



How then shall we live?

“WE SHALL LIVE IN THE SPIRIT”

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1. Introduction

Early in 2009 the presbytery of Tasmania established a Task Group to progress the Uniting Alive:Hobart 2020 process. Early in 2010 the Task Group presented their report, entitled *How then shall we live?*, to the Presbytery of Tasmania. This report, with its emphasis on living more faithfully, more often, was greeted with significant warmth and enthusiasm by the presbytery, and, subsequently, by a wider audience.

In response to the report, the presbytery agreed to resource an ongoing process to enable the congregations, faith communities and the agencies in the greater Hobart area to develop a considered response to the recommendations in the report. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has also been heartened by the report and has provided assistance to the process.

Over the course of 2010 there has been extensive consultation with ministry workers, with the leaders of congregations and agencies and with members of congregations to assist them to first receive and then begin to develop their response to the *How then shall we live?* report.

Four theological reflections were circulated during 2010, there were a number of discussion forums held during the year and a series of contemplative reflections around the theme of *'that which is coming'* held during Advent.

Along the way there have been many outcomes. There has been extensive debate and discussion; the ministry workers in the region developed and signed a Charter of Cooperation; the leaders of various congregations and agencies worked together to identify various concrete proposals for action. Then, towards the end of the year, members of congregations and agencies were able to discuss these proposals and to suggest alternative actions. Every opportunity has been given for those who wished to do so, to participate in the process and to seek the future of the church in greater Hobart.

The Hobart 2020 Uniting Alive process is now almost two years old; it has involved much discussion, dreaming and debate. We have now arrived at the point of making some decisions about how we move forward in faith.

During the consultation there has been little sense that we should, or could, continue along our current paths. There is a widespread recognition, both from a missional perspective and from a practical sense, that changes are both needed and inevitable. Either we can take charge of our own destiny and respond to the current situation by initiating the changes that we believe will create a missional focus for the 21st century church, or we can have change thrust upon us. We have come to recognise that change is inevitable - the question is 'What are the changes that we believe best meet the challenge of faithfully being the people of God in this place and time?'

While we highly value all that we have inherited, our primary allegiance is to God, not to our history, nor to our buildings. As we come to make decisions we need to be clear

about the challenge to us as disciples of Christ, not as protectors of our the legacy of our forebears.

We shall live in the Spirit represents an interim response to *How then shall we live?* It is designed to present the congregations, agencies and faith communities of the Uniting Church in greater Hobart with the opportunity to consider and respond to the proposals it contains. An outline of the process which might lead us from this point to a final report to Presbytery in May is contained here.

2. Themes for change

How then shall we live? is a call to the Uniting Church in greater Hobart to become a new kind of church. Its emphasis is on the living out of our faith as we seek to participate in the mission of God. It's a challenge to us to live in relationship with our community, and to make the best use of our resources as we seek to enable this renewed approach.

Through the process of consultation outlined above, a number of proposals for specific action have emerged. These proposals, while different in form and style, are aimed at enabling the kind of life imagined in *How then shall we live?* to emerge. The proposals can be broadly grouped into four categories:

- Communication and coordination of activities
- Sharing in joint activities
- Sharing of physical resources
- The wise use of leadership resources

The proposals reflect the view that this *Uniting Alive:Hobart 2020* process is not about a response to financial stress, nor is it a mechanism to keep open the doors of existing churches; it is a call to live more fully and faithfully as disciples of Jesus the Christ living in the love and grace of God.

While it is clear that the discussion so far has generated anxiety amongst some people, there is also a sense that this is a time for boldness and courage that will embrace change. More of what we are doing currently is unlikely to yield any different results. The proposals that have emerged from extensive discussion among the leadership bodies of the church represent a beginning of the change that is felt broadly to be required.

Proposals for change

A set of 13 proposals were formulated by the church leaders (church council members and ministry workers) in late 2010. After subsequent consideration and discussion by members of congregations and agencies, these 13 proposals have been reduced in number and refined.

The resultant proposals are evolutionary rather than revolutionary. They have a particular focus on providing support for existing forms of church, while creating resources to support the development of fresh expressions of being church. Coordination, integration and wise use of resources are at the heart of the proposals. At the same time they seek to encourage, to recognise and to honour diversity of approaches.

