

Regenerating the Church



OUR STRATEGY

The Regenerating the Church strategy seeks to encourage, nurture and sustain a culture of church renewal across the Presbytery through developing new forms of church, planting a variety of expressions of church and encouraging new missional life in existing congregations, faith communities, agencies and schools.¹

God's work of love in the world, namely, the mission of God – has a Church - the Body of Christ. The church has been called into being by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit². As first-fruits of the coming reign of God, we are collaborators in God's mission.³ The church is the people of God, a servant people, a reconciling community of the Holy Spirit where divisions are broken down, the body of Christ in the world.⁴

As the church of God, we are a pilgrim people, called to "to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds"⁵, worshipping God and serving the world in our time and place. The church is called to be a lived-out expression of the Gospel, communities of reconciliation, and a blessing to our communities.⁶

OUR PURPOSE

As the Presbytery of Port Philip West, we are called by God to steward our resources wisely, discerning what we are called to do in our part of God's vineyard. In particular, we will seek to work in partnership with the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of VicTas, following their vision of *"Following Christ, walking together as First and Second Peoples, seeking community, compassion, and justice for all creation."*⁷ Within that overarching vision for the Synod, our vision is to foster vibrant, diverse, contextual, disciple-making Christian communities.

OUR VISION

Through the work of the Spirit of Christ: For the Presbytery of Port Phillip West to be a network of increasingly vibrant, diverse, contextual and disciple-making communities of Christ participating in and witnessing to the wonder of God's mission.

¹ Regenerating the Church Strategy 2016.

² John 20:22.

³ Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 4:1.

⁴ 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Galatians 3:28; Romans 6:5.

⁵ UCA Basis of Union, para 11.

⁶ UCA Basis of Union, para 3.

⁷ <https://victas.uca.org.au/about-us/vision-and-mission/> Accessed 11/6/21

OUR PASSION

Vibrant, diverse, contextual mission and disciple-making churches.

Vibrant - Vibrant, vital and viable congregations, faith communities, schools and agencies, filled with vim and vigour. Christ came to give us abundant and vital Life.⁸ PPW wants to support every congregation to be viable and vital, healthy and resilient for the future.⁹

Diverse - The Uniting Church belief is our diversity is our strength. We are diverse people, with diverse gifts and diverse points of view. We seek to be an inclusive church that listens to our First and Second peoples.¹⁰ This takes into account that we are intercultural, differently abled, all-age, with differing genders and stories.

Contextual - When regenerating the Church we seek to make changes that treat each of our local contexts with integrity. The local context is the soil in which we plant the seeds of mission. For the seeds to take root and grow we must first understand the soil nutrients that we are planting in and its limitations [Parable of the Sower].¹¹

Discipleship-making - The UCA has a unique story to tell Australia. UCA members need to be coached to tell their stories of faith to others they meet. Our congregations need to make pathways for the people we are building relationships with, to become disciples.¹²

We will prioritise new and renewing Christian community, strengthen our Intercultural life, seize the fresh opportunities provided by Digital Church, and collaborate with all-ages together in mission.

OUR STORY

Jesus said 'I am the vine and you are the branches'.¹³ It is story of dependence on Christ for our strength. It recognises that some time there is dying back and there is a need to prune. It is a story of regeneration - of **new and renewing** growth.

The parable of the mustard seed, the small seed that is planted in the ground and grows up to become a tree that the birds of every kind come to rest in its branches. Is a story of hope, from little things big things grow. It is a story of hospitality as the tree provides shelter, food and rest. It is story about **diversity** as bird of every kind come together as a foretaste of kingdom of God.

Post-covid we might feel like the fig tree that is not producing fruit. Scared that the owner of the orchard might seek to cut us down. The gardener recommends digging around the plant and fertilizing it and giving it one more year. This is story of second chances. The owner and the gardener **collaborate** for a better option. But there is also a time by which the fruit must take place, this is good stewardship.

The Sower cast out many seeds but does not know where to find the fertile ground, where the seed will take root. Seed on the path are eaten by birds. Seeds in the rock are shallow rooted and are burnt by the sun. Seed among thorns may grow up together but eventually the good seed are strangled by the robust weeds. This parable is about the seed the of good news or faith. Or we might think of them as the seeds of good mission. We need to **cast seed widely**. Observe what seed takes root and nurture them to grow.

Images of regenerating as Church are all throughout our scriptures, they are fertile soil for us understanding mission in our world.

⁸ Abundant Life John 10:10

⁹ PPW Policies: Vibrant, Vital and Viable Congregations Policy; Faith Communities.

¹⁰ Basis of Union paragraph #13. Assembly Vision website.

