

The Olive Way 2021 Review

Discerning a Way Forward 2022-2024

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¹ Lew Hess – a short biography

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Introduction

Informed by the Terms of Reference relevant to this Review this report aims to capture and distil the essence of The Olive Way, as well as the extant experience and future trajectories **regarding staffing (paid and volunteer) resources.**

This analysis of future trajectories will be contextualised by an important distillation of The Values Framework that informs the ways of being and doing at The Olive Way. In this regard it is apparent that the bedrock value of **Welcome** and **Hospitality** is well established as both a seminal guiding principle and as a grounded practice. Other values (community/a grounded spirituality etc.) appear to be present and formative (transformative) but not as explicitly articulated as Welcome and Hospitality. A clearer distillation of these (other) values that are present organically and transacted through relationship is of importance in articulating a robust philosophical frame of reference (Values framework) to inform both policy and practice at The Olive Way generally and the particular decisions about staffing pertinent to this review. **This suggested articulation and further strengthening of The Olive Way Values Framework represents an additional recommendation to those articulated as part of the 2018 Review.**

Informed by this suggested strengthening of the Olive Way Values Framework this report will also make explicit reference to the key recommendations relevant to the 2018 review with priority comment and analysis accorded to those recommendations that are of direct or cognate relevance to staffing requirements etc.



Preface (see Wikipedia)²

In the name 'The Olive Way', there is a connection to a long and sacred tradition of beliefs and practices. Olive oil has long been considered sacred and holy. The olive branch has often been a symbol of abundance, glory, and peace. The leafy branches of the olive tree were ritually

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olive#Judaeo-Christianity>

offered to deities and powerful figures as emblems of benediction and purification, and they were used to crown the victors of friendly games and bloody wars. Today, olive oil is still used in many religious ceremonies. Over the years, the olive has also been used to symbolize wisdom, fertility, power, and purity.

Use in Judaeo-Christianity

Olives were one of the main elements in Ancient Israelite cuisine. Olive oil was used for not only food and cooking, but also lighting, sacrificial offerings, ointment, and anointment for priestly or royal office. The olive tree is one of the first plants mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament), and one of the most significant. An olive branch (or leaf, depending on translation) was brought back to Noah by a dove to demonstrate that the flood was over (Book of Genesis, 8:11).

The olive is listed in Deuteronomy 8:8 as one of the seven species that are noteworthy products of the Land of Israel. According to the Halakha, the Jewish law mandatory for all Jews, the olive is one of the seven species that require the recitation of *me'eyn shalosh* after they are consumed. Olive oil is also the most recommended and best possible oil for the lighting of the Shabbes candles.

The Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, is mentioned several times in the New Testament. The Allegory of the Olive Tree in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans refers to the scattering and gathering of Israel. It compares the Israelites to a tame olive tree and the Gentiles to a wild olive branch. The olive tree itself, as well as olive oil and olives, play an important role in the Bible.

A Strengthening of the Values Framework: Core Olive Way Values of Welcome and Hospitality

Welcome and hospitality are clearly articulated as core guiding principles and grounded practice at The Olive Way. A very useful compendium of articles entitled *Hospitality, Christian Reflections: A Series in Faith and Ethics* compiled by Baylor University (<https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/53376.pdf>) affirms The Olive Way experience and invites deeper conversation and reflection by all who have an interest in the redemptive power of welcome and hospitality. A narrative examining The Olive Way discourse and experience with regard to welcome and hospitality would also be a very valuable addition to the next edition of the compendium!

The following comment by Christine Pohl, one of the contributors to this compendium appears particularly resonant with The Olive Way experience:

Although we often think of hospitality as a tame and pleasant practice Christian hospitality has always had a subversive counter cultural dimension. Hospitality is resistance, especially when the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons. Small acts of respect are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of values and an alternate model of relationships.³

Community

Reference to community appears in The Olive Way discourse and narrative. 'Olive Way is about creating a place in which community and a sense of belonging can flourish for those who live in or visit Brunswick' (Welcome to Olive Way brochure).

A clearer distillation of community as a primary construct/guiding principle/grounded practice at The Olive Way is of critical importance to making transparent the values and philosophical underpinnings that inform and shape The Olive Way's ways of being and doing. A privileging of community also has the potential to speak to The Olive Way's interest in affirming and enabling participant ownership and control (discussed more fully elsewhere in this report). Emeritus Professor Susan Kenny's 2017 text *Developing Communities for the Future* provides a very useful framework for understanding community and community development.

In what ways is The Olive Way a community?

Much of The Olive Way's experience regarding community resonates with important contemporary understandings of community/community development. Seminal principles/precepts embedded in community include the following: the critical importance of belonging, an acknowledgement of shared ownership, broad based participation and involvement in decision making, the need for co -creation, an acknowledgment that expertise

³ Pohl, Christine D., *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1999, p.62.

is shared by all who are a part of community, a respect for all human beings, a privileging of those who are powerless, and an explicit commitment to social justice.