There are undoubtedly cultural issues that will have to be addressed if change is to be implemented. That will require both sensitivity and strength of purpose. There has been some debate about the value of the congregations participating in the region developing a charter or covenant in which the various groups commit themselves to work together cooperatively to advance the changes that are agreed to. While charters do not in themselves change anything and some have suggested that they have little value, others have suggested that it may have great symbolic significance and be a public affirmation of commitment. It is suggested that the various congregations, agencies and faith communities within the region give consideration to how their commitment to each other and to God may be appropriately expressed.

2.1 Collaboration and Clusters

There has been positive support for the notion of creating clusters of congregations in the four regions of greater Hobart. These would include a northern cluster (already emerging as the Derwent cluster), an eastern cluster, a central city cluster and a southern cluster.

The notion of a cluster is of a group of congregations and faith communities sharing resources of people, talent and finances and in this way creating a diversity of forms of expression of church. It is therefore proposed that:

PROPOSAL 1: Establishment of clusters. *That congregations and faith communities in the northern corridor, the eastern shore, the central city and the southern region establish clusters.*

To give substance to this proposal it is suggested that the clusters utilise the resources they have available to them to the very best possible missional use. During the consultation there has been a strong sense from a number of people that we have lost our way and that we are spending far too much time, energy and finances on tasks that have little or no missional purpose. A set of related proposals suggest the sharing of resources within the clusters, the establishment of ministry teams whose members have clearly identified and different roles and the formation of leadership groups capable of vision and implementation.

PROPOSAL 2: Pooling resources within the clusters. *It is proposed that resources are pooled within the clusters and used to support the life, witness and worship of the participating communities of faith.*

A joint strategic group in each cluster would attend to budgeting, the allocation of funds across the cluster, and to property management.

PROPOSAL 3: Establishment of ministry teams. *It is proposed that ministry workers (ordained or lay) are called to the cluster and not to any specific community.*

This would be done with the clear intention of creating a team of workers with different skills and roles some of which would have no active role in the leadership of traditional Sunday morning worship. Such roles could include specialists in community development and partnership, resourcing fresh expressions of church as well as families and youth ministries. The range of skills within the leadership team would be available across the cluster. Clear priorities would be established for each ministry worker along with clear accountability for the work that they undertake. The ministry teams would be financed from the central fund established for each cluster.

PROPOSAL 4: Establishment of a combined strategic leadership for each cluster. *It is proposed that within each cluster the congregations and faith communities establish a strategic leadership group to make decisions on how resources are deployed and used within the cluster.*

Such groups could explore the rationalization of worship times and styles across the cluster, the mechanisms for resourcing fresh expressions of faith, reviving the vitality of existing congregations and faith communities, and where appropriate, the closure or redeployment of existing congregations or facilities.

2.2 Fresh Expressions

One of the strands of the approach that the leaders developed at their various meetings was to provide support for the traditional approaches to church life that have been, and continue to be, so meaningful for many people remaining within the church.

In addition, there is a clear recognition that we would like, collectively, to see some fresh expressions of faith community that seek to provide meaning and purpose for many others who currently have no mechanisms for the collective practice and exploration of faith. To that end there has been expression that each cluster be encouraged to establish new faith communities that express their Christian faith in fresh ways. It is proposed that:

PROPOSAL 5: Fresh Expressions. *Each cluster be encouraged to develop fresh expressions of faith community.*

The support and nurture of fresh expressions fits within the broad framework of *How then shall we live?*, the Presbytery of Tasmania's strategic plan, and the emerging priorities of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. The resources of the Presbytery and Synod will be available to support initiatives in this area.

2.3 Administration

A damaging part of the present church culture is the disproportionate association of activities with particular places and communities rather than a sense that we all share in the mission of God in the world *together*. There is a challenge for all leaders in breaking down the barriers between the congregations.

Concern has been expressed to ensure that the current limited communication and connection between the various congregations is improved in the future. One of the clear objectives of proposals in this area would be to provide assistance to ordained and lay leadership, to facilitate communication and to ensure that information is distributed within and across clusters.

PROPOSAL 6: Integrated administrative support and communication network for the clusters. *It is proposed that each cluster develop a centralized administrative support for all the congregations and faith communities within its network.*

Through the provision of such administrative support across the greater Hobart area and cooperation between them, there is capacity for the production of a greater Hobart newsletter and an integrated diary of events. One of the objectives of this approach would be to relieve ministry workers of some of the administrative management burdens, that might also include finance and property matters. The network could also develop and maintain a joint web site for the churches of the greater Hobart area.

