

## **A Journey Together**

The following reports, first printed in the News & Views (monthly newsletter) of the West Brunswick Parish, chart the journey from November 2002 to March 2005 which saw the South West Brunswick, Union St. & St. David's, Melville Rd, West Brunswick Parish congregations de-link and the South West Brunswick & St. Andrew's, Sydney Rd. Brunswick congregations merge to become the Brunswick Uniting Church, Sydney Rd. Brunswick on **20<sup>th</sup> March 2005**.

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### **November 2002**

#### **Joint Council Task Group**

The Task Group met for the first time on October 23rd. This group arose from a letter the St David's congregation wrote to the Joint Council requesting a review of the linked congregational model that St David's and SW Brunswick currently operate under.

Three representatives from both congregations (South West: Elaine Potter, Nigel Long and Barry Cook; St. David's: Judith Newman, Lyn Christensen, Malcolm McIlvena), and the minister are on the task group. Ray was asked to convene the first meeting. At this first meeting Ray expressed his hope that members of the group would see themselves as not just representing the interests of their own congregations, but more importantly as West Brunswick Uniting Church people. Our first priority will be to discern the best way of being able to proclaim and live the gospel in our area.

Each member of the Task Group was then asked to share something of both what excited them and what concerned them about the work before us.

It was suggested we look at the name of the group – “steering committee” was one alternative, the point being we see ourselves as “erecting sign posts” rather than filling in all the details.

We agreed the two key questions at this stage as “What is the decision we are to make?” and “What is the process by which we get there?”

There was discussion as to whether we would take a range of options back to the congregations, or only one recommendation. It was agreed that even if we do bring a range, we should have a preferred option.

The group was aware of the importance of carrying the congregations along during the process, rather than presenting a final product that is sprung on people. There will need to be further discussion on the means of reporting back.

There was then discussion about the characteristics of both congregations and this stimulated much discussion and soul searching. We were particularly interested in hearing of the growing edges of these communities, as these may be a good indication of the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit, and may indicate some of the signs for the way forward.

The meeting then turned its thoughts to where it would like to be in (nominal?) 6 months. We would like to have a clear idea about the future directions that are possible for the Uniting Church in West Brunswick and have arrived at a number of options, but to have identified our preferred one.

**Information and action we require to proceed:**

- Analysis of census figures showing population break down and trends for the Brunswick and wider area
- Financial position of linked congregations.
- Analysis of property, condition and value
- Reports of other congregations who have gone down this track, and especially any local initiatives and issues that may be relevant
- It was also suggested that obtaining the services of a person to act as minute secretary (but not participate in the meeting) would be an advantage.
- A time frame in which we would operate

Our **next meeting** is on Sunday November 10th.

Ray Gormann

**December 2002**

**Report from Joint Council Task Group**

This group has been charged by the Joint Council with the considerable task of reviewing whether the current two congregation model of being the Uniting Church in West Brunswick is still the most appropriate.

At our last meeting we decided to refer to the two congregations as the “Union St” and the “Melville Rd” congregations in a gesture towards overcoming the attachments and biases we may bring to our work.

The first meeting of the group was largely hearing about the life of both congregations and establishing ourselves as a working group.

The group held its second meeting on November 10, 2002 and spent considerable time reviewing the information we had asked members to obtain.

- **Demographics of the area**, which showed the number of families (despite what some of us would have thought) has decreased between 1991 and 2001. This is against the trend in wider Melbourne where numbers of families have increased and the overall population has increased by 7% between 1996 and 2001. One suggestion was that families move from Moreland as children grow older and need more space. The Union St congregation is going against this trend and the majority of new people are younger families. In general the number of Christians in Moreland declined between 1996 and 2001. Other religions, especially Islam experienced growth. Of all the Christian denominations, the UCA showed the largest decline in numbers during 1996 and 2001. Again the Union St congregation is defying the wider trends.
- **Property** We had a local Real Estate Agent give an estimate of value for the property. Results, which we were told are conservative, are - both Union St and Melville Rd sites approx. \$1.25 mill each. This is land value, as the buildings not really worth anything. The manse \$600 – 645, 000. When Hutchinson Close flats are added in we realized our linked congregations manages/oversees close to 4 million dollars of property. The call for faithful stewardship is clear, and we are considering the implications of this. Any major decisions regarding property would need both Presbytery and Synod approval.
- **Finances** We heard a report from the Treasurer which indicates that the linked congregations do not have large financial reserves and is struggling to meet this year’s budget. Rent from community use of property is a significant source of income, especially at Melville Rd.

Again, as with the first meeting, the task group is being led to consider the wider picture of a regional context. In line with this we have asked Barbara Spencer (Presbytery Regional Development Worker) to the next meeting to talk with us about some of the developments in our region. We will also seek to have contact with St Andrew's in Sydney Rd. when the minister, David Mills, is back from holiday.

We are aware that our current process builds on previous efforts at discerning the way forward for our congregations. We have revisited a joint congregational discussion paper from 1995 (that led to the renovations at both properties and flagged a review of the life of both congregations down the track), as well as the results and thinking that emerged from the exercise at Union St last year.

Our next meeting is Sunday December 1st, 2002.

Ray Gormann

## February 2003

### **Joint Council Steering Committee**

The following report is a selection of notes from the meeting held in December.