The presence of volunteers at The Olive Way is one exemplar that is foundational to the co-creation of community. It is evident that many of those who volunteer at The Olive Way aspire to and embody more progressive understandings of volunteering than various modernist approaches, which conceptualise the volunteer as the 'doer of good' and one who is hierarchically very different to the participants (the recipients of good works).

Both organically and by intention, volunteering at The Olive Way (at least for some) acknowledges that reciprocity is a key human experience and that in their involvement at The Olive Way they *receive* as well as *contribute* to the co-creation of a safe and accepting community. In this regard some volunteers also very clearly see themselves as participants (shared humanity/shared expertise etc). (The role of volunteers in relation to community will be discussed more fully elsewhere in this report)

The distillation of The Olive Way's experience of community through reference to both contemporary thinking on community / community development and through the exploration of other models of community will strengthen the Values Framework seminal to The Olive Way and contribute to a distinctive Olive Way voice on community

(Urban) Spirituality

The Olive Way is clearly identified as an 'outreach activity' of the Brunswick Uniting Church. Strengthening the pastoral support available to guests and creating more opportunities for involvement/linkages with the church community have been identified as key recommendations of the 2018 Review.

Acknowledging my absence of theological credentials and affirming the theological expertise of those responsible for both the initial co-creation of The Olive Way and for its ongoing oversight, a clearer articulation of the theological (philosophical) underpinnings to The Olive Way is important in both conceptualising the meaning of outreach and inviting a thoughtful articulation of The Olive Way's spiritual expression and experience.

How is spirituality understood and experienced at The Olive Way?

A clearer enunciation and documentation of The Olive Way's understanding of spirituality and spiritual expression will enable the articulation of seminal guiding principles and grounded practice critical to The Olive Way's ways of being and doing.

Reverend Doctor Karen Kreminski's concept of Urban Spirituality (embodying God's mission in the neighbourhood) is one spiritual framework/expression of spirituality that would appear *prima facie* to be resonant with the experience of The Olive Way. Reverend Kreminski in her book entitled *Urban Spirituality* notes the uniqueness of the urban environment and the importance of embodying an urban spirituality in engaging with the social, cultural ethnic and religious diversity of inner-city communities. **Her notion that spirituality needs to be incarnational and 'this worldly' rather than disembodied and 'other worldly' speaks to the experience of the participants at The Olive Way, many of whom have been impacted on by intergenerational disadvantage, unemployment, homelessness, mental illness, and social and economic**

alienation. The relationships that continue to be developed between The Olive Way staff, volunteers and participants intentionally embodying goodwill, kindness, positive regard, connection and experience of community can clearly be considered 'incarnational' expressions of a grounded spirituality and an engagement with the sacred (our shared and quintessential human-ness).

Reference to Reverend Kreminski's model of Urban Spirituality (as one exemplar), and an intentional exploration of various models and contemporary theological thinking addressing a spirituality relevant to social and economic disadvantage, will be of value in conceptualising more clearly a distinctive Olive Way voice as to how The Olive Way understands, manifests, and celebrates spirituality. More clarity and transparency in this regard will represent important spiritual intelligence and better position The Olive Way to appropriate a language that enables useful, and perhaps more sophisticated, communication with the Brunswick Uniting Church in conceptualising The Olive Way as a participant centred expression of spirituality and engagement with the sacred. This distillation of a model for The Olive Way's engagement with the spiritual will be also helpful in identifying synergies between The Olive Way community and the Brunswick Uniting Church community, points of difference, and deeper opportunities for collaboration/cross fertilisation. The articulation of a grounded community-based Olive Way spirituality will also have the potential to consolidate (through the identification of common values) alliances with people of goodwill who have no particular church or religious affiliation but who privilege human values, connection and community as a primary motivation for involvement in The Olive Way.

Staffing

Acknowledging the relevance of an explicit, robust and well documented Values Framework to guide the policy and practice of The Olive Way staffing (both paid and volunteer) is of critical importance to making incarnate the underpinning values of The Olive Way.

Paid Positions

The two paid positions, Pastor (Peter Blair) at 19 hours per week and Kitchen Coordinator (Peter Murphy) at 10 hours per week are obviously critical to the life of The Olive Way.

However it is also self-evident that this staffing model requires substantial strengthening. The primary dependence on the position of Pastor leaves The Olive Way open to a range of potential vulnerabilities. It also limits the very obvious potential of The Olive Way to co-create an even richer and more vibrant experience of community for all who participate. Staffing is also of paramount importance to the capacity of The Olive Way to authentically honour and address the recommendations contained in the 2018 Review.