¹¹ Regenerating the Church Strategy [2016-2021]. Matt 12:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15

¹² VicTas Synod New and Renewing website

¹³ The Vine John 15; Mustard Tree Matt 13:31-21; Fig Tree Luke 13:6-9; The Sower Matt 12:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15

OUR FOCUS [2022- 2026]

Five Strategic Directions		S.M.A.R.T GOALS (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound)
New and Renewing	We live in times of great change and the UCA continues to adapt in order to bring life in all its fullness as promised by Christ. We need to be “inspiring and enabling more new contextual Christian communities to be born, and to renew existing ones to be more faithful and missional”.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In 2022 MSE map ‘new and renewing ministries and mission’ across PPW to identify missional growth. 2. Annual education, training and coaching of congregations to live out their vision and mission in regenerating the Church. 3. Research about emerging contextual expressions of church and stories shared across the Presbytery via council meetings, website resources, Facebook post and links, newsletters and emails. 4. Ongoing support of 20% of Presbytery Budget will be on New and Renewing projects.
Intercultural	We learn from and enable diverse cultural groups within the presbytery to flourish and grow together.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Presbytery worship reflects our diversity. 6. Presbytery Strategy has been translated into key languages. 7. Annually seek to increase cultural diversity on presbytery committees. 8. Presbytery make pathways for Synod Intercultural Forum (SIF) & equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM) unit to guide us in how to be a vibrant Intercultural church.
Intergenerational	We welcome, equip and empower the different generations, in their life together, discipleship-making, ministry and mission.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Annual education and training in faith seeding and faith sharing, storytelling and disciple-making for all ages. 10. Annual Uniting Youth Camps, and an on-line community for youth and leadership training for young adults. 11. Encourage the input of child, youth and young adult voices in presbytery meetings. 12. Annual Lay preacher training, assessment and accreditation.
Digital Church	We take risks and embrace digital technology that enable the church to engage in missional engagement on-line. Creating discipleship pathways in social media and other on-line platforms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Create hubs of IT people, encouraging and supporting congregations in seeding on-line ministry and mission. 14. Continue to resource the presbytery website and Facebook page and to grow its number of users. 15. Create on-line ‘Missional Learning Communities’ for continuous education on mission and asynchronous learning.
Collaborate	We need to work with partners to engage in mission.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Presbytery facilitate congregations and other ministry contexts to work together. 17. Presbytery collaborates with Synod and congregations and partner with Uniting, Age Well and Schools. 18. Partner with Narana and Justice and International Mission unit in covenanting ‘From the Heart’.

OUR HOPE

Our Hope to Guide the Presbytery

Our hope is that this strategy will guide the planning, work and budget of the Presbytery of Port Phillip West for the next 5 years. The presbytery will seek to resource the congregations and faith communities, in living out their 'Regenerating the Church' ministry and vision. Together we will discover and plant new seeds of mission and ministry, observe what takes root and seek to nurture it to fruition.

Our hope is that the Synod 'Here for Good' project and 'Money for Mission' fund be a call to the presbytery and congregations to continue to be good stewards of God's resources. That property 'excess to use' be faithfully considered how it might be made 'fit for future mission'.

The Presbytery will use the vision and the 5 strategic directions to prioritise in their decision making. For example: strategic plans, budgets, grant applications, mission study, future placements and consultations.

Presbytery act as a discernment partner to evaluate how ministry contexts are vibrant, vital and viable. The presbytery representatives will endeavour to understand the local congregation and their community context and resource congregations in their vision and mission strategy. The presbytery will call congregations together to collaborate in ministry placements, leadership and in missional opportunities.

Our Hope to Inspire Congregations and Faith Communities.

Our hope is that congregations and faith communities are endeavouring to be vibrant, diverse, contextual and disciple-making to regenerate the church. We would encourage all ministry contexts and in particular church councils to use this vision and strategy to help them as they discern and plan their own ways forward. For example, how are missional activities intergenerational? or collaborative? or incorporating digital content?

Our hope is that this strategy will resource the congregations to continue to take risks and experiment with new ways of engaging with their community. Even going out of their church buildings and finding new ways to be church. Now is the time to cast the seeds of mission widely. Considering how they are regenerating in their local area? What new missional seed are they planting? What pruning is needed to ensure renewed growth?

Intercultural congregations, and others that find the concepts in this document unfamiliar or too abstract, might start with the biblical texts referenced. And talk about what the readings teach us about the church engagement with the world.

Ministers and congregations could take themes out of this document and lead devotions and worships on these topics and how they are true in their own setting.

Increasingly vibrant, diverse, contextual and disciple-making communities of faith participating in and witnessing to the wonder of God's mission. Amen.