#### DISCUSSION OF REPORTS (as distributed) –

- Report prepared by Saide Cameron, Alistair Macrae, Janet Watson-Kruse in 1995 at time of building renovations at both sites.
- Responses from Discernment Process at Union Street in 2001.
- National Church Life Survey (2001) results for Melville Road and Union Street
- Would have been good if discernment process at Union Street in 2001 had been extended to St. David's.
- None of the material addresses questions, "What does it mean to be the church?", and "What are essential characteristics of church?"
- It is hard to be involved in local community when people come from different areas to attend Union Street congregation.
- Is there "something missing" in churches in other areas that causes people to travel to attend Union Street congregation?
- Society has individualistic focus – generally, people come to church to be fed and they don't work corporately on projects (But, NB People attending Melville Road live locally, are involved in groups such as the Guild and UCAF and share their lives)

#### INPUT BY BARBARA SPENCER

- BOMAR (at Synod) has made decision not to "prop up" properties that do not promote healthy congregations. Synod has produced a document entitled "Healthy Congregations", and is now working on another document, "Healthy Presbyteries". Synod would be happy to send someone out to lead discussions on "Healthy Congregations".
- The Strategy Committee of Presbytery will categorize each congregation in the presbytery. Categories include Cathedral congregation, Mission congregation, Ethnic congregation, Regional congregation and Local Community congregation.
- Community is about shared meaning. Union Street is a regional congregation. It has a strong shared meaning, but that meaning is hard to identify. It typifies the new Moreland community (people moving into area to renovate old houses or live in new apartments). Melville Road has a different shared meaning and is a "village" based local community congregation. It typifies the old Moreland community (people who have always lived in the area). The meeting raised the question – If one congregation is regional and one is community is there any point in getting the congregations together?

Picture is broader than just the two congregations of Melville Road and Union Street. There are other congregations in the general area:

1. Fitzroy Uniting Church does not have the resources to continue at its present site. It is in discussion with CERES about using a building CERES wants to build for community use.
2. Sydney Road, Brunswick – Rev. David Mills is looking at various options.
3. Ascot Vale and Moonee Vale are both declining congregations and they are looking at what they have in common.

It is important that Melville Road and Union Street engage with Brunswick and Fitzroy/CERES.

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

- Do the two congregations want to come together?
- If so, is either site suitable?
- Why do people go to Union Street and not to Melville Road? Is it a viable strategy to attempt to grow two Uniting Church congregations that are located so close to each other?
- What might the two congregations have in common? (eg. Similar theology?)
- Would holding two services on one site perpetuate “separateness”?

#### ACTIONS

- Barbara Spencer will run a program at Melville Road in January on the Hugh Mackay “Generations” material ( this material gives a good understanding of values and thinking of different generations).
- Barbara Spencer will contact Rev. Coralie Ling (minister at Fitzroy Uniting Church) to find out how their negotiations with CERES are proceeding.
- Ray Gormann will look out the “Healthy Congregations” material.
- Ray Gormann will invite Rev. David Mills (Minister at Brunswick Uniting Church) to the next meeting (February 2003).
- Need to look at what the 2 congregations share. Ray Gormann

### March 2003

#### Joint Council Task Group

Barbara Spencer will attend meetings whenever possible and will run a Hugh Mackay “Generations” program with the St. David’s congregation on March 2nd.

The Task Group discussed issues including the different motivations for change of the two congregations, the history of our linked relationship and also the impact of different service styles and current worship times.

Representatives from the Brunswick Uniting Church attended the meeting and gave an overview of their history and current directions. Ray Gormann convened the Brunswick congregation’s consultation in 2001.

The task group considered the input from the Brunswick congregation and felt that whilst it was helpful to hear from another congregation the way forward is not clear. For the next meeting Ray Gormann is preparing a paper summarising progress thus far and proposing some possible ways forward. Ray Gormann

### April 2003

#### Joint Council Task Group

This group of three representatives from the Union St congregation and three representatives from the Melville Rd congregation was asked by the Joint Council to review the current “linked congregation” model of being the Uniting Church in West Brunswick.

The Task Group has found that the two congregations are each facing a different major issue. The Union St congregation has grown steadily over a period of about 12-15 years, until now with its Sunday school groups and youth group looking for space, and a community of over 200 people, it has outgrown its buildings. The Melville Rd congregation during the same period has experienced numerical decline and is now an ageing congregation becoming increasingly concerned for its future.

The Task Group has not met since the last News and Views as it has been preparing its first report to come back to the congregations. In this report the “12 Signs of a Healthy Congregation” booklet, produced by the Uniting Church, has influenced us. Looking at the list the Task Group has identified as particularly pertinent for our situation the issues of “Growth” (understood broadly but certainly including numerical growth) and “Mission” (a word we hear often repeated in our congregations). We have also identified the phenomena that many of the newer people finding their way to the Union Street congregation are travelling 2 – 3 suburbs or more, meaning that congregation is no longer a local community church.

These points will underpin the report currently being prepared and the preferred recommendation of the way forward the Task Group will bring to the congregations. We meet next on Tuesday, April 8 – please keep us in your prayers. Ray Gormann

### **May 2003**

#### **Joint Council Task Group Report**

The task group that has been reviewing the future of the linked congregations of the Uniting Church in West Brunswick has been meeting for about seven months. In the last two months we have been focusing upon the three key themes of “growth”, “mission” and “regional issues”. Over the last three weeks a smaller group has been writing up the deliberations of the task group. We are now entering the most exciting and challenging phase of our work as we are ready to present our recommendations.

This weekend members of the two congregational Church councils will receive copies of the visioning paper which will then be discussed at their May meetings. If the church councils share the excitement of the task group they will be asked for input as to how best to present the recommendations to the congregations.

