (not the numbers that actually attended Church)

Had they been a faith community – they may well have been able to adapt to the massive changes in rural community and survive. They lasted another 20 years and then sold up.

### **To think about**

These are but four stories.

1. How was being a “Congregation” actually a millstone around their neck.
2. What did/could they do to convert their faithfulness into fruit-bearing?
3. Are there examples that you can add of congregation who may be able to be more effective as a faith community?
4. Are there groups existing already in your setting, but outside the institutional structures, that could be considered to be a faith community
5. As you have thought about your essentials, non-essentials and resources how might they be harnessed so that you can be released for more effective worship, witness and service?

## **UCA Regulations:**

### **FAITH COMMUNITIES**

#### **3.9.2**

- (a) A Presbytery may recognise as a Faith Community a grouping of people who;
- (i) are seeking to explore the implications of faith in God, gathering in order to serve the community and/or nurturing one another in faith; or
  - (ii) are worshipping together and seeking to relate to the Church for nurture and support, and
  - (iii) apply to the Presbytery to be recognised as a Faith Community.
- (b) A Faith Community may include confirmed members of the Church who hold their membership in a Congregation or who have their membership recorded with the Presbytery.
- (c) A Faith Community will order its life, under the oversight of the Presbytery, so as to encourage its participants, develop its mission, and be accountable for its resources, and may seek the guidance of a Presbytery about possible ways to do so.
- (d) A Faith Community may appoint leaders from its participants and may designate a participant to attend meetings of the Presbytery.
- (e) A Faith Community may apply to Presbytery to be recognised as a Congregation. A Presbytery may request a Faith Community to make such an application.
- (f) A Presbytery may cease to recognise a Faith Community.

## **The Presbytery of Western Victoria**

To what extent do the current Regulations enable the Presbytery of Western Victoria to provide a way for Congregations or Regions in the Presbytery of Western Victoria to step back from being recognised as a Congregation, and thus having to meet all the demands of what is required of a Congregation under the regulations, and seek rather to be recognised as a Faith Community.

1. The Regulations in their current form identify the Presbytery as the principal oversight. (Reg 3.9.2) One possibility is to use the power of delegation, (Reg 3.7.2 b,c) for the Presbytery to refer the oversight responsibilities of a Faith Community to another body that it establishes, for example, a Regional Council or where this does not exist in any of the Regions of the Presbytery to a Church Council. However Clause (e) sets a requirement that any committee or task group to which Presbytery wishes to delegate its powers must have a majority of its members as Presbytery members.
2. One of the responsibilities of the Presbytery is to give attention to such administrative functions as may be necessary for the satisfactory working of the Presbytery (Reg. 3.1.3 n). The Presbytery of Western Victoria acknowledges that there is a two-way direction for the formation of a Faith Community. The satisfactory working of the Presbytery may, in some cases mean that the Presbytery invites a Regional Co-ordinating Council or a Church Council to be a partner with the Presbytery and the Faith Community to ensure that the oversight that is to be exercised by the Presbytery can be carried out in closer proximity to the geographical location of that Faith Community. The Memorandum of Understanding will need to be worded in a way that spells out the responsibilities of each of the Councils of Presbytery and the Regional Co-ordinating/Church Council. Such a Memorandum will recognise that there are three partners. As a consequence, so that the Presbytery may be seen to fulfil its responsibilities under Reg 3.9.2, at its AGM in February each year, the Presbytery, will agenda any Memorandum of Understanding between the Presbytery and a Faith Community with that report on the life of the Faith Community being mediated by a partnered Regional Council or Church Council.

### **Add your bit**

Are there any issues or un-answered questions that you have that this document has not yet addressed for you?

**Being Church Differently** included a pro forma of a Memorandum of Understanding which, though legalistic in its structure, is a way of spelling out the roles and responsibilities of each party ensuring that there is a balance between independence and accountability. Taking their invitation to adapt that Memorandum to best suit a local situation, such a Memorandum for use within the Presbytery of Western Victoria could be worded in a way that has been written in GREEN, but although this is a template each Memorandum would be unique.

***The Uniting Church prays that,  
through the gift of the Spirit,  
God will ... use its worship, witness and service  
to God's eternal glory  
through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.***

**Pro forma Memorandum of Understanding  
(Please adapt this pro forma to best suit your local situation.)**

The wording in green gives some suggestion as to what needs to be included in that clause.

1. The partners in this agreement are
  - a. the Church Council of the XXX Congregation , or the Regional Co-ordinating Council of the XXX Region and
  - b. the Presbytery of Western Victoria of the Uniting Church in Australia.
  
2. The Church/Regional Co-ordinating Council and the Presbytery of Western Victoria share a common concern for the total well-being of the people who currently have constituted the Uniting Church Congregation of XXX.
  