Peter Blair's incumbency as Pastor clearly brings excellence to the leadership of The Olive Way. His capacity to enact skillful and generous oversight to the multiplicity of operational factors that manifest in the day-to-day life of The Olive Way is of critical importance to creating a safe and welcoming space for community. Such versatility and humility expressed perhaps axiomatically in his skillful mopping of The Olive Way's floors at the end of the day is of course complemented by highly developed interpersonal and relational skills which position him well to

engage with both participants and volunteers. Such grounded operational and relational skills are enriched by his well-developed critical and strategic thinking, his creative and innovative ways of being and doing and his very intentional nurture of spiritual expression.

Given the breadth and depth of what Peter Blair is currently required to hold and manage in his role as Pastor and given the creative potential that clearly exists for further enrichment and development of The Olive Way, as per the Key Recommendations of the 2018 Review, further investment is required in the staffing infrastructure.

Two possible Options for Consideration: (1) The Creation of a 'Second In Charge' position

The creation of a Second in Charge position to share leadership responsibility and to enable more focused attention to the enrichment of The Olive Way experience through more substantial implementation of the 2018 Key Recommendations is essential. An intentional sharing of leadership responsibility will also clearly reduce the dependency on the position of Pastor and represent an important investment in both continuity and sustainability for The Olive Way. Acknowledging Peter Blair's very good 'goodness of fit' and his obvious and demonstrated commitment to The Olive Way, a continued primary dependence on him represents a significant risk factor. A Second in Charge position will effectively share leadership responsibility, reduce the Pastor's workload and enable more focused and creative attention to be brought to various dimensions of The Olive Way experience. A continuation of the current staffing arrangements (i.e. no direct second in charge) has the potential to challenge the longevity of the Pastor's tenure through possible burn out (despite the very obvious commitment demonstrated by Peter Blair) and render The Olive Way vulnerable should an unforeseen change in circumstances preclude Peter's continuation in the role. The absence of an authentic sharing of leadership responsibility will also impede the opportunities to build on and further develop both the nascent and already established richness of The Olive Way community. A Second in Charge position will enable such creative potential to be realised.

The funding of the Kitchen Coordinator position at 10 hours per week does not effectively represent a Second in Charge position, viz. the sharing of leadership responsibility in the way that is required or recommended. Acknowledging the importance of hospitality and the challenges manifest in any kitchen, Peter Murphy's job description and personal and professional attributes deem his sphere of influence essentially limited to the kitchen.

Acknowledging the seminal importance of food to welcome and hospitality and respectful of the traditions that have been enshrined at The Olive Way in this regard, but also recognising the bedrock importance of the strengthening of leadership through the creation of a Second in Charge position, it is recommended that serious consideration be accorded to restructuring staffing in the following way:

Funding for the Kitchen Coordinator position (10 hours per week) to cease and be re-directed towards the creation of a Second in Charge position. Under this suggested restructuring of paid staffing resources, a commitment to welcome and hospitality will continue to be a core component of The Olive Way fabric but will be expressed through the provision of healthy snacks (e.g. soup/fruit/sandwiches etc.) rather than the provision of a more formal lunch one

day per week. Such healthy snack-based hospitality will be facilitated through volunteers. A more substantial lunch continues to be offered by the Salvation Army (Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday).

The proposed Second in Charge position (10 hours per week) will require the creation of a new job description. Acknowledging the obvious interdependency between the proposed Second in Charge position and the Pastor's role, careful consideration will need to be accorded to demarcation and the identification of particular responsibilities for both Pastor and Second in charge.

Demarcation and differentiation could occur in a number of ways including the following: the Second in Charge Position to assume primary responsibility for day to day operations and enacting an intentional and nurturing presence in regards to all encounters that might manifest in the operations of The Olive Way Drop in Program. In this demarcation the Second in Charge incumbent would assume an internal/operations focus. This would allow the Pastor to assume a primary developmental focus both internally (volunteers/identification of enrichment activities and processes for the participants etc.) and an important external focus (eg. building synergies with the Brunswick Uniting Church and the wider Brunswick community and other service providers in the area). This division of responsibility would also hopefully create some space for the Pastor to engage with the importance of developing a clearer articulation of a Values Framework for The Olive Way. **The Pastor is uniquely positioned to facilitate the strengthening of The Olive Way Values Framework.**

Clearly some overlap in the respective foci of the Pastor and Second in Charge positions will need to occur and is desirable both pragmatically and philosophically (a privileging of a leadership team).

Consideration will also need to be given to a job title that captures the Second in Charge's enactment of shared leadership (e.g. Program Coordinator, Drop In Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator etc.).

Acknowledging the importance of goodness of fit with the job description that will be developed, it would seem *prima facie* that the identification of a female with the requisite skills and attributes would be preferable with regard to both gender balance and a commitment to further exploration of the involvement of women in The Olive Way.

Privileging contemporary values with regard to staff recruitment per se, the possible appointment of a Second in Charge from within the Brunswick Uniting Church community *prima facie* offers considerable potential for the strengthening of relationship between The Olive Way and the church.