The expectation of the Task Group is that, subject to the support of the Church & Joint Councils, we will be ready to bring the vision to the congregations in about six weeks.

Ray Gormann

### **June 2003**

#### **Joint Council Task Group**

The Task Group has completed its report, which contains what we are calling a “Visioning Paper”. We are deliberately not saying this is a proposal, as it would require significantly more work on it to become a proposal. At this stage it is a Vision.

This will be presented to the Joint Council on Wednesday May 28 and it is anticipated that the Joint Council will call a special meeting of the Combined Church Councils (all members of the Church Councils, along with members of the Task Group who are not members of a church council). No doubt this meeting will decide how to report back to the congregations.

The Task Group has done its work diligently and the Vision it has come to is one that has the potential to take us into a very exciting new phase of our life together as the Uniting Church in West Brunswick. Please pray for the discernment of the Spirit as this Vision is discussed.

Ray Gormann

## July 2003

### **St. David's Congregational Meeting**

Last Sunday St. David's Congregation met to discuss the Vision Statement. Stephen Mullen, Chair of the Joint Council, led the meeting.

It was explained to the members present that the purpose of the meeting was to seek their approval to set up talks between the two Brunswick West congregations and the Brunswick congregation in Sydney Road. The proposal in the Vision Statement is to consider a multi-staffed, multi-pronged ministry in the area. It may answer the questions of what is to be done about the dwindling numbers at St. David's, and the large numbers at South West.

It was explained that the meeting was not being asked to commit to a joining together, or to the closing down of any churches. At this stage they were only being asked to commit themselves to talking about the changes and their implications.

The congregation unanimously agreed to the proposal that a committee be set up to review the feasibility of the integration of the three congregations.

They elected Judith Newman, Margaret Dyson and Malcolm McIlvena to that Committee, and they agreed to the Operating Guidelines and The Draft Frame of Reference.

Malcolm McIlvena

### **South West Congregational Meeting**

At a very well attended congregational meeting after worship at South West on June 22nd the proposal "that the congregation gives permission for a committee to be set up to review the feasibility of the integration of the three congregations, Union Street, Melville Road and Sydney Road, in line with the visioning document" was accepted by consensus (ie. unanimously). Barry Cook, Stephen Mullen and Elaine Potter were elected as our representatives on the Vision Feasibility Committee. The meeting also agreed by consensus that this committee would bring a Frame of Reference for its work to another congregational meeting for approval in a month's time. The Frame of Reference will be based on the draft presented to the meeting and will incorporate other issues raised during the meeting, in particular, how to enable the participation of children and young people in the time of discernment and planning that lies ahead.

Ruth Millard

## August 2003

### **Vision Feasibility Committee**

This for some unexplained reason seems to be the working name of this group which is charged examining the feasibility of the Vision Paper that was recently circulated among the congregations of SW Brunswick, St David's and St Andrew's in Sydney Road.

The first meeting of the group is Tuesday, August 5, 2003 at the Sydney Road site. We will need to finalise the Draft Terms of Reference (also previously circulated), decide who will convene the group and if any co-options are required, and set ourselves some tasks to follow up.

Members of the group are: SW Brunswick – Barry Cook, Elaine Potter, Stephen Mullen  
St David's – Judith Newman, Margaret Dyson, Malcolm McIlvena  
St Andrew's – Sean Whelan, Louise Adams, Leanne Salau  
Plus Ray Gormann

Please see one of your representatives if you wish any matters to be brought up at these meetings which will probably be monthly from this point on, or if you wish to obtain current information. Regular monthly reports will be made. And pray for the group! Ray Gormann

## September 2003

### Vision Feasibility Committee

The committee looking at the potential for the consolidation of The Uniting Church in Brunswick has now met twice including a Workshop session on 23rd August. Shawn Whelan from Sydney Road congregation is Chairperson, and Barry Cook is Secretary. Goodwill is present in large measure but it is too early to predict where this exploration will lead us.

We have now finalised the Terms of Reference and shared with each other both the priorities and matters of concern identified by members of each congregation. In the next two weeks we will bring those two pieces of information to you as a report for your further endorsement.

When that communication is complete we will review whether possibilities outlined in the original Vision Paper and the priorities and concerns of each congregation will lead to the emergence of clear options for the future. If necessary, we will nominate small task groups, with co-options where necessary, to examine issues in more detail before completing our work and bringing a report to the congregations in November.

Barry Cook

## October 2003

### Vision Feasibility Committee

The Vision Feasibility Task Group continues to meet and address the terms of reference it was given when it was established 3 months ago.

We have now met three times – twice at Sydney Rd and one extended meeting at St David's. Much of the time to this point has been spent getting to know the communities we represent and identifying the issues that arise from the terms of reference. At our last meeting we identified a range of the "interests" each congregation brings to the vision and posted these at our congregation's buildings to obtain feedback. The comments were brought to the last meeting of a week ago and taken note of.

We now feel we are ready to begin the challenging work of putting flesh on the bones of the vision. To this end we have set up a fairly intensive calendar of meetings over the next couple of months to look at how we may develop various aspects of the vision. These meetings are -

- Monday, September 29 to look at mission and outreach
- Wednesday October 15 to look at worship and youth
- Tuesday October 28 to look at property, finances and other resources

We are looking forward to a more specific and detailed vision of the ministry and mission of the possible new congregation being presented at the meeting on September 29. This is really getting into the substance of where God may be leading us, so continue to pray for us and we will keep you informed as to our progress.

