

Sustainability and Strategic Locations (SSL)

The Mission of the Bremer Brisbane Presbytery is “Growing Healthy Christian Communities”.

Presbytery Strategic Priorities

The Presbytery has identified four mission priorities to be addressed in the coming years. These are: Discipleship; Community Engagement; Leadership; Sustainability.

The Sustainability mission priority will address two strategies:

Identify Church Model and Mission

Using the mapping tool, Synod resources, NCLS data, help congregations to identify who they are and what steps they are taking in their mission.

Identify strategic locations

Identify and resource strategic locations by utilising the resources available within the Presbytery and Synod

This paper will address the second strategy, Identifying strategic locations.

Each city, town, suburb and street within the bounds of the Presbytery should be equally important to the congregations and people of the Presbytery, because in these places live the people to whom we are sent to proclaim the gospel and serve in the name of Jesus. To reach these people is a task that is large. Jesus encourages us to “..... be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16). Sustainability and strategic locations is about being wise stewards in the best use of the resources that we have available to us to fulfil the Presbytery’s mission. When we think about strategic locations we engage in a process of identifying the physical locations of our congregations and faith communities so that together they may work together to have the best impact.

Drivers

There has been no overall plan that has sought to coordinate where churches should be located. The current positions of many of our congregations is a legacy of past decision making. As populations grew and new towns and suburbs were developed, strategic decisions were made to plant churches where the people were. These congregations were planted with what was then an understanding of local churches, transportation patterns and a higher proportion of church attendance. Over time there has been some movement in the location of congregations. This has usually come about when congregations of the denominations coming into Union in the same, or neighbouring suburbs, combined as they lived out the vision of the Basis of Union of bearing witness to the “unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church” (BoU para 1). Other times it has been more for reasons of expediency.

Congregations are increasingly weighed down by the obligations of compliance, week by week organisation and administrative requirements, budgetary limitation and upkeep of property leaves little time to purposefully engage in the mission of God.

Within the bounds of the Presbytery there are areas that are projected to experience significant population growth over the next 20 to 30 years. (eg Toowong, Springfield, Brookwater, Rosewood,

Hattonvale). Ripley Valley is already experiencing this. A challenge for the Presbytery will be to resource new congregations and/or faith communities in these development areas or to provide resources to existing congregations to strengthen their ministry in their area to the expanding population. Our current distribution of resources concentrates property and money in established areas.

The Presbytery of Bremer Brisbane currently has 32 congregations and 4 faith communities. The Presbytery is yet to identify what characterises a sustainable congregation. One element of sustainability must include the ability of that congregation to sustain a full-time placement (Regulation 3.1.1 (c)(vi) provides that payment of the stipend shall be the first call on the funds of a congregation). The Presbytery currently has only 8 congregations that are able to sustain one full time placement through congregational offerings alone.

Where we are up to

At the February 2018 Presbytery meeting, the SSL presented a tool named 'The Quadrant Model'. This tool was purposed to help congregations begin the process of having a 'good, hard look at themselves' with regard to their current situation and where they might aim to be in the future. In May 2018 a letter was sent to all church congregations with the quadrant model included. At the time of our meeting in August 2018 there had been limited response to the questions that were asked of Church Councils.

The Presbytery identifies the following matters to be considered when thinking about Sustainability and Strategic Locations:

- Alignment with Presbytery geographical footprint

The Presbytery of Bremer Brisbane covers a geographical footprint of urban, suburban and rural areas, including long established demographic centres and many new growth areas. The Presbytery's intention is that all parts of the Presbytery are served by healthy, vital congregations who are engaged in their local communities.