Funding for staffing required as part of this option amounts to 29 hours per week (19 hours for the Pastor role and 10 hours for the Second In Charge role).

(2) The Creation of a Second in Charge Position and an Expansion of the Pastor's role

Acknowledging the anticipated benefits accruing from the creation of a Second in Charge position, there is the potential (perhaps paradoxically) for the demands on the Pastor's time to (inevitably?) increase as a result of a more intentional privileging of his attention to volunteer involvement, the identification of collaborative projects with other organisations and groups, and developing further synergies with the Brunswick Uniting Church community, all of which will be made more possible as a result the Second in Charge incumbent assuming primary and shared responsibilities for day-to-day operations. A second reconfiguration of staffing options that would partially address the additional work anticipated as a result of changed priorities, would involve the Pastor's time allocation being increased to 22 hours per week and the Second in Charge's proposed time allocation being increased to 13 hours per week.

The additional staffing hours could be utilised in a variety of ways including the Pastor's additional three hours being devoted to a weekly blog involving reflections on the grounded spirituality of The Olive Way which would be useful in inviting conversation and building synergies with the Brunswick Uniting Church. The blog could also be used very intentionally to build alliances with people of goodwill who have no particular church or religious affiliation but who privilege human values, connection and community as a primary motivation for involvement in The Olive Way. This focus will directly address the Key Recommendations of the 2018 Review relevant to the creation of better links with the Church community and the development of opportunities for volunteers.

The rationale for the additional hours relevant to this option will be made more explicit in the analysis of the role of volunteers within The Olive Way community (which now follows).

Funding for staffing required as part of this option is 35 hours per week (22 hours for the Pastor role and 13 hours for the Second in Charge role).

Volunteers

Volunteers are clearly an important part of the fabric of The Olive Way and assume a significant role in the co-creation of community (and through their assistance with staffing).

Acknowledging the omnipresence of volunteers in a range of community settings and the co-existence of a variety of models for volunteering, it is apparent that many of the volunteers who are involved at The Olive Way intentionally (or organically) embrace a non-hierarchical volunteer identity that acknowledges and celebrates the reciprocity in relationships with participants, and indeed, their shared humanity. It is apparent that many of the volunteers consider The Olive Way community as being as important to them as it is to the participants. As a reflection of such groundedness, some volunteers have a preference for the language of participant ('one of the blokes') as capturing the essence of their involvement, or alternatively a participant/volunteer acknowledging a co-existing duality. This model of volunteering, which articulates as much in common or more in common with the participants than with the paid staff, speaks to an experience of community that is consistent with progressive understandings of the essence of community and community development.

This acknowledgement of shared humanity and interdependency contributes to a life-affirming expression of humanness, community, and indeed, spirituality that does not reinforce the positioning of the participants as essentially different, inadequate or somehow inferior, or saturated by disempowering labels (e.g. 'client', 'unemployed', 'homeless', 'mentally ill' etc.). Interaction with volunteers/blokes at The Olive Way offers the opportunity for the participants to embrace more ordinary and affirming encounters than some of the interactions that they have had, or are having, with social workers and caseworkers, etc.

This more grounded understanding of the volunteer role and identity seems to have been, at least for some, an organic expression of their ways of being and doing in the world. Clearly both the modelling and nurture of Peter Blair and others who have enacted leadership over the years has also contributed to the affirmation of respectful and empowering relationships.

The co-creation of mutually beneficial relationships that allow all to express their humanness, connection and shared humanity constitutes an exceedingly special experience that The Olive Way offers all.

Given the richness embodied in the volunteer experience at The Olive Way attention should be also accorded to distilling and documenting The Olive Way voices (models), with regard to both volunteering and community, with the view to making more explicit the non-hierarchical human values that underpin the presence of volunteers within The Olive Way Community.

Recognising that volunteers are obviously not homogenous and will present at The Olive Way with myriad styles and attributes informed by their personalities, life experiences, and personal motivations, orientation training and support is obviously of paramount importance. Peter Blair is well positioned to nurture volunteer participation highlighting the importance of shared human values and non-hierarchical ways of being and doing. His capacity to do this, however, is compromised by the multiplicity of persuasive demands placed upon his time.

The suggested reconfiguration of staffing resources will hopefully provide opportunities for priority to be accorded to both a clearer articulation of the values and models informing the presence of volunteers at The Olive Way, and to the support of volunteers per se. Much potential exists to affirm and confirm the co-creation of The Olive Way community through the respectful and sensitive involvement of volunteers, that very intentionally recognises reciprocity and shared humanity as key to life nourishing relationships. With a privileging of the co-creation of community and systematic training and support, the presence of volunteers has the potential to be a flagship for The Olive Way's ways of being and doing and to the enactment of a distinctive understanding of community.

With access to additional paid staffing resources, as per the recommendation of this report, the Olive Way volunteer work force should be expanded and diversified (**incrementally doubled from the current critical mass of around fifteen people**).