We are aware that Brunswick is currently without a minister and they will be looking for some direction from our group by the end of November as to whether they should be proceeding to a call, looking for interim ministry or exploring some other alternative.

Ray Gormann

## November 2003

### Vision Feasibility Committee

The Brunswick Uniting Church Congregations' Vision Feasibility Committee with representatives from the three Brunswick congregations has been meeting over several months.

Initially we spent time getting to know each other and decided it would be good to move the meetings round to the different churches so that we could all see the facilities that were on each site.

We are aware that Sydney Road is without a permanent minister and we need to keep moving on so that the Joint Nominating Committee are able to take into account any recommendations of the Vision Feasibility Committee.

The Committee has agreed to focus on three key areas:

1. Outreach and Mission.
2. Worship, Children and Youth, and Fellowship.
3. Property and Resources.

At this point we have discussed Outreach and Mission and worship and the future direction of outreach ministries. One ministry possibility would focus on spirituality and the arts – music, dance, theatre, performance, seminars and workshops, exhibitions and visual art. The other is ministry with the marginalized in our society – through economic circumstances, ethnicity, disability, addiction, unemployment, etc. After a detailed and informative discussion that invited and allowed all members of the committee to make comments, it was decided that currently a ministry focusing on spirituality and arts was not a high priority in Brunswick. However, there was still a strong interest in supporting one off events such as art exhibitions.

After lengthy discussion about Outreach and Mission the Committee nominated five groups as priorities to consider and research in some detail:

1. Asylum Seekers/Refugees.
2. Youth and Students.
3. Elderly. (Many of whom face the problem of being asset rich but cash poor)
4. People with mental and physical disabilities.
5. 30-40 year old single men in crisis.

At our last meeting the discussion on worship raised many interesting aspects of what is important to us in gathering to worship God. Our three congregations have similar approaches to worship and value aspects such as being centred on the triune God, vibrant music, lay participation, an informality that still is reverent and in touch with our tradition, good preaching and flexibility. We discussed various combinations of worship services and times. We looked at the question of whether we would need two morning services or whether it would be better to have the one service that incorporated the best of a more traditional/contemporary mix. Other possibilities we are looking at are a Sunday evening service and a mid week service. We are also mindful of the ethnic congregations using our property and how we will need to accommodate them. We are still considering the issue of an ongoing Uniting Church presence in West Brunswick and how this may be addressed.

We will continue discussing the three key areas and researching the five priority groups listed under outreach and mission over the next few weeks and look forward to the presentation of a more comprehensive final report containing our recommendations to all congregations by the end of November.

There is still a lot of work to be done and a lot of prayer and discussion to take place, so keep praying for the committee. We meet again on Tuesday, October 28 at St Andrew's, Sydney Road.

Ray Gormann

### **December 2003**

#### **Joint Council**

Joint Council met on November 19th a week earlier than scheduled, in order to discuss the Interim Report from the Vision Feasibility Committee. The Council thanked the Vision Feasibility Committee for its work and received the report. The report, along with statements from the two congregational councils, will be taken to congregational meetings on November 30th. Copies of the report and accompanying statements will be distributed on November 23rd. The Council is recommending that a combined service for St David's, South-West and St Andrew's be held at St Andrew's on one of the Sundays in January.

Ruth Millard



## February 2004

### Combined meeting of St David's Council & South-West Council

A combined meeting of South-West and St David's Councils and members of the Vision Feasibility Committee was held on December 10th to seek to identify ways to move forward with regard to the Interim Report of the Vision Feasibility Committee.

After extended discussions the meeting agreed to the following, and to convey this information to the Vision Feasibility Committee:

- (i) The meeting supports the Vision Feasibility Committee going forward in its work, and encourages people of the 3 congregations to view themselves as one group (possibly with a new name) rather than as three separate entities.
- (ii) The meeting reminds the Vision Feasibility Committee of their power to co-opt others to assist them and to delegate tasks to others, and encourages them to do this as needed.
- (ii) The meeting recommends that the Vision Feasibility Committee draw up a discussion and "getting to know you program" for the three congregations.
- (iii) The meeting recommends that, as part of the discussion process, the following question be raised and discussed: What would be the mission focus of the new congregation?
- (iv) The meeting recommends that, as part of the discussion process, the following questions be raised and discussed: What are the barriers to us becoming one congregation? Are these barriers valid? Can the barriers be resolved? What information do people want about the proposed vision? What questions do people have about the proposed vision?
- (v) The meeting recommends that the Vision Feasibility arrange opportunities for the people of Brunswick and West Brunswick to hear from people belonging to other congregations that have merged (eg. Burnside in Springvale)

Ruth Millard

## March 2004

### "A JOURNEY TOGETHER" - Report from Vision Feasibility Committee

We have been meeting since August 2003. In many ways the going has been heavy and the Committee is not of one mind. The following are extracts from a recent pastoral letter from Shawn Whelan, Chairperson of the Committee talking about our journey together.

"The Congregations of Sydney Road, Brunswick (St Andrews); Melville Road, West Brunswick (St David's); and Union Street, West Brunswick (South West), have agreed to explore the possibility of becoming one combined congregation so as to offer increased opportunities for vibrant worship, Christian education, fellowship, outreach and witness for God in our region.

It is too early to know where this journey will lead us. Many questions are still being asked and potential difficulties addressed. But the Vision Feasibility Committee is moving forward optimistically and hopes to bring proposals to present to the congregations in late April for decision-making sometime in May this year.