PROPOSAL 7: Rationalisation of IT support. *In order to facilitate the improved communication that the leaders of the church seek it is proposed that there is an integration of IT support across the congregations to create an electronic network.*

2.4 Creative Approaches to Property

The visit to Hobart of the Rev Lord Andrew Mawson from the UK in late 2010 has stimulated greater discussion about how the substantial and strategically situated property resources of the Uniting Church in the greater Hobart area might be used more effectively in partnership with other groups to support the broad mission of the church. There are a number of factors that are necessary pre-requisites before such partnerships are likely to be effective

- The encouragement of, and support for, Christian entrepreneurship that seeks to form partnerships that provide for the wider community in ways that reflect the reality of the gospel
- Permission from the congregations for creative partnerships that foster life in the community
- A diminution of feelings of ownership amongst some who oppose the use of church facilities by external groups

To this end it is proposed that:

PROPOSAL 8: Develop Community Partnerships. *Entrepreneurial Christians are identified who can assist congregations and faith communities to develop partnerships with community partners for the shared use of facilities.*

2.5 Discipleship Development

There has been a widespread recognition that in the Uniting Church we have been less than successful in the theological resourcing of individuals and congregations for discipleship.

The level of understanding of the basic texts of the faith is not well developed and all too often there has been a disconnection between the understandings of mainstream contemporary Christian theologians and the exegesis underpinning much of our congregational teaching and preaching. Similarly our tradition has discarded much of the richness of traditional communal Christian practice and replaced it with a privatised version.

If we are to be missional it will require a greater confidence in what we believe and a willingness to share that with those around us. There is a sense in which we need to be much more intentional in resourcing people in the practice of and reflection on the faith. Rather than the current approaches it is suggested that there is a cooperative approach to discipleship training. It is proposed that:

PROPOSAL 9: Develop discipleship training approach. *In partnership with the Synod and the Presbytery the clusters of the greater Hobart area develop activities for discipleship training.*

2.6 Advocacy

It has been suggested that the voice of the Uniting Church is sometimes quieter on issues of public concern than some would wish. Lacking the episcopal structures that enable some denominations to speak clearly and quickly our consultative approach sometimes means that we speak slowly and with a voice that represents the variation of view often found within our denomination. However, there is a feeling that we could do more to help promote debate on issues of major public interest. To that end it has been proposed that:

PROPOSAL 10: Develop means for advocacy. *The clusters of the greater Hobart area combine to resource and to promote the development of a public city forum to assist in the consideration of contemporary ethical and spiritual issues of concern to people.*

It was suggested that the city forum would provide a public face for the Uniting Church which is often absent in this state. In a similar way there has been debate about the merit of a city shop front that would raise the profile of the church. While this idea captured the imagination of some people it was rejected by others, while others still were unsure about what this might entail.

While this idea may have merit and should not be lost from our agenda there may need to be more work around the function of such a shop front. If there is energy for this idea a small task force may want to develop the detail.

2.7 Whole of Region

There has been significant comment about the substantial degree of duplication and the lack of diversity across the greater Hobart area. While the focus of these initial proposals is on the establishment of regional clusters there has been some comment that there may be merit in drawing the clusters together in some formal structure as a southern Tasmanian parish so that:

- The clusters might work together on issues of importance to the whole region
- Opportunities to share in combined worship
- Develop programs for discipleship that foster the practice of, and reflection on, Christian teachings
- Resources are directed to the missional needs of the church rather than being dictated by the historical pattern of the ownership of resources

Others have suggested that this may be a goal for the longer term and others still wish to resist too much focus on structure. It is therefore suggested that the clusters may wish to consider the most appropriate mechanisms for working collaboratively. Amongst the suggestions for joint activity are

- The establishment of a joint musical activity between the greater Hobart congregations
- Combined worship services at least twice per year, and, possibly, even quarterly.

While discussion in this area has fallen short of a formal proposal, we nonetheless share the thoughts above for consideration.

3. Process during early 2011

This report is provided for the information and consideration of the congregations, faith communities and agencies of the Uniting Church within greater Hobart.

There are some proposals within it which can be adopted on a congregational basis, and others which will require the collaboration of a number of congregations.

The *Uniting Alive:Hobart 2020* facilitators (Andrew Glenn with support from Scott Guyatt) are available to meet with church councils and leadership teams to assist in a considered response to the proposals between mid-February and mid-April.

Ideally, a final response and presentation will take place at the May 7th meeting of the Presbytery of Tasmania.

To arrange for such discussions to take place, please contact Andrew Glenn on 0434 308 815 or email andrew-glenn@hotmail.com.