- Presbytery response/policy
- Key congregations
- Regions/locations
- Demographics – eg Plants id: green/brown

- Internal sustainability

To fulfil the functions required of a congregation under the Regulations, each congregation requires a certain level of resourcing and capability. These are identified as:

- Attendance/membership
- Resources – including leadership depth and strength, volunteer base
- Finances
- Discipleship paths
- Pastoral Care systems
- Ministry Resources
- Congregational Systems for attending to legal, administrative and regulatory compliance

- Community connections/impact, including collaboration with Uniting Church agencies

A healthy and vital congregation has an external orientation that is expressed in its missional activities toward its community. It may share these activities with other Uniting Church bodies in the area.

We also asked what information might help us in our responsibility. These included:

- Finances
 - Special projects
 - Offerings
 - Other income
 - Property Income/Expenses
- Numbers
 - Attendance/Average Attendance
 - Real connections
 - Ages
- Community connections
 - Renting premises
 - Ministry – Congregation
 - Ministry – Individual
 - Schools
 - Institutions
- Trends
- Growth Areas in Bremer Brisbane

Uniting Church Regulations

Regulation 3.1.1 (a) tells us that a congregation has a specific and important function within the life of the Uniting Church as a movement of Christ's church. "as the embodiment in one place of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, shall be those members and adherents who worship, witness and serve as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ, and who meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world, and who are recognised as a Congregation by the Presbytery."

A Congregation is therefore more than the people gathered in one place. There is a deliberate upward, inward and outward orientation in their shared missions that expresses the kingdom of God here on earth.

Actions

The SSL intends to categorise each congregation and faith community within the Presbytery as either:

- Sustain
- Reinvigorate
- Amalgamate
- Close

Sustain

The congregation or faith community is currently in a state of high missional health and has a demonstrated capacity to sustain its ministry and mission into the future.

Characteristics include:

- Being in a geographic location is essential to the witness of the Uniting Church in Bremer Brisbane
- Being in a geographic location that is projected to have positive population growth in the coming years
- Demonstration of sustainable resources for ministry, including finances and people
- Demonstration of increased levels of financial giving and attendance growth.
- Multiple ordained and lay leadership that equips and empowers
- Collaborative and permission-giving culture
- Capacity to take risks
- Open structures that allow participation, support and reward to flourish
- Effective systems to handle legal, administrative and regulatory compliance
- Strong, outward focus on mission

Presbytery Response

- Ensure that these congregations continue on their growth path, through working with them to identify gaps in mission, structure, strategy and systems and help identify ways and means of filling them.

Reinvigorate

An existing congregation is identified as being in a location where the Uniting Church needs to continue to have a presence. However, the congregation is not currently in a state of health and sustainability that enables it to engage effectively in mission.

Characteristics to identify congregations that are appropriate to be reinvigorated include:

- Being in a geographic location is essential to the witness of the Uniting Church in Bremer Brisbane
- Being in a geographic location that is projected to have positive population growth in the coming years
- There has been identified willingness by the congregation to engage in change, transition and growth
- A coalition for change within the congregation are able to express a biblically informed, missionally engaged and relevant vision for the future
- The congregation's current financial, property and people resources and missional focus and activities are in a state that it is likely they could be turned around and the congregation become sustainable.

Presbytery Response

- Shepherd the congregation through necessary change
- Ensure that the congregation is led by transformation ministerial leadership
- Raising up and equipping empowering lay leadership
- Identifying a compelling vision for the congregation

- Prioritising mission and outreach over inward survival activities
- Engaging the community

Amalgamate

Two or more congregations, within a defined geographical proximity may be identified to amalgamate to form a multi-site single congregation. These congregations would be identified as not being sustainable and are not candidates to be reinvigorated. In bringing the congregations together to create one single or single multi-site congregation, they will share their mission, leadership, resources and governance. Amalgamations are a strategy for dramatic change. Through working together they can increase their impact on the community, maximise their resources, serve their community better and leverage a critical mass across generations.

