



SECTION 1 – BASIC INFORMATION

1. **Placement Name(s):** Weeroona Uniting Church Bendigo

2. **Please list congregations/agencies names below**

Weeroona Uniting Church Bendigo

o Neale Street Campus

o White Hills Campus

3. **Profile approved by Church Council/Governing Body** 07/09/2021

4. **Primary purpose of placement:**

A Minister of the Word who will work with the congregation to build and nurture gifts of members of the congregation. Empowering the congregation to reach out to the community of Bendigo and enriching the community with vibrancy, love and acceptance.

5. **Suitable for (bold all that apply): Minister of the Word / Deacon / Ordinand/ Pastor**

6. **Time fraction:** ___100___%

7. **Term:**

Undefined up to 10 years (See Reg 2.7.3(a))

Fixed Term: _____ Years

Initial Term reviewed in: _____ Years

SECTION 2 – MISSION DIRECTION

1. What is the Vision statement and or Mission priorities of the placement (or of the individual congregations)

A congregation committed to bringing the good news of Christ's love to the people of Bendigo.

2. **Date adopted** 01/07/2014 (at merger of congregations)

3. **Provide a short description of the placement/congregation(s)**

Weeroona Uniting Church Bendigo is an active congregation whose membership, despite getting older, continues to encourage the presentation of the Good News in Bendigo.

Meeting at two locations the one congregation enjoys a variety of worship experiences. The congregation conducts all-ages worship weekly at the Neale Street campus, a more traditional service at White Hills on the first and third Sundays of the month, and a fortnightly alternative worship in the evening at Neale Street.

The urban congregation is aging however one of our campuses is located close to the University and the other is in one of the major growth corridors in Bendigo.

Most of the congregation are of retirement age, however there are a number of families involved in the life of the church who are not always able to be involved in the traditional church worship times.

Due to its geographical location the congregation has had a strong connection to Uniting Agewell's Strath-Haven. Although there is no formal partnership between the two many residents have been members of Weeroona and groups would often visit. In the past the minister also contributed to the weekly service roster.

The congregation has established a strong connection with the Uniting Church in Dingee. Since 2006 members and groups of the congregation have led services approximately monthly to support the rural church. Other support has included assistance during times of drought and flood. Dingee have been most appreciative of the support, regularly communicating with the congregation and conveying their thanks for the support. The highlight of the relationship is the annual Community Carols night in Dingee where members of the church help lead the event and cook a BBQ dinner.

4. **How has the placement/congregation(s) changed over the last 5 years?**

The last 5 years have presented challenge and change to Weeroona UC Bendigo. We have built resilience as we journeyed alongside a minister whose circumstances altered considerably, which meant that the congregation had several periods of supply during the placement.

The congregation has seen the youth and vibrancy it once had move on (or age), leaving a gap between the young families and those in the last third of their life.

Despite the congregation aging, we continue to see members remain active in the life of the church and participating in a variety of activities.

5. **What are the congregation(s)/placement's goals?**

The congregation hope to connect with the community more intentionally. The congregation are committed to continuing the playgroup, however, are looking at ways to engage with people of other age groups. This could be through the creation of sacred spaces, a labyrinth, café, possible community meals or holding events such as workshops, lectures, studies or camps.

The congregation has been working on long-term plans to build a new worship centre and move the main campus from Neale Street to White Hills. This process has not been as quick as initially hoped although plans are continuing.

The congregation recognise the importance social media and technology have played in keeping members of the congregation and wider community connected and informed during COVID-19.

The congregation would like to continue this use and look at ways of using it more effectively and increasing our presence online.

Strengthening the connections to other Agencies in our area, such as Strath-Haven and Uniting, are important – many members are already involved in various ways. The congregation want to continue to support these agencies as well as engage with other social-justice opportunities, such as the environment, refugees, and climate change.

6. What are the next Strategic Steps to achieving those goals?

Weeroona Uniting Church Bendigo has committed to building infrastructure that enables a technological presence. Worship services are regularly recorded and streamed online. Zoom services, meetings and gatherings have been held when physical get-togethers have not been possible.