In addition the Vision Committee wants to provide opportunities for discussion and reflection and also has plans for social activities (*details in Coming Events*) that will help us become more relaxed and confident with each other."

"Find as many opportunities as you can to participate in the activities planned. When it comes to decision time in May be as prepared as you can to vote with full information and a real sense of whether God is calling us to something different.

"Will you join us on the journey? As we pray and reflect together let us listen to God so we can discern what shape our relationship should take" - Shawn Whelan, Chairperson.

Since that letter was circulated the Committee has met again and at this stage is likely to recommend that we become one Congregation with a single Council and worshipping sites at Sydney Road and Melville Road. Sunday School, Christian Education and Youth Activities would

be at Sydney Road. In presenting the final report to the Congregations, the options of Yes, No or Wait will be offered.

We are now concentrating on Financial and Property resources and Mission Outreach opportunities and are meeting fortnightly to help meet our reporting deadline. Barry Cook

## **April 2004**

### **Vision Feasibility Report**

The Committee continues to meet fortnightly, as it has been for the past two months. Our heavy meeting schedule is so we may have some detail to bring to the meeting proposed after the fourth of our combined services on Palm Sunday, April 4 at St Andrew's. We have been encouraged by both the attendance and the sense of occasion and expectancy evident at the three combined services we have had thus far.

Other activities that appeared on our calendar of events distributed about 6 weeks ago have been good, but have had mixed attendance figures.

Recent meetings of the committee have focused upon property and finance and mission. At the property and finance committee we examined the financial statements of the three churches and confirmed that any new congregation would be in an extremely strong financial position. We would also have the collective stewardship of 13 properties that we estimate would be valued in the region of 12 million dollars. This is a sobering realisation for the Uniting Church which has about 130 - 140 people worshipping in its buildings on any given Sunday, although of course our contact lists have many more people and we support many projects beyond our own congregations. Still... we were challenged to again face the issue of whether we are called to be more actively at mission and outreach, and hence making good use of what has been entrusted to us.

At our last meeting of a fortnight ago we turned to look at the above question. Some of the possible projects that stirred us include –

- Renting a shopfront for an outreach project, that would be multi use, but include drop in, community space for groups, possible meals, a relocation of an expanded food co-op currently based at SW Brunswick. We are investigating rentals.
- Leasing/Purchasing a mini bus for use by church groups, including youth group, and some community groups such as Stewart Lodge, but also for bringing elderly/disabled/non mobile people to church
- Developing further the intentional Christian community gathering around the student houses for tertiary students already based at St Andrew's. This could include requiring prospective residents to nominate their chosen mission area.
- Deepening the links that already exists with the Asylum Seeker Centre at the St Andrew's site and Stewart Loge, a supported residential home in Brunswick, and forging a new partnership with Moreland Hall, a UCA drug and alcohol treatment centre based in Coburg.
- Examining options for expanding the housing options if we have a non required site – for example more Hutchinson Close type units, or low income housing .
- Working at creating a regional youth group and network.

These are some of the directions we imagine the new congregation moving towards, some of which could be implemented with minimal extra work and some of which will require still more research and planning. Ray Gormann

## **May 2004**

### **Vision Feasibility Committee**

This committee has continued its busy meeting schedule with fortnightly meetings for the past few months. We reported recently that we were not able to make the original date of a final report by April/May. We are now planning to wrap up our work in late June/July with the final

decision making by the congregations is scheduled for August. Here is what we are proposing for the next few months.

On May 2 everyone at worship will receive two papers. One is the Mission paper, which we on the committee consider a very important piece of work. Mission and outreach are what we believe is driving this whole process, and where we expect we would see the greatest advantages in any proposed merger – so the thought that has gone into this paper is crucial and our hope and prayer is that some of the excitement the committee feels will be evident. Accompanying it on May 2 will be our second “Pastoral Letter” that gives an update and some dates for what is proposed in the near future.

On May 9th the three congregations have our fifth combined worship at 10.00am at South West. There will be opportunity for people to make a brief response to the Mission Paper if they wish. The following week will be a big one as we expect the major report to be going to the separate three church councils for their approval for it to be distributed to the congregations. We propose that distribution happen on May 16, and a survey will be also distributed. The survey is to gauge our people’s attitudes on a few issues, but primarily on what has been the most vexed issue in our 9-month journey as a committee – if this merger goes ahead and we form a single congregation and have two worship services each Sunday, where will these services be located? Surveys will need to be returned by June 6 and after that we will make an assessment as to whether or not we move to a final vote in August.

Ray Gormann

## **June 2004**

### **Vision Feasibility Questionnaire**

Two weeks ago the Committee’s Second Report was distributed to the St. Andrew’s, South West and St. David’s congregations. At the back of the report is a questionnaire which provides people with the opportunity to comment on their overall reaction to the committee’s recommendations, location of services, location for a second service (if necessary) in West Brunswick and mission opportunities. Please take the time to read the report and mission opportunities papers carefully and then to respond to the issues raised in the questionnaire. The committee will use these responses to assist with the preparation of the final report and recommendations to be brought to the congregations in August.

## **July 2004**

### **Vision Feasibility Committee**

The Vision Feasibility Committee has enjoyed having a lighter load over the past month after the frantic pace leading up to the distribution of the questionnaire. We now have the results of the questionnaire in - about 49 were returned from SW, 21 from St David’s and 14 from St Andrew’s. Shawn Whelan and Stephen Mullen gave a brief report back, and circulated a written summary at the combined worship service held at St David’s on June 20. The full extensive report, including comments from every individual who filled in a questionnaire, will be made available to the three Church Councils. A huge expression of thanks is due to Barry (and Glenice) Cook who spent hours and hours reading and tabulating the questionnaires and getting all the raw data into a form that is readily accessible.