Opportunities for Volunteer Involvement

With a strengthening of staffing resources and commensurate capacity to affirm and develop the presence and role of volunteers, much potential exists for further enrichment.

Kitchen based volunteers will continue to be an important part of The Olive Way community, and given the recommendation contained in this report regarding the cessation of the paid Kitchen Coordinator position, the presence and contribution of Kitchen volunteers will be affirmed more strongly.

Volunteers who are confident to sensitively and respectfully engaging in non-activity-based conversation and relationship building with the participants (and supported through training), is another role of paramount importance that invites further development (eg. yarning with the blokes/chatting with the women/being intentionally conversational). This role affirms the preference of some, indeed many, of the participants to prefer yarning over activity.

Further potential exists to celebrate, broaden and diversify the experience of The Olive Way community through the deployment of additional volunteers in the co-creation of enrichment activities as per the excellence of The Sydney Road Opera Company and Olive Arts. Informed by the importance of co-creation and the primacy of the participants' voices and preferences, potential exists, for example, for the needs of women to be more intentionally considered and nurtured, and for a men's group to be explored.

Given the capacity for more attention to be given to volunteers through the recommended additional paid staffing, potential also exists for both innovation and the embrace of new volunteer roles to emerge within The Olive Way community. In this regard volunteers could be supported to assist with the development of intentional links and/or partnerships with a range of selected agencies and community-based initiatives in Brunswick and beyond.

More attention to volunteering also invites the opportunity for nascent (or latent) interest within the Brunswick Uniting Church community (eg. The student house) and beyond to be nurtured and further developed.

Opportunities for Volunteer Support

The need to support volunteers in the important roles that they assume in The Olive Way community is clearly acknowledged and a range of activities have taken place since inception in this regard (eg. dinners, training session, etc.). This intentional focus has, of course, been constrained by available leadership resources and the multiple demands placed on Peter Blair's time.

With the proposed increase in the Pastor's hours and the creation of a Second in Charge position, more gravitas can be brought to the recruitment, deployment and training of volunteers. Acknowledging the primacy of in-house responses in this regard, consideration should also be accorded to relevant training and professional development opportunities that might be accessed externally.

The Creation of Intentionally Reflective Spaces

Consideration should also be given to the creation of regular (perhaps bi-monthly), more formal, opportunities for volunteers to meet in small groups (with paid staff) for reflective conversations on their experience of volunteering and their participation in The Olive Way community more broadly.

The creation of an intentional space to discuss and reflect on the experience of volunteering, the challenges that sometime manifest, and the opportunities for further enrichment of the community, represents an important and tangible support mechanism that both acknowledges and affirms the contribution of volunteers, and contributes to their skill development. This is consistent with best practice mainstream human service staff and volunteer support.

These reflective small group conversations could be facilitated by the Pastor or the Second in Charge, but consideration should also be given to exploring within the Brunswick Uniting Church community and beyond, the availability of professionals skilled in reflective practice and small group work who might be available to assume responsibility for the voluntary, pro bono facilitation of reflective spaces for volunteers and staff. The engagement of a suitably skilled facilitator will be valuable in broadening the leadership resource base but also useful in creating an intentional space where the paid staff (Pastor or the Second in Charge) can also be positioned as conversationalists and partners in reflection. This model affirms the importance of dialogue that positions all involved in The Olive Way as learners/community members.

Training Opportunities

The proposed reflective spaces should, of course, be complemented by more formal in-house (and possibly external) training opportunities. More capacity to focus on training via the proposed restructuring and expansion of staffing will enable a further development of the training materials utilised by Peter Blair.

Acknowledging the privileging of community at The Olive Way and the preference for all Olive Way encounters to essentially involve human responses rather than a privileging of professional involvement (the presence of trained social workers etc.), opportunities for volunteers to be trained in processes for sensitive and non-hierarchical engagement with the participants, initiating conversation and developing rapport and relationship etc. is of vital importance.

This training focus should also involve grounding in a range of important micro skills such as respectful and deep listening, the posing of curious but non-intrusive questions, keeping conversations safe (containment etc.) and how to respond to the disclosure of difficult material ('pastoral care 101' and incidental counselling etc.)

Training and support in these areas will be useful in building the confidence of volunteers to embrace a range of interactions that complement but are potentially more differentiated from the volunteering that is centred on the kitchen and the provision of food.

Much of this content will of course already be incorporated in Peter Blair's ongoing support of volunteers, but additional staffing resources will enable the further development of training materials and the capacity for training and professional development to be offered.

Summary of Staffing Position options

To summarise the discussion thus far, three staffing options exist (also see below). As argued in the preceding analysis **Option 2 and Option 3 are the only models that should be considered.** Option 1 (Status Quo) leaves The Olive Way devoid of an adequate staffing infrastructure and at considerable risk with respect to both sustainability and further development.