The congregations is committed to continuing the support of our three Commissions (which incorporate our Elders) – Caring, Discipleship and Mission. These commissions are the primary “work-horses” of the congregation. They report to Church Council and meet as a collective and individual groups.

Caring Commission – is responsible for coordinating pastoral care.

Discipleship Commission – is responsible for giving people opportunities to explore and share their faith, often in novel ways.

Mission Commission – is responsible for outward facing opportunities to share God’s love

SECTION 3 - CONTEXT

1. Describe the communities in which this placement is located (Mission context).

Weeroona UC Bendigo is in predominantly residential areas. The wider Bendigo area is currently experiencing a housing boom and rapid growth, particularly in the northern corridor near the White Hills campus of WUCB.

Bendigo has a vibrant sporting and cultural community, and it is developing a more diverse ethnicity profile. Bendigo has excellent infrastructure with state-of-the-art hospitals (public and private), Arts Precinct, Sporting Facilities, Aged Care, restaurants/cafes and food (Australia's first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy), and Education facilities, from pre-school to TAFE and university.

Bendigo has been recognised by Booking.com as one of Australia's top 10 friendliest cities in 2020.

Bendigo has several community support agencies that assist the community in need, Haven: Homesafe, Uniting, and Foodshare are just a few.

Bendigo is currently experiencing some generational change as younger generations are buying homes and older generations are downsizing and moving into retirement communities.

Weeroona's Neale Street campus is located near La Trobe University in Bendigo, as well as some of the largest schools. It is also near several retirement villages and nursing homes.

White Hills campus is also near a number of large and growing schools and is alongside Uniting Agewell's White Hills Haven. The Church is located directly opposite the small shopping strip in White Hills, which includes a Uniting Op Shop that was previously using the White Hills hall.

2. How does your congregation reflect or vary from the age, and ethnic mix of your local community?

The congregation reflects the surrounding suburbs, which are predominantly middle class, Anglo retirees.

3. What are the opportunities and points of stress and pain in the wider community?

The congregation is presented with several opportunities. Next-door to Neale Street the church owns a property which is used for low-cost rent. This is primarily for students; however, some exceptions are made. The congregation is wanting to develop the relationship with the tenants of the property more and include them in the life of the congregation.

The congregation is coming to terms with the fact that church no longer plays a central role in the community and that families are often prioritising alternative activities (such as sport) over attending worship. The congregation have previously attempted to create connections with schools in the local area through homework clubs, however this has been difficult to establish.

The congregation recognises that there is an increasing gap between those who have, and those who don't. The congregation wants to increase the hospitality it offers the community. The congregation has a playgroup with around 30 families registered – for most of whom this is their only engagement and contact with the church.

The congregation appreciated the extra reach to the community that an online presence had during COVID-19 in 2020 and into 2021. as a way of ensuring that we are able to connect with our community in the now and still be relevant.

4. List ways in which you connect with, serve, or partner with people in your wider community?

Low-cost rental accommodation at 85 Neale Street

Playgroup at Neale Street – up to 35 families registered

Members volunteer at Uniting emergency relief centre

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- Members involved in a wide number of community groups and activities
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- Provide hall rental for local dance school (Neale St campus)
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- Church premises available for Strath-Haven community services
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- Have held church musicals, concerts
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- Commit to Operation Shoebox & Backpack with large numbers being compiled each year
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- Members make blankets (knitted) to donate to emergency relief and other organisations
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- Regular donations of food to emergency relief – hold annual Harvest Festival
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- Provide support to Dingee UCA congregation through worship leadership and supporting the running of events.
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- Opportunity for those who are alone to eat with others once a month (Lone Ranges)
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- Have previously held soup lunches in conjunction with White Hills Op-Shop
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- Online worship services – YouTube & Zoom
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5. What schools/agencies/institutions are in your local communities?

Bendigo has a population of 100,000 and there are numerous schools in the local area, primary and secondary, with both public and private school system options available. La Trobe University has a large campus in Bendigo as does Monash University, with the School of Rural Health campus.

Bendigo has several community organisations which provide support to members of the community, of which Uniting plays an important role with Emergency Relief and Op-Shops. Uniting Agewell operate community services and two residential facilities “Strath-Haven” and “White Hills Haven”.