The Vision Feasibility Committee spent most of the last meeting discussing just where the results of the questionnaire left the committee and what they indicated regarding the way forward. The issue we were seeking guidance in the questionnaire was, - if there is a merger, one service (at least) will be held at Sydney Rd but where will the second worship service be held? It has been clarified and confirmed that there is a difference in opinion between the three congregations on this matter, with St Andrew’s and South West favouring the Sydney Rd site for both services, and St David’s favouring a West Brunswick site, and preferring Melville Rd. Interestingly although this was not an option in the questionnaire a number of people indicated they were in favour of one

service only on a Sunday morning, although open to another at a different time during the week. Also interesting is that a few people said we should look at selling all three churches and starting again on a new site.

The VFC will take all this into account and shape up the wording of the proposal that will be put to the vote. We are still working towards having the vote in August. The implications of the outcome of any vote will also need to be worked on by the committee, and we are beginning to do this.

We repeat that the vote is not about closing down any congregation. Each congregation will have its own future in its own hands, will decide its own direction, and will have the opportunity to indicate where it discerns that the Spirit of God is leading the congregation.

The committee is planning to continue the shared services, at least until the vote. The next service will be on July 25 at St Andrew's, and the one in August will be on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Ray Gormann

## August 2004

### Vision Feasibility Committee

#### UNITING CHURCH CONGREGATIONS IN BRUNSWICK

#### AN OPPORTUNITY TO VOTE ABOUT THE FUTURE

Over the past twelve months the Vision Feasibility Committee, with three representatives from each of Sydney Road, Union Street and Melville Road congregations, together with Ray Gormann and recently Richard Arnold, has been meeting to explore the potential of becoming one congregation of the Uniting Church in the inner northwest region. We have now had many opportunities to worship together and other occasions for social interaction.

We have been praying and listening to discern what God is asking of us and have received newsletters and major progress reports outlining issues and possibilities to inform and challenge us. In preparation for a vote in each of the congregations we recently asked you to complete a questionnaire seeking opinions on the broad proposal to amalgamate at Sydney Road and whether there would be support for a second worship service in West Brunswick.

The responses from Sydney Road and Union Street were on the whole very positive although only fourteen (14) questionnaires came back from Sydney Road. On the other hand if the results of the questionnaire at Melville Rd carried through to the vote, that congregation would not be in favour of a merger and would want to maintain a worshipping presence in West Brunswick. Since then the Melville Road congregation has had an opportunity to explore the implications for their future should Sydney Road and Union Street vote to confirm the opinions expressed in the questionnaires and decide to merge at Sydney Road.

The Vision Feasibility Committee has been considering the information that arose from the questionnaire and one outcome of the vote may be that the Melville Rd congregation decides to stay and work at creating a more vibrant congregation at Melville Road and, if necessary, to seek alternative part-time Ministry. They extend their blessing to Union Street should they vote to move but invite any members who would prefer to worship in West Brunswick to join their congregation.

In the event of the above scenario it will mean dividing property and financial resources between any new congregation at Sydney Rd and the congregation at Melville Road. An arrangement will need to be determined and consented to by all parties and approved by the Uniting Church. The Vision Committee believes that this can be done without great difficulty and without threatening the viability of a two-way merger between Sydney Road and Union Street if such action is agreed.

### Where to from here?

The Vision Committee, although never of one mind on all issues, is now clearly of the opinion that it is time for the congregations to vote about their futures and **proposes that each of the three congregations hold meetings on Sunday 15 August for this purpose.** The first question to be asked is: **Do you support the merger of the Sydney Road, Union Street and**

## **Melville Road congregations at Sydney Road and the appointment of a transitional Council to facilitate the detail and timing of that merger?**

If that question is answered in the positive, the consent of the Presbytery of Maribyrnong Valley (Regional Council of the Uniting Church) will be sought. The Pastoral Relations Committee of Presbytery has been receiving progress reports on the work of the Vision Feasibility Committee. If Presbytery agrees to the merger proposal the transitional Church Council will take responsibility as soon as it can be appointed.

If the answer is negative, we will remain as three congregations and consider whether there are other ways for us to worship and provide witness together without an organic merger.

Each of the existing Church Councils has decided on voting processes and they are outlined below. The Vision Committee wants those decisions to be made known to the other congregations and to the Presbytery so there is no misunderstanding in relation to the Uniting Church Regulations. They reflect established practices in each congregation.

If you have any further questions about issues or process please address them to one of the Vision Feasibility Committee who are named below.

It is now time for us to let go and let God. We ask you to pray for guidance as you prepare to participate in this decision.

*Ray Gormann, Richard Arnold, Leanne Salau, Louise Adams, Shawn Whelan, Margaret Dyson, Judith Newman, Malcolm McIlvena, Elaine Potter, Stephen Mullen and Barry Cook.*

**September 2004**

### **Joint Council**

Joint Council met on August 25<sup>th</sup>. We approved a letter to go to the Pastoral Relations Committee of the Maribyrnong Presbytery outlining the decisions made regarding the merger of congregations in the Brunswick area, and seeking Presbytery's approval of the decisions. The Pastoral Relations Committee meets in early September and will take our letter to the Standing Committee of Presbytery. There is no Presbytery meeting in September, so either the Standing Committee will make a decision at their September meeting or will refer the matter to the October meeting of Presbytery. Presbytery approval is required before the decisions of the congregations can be implemented. In the meantime the Finance Committee of the Linked Congregations will look at the finances and property of the Linked Congregations and work towards recommendations for a settlement of these matters between St. David's and South West. Ruth Millard

### **St. David's Council**

St. David's met after Church on August 15<sup>th</sup> to vote on the question "Do you support the merger of the Sydney Rd., Union St. and Melville Rd. congregations at Sydney Rd. and the appointment of a transitional council to facilitate the implementation of that merger?" St. David's members voted 16 to 3 not to approve the proposal while South West decided by consensus, and St. Andrew's by agreement to become a new congregation on the Sydney Rd. site.

