



## Bulletin – April 2019

**Encouraging each other in ministry and mission,  
sharing resources, providing mutual support.**

# The Mission and Building Cohort

***Rev. Paul Turley contemplates what prevents us from truly working together muses that it is lodged deeper in our cultural DNA, and offers the following for us to savour.***

What prevents us from truly working together resides in our continued commitment to the village-based congregational model of church. A model that was so useful and important in the life of the church in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century – every small village-like community would have a congregation and usually a purpose-built building that could be a (and often *the*) focus for the readably identifiable community of the village/town/suburb. That was then, this is now. These identifiable communities have long since disappeared as villages morphed into suburbs and country towns concentrated services and population in regional centres.

However, so wedded are we to the village-based congregational model that, in the case of my congregation, if all you knew about the Uniting Church came through attendance at Sunday worship services, you would have no clue at all that within a five-kilometre radius of our church buildings are ten other Uniting Church congregations, and who knows how many congregations of other denominations.

We exist very much as hermetically-sealed, isolated, village-shaped congregations who at our best link with the wider church through Synod/Presbytery and Assembly structures but who have very little to do with our neighbouring congregations. Despite the fact that we share exactly the same problems and challenges around sustaining congregational life and maintaining ageing buildings. It seems we are willing to sit, in (albeit uncomfortable) silence, as we watch nearby Uniting Church congregations close down. We breathe a sigh of relief that this time it wasn't us because, clearly in our 19<sup>th</sup> Century village model, it wasn't *us* it was *them*. If we are truly fortunate, the survivors of that closed congregation might choose to join

us, thereby helping us to forestall the same fate. While those same survivors, should they turn up at our congregation on a Sunday morning (and recent studies seem to show that increasing numbers from closed congregations don't ever attach themselves to another congregation), are faced with introducing themselves to a neighbouring congregation who have been virtual strangers to them for decades.

While we remain fixated by the village-based model of congregation, we have been creating regional congregations by stealth for decades. My own congregation has maintained itself as much by amalgamation as by growth in its more than 160-year life. Of course, this is true of our whole denomination; the Uniting Church is in many ways living off the "fat" of 1977.

What will help us critique and challenge our fixation with the village-based congregational model? We need to think more fundamentally about what we think church can be and look like shorn of much of its trappings.

Of course, it's easy to say all of this and much harder to find ways forward. Many of us are weary of those who "know" what to do and are so eager to offer it to us in books, websites, and seminars. What we are looking for we will find among us, but it requires us to examine our assumptions about what we do and how we do it. And it requires us to ask the right questions.

A group of us from congregations in similar situations have been meeting to try and sort out some of the questions we need to be asking and to look at some of our assumptions that need questioning. We are calling ourselves, at the moment, *the Mission and Building Cohort*. We meet regularly without a plan and without an agenda. This, of course, frustrates some people who just want to "get on with it" (although, I have no idea how they can be so sure what "getting on with it" means...), so it's not a group for everyone.

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## News from the wider church

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As indicated in Circular no.2, (which is available at [www.urbannetwork.org.au](http://www.urbannetwork.org.au), and <https://sa.uca.org.au/presbytery-and-synod/restructure>), the initial choice of congregations as to which Presbytery they prefer to join will need to be made prior to 7 June. Once Standing Committee have held their meeting on Friday 5 April and made some critical decisions in keeping the restructuring process going, the Restructuring Task Group will issue its third Circular and a response document to be completed by Congregations. This Circular will contain as much information as possible to help congregations make that choice.

### **Break the Silence Sunday**

At the Special Synod meeting of 9 February 2019, members of the Special Synod meeting resolved to adopt the **4th Sunday in April, or another suitable Sunday**, as a "Break the Silence Sunday." This is to provide UCA congregations, faith communities, and organisations associated with the Uniting Church opportunities to open up a dialogue within the Church about rape and sexual assault. As a faith community we:

- acknowledge of the reality of rape and sexual violence in our world
- support survivors by creating a place where they can tell their stories, feel loved and supported, and find encouragement on their healing journey
- commit ourselves to the work of changing the world and creating a future

The SA Synod requests that you share this information with your congregations and faith communities and implement it during April, as described.



All members of the Uniting Church in Australia are invited to join

**President Dr Deidre Palmer  
at her first**

### **President's Conference**

**Saturday, July 13 – 17 2019**

**Nadi, Fiji**

This is a unique opportunity to discuss and explore issues of environment and climate, gender justice and how we grow in Christian discipleship as you connect and grow with your sisters and brothers in faith.

Information about accommodation, registration, and pricing is on the Assembly website at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/presidentsconference>

### **John Bell in Adelaide**

**8 – 10 May**

All events at

**Adelaide West  
Uniting Church**

**312 Sir Donald Bradman Dr. Brooklyn Park**



*John Bell is a preacher, hymn writer, composer, lecturer, and broadcaster. He is an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland and a member of the Iona Community. John is coming to Adelaide for a 3-day workshop in which he is covering such topics as "Songs to enliven communities of faith," "Keeping faith in an age of consumerism" and "Exploring Celtic Spirituality."*

For bookings and info go to [www.trybooking.com/BBNLH](http://www.trybooking.com/BBNLH)

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## Wider community news

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### **Walk for Justice for Refugees**

**Palm Sunday – April 14, 2.00 pm**

Meet at 1.30 pm at the **Southern half of Victoria Square**

An opportunity in the lead up to the Federal election to highlight the imperative for humane policies in relation to refugees and asylum seekers. Community groups, churches, families, friends, and individuals are all welcome to come along.

Departing Victoria Square at 2.00 pm and walking to Parliament House. Speeches begin at 2.30pm at Parliament House.

A pop-up art installation for *Safe Harbour Australia* will also be on show beforehand.

Come and paint a boat to add to the flotilla, or simply admire the hundreds of boats already painted and displayed. Contact: Molly at [info@justiceforrefugeessa.org](mailto:info@justiceforrefugeessa.org) or Rev Sandy Boyce, 0409283004, [boyce@pilgrim.org.au](mailto:boyce@pilgrim.org.au) <https://justiceforrefugeessa.org>