Options 2 and 3 explicitly address the risk and potential vulnerabilities involved in continued and singular dependence on Peter Blair through the creation of a Second in Charge position.

The restructuring of paid staffing suggested in Option 2 and Option 3 represents a vital investment in continuity and sustainability and positions The Olive Way to both celebrate its strengths and further consolidate and develop its presence as a bedrock support to all who participate in the experience of community.

The creation of a Second in Charge position also addresses very intentionally the importance of safety both psychologically and environmentally for all who are a part of The Olive Way community. Peter Blair's presence has obviously been of strategic importance in holding the space and ensuring a culture of safety so important to the experience of welcome and hospitality. Given the openness of The Olive Way welcome to all who may enter, the potential for challenges to safety remain a backdrop to the experience of community at The Olive Way. Challenges to safety from the manifest mental illness of some participants, personality-based complexities, structurally imposed disadvantage, and the potential presence of racism / sexism have all been managed with sensitivity and skill. Fortuitously these challenges have been the exception rather than the rule. But the potential challenges to both environmental and psychological safety at The Olive Way remain and have the potential to be further exacerbated because of the continuing pandemic. A Second in Charge position very intentionally shares responsibility and presence regarding safety.

My clear preference is for Option 3. Option 2 involves a useful re-structuring of current staffing but essentially does not increase the staffing resources available to The Olive Way. As noted elsewhere in this report a restructuring of current staffing resources as per Option 2 is likely to involve and invite co-existing and competing truths. On the one hand the creation of a Second in Charge will reduce the dependence on Peter Blair's position and authentically develop a leadership team, but in doing so it will allow more intention/attention to be brought to development, enrichment, and innovation regarding volunteers, the church community, the wider community, and external relations - this will inevitably involve more work. Such creative potential thus has (perhaps paradoxically) the capacity to put more strain on the leadership incumbents. Additional staffing resources as per Option 3 will enable a more realistic embrace of the very clear creative potential that exists for both sustaining and further developing The Olive Way as a vital experience of community for all participants.

Acknowledging that there is no dearth of very worthy causes that require support and requisite funding, and that inevitably the jostling for resources has been exacerbated by the pandemic, some of the key informants that were interviewed as a part of this review process indicated that potential existed to invite further philanthropy from within the broader Uniting Church. Particularly if the needs of The Olive Way could be packaged and presented as important

opportunities for the consolidation and further development of The Olive Way community as a vital context for both service and outreach.

Analyses of potential funding sources and the possible packaging of The Olive Way's needs is clearly beyond the remit of this report. But one example of a possible need that might lend itself to packaging and philanthropy is the funding of the proposed weekly blog (3 additional hours to Peter Blair as per Option 3).

As discussed, the blog would privilege reflections on the *grounded spirituality* of The Olive Way and be very useful in inviting conversation and building synergies with the Brunswick Uniting Church. The blog could also be used very intentionally to build alliances with people of goodwill who have no particular church or religious affiliation but who privilege human values, connection and community as a primary motivation for involvement in The Olive Way.

Summary of proposed positions

Option 1 (Status Quo)

Pastor: 19 hours per week

Kitchen Coordinator: 10 hours per week

29 hours per week

Option 2 (Restructuring of current staffing)

Pastor: 19 hours per week

Second in Charge (Program Coordinator ?): 10 hours per week

Requires the development of a new job description with an internal/management of operations focus. This will allow the Pastor to more effectively privilege development and enrichment and innovation (internal and external focus).

Cessation of Kitchen Coordinator position (moving to the provision of sandwiches/soup/fruit/healthy snacks, facilitated by volunteers to replace designated lunch day.

29 hours per week

Option 3 (Expansion/Seizing the Opportunities)

An increase in staffing hours to a total of 35 hours per week.

Pastor :19 hours to 22 hours per week (a privileging of development)

Second in Charge: (Program Coordinator with primary internal operations focus)13 hours per week.

The additional staffing hours (second in charge) focusing on internal operations will enable the Pastor to more effectively bring an intentional focus to the strengthening and further development of both volunteer involvement and external relations (church community and wider Brunswick community).

Acknowledging the operations focus of the proposed Second in Charge position, it is also expected that the incumbent will share/contribute to the developmental tasks and processes relevant to the Pastor's role.

A clear demarcation of roles (Pastor and Second in Charge), acknowledging the importance of some overlap, will be required in both Option 2 and Option 3 and should be informed by differentiated roles in regards to internal and external focus etc., but any proposed demarcation should also be informed by an analysis of relevant synergies/areas of complementarity between the Pastor and the Second in Charge once the new appointment has been finalised.

35 hours per week

Key Recommendations of the 2018 Review

As previously noted, progress has taken place with respect to all of the Key Recommendations identified in the 2018 Review with staffing, both paid and volunteer, being of critical importance to the achievements.