These decisions will obviously require faith, trust, diligence and hard work by all of us. While we congratulate South West and St. Andrew's on their decision and wish them well in their journey together. I sense there is deep hurt, disillusionment and uncertainty as to the effect of the situation which has transpired. Concerned members of St. David's are invited to contact members of our Council to share their concerns. Graeme Wilde

### **South-West Congregational Meeting**

Over eighty people attended the congregational meeting at South-West on Sunday August 15<sup>th</sup> to consider two questions from the Vision Feasibility Committee regarding a proposed merger of the Sydney Road, Union Street and Melville Road congregations at Sydney Road, or, if Melville

Road decided to maintain a separate worshipping presence in West Brunswick, of the Sydney Road and Union Street congregations at Sydney Road.

The meeting was very ably and sensitively chaired by Clare Boyd-Macrae, the chairperson of South-West Council, and Kylie Crabbe gave a helpful summary of the consensus process which we then used to reach decisions during the meeting. In the course of the meeting nearly thirty people took the opportunity to make comments and suggestions, honestly expressing their enthusiasm and/or concerns regarding the proposed merger. After considerable discussion the meeting agreed by consensus to the merger of the three congregations. Further discussion ensued, and the meeting then also agreed by consensus to the merger of Sydney Road and Union Street in the event that the Melville Road congregation decided to maintain a separate worshipping presence in West Brunswick.

There was some sense of the losses South West will experience in deciding to merge, but also a growing sense of vibrancy and energy as the meeting moved towards making the momentous decision to leave the South-West site and be part of a new congregation at Sydney Road.

Ruth Millard (Secretary, South-West Council)

## October 2004

### South West Council

At our September meeting we were occupied with issues related to the upcoming merger of the South-West and St Andrew's congregations and the de-linking of the South-West and St David's congregations. Ray Gormann reported that a letter relating the decisions made at congregational meetings on 15<sup>th</sup> August and co-signed by representatives from St Andrew's, St David's and South-West, was received at Pastoral Relations Committee at their meeting on Monday September 6<sup>th</sup>. The PRC formulated five recommendations as follows to go to the Standing Committee of Presbytery on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> September:

- (i) to dissolve the link between the South-West and St David's congregations
- (ii) to amalgamate the South-West and St Andrew's congregations
- (iii) to authorise South-West and St Andrew's to establish a Transitional Council.
- (iv) to encourage St David's and the new congregation to have conversations about possible links between them (including in relation to finances and property).
- (v) to appoint a Presbytery person to journey with the St David's congregation.

We have since learned that the Standing Committee accepted all five recommendations.

After discussions the South-West Council agreed to appoint five of the South-West representatives for the Transitional Council from the current South-West Council, and that nominations will be called for to fill the other two positions. The rationale behind appointing five of the representatives from the current Council is that the Council has experience and knowledge of the congregation built up over the years to take into the transitional council, has been leading the South-West congregation as we discerned our future together under God, and has been closely involved in "Visioning" processes since they began. The five representatives from the South-West Council are Nicole Batch, Clare Boyd-Macrae, David Kruse and Stephen Mullen (who have all accepted one-year terms) and Mark van Tatenhove (who has accepted a two year term). Elections for the other two elected positions will be held at a Congregational Meeting after worship on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

Ruth Millard

## November 2004

### Transitional Council

There was a great atmosphere at the first meeting of the transitional council on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October at St. Andrew's. South West has five male and two female reps, and St Andrew's four female and one male, so the gender balance (apart from the clergy) is just about perfect.

Ray welcomed us, Clare took opening worship and then we went around the table saying a little about ourselves. There was an impressive and diverse array of professions and interests in the group. We also wrote down and shared three of our hopes for our new congregation, and there was a lot of common ground in these.

We got through a power of work by 10pm. Topics tackled included:

- Committee structure: although St A's has done things a little differently, we will probably stay with the committee model, with groups taking care of worship, pastoral care, children and youth, outreach/mission, property, finance and communication. We're keen to get expressions of interest from anyone interested in being part of one of these.
- Executive positions: we'll start thinking and praying about this.
- How things will wind up with St David's.
- Worship space and possible changes: although some members at St A's are apprehensive about this, St A's members of the council are keen to start talking right away about how we can change the worship space. Kirsty Bennett (current chair of St A's council) is an architect and was very encouraging and open. At our next meeting we plan to bring the names of some architects who could listen to what we need, what our dreams and mission are and lead us in a process of working out what will work for us.
- Name of a new congregation: to be dealt with at a future date.
- Finance group: transitional council member Matthew Lees has been treasurer at St A's and is going to speak to Judith Newman, Andrew Moorhouse and Stephen Mullen about our finances work. Matthew and Stephen are keen to start a budget together as soon as we can.
- We briefly discussed the youth leader position and southwest property, and also joint services coming up – December 12 and January 16.
- Timelines – the question on everybody's lips! Impossible to be definite about this, as over the next month or two we'll be determining essential pre-merger tasks (such as installing child-proof fences). But we think that a move might be possible by Easter.