3. The purposes of this community of faith are to enable that community to *meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world.*
  
4. The purposes of Presbytery of Western Victoria are set out in Regulation 3.1.3 of the Uniting Church in Australia.
  
5. Both partners recognise and respect each other's legitimate purposes and areas of responsibility.
  
6. The members of the Congregation moving into a Faith Community request that their membership of the Uniting Church be held within in the Congregation of XXX
  
7. As a component in fulfilling the responsibilities inherent in these purposes, both partners agree that the Presbytery of Western Victoria, on recommendation of the relevant Regional Co-ordinating/Church Council
  - a. withdraws its recognition of XXX as a Congregation of the Uniting Church and
  - b. approves of the continuation of a Faith Community established under *Basis of Union, Constitution*, and the relevant *Regulations* of the Uniting Church in Australia and
  - c. will close that Congregation under Regulation 3.4.3 to take effect from: DATE.
  
8. Membership of the Faith Community shall be open to whoever of that community seeks to participate and identify with this community.
  
9. At the invitation of the Presbytery and with the agreement of the proposed Faith Community, for administrative purposes, the pastoral oversight of the Faith Community shall be exercised by
  - a. the Regional Council of XXX or
  - b. the Church Council of XXX in accordance with the *Regulations* of the Uniting Church in Australia. The appointment of the person exercising oversight of the Faith Community, whether part time or fulltime, shall be by the Presbytery, following consultation with the partnering Regional Co-ordinating Council or Church Council.
  
10. The Presbytery, in consultation with the leader of the Faith Community designates (or authorises in the case of a Lay Presider) NNN to conduct the Sacraments within this Faith Community.
  
11. Statement about the nature, usage, maintenance and future of property currently under the beneficial usage of Faith Community and arrangements for where the new Faith Community will meet. (e.g. the Congregation of XXX will pass the beneficial use of the property known as XXX
  - a. to the full control of the Presbytery. , or
  - b. to the Regional Co-ordinating Council or the Church Council of XXX of which it had formerly been a part
 for that body to determine the best use of the asset which will enable it to meet the ministry and mission needs of the region.)
  
12. Financial arrangement in relation to property.or any bequests held by the Congregation The proposed Faith Community recommends that any income from the sale or lease of the property be applied to

- a. the Presbytery Development Fund,
- b. the Chaplaincy Fund or
- c. XXX

13. Financial arrangements in relation to pastoral staff. The members of the Faith Community will contribute to the ministry and mission needs of the body exercising oversight of that Faith Community through gifts, donations or stewardship giving.

14. This arrangement may be varied at any time with the consent of the Faith Community, the Regional Co-ordinating/Church Council and the Presbytery of Western Victoria. It shall be reviewed after twelve months and then every [5?] years or any time at the request of any of the parties.

15. This Memorandum of Understanding will take effect at the Commissioning of the Faith Community to be at XXX held on DATE.

Signed:

Chairperson  
Regional Co-ordinating/Church Council

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Date .....

Chairperson  
Current Congregation seeking to  
become a Faith Community

.....

Date .....

Approved by the Presbytery of Western Victoria at its meeting on .....

Chairperson,  
Presbytery of Western Victoria

.....

Date .....

**Finally:**

1. What else might it be useful for such a Memorandum to include?
2. What other specific guidance would it be helpful to provide?
- 3.. What next?

## **A Possible Presbytery Process for forming a Faith Community from a Congregation**

1. A Ministry agent, Congregation, Church Council/ Regional Co-ordinating Council or a Presbytery officer or Committee initiates the question with the Congregation
2. The Congregation notifies the Pastoral Relations Committee (PRC) that being a Faith Community is being considered and requests the appointment of a Presbytery Contact Person (PCP).
3. The PCP leads a meeting of the Congregation – using the boxes in this document or some other resources to stimulate honest reflection/discussion
4. The Congregation is led through a process of prayerful discernment to determine what options its members have :–
  - a. closing down and selling up;
  - b. closing the Congregation and being formally recognised as a Faith community or
  - c. do nothing but guaranteeing that by remaining as a Congregation it can fulfil the regulatory requirements of being a congregation.
5. If there is support for continuing as a Faith Community, the members of that Congregation discuss and come to agreement about where, when, how their Faith Community is to meet
6. The PCP will give guidance in the process of determining the local leadership of this Faith Community and what support and resourcing is needed and how the provision of the sacraments is made available..
7. The PCP will give guidance to the Faith Community and the overseeing body concerning membership rolls, pastoral care, finances.
8. The Congregation needs to decide what is to be done about existing property and finances
9. The PCP assists the Congregation to draw up the Memorandum of Understanding – and leads the process through the Councils of the Church.
10. The Presbytery will lead a service of celebration and thanksgiving for the worship witness and service of the Congregation and formally close the Congregation, and then formally recognise the group as a Faith Community within the Uniting Church.