Characteristics

- Being in a geographic location is essential to the witness of the Uniting Church in Bremer Brisbane
- Being in a geographic location that is projected to have positive population growth in the coming years
- There has been identified willingness by the congregation to engage in change, transition and growth, however, there is little or no capacity to turn this willingness into action
- A coalition for change within the congregation are able to express a biblically informed, missionally engaged and relevant vision for the future
- If they were to amalgamate, the combined congregations' financial, property and people resources and missional focus and activities would indicate potential for a turnaround in congregation life, leading toward sustainability.
- There is clearly expressed commitment toward shared mission and purpose within the congregations.

Presbytery Response

- Own the responsibility of the Presbytery to amalgamate Congregations and the resulting obligations of communication and consultation (Reg 3.4.4)
- Identify Congregations that might be suitable for amalgamation and lead them in a process of identifying potential missional opportunities that can come through amalgamation
- Shepherd the congregations through necessary change
- Ensure that the congregation is led by transformation ministerial leadership
- Facilitate conversations between Congregations
- Provide oversight of the process of amalgamation.
- Prioritising mission and outreach over inward survival activities

Close

Consideration will be given to dissolving a congregation that is not in a geographical necessary location and is not sustainable.

A Congregation shall be dissolved or cease to be recognised when, in the opinion of the Presbytery it is not capable of and / or unwilling to fulfil the purpose, functions and responsibilities specified in Regulation 3.1.1. (b) A Presbytery may dissolve and cease to recognise a Congregation for reasons which it considers are in the best interests of the mission, witness and service of the Church within the bounds of the Presbytery.

Characteristics that identify congregations suitable for closing include:

- They are in a location that the Presbytery has identified is not essential to the witness of the Uniting Church in Bremer Brisbane
- They are unwilling to change. The very nature of the church is that it is to be a dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit. The church takes the timeless message of life in Christ and represents it fresh to each new generation. We draw on the traditions from the past to do this. But we find new practices from contemporary society. Congregations that are unwilling to do this lose their place in the world and in the mission of God.
- They therefore demonstrate no fruit. These congregations do not experience growth in faith, discipleship or attendance. They have no energy or capacity to engage in new mission activities.
- There is limited depth in leadership. Leadership is offered by a small number of individuals, without a recognisable succession plan.
- They are experiencing financial issues. Income from offerings is declining. They may be reliant on legacy income, including bequests or rental income.
- They are experiencing difficulty in undertaking legal, administrative and Regulatory activities
- Their focus is on maintenance and survival
- The economic cost, to the Uniting Church, of maintaining the congregation is considered to great

Presbytery response

- Recognise the responsibility of the Presbytery to dissolve congregations under Regulation 3.4.3 and ensure proper consultation and communication with stakeholders
- Provide pastoral care to congregation members
- Celebrate and affirm the ministry of the congregation
- Identify suitable beneficiaries to use the property of the congregation

Additionally, an action critical to the ongoing nature of the Uniting Church in the Presbytery of Bremer Brisbane is church planting.

Plant

Green field (places of new development) and brown field (places with existing development) provide opportunities for church plants. Church planting involves the establishment of a new congregation. It could be in a geographical location where there has been no previous

congregation, usually in a new growth area. Or it can be in an area where previous congregations and it is considered necessary to commence something new. This might be to reach an untapped demographic niche or where the existing congregation is not sustainable and unable to be reinvigorated and amalgamated.

Church planting is a practice that reaches back to the early days of the church. Each of our current congregations were commenced as a church plant and we need to continue that practice today. Church plants reach new people. They also provide encouragement to the sending church and other congregations as they hear the success stories of growth and new people.

Characteristics:

- The presbytery has identified a specific geographical area where there is currently no viable and suitable Uniting Church presence
- For the sake of the mission and witness it is believed that there needs to be a Uniting Church presence

Presbytery Response

- Identify locations that are suitable for church plants
- Collaborate with church planting partners, such as established church planting congregations, Trinity College Queensland and New Life College to recruit suitable leadership
- Support the leadership in strategizing the establishment and growth of the church plant

The Presbytery will research different models for church planting and will identify locations that are suitable for church plants.