Plenty of work for our next meeting on November 23! At the end of the night I was left with the feeling that we had got through a lot of work, that people around the table seemed relaxed and comfortable and also excited, and that we were on a very similar wavelength. Please pray for us as we continue this work.

Clare Boyd-Macrae

## December 2004

### Transitional Council

The second meeting of the transitional council, held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November was lively and relaxed. There was a palpable sense of excitement and common purpose, and we got through a lot of business.

The main items discussed after opening worship led by Ray Gormann were:

- Committees – names are going up fast on lists. The Finance and Mission committees are already up and running.
- The finance people are working on a new budget.
- We walked around some of the property. St Andrew's are having a fence erected in the back to

provide a safe outside area for children.

- Kirsty Bennett has gathered seven names of architectural consultants who work with churches and could begin working with the new congregation on developing ideas for shaping the interior of St. Andrews in line with our vision and desire for a more inclusive, open worship space. A committee (Kirsty Bennett, Mark van Tatenhove, Clare Boyd-Macrae and anyone else who would love to be involved) will short-list and then interview some of these architects. This is a first stage and the resulting conceptual drawings will be used as the basis for going into a further stage which will develop working drawings and specifications.
- Executive positions were decided: Chair: Clare Boyd-Macrae, Secretary: Richard Arnold, Treasurer: Matthew Lees.
- We listed tasks that must be completed before joining.
- Timeline for completion of the merger: because Easter is early this year, and the school holidays are after Easter, to wait till an appropriate time after all this meant it would be nearly May before we joined. We discussed the desirability of all worshipping together over the Holy Week period, and decided to aim for Palm Sunday (20 March) as our joining date. We all felt pretty excited about this!
- A new name: we felt we couldn't go past 'Brunswick Uniting'. Brief and to the point.
- We enjoyed our meeting so much that we decided to meet again before Christmas.
- We left rejoicing!

Clare Boyd-Macrae

### **Transitional Council Committees**

The Council is commencing with the following committees (to be reviewed as we get under way) Property; Finance; Children and Youth, including student housing (St Andrew's has two houses where tertiary students live); Mission and Outreach; Worship; Communication. Members of the Transitional Council have indicated their areas of interest and are keen to begin giving the same opportunity to members of the two congregations. A special committee to look at the worship space has also been set up. Please see the Transitional Council report for further details. It is important we have as many people as possible actively involved in launching the life of the new congregation, so here is a way you can become involved in the near future. We have placed paper on the glass in the entrance to the church with the name of the church councilor's areas of interest and you are invited to place your name down on the sheet where you would be interested in becoming involved. We hope the committees may even get a meeting in before the end of this year.

### **March 2005**

#### **Annual General Meeting & De-linking Service**

The Annual General Meeting of the South West & St. David's congregations will be held at 9:30 am **before** the De-linking service. The De-linking service for the South West and St. David's Congregations will be held at South West on **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March**, at 10 am. This service will be an opportunity for us all to remember and celebrate the long relationship we have shared and to bless each other on this next phase of our separate journeys as the people of God.

#### **Almost Final South West Brunswick service**

A few people have indicated that they will not be able to attend the final South West service on **13<sup>th</sup> March** due to the long weekend, and have expressed interest in having a brief "almost final service" during the week. This is being arranged for 7.00pm on **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March** and will run for about half an hour. Anyone who will be attending this worship service and is interested in putting some shape to it please speak to Ray Gormann, ph. 9387 0870.



### **Final South West service**

The Final Service of worship for the South West Brunswick congregation will be held at South West, 9:30 am, on **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> March**. During worship we will have the opportunity to remember and celebrate our South West Brunswick story and to respond to Jesus' command (re Lazarus) to 'Unbind him and let him go'. Worship will include the celebration of Holy Communion. A special morning tea will follow the service.

### **Palm Sunday Opening Service**

The Opening Service of the Brunswick congregation will be held on **Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March**, 9:30 am at Sydney Rd. We are delighted that Rev Dr. Robert Johnson (General Secretary of Synod) will preach at this service. You are invited to join in a procession from South West to St. Andrew's starting at 8:30 am. We will all gather together on the back lawn at St. Andrew's at **9:15 am** to process into the church together as the new Brunswick congregation. *PS. There is a large car park in Edward St. (just around the corner).*

## **April 2005 News & Views**

### **Worship Committee**

The worship committee has been having a wonderful time during February and March preparing for all the special services held in recent weeks. Colour and movement have been common threads through all of the Holy Week services commencing with the processing in of people of the new Brunswick congregation with cloths of the liturgical colours of white, green, red and purple. These cloths were then used in various ways during the remaining Holy Week services. The Opening Service on Palm Sunday carried within it a great sense of celebration as Clare Boyd-Macrae & Kirsty Bennett welcomed each other and the congregations into this new congregation. Our paper doves and people were scattered over the cloths and branches. David Mills, chairperson of the Maribyrnong Valley Presbytery blessed the team ministry of our minister's Ray Gormann and Richard Arnold. Richard Johnston, General Secretary of the Synod, spoke of how we might convey the person of Jesus to the people of Brunswick. New name-tags and Directory's were distributed. Ray told the children about the trapdoors which they hurried to find after worship. An olive tree was planted by the oldest and youngest members of our congregation, Vera Pierce & Adam Moorhouse, to mark the occasion.

Saide Cameron