I will provide brief comments / analysis on the recommendations not thus far explicitly addressed in this report, namely the Development of The Olive Way as a Hub, The Development of Pastoral Supports for Guests and Strengthening Opportunities for Guest Ownership and Control.

The Development of Olive Way as a Hub

Nascent ideas for the development of The Olive Way as a Hub have acknowledged the potential for both a broadening and deepening of the experience of community through the provision of new services either in situ or via referral. Access to social work, allied health, housing and legal services etc. clearly has the potential to offer participants valuable information and support. But if not carefully managed the presence of professionals and a privileging of professional discourses around help-seeking and help-giving behaviour (and who knows best) has the potential to undermine the primacy of community and shared humanity, which is manifest in The Olive Way's ways of being and doing. A privileging of professional discourses has the potential to invite an unhelpful reconceptualisation of The Olive Way as a 'welfare centre'. In this regard many of the participants have had (and continue to have) engagement with caseworkers, social workers that deem them needy, inadequate and lacking in personal agency, and cause them to be often disaffected with the helping professions. This narrative is antithetical to The Olive Way experience of community which affirms friendship, acceptance, belonging and shared experiences as the most important narratives.

Professional narratives and community narratives of course need to be held in creative tension. When professional assistance is recommended and the presenting situation is beyond the active listening, respectful relationships, and pastoral care skills embedded in The Olive Way, referrals should take place. Of particular note in this regard is "The Care In Mind Program" of the North West Primary Health Network which can assist people residing in the north and west of Melbourne with up to twelve free counselling sessions per year via psychologists or accredited mental health social workers. The "Care In Mind" Referral Pro forma that needs to be completed by the participant's GP is attached.

The additional staffing resources recommended in this report will enable the leadership team and appropriately trained volunteers to identify and develop a comprehensive range of referral pathways that can be utilised as required.

Potential obviously also exists for the creation of further enrichment activities as part of The Hub. The Olive Arts and Sydney Road Opera Company are excellent exemplars of activities to enrich the experience of participants. As previously noted, many of the participants however express a preference for just meeting their mates and *prima facie* eschew organised activity. This suggests that the identification and implementation of possible enrichment activities needs to purposively and skillfully engage the participants to ensure *authentic co-creation*. The intentional use of both Story Telling and Reminiscence Therapy has the creative potential to respectfully invite the participants to embrace new ideas regarding their participation at The

Olive Way. Again, The Olive Arts and The Sydney Rd Opera Company are wonderful models for respectful co-creation.

The Development of Pastoral Supports Available to Guests

As noted elsewhere in in this report, a clearer enunciation of The Olive Way experience of spirituality and spiritual expression is of critical importance to both articulating and strengthening The Olive Way's Values Framework and thus enabling the "spiritual lens" to inform, shape and celebrate The Olive Way experience.

A distillation and documentation of The Olive Way's spirituality and spiritual expression is an important piece of work that will require intentionality and time allocation and could perhaps be achieved by the creation of a small working group involving Peter Blair, some members of The Olive Way Steering Group, and the Brunswick Uniting Church.

Acknowledging all that there is to celebrate in The Olive Way expression of spirituality, this suggested internal focus, distilling and documenting The Olive Way's extant spirituality, could be complemented by intentional exploration of various models and contemporary theological thinking addressing a spirituality relevant to social and economic disadvantage (an Urban spirituality etc).

Given the multiplicity of demands placed on Peter Blair's time and also the Steering Group, consideration could also be given to the exploration of the potential for a Uniting Church (or other) theological student being invited to assist with this process. The student could undertake a valuable literature search, work closely with Peter Blair and The Steering Committee and provide useful support to this process of theorising and celebrating The Olive Way spirituality and spiritual expression.

This intentional process will also invite analysis of more broadly based processes for affirming the spiritual/pastoral care, acknowledging both the gravitas embedded in Peter Blair's position but also the need for the expression of spirituality/pastoral care to be more broadly based and integrated.

Strengthening Opportunities for Guests Ownership and Control

The 2018 Review noted that scope existed for guests to be invited to become more involved in various aspects of the operations and management of The Olive Way. Opportunities could include official volunteer status and volunteer training, further participation in The Olive Way Steering Group and executive, the chance to be responsible for activities and liaising with other service providers.

Peter Blair and others have been intentional in gently nurturing the involvement and agency of participants in helping shape and co-create The Olive Way experience, but this goal has jostled amongst many and requires more dedicated attention in order to be authentically embraced and made manifest and to enable more dedicated attention to be accorded to authentic engagement with notions of ownership and control. In this regard either the Pastor or the proposed Second in Charge could assume primary responsibility for this brief and create processes (intentional group conversations, meetings etc.) to invite engagement with the participants as to their position and involvement, ownership and control preferences. An explicit

brief in respect to ownership and control will also enable mindfulness to be brought to opportunities that sometimes organically present for more broadly based ownership to be invited, as well as keep ownership and control on the agenda.

Various models exist for the affirmation of participant-centred ownership, agency and control, and such models should be accessed to both complement the distilled narratives of The Olive Way participants. These could help inform and shape a distinctive Olive Way engagement with the primacy of participant involvement. Exploration of models that privilege both community and participatory management (see earlier comments regarding distilling community as a seminal value embedded in The Olive Way Values Framework) and involve a constituency unaccustomed to or with no frame of reference for what are essentially more middle-class notions of participation and ownership is recommended.

Acknowledging the urban ethos of The Olive Way (see earlier comments regarding the articulation of a distinctive Urban Spirituality), exploration of church and community initiatives targeting people impacted by entrenched social and economic disadvantage is likely to offer creative cross fertilisation and insights into non middle-class models for participatory management.

Knowledge of (some) church and community initiatives of direct and cognate relevance to The Olive Way's interest in distilling the primacy of the participant voices in shared ownership and control is probably already within the orbit of Peter Blair, the Steering Group, and the Brunswick Uniting Church community etc.

Creating the space for a more intentional exploration of various models is of paramount importance. It may be useful to this regard to invite conversation with key people grounded in the Urban Seed initiative previously auspiced by the Collins St Baptist Church.

The Family Centre in Lower Hutt New Zealand (familycentre.org.nz) is also an excellent exemplar of an agency committed to privileging the voices of its culturally and linguistically diverse constituency in all aspects of the organisation's life, including participatory management, with a commensurate diminishing of the voices and power of the white (Pākehā) mainstream community. Although not directly relevant to The Olive Way, The Family Centre's very sophisticated approach to privileging the voices of those excluded from the mainstream has cognate relevance to the commitment of The Olive Way to privilege the voices of its participants in all aspects of community life including shared management.

Acknowledging both the intentionality and time that needs to be devoted to exploring the co-creation of authentic participant-centred management structures, and also the persuasive competing demands placed on the time of Peter Blair and The Olive Way Steering Group, consideration should be given to supporting a Masters in Social Work student being offered a 70 day placement or internship with the brief to explore and document participatory management models relevant to The Olive Way's constituency. This would enable a useful literature search to be undertaken and praxis to be brought to mechanisms and processes to privilege the participants' voice. RMIT School of Social Work will be able to identify a student suitable to this task. Supervision of a Social Work student needs to be provided by a qualified social worker and the availability of social workers within the Brunswick Uniting Church community and related networks willing to provide pro bono supervision should be explored.

An explicit brief to explore and develop more extensive participatory mechanisms will necessarily involve a respectful engagement with the narratives of the participants, many of whom, as previously noted and for complex reasons, eschew organised activity and will *prima facie* be disinclined to shared management. It will also involve an authentic and sophisticated further engagement with the suggested Olive Way Values Framework. The explicit commitment to welcome and hospitality helpfully positions the participants as honoured guests, embodying a much more life-affirming narrative than their conceptualisation as welfare clients, which has the potential to reinforce their deficits rather than strengths. But paradoxically the privileging of the guest/host relationship potentially introduces some unintended complexity when inviting more ownership and control. Self-evidently the designation of 'guest' (to the participants) speaks to what can reasonably be expected with respect to ownership and control. Intrinsically being a guest but also being invited to exercise ownership and control, 'embodies some contradiction.

As previously noted further consideration of 'community' as key to The Olive Way Values Framework will hopefully invite a continued affirmation of hospitality, but also the articulation of other values that more intentionally invite ownership and control. Community per se has much to contribute to belonging, participation, shared leadership etc.

Concluding Comments

Clearly the preceding pages suggests that there is much to be said and much to celebrate about The Olive Way, and much to muse on in relation to future directions. The deadline Richard has asked me to work to however now looms (thankfully for all of us preventing this report becoming a Masters or doctoral thesis!). Self-evidently much more could be said. It is my hope that the preceding analysis usefully contributes to the iteration and re-iteration of The Olive Way in the 2022 to 2024 period (and stimulates much conversation and reflection both now and into the future).

I express my sincere thanks for the opportunity to be invited into The Olive Way community and to garner some glimpses into what is a truly wonderful co-creation and a powerful expression of both spirituality and humanity.

I have been humbled by the narratives of participants; staff, both paid and volunteer, The Olive Way Steering Group, and a range of significant others who most generously agreed to speak with me and share their insights. The voices of all whom I interviewed offer a rich tapestry celebrating The Olive Way community and life... and I salute them all.

There is much to be excited about in relation to the future and much creative potential exists for consolidation and further enrichment. An adequate paid staffing structure is, as argued, of seminal importance to both sustaining and realising the full potential of The Olive Way.

The following cartoons by the prophetic Michael Leunig represent a very useful final comment. An 'Olive Way' Miracle (a respectful variation on the Christmas Miracle noted in the Leunig cartoon) and advice on 'How